

WITTGENSTEINIAN QUIETISM

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One can't help but be struck by the range of incompatible positions that Wittgenstein's philosophy, his rule-following considerations in particular, have been taken to support. For instance, according to one very popular interpretation of the rule-following considerations, Wittgenstein proves that claims about the meanings of words aren't objectively true. On another interpretation, Wittgenstein shows that discourse about meaning, though without foundation, is as capable of robust truth as any. Still others argue that the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* was neither a realist nor an antirealist with respect to discourse about meaning. On the contrary, according to proponents of this last interpretation, Wittgenstein rejected as "nonsense" both the questions that the rule-following considerations seem to pose and the answers that realists and antirealists have tried to give to these questions.

This third, *quietist* interpretation of Wittgenstein has received increased critical attention of late. Some commentators have suggested that there is no textual basis for the quietist interpretation of the early Wittgenstein. Less has been written that purports to assess the arguments that quietists have found in Wittgenstein, early or late.

In this dissertation, I assess the philosophical credentials of the quietist interpretation of Wittgenstein. In the first part, I argue that the material from Frege that inspired the *Tractatus* doesn't support quietism in the way that proponents of the quietist interpretation of Wittgenstein suppose. In the second part, I argue that the rule-following considerations support a position

that's closely related to, but in important respects different from the one that the proponents of the quietist interpretation of Wittgenstein endorse.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	VIII
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2.0 FREGE’S CONCEPTION OF LOGIC	19
2.1 QUIETISM WITH RESPECT TO LOGICAL CATEGORIES.....	21
2.1.1 The Concept Horse Problem.....	21
2.1.2 The Quietist Interpretation of the Concept Horse Problem	36
2.1.3 Conclusions.....	42
2.2 QUIETISM WITH RESPECT TO THE LAWS OF LOGIC	45
2.2.1 Psychology and Logic	45
2.2.2 Frege’s Argument	50
2.2.3 Conceivability and Sense.....	55
2.2.4 Conclusion	70
3.0 WITTGENSTEIN’S RULE-FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS	72
3.1 ANTIREALIST INTERPRETATIONS OF THE RULE-FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS.....	83
3.1.1 Kripke’s Skeptic.....	84
3.1.2 Baker and Hacker’s Conventionalism	89
3.1.3 Wright’s Euthyphronism	103
3.2 QUIETIST INTERPRETATIONS OF THE RULE-FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS.....	115
3.2.1 Understanding and Interpretation	116
3.2.2 Use	120
3.2.3 Squiggle Theory	126
3.2.4 Perspective Independence	132

3.3	ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM WITH RESPECT TO THE RULE-FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS	144
3.3.1	Anti-Foundationalism.....	145
3.3.2	The Contrastive Theory of Meaning.....	157
4.0	CONCLUSION.....	167
	APPENDIX.....	171
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	186

PREFACE

If this dissertation isn't a travesty, it's only because I've had a great deal of help. I'm grateful to each of the members of my dissertation committee. Nicholas Rescher has commented on multiple drafts of the introduction to this dissertation. Keiran Setiya gave prompt and characteristically penetrating responses to multiple drafts. The extent of my debt to Kieran is only partly evidenced by the many times his comments have forced me to clarify, modify or abandon something I was trying to say.

David H. Finkelstein has gone over this dissertation with me with a fine-toothed comb. He encouraged me when something was working and helped me to make changes when something wasn't. I met David when I was a junior at Indiana University. I scanned the fall course offerings and noticed that I was scheduled to teach an advanced undergraduate course in the philosophy of mind. I found this alarming, both because I was still an undergraduate myself, and because I didn't know anything about the philosophy of mind. Luckily for the students in that class, and for me (who went on to take the class), the real explanation for the course offering was that the Philosophy Department had just hired an assistant professor from the University of Pittsburgh who, coincidentally, was also named David Finkelstein. (We are not related. Also, his middle name is Howard, and mine is Michael.) I went on to work with David on my undergraduate thesis, and he made me see how the whole thing was a mess. He was equally effective at helping me to build it up from scratch. Since then, he has helped me a great deal

with this dissertation, in which I actually revisit some of the themes from my senior thesis. More importantly, he was the one who showed me that philosophy ought to be clear. None of what I've done since college would have been possible without David.

Finally, I am more grateful than I can say to John McDowell. I first became aware of John's work in college when I was assigned *Mind and World*. Since then, I've worn out multiple copies of that book. When I moved to New York, and was able to keep only a handful of philosophy books, my most recent copy of *Mind and World* was one of the books that made the cut. It now sits alongside Kant and Wittgenstein in my bookshelf. I take it that this is a good indication of how much John's philosophy has mattered to me. I came to Pittsburgh in large part because I wanted to work with John. At Pittsburgh, I have taken most of his seminars, served as his teaching assistant, and spent countless hours in his office trying to hash out this project. To whatever extent I manage to get Frege and Wittgenstein right, it's a credit to John, because Lord knows he had to do more work than it would have been fair to expect to get me up to speed. I'll always be grateful that I've had this opportunity to learn from him.

In addition to the members of my committee, I am grateful to my family and friends. Four people, in particular, deserve special mention. My friend Kevin Davey has always had strikingly original things to say whenever I would discuss this material with him. There's very little of this dissertation that I haven't discussed with Kevin, and that hasn't improved as a result of his help.

My partner Janice Reyes edited this dissertation, as well as most of my coursework papers. As a result, I have repeatedly been saved from embarrassing typos, and she's been repeatedly put to sleep. More significantly, she puts up with me when I'm cranky, and comforts

me when I'm anxious. The memory of my life in Pittsburgh without Janice makes me even more grateful that she is with me now.

My father, Michael Finkelstein, has supported me during the time it has taken me to complete this project. Though there is much about which we disagree, I see his influence in everything I do. To the extent that this dissertation achieves anything resembling coherence and persuasiveness, this is a tribute to him.

Finally, my mother, Carol Masone, has never let my fumbling attempts to explain my research interests interfere with her pride in the fact that I was engaging in them. More than anyone else, it was she who wanted me to finish this dissertation. So it is to her that I dedicate it now that it is done.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

[T]o know what questions may reasonably be asked is already a great and necessary proof of sagacity and insight. For if a question is absurd in itself and calls for an answer where none is required, it not only brings shame on the propounder of the question, but may betray an incautious listener into absurd answers, thus presenting, as the ancients said, the ludicrous spectacle of one man milking a he-goat and the other holding a sieve underneath.^{1,2}

This will be a dissertation about the sort of quietism that recent commentators have found in Wittgenstein. Quietism can mean various things. A quietist in the sense I want to consider is someone who rejects a philosophical question, and the theories that seek to answer it, as *nonsense*.

To call a thesis nonsense is not to call it false. Someone who wants to reject the claim that, for instance, freedom requires causal indeterminism might think it *false*. She would then, presumably, think the negation of that claim true; she would think that freedom does not require causal indeterminism. In that case, she would *not* “stay quiet” with respect to the question. A quietist by contrast would say that the thesis that freedom requires indeterminism and its negation are equally nonsensical; she would reject the sorts of answers that others have given without offering any of her own.

¹ KANT, CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON A58 (N. Kemp Smith trans., 1965).

² A NOTE ON CITATIONS: in what follows, I will cite to texts in the conventional, legal manner. See THE BLUEBOOK: A UNIFORM SYSTEM OF CITATION (18th Ed. 2005).

Thus defined, quietism isn't obviously interesting. After all, if someone were to try to assert that *all* philosophical questions are nonsense she would endorse a position that is probably self-refuting.³ On the other hand, if anyone who thinks that *some* philosophical question is nonsense is a quietist, then very arguably *every* philosopher is a quietist, and the truth of quietism will be a virtual triviality.⁴

But of course, as the term is used by philosophers, to call someone a quietist is not merely to say that she thinks that at this or that point in history someone has lapsed into nonsense. Rather, it is to say something much more like this: *what distinguishes philosophical issues from empirical ones is precisely that they are nonsense for the most part; or: almost all of the theses adduced in metaphysics turn out to be nonsense; or: it's a central feature of the philosophical enterprise that philosophers end up meeting nonsensical questions with nonsensical answers.* These are not trivial claims, nor are they self-defeating.

One philosopher who is often taken to hold this sort of view is Wittgenstein. Recent commentators have taken Wittgenstein to have shown that a great deal of what many have taken to be the interesting questions of philosophy turns out to be nonsense. This sort of view obviously requires its proponent to account for *which* questions are nonsense and why. I'd like to save a fuller discussion of this question for my dissertation proper. Each section of this dissertation will be concerned with an important philosophical issue that commentators have taken Wittgenstein to have shown to be nonsense. For the remainder of this introduction, I

³ The quietist *produces* philosophical sentences when she articulates her view. Consequently the "global" quietist faces a paradox. If she assumes that quietism gives the *correct* account of the status of philosophical sentences then she must conclude that what she takes to express her convictions are really just confusions, *apparent* thoughts. On the other hand, if she is convinced that her own sentences really *do* say something, then she must conclude that quietism is false.

⁴ I am grateful to Nicholas Rescher for bringing this worry to my attention.

propose to put the dissertation proper in context by discussing other distinguishing characteristics of Wittgensteinian quietism.

Although this dissertation isn't directly concerned with what quietism has been in other periods of the history of philosophy, it's perhaps worth noting that the idea that there's a particular connection between certain topics in philosophy and nonsense did not originate with Wittgenstein. For instance, Kant famously develops a conception of philosophy according to which the distinctive thing about certain philosophical problems isn't that they're so difficult to solve, but that they're *impossible* to solve. Indeed, this idea has pride of place in the First Critique. The very first sentence of the A-edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* provides, "Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer."⁵

Kant develops this idea that philosophy is concerned with questions we are neither able to ignore nor able to answer in his introduction to the Transcendental Dialectic. There he distinguishes between ordinary mistakes and *transcendental illusion*. Transcendental illusion, for Kant, doesn't go away even after it's been diagnosed.⁶ Kant has a story, of course, about how such illusion is possible. The details of that story continue to elude me. The important thing for my purposes is the bare idea that there is a sort of confusion we sometimes find ourselves in when we engage in philosophical reflection. The reason we are confused is that we're in the grips of an "illusion." But the nature of the illusion is such that it continues to

⁵ CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON at Avii.

⁶ Id. at B353 ("Transcendental illusion, on the other hand, does not cease even after it has been detected and its invalidity clearly revealed.")

trouble us even after it's been pointed out.⁷ The idea that one can find oneself in such a state, and that it's the peculiar nature of a mode of philosophical reflection to leave us in such states, as we will see, turns out to be central to Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as well.

Kant's point is that philosophical questions have a distinctive sort of phenomenology. Of course, Kant hasn't said anything about nonsense yet. But one way to understand Kant's point would be to conceive of the difference between ordinary and philosophical questions in terms of nonsense. Although Hume came before Kant, he can be read as taking this approach.

On Hume's view, all conceptual content has its basis in experience;⁸ there's nothing in the mind except sensations and what is derived from sensations.⁹ This has two important consequences. First, since concepts are all directly or indirectly derived from experience, our conceptual capacities—and hence, our capacity to judge—are limited by our actual experience. Put simply, there's a sense in which we can think about only what we've actually experienced.¹⁰ This in turn suggests that it's a confusion to take oneself to have a concept that is neither derived from our experience nor “built up” from concepts so derived, and that thoughts involving such “concepts” aren't really thoughts at all:

When we entertain, therefore, any suspicion, that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but enquire, *from what*

⁷ Id. at B354-55 (“There exists ... a natural and unavoidable dialectic of pure reason ... one inseparable from human reason, and which, even after its deceptiveness has been exposed, will not cease to play tricks with reason.”)

⁸ Note: Hume doesn't speak of concepts, but of ideas. I'm translating.

⁹ HUME, AN ENQUIRY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING (“ENQUIRY”) 11 (Eric Steinberg ed., 1993) (“[A]ll the materials of thinking are derived either from our outward or inward sentiment ... all our ideas ... are copies of our impressions.”) Compare JERRY FODOR, HUME VARIATIONS 28, 35 (2003).

¹⁰ ENQUIRY at 11 (“[T]hough our thought seems to possess this unbounded liberty, we shall find, upon a nearer examination, that it is really confined within very narrow limits, and that all this creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience.”) See also HUME VARIATIONS at 85 (“[T]here's no end to the things one can think of. But since the population of simple concepts is fixed there is an end to the things one can think of by thinking *them*.”)

impression is that supposed idea derived? And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicion.¹¹

When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames: For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.¹²

The connection between philosophical speculation and the tendency to come out with “pseudo-judgments”, judgments purporting to involve concepts not derived from experience, is only hinted at by Hume. But this theme has been made explicit by subsequent philosophers seeking to develop Hume’s empiricism. Consider, for instance, A. J. Ayer. Ayer famously insists that “all metaphysical assertions are nonsensical.”¹³ Furthermore, on Ayer’s view it’s easy to lapse into nonsense without knowing it: “[it is easy] to write sentences which are literally nonsensical without seeing that they are nonsensical”;¹⁴ “the metaphysician ... does not intend to write nonsense. He lapses into it through being deceived by grammar.”¹⁵

According to Ayer, the problem with metaphysical speculation is that it is by its very nature consistent with any assumption whatsoever concerning future experience. But if we think through the conditions under which a sentence can have meaning, we see that such speculation is literally nonsensical.¹⁶

We are attracted to pseudo-speculation because we have failed to take heed of Hume’s insight: concepts come from experience. Consequently, we can’t make a judgment that fails to

¹¹ ENQUIRY at 13.

¹² Id. at 114.

¹³ AYER, LANGUAGE TRUTH AND LOGIC 41 (1946).

¹⁴ Id. at 44.

¹⁵ Id. at 44-5.

¹⁶ Id. at 35 (“If ... the putative proposition is of such a character that the assumption of its truth, or falsehood, is consistent with any assumption whatsoever concerning the nature of his future experience, then, as far as he is concerned, it is, if not a tautology, a mere pseudo-proposition. The sentence expressing it may be emotionally significant to him; but it is not literally significant.”)

speaking to some possible experience. We imagine that we *can*—that we can judge something to be the case even if it would make no difference to us for this judgment to be true—only when we are deceived by the superficial grammatical similarity between metaphysical and ordinary sentences, between sentences like “gold is more precious than copper”, and ones like “beauty is more precious than truth.”

Both Hume and Ayer think that much of what passes for philosophy turns out to be nonsense. Furthermore, both endorse a theory of meaning that they think allows us to test for when a sentence is nonsense. As we will see, Wittgenstein also thinks that much philosophy is nonsense, but attempts to entitle himself to this conclusion *without* endorsing any general theory of meaning.

I will have more to say in subsequent sections about the historical sources of the sort of quietism that some commentators have found in Wittgenstein. But while it's important to see that Wittgenstein didn't write in a vacuum, this will not be a dissertation on the sources from which Wittgenstein took his inspiration. Rather, my concern will be what Wittgenstein contributed to this conception of philosophy: the extent to which he endorsed it, and the extent to which his writings lend it support. Along these lines, it's useful to distinguish the sort of quietism with which I will be concerned from a contemporary, non-Wittgensteinian form of quietism.

One recent (and increasingly popular) tactic for defending a sort of quietism is to put the non-quietist on the defensive by showing that certain philosophical concepts *can* be interpreted to be vacuous, and then challenging the non-quietist to show that this isn't the *right* interpretation. As an example of this sort of tactic, consider the strain of meta-ethical quietism

one finds in Ronald Dworkin's *Objectivity and Truth*.¹⁷ Dworkin notes that on one interpretation of what we mean when we say that "p is an objective fact," the "—is an objective fact" operator serves as a device for disquotation. On this interpretation, however, there's no room to distinguish between skepticism with respect to the *objectivity* of ethical claims and skepticism with respect to the claims themselves.

To see how this works, it helps to have an example. Imagine that Frances is convinced that it's wrong to give homosexuals the right to marry. But Frances is aware that certain courts—the Supreme Court of the State of Massachusetts, perhaps even the United States Supreme Court—have recently suggested that it's wrong *not* to let homosexuals marry.¹⁸ Imagine, however, that Frances has an explanation for this: she thinks that the courts have based their decision on their personal sympathy for gays, but in so doing they miss the independent, ethical reasons for denying gays the right to marry. Frances might choose to express this by saying "the problem with that fancy Mr. Justice Kennedy is that he thinks that the academic community should get to decide. But it's an *objective fact* that gay marriage is wrong." But now recall Dworkin's point about the rhetoric of objectivity. If "it is an objective fact that gay marriage is wrong" just means "gay marriage is wrong" then the rhetoric of objectivity probably isn't doing the work Frances wanted it to do. It seems that Frances wanted to comment on the *basis* for her moral conviction, not just to express that conviction. But on Dworkin's interpretation, the rhetoric of objectivity is ill-suited for this purpose. On that interpretation, the

¹⁷ Ronald Dworkin, *Objectivity and Truth: You Better Believe it!* ("Objectivity and Truth") 25 PHILOSOPHY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS 2 (1996).

¹⁸ This is a caricature. Those recent decisions—*Goodridge v. Dept. of Public Health*, 440 Mass. 309 (2003), and *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 (2003)—don't go to the *morality* of gay marriage, at least not directly. Rather, the Massachusetts Supreme Court holds (and Justice Kennedy, writing for the majority of the Supreme Court, hints) that prohibitions against gay marriage violate the equal protection clause of the Massachusetts Constitution, or the equal protection clause of the United States Constitution, on which the former is based. But imagine that Frances is a "legal realist"—she thinks that reasoning about the meaning of ambiguous legal provisions is really just moral reasoning in disguise.

rhetoric of objectivity can't be used to isolate an issue at the meta-level about which people can argue while staying uncommitted at the object-level. For Dworkin, there aren't two questions: (1) is gay marriage wrong? And (2) is there an *objective* fact concerning the moral status of gay marriage? Rather, these questions amount to the same thing. Consequently, the distinction between meta-ethics and applied ethics collapses.

Of course, one might insist that any interpretation of the rhetoric of objectivity that undermines our ability to stake meta-ethical claims is *eo ipso* inadequate. But philosophers like Gideon Rosen have shown that other interpretations of the rhetoric of objectivity also seem to fail to vindicate the distinction between ethics and meta-ethics.¹⁹

To see this, consider one putatively non-trivial interpretation of the rhetoric of objectivity: "p is objective" means that p is "response-independent"—p doesn't need to be understood in terms of the response it produces in us, it doesn't *implicate subjects* (to paraphrase Pettit).²⁰ The problem with this proposal is that if something tends to elicit a certain response then it is a *fact* that it does. It's true that this is a *fact about people*. But it's hard to see why we should think that facts about people aren't as real, as "out there", as any.²¹ One consequence of this is that if we understand objectivity in terms of response-independence in this way, we fail to vindicate the idea that the antirealist attacks and the realist defends the *worldly status* of ethical facts. For even if we were to concede, for the sake of argument, that moral concepts are response-dependent, this in itself would give us no reason to deny that ethical judgments are

¹⁹ Compare Rosen, *Objectivity and Modern Idealism* in PHILOSOPHY IN MIND 293 (M. Michael & J. O'Leary-Hawthorne eds., 1994). A great part of Dworkin's own *Objectivity and Truth* is also devoted to defending this idea, somewhat less convincingly.

²⁰ A rough and ready definition of response-dependence would be: a concept is response-dependent if it is to be understood in terms of a disposition to produce a psychological response (or a truth-functional or quantificational combination of concepts of such dispositions). Compare Johnston's *Objectivity Refigured* in REALITY, REPRESENTATION AND PROJECTION 103-4 (Haldane & Wright, eds., 1993).

²¹ Rosen, *Objectivity and Modern Idealism* at 293 ("unless we have concerns about the status of dispositions in general or about the status of psychological states ... then it is hard to see why the facts about which sorts of proddings [elicit a response] should count as anything short of robustly real.")

made true by facts about how reality is configured. So this interpretation of the rhetoric of objectivity still doesn't give us what we wanted. What we wanted was an interpretation of what it means to say that a fact is "objective" that would enable us to, on the one hand, make moral judgments and, on the other hand, step back and ask if such judgments really describe the facts. But if "—is objective" just means "—is response-independent" then the rhetoric of objectivity is useless for this purpose. Rosen aims to show that other popular glosses on the rhetoric of objectivity (width of cosmological role, judgment-dependence, cognitive command, etc.) are problematic in the same way.

I mention Dworkin and Rosen because I think this is liable to be what one has in mind when one hears the word "quietism" nowadays. But this will not be the kind of quietism with which I will be concerned. The kind of quietism I am interested in is inspired by a creative and increasingly popular reading of Wittgenstein (early and late).²² The standard reading (famously articulated by, among others, Dummett, Baker and Hacker, and popularized by Kripke) has it that the early Wittgenstein was a realist and the late Wittgenstein an antirealist. The non-standard reading argues, on the contrary, that Wittgenstein (early and late) rejected the questions to which the standard interpretation sees him as giving different answers at different stages in his career.²³ Moreover, for proponents of the non-standard reading, Wittgenstein gave powerful arguments in defense of his refusal to engage in philosophy as it has been practiced, in "constructive philosophy."

²² I should note that proponents of this reading of Wittgenstein mostly don't like being called quietists. I call them that, not because I want to insult them, but because that's the standard way of referring to them, and nothing much seems to hang on it.

²³ Compare Crary, Introduction, *THE NEW WITTGENSTEIN* ("NEW WITTGENSTEIN") 2-4 (A. Crary & R. Read eds., 2000).

I take it that the quietism that some have found in Wittgenstein is different from other forms of quietism in a number of respects. One (mostly superficial) difference is that Wittgenstein's quietism aims to be *therapeutic*. The therapeutic character of Wittgenstein's philosophy becomes apparent when we compare it to the kind of quietism that we considered above. Dworkin, for instance, seems happy to tell the antirealist that she is misusing the rhetoric of objectivity and leave it at that. To the extent that the antirealist still feels that there is room for a neutral meta-ethics, Dworkin, it seems, would insist that she simply get over it.²⁴ The Wittgensteinian quietist, on the other hand, takes it to be a condition on the adequacy of the kind of philosophical account that she aims to give that it help to relieve us from the frame of mind in which we're taken in by philosophical illusions, that it show "the fly the way out of the fly bottle."²⁵

Some Wittgensteinian quietists have suggested that this is the most important characteristic of Wittgenstein's philosophy. For instance, in her introduction to a collection of essays by many of the proponents of the quietist reading of Wittgenstein, Alice Crary says that proponents of the quietist reading of Wittgenstein "agree in suggesting that Wittgenstein's primary aim in philosophy is ... a therapeutic one."²⁶ She goes on to suggest that this is the principal insight of the sort of interpretation of Wittgenstein with which I'm concerned, since "standard interpretations of his later philosophy *utterly fail to capture its therapeutic character*."²⁷

²⁴ This, at any rate, seems to be the tone of his response to his critics on BEARS, <http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Philosophy/bears/symp-dworkin.html> (last visited 10/7/05).

²⁵ WITTGENSTEIN, PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS ("INVESTIGATIONS") § 309 (G. E. M. Ancombe trans., 1968).

²⁶ NEW WITTGENSTEIN at 1.

²⁷ Id. at 3.

With this in mind, we can say something about the difference between Wittgenstein's and, for instance, Dworkin's quietism. It's not that the Wittgensteinian quietist would disagree with where Dworkin ends up. But, insofar as her principal aim would be to help to bring meta-ethics peace, the Wittgensteinian quietist would judge a philosophical intervention successful to the extent that it helps to *dispel* the illusion that there is an interpretation of the rhetoric of objectivity such that it can be used to command an external perspective on the object-level of ethical discourse.²⁸

As I said, I take it that this is a superficial difference between Wittgensteinian and non-Wittgensteinian quietism. For even if Dworkin attempted to give a story about *why* we are taken in by the project of trying to cash out the rhetoric of objectivity which moved us to give up on the project, this still wouldn't make him a Wittgensteinian quietist, at least not in my sense.

Another difference between Dworkin's and Wittgenstein's quietism is that the latter has been deployed more broadly than the former. For the Wittgensteinian quietist, *most* philosophical questions are nonsense. Questions concerning logical necessity, the structure of thought, normative constraint, semantic content, and intentionality *all* turn out to be incoherent. (And this is to name only the examples that will occupy us in this dissertation.) Quietists often express their conclusion by saying that we can't occupy a "metaperspective" on ordinary discourse.²⁹ Wittgenstein was famously concerned to give an account of a *family* of topics that seem to invite philosophical reflection but which we can't "get outside of."³⁰

²⁸ Compare Putnam's *Was Wittgenstein Really an Anti-Realist about Mathematics?* in WITTGENSTEIN IN AMERICA 164 (T. McCarthy & S. Stidd, eds., 2001).

²⁹ See, for example, JOAN WEINER, FREGE IN PERSPECTIVE 227 (1990), and James Conant's *Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and Early Wittgenstein* in NEW WITTGENSTEIN at 207.

³⁰ Some commentators give the impression of taking Wittgenstein to have thought that *everything* that gets called philosophy is incoherent. See, for instance, Cora Diamond's *Throwing Away the Ladder* in THE REALISTIC SPIRIT ("REALISTIC SPIRIT") (1991), at 183 ("For Wittgenstein the provision of replacements for terms in the philosophical vocabulary is not an incidental achievement but a principle aim, and, more important, it is the *whole*

But even this doesn't give us a satisfactory characterization of what's distinctive about Wittgensteinian quietism. Even a broad Dworkinian quietism, however that might work, would not qualify as Wittgensteinian. The most important characteristic of Wittgensteinian quietism is methodological. Wittgensteinian quietism bases its attack on philosophical theory, not on a deflationistic reinterpretation of philosophical language, but on positive arguments that no interpretation of what's at stake for us when we deploy certain philosophical language *could* be adequate. Moreover, the arguments that are meant to vindicate Wittgenstein's quietism are based either on interpretations of material from Wittgenstein himself or on the philosophical work that they take to have inspired him.³¹ The thought is that once we see our way to the bottom of the *Tractatus*, or the bits from Frege that (arguably) find their way into the *Tractatus*, or the rule-following considerations, or whatever, then we shouldn't be surprised by the deflationist's conclusions. For the kind of quietist with which I will be concerned, Wittgenstein already showed that we can't get outside of ordinary discourse in the way that Dworkin's realist

philosophical vocabulary which is to be replaced.") See also Crary, NEW WITTGENSTEIN at 6 ("the point of view on language we aspire to or think we need to assume when philosophizing—a point of view on language as if outside from which we imagine we can get a clear view of the relation between language and the world—is no more than the *illusion* of a point of view.")

If the thought is that all that gets called philosophy is incoherent then Wittgenstein was a quietist with respect to *all* philosophy, and total quietism isn't worth taking seriously. (As Nicholas Rescher remarked in an e-mail on 10/15/02, "metaphilosophy is a branch of philosophy itself and the contention at issue (if contention it is) looks to be a quintessentially philosophical one—in which case it is surely hoisted by its own petard.")

Again, total quietism is also a straw target: no one actually believes in it, not even the authors of the more incautious formulations of Wittgensteinian quietism. When Wittgenstein says philosophy must leave everything as it is, he means that philosophy *as I aim to practice it* leaves everything as it is. Compare Conant, *The Method of the Tractatus* ("METHOD"), in FROM FREGE TO WITTGENSTEIN: PERSPECTIVES ON EARLY ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY 80 (E. Reck ed., 2001) ("[W]hat the work means to say about itself [is] that philosophy, *as this work seeks to practice it*, results not in doctrine but in elucidations.") Furthermore, when she implies that philosophy proceeds from the illusion of a point of view, Crary means that philosophy that attempts to respond to the kinds of problems that Wittgenstein was interested in is held captive by an illusion.

³¹ I say, "they *take* to have inspired him" because some have argued that the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* hadn't yet made a careful study of Frege's philosophical work. See, for instance, Goldfarb's *Metaphysics and Nonsense* 22 JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH (1997), and Hacker's *Was He Trying to Whistle It?* in NEW WITTGENSTEIN and *Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians* 53 THE PHILOSOPHICAL QUARTERLY 210 (2003).

and the antirealist look to do. The deflationist merely shows that a particular case of trying to jump outside of our own skins really is as problematic as Wittgenstein would have claimed.

There is one more distinctive characteristic of Wittgensteinian quietism. Proponents of Wittgenstein's quietism endorse a strikingly counterintuitive theory of what we commit ourselves to in calling something nonsense, which they take Wittgenstein to have learned from Frege. Thus, when they say that philosophy traffics in nonsense, Wittgensteinian quietists often mean something other than what one wants to take them to mean.

Wittgensteinian quietists argue that one consequence of Frege's account of judgment is that *there are no logical distinctions between types of nonsense*. Put otherwise, when she says that a philosophical sentence is nonsense, the Wittgensteinian quietist means that it's semantically equivalent to random strings of signs. Since this view of nonsense is one of the distinctive commitments of Wittgensteinian quietism, and because it seems so counterintuitive, it's worth getting clearer about it.

Insofar as we have intuitions about this sort of thing at all, it's natural to want to distinguish between *types* of nonsense. For instance, (1) "frump the bump" seems like a different type of nonsense from (2) "the nothing itself nothings", or (3) "Caesar is a prime number." One way of thinking about the difference is this: (2) and (3), while nonsense, are composed entirely of meaningful expressions, whereas (1) contains a sign ("frump") to which no meaning has been given. We might call (1) *mere nonsense*. (2) and (3), on the other hand, are examples of *substantial nonsense*. Substantial nonsense, we might think, is nonsense precisely because of the meanings of the terms out of which it is composed, because the meanings of the expressions do not fit together.

Note further that there seem to be differences between cases of substantial nonsense. For instance, there is nonsense that violates the “rules of logical syntax.” (2) is meant to be an example of this. Here (at least according to Carnap) the negative existential particle is being used incorrectly, it is being used in the place of a descriptive phrase.³² There is also substantial nonsense that seems to follow the rules of logical syntax, but which attempts to combine signs of the wrong semantic category.³³ (3) is meant to be an example of this. With (3) it seems natural to say that “is a prime number” is being used as a predicate-expression, as it should, but that “Caesar” can’t be brought under that particular predicate. So (3) is an instance of attaching a predicate to an *unsuitable* subject. In trying to combine this predicate with this subject we commit a “category error.”

According to the quietist, Wittgenstein inherits from Frege a set of commitments that lead him to reject this conception of nonsense. The line of thought in Frege that is inconsistent with this conception of nonsense has its source in his “Context Principle.”³⁴ For Frege, the semantic value of sub-sentential expressions is a function of their capacity to figure in sentences that express judgments. Thus, we should ask for the meaning of a word only in the context of a proposition.³⁵ The reason for this is that the meaning of a word is the work it does in a sentence.³⁶ Obviously it is only in the context of a sentence that actually says something, that a word does any work at all. So expressions can’t have meaning in isolation.

More importantly for our purposes, a single expression can be used to do different kinds of work. For instance, an expression that is ordinarily used as an object-expression can in other

³² Compare Goldfarb’s *Metaphysics and Nonsense* 2-3 JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH (1997).

³³ Compare MICHAEL DUMMETT, FREGE: PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE 32, 62 (1981), and Baier’s definition of “nonsense” in the ROUTLEDGE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY (E. Craig ed., 1998).

³⁴ FREGE, FOUNDATIONS OF ARITHMETIC (“FOUNDATIONS”) x (J. L. Austin trans., 1980).

³⁵ This is actually closer to Wittgenstein’s formulation of the Context Principle in the TRACTATUS LOGICO-PHILOSOPHICUS (“TRACTATUS”) § 3.3 (C. K. Ogden trans., 1922).

³⁶ Diamond, *What Nonsense Might Be* at 98.

contexts be used as an expression for a concept. Frege's example is the sentence "Trieste is no Vienna." In most contexts, "Vienna" is used to name a city. But any reason for thinking that the sentence "Trieste is no Vienna" makes a claim about Trieste is a reason to conclude that the expression "—is a Vienna" is being used as an expression for a concept, and "Vienna" part of the means by which we designate the concept we have in mind.³⁷ We know that "Vienna" is part of an expression for a concept here because it occupies the place of a concept-expression, and what plays the role of a concept-expression *is* a concept-expression.

This idea has a number of important consequences. The first consequence is that, as Wittgenstein says, "we can't give a sign the wrong sense."³⁸ To see why, let's reconsider one of our cases where we *seemed* to give a sign the wrong sense: "Caesar is a prime number." If we accept Frege's context-principle, then we'll have to conclude that "Caesar" refers to Caesar only if the sentence in which it occurs actually says something. But for that sentence to say something, it must *not* be nonsense. And for this to be the case, "—is a prime number" must express something it makes sense to say of a person. Alternatively, if "—is a prime number" means what it ordinarily does, then (since it can only do so in the context of a sentence that says something about a number) "Caesar" must in this context be a name for a number. Either way, there's no room to suppose that "Caesar" and "—is a prime number" are illegitimately combined. On the contrary, the reason "Caesar is a prime number" is nonsense is that we've assigned no meaning either to "Caesar" as a number-word or "—is a prime number" as an expression that can be used to talk about Caesar. As Wittgenstein says, "Every possible

³⁷ Compare Diamond's *Frege and Nonsense* in REALISTIC SPIRIT at 74.

³⁸ TRACTATUS § 5.4732.

proposition is legitimately constructed, and if it has no sense this can only be because we have given no *meaning* to some of its constituent parts. (*Even if we believe that we have done so.*)³⁹

On this way of thinking, there are no logical distinctions between types of nonsense—all nonsense is mere nonsense.⁴⁰ Though Frege seems to have resisted this conclusion (as we will see in § 2.1, he tries to distinguish between mere nonsense and elucidatory nonsense), quietists take Wittgenstein to have enthusiastically embraced it.⁴¹ And the most important advocates of Wittgensteinian quietism have embraced it themselves.⁴² This is significant for at least two reasons. First, if this conception of nonsense—henceforth the *austere conception of nonsense*—is right, then it's a mistake to suppose that there could be a logical syntax of the kind that Carnap envisioned.⁴³ Logical syntax is meant to rule out combining signs whose meanings fail to blend. But for the proponent of the austere conception of nonsense there's nothing to be ruled out. As Conant says, “the source of philosophical confusion is to be traced, not (as for Kant) to the existence of a limit which we overstep in our thought, but to our falling prey to the illusion that

³⁹ Wittgenstein, NOTEBOOKS 1914-1916 2/9/14 (G. H. von Wright & G. E. M. Anscombe eds., G. E. M. Anscombe trans., 1961). The preceding is a paraphrase of Diamond's discussion of the context-principle in *What Nonsense Might Be* at 101-02.

⁴⁰ I say “no *logical* distinctions” so as not to give the appearance of denying that putative cases of substantial nonsense *strike us* as being very different from sentences with made-up words. We might put this by saying that, whereas from the point of view of *psychology* there are differences between types of nonsense, from the point of view of *logic* there aren't.

⁴¹ CAMBRIDGE LECTURES: 1932-1935 (A. Ambrose & M. Macdonald eds., 2001) offers striking support for the attribution of the austere conception of nonsense to Wittgenstein. At 63-4, Wittgenstein says, “Most of us think that there is nonsense which makes sense and nonsense which does not – that it is nonsense in a different way to say ‘this is green and yellow at the same time’ from saying ‘ab sur ah’. But these are nonsense in the same sense, the only difference being in the jingle of the words.”

Less direct support can be found in INVESTIGATIONS § 500, PHILOSOPHICAL GRAMMAR 130 (R. Rhees ed., A. Kenny trans., 1978), and TRACTATUS § 5.4733.

⁴² See for instance, Diamond's *What Nonsense Might Be* at 99-100, 102, and 104. See also Goldfarb's *Metaphysics and Nonsense* at 7.

⁴³ But wasn't *Begriffsschrift* designed to be just that? According to Conant and Diamond, the answer is no. For them, *Begriffsschrift* was never meant to rule-out counter-syntactic nonsense. Rather, it helps us to avoid cross category equivocation—pairing a single sign with multiple symbols. *Frege and Nonsense* at 77 (citing Frege, *On the Scientific Justification of a Concept-Script* in MIND 73 155-60 (J. M. Bartlett, trans., 1964)).

there is a limit which we run up against in thought.”⁴⁴ For Conant, if it’s an *illusion* that there’s a limit to thought then Carnap’s idea of logical syntax is as nonsensical as the nonsense it is meant to prevent.⁴⁵

More significantly, the austere conception of nonsense gives us another way of distinguishing between Wittgensteinian and non-Wittgensteinian quietism. When the Wittgensteinian quietist calls a philosophical sentence nonsense—when she says that Wittgenstein, early and late, showed that philosophy traffics in illusions—she means that the sentences we come out with in the midst of philosophizing are logically indistinguishable from mere babble. This is something that the main proponents of Wittgensteinian quietism have been fairly explicit about. For instance, Diamond speaks of the results of philosophical therapy as the “dropping away of some philosophical views as *mere muddle*.”⁴⁶ She adds “there is not some meaning you cannot give [a philosophical claim]; but no meaning, of those without limit which you can give it, will do; and so ... [i]t dissolves: you are left with *the sentence-structure ... standing there ... innocently meaning nothing at all*.”⁴⁷ Again, this is worth making clear from the outset because it brings out the ambitiousness of Wittgensteinian quietism, as compared to other things that one might want to call quietism.⁴⁸

The quietist interpretation of Wittgenstein, as I understand it, involves two claims: the first is that Wittgenstein (early and late) was a quietist; the second, in effect, is that we should be

⁴⁴ METHOD at 134.

⁴⁵ Id.

⁴⁶ *What Does a Concept Script Do?* in REALISTIC SPIRIT at 143, my emphasis.

⁴⁷ *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 198, my emphasis. See also *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 184; *Metaphysics and Nonsense* at 10; Conant, *The Search for Logically Alien Thought* (“ALIEN THOUGHT”) 20 PHILOSOPHICAL TOPICS 1, 159 (1992) (“The aim [of philosophy] is not to take us from a piece of deep nonsense to a deep insight ... but rather from a piece of apparently deep nonsense to the dissolution of the *appearance* of depth.”)

⁴⁸ In § 3.3, I defend a reading of Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations that qualifies as Wittgensteinian quietism in all ways but this last one.

too. Recently, there have been a series of challenges to the first claim.⁴⁹ It seems to me that these challenges raise serious problems for the quietist interpretation of the early Wittgenstein. But I will neither defend this, nor offer any new challenges of my own. Less, to my knowledge, has been published that purports to assess the second claim.⁵⁰ It is toward the end of assessing this claim that this dissertation is directed.

In § 2 of what follows, I examine the extent to which Frege's conception of logic supports the kind of quietism that some interpreters have found in the early Wittgenstein. In § 3, I examine what is arguably the most famous theme from Wittgenstein's later philosophy, his discussion of following a rule, in order to determine the extent to which *that* supports the kinds of conclusions that Wittgensteinian quietists have looked to draw. In both parts of this dissertation, I conclude that interpreters have tended to mischaracterize both the nature and the generality of the sort of quietism to which Wittgenstein's philosophy lends support, that the considerations on which Wittgensteinian quietists base their interpretation can be taken seriously without going so far as actually embracing that interpretation.

⁴⁹ See Hacker's *Was He Trying to Whistle It?* and *Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians*, and Proops' *The New Wittgenstein: a Critique* in 9 *EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY* 3 (2001). There are other manuscripts circulating but still (to my knowledge) unpublished. Many of them come from philosophers at the University of Michigan.

⁵⁰ Wright has some unsatisfying things to say about the philosophical credentials of one form of Wittgensteinian quietism at the end of his *TRUTH AND OBJECTIVITY* (1992).

2.0 FREGE'S CONCEPTION OF LOGIC

In spite of his own contribution to our understanding of the semantics of first order logic, and his conviction that logic concerns “the most general laws of nature,” quietists have found in Frege a series of arguments that they take to prove the emptiness of logical sentences and the impossibility of a substantive theory of logic. There are two moments in particular where Frege’s logical writings threaten to have this sort of force: his resolution of the concept horse problem in “On Concept and Object” and his polemic against psychologism in the introduction to the *Basic Laws of Arithmetic*. Quietists take the discussion from “On Concept and Object” to establish that we can’t reflect on the basic categories of logic.⁵¹ They take the introduction to the *Basic Laws* to show that we can’t give a substantive account of logical necessity.⁵²

Throughout his career, Wittgenstein makes claims that evoke this strain in Frege’s thought. For instance, echoing the moral quietists look to take away from the concept horse problem, Wittgenstein says “To be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to put ourselves with the propositions outside logic, that is outside the world.”⁵³ And echoing their preferred interpretation of the introduction to the *Basic Laws*, Wittgenstein repeatedly says that we cannot speak of the “essential features of the Universe.”⁵⁴ Quietists insist that most

⁵¹ Moreover, they claim that this shows we can’t reflect on the logical structure of language or of thought either. See, for example, Ricketts’ *Frege, The Tractatus, and the Logocentric Predicament*, 8, 19 NOÛS 1 (1985).

⁵² As we will see, both of these claims need qualification since, for the quietist, the real lesson is not that there’s something that we’re kept from doing, but that there’s nothing to do.

⁵³ TRACTATUS § 4.12.

⁵⁴ WITTGENSTEIN, NOTEBOOKS, 1914-1916 at 107. See also TRACTATUS §§ 2.172-2.174 & 4.12.

interpreters miss the real force of these remarks. For them, the reason it's so easy to misunderstand Wittgenstein's point (here and elsewhere) is that we fail to see how his views were formed through his study of "the great works of Frege."⁵⁵ For the quietist, Frege's conception of logic is riddled with tension. Certain aspects of Frege's logic, in particular his account of judgment, can't be made to sit together with the story Frege looks to tell about the place of logic among the sciences. On the quietist interpretation, the early Wittgenstein was the first to see this tension in Frege's account, and resolved it in favor of the line of thought in Frege that tells against the possibility of logical knowledge.

⁵⁵ TRACTATUS, preface. Compare G. E. M. ANSCOMBE, AN INTRODUCTION TO WITTGENSTEIN'S *TRACTATUS* 12 (1991) ("In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein assumes, and does not try to stimulate, an interest in the kind of questions that Frege wrote about."). See also METHOD at 12.

2.1 QUIETISM WITH RESPECT TO LOGICAL CATEGORIES

2.1.1 The Concept Horse Problem

For Frege, logic begins and ends with the analysis of *thought*, with the aim of making clear the relation between thoughts. As Frege says:

what is distinctive about my conception of logic is that I begin by giving pride of place to the content of the word “true,” and then immediately go on to introduce a thought as that to which the question “Is it true?” is in principle applicable. So I do not begin with concepts and put them together to form a thought or judgment; I come by the parts of a thought by analyzing the thought.⁵⁶

Judgments are expressions of thoughts. It will be helpful to distinguish between types of judgments. Let us call anything that’s either a quantified judgment or a judgment built up from other judgments by means of logical connectives a *complex* judgment. And let’s call any judgment that isn’t complex *simple*.

According to Frege, if we reflect on simple judgments we see that they have two parts: an expression for what the judgment is about and a predicate. For Frege, each type of expression has its own kind of significance (that is, does a distinctive kind of work). The first type of expression names the *object* of the judgment. Accordingly, Frege calls the first type of expressions object-expressions. The second type of expression, on Frege’s way of thinking,

⁵⁶ Frege, *Notes for Ludwig Darmstaedter* in THE FREGE READER (“FREGE READER”) 362 (M. Beaney, ed., 1997). See also *Thought* in FREGE READER, and FOUNDATIONS at 71.

names a concept. Frege thought that a concept was a type of function, or “transformation.” Specifically, a concept is a function from—that is, something that *transforms*—objects into truth values.^{57,58}

We need to say more about what Frege meant when he spoke of the significance of concept and object-expressions. The early Frege spoke of the *conceptual content* of an expression. The conceptual content of an expression is the content that has significance for inference.⁵⁹ For instance, the conceptual content of a *sentence* is given by the set of inferences it licenses. The conceptual content of a *logical connective* is given by its truth-table. Thus, “and” and “but” have the same conceptual content, though they obviously have different meanings.

In his later work, Frege gives up talking of conceptual content and instead distinguishes between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*. *Sinn* (henceforth sense) is a particular presentation of an aspect of a *Bedeutung*. Frege explains that sense is to *Bedeutung* as the image projected onto the telescope glass is to the moon.⁶⁰ That is to say, sense is the presentation of an aspect of an object.⁶¹ The *Bedeutung* of an expression, on the other hand, is what the expression *names*. For Frege, *Bedeutung* is all and only that which is relevant to the truth of the sentences in which it appears. (Thus, the expressions “1 + 1” and “4 / 2” have the same *Bedeutungen* but different senses.)⁶²

⁵⁷ *Function and Concept* in TRANSLATIONS FROM THE PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS OF GOTTLIB FREGE 31 (P. Geach & M. Black, eds., 1980).

⁵⁸ It seems to me that some commentators give a confused account of the kinds of things that concepts and objects are. For instance on p. 25 of METHOD, James Conant speaks of concepts and objects as “the logically discrete functioning parts of a judgment.” Earlier (on p. 20), he speaks of them as parts of *thought*. With both characterizations, it seems to me, Conant has missed Frege’s point. For Frege, concepts and objects are the *Bedeutungen* (or semantic values) of sub-propositional expressions; they are what is *named* by parts of judgments. The *senses* of expressions are the contents (or parts) of thought. It’s worth being clear on this from the beginning, because I think Conant’s mistake helps to explain the use he looks to make of the Kerry paradox, which we will consider below.

⁵⁹ Compare JOAN WEINER, FREGE 28 (1999).

⁶⁰ On *Sinn and Bedeutung*, in FREGE READER at 155.

⁶¹ Furthermore, sense *determines Bedeutung*. POSTHUMOUS WRITINGS at 124 (“It is via a *Sinn*, and only via a *Sinn*, that a proper name is related to an object.”)

⁶² One might object that there are types of expressions for which not just the *Bedeutung* but also the *sense* of the sub-sentential expressions is relevant to the truth. For instance, in the sentence “Frances *believes* that x is ϕ ”, not

Frege's account of the *Bedeutung* of linguistic expressions takes on a new importance in the light of his response to the so-called "Kerry paradox." Benno Kerry objected to Frege's principle that objects and concepts are fundamentally different from one another.⁶³ Kerry offered the following sentence as a counter-example to Frege's principle: "the concept 'horse' is a concept easily attained." That this makes trouble for Frege, we might think, becomes apparent if we keep two points in mind. First, Kerry is right; the concept horse *is* easily attained. I have a nephew and I'll bet he already knows what a horse is. And if he doesn't, I'll bet I could explain it to him. But he's pretty young, so I probably couldn't get him to understand what an isomorphism is. So the concept *horse* is easily attained; the concept *isomorphism* is not. In other words, the Kerry sentence is true. To say it is true is to say that that which is the referent of the object-expression really *is* a concept easily attained. But then *a fortiori* it's a *concept*. So "the concept horse" names a concept.

The second point to keep in mind is that for Frege, anything that falls under a (first-level) concept is an object. Consequently, if "—is a concept easily attained" is an expression for a first-level concept then whatever gets named by "the concept horse" falls under such a concept. And for Frege, only objects fall under first-level concepts.⁶⁴ So the concept horse is an object.

just the *Bedeutung* of *x* but also its sense is relevant. Frege's response to this problem is to distinguish between direct and intensional (or "opaque") contexts, and to insist that the *Bedeutung* of an object-expression in intensional contexts is its sense in direct contexts.

⁶³ *Comments on Sinn and Bedeutung*, in FREGE READER at 174-75.

⁶⁴ For Frege, first-level concepts (such as "—is a concept easily attained") are functions from objects to truth values, whereas second-level concepts (such as "—exists") are functions from *first-level concepts* to truth values. The proof that "—is a concept" is an expression for a first-level concept is that only complete expressions—grammatical proper names—fit into its argument place.

Since “the concept horse” seems to name something that is both an object and a concept, Kerry concludes that Frege is wrong to insist that it’s impossible for one and the same thing to be both.⁶⁵

Frege’s response to Kerry is taken by quietists to set him down a path that, properly thought through, should have led him to abandon his conception of logic. According to Frege, Kerry confuses the logical sense of the word “concept” with its psychological sense.⁶⁶ For Frege a concept-expression is by definition a functioning part of a sentence expressing a judgment; to call something a concept-expression is to say that it is the part of the sentence that is responsible for referring to that which is predicated of the subject of the judgment. This is the logical sense of the word “concept.” When Frege accuses Kerry of confusing the logical sense of the word “concept” with its psychological sense, what he means, I think, is that Kerry mistakes one (perfectly natural) way of using the word “concept”—as a way of speaking of psychological capacities, for instance—with Frege’s own use of the word.⁶⁷ For Frege, “concept” is a word, not for a psychological capacity, but for what is named by expressions with certain logical roles. The mere fact that the word “concept” appears in a sub-propositional expression doesn’t give it the relevant sort of logical role.⁶⁸ Thus, Kerry fails to appreciate how Frege’s concept/object distinction is meant to work when he suggests that all that can be truly said to be “a concept

⁶⁵ My presentation of the Kerry paradox borrows heavily from Conant’s METHOD.

⁶⁶ *On Concept and Object* in FREGE READER at 181-82 (“The word ‘concept’ is used in various ways; its sense is sometimes psychological, sometimes logical, and sometimes perhaps a confused mixture of both ... Kerry’s misunderstanding results from his unintentionally confusing his own usage of the word ‘concept’ with mine.”)

⁶⁷ In other contexts, Frege gives the impression of thinking that to confuse the psychological and the logical sense of some word is to miss the distinction between the word’s *meaning* and the play of images that passes before one’s mind’s eye on hearing the word. I don’t think that Frege is suggesting the Kerry is guilty of psychologism in *this* sense.

⁶⁸ Compare *Function and Concept* in FREGE READER at 131-32 (“It is as though one wanted to regard the sweet-smelling violet as differing from *Viola odorata* because the names sound different. Difference of sign cannot by itself be a sufficient ground for difference of the thing signified.”)

easily attained” is a concept. The phrase “the concept horse” figures in the object-position of the Kerry sentence. For Frege, that’s all we need to know. To say that the phrase plays the role of an object-expression in the context of the Kerry sentence is to say that it doesn’t refer to a concept (at least not if we use the word “concept” in a strictly logical sense). As Frege says, “the concept horse is not a concept.”⁶⁹ Therefore, the Kerry sentence can’t be true. And so Kerry’s objection is without basis.

Frege’s response to Kerry is worth taking seriously because it seems to carry with it the consequence that we can’t talk about concepts. Toward the end of his discussion in “On Concept and Object,” at any rate, Frege seems very much resigned to this conclusion. In one of the more infamous moments of his philosophical writings, he says:

I admit that there is a quite peculiar obstacle in the way of an understanding with my reader. By a kind of necessity of language, my expressions, taken literally, sometimes miss my thought; I mention an object, when what I intend is a concept. I fully realize that in such cases I was relying upon a reader who would be ready to meet me halfway – who does not begrudge a pinch of salt.⁷⁰

Frege is compelled to “rely on his reader”—to beg for a pinch of salt—because he is in the awkward position of *needing* to say things about concepts. Since they are one of his basic logical categories, it’s hard to see how we would teach someone how to carry on in his logically perfect language if we couldn’t say things like “in *Begriffsschrift*, upper-case letters refer to

⁶⁹ *On Concept and Object* at 185.

⁷⁰ Id. at 192. See also *On Concept and Object* at 193 (“[Our inability to say what a function is] is essential, and founded on the nature of our language ... we cannot avoid a certain inappropriateness of linguistic expression”); *Comments on Sinn and Bedeutung* at 174 (“We cannot avoid words like ‘the concept’, but where we use them we must always bear their inappropriateness in mind”); *On Schoenflies: Die logischen Paradoxien der Mengenlehre* in POSTHUMOUS WRITINGS 171-72 (H. Hermes, F. Kambartel & F. Kaulbach eds., P. Long & R. White trans., 1979) (“[I]t is necessary to point out an imprecision forced on us by language ... language brands a concept as an object, since the only way it can fit the designation for a concept into its grammatical structure is as a proper name.”)

concepts and lower-case letters to objects.” At any rate, it’s hard to see how we would explain the point of what we’re doing. But it’s by no means clear that only a begrudging reader would be hesitant to take such utterances at face value. By Frege’s own lights, his characterizations of concepts contain expressions without *Bedeutung*. (They don’t *bedeuten* concepts and we can’t specify which *object* we meant to refer to by expressions like “the concept ϕ .”) Therefore, the sentences themselves lack *Bedeutung*. Therefore, they lack sense: not only do they miss *Frege’s* thought, they miss *all* thought. So Frege, in his effort to characterize his conception of logic, produces sentences that by his own lights are without meaning—he produces *nonsense*.

Frege invents the notion of *elucidation* in order to make this predicament seem palatable. An elucidation, for Frege, is an artfully employed bit of nonsense that, in spite of its senselessness, manages to gesture at an unspeakable thought. So long as we conceive of ourselves as offering elucidations, Frege claims, we can go on trying to talk about concepts.

Not surprisingly, many are suspicious of Frege’s idea that we can think about and gesture at that about which we cannot speak.⁷¹ What *is* surprising is that on the quietist interpretation, we ought to take this to be an indictment of the possibility of reflection on logic, rather than an indictment of Frege’s conception of concepthood. There are many examples of quietists making this sort of claim. To take but one, consider Ed Witherspoon’s remark that “No matter what components a logician takes as the basic units of her particular brand of logical analysis, in describing these basic units she will find herself in a version of Frege’s predicament.”⁷² Again,

⁷¹ At the risk of getting ahead of ourselves, it’s the main point of the *Tractatus*, according to the quietist interpretation, that when we take ourselves to be unable to speak of something really there’s nothing to say.

⁷² EDWARD WITHERSPOON, *NONSENSE, LOGIC AND SKEPTICISM* 183 (1996) (unpublished PhD dissertation) (on file with the University of Pittsburgh). See also Anscombe, *AN INTRODUCTION TO WITTGENSTEIN’S TRACTATUS* at 164 (“Sentences ... cannot represent, and nothing in them can stand for, ‘the logic of the facts’”); Peter Geach, *Saying and Showing in Frege and Wittgenstein* 28 *ACTA PHILOSOPHICA*

what's surprising is that, rather than taking Frege's difficulty to rest on some mistake or other, Witherspoon (and others) take Frege to have (inadvertently) shown us that there's no such thing as reflecting on the form of thought.

Moreover, some have taken Frege to have demonstrated more even than this. For some, the Kerry paradox shows, not only that we can't occupy a metaperspective on *logic*, but also that we can't occupy a metaperspective on *language* or *thought*. For instance, Conant claims that "We cannot express 'it'—the logical form of language—in language."⁷³ And Diamond adds, "there are features of *thought* which cannot be put into true or false sentences. It seems, then, that philosophy ... is in a peculiar way stymied: its subject matter has essential features that escape it."⁷⁴

Conant and Diamond aren't clear about why they take the concept horse considerations to generalize, vitiating our ability to give an account not just of logic but also of language and thought. One conjecture is that they implicitly subscribe to the idea that parts of language are nothing but expressions for (and parts of thought are nothing but the *Sinn* of) concepts and objects. Therefore, one might think, we need to exploit our ability to say how things are on the level of *Bedeutung* to characterize the parts of speech or of thought.⁷⁵ Take the case of parts of thought. If what it is to be a predicative part of thought is to be one way of thinking about a

FENNICA 55 (1976); and Geach, PHILOSOPHICAL ENCOUNTERS 13-16 (1991) ("[Frege's] difficulties in expressing himself about function, concept, and object were not from a muddled self-bemusement but from the nature of the case.") Diamond makes these sorts of claims throughout the essays that comprise her REALISTIC SPIRIT. See, in particular, pp.129, 130, 131, 179-80, 184 and 199.

⁷³ ALIEN THOUGHT at 135. See also *Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and early Wittgenstein* in NEW WITTGENSTEIN at 207. Conant's remarks evoke Wittgenstein's NOTEBOOKS, 1914-1916 at 108 ("Logical so-called propositions *shew* [the] logical properties of language and therefore of [the] universe but *say* nothing. This means that by merely looking at them you can *see* these properties; whereas, in a proposition proper, you cannot see what is true by looking at it. *It is impossible to say what these properties are, because in order to do so, you would need a language, which hadn't got the properties in question.*")

⁷⁴ *Philosophy and the Mind* in REALISTIC SPIRIT at 1 (first emphasis mine). Moreover, Diamond accuses Wittgenstein of thinking that Frege's quietism with respect to logical categories leads to quietism with respect to modality. *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 200.

⁷⁵ I'm very grateful to John McDowell for explaining how the quietist's conclusions might be motivated in this way.

concept,⁷⁶ and if the nature of the case keeps us from characterizing concepts, then it's reasonable to worry that we'll never be able to fully characterize the relevant parts of thought either. On this way of thinking, expressions (and parts of thought) inherit the logical character of that which they *bedeuten*.⁷⁷ Thus, if we can't characterize the latter, we can't very well say what gets reflected in the former.

I will argue that each of these conclusions is problematic, that the concept horse problem really teaches us *nothing* about the possibility of reflection on logic, language *or* thought. But to see why, we will need to consider Frege's response to Kerry more carefully.

Though Frege doesn't quite *argue* that talk of concepts is impossible, something like an argument is clearly implicit in his response to Kerry.⁷⁸ We've already seen how Frege emphasizes the fact that the grammatical role of a word or sub-propositional expression can vary with context. In the context of the proposition "Vienna is a city in Austria" the word "Vienna" is an object-expression, which, for Frege, is to say that it names an object. But the same word in the context of a proposition like "Trieste is no Vienna" has a different meaning in virtue of its new grammatical role. In the latter proposition, the word is part of a concept-expression. So the meaning of the word varies with context.⁷⁹ And what is true of the word "Vienna" is true of all words. (As our colleagues in the English department like to remind us, there is nothing about the

⁷⁶ Compare GARETH EVANS, VARIETIES OF REFERENCE 16-17 (J. McDowell ed., 1982).

⁷⁷ Compare FREGE IN PERSPECTIVE at 249 ("linguistic categories 'mirror' logical categories.")

⁷⁸ What follows is one version of an argument, the raw materials of which one might find in Frege's response to Kerry and elsewhere. It is not the only version. In particular, in his account of Frege's correspondence with Russell, James Conant gives a related, but slightly different version of the same argument. There, we assume that we can speak meaningfully of functions – that sentences in which the expression "function" occurs hit their target. We then note that in the sentence "x is ϕ ," whatever we substitute for x will refer to an object. Compare METHOD at 187. Consequently, whatever we substitute for x, the sentence "x is a function" comes out false. We conclude that either there are no functions (and so any sentence purporting to describe a function will be false) or there is no way of speaking of functions.

⁷⁹ This is expressed by the second of Frege's three fundamental logical principles, that we should "never ... ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition." FOUNDATIONS at x.

written mark or the spoken sound that makes it especially suitable to represent one object rather than another.⁸⁰ Similarly, nothing about the physical sign makes it especially suitable to play a particular grammatical role.)

The manner in which context can change the meaning of sub-propositional expressions will turn out to matter a great deal for Frege's argument. All we need to add is that (1) concepts are essentially predicative (or "unsaturated"); what it is to be a concept is to be a certain kind of function, the kind of thing that takes objects into truth values.⁸¹ (2) Objects are not predicative; objects do not have argument places, they do not transform other objects to truth values. (This is why the concatenation of two object-expressions is a list, not a judgment.) (3) The subject of a simple judgment—what that judgment *concerns*, or is *about*—is that which is designated by the object-expression. (For instance, the judgment "Frances is nice and chubby" is about Frances; the judgment "my nephew knows his horses" is about my nephew; and so on.) (We also need to assume (4) the only way of talking about something is by means of simple judgments.)

From (3) and (4), we conclude that in order to talk about a concept, we must use an object-expression. Frege recognizes this, saying that phrases like "the concept horse," "brand[] a concept as an object."⁸² But if we combine this thought with the first two, we seem to have a problem. What it is to be a concept is to be unsaturated, or predicative. But what we end up speaking of lacks this predicative nature.

This is no accident—what we speak of is *never* predicative, or we couldn't have it as the subject of our judgment (from (2) and (3)). But to say that our judgment concerns something without a predicative nature is to say that our judgment doesn't concern a concept. And the

⁸⁰ This is Saussure's famous, but utterly banal, principle of the arbitrariness of the signifier.

⁸¹ *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik, Volume I* at 119-20.

⁸² *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik, Volume II* at 177-78.

proof that what we have isn't a concept is manifest in the fact that our expression can't do the *work* of a concept-expression, it can't stand in for one. Rather, we "brand a concept as an object," leaving ourselves with something completely unlike a concept in the most fundamental respect.⁸³ Consequently, our efforts to talk about the concept miss their target. As Frege says, "it is a mere illusion to suppose that a concept can be made into an object without altering it."⁸⁴

Consider an application of this argument to Kerry's attempt to speak of concepts. If I were to say "but surely *the concept horse* is a concept", "—is a concept" would be an expression for a first level concept (since "saturated" expressions fit into its argument place). "The concept horse" fits into the argument place of that expression. Therefore, it is a saturated expression. Therefore, it is *not* an expression for a concept. (Again, if it *were*, the resulting sentence would be nonsense—first level concepts can't serve as arguments for other first level concepts.) So I haven't succeeded in speaking of a concept after all.

I think we can better see how this argument works in the light of one recent attempt to leave Frege's semantics of predication in place while disputing his conclusion. According to Crispin Wright, Frege's argument confuses *Bedeutung* with reference. *Bedeutung* is meant to equip us with a way of speaking of the significance of an expression for logic. Two expressions have the same *Bedeutung* if they are intersubstitutable *salve veritate* in extensional contexts.⁸⁵

⁸³ One might think that this talk of "branding" is not apt since, strictly speaking, language fails to touch the concept at all. It's not that we touch it and, like a grammatical King Midas, turn it into something else. Rather, on this story it eludes our grasp entirely.

⁸⁴ FOUNDATIONS at 90.

⁸⁵ The *Bedeutung* of sub-sentential expressions consists in their capacity to affect the truth value of the complete sentences in which they figure. For Frege, expressions have this power in virtue of their association with an extra-linguistic entity. His point is easiest to see when we consider the case of proper names. A proper name is associated with an *object*. Moreover, so long as we restrict our attention to extensional contexts, it is the object with which a name is associated that determines the truth or falsity of the sentences in which the name figures; if two names are associated with the same entity then all that can truly be said of the bearer of the first name can also be said of the

But “the concept ϕ ” is obviously not substitutable for “—is a ϕ .” So the words “the concept ϕ ” *bedeuten* an object if they *bedeuten* anything at all. Frege’s idea is that since the words “the concept ϕ ” don’t *bedeuten* a concept they “misfire,” that we intend a concept but *mention* an object. But there’s a step from the idea that our words *bedeuten* an object to the conclusion that they *mention* an object. Why take that step?

Frege’s idea seems to be that for two expressions to refer to the same thing, they must do the same “work” in the context of the sentences in which they appear. Consequently, *co-referential* expressions are intersubstitutable *salva veritate* in extensional contexts. Following Wright, let’s call this the *Reference Principle*. For the proponent of the Reference Principle, co-referential expressions have the same *Bedeutung*. So because “—is a horse” and “the concept horse” don’t have the same *Bedeutung*, they can’t refer to the same thing. But the phrase “—is a horse” refers to the concept that the phrase “the concept *horse*” was “meant” to refer to. So the phrase “the concept *horse*” misses its mark. Since “—is a horse” refers to the concept *horse*, that means “the concept *horse*” doesn’t.^{86,87}

The key to this argument is the Reference Principle. The Reference Principle is obviously true for names. It seems that some commentators have assumed that it is true of *all* expressions. For instance, Diamond says that

To *talk about* a function or functions ... is to *use* expressions in a certain way. To refer to a function, that is, is to *use* a sign with a characteristic kind of incompleteness, and to predicate something of a function is to use a sign with its own further kind of incompleteness. And when we say *that* there is a distinction between functions and objects, we see that we are not *there using* language to talk about functions at all, because

bearer of the second. In this case, inferences involving the substitution of one name for the other won’t change the truth value of the complete sentence.

⁸⁶ Of course, all of this turns out to be transitional nonsense for the Fregean. This is the sense in which Frege’s conclusion is paradoxical.

⁸⁷ I’m very grateful to Kieran Setiya for helping me to formulate this argument.

we are not there using signs of the distinctive sorts through which functions are spoken about and characterized.⁸⁸

Here Diamond suggests that the proof that “f(—)” and “the function f(x)” don’t refer to the same thing is that the latter can’t stand in for the former: use determines reference. Once again, if this conclusion is allowed to stand, then Frege’s paradoxical conclusion that there is a meaningful ontological category about which we cannot speak seems unavoidable.

Wright attempts to avoid this conclusion by arguing against the Reference Principle. According to Wright, the Reference Principle implies that predicates stand in the same relation to concepts as names stand in to their referents, that the relation between predicate and concept is one of reference.⁸⁹ But Wright argues that this can’t be so.

Wright reminds us that an account of the reference of a name would involve three things: (1) a term standing for the referent (in most cases, the name itself); (2) a term standing for the object-expression (in most cases, the name mentioned, not used); and (3) a term for the relation between (1) and (2). Now (1) is an object-expression and so is (2). Thus, (3) must—on Frege’s way of thinking, at least—express an object-object relation. Consider a case of an account of the relation between name and bearer. The phrase “my cat” refers to my cat. The name “‘Frances’”, on the other hand, refers to the *name* of my cat. (Note the two sets of quotes.) Thus, I can account for the relation between a specific name and a specific bearer by saying: the relation between “‘Frances’” and *my cat* is one of *reference*.

⁸⁸ *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 183. Compare *Id.* at 199; *What Does a Concept-Script Do?* at 134, 137. Goldfarb too seems to endorse a version of this idea in *Metaphysics and Nonsense* at 14 (“it obviously makes no sense at all to think one can see a name going proxy for [logical form].”) For both Diamond and Goldfarb, the thought is for that for a name to *represent* something, it must be capable of *going proxy* for it.

⁸⁹ Here Wright seems to overlook the idea that either “reference” or some other word can be used as a label for a genus whose species include various types of word/world relations, that “reference” can be understood as a “type-straddler” (to quote McDowell). More on this below.

According to Wright, the relation between a predicate and a concept cannot be like this. The conclusion of Frege's argument is that no object-expression refers to a concept. Thus, expressions referring to concepts must be grammatical predicates. But expressions referring to those predicates must be grammatical proper names. (Once again, in the most straightforward cases, they are the predicates mentioned, not used. We can also do the trick with expressions like "what I just said.") Consequently, any account of the relation between predicate and concept must, as Wright says, "bridge distinct orders." That is, the relation must be one in which an object is capable of standing to a concept. But in the previous paragraph, we said that the relation between name and bearer does *not* bridge distinct orders. Consequently, if we reserve the word "reference" for the relation in which a name stands to its bearer, then we must conclude that the relation between predicate and concept is not one of reference. Thus, Wright concludes that, "Frege was simply never at liberty to introduce *Bedeutung* into the semantics of predication, at least not if that is to involve having *the very same relation* link predicates and concepts as ties a singular term to its bearer."⁹⁰

Wright assumes that if we see that concept-expressions don't stand in the same relation to concepts that names stand in to objects, and if we reserve the word "reference" for the latter type of relation, then there will be no reason to think we can't say that names refer to concepts. Singular expressions, Wright admits, are not substitutable for concept-expressions. But for Wright, this doesn't mean that singular expressions can't refer to concepts, because this *isn't* what concept-expressions do.

⁹⁰ CRISPIN WRIGHT, *Why Frege Does Not Deserve His Grain of Salt* in THE REASON'S PROPER STUDY 13 (2004).

That things aren't this simple is, I think, brought out by the fact that Wright saddles Frege with the assumption that concept-expressions stand in the *same* relation to concepts that object-expressions stand in to objects. This can't be right. The whole point of Frege's third logical principle takes shape in the context of his denial that concepts stand in identity-relations. There, Frege's idea is that it's *not* the case that there are functions that can take either objects or concepts as their arguments (functions of more than one level). One implication of this, though, is that if "reference" names a two-place relation between objects (a name and a bearer), then concept-expressions can't stand in *that* relation to concepts.⁹¹ What this shows, it seems to me, is that Frege never accepted the "Reference Principle." But this ought to lead us to suspect that whatever kind of concept horse problem Frege took himself to have, it must survive Wright's repudiation of the Reference Principle.

Indeed, I think this is the case.⁹² To see why, it helps to remind ourselves that the reason we hoped to use names to refer to concepts is that we wanted to *say things about them*. More specifically, we wanted to say things about concepts by means of singular judgments. But even if we reject the Reference Principle, we might worry about our ability to say things about concepts. A meaningful singular judgment, for Frege, brings something under a first-level concept. But in such cases, what is said is said of the *Bedeutung* of an object-expression. And since object-expressions don't *bedeuten* concepts, this means that either the object-expression we employ takes an object as its *Bedeutung*, in which case we've said something about an object (in Frege's sense), or it doesn't take an object as its *Bedeutung*, in which case it's an empty expression and we haven't said anything. But this means that even if we're careful about

⁹¹ I'm very grateful to John McDowell for reminding me of Frege's discussion of the identity-relation and showing how it is relevant to Wright's claim to see something that Frege didn't see.

⁹² I'm very grateful to Kieran Setiya for showing me how Frege's argument can be formulated in this way.

reserving the word “reference” for the relation between names and objects—even if we’re careful to use a different word for the relation between concept-expressions and concepts—we’re still forced to conclude that names stand in the *Bedeutung*-relation (now we can say, “refer”) only to a particular region of being, the region including all and only “saturated” entities. Consequently, only this region of being offers itself up to singular judgment.

At this point, it’s helpful to take a step back. *Bedeutung*, for Frege, is the significance of a bit of language from the point of view of logic. Frege was committed to the idea that expressions have the significance they do thanks to being associated with an extra-linguistic entity, with a bit of the world.⁹³ Wright’s argument reminds us that Frege must be willing to countenance more than *one* kind of language/world relation. But so long as we accept Frege’s semantics of judgment—according to which there are different types of extra-linguistic entities, and expressions make the contributions to the truth value of complete sentences that they do in virtue of being associated with an entity—some version of the concept horse problem will be unavoidable. The point of postulating the existence of concepts—weird, “unsaturated” entities—was to have something on the world side of the language/world relation for concept-expressions to be associated with. But if what it is to be on the *language* end of that relation is to be *used* as a concept-expression in a sentence expressing a thought, then the problem is still with us. All Wright’s argument gets us is the need for care in the language we use to formulate our

⁹³ COLLECTED PAPERS at 281-82 (“To this difference in the signs there of course corresponds an analogous one in the realm of meanings: to the proper name there corresponds the object; to the predicative part, something I call a concept”); Id. at 292 (“The peculiarity of functional signs, which we here call ‘unsaturatedness’, naturally has something answering to it in the functions themselves. They too may be called ‘unsaturated.’”) For a discussion of this point, see EVANS, VARIETIES OF REFERENCE at 8, and MICHAEL DUMMETT, TRUTH AND OTHER ENIGMAS 116-44 (1978).

conclusion. (Now we say: the relation between concept-expressions and the entities they name is not one of reference. But it's a relation *analogous* to reference.)

Of course, we can simply reject Frege's semantics of predication, and with it, his semantics of judgment. In its place, we could substitute a view according to which the only bits of language whose logical significance depends on their being related to bits of non-language are singular terms. On this view, there needn't be bits of non-language for concept-expressions to be related to. But this is just to say that there needn't be *concepts* in Frege's sense.

This much, I think, quietists can take in stride.⁹⁴ But it seems to me that their entitlement to draw conclusions concerning the possibility of reflecting on logical form lapses once we reject Frege's idiosyncratic way of thinking about logic. If this is right, then the quietist's early Wittgenstein takes the wrong lessons away from Frege's concept horse problem. Or, at any rate, so I will now argue.

2.1.2 The Quietist Interpretation of the Concept Horse Problem

Frege's conclusion is that all attempts to talk about concepts result in nonsense. The challenge, then, is to show that we can be entitled to speak of a distinction between concepts and objects at all when all attempts to characterize the distinction, to paraphrase Anscombe, reduce us to stammering.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Indeed, Wittgenstein himself seems to have reached the same conclusion. See INVESTIGATIONS § 94 (“‘A proposition is a queer thing!’ Here we have in germ the subliming of our whole account of logic. The tendency to assume a pure intermediary between the propositional *sign* and the facts”). See also Id. at § 120 (“You say: the point isn't the word, but its *Bedeutung*, and you think of the *Bedeutung* as a thing of the same kind as the word, though also different from the word. Here the word, there the *Bedeutung*. The money, and the cow that you can buy with it. (But contrast: money, and its use.)”)

⁹⁵ Anscombe, AN INTRODUCTION TO WITTGENSTEIN'S TRACTATUS at 164.

Some commentators have suggested that the challenge can be met simply by rejecting realism with respect to logical categories. Logical *realism*, as Diamond says, involves the idea that logic is classificatory, that entities have an independent logical character and that they're independently classifiable based on their logical character.⁹⁶ At times, Frege gives the impression that he is a logical realist, that he thinks of concepts and objects as types of *things*. For instance, he says that the difference between first- and second-level functions is *founded deep in the nature of things*.⁹⁷ It's natural to think he would say the same thing about the difference between concept and object.

Many have noted that the realist interpretation of Frege's *Begriffsschrift* doesn't show it to its best advantage. Consider, for instance, Ryle's famous remark that,

Frege's difficult but crucial point ... [is] that the unitary something that is *said* in a sentence or the unitary sense that it expresses is not an assemblage of detachable sense atoms, of that is, parts enjoying separate existence ... Word meanings or concepts are not proposition components but propositional differences. They are distinguishables, not detachables; abstractables, not extractables.⁹⁸

In the first instance, Ryle's point concerns the *senses* of concept-expressions.⁹⁹ But this point could be applied just as easily to our account of Frege's logical categories themselves. Taken in this way, the upshot of denying that a propositional component—a concept, for instance—is *detachable* from a judgment is the idea that it doesn't stand there waiting there for us to refer to it. To the extent that propositional components lack independent existence, logical categories must not characterize the nature of *things*.

⁹⁶ Diamond, *What Does a Concept-Script Do?* at 129.

⁹⁷ Frege, *Function and Concept* at 41.

⁹⁸ GILBERT RYLE, COLLECTED PAPERS, VOLUME I 58 (1971).

⁹⁹ I am grateful to John McDowell for pointing this out to me.

Some commentators have suggested that our inability to refer to concepts is unsettling only to the extent that it threatens our implicit commitment to realism with respect to logical categories. On this line of thought, we can take the Kerry paradox in stride while at the same time preserving all that we wanted to preserve in Frege's logic by rejecting the idea that logical categories are classificatory, that they correspond to types of things. Diamond, at any rate, seems to suggest all this when she says that our mistake was to assume that logical categories are "objectively fixed and independent of language."¹⁰⁰ Weiner also endorses the idea that "if the notion of concept is not part of a metaphysical theory but is used only ... in the explication of *Begriffsschrift* notation, then there is no [concept horse] problem."¹⁰¹ And Goldfarb too imagines that we can solve some of the problems that belong to the same family as the Kerry paradox in this way. According to Goldfarb, "we can see what it comes to to have a resolute view of nonsense ... why it is that the categorical distinction cannot be talked about with sense, and how it is that when we see that we will no longer want to talk of such distinctions *as though they were features of reality*."¹⁰²

Goldfarb claims that this resolution to the Kerry paradox is consistent with a resolute view of nonsense since it attempts to take the fact that claims about logical categories are nonsense seriously. On Goldfarb's view, however, we can be resolute about the nonsense that we produce when we try to talk about concepts by giving up only the idea that concepts are

¹⁰⁰ *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 194. Compare *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 197; *What Does a Concept-Script Do?* at 129 (suggesting that the desire to refer to concepts rests on our belief in "an obliging ontological category of concept-surrogates.")

¹⁰¹ FREGE IN PERSPECTIVE at 246.

¹⁰² *Metaphysics and Nonsense* at 12. Goldfarb talks at much greater length about this idea as a solution to a parallel problem concerning the expressibility of logical possibility. With respect to that problem, Goldfarb says when we throw away the ladder we can have "an understanding of possibility that is not ontologically based." *Metaphysics and Nonsense* at 13.

“features of reality.” Conant seems to agree that this is all we must give up when he concludes that “it’s consistent with Diamond’s resolute reading of Frege to say that the distinction between concept and object *shows itself* through the difference in *Begriffsschrift* signs.”¹⁰³

Diamond is the author and principal proponent of the “resolute” view of nonsense, which she defends throughout her work, and in particular in her essay on how to read the *Tractatus*.

There, being resolute (though that’s not the word she uses) is contrasted with “chickening out.”

Here is how she characterizes an *irresolute* view of nonsense:

what exactly is supposed to be left of [the idea of unsayable features of reality] after we have thrown away the ladder? Are we going to keep the idea that there is something or other in reality that we gesture at, however badly, when we speak of “the logical form of reality”, so that *it, what* we gesture at, is there but cannot be expressed in words? *That* is what I want to call chickening out. What counts as not chickening out is to say that it is not ... his view that there are features of reality that cannot be put into words but show themselves.¹⁰⁴

Here I think we can see that being truly resolute, truly “throwing away the ladder,” requires more than ontological parsimony. Diamond suggests that to truly throw away the ladder, we must give up the idea that nonsense communicates *anything*. Goldfarb and Conant seem to want to hold on to the idea that there is a genuine distinction between concept and object. Implicit in this, I think, is the idea that the nonsense we produce when we try to speak of concepts in a way *does* communicate something, only not anything (to paraphrase Goldfarb) about *reality*.¹⁰⁵ But this is still “chickening out.”

¹⁰³ METHOD at 77.

¹⁰⁴ *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 181.

¹⁰⁵ Goldfarb says “In the Fregean case, we can see what it is to overcome the transitional language, for we see what it is to use *Begriffsschrift*, and we see how our use of variables in *Begriffsschrift* differs for objects and for functions ... what Frege offers about the distinction between concepts and objects is literally nothing, apart from *Begriffsschrift*.” *Metaphysics and Nonsense* at 22. But this stops short of true resoluteness. There’s nothing to *say* about functions. So there’s nothing to *see* about functions either, no “what” that is shown. Consequently, to be truly

At this point, we should be able to see that the proponent of the “resolute” conception of nonsense who also wants to endorse Frege’s conception of logic is in a muddle. On the one hand, she insists that (1) nonsense says nothing (and it shows nothing—what it expresses is literally *nothing*).^{106,107} On the other hand, she also wants to say that (2) Frege’s logical distinctions are not arbitrary, that they are founded deep in the nature of things.¹⁰⁸ And because she accepts Frege’s response to Kerry, she thinks that (3) sentences about logical distinctions are nonsense.¹⁰⁹

These three points can’t be reconciled. If Frege is right about (3) and Diamond is right about (1), then (2) *must* be false: if there’s nothing that can’t be said clearly *and* there’s no way of giving meaning to the phrase “the distinction between concept and object” such that it says what we want it to say, then there must not *be* anything we were struggling to say, no distinction between concept and object. On the other hand, if we suppose that the words we come out with when we attempt to characterize (and in characterizing, occupy a metaperspective on) logic are *not* nonsense, if we suppose that we can give sense to the distinction between concept and object,

resolute is to say that what Frege offers about the distinction is literally nothing, *not* nothing *about reality*, or nothing *apart from Begriffsschrift*.

¹⁰⁶ Diamond, *What Does a Concept-Script Do?* at 140 (“when there’s no way of saying properly what we are trying to say, what we come out with is in fact a kind of nonsense and corresponds to no ineffable truth.”) See also *Wittgenstein and Metaphysics* in *REALISTIC SPIRIT* at 24; *What Nonsense Might Be* at 98; and *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 194.

¹⁰⁷ Goldfarb himself seems to make this point in *Metaphysics and Nonsense* at 17, 18 and 20. For him, however, this seems to mean that there are no inexpressible truths *about reality*. And be that as it may, there *is* something *shown* by propositions with sense: namely, the *possibility* of states of affairs, the distinction between *concept* and *object*, and etc. So Goldfarb’s version of this point looks like it rests on a verbal trick. There *is* something—possibility, distinctions of logical category—shown, only what’s shown aren’t *truths*. Thus, Wittgenstein’s point, on Goldfarb’s reading, is that there are no inexpressible “truths,” not that there’s *nothing being said here*. That is to say, Goldfarb’s Wittgenstein helps himself to some of Diamond’s language but still chickens out.

¹⁰⁸ That is, there *are* distinctions in logical category whose significance we grasp. See *What Does a Concept-Script Do?* at 141-42. See also Witherspoon’s, *NONSENSE, LOGIC AND SKEPTICISM* at 183 (“No matter what components a logician takes as the basic units of her particular brand of logical analysis, in describing these basic units she will find herself in a version of Frege’s predicament.”)

¹⁰⁹ *Philosophy and the Mind* at 1; *What Does a Concept-Script Do?* at 141 (“[T]he logical distinctions built into *the* language [viz. Frege’s *Begriffsschrift*] cannot themselves be the objects of thoughts.”)

then (2) must be false. Either way, for the proponent of (1), Frege's account of logic must collapse.¹¹⁰

If all this is true, though, then the leading proponents of the resolute conception of nonsense seem to misunderstand what this conception of nonsense commits us to. It's won't do to say that concepts don't exist outside of judgments. Rather, any logic that traffics in such things as "concepts" in Frege's sense, that thinks of "concepts" as pure intermediaries between propositional signs and the world,¹¹¹ must collapse. Moreover, we're not to take this to mean that language obscures some truth about logic. Rather, we're to take it to mean that there's literally nothing that we have in view when we try to reflect on concepts in Frege's sense. So if we are to throw away *Frege's ladder*, we must throw away, not only the idea of concepts as entities, but also the idea that there is anything for us to mean when we attempt to say (or think) what concepts (in the logical sense) are. And if there's nothing for our talk of concepts to mean, then ordinary sentences can't show anything about concepts either.

Diamond, at least, has anticipated this conclusion. According to Diamond,

We are so convinced that we understand what we are trying to say that we see only the two possibilities: *it* is sayable, *it* is not sayable. But Wittgenstein's aim is to allow us to

¹¹⁰ Consider all this from a different angle. In his correspondence with Russell, FREGE, PHILOSOPHICAL AND MATHEMATICAL CORRESPONDENCE 136 (H. Kaal trans., B. McGuinness ed., 1980), Frege gives a version of the following argument: assume that the Reference Principle is true. Assume further for *reductio* that the relation between concept-expressions and concepts is one of reference. Object-expressions can't do the work of concept-expressions. Consequently, object-expressions can't refer to concepts. But then object-expressions must refer to objects. Now whatever fits in the argument place of the expression "—is an object" will be an object-expression. (This follows from the context-principle.) Consequently, the sentence "x is an object" is true for all values of x. Moreover, the sentence "x is a concept" doesn't come out true on *any* interpretation. So there *are* no concepts. Consequently, if my thoughts concerning the existence of concepts are true even though my expressions of those thoughts are false then the existence of concepts turns out to be a *mystical* fact, a fact that can't find adequate expression in language.

¹¹¹ Compare INVESTIGATIONS § 94.

see that there is no “it.” ...To grasp “it” is to cease to think of “it” as an inexpressible *content*—that which you were trying to say.¹¹²

But, once again, this conception of nonsense taken together with Frege’s insistence that what is said is said of the *Bedeutung* of an object-expression undermines the idea that the distinctions upon which Frege’s logic is built are meaningful. Consequently, if both points are allowed to stand, we run the risk of making Frege’s *Begriffsschrift* seem as if it rests on a mistake. But this rules out the possibility of a metaperspective on logic only so long as we allow both points to stand. It seems to me that there’s plenty of room for skepticism with respect to either point.

2.1.3 Conclusions

In her account of the Kerry paradox, Weiner attempts to apologize for the fact that Frege can’t say anything about the nature of concepts, saying “Kerry ... cannot claim that Frege has inaccurately explained the meaning of ‘concept’, for Frege does not take himself to be explicating any ordinary word but to be coining a technical term.”¹¹³ What I have been arguing is that Weiner’s position is completely unsatisfactory. Even if we take Frege to have introduced a word for a new notion, the question is: does anything answer to that notion? Is it a genuine notion? My thought has been that if Frege’s conclusion is allowed to stand then the answer must be “no.” If all attempts to give content to that notion reduce us to stammering then we can’t continue to assume that there was something that we were trying to say.

¹¹² *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 198. Moreover, as we will see, Diamond thinks this is as true of talk of “necessity” as it is of talk putatively involving “formal concepts.”

¹¹³ FREGE IN PERSPECTIVE at 254.

Frege thinks both that (1) there are concepts and that (2) all attempts to characterize them is nonsense.¹¹⁴ To be entitled to both of these thoughts, one must endorse a kind of mysticism, according to which one's powers of thought in some cases outrun one's powers of expression. In her papers on Frege, Diamond repeatedly rejects the idea that Frege actually endorses mysticism. But this seems to be a strange form of blindness on her part. Frege says, “[b]y a kind of necessity of language, my expressions, taken literally, sometimes miss my thought.”¹¹⁵ So he, more than some of his quietist sympathizers, seems to see that his way of thinking about logic, properly thought through, leads either to mysticism or absurdity.

Either Frege is wrong that we can't say what a concept is, or he's wrong to think of concepthood as he does. But there is *no* room for a resolute philosophy—a philosophy that denies that nonsense can express unspeakable truths—that accepts both of Frege's conclusions. If we aspire to resoluteness then Frege's understanding of “concepthood”—his semantics of predication—comes apart in our hands. But then so too does the idea of what gets expressed by the way sentences are formed in *Begriffsschrift*. Talk of the *Bedeutung* of concept-expressions will now be not just impossible but also pointless—there's nothing *to* say. Again, this is problematic only to the extent that we also think that Frege's conception of concepthood is obligatory. But once we see that on the resolute interpretation, Frege *has* no conception of

¹¹⁴ Compare FREGE IN PERSPECTIVE at 256 (admitting that Frege “can give no content-full explanation of concepthood.”)

¹¹⁵ *On Concept and Object* at 192. It's curious that Diamond never suggests what a resolute interpretation of this passage or ones like it—compare, for instance *Comments on Sinn and Bedeutung* in FREGE READER at 174—might look like. Instead, it seems that her strategy is to argue that he *couldn't* have thought that, because he endorsed the Context Principle and the Context Principle, properly thought through, rules out mysticism. But clearly he *did* think that, because he *said* it. And he said it more than once.

It seems to me that Diamond is right about the implications of Frege's Context Principle. But it strikes me that the reasonable thing to say is that Frege's intuitions pull him in opposing directions. Diamond, it seems, is kept from saying this by her interpretation, on which all of the early Wittgenstein's insights were already there in Frege. It would be interesting if this were true, but we just can't wish indications to the contrary away.

concepthood then, absent some argument that no other logical taxonomy will do, the problem lapses.

Moreover, even if the Kerry paradox really did vitiate all efforts to reflect on logical form, this *still* would be without prejudice to the question of whether we can reflect on language and thought. Assuming *arguendo* that we can't reflect on logical form. Conant says that this means that we also can't speak of the logical structure of language.¹¹⁶ But we've been given no reason to suppose that this follows. In conversation, John McDowell gave an example of a claim about the structure of language that would satisfy the scrupulous Fregean: "*— is a horse*" is an expression; you can make a complete sentence by putting an object-expression in the gap. And the resulting sentence will be true just in case the referent of the object-expression really is a horse. This is a sentence by means of which we can say something about the logical structure of language. Using a similar strategy, we can talk about the parts of thought.¹¹⁷ So even if the right conclusion to draw from the concept horse problem *were* that we can't occupy a metaperspective on logic, and not that Frege's understanding of concepthood is unsustainable, it wouldn't follow that we can't occupy a metaperspective on *language* and *thought*.

¹¹⁶ ALIEN THOUGHT at 135.

¹¹⁷ "*—is a horse*" is an expression for a *part of thought*. The thought of which it is a part is true just in case that thought concerns something that really *is* a horse.

2.2 QUIETISM WITH RESPECT TO THE LAWS OF LOGIC

2.2.1 Psychology and Logic

The very words “possible” and “necessary” ... are characteristic indications of lack of clarity.¹¹⁸

Quietists repeatedly insist that we can’t occupy a “metaperspective” on logic.¹¹⁹ In § 2.1, we saw one reason that they take it that we can’t “get outside” of logic: the logical form of thought, they argue, can’t itself be an object of thought.

There is another, probably more well-known sense in which quietists take it that we can’t get outside logic. According to the quietist, our most natural “thoughts” concerning the character of the laws of logic, our thoughts concerning their *necessity*, turn out not to be thoughts at all. For instance, Conant suggests that we can’t make sense of the notion that logical truths are contingently necessary or that they’re necessarily necessary, and there’s no third possibility.^{120,121} And Diamond has argued that Wittgenstein thinks that “sentences about necessity ... are, at the end, entirely empty.”¹²²

¹¹⁸ *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 184.

¹¹⁹ See, for instance, FREGE IN PERSPECTIVE at 227 (“[T]he nature of logical laws precludes the existence of a substantive metaperspective for logic.”)

¹²⁰ ALIEN THOUGHT at 115-16 (“Descartes thought the laws of logic were only contingently necessary ... Aquinas believed that they were necessarily necessary ... Kant thought they were simply necessary. Frege wanted to agree—but his manner of doing so raised the worry that there was no way in which to express his agreement that made sense. Wittgenstein agreed with the worry. He concluded that sense had not (yet) been made of the question to which [Descartes and Aquinas] sought an answer.”) See also Diamond, *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 200-01;

Quietists take themselves to have learned all this from Wittgenstein, and they take Wittgenstein to have learned it from Frege, in particular, from his polemic against psychologism in the Introduction to the *Basic Laws of Arithmetic*.

Frege complains about “psychologism” throughout his philosophical writings, but in the introduction to the *Basic Laws*, he makes a series of remarks that commentators have taken to indict, not just the plausibility, but also the very intelligibility of psychologism.

Before we can begin to assess the argument, we need to say something about what psychologism is for Frege. The second of Frege’s three fundamental logical principles admonishes us to be mindful of the distinction between the psychological and the logical senses of words. To fail to make this distinction is to be guilty of psychologism.

It’s easy to misunderstand what psychologism amounts to for Frege. On one account, the proponent of psychologism confuses facts about the external world with facts about the mind: Frege’s psychological/logical distinction is meant to correspond to our distinction between the mental and the physical. There’s a sense in which this is just wrong, and a sense in which it’s underinclusive. This is just wrong if we take Frege to be saying that because logical truths are not to be found in our minds, they must be found in physical reality.¹²³ Perhaps more to the point, this account risks giving the impression that the *only* way to be guilty of psychologism is

Ricketts, *Objectivity and Objecthood: Frege’s Metaphysics of Judgment* in FREGE SYNTHESIZED 313 (L. Haaparanta & J. Hintikka eds., 1986).

¹²¹ Conant’s claim needs qualification. Surely Conant doesn’t mean that there’s *no* hygienic way of deploying the rhetoric of logical necessity. We could, for instance, give an interpretation of the “—is logically necessary” operator according to which it maps tautologies onto the True. This is, it seems to me, what we mean by the rhetoric of “logical necessity” at least some of the time. Moreover, it seems clear that Conant would have no problem with this (not particularly philosophical) use of language.

¹²² *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 198.

¹²³ Compare Ricketts, *Objectivity and Objecthood* in FREGE SYNTHESIZED at 295-96. The thought is: we all know that Frege was a platonist. So it must be in the spirit of affirming the truth of platonism that he denies that the psychological account of numbers or of concepts is right. But to deny that the psychological account is right is to insist that they are *not* creatures of our minds—that they are really “out there.”

to think of logic as a kind of fact about our minds (as if a behaviorist could never be guilty of psychologism).

To see what Frege really meant by psychologism, we need to reconsider his account of judgment and thought.^{124,125} In § 2.1, we said that judgment is the principal concern of Frege’s logic. For Frege, judgment is the lowest common denominator of sense, the basic unit of semantic significance.¹²⁶ Words have sense because they are components of expressions of judgments, not vice versa. Moreover, judgments are answerable to states of affairs—they *say* something about the world.

Frege has an influential story about the relation between judgment and thought that will become important later in this section, and again when we consider quietist interpretations of the

¹²⁴ Recall § 2.1, *supra*.

¹²⁵ It’s worth considering a worry that threatens to keep us from getting this discussion off the ground. Frege speaks of logic as delineating the basic rules of thought, or reasoning. But one might think that logic, strictly speaking, has very little to do with thinking and reasoning. Logic gives the rules for “proof of a conclusion from premises through a series of intermediate steps.” GILBERT HARMAN, *CHANGE IN VIEW: PRINCIPLES OF REASONING* 3 (1986). But in ordinary cases of belief revision—when Mary sees that the Cheerios are gone, for instance, and decides that Elizabeth must have eaten them—then logic as Frege conceives of it plays no role. (The example is Harman’s.) As Harman says, “Reasoning in the sense of reasoned change in view should never be identified with proof or argument; inference is not implication. Logic is the theory of implication, not directly the theory of reasoning.” *Id.* at 10.

The response to this is that Frege and Harman have something different in mind when they speak of “logic.” Thinking and reasoning, for Frege, are *by definition* constituted by logic. When Frege says, “[laws of logic] have a special title to the name ‘laws of thought’ [because] they are the most general laws, which prescribe universally the way in which one ought to think if one is to think at all,” *BASIC LAWS* at 12, he means this as a definition. To imagine a set of principles that have nothing to do with reasoning—rules of inference, for instance—is to imagine principles that aren’t laws of logic. Consequently, if Harman is right that inference rules have nothing to do with thinking and reasoning, then such rules would not be laws of logic in Frege’s sense.

With this in mind, recall Harman’s example. Mary doesn’t actually *use* logical principles to reason. But standards of consistency nevertheless seem to be normative for her. Indeed, we wouldn’t count her reasoning, reflecting and revising as *thinking*, if she were carrying on in an altogether illogical way.

(This isn’t, of course, to deny that people sometimes have inconsistent beliefs. It’s to say, rather, that there must be *some* consistency to what a person believes. If the logical relation between two propositions were obvious and my attitude toward them logically inconsistent, then you would just as likely interpret me as insane as inconsistent. Moreover, when we discover that we endorse inconsistent beliefs, we are obliged to revise our beliefs, to determine which beliefs make the stronger claim. So logic in the traditional sense *does* seem to be normative for thought. And now the question with which Frege is concerned is: is this optional? Is this just how *we* think about what being a thinker involves? Are there other ways of thinking about thinking?)

¹²⁶ Compare ROBERT BRANDOM, *MAKING IT EXPLICIT: REASONING, REPRESENTING, AND DISCURSIVE COMMITMENT* 79 (1994) (“[T]he fundamental unit of awareness or cognition, the minimum graspable, is the *judgment*.”)

rule-following considerations in §§ 3.2, 3.3, *infra*. Frege says “A propositional question contains the demand that we should either acknowledge the truth of a thought, or reject it as false,”¹²⁷ that “a real proposition expresses a thought. The latter is either true or false: *tertium non datur*.”¹²⁸ Frege’s thought is that objects of thought must also be capable of being objects of judgment, that one can by definition *proceed* from a proposition to a truth value. Call this the doctrine of the demand for judgment (“DDJ”). The DDJ expresses the idea that the layouts of minds necessarily offer themselves up for expression. To be *thinkable* is to be judgable; that which fails the demand for judgment at best expresses a “mock thought.” Furthermore, as Conant says, “there is a pressure in Frege’s philosophy ... one which the *Tractatus* does not resist ... to conclude that ... mock thoughts ... [seduce] us into an illusion of understanding.”¹²⁹

With this in mind, we can say something more about Frege’s distinction between the logical and the psychological. States with logical significance stand in relations of entailment, agreement and exclusion. For Frege, thoughts and judgments have this character. Thus, to have a thought or to make a judgment is to undertake a *commitment*, it’s to be subject to an obligation to reflect on the relations between one’s thoughts and judgments and to revise them if the need arises.¹³⁰

The logical stands opposed to the psychological. *Idea*, for Frege, is a psychological notion. When Frege says that someone has an idea, he doesn’t mean that she has a *thought*. Rather, an idea in Frege’s sense is something more like a fleeing sensation, a state that *doesn’t*

¹²⁷ FREGE, COLLECTED PAPERS ON MATHEMATICS, LOGIC AND PHILOSOPHY 373 (Black, Dudman, Geach, Kaal, Kluge, McGuinness and Stoothoff trans., B. McGuinness ed., 1984).

¹²⁸ COLLECTED PAPERS at 279. See also *Thought* in FREGE READER at 60 (“A *thought* is something for which the question of truth can arise.”) Compare TRACTATUS § 4.023 (“A proposition must restrict reality to two alternatives: yes or no.”)

¹²⁹ ALIEN THOUGHT at 137.

¹³⁰ Compare JOHN MCDOWELL, MIND AND WORLD 12 (1996).

constitute a commitment. If Frances serves us dinner, and you feel a surge of anticipation while I feel a wave of revulsion, different though our feelings are, we have nevertheless not *disagreed* with one another. Moreover (as we learned in non-cognitivism 101) even if we both give voice to our feelings—I say “boo” and you say “yay”—we still would not be disagreeing. We would simply be expressing feelings that happen to be different.¹³¹

With this in mind, let’s get back to our question of several paragraphs ago. What does it mean to say that psychologism confuses the psychological with the logical? If what I have said is right, this means that there is a sense in which the psychologistic logician is insufficiently vigilant in distinguishing between utterances such as “yay” that express ideas but not thoughts and utterances such as “the cat is on the mat” that express thoughts, though they may or may not express particular ideas.

Thus described, I doubt many people would consider themselves guilty of psychologism. But Frege thinks that it’s much easier to confuse the psychological with the logical than many suppose. Many people are guilty of psychologism without even realizing it. In fact, Frege claims that psychologism is, “a widespread philosophical disease.”¹³² For Frege, psychologism with respect to the laws of logic has this character. The psychologistic logician thinks that logic aims to delineate the principles in accord with which human beings happen to reason, that the laws of logic are merely *contingently necessary*.¹³³ Put otherwise, for the psychologistic logician, there’s a sense in which, while the laws of logic are necessary *for us*, they might not be valid for *all* thinking beings.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Compare Ricketts, *Objectivity and Objecthood* in FREGE SYNTHESIZED at 299-300.

¹³² In a footnote to *On Concept and Object* at 104-05, and in COLLECTED PAPERS at 209.

¹³³ Compare ALIEN THOUGHT at 121-22. Here Conant borrows Kant’s own characterization of this sort of view in the CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON at B167-68.

¹³⁴ Compare ALIEN THOUGHT at 123-24.

This sort of position deserves to be called “psychologism” for at least two reasons. First, laws that have the character that the psychologistic logician ascribes to the laws of logic are like “laws of nature”: they *describe* how things happen—how we reason—but they lack the normative force Frege teaches us to associate with the realm of judgment. For Frege, the order and connection that the realm of ideas exhibits is quite different from the normative connections that constitute the realm of judgment. To miss the difference between how we *do* reason and how we *should* reason is to be guilty of a basic confusion, a version of the naturalistic fallacy.

For the Wittgensteinian quietist, there’s another, more surprising sense in which psychologism with respect to the laws of logic confuses thoughts with ideas. As we will see, quietists claim that the psychologistic logician’s own utterances express ideas but not thoughts; viz. her position fails to make sense.¹³⁵ This is the upshot of the denial that we can attain a metaperspective of logic. As we’ve seen, Conant says that *no sense has been made* of philosophical questions concerning logical necessity.¹³⁶ For the likes of Conant, as we will see, we think that these are real questions, and that one finds various different answers to these questions in the history of philosophy only insofar as we confuse the *feelings* that philosophical utterances trigger for genuine thoughts.

2.2.2 Frege’s Argument

With this in mind, we’re in a position to consider the quietist version of Frege’s argument. The remarks that form the basis of the quietist account of Frege’s argument against psychologism are surprisingly brief, and worth quoting in full. Frege says,

¹³⁵ See ALIEN THOUGHT at 134, 150, 157 and 158.

¹³⁶ Id. at 115-16.

The laws of truth are not psychological laws: they are boundary stones set in an eternal foundation, which our thought can overflow, but never displace. It is because of this that they have authority for our thought if it would attain to truth. They do not bear the relation to thought that the laws of grammar bear to language; they do not make explicit the nature of our human thinking and change as it changes. Of course, [the psychologistic account] of the laws of logic is quite different. [It] doubts their unconditional and eternal validity and would restrict them to our thought as it is now ... “our thought” surely can only mean the thought of human beings up to the present. Accordingly the possibility remains of men or other beings being discovered who were capable of bringing off judgments contradicting our laws of logic. If this were to happen? [The psychologistic logician] would say: here we see that these principles do not hold generally. Certainly! –if these are psychological laws, their verbal expression must single out the family of beings whose thought is empirically governed by them. I should say: thus there exist beings that recognize certain truths not as we do, immediately, but perhaps led by some lengthier route of induction. But what if beings were even found whose laws of thought flatly contradicted ours and therefore frequently led to contrary results even in practice? The psychological logician could only acknowledge the fact and say simply: those laws hold for them, these laws hold for us. I should say: we have here a hitherto unknown type of madness. Anyone who understands laws of logic to be laws that prescribe the way in which one ought to think—to be laws of truth, and not natural laws of human beings’ taking a thing to be true—will ask, who is right? Whose laws of taking-to-be-true are in accord with the laws of truth? The psychological logician cannot ask this question; if he did he would be recognizing laws of truth that were not laws of psychology.¹³⁷

The schematic version of the argument that quietists have found in this passage is: the psychologistic logician is committed to the existence of “logical aliens”, beings who follow different logical principles. But Frege’s thought experiment shows that sentences like “I’ve discovered/recognized/imagined a case of logically alien thought” don’t meet the demand for judgment.¹³⁸ As we’ve seen, that which fails the demand for judgment is nonsense.¹³⁹ So sentences that seem to be about logical aliens are really nonsense—they seduce us into an

¹³⁷ FREGE, THE BASIC LAWS OF ARITHMETIC: EXPOSITION OF THE SYSTEM 13-14 (M. Furth trans., 1964).

¹³⁸ ALIEN THOUGHT at 149.

¹³⁹ Conant makes this claim in two stages: first, he claims that which fails the DJ expresses only mock thoughts (or *Schiengedanken*). Id. at 137 and 139 (“sentences [putatively expressing logical propositions] cannot withstand the demand for judgment, Frege’s ... litmus test for distinguishing mock thoughts from genuine ones.) And elsewhere, he claims that sentences expressing mock thoughts are nonsense. METHOD at 105 (“*Schiensätze* ... are not a species of the genus ‘proposition’ ... but rather strings of signs which we are prone to mistake for propositions.”)

illusion of understanding. But the psychologistic logician is committed to the possibility of logical alienhood. So psychologism with respect to the laws of logic is defined by a commitment that is ultimately unintelligible. Consequently, sentences seeming to express the commitments of the psychologistic logician too must be nonsense. Moreover, the denial of these claims also fails to meet the demand for judgment.¹⁴⁰ So neither assertion nor negation makes sense. So there's simply nothing to be said about the status of the laws of logic.

The key point here is that logical alienhood fails to meet the demand for judgment. There are different versions of Frege's argument for this point.¹⁴¹ I take it that Conant's *Search for Logically Alien Thought* gives this argument its most compelling formulation. On Conant's interpretation, the key to the argument is that we can't give a satisfactory characterization of the sense in which a putatively alien logic *disagrees* with our own. Imagine aliens who speak a language that is like English but which contains a logical connective that our language lacks: the "tonk" connective. Imagine further that the tonk-connective has the following properties: *if A, then A tonk B*; and *if A tonk B, then B*. Implicit, one might think, in the recognition of a connective with these characteristics is the failure to recognize the validity of the law of non-contradiction. Consequently, if you were psychologically inclined, you might say that the law of non-contradiction governs our thought but not theirs, that they recognize laws of logic that are *different* from our own.

¹⁴⁰ METHOD at 105. Although Conant isn't as explicit about this as one might wish, the basic point, I think, is that if p is a piece of nonsense, then so too is not-p.

¹⁴¹ Conant gives a simplified version of the argument in ALIEN THOUGHT at 146: assume that psychologism is true—we can't but judge in accord with the recognized laws of logic. Consequently, we *must* judge the aliens to be, not just different but wrong. But alien thought is by definition equally valid. Here we have a contradiction.

Ricketts also gives a version of this argument, suggesting that since we use logic to draw connections between propositions as part of the process of understanding a proposition, we can't understand the suggestion that a law of logic is false—in order to understand the suggestion that a principle of logic might be false, we would need to act on the assumption that it is true. So the attempt to "get outside" logic, to imagine other logical possibilities, is self-defeating. Compare Ricketts, *Frege, the Tractatus, and the Logocentric Predicament* 11 NOÛS 19:1 (1985).

But what can we say about this difference? The most obvious answer would be: *our logical laws are different insofar as theirs are incompatible with ours. Two judgments are incompatible if they cannot both be true. We think the law of non-contradiction is true. They clearly do not think the law of non-contradiction is true. The law of non-contradiction cannot be both true and not true. Therefore, their laws of logic are incompatible with ours. Therefore, we disagree about what counts as a logical law.*

This all seems fine until we ask ourselves: to *whom* would it be apparent that our laws and theirs cannot both be true? The answer is: to anyone who thinks the affirmation of the law of non-contradiction and its denial cannot both be true. And, of course, only a being that recognizes the validity of the law of non-contradiction would admit this. So it's only from *our* logical perspective that our logic contradicts theirs.

If we continue to insist that they really are disagreeing, then we imagine that our logic is valid for them as well, that their logic is defective. But then we have yet to imagine beings for whom our logic isn't valid.¹⁴²

It would be of no avail for the psychologistic logician to seek to avoid the snare she gets herself in by privileging our logic over theirs by saying that logical aliens are beings whose logic *seems* to disagree with ours. The psychologistic logician is committed to the possibility of real logical disagreement. To say that we merely *appear* to disagree is to imply that the alien's judgments are psychologically (and not logically) different from our own. But to say that their judgments neither accords (clearly) nor conflicts with ours is to admit that their utterances fail to impinge on our world views altogether—that they are just *noise* to us. Admittedly, it's a psychologically distinctive kind of noise, a noise that we feel inclined to treat as an expression of

¹⁴² Compare *Objectivity and Objecthood* in FREGE SYNTHESIZED at 298, and ALIEN THOUGHT at 145.

thought. But to say that we're inclined to feel that a noise expresses thought isn't to say that we have any *reason* to treat it as an expression of thought.

Implicit in our inability to characterize the nature of our putative disagreement with the aliens is the often-invoked point that the laws of logic constitute the framework within which thought, and hence disagreement, is recognizable.¹⁴³ If we try to refrain from privileging our logic over theirs, we lose our right to say that they have a logic: to say that their judgments are unrelated to anything that we can say (or think) is to say we're incapable of recognizing their utterances as expressions of thoughts at all.¹⁴⁴

To reiterate, on this interpretation Frege's basic idea is that the clash between alien logic and ours is either logical or it is psychological. To say it's logical is to bring *our* logic to bear on their thought, to treat their logic as *wrong*. To say that it's psychological is to imagine that there *is* no real clash. (Along the same lines, the mere fact that two people make different noises doesn't mean that they *disagree*). Either way, there's no room to say that there's something it would be like for thought to be illogical; logic constitutes the possibility of rational discourse.¹⁴⁵

Having seen this, the psychologistic logician seems forced to yield some part of her conception of her position. Moreover, the psychologistic logician's predicament is such that we might begin to doubt the *meaningfulness* of her claims.¹⁴⁶ If the contingency of the laws of logic entails the possibility of alien thought, and if the very idea of logical alienhood comes apart in our hands, then doesn't the idea that logic is contingent (or that it's not) come apart in our hands

¹⁴³ Compare *Objectivity and Objecthood* in FREGE SYNTHESIZED at 299 ("the principles of logic provide us with a shared background, context, or framework that enables us, first, to recognize disagreement, and second, to arbitrate the consequent debate"); ALIEN THOUGHT at 148.

¹⁴⁴ Compare Donald Davidson, *On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme* in ESSAYS ON TRUTH AND INTERPRETATION 188 (1984) ("nothing, it may be said, could count as evidence that some form of activity could not be interpreted in our language that was not at the same time evidence that that form of activity was not speech behavior.")

¹⁴⁵ Compare ALIEN THOUGHT at 148.

¹⁴⁶ Id. at 157.

too? Put otherwise, if we can't imagine what it would be like for psychologism to be true, then what is there to be meant by the words the psychologistic logician uses to express her commitments? Furthermore, what is there to be meant by the denial of the psychologistic logician's commitments, by the insistence that logic really *is* necessary?¹⁴⁷ (Again, the denial of a piece of nonsense is just more nonsense.) And if neither psychologism nor its denial makes sense, then perhaps the rhetoric of logical necessity lacks sense altogether.

2.2.3 Conceivability and Sense

That we can form no idea of its content is therefore no reason for denying all meaning to a word, or excluding it from our vocabulary.¹⁴⁸

Frege's argument shows that we can't conceive of logical aliens. This could mean a number of things. In the first instance, the psychologistic logician would probably want to take this to mean that (1) we're just not cognitively privileged enough to conceive of logical aliens. Let's concede that *this* isn't a plausible response to Frege's argument. After all, absent some further story, this would imply that conceivability isn't even a *defeasible* guide to possibility. And that's not a terribly plausible view. (If that were the case, as Kieran Setiya remarked in response to an earlier draft, then we'd have a hard time defending *any* modal claims.)

Alternatively, we might take Frege's argument to show that since part of what it *is* to be a thinker is to habitually infer in sensible ways, (2) logical aliens are metaphysically impossible; that is, they are ruled-out by the nature of thought, even though the notion of a logical alien is *logically* consistent. On yet another alternative, we could take Frege's argument to show that (3)

¹⁴⁷ Compare Id. at 150. See also Id. at 134 and 158.

¹⁴⁸ FOUNDATIONS § 60.

the very idea of a logical alien is nonsense, that we can't use the phrase "logical alien" to express the thoughts we were looking to express.

Proponents of the quietist interpretation of Frege's argument endorse (3). In so doing, they postulate a very strong link between *conceivability* and *sense*. This link is implicit in the transition from Frege's explicit conclusion—we can't imagine logical aliens, and to try to do so is to imagine instead a form of madness—to Conant's—the words "logical alien" are meaningless. Quietists take themselves to have learned about the connection between what we can imagine and what we can sensibly talk about from Wittgenstein.¹⁴⁹ In *Philosophical Grammar*, for instance, Wittgenstein says

How strange that one should be able to say that such and such a state of affairs is inconceivable! If we regard thought as essentially an accompaniment going with an expression, the words in the statement that specify the inconceivable state of affairs must be unaccompanied. So what sort of sense is it to have? Unless it says these words are senseless. But it isn't as it were their sense that is senseless; they are excluded from our language like some arbitrary noise, and the reason for their *explicit* exclusion can only be that we are *tempted* to confuse them with a sentence of our language.¹⁵⁰

Here Wittgenstein seems to suggest that words that purport to describe an inconceivable state of affairs are like some empty noise. It would be surprising if this were Wittgenstein's considered view, if the philosopher who endeavored not to advance philosophical theses really

¹⁴⁹ Ricketts is explicit about this in *Frege, the Tractatus, and the Logocentric Predicament* at 12 ("the link between logic and conceivability that is somewhat implicit in Frege is fully explicit in the *Tractatus*.")

¹⁵⁰ WITTGENSTEIN, *PHILOSOPHICAL GRAMMAR* § 83 (R. Rhees, ed., A. Kenny, trans., 1974).

endorsed anything so philosophically contentious.¹⁵¹ Moreover, it's not clear why Wittgenstein takes conceivability and sense to be linked, or what sort of link he takes there to be.¹⁵²

Perhaps the fact that we can't imagine what it would be like for a state of affairs to be the case tells against the intelligibility of sentences (putatively) expressing that (putative) state of affairs. We might express this proposal as follows:

¹⁵¹ But note that a remark to this effect does show up in INVESTIGATIONS part ii at 178; REMARKS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF PSYCHOLOGY, VOLUME 1 § 265 (G. E. M. Anscombe & G. H. von Wright, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe, trans., 1980).

¹⁵² To wit, we might note that it's not even clear what the quietist means by *conceivability*. Clearly our ability to form conceptions can't be a mere psychological capacity, for then there would be *no* link between conceivability and sense. Imagination in the psychological sense is clearly linked to intelligence. (Here I mean intelligence in some thin sense—the capacity to rotate two-dimensional figures in your head, for instance.) And humans are finitely intelligent. Consequently, humans must be finitely imaginative as well. To take an example, I'm fairly good at imagining three- and four-sided figures (thanks to a childhood spent playing *Dungeons and Dragons*). But I would be at a loss if you asked me to imagine a twenty-sided figure. (The proof of this is that if you were to ask me to imagine a twenty-sided figure and then determine how much greater the angles formed by the sides are than the corresponding angles of a nineteen-sided figure, I would have to guess.)

One might respond that while the limit of any particular human's imagination is indeed arbitrary, the limit of human imagination as such is not. And what is true of me is true of all humans. Take the smartest human you know and you can imagine that person performing better on the relevant cognitive tests. (If nothing else, we could imagine that that person finishes the test sooner.)

While I think that all of this is true, it nevertheless strikes me that we can form the notion of a limit that human intelligence can approach but not surpass. In the case of some humans, idiot savants perhaps, that limit will be so far past what normal humans can actually do it won't really seem like humans are fenced in at all. But even savants aren't infinitely resourceful—there are calculations that even savants can't perform in their heads. Consequently, however far above the line representing the limits to my intelligence you want to draw the line that represents the limits to human intelligence as such, such a line can be drawn. (There is some n such that no human can multiply figures of n digits in her head. Similarly, there is some number such that even the most mathematically adept savant cannot perform mental operations on figures of that many sides. And so on.)

Once we admit that such lines can be drawn, however, the idea that there's a psychological limit to sense becomes hopeless. After all, there are events in nature that even our most powerful computers can't model: proteins folding, storms brewing and etc. And with respect to our ability to perform tasks built up from elementary mathematical tasks, humans are far less resourceful than computers. Consequently, it is plainly false that all that is written in the book of nature is imaginable in the psychological sense.)

This should come as no surprise to those who would follow Frege, for the great man himself insists "That we can form no idea of its content is therefore no reason for denying all meaning to a word, or excluding it from our vocabulary." FOUNDATIONS § 60. (Recall that "idea", for Frege, is tied to the faculty of imagination.) But if imagination is to be understood as a non-psychological capacity—if it is to be understood as an *epistemic* capacity—then the quietist interpretation of Frege's argument begs the question against the psychologistic logician. (If we understand *imagination* psychologically then the psychologistic logician must admit that she can't imagine logical aliens; if we understand *imagination* epistemically, she is under no pressure to do so.) Now insisting that we can't imagine logical aliens will just mean we can't form beliefs about logical aliens. And this the psychologistic logician will just deny.

(P1) every meaningful sentence corresponds to a state of affairs that is conceivable by a finite being

The problem with (P1) is that it isn't conservative—it threatens to have implications for mathematics and perhaps even for science.

We can see that (P1) isn't conservative by reflecting on the properties of the real numbers. We take it that our conception of real numbers is as semantically hygienic as any. But it turns out that we can prove that there are some real numbers that are *indescribable*.¹⁵³ Indescribable numbers, it turns out, are a proper subset of transcendental numbers. Unlike ordinary transcendental numbers, indescribable reals cannot be uniquely specified by any first-order sentence or concatenation of sentences, hence the label.^{154,155} (The proof of this is that there are countably many symbols. Therefore, there are only countably many first-order descriptions. But there are uncountably many real numbers (by Cantor's diagonal argument). Therefore, some real numbers—as it turns out, most—must be indescribable.)

Note that since this is so, there are real numbers that are unimaginable. (Put simply, if you can't in principle uniquely pick something out with a description then you can't imagine it either.) Relative to (P1), such numbers (and indeed, sets containing such numbers as their members) are in the same semantic boat as the logical aliens: if all and only that which in principle can be imagined by beings like us can be generalized over, then the words “indescribable real” (and the words “real number”, insofar as real numbers include “indescribables”) no less than the words “logical alien”, will turn out to be “empty noise.”

¹⁵³ The main context in which the term “indescribable” figures is in the theory of cardinal numbers, but as the diagonal argument demonstrates, the same point applies to real numbers as well.

¹⁵⁴ This is a point that Kevin Davey has patiently taken me through. Here, as always, I am very grateful to Kevin.

¹⁵⁵ Moreover, going second-order won't help matters. First, even if sentences of infinite length could uniquely specify the indescribables, this wouldn't suffice to make them semantically hygienic by the quietist's lights. Moreover, the problem of indescribables will re-occur at a higher level. That is to say, there will be some *other* class of numbers that aren't uniquely specified by any second-order descriptions.

It strikes me that this view will be unacceptable for those who have bought into Wittgenstein's account of his own philosophical method.¹⁵⁶ If the phrase "real number" is empty noise, then mathematicians will have to reevaluate what they thought they knew about numbers. Moreover, mathematicians will have to reevaluate their faith in the proof techniques that led them astray in this way. (If the diagonal argument yields nonsense, then clearly it utilizes illegitimate techniques.) So it seems clear that the quietist who avails herself of (P1) to justify herself does not leave *mathematics*, at any rate, as it is.^{157,158}

¹⁵⁶ Compare INVESTIGATIONS § 124 ("[Philosophy] also leaves mathematics as it is.")

¹⁵⁷ Of course, not everyone agrees that the mathematical example ought to be a source of comfort to the psychologistic logician. Surprisingly given his characterization of his philosophical method, Wittgenstein probably should be counted among the skeptics. In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein's interlocutor says, "In the decimal expansion of π either the group '7777' occurs, or it does not – there is no third possibility." And Wittgenstein responds, "That is to say: 'God sees – but we don't know.' But what does that mean? – We use a picture; the picture of a visible series which one person sees the whole of and another not ... And this picture *seems* to determine what we have to do, what to look for, and how – but it does not do so, just because we do not know how it is to be applied. Here saying 'There is no third possibility' or 'But there can't be a third possibility!' – expresses our inability to turn our eyes away from this picture. INVESTIGATIONS § 352. See also INVESTIGATIONS § 516, and WITTGENSTEIN, REMARKS ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MATHEMATICS V-34 (G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, & G. E. M. Anscombe eds., G. E. M. Anscombe trans., 1978).

I take it that this is an expression of some form of constructivism. In conversation, John McDowell suggested that this does not go without saying. Perhaps Wittgenstein is saying, not that it's *never* legitimate to say "either 7777 occurs or it doesn't," but rather that a particular picture that can motivate us to say this is suspect. It seems to me that this interpretation is ruled-out by what Wittgenstein says elsewhere. In REMARKS ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MATHEMATICS V-34, for instance, Wittgenstein says "Suppose that people go on and on calculating the expansion of π . So God, who knows everything, knows whether they will have reached '7777' by the end of the world. But can his *omniscience* decide whether they *would* have reached it after the end of the world? It cannot ... Even for him the rule of expansion cannot decide anything that it does not decide for us." As Putnam notes, this formulation has it that if a calculation is not *actually* possible—because the universe will undergo heat collapse before we can complete it, for instance—then there is no fact of the matter concerning its outcome. (Compare Putnam, *Was Wittgenstein an Anti-realist about Mathematics?* at 193.) This is surely a strong form of antirealism!

I don't really know how Wittgenstein came to be committed to this. One possibility, though, is that he took this commitment on board in the course of his study of "the great works of Frege," (TRACTATUS at p. 29) that he thought that buying into Frege's line against the psychologistic logician requires one to be something like a constructivist with respect to mathematics. But once again, this compels him to advance philosophical theses about mathematics. (Putnam notes, *pace* Wittgenstein's official line, that, "we should regard the question whether [7777] ever occurs in the expansion of π as a perfectly sensible mathematical question ... What Wittgenstein should have said is that the mathematicians do understand the question ... and that they have learned to understand such questions by learning to do number theory; and that something that they have also learned by learning to do number theory is that either [777] will occur in the expansion or [777] will never occur in the expansion." *Was Wittgenstein an Anti-Realist?* at 178-79.)

I'm not really prepared to argue that these philosophical theses are false, that non-constructive mathematics is hygienic. But for the Wittgensteinian, it is clearly anathema to "throw away the notion of" certain numbers based

It seems clear from this that the quietist can't be committed to anything like (P1). But it's also more or less clear that she doesn't need to be. The case of the logical aliens is clearly very different from the case of the Reals. In the case of the Reals, it is the limits of our linguistic resources (either due to their finitude or their insufficient cardinality) that is the source of our difficulty. But our finitude (or whatever) has nothing to do with the inconceivability of logical aliens. To the extent that we can make sense of the idea of a logical alien at all, it's not an arbitrary member of a class whose reach is too great for us to fathom, but a *particular* object we can't wrap our minds around. So no enrichment of our linguistic repertoire would be of any avail here. With this in mind, we might re-formulate our original proposal about the link between conceivability and sense as follows:

(P2) every meaningful sentence corresponds to a conceivable state of affairs.

It seems to me that (P2) represents our best effort at capturing the quietist's intuition concerning the link between conceivability and sense, that the quietist *must* be committed to something like (P2).¹⁵⁹ In what follows, I argue that (P2) is false. I will raise two problems with

on first principles. (For the rest of us, it simply won't do to have to say silly things like "the claim 'there is a proof of Fermat's Last Theorem' was nonsense in 1995, but true slightly thereafter.")

¹⁵⁸ A technical digression: we might think that the problem follows from the reference in (P1) to conceivability by a *finite* being. Although there's a sense in which that's right, there is also a sense in which it's not. To see how one might think something like this and be wrong, imagine someone who thinks (P1*) all genuine configurations of mathematical reality are describable if we allow ourselves to use sentences of infinite length. The problem with (P1*) is that for any specification of the cardinality of our language, as it were, we can define a class of numbers that can't be uniquely specified by descriptions in that language, even if descriptions include sentences of infinite length. (For instance, if our language contains countably many symbols then we can define a set of numbers with a cardinality of $\aleph-1$, and some members of that set will be indescribable in our language. And so on.)

¹⁵⁹ I will consider possible modifications of (P2) in my Appendix, *infra*.

(P2). The first problem is that taken together with the quietist's *other* commitments, (P2) is provably false. The second problem is that (P2) foists on us a problematic story about reasoning.

The first problem with (P2) is that it is provably false. The proof I have in mind will draw on the relation between the ability to conceive of a state of affairs and the ability to form beliefs concerning that state of affairs. I propose to cash out this relation as follows: if something is imaginable then one is capable of forming at least some beliefs about it.¹⁶⁰ Accordingly, the quietist must think that the limits of the actual are coextensive with the limits of possible *belief*, that the truth of some proposition entails the possibility that someone actually believes that proposition.

Note that if we rigidify imaginability-relations, we can define a set of possible worlds in which (P2) entails what I will call *the weak principle of true belief*, the idea that all facts are possible subjects of true beliefs. So we deduce that the quietist is committed to:

(P2*) all genuine states of affairs are the possible subjects of true beliefs.

¹⁶⁰ Even if there is some object *x* whose nature is such that no beliefs of the form “*x* is ϕ ” can be true in the actual world, one can still form beliefs concerning *x*. (To take an example, Frances is a badger who is the main character in a children's book. (She is also the namesake of my wonderful cat.) In the story, Frances eats only bread and jam. Now as far as I know, there is no real badger who wears skirts and eats only bread and jam. But obviously this doesn't stop me from saying things like “That badger that you just saw isn't the real Frances” to confused nieces and nephews.)

That all facts are believable is entailed by (P2) taken in concert with my proposed gloss on imagination. That all facts can be the subjects of *true* beliefs follows from the fact that it is *facts* we are talking about.¹⁶¹

The problem with the weak principle of true belief is that it actually entails a much stronger principle that no one would accept. Let the following be the strong principle of true belief: some fact obtains if and only if at present someone believes that fact and that belief is true.

No reasonable person could accept the strong principle of true belief.¹⁶² But the weak principle *entails* the strong principle. To see the logical connection between the two principles, assume for *reductio* that the weak principle is true and the strong principle false. For this to be the case, there must be some proposition that no one actually truly believes but which is true and moreover which someone *might* have truly believed. Imagine that “Frances is hiding in the closet” is one such proposition. Furthermore, the proposition “Frances is hiding in the closet and yet no one actually truly believes that that’s where she is” is also true. What happens when we apply the weak principle of true belief to the latter proposition? When we apply the principle to that more complicated proposition, it yields the following: “it is possible that someone truly

¹⁶¹ A digression: Anil Gupta pointed out that the principle that (1) everything is believable (for all x , Bx) doesn’t entail that (2) everything is *truly* believable (where TBx entails x). (After all, if w_1 names some other possible world then the proposition “ w_1 satisfies S believes p ” vindicates (1) but not necessarily (2).)

Gupta is right. But the quietist subscribes to something stronger than (1). She thinks that all that is is such that *we* can believe it. One way of cashing this out would be as follows: for the quietist, if p then there’s a branch of space/time that shares a history with the actual world in which someone believes that p . (Issues related to this will come up again in our discussion of Dorothy Edgington’s distinction between *possible worlds* and *possibilities* in my Appendix, *infra*.) Now, insofar as those worlds share a history with the actual world, p will (necessarily) obtain in those worlds as well. So the quietist subscribes to (2).

(Of course, if she reads on and sees the trouble that this gets her in, the quietist can reject (2). But then she must admit that the imaginability of some fact says nothing about its ontological status, or the semantic status of sentences putatively expressing it.)

¹⁶² But unless I am mistaken, there are many philosophers who accept something like the weak principle of true belief. Both Davidson and Strawson seem to endorse this principle. (See Davidson, *On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme*, and P. F. STRAWSON, THE BOUNDS OF SENSE: AN ESSAY ON KANT’S CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON 42 (1975).) Also, McDowell gives a defense of sorts of this principle in MIND AND WORLD 40 (1996), and throughout Lecture II.

believes both that Frances is hiding in the closet and that no one truly believes that that's where she is." But we can derive a contradiction from this. (If it is possible then there is a world in which it's satisfied. In that world, no one truly believes that Frances is hiding in the closet (since "truly believable" entails "true"). But in that world, someone does believe that Frances is hiding in the closet (since "truly believable" distributes over conjunction).) Consequently, it can't both be the case that the weak principle is true and the strong principle false; the weak principle entails the strong.

This, of course, is a version of Fitch's famous argument against verificationism. Not surprisingly, the argument has generated a strong response in the antirealist community. I will have a great deal more to say about this argument in the Appendix, *infra*, where I will argue that the various antirealist proposals for how to formulate the principle of verification in a way that isn't "Fitchable" are of no avail to the quietist. For the time being, I want to note that the antirealist objections don't save (P2*). No one in the antirealist community challenges the validity of the argument, the idea that *if* we assume that there are truths of which no one is aware, *then* there are also true propositions of which no one *could* be aware, unbelievable truths. What the antirealists challenge is the idea that proponents of verificationism need to be committed to (P2*). Assume that this is right. It's far from obvious that this ought to be a source of comfort for the quietist. For, as we said, the quietist's interpretation of Frege's polemic rests on some version of (P2). If I'm right that (P2) entails (P2*), then (P2) can't be right. As such, absent some further story, there will be little reason to think that (P2) can bridge the gap between Frege's explicit conclusion and Conant's.

These issues concerning the sort of link we should recognize between conceivability and sense will come up again in the context of our discussion of quietist interpretations of Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations. Consequently, I think it's worth considering one further problem with (P2) that I'll want to appeal to again in § 3.3.

The problem I have in mind comes into view when we reflect on the relation between conceivability and contingency. Consider: we can't conceive of what it would be like for a contradiction to be the case. Consequently, for the proponent of (P2), sentences expressing contradictions are *without sense*.¹⁶³ Moreover, to say that a sentence is without sense is to imply that logical embeddings of that sentence likewise lack sense. So for the proponent of (P2), neither tautologies nor contradictions have sense. As such, (P2) implies

(P2**) every genuinely meaningful sentence corresponds to a *contingent* state of affairs.¹⁶⁴

(P2**) is one formulation of what is often called the *contrastive theory of meaning* (henceforth CTM). As I said, I will have more to say about the CTM when it comes up again in § 3.3. In the meantime, I want to note that many quietists seem to endorse, and take Wittgenstein

¹⁶³ We need to be careful here. Neither the quietist, nor the early Wittgenstein thinks that tautologies and contradictions are nonsense (*Unsinn*). Rather, they think that logical sentences are not sensible (*Sinnvoll*). The early Wittgenstein distinguished between logical and philosophical sentences. For him, neither sentence-type has *Sinn*, but whereas the second is mere nonsense, the first belongs to its own logical category—it is *Sinnlos*.

¹⁶⁴ This establishes a formal connection between (P2) and the CTM. There is also an intuitive connection. There's a certain kind of "work" that sentences putatively expressing inconceivable propositions don't do. When a proposition is inconceivable, it doesn't sort possible states of affairs into groups based on whether they accord with the proposition or not. Thus, to say a proposition isn't conceivable by us is to say that it can't matter to us, that it's nothing for us.

to have endorsed, the CTM.¹⁶⁵ In what follows, I argue that the CTM is problematic, that it commits us to an implausible view of reasoning.

We can begin to bring out the problem with the view of reasoning implicit in the CTM by reflecting on our ability to form conditionals with ethical sentences as their antecedents.¹⁶⁶ It seems natural to think that the attitudes expressed by such conditionals can be coherently and incoherently combined with other attitudes. To see this, imagine that in the course of listening to her favorite Smiths album, it occurs to Frances that

(1) if Morrissey is right that meat is murder then Giant Eagle will some day stop selling meat.

Now whatever story we propose to tell about what Frances's endorsing (1) consists in—is it an attitude? A belief? A desire?—clearly it can constitute a reason for certain beliefs. For instance, if Frances's study of Peter Singer led her to accept that

(2) Morrissey is right; meat *is* murder,

but she also adopted a stance incompatible with believing

(C) Giant Eagle will stop selling meat,

¹⁶⁵ Goldfarb, *Metaphysics and Nonsense* at 18 (“[Wittgenstein] goes beyond the idea that the proposition is intrinsically true or false, truth-valued of its very nature; it is also that it has both poles, it must set up a contrast between what makes it true and what makes it false.”)

¹⁶⁶ What follows is a version of an argument Cian Dorr gives against ethical non-cognitivism in *Non-cognitivism and Wishful Thinking* NOÛS 36:1 (2002).

(if she *suspended judgment* with respect to (C), or accepted a belief incompatible with (C)) we would say she is *inconsistent*. Thus, (1) and (2) *imply* (C). What's more, if we imagine that Frances has no evidence for (C) apart from her endorsement of (1) and (2), then it would be irrational for her to accept (C) before accepting (1) and (2), and irrational for her *not* to accept (C) after. So (1) and (2) give Frances a *reason* to accept (C).¹⁶⁷

But now we should be able to see the trouble caused by giving the wrong sort of account of (2). Consider, for instance, the account that non-cognitivists give of (2). According to the non-cognitivist, when Frances accepts (2) she changes her attitudes and not her beliefs. For the non-cognitivist, while Frances's study of Peter Singer might have led her to have new beliefs—about how animal carcasses are processed, for instance—none of *that* is what accepting (2) consists in. For any set of what the non-cognitivist would be prepared to call genuine beliefs, we can imagine Frances accepting all the members of that set and yet not accepting (2). Of course, no one—cognitivist or non-cognitivist—thinks it rational to change one's beliefs because one has changed one's attitudes or desires. Indeed, were Frances to accept (C) based on (1) and (2) this would be wishful thinking. And wishful thinking is irrational.¹⁶⁸ But since (1) and (2) imply (C), it would also be irrational for Frances *not* to accept (C). So it seems that by the lights of the non-cognitivist, the only safe thing for Frances to do would be to *reject* (1) on accepting (2). And that's just crazy!

¹⁶⁷ Dorr notes that in some cases, premises can imply a conclusion without constituting reasons for accepting that conclusion. For instance, when the conclusion concerns a state of which one is non-inferentially aware (e.g. (C*) I am in pain) then if one comes to accept the major premise of a syllogism implying (C*), this constitutes a reason to reject the minor premise and vice versa. But arguments like the one given above seem very unlike this if for no other reason than that it's possible to imagine a rational being accepting (C) only after she accepts (P2).

¹⁶⁸ *Non-Cognitivism and Wishful Thinking* at 99 ("It is often rational to modify your views about one part of the world so that they cohere with your views about the rest of the world. It is irrational to modify your views about the world so that they cohere with your desires and feelings.")

For *any* syntactically assertoric sentence, if we give the wrong sort of account of the status of this sentence, then we will be left unable to make sense of the fact that accepting the sentence can constitute a reason for believing a claim whose cognitive status *isn't* in dispute. This problem, I think, repeats itself for the proponent of the CTM. The proponent of the CTM maintains that mathematical and, at any rate, philosophical sentences fail to express thoughts, that they only *seem* to express thoughts. But if this is right then when we modify our views about the world to cohere with our mathematical and philosophical “convictions” we will risk seeming worse than irrational—we will risk seeming insane.¹⁶⁹

To see this, imagine that Frances is reflecting on the implications of ethical non-cognitivism and she decides that

(1*) if ethical judgments merely express attitudes then I have no reason to refrain from taking these cookies without bothering to purchase a Giant Eagle cookie card.¹⁷⁰

Imagine further that she is persuaded of the capacity of Giant Eagle’s management to keep track of the requirements of reason and concludes that

(2*) if I needn’t comply with the cookie policy, then this policy will surely go unenforced.

¹⁶⁹ I’m not going to discuss at any length the case of the potential relation between *mathematical* and ordinary beliefs. But it seems clear that a version of this argument could be made to fit. Imagine, for instance, that Frances thought that she had a proof of the falsity of Fermat’s Last Theorem. She submits the proof to the prize committee along with instructions for wiring the award money to her bank account. She expects that, since she has indeed proven the theorem false, her balance will be considerably larger than the ten-dollar minimum balance she currently carries. Imagine further that a friend puts her on to Wiles’s proof, which, once she peruses it, leads her to realize that she hadn’t proved the theorem false after all. She will then, without a doubt, also want to revise her beliefs concerning that value of her bank account.

¹⁷⁰ Giant Eagle has a program where you can purchase a cookie card (with some percentage of the proceeds from the sale benefiting local children’s charities), which entitles you to a free cookie with each visit.

So she concludes that

(C1*) if ethical non-cognitivism is true then what I've been doing all these years—viz. taking cookies without paying—isn't going to get me in trouble.

Now imagine that she has her copy of *Ethics and Language* and, on consulting it, concludes that

(3*) Stevenson is right.

So she concludes

(C2*) I am not going to jail.

Once again, if the contrastive theory of meaning is correct, then (3*) isn't a belief.¹⁷¹

Once again, this seems to mean that it is impermissible for Frances to accept (C*) *because* she accepts (3*).¹⁷²

When we first considered examples of this sort of reasoning, we concluded that non-cognitivists seem to be forced to characterize what looks like *reasoning* as nothing more than *wishful thinking*. But the CTM seems to make this sort of reasoning seem even worse than *wishful thinking*. For the proponent of the CTM, the sentences whose status is in dispute are

¹⁷¹ I haven't seen quietists explicitly apply the contrastive theory of meaning to meta-ethical disputes. But in conversation Diamond *has* applied it to object-level ethical judgments. (Her example was "it's wrong to torture cats." She suggested in conversation that this sentence is a kind of nonsense.) Consequently, it seems reasonable to suppose that she wouldn't object to applying it to moves at the meta-level as well.

¹⁷² We can also get a version of this argument going for non-cognitivism with respect to logical propositions. Imagine an intuitionist granting that if the law of the excluded middle is valid, then ... whatever. Imagine further that the intuitionist sees the light and converts to classical logic. You see how this goes.

nonsense. Consequently, the reasoning we look to engage in by means of such sentences looks, not like wishful thinking, but like a new form of insanity.¹⁷³ In both cases, the point is that we should take it as a condition on the adequacy of any account of the meaning of sentences that it not rule out on the basis of first principles instances of reasoning that are intuitively unproblematic. The fact that it prevents us from recognizing that one's endorsement of philosophical sentences can constitute (part of) a reason to endorse unproblematically descriptive claims seems to constitute excellent reason to reject the CTM. That is, the fact that it seems to yield such a counterintuitive view of what rationality requires when one (takes oneself) to endorse a conditional sentence with a philosophical (or mathematical) sentence as its antecedent seem to show that the CTM is demonstrably less plausible than the straightforward view that philosophical discourse really is meaningful.¹⁷⁴ And to the extent that the link between conceivability and sense that the quietist posits goes hand-in-hand with the CTM, the former seems no more innocent than the latter.

¹⁷³ One might worry that Dorr's argument isn't really applicable to the quietist's stance toward non-logical necessary truths. Dorr's point, after all, is only that it's irrational to change one's mind based on nothing more than changes in one's non-cognitive states. But one might think that "seeming to express a thought" is a sort of cognitive state. As Kieran Setiya said in response to an earlier draft, seeming to grasp a thought "may be no less a cognitive state than other cases of seeming."

I don't think this could be right, though. For the proponent of the austere conception of nonsense, to call something nonsense is to say that it is at most *psychologically* distinct from plain nonsense. Conant has suggested that psychologically compelling nonsense has no more significance from the point of view of logic than the mooing of a cow. In other words, while our responses to manifestations of these states may have some sort of ancillary cognitive content, the states themselves do not. (Indeed, to call them "seeming expressions of thoughts" is to characterize our responses to the expressions, not the expressions themselves.)

¹⁷⁴ Could the proponent of the CTM bite the bullet? Again, not if she wanted to preserve Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as failing to impinge on the mistakes we make at the object-level of language, as "leaving everything as it is." I take it that this idea is central enough to the Wittgensteinian quietist's conception of what she's doing that, for her, simply embracing the surprising consequences of her conception of philosophical sentences would be unimaginable.

2.2.4 Conclusion

The psychologistic logician understands the principles of logic to exhibit a kind of natural necessity. For the psychologistic logician, logical laws describe how we can't help but judge, not how we ought to judge.¹⁷⁵ Frege shows that this is a mistake, that it confuses *reasons* (which justify) with *causes* (which compel). As Cavell notes, Frege's case against psychologism paves the way for, among other things, Sellars's rejection of bald naturalism in epistemology and (arguably) Wittgenstein's rejection of bald naturalism in psychology.¹⁷⁶

It seems to me that Frege's polemic is compelling; it seems to me right that we can't know what it would be to revise a law of logic and that nothing could count as evidence that a law of logic needs to be revised.

I have argued, however, that we can accept this much of Frege's argument without committing ourselves to the notion of a logical alien is *nonsense*, that psychologism fails to constitute an intelligible view of logic. Moreover, the principles one might supply to get the second conclusion to follow from the first are not only contentious, but, it seems to me, false.

To reject the quietist's story about the link between conceivability and sense is to give up the idea that the thought experiment establishes *anything* about the sense (as opposed to the plausibility) of psychologism. Consequently, to the extent that psychologism represents one attempt to "occupy a metaperspective on logic," Frege's argument has no implications for the availability of such a metaperspective. Put simply, if psychologism is *false* (as opposed to

¹⁷⁵ Frege captures this point by claiming that the psychologist thinks that logic governs our "takings-to-be-true" as opposed to the truth.

¹⁷⁶ Stanley Cavell, *Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy* in *MUST WE MEAN WHAT WE SAY?* 91 (1976) ("We know of the efforts of such philosophers as Frege and Husserl to undo the "psychologizing" of logic (like Kant's undoing Hume's psychologizing of knowledge): now, the shortest way I might describe such a book as the *Philosophical Investigations* is to say that it attempts to undo the psychologizing of psychology.")

nonsense) then there must be some sense in which we *can* reflect on, and in reflection, get outside of the object-level of logical discourse.¹⁷⁷

Again, this is by no means to suggest that Frege is wrong about logic and that psychologism is true. I don't think that conceivability ought to be *no* guide to our understanding of what's possible. Rather, I mean to suggest that it would be a mistake to characterize the defect of psychologism as one of sense. If this is right, though, then there's no reason to think that philosophy has nothing interesting to say about how the rhetoric of logical necessity ought to be deployed, that philosophy must throw away questions concerning logical necessity.

¹⁷⁷ This, of course, doesn't mean that *every* attempt to give a philosophical account of logical necessity is sensible, that philosophers are *never* confused about what it makes sense to say about logic. For instance, as McDowell noted in a response to an earlier draft, my argument does nothing to vindicate the intelligibility of the idea that we need to choose between saying that logic is validated by super-facts and saying that logic is a human construction.

3.0 WITTGENSTEIN'S RULE-FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS

Although critics have for the most part focused on quietist interpretations of the early Wittgenstein, quietists also interpret the later Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations as an indictment of the possibility of a substantive metaperspective on thought. For the remainder of this dissertation, we will be concerned with the right way to understand the rule-following considerations.

One finds material relevant to Wittgenstein's "rule-following considerations" throughout the *Investigations*. However, commentators seem to agree that §§ 185-242 form something of a "chapter" on rule-following. The heart of this chapter is §§ 198 and 201, where Wittgenstein describes and attempts to dissolve a "paradox" he takes us to face when we're challenged to justify our understanding of a rule's requirements.¹⁷⁸ The problem, in the first instance, is one of

¹⁷⁸ Wittgenstein was not the first to recognize this problem. One finds a compelling, and surprisingly ancient, formulation of this sort of worry in FRANCIS LIEBER, *LEGAL AND POLITICAL HERMENEUTICS* (1839). There, in the context of defending an ancestor of what's now called "legal realism," Lieber says: "Let us take an instance of the simplest kind, to show in what degree we are continually obliged to resort to interpretation. By and by we shall find that the same rules which common sense teaches every one to use, in order to understand his neighbor in the most trivial intercourse, are necessary likewise, although not sufficient, for the interpretation of documents or texts of the highest importance ... Suppose a housekeeper says to a domestic: 'fetch some soupmeat,' accompanying the act with giving some money to the latter; he will be unable to execute the order without interpretation, however easy and, consequently, rapid the performance of the process may be. Common sense and good faith tell the domestic, that the housekeeper's meaning was this: 1. He should go immediately, or as soon as his other occupations are finished; or, if he be directed to do so in the evening, that he should go the next day at the *usual* hour; 2. that the money handed him by the housekeeper is intended to pay for the meat thus ordered, and not as a present to him; 3. that he should buy such meat and of such parts of the animal, as to his knowledge, has commonly been used in the house he stays at, for making soups; 4. that he buy the best meat he can obtain, for a fair price; 5. that he go to that butcher who usually provides the family with whom the domestic resides, with meat, or to some convenient stall and not to any unnecessary stall, and not to any unnecessarily distance place; 6. that he return the rest of the money; 7. that he bring home the meat in good faith, neither adding anything disagreeable nor injurious; 8. that he fetch the meat for the use of the family and not for himself. Suppose, on the other hand, the

justification: Wittgenstein's interlocutor challenges us to account for what justifies our understanding of a rule's demands.

Wittgenstein dramatizes this challenge in § 185 when he imagines a student who, when told to "continue the sequence that begins: 2, 4, 6, 8 ...", generates the correct series up to 1000, but then begins to add by fours. The worry is that there is an interpretation of the instructions she's been given relative to which her behavior is correct. Moreover, were we to try to rule out her interpretation of our instructions by offering a preemptive interpretation, the words we would come out with ("and by that I mean: add by twos") likewise seem to fail to fix their own content.¹⁷⁹ We might try to give an interpretation of *these* remarks. But then we'd be off on a regress. Neither our instructions nor our interpretation of those instructions, we worry, really communicate our expectations to our student. (After all, there's no guarantee that she'll understand them.) It seems that we must offer her further interpretations. (What else can we give her?) But clearly no mere interpretation will do. As Wittgenstein says, each interpretation contents us for a moment until we think there must be one, as it were, *behind* it.¹⁸⁰

Thus conceived, the central problem of the rule-following considerations is one of *justifying* our preferred interpretation of a sign or a bit of behavior. But this problem leads to further worries. Having seen the trouble we find ourselves in when we try to justify our understanding of the content of the rule, for instance, we might have worries concerning what

housekeeper, afraid of being misunderstood, had mentioned these eight specifications, she would not have obtained her object, if it were to exclude all *possibility* of misunderstanding. For, the various specifications would have required new ones. Where would be the end? We are constrained, then, always, to leave a considerable part of our meaning to be found out by interpretation, which, in many cases must necessarily cause greater or less obscurity with regard to the exact meaning, which our words were intended to convey Human speech is the clearer, the less we endeavor to supply by words and specifications that interpretation which common sense must give to human words." LEGAL AND POLITICAL HERMENEUTICS at 28-31.

¹⁷⁹ "Add by twos" could mean +2 when $x < 500$ and +4 otherwise.

¹⁸⁰ INVESTIGATIONS § 201.

following a rule *consists in*. This is how Kripke interprets the rule-following considerations.¹⁸¹

According to Kripke's skeptic, if there's a *fact* about what I have meant by a sign (Kripke's example is "+"), it must be constituted by aspects of my behavior and mental life. But neither my behavior nor that which passes before my mind settles it that I have meant something determinate by "+." (Again, for any interpretation of "+"—or set of uses of "+"—there is a rule according to which that interpretation—or set of uses—calls for what we would consider mathematically deviant behavior.) Therefore, there *is* no fact about what I meant by "+." So there must be no fact about what I mean *now* by "+." And "+" is like any other sign. So there must be no facts about what I mean in general. But you're just like me; there must be no facts about what *you* mean either. So there are no facts about what *any* expression means, and no facts about what *uses* of an expression *comply* with its (nonexistent) meaning.

Here, then, are two problems one might take oneself to confront when one reflects on Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations. Both seem to leave us with a dilemma: either we imagine that there are facts concerning which uses of a sign are justified or we imagine that there are not (either we imagine that there is something stopping the regress or we imagine that there isn't). If there are such facts, Kripke's skeptic tries to show that they must be constituted independently of facts about my behavior and mental life—they must have a special power that ordinary facts—facts about my behavior, for instance—lack. Commentators have called this idea *platonism*. Alternatively, if there aren't facts about what a sign means, then there can be no such thing as meaning anything by a word. This is *skepticism*.

While there is a great deal of disagreement about the right way of understanding the moral of the problems posed by the rule-following chapter and the passages that surround it, a

¹⁸¹ SAUL KRIPKE, WITTGENSTEIN ON RULES AND PRIVATE LANGUAGE 7-22 (1982).

fair amount of consensus has emerged concerning the shape any solution must take. The next sections will be for the most part concerned with material about which commentators do not agree. But before we get to this, I think it helps to first consider those aspects of Wittgenstein's view that are more or less common ground in the secondary literature. These themes include the following.

RULES ARE NORMATIVE

One reason that Wittgenstein was so concerned with rule-following is that our capacity to follow rules goes hand in hand with the fact that we are subject to constraint by norms. Wittgenstein says, "The word 'agreement' and the word 'rule' are *related* to one another, they are cousins."¹⁸² Rules are by definition the kinds of things with which certain actions *agree* and others don't. For this to be the case, there's a sense in which the content of a rule must be independent of our judgments; we can't just decide what a rule requires as we go along. As Wright notes, "If the requirements [of the rule] are not settled independently of the way I find myself inclined to go, then I do not *follow* anything – any more than, when walking in bright sunlight, I follow my shadow."¹⁸³

But while the requirements of rules aren't settled by our judgments, nor are they completely independent of them. We are at least potentially aware of the rules we follow. This, of course, isn't to say that we're *always* conscious of the rules we follow as we act. But to imagine a rule of which we could never become aware is to imagine a rule we couldn't follow,

¹⁸² INVESTIGATIONS § 224. See also *Id.* at § 225 ("The use of the word 'rule' and the use of the word 'same' are interwoven. (As are the use of 'proposition' and the use of 'true'.)")

¹⁸³ CRISPIN WRIGHT, TRUTH AND OBJECTIVITY 180 (1992).

even if we could unknowingly bring our behavior to conform to it. As Baker and Hacker helpfully remark, “Being knocked sideways by a board on which is written ‘Turn left!’ is not to *follow* the rule to turn left, but only to be caused unwittingly to conform to it.”¹⁸⁴

Because we are guided by our awareness of rules, in citing the rule I follow I can give my *reason* for acting as I do.¹⁸⁵ Thus, rule-following is as connected to rationality as it is to normativity.

RULES SERVE AS A MODEL FOR INTENTIONAL STATES

Because rules are normative, Wittgenstein thinks that they can help us to demystify the notions of intentional psychology. In *Investigations* § 81, Wittgenstein speaks of the temptation to “compare the use of words to calculi which have fixed rules.” He then suggests that the precise sense in which language is rule-governed “can only appear in the right light when one has attained greater clarity about the concepts of understanding, meaning and thinking.”

For Wittgenstein, in other words, intentionality and rule-following illuminate each other. Like action governed by rules, intentional states stand in normative space.¹⁸⁶ To take an example, one *means* something by an expression (“cheddar”) iff certain uses would be correct (“that’s not gouda, that’s cheddar” when confronted with a yellow cheese) and others not

¹⁸⁴ G. P. BAKER & P. M. S. HACKER, WITTGENSTEIN: RULES, GRAMMAR AND NECESSITY (henceforth “RULES, GRAMMAR AND NECESSITY”) 45 (1985).

¹⁸⁵ Of course, this isn’t to say that when one cites a rule one *always* justifies one’s actions. As Kieran Setiya noted in response to an earlier draft, “I may be following a rule in playing ‘chicken’ but that needn’t do anything to justify my behavior.” Quite right. The point is, rather, that in citing a rule I can give *my* reasons for acting, which all too often turn out to be bad reasons. Even when my reasons for acting are bad, though, they still render my action intelligible.

¹⁸⁶ Indeed, this is true by definition. “Intentional psychology” is a term of art that lets us distinguish between mental states that stand in normative space—meaning, for instance—and those that do not—example: feeling a persistent itch. Any evidence that a mental state doesn’t stand in normative space is *eo ipso* evidence that it isn’t an *intentional* state. Compare Simon Blackburn, *The Individual Strikes Back*, 281-82 SYNTHESE 58 (1984).

(“Frances is cheddar” when confronted with Frances). If we encounter someone who seems to call *everything* “cheddar,” then either she means something different than the rest of us, or (more likely) she means nothing at all.

Thought also is normative. Thoughts are things with which only some states of affairs accord.¹⁸⁷ And *understanding* too is the kind of thing with which only some actions are consistent. The answer “1002” is consistent with my understanding of what comes after 1000 in the series “ $f(x)=2x$ ”, and the answer “1004” is not.

None of this is to say that rules constitute the *foundation* of intentionality. On the contrary, as Boghossian notes, following a rule is an act whose causal antecedents include intentional states. Consequently, rule-following *presupposes* intentional psychology.¹⁸⁸ But the nature of the connection gives us reason to hope that by seeing how behavior governed by rules can be normatively constrained, we will be in a position to explain the nature of mental content, which is also normative.

The nature of the relationship between rules and intentional states is such that rule-following gives us a model for other intentional states. This is why Kripke is able to exploit the regress—see *infra*—to make a point about meaning *plus* by “+.” If we conclude that statements about *rules* aren’t literally true, then the same will be true of statements about *meanings*. And the same will also be true of statements about thoughts, knowledge, wishes, etc. In other words, rules are interesting in their own right. But part of their interest lies in the manner in which they illuminate other aspects of our lives.

¹⁸⁷ Compare John McDowell, *Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy* in MIND, VALUE, & REALITY 270 (1995).

¹⁸⁸ Paul Boghossian, *The Rule-Following Considerations* 517 MIND 98 (1989).

THE REGRESS OF INTERPRETATIONS

Recall Wittgenstein's example in *Investigations* § 185. If I write "2, 4, 6, 8 ..." on the chalkboard and ask you to continue the series, I take it that I publicly manifest the fact that I am *adding by twos*. But this seems to overlook the fact that there are infinitely many mathematical (and non-mathematical) rules compatible with what I've written so far. Consequently, one might worry that what I've written so far fails to set standards for your subsequent behavior, or even my own subsequent behavior. Here the guiding thought is that (1) my understanding of the series must be something that I can publicly *manifest*—that I don't grasp more than I can explain;¹⁸⁹ and (2) on reflection, I realize that I don't manifest as much as I think—what I write fails to genuinely manifest my understanding.

So long as we leave (1) and (2) in place, the problem that threatens our intuitive conception of rules will be unavoidable. No one, to my knowledge, denies (1). (Indeed, I think it's helpful to interpret the private language argument as directed against the temptation to dissolve the regress by denying (1).) (2) is held in place by the intuition that the content of my public display of understanding can't be something I require you to guess at; the connection between my action and your understanding must be in some sense automatic. If I *did* require you to guess, then we couldn't call the result *understanding*, even if you guessed *right*.¹⁹⁰ (As Kieran Setiya said, the thought is that "the result [of guessing] would be too epistemically precarious to count as understanding.") Unfortunately the regress surely shows that there is no guarantee that speakers will get things right. So it seems that we *must* guess. Rules, Wittgenstein's interlocutor

¹⁸⁹ INVESTIGATIONS § 71.

¹⁹⁰ Compare Michael Dummett, *What is a Theory of Meaning? (II)* in TRUTH AND MEANING: ESSAYS IN SEMANTICS (G. Evans & J. McDowell eds., 1976). Compare also the introduction to CRISPIN WRIGHT, REALISM, MEANING AND TRUTH (1993).

reminds us, *cannot* be formulated so as to leave no latitude in their interpretation.¹⁹¹ *However* many rules you give, I can give a rule which justifies a deviant employment of your rules.¹⁹²

If this is right, then nothing I tell you can fully communicate what I have in mind. But this is true for *any* rule and *any* expression. Neither my initial behavior nor my subsequent interpretations ever unambiguously select behavior that would count as going on in the same way. Consequently, we're liable to worry that in order to be entitled to think of ourselves as bound by rules—as we must since the problem generalizes to all aspects of our life—we need to find something that *does*.

PLATONISM

It's tempting to think that the right account of rule-following will find something that, as it were, *stops* the regress, something that guarantees that our instructions will be understood. Since no mere behavior could do this, however, it seems that only a *transcendent* fact could accomplish this. Nevertheless, since we obviously *can* follow rules (and grasp the demands that rules make of us), we might think, such transcendent, regress-stopping facts *must* exist; we just have to find them. I will call this sort of view platonism.^{193,194} The platonist is committed to two ideas: first, our public behavior really does fail to convey our meaning; and second, when we trace interpretations back, we eventually hit a bedrock of facts in virtue of which our words

¹⁹¹ MICHAEL DUMMETT, TRUTH AND OTHER ENIGMAS 172 (1978).

¹⁹² See, for instance, WITTGENSTEIN, REMARKS ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MATHEMATICS I-113 (G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees & G. E. M. Anscombe eds., G. E. M. Anscombe trans., 1978).

¹⁹³ Compare David H. Finkelstein, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Platonism* in NEW WITTGENSTEIN at 67.

¹⁹⁴ Of course, this isn't the only sort of view that gets called "platonism." Indeed, it's not even the only sort of response one might give to Wittgenstein's regress that gets called platonism. For some other characterizations, see *Wittgenstein on Rules and Platonism*, pp. 53-4, *Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following* in MIND, VALUE, & REALITY at 203, and the introduction to CRISPIN WRIGHT, RAILS TO INFINITY: ESSAYS ON THEMES FROM WITTGENSTEIN'S *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS* (henceforth "RAILS TO INFINITY") 3 (2001).

impress their content on us, that “neither need nor brook further interpretation.”¹⁹⁵ In the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein’s interlocutor famously gives voice to this second idea, saying, “Every sign is capable of interpretation; but the *meaning* mustn’t be capable of interpretation. It is the last interpretation.”^{196,197}

Though different sorts of views get called platonism in the secondary literature, everyone agrees that it’s not a good thing to be a platonist.¹⁹⁸ The problem with platonism in the sense that interests me is it makes its regress-stopping facts (as well as our capacity to keep track of them) seem mysterious. Because the platonist insists that meaning transcends public displays of meaning, her position amounts to little more than the suggestion that the regress is stopped by something, she knows not what. Thus, even if platonism were true, it would fail to answer the problem posed by the regress, it would fail to *explain* what following a rule consists in. Since meaning by definition determines what I am to do, the claim that we can have meanings in mind becomes useless from the point of view of one desiring an *explanation* of the source of the constraint of rule-governed action. As Wright says, “[k]nowing the correct interpretation of the rule’ becomes just a piece of patter equivalent to ‘knowing the rule.’”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Compare Finkelstein, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Platonism* at 56.

¹⁹⁶ WITTEGENSTEIN, THE BLUE AND BROWN BOOKS: PRELIMINARY STUDIES FOR THE “PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS 34 (1942).

¹⁹⁷ Thus, Kieran Setiya has helpfully suggested that the platonist confuses the epistemological with the metaphysical problem, looking to a special, metaphysical doctrine (according to which the facts in which the rule’s requirements consist are more than merely natural) to overcome our epistemological worries (concerning what justifies our use of an expression).

¹⁹⁸ This isn’t quite right. McDowell famously looks to make room for a hygienic form of platonism. But his point, as I understand him, is that we can say all that the platonist wants to say—that rules really set standards for us to follow, for instance—without making this seem queer, as the platonist in the narrow sense does.

¹⁹⁹ *Wittgenstein’s Rule-Following Considerations and the Central Project of Theoretical Linguistics* in RAILS TO INFINITY at 184-85.

SKEPTICISM

Moved by the manifest implausibility of the platonist's thought, it might seem that our only other option is skepticism. According to the skeptic, there is *nothing* constraining putatively rule-governed behavior, there are no facts about whether someone has followed a rule.

Skepticism is at least as implausible as platonism. Applied to the grounds for our belief in the skeptical conclusion, skepticism leaves us with the uncomfortable (or comfortable, as the case may be) thought that the words putatively expressing and giving reasons for our skepticism are meaningless. And it's hard to see how a meaningless string of words can constitute a reason to believe *anything*.²⁰⁰ As Wright says, nobody can coherently accept the skeptic's response to the regress: the power of this response can only be that of a paradox.²⁰¹

ANTIREALISM AND QUIETISM

Neither platonism nor skepticism is acceptable. Yet the regress seems to force us to choose: either something stops the regress, in which case it must be a mysterious "something"—something that defies our attempts to characterize it—or nothing does, in which case there are no rules (hence no minds).

²⁰⁰ This anticipates a theme of § 3.3, *infra*.

²⁰¹ *Rule-Following, Meaning and Constructivism* in *RAILS TO INFINITY* at 58. This argument against skepticism is as old as the mountains. Rupert Read gives a version of it in his *What 'There Can Be No Such Thing as Meaning Anything by Any Word' Could Possibly Mean* in *NEW WITTGENSTEIN*.

Wittgenstein suggests that the dilemma rests on a misunderstanding.²⁰² This gives us one condition on the adequacy of any interpretation of the rule-following considerations: a satisfactory account must be neither platonistic nor skeptical.

Two traditions have emerged in the secondary literature, both of which seek to answer this challenge. Following convention, I will call the first the *antirealist* and the second the *quietist* interpretation of the rule-following considerations. In what follows, I will examine some important strains of each in order to determine the extent to which one can find in them resources for dissolving Wittgenstein's paradox. I will argue that while each tradition offers genuine insights, these insights have been obscured by the problematic and often superfluous ways the principal proponents have characterized their commitments.

²⁰² INVESTIGATIONS § 201. See also § 112.

3.1 ANTIREALIST INTERPRETATIONS OF THE RULE-FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS

It's well beyond the scope of this work to justify a characterization of antirealism in general. In what follows I will be concerned only with antirealist interpretations of the rule-following considerations, which I propose to understand as follows: antirealist interpretations of the rule-following considerations steer a course between platonism and skepticism by developing Wittgenstein's remarks about the relevance of *custom*.²⁰³ A classic example of one such remark is *Investigations* § 199, where Wittgenstein says "[t]o obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* (uses, institutions)."²⁰⁴ The antirealist seeks to show that the key to understanding remarks like these—indeed, the key to making sense of rule-following—lies in seeing how *custom* constrains our interpretation of rules.

Why should we call this antirealism? Aren't facts about customs, about how the community "goes," as robustly real as any? For now, I hope it will suffice to say that if our rule-governed behavior is constrained only by custom, then we are not constrained in the way that we're inclined to think. Intuitively, we want to think that rules are like rails, that they "lead us" toward the correct behavior. As we will see, the antirealist rejects this intuitive conception of rules. Consequently, even if facts about the community are "real," what the rule requires, according to the antirealist, is *less real* than we suppose.

²⁰³ Compare Putnam, *Was Wittgenstein an Anti-Realist* at 143.

²⁰⁴ Note, though, that "custom" translates *Gepflogenheit*, which, as Putnam notes (in *Was Wittgenstein an Anti-Realist*) really means something more like "habit." (This is especially apparent in REMARKS ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MATHEMATICS, II-67.) Translated in this way, it is even less clear that Wittgenstein's remarks point toward any kind of antirealism.

I don't pretend I've said enough about this. I take it that the antirealist implications of the invocation of custom in response to the regress of interpretations will become apparent in what follows. There are, at any rate, different ways of attempting to invoke custom in response to the regress. I will discuss three: Kripke's skepticism (or rather, the skepticism of Wittgenstein as he struck Kripke), Baker and Hacker's conventionalism, and Wright's euthyphronism.

3.1.1 Kripke's Skeptic

Kripke's skeptic proposes a "skeptical solution" to Wittgenstein's skeptical paradox. Kripke generates a version of Wittgenstein's regress by asking what *makes it the case* that we mean *plus* by "+." Having translated Wittgenstein's problem in this way, Kripke characterizes the difference between skeptical and straight solutions as follows:

[Wittgenstein] does not give a "straight" solution, pointing out to the silly skeptic a hidden fact he overlooked, a condition in the world which constitutes my meaning addition by "plus". In fact, he agrees with his own hypothetical skeptic that there is no such fact, no such condition in either the "internal" or the "external" world.²⁰⁵

What I want to focus on is the idea that there is no *fact* that constitutes my meaning addition by "plus."²⁰⁶ It's not clear what we ought to take Kripke's skeptic to mean here.²⁰⁷ But

²⁰⁵ WITTGENSTEIN ON RULES AND PRIVATE LANGUAGE at 69.

²⁰⁶ See also WITTGENSTEIN ON RULES AND PRIVATE LANGUAGE at 70-1 ("Wittgenstein holds, with the skeptic, that there is no fact as to whether I mean plus or quus.")

²⁰⁷ These seemingly anti-factualist remarks are especially puzzling in the light of Kripke's insistence that Wittgenstein endorsed a version of the minimalist's idea that fact-talk can be had cheap. See, for instance, WITTGENSTEIN ON RULES AND PRIVATE LANGUAGE at 86. (See also pp. 51, 69 and 85.) I'm not sure how to reconcile these two strands in Kripke's skeptic's position. In what follows, I sidestep this issue and focus on the anti-factualist strand in Kripke's skeptic's thought.

it's awfully tempting to take Kripke's skeptic to mean that the rule-following paradox is held in place by the notion that there must be "facts" about rules.²⁰⁸

For Kripke's skeptic, we can live with non-factualism about meaning when we appreciate that claims about meaning (for instance) are *capable of being legitimately asserted* even though they are not, strictly speaking, *capable of being true*.²⁰⁹ If we focus on assertability-conditions, according to Kripke's skeptic, we can equip ourselves with a story about the appropriateness and the practical utility of assertions about another's meaning. And Kripke's skeptic thinks that this should be enough to keep us happy.²¹⁰

The skeptical solution is deeply unsatisfying, failing both as an interpretation of Wittgenstein and as an answer to the problem that concerned him. Here I will focus only on problems with the tenability of the position Kripke finds in Wittgenstein.

Kripke's skeptic attempts to use community inclination to vindicate the legitimacy of intentional state attribution. On Kripke's skeptic's account, I am warranted to speak of Frances's meaning something only if I take it that I would have behaved as she now behaves if *I* meant that. And Frances is typically warranted to say of herself that she meant something whenever she feels inclined to say so. Kripke writes:

²⁰⁸ See G. P. BAKER & P. M. S. HACKER, *SKEPTICISM, RULES AND LANGUAGE* (1984), Paul Boghossian, *The Rule-Following Considerations* MIND 98 (1989), and John McDowell, *Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy* for examples of this reading.

²⁰⁹ As Boghossian notes, there is something inherently strange about this suggestion. In the first instance, if you convince me that the nature of the property *p* is such that no claim of the form "x is *p*" is true, then it seems most reasonable to accept an error theory with respect to discourse about *p*. For instance, if I'm convinced that nothing has the property of being a Witch (Boghossian's example) then the most natural conclusion concerning talk of Witches is that it's systematically false, not that it's non-truth conditional. Compare *The Rule-Following Considerations* at 523.

²¹⁰ WITTGENSTEIN ON RULES AND PRIVATE LANGUAGE at 77-8 ("All that is needed to legitimize assertions that someone means something is that there be roughly specifiable circumstances under which they are legitimately assertable.")

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 correction by others, to judge a new response to be “correct” simply because it is the response he is inclined to give. These inclinations (both *Jones*’s general inclination that he has “got it” and his particular inclination to give particular answers in particular addition problems) are to be regarded as primitive. They are not to be justified in terms of *Jones*’s ability to interpret his own intentions or anything else. But *Smith* need *not* accept *Jones*’s authority on these matters; *Smith* will judge *Jones* to mean addition by “plus” only if he judges that *Jones*’s answers to particular addition problems agree with those *he* is inclined to give.²¹¹

To bring out the problems with this story, let’s focus on the skeptic’s account of *Smith*. *Smith*, on this story, is entitled to judge that *Jones* means something only if *Smith* would have been inclined to judge herself to have meant that had she behaved as *Jones* now does. This doesn’t sound right. Intuitively, being inclined to carry on as another does doesn’t constitute a necessary condition for asserting that she means something. Imagine that *Frances* is an enthusiastic reader of Lacan. You note that she keeps using the word “ideology” in a peculiar way, and ask me what she takes the word to mean. I say “by ‘ideology’, *Frances* means *the imaginary representation of real relations to the conditions of production.*” Since I’m personally no great fan of Lacan, I hope I can say this without committing myself to the idea that this is what *I* mean by “ideology.” But if I can, then I can make claims about what *Frances* means without feeling that *Frances*’s behavior is the same as the behavior I would have produced if I were in her shoes.

Being inclined to do what *Frances* does doesn’t *suffice* to warrant certain claims about her meaning either. Imagine now that *Frances* is drawing a picture. Looking over her shoulder, I observe that she is doing a good job of drawing someone who looks just like my grandmother. In this case, I can observe that this is just what I should have done had I wished to draw a portrait

²¹¹ WITTGENSTEIN ON RULES AND PRIVATE LANGUAGE at 90-1.

of my grandmother. But I can't thereby conclude that Frances is drawing my grandmother.

(Maybe she hasn't even *met* my grandmother.)

Kripke's skeptic's remark about Jones and Smith is obviously crude. Perhaps I'm putting too much weight on it; perhaps Kripke's skeptic would respond that the remark was meant only to give a picture of how meaning-talk works in the simplest cases. This picture, we might think, can be revised as needed to deal with the objections that arise when we go on to consider less simple cases.²¹²

But I'm not optimistic that a satisfying extension of Kripke's skeptic's crude account is forthcoming, nor am I convinced that such a project is worth undertaking. For one thing, it's hard to imagine a story about what warrants talk about someone's meaning that doesn't appeal to *facts* about what she means. Indeed, Paul Boghossian has argued that there can be no substantive account of the conditions under which claims about another's meaning are warranted.²¹³ Such an account would have to specify conditions the satisfaction of which would rule out the possibility of error. But according to Boghossian, no condition or set of conditions can be both naturalistically specifiable and preclude the possibility of error.²¹⁴

Assuming *arguendo* that we *did* have a solution to this problem—a version of Kripke's skeptic's story that gives assertability-conditions for meaning-talk in the complicated cases, then

²¹² Kieran Setiya made this objection to an earlier draft.

²¹³ *The Rule-Following Considerations* at 540.

²¹⁴ Boghossian's argument is more or less as follows: (1) belief is "holistic" in character. This means that one belief can trigger different judgments in the context of different background theories. This also means that *an erroneous judgment can be triggered in indefinitely many ways*. (For instance, I can misidentify a horse as a cow because lighting is bad, or because I think that there are no horses on this island, or because I don't have the concept "horse," or because I think *you* believe it's a cow and that you're authoritative, etc.) (2) *an optimality condition*—a condition the satisfaction of which precludes the possibility of mistakes—*would have to rule out the presence of all beliefs that would mediate the transition from stimulus to erroneous judgment*. (To say the optimality condition for identifying cows rules out the possibility of misidentifying horses is to say quite a lot. It's to say, for one thing, that such a condition rules out the possibility of misidentifying horses as cows. But even this, it seems, can happen in infinitely many ways.) (3) *There is no non-intentionally specifiable common denominator of such beliefs*. Therefore, there can be no non-circular optimality condition.

it would be hard to see how our account of rule-following is *skeptical*. Talk of *truth* and of *facts* can be had cheap. In some minimal sense, *all* syntactically assertoric sentences are truth-apt. Moreover, when we say things like “it is a fact that *p*,” what we typically mean is *it is true that p*. If this is right, then once we admit that claims about meaning can be legitimately asserted, there is nothing standing in the way of our saying both that they have truth-conditions and they represent the facts. I take it that John McDowell gives voice to a version of this objection when he notes,

now it seems a merely notational issue whether we count a story about social recognition and the like, with Kripke, a “skeptical solution”, replacing any picture of a fact or state of affairs in which someone’s understanding consists, or as a “straight solution”, saying in a regress-proof way what the relevant facts or states of affairs come to.²¹⁵

It seems to me that McDowell doesn’t go far enough. McDowell seems to be saying that we can describe Kripke’s skeptic’s proposal in either of two ways. But it seems to me that we shouldn’t be so quick to assume that we can make sense of the “skeptical” description of the line of thought that Kripke sketches. Kripke’s skeptic pays lip service to the disquotational account of fact-talk,²¹⁶ but seems to insist, nevertheless, that there’s *another* sense of the word “fact” in which there are *no* facts about meaning. But now Kripke’s skeptic owes it to us to spell out that sense—to give an account of facts that’s stronger than the “deflatable” one. We never get such a story. Moreover, it’s hard to see how such story *could* be plausible. As Wright notes, if there

²¹⁵ *Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy* at 269-70.

²¹⁶ WITTGENSTEIN ON RULES AND PRIVATE LANGUAGE at 90 (“Like many others, Wittgenstein accepts the ‘redundancy’ theory of truth: to affirm that a statement is true (or presumably, to precede it with ‘It is a fact that ...’) is simply to affirm the statement itself.”)

are no robust facts about meaning, then there are no robust facts full-stop.²¹⁷ Furthermore, if there are no robust facts, then it's hard to see what sense there is to be made of the notion that claims about meaning are minimally but not robustly factual.

The remark about Jones and Smith that I quote above represents a crude attempt to make sense of the manner in which linguistic behavior is constrained without conceiving of this constraint platonistically. The other antirealist interpretations of the rule-following considerations that we will consider also try to do this, while taking these worries about non-factualism seriously. The subsequent accounts that we will consider seek to reject non-factualism while at the same time being careful about the *kind* of fact that constrains our rule-governed behavior.

3.1.2 Baker and Hacker's Conventionalism

As an example of a position that attempts to marry an antirealist understanding of the significance of custom to a factualist conception of meaning, thinking and understanding, I want to first consider Baker and Hacker's conventionalism. I am interested in particular in Baker and Hacker's attempt to apply the rule-following considerations to the problem of normativity and mathematical necessity. I will argue that Baker and Hacker's account of necessity in general and mathematical necessity in particular prevents them from giving an adequate response to Wittgenstein's regress. To bring this out, I will need to say more first about the philosophical problem of necessity and then about Baker and Hacker's account of Wittgenstein's solution to this problem.

²¹⁷ As Wright argues, if the truth value of any sentence is a function of the state of the world *and* of the meaning of the expressions employed in the sentence, and if meaning fails the test of objectivity, then so too must truth.

According to Baker and Hacker, Wittgenstein is interested in rules because they help us to understand necessity. Necessary truths can raise a variety of philosophical worries. First, it's unclear what *makes it the case* that some fact couldn't have been otherwise. Let's call this the *constitutive problem* of necessity. Furthermore, even if we had a satisfying story about what a fact's necessity consists in, such facts are so unlike facts of the ordinary, empirical variety. Consequently, it's not clear how we could come to *know* of such facts. Let's call this the *epistemic problem* of necessity.²¹⁸

According to Baker and Hacker, attending to rule-following helps to resolve these problems. For them, Wittgenstein teaches us that so-called necessary truths are really just rules of grammar in disguise. Wittgenstein says, "To accept a proposition as unshakably certain – I want to say – means to use it as a grammatical rule: this removes uncertainty from it."²¹⁹ Grammatical propositions license (or prohibit) transitions between empirical propositions. So when we say "1 + 1 = 2," we don't describe a worldly state of affairs. Rather, we give rules for the use of the signs "1", "+", "=", and "2" in empirical statements. Put otherwise, ordinary empirical statements are descriptive: they tell us what *is* the case. Statements about rules, on the other hand, are prescriptive—they tell us what *ought* to be done. As we'll see, this means that there's a sense in which *nothing* constrains our linguistic behavior; to call something logically necessary is to say that we're *unwilling* to speak of it as being otherwise, not that we're incapable of doing so.

²¹⁸ Compare TRUTH AND OTHER ENIGMAS at 169.

²¹⁹ It will emerge below that the account I just gave of Baker and Hacker is an oversimplification. Really Baker and Hacker endorse a *modified* form of conventionalism, according to which (1) nothing constrains our decision to adopt a particular mode of representation, but (2) once adopted, our mode of representation – our logical axioms and inference rules – requires us to acknowledge the validity of certain judgments, and *this* necessity is not a matter of convention. But, as Dummett argues, this view, properly thought through, collapses into the more radical one that our ratification of first principles fails to constrain our subsequent judgments. Consequently, (1) comes at the expense of (2).

This account—let’s call it *prescriptivism* with respect to necessary propositions—seems to dispel the air of mystery surrounding statements about necessary truths. As we said earlier, there can be no problem concerning our knowledge of rules.²²⁰ Consequently, if necessary truths really are just rules in disguise, there can be no great mystery about our knowledge of them.²²¹

Moreover, prescriptivism promises to dissolve the constitutive problem as well. According to the prescriptivist, a statement’s necessity consists in its being used as a norm for expression. There can be no question concerning the special status of necessary truths since we *give* them that status. Baker and Hacker summarize this view as follows: “Necessary propositions do not describe the limits of what is possible, fencing us in from impossible possibilities. They are norms of representation constituting the bounds of *sense*, delimiting what it makes sense to *say*. They fence us in only from the void.”²²²

While there is much that is appealing about prescriptivism, put to this end it is more of an artful dodge than a real answer to our difficulties. Surely it’s no accident that we agree on *these* necessary truths, these rules of grammar. If we settled on different grammatical rules we would be unable to form reliable expectations concerning the state of the world. For instance, if we had decided that “ $1 + 1 = 3$ ” then it would be hard to carry on. To make this vivid, imagine that bank funds are backed by actual currency and that the bank statement is produced, not by accounting for the effects of transactions over a given period, but by counting the currency in a customer’s

²²⁰ Recall § 3.0, *supra*. See also RULES, GRAMMAR AND NECESSITY at 61-4 (arguing that something is a rule only insofar as it plays a role regulating behavior, and that if a rule were unknowable, it wouldn’t be able to play this role).

²²¹ REMARKS ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MATHEMATICS at III-39.

²²² RULES, GRAMMAR AND NECESSITY at 271. See also WITTGENSTEIN’S LECTURES: CAMBRIDGE, 1932-1935 16 (A. Ambrose ed., 1979); THE BLUE AND BROWN BOOKS at 55; and REMARKS ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MATHEMATICS at VII-6 (making this point in the context of a discussion of mathematical necessity).

personal vault. In that case I would calculate the value of my account by adding this month's deposits to the starting balance whereas the bank would calculate the value of my account by counting the currency. Consequently, if I employed non-standard rules of arithmetic I would come to blows with the bank as often as I bothered to balance my checkbook.) Once we see this, philosophical perplexity is liable to reemerge. Now instead of wondering what makes this statement necessarily true, we'll want to know what makes *this* an appropriate rule of grammar. And instead of wondering how we come to know necessary truths, we'll wonder how we know about that which exerts constraint on our grammatical conventions. So versions of the epistemic and constitutive problems are still with us in a different form.

To answer the epistemic and constitutive challenges in their new form, Baker and Hacker endorse *conventionalism*. For the conventionalist, we aren't stuck with our rules of grammar. Rather, we *decide* to adopt them, much as we decide that fifty-five miles an hour will be the speed limit on the Parkway but not on the PA Turnpike. Consider a particular rule of grammar: the law of non-contradiction. When we adopt this as a rule of grammar, we commit ourselves to refrain from saying not-p when we're already committed to p. Moreover, we refuse to accept that the law can be falsified.²²³ If a situation elicited a judgment that seemed to constitute grounds for doubting the law of non-contradiction, we would refuse to endorse this judgment. But for Baker and Hacker's Wittgenstein, nothing forces our hand here; our rules of grammar could have been otherwise. Along these lines, Baker and Hacker insist that "rules are human creations, made not found. They are not true or false, and they are not answerable to reality; in

²²³ RULES, GRAMMAR AND NECESSITY at 294 ("Doubt is not refuted but *excluded*.")

this sense they are *arbitrary*. So it must always make *sense* to modify or annul a rule in practice.”²²⁴

This promises to point the way to a deeper response to our transcendental discomfort concerning the status of necessity truths. Recall that Baker and Hacker’s Wittgenstein’s prescriptivism left us with the question of what makes *these* rules of grammar the right ones. To this the conventionalist answers, in effect, “nothing.” Nothing, no state of affairs, vindicates our decision to speak of its never being the case that both a proposition and its negation is true; nothing forces us to say that “ $3 + 2 = 5$.”²²⁵ Consequently, there’s no special problem about what such (non-existent) states of affairs consist in, or of how we come to know of them.²²⁶

Baker and Hacker’s conventionalism is highly unstable. I want to raise three objections. First, I will suggest, Baker and Hacker misread Wittgenstein. Second, I will argue that Baker and Hacker’s flavor of conventionalism doesn’t really solve the epistemic and constitutive problems concerning necessary truths. Finally, I will suggest that Baker and Hacker’s conventionalism is both vulnerable to and ultimately incapable of distinguishing itself from the sort of skepticism that we considered in § 3.1.1, *supra*. Thus, it fails the most important test for any interpretation of the rule-following considerations: it fails to point to a genuine middle course between platonism and skepticism. Let us consider each of these objections in turn.

There are at least four things one might mean when one says that rules of grammar are arbitrary: (1) absolutely nothing constrains our choice to adopt certain rules of grammar; (2) these choices are causally but not rationally constrained; (3) these choices are constrained by

²²⁴ Id. at 63. See also Id. at 37, 40, 54, 335-36.

²²⁵ Id. at 326 (“While $3 + 2 = 5$, indeed, it *must* = 5, *for us*, this doesn’t mean that there could not be an arithmetic in which $3 + 2 = 6$ —and this does *not* mean just that ‘6’ *means* 5!”)

²²⁶ Again, compare TRUTH AND OTHER ENIGMAS at 169.

reasons, but only by *practical* reasons; or (4) they are constrained by epistemic reasons grounded in features of the world, but these reasons aren't so decisive that we couldn't imagine other ways of going on.

Baker and Hacker sometimes give the impression of accepting (1), but (1) is silly, and at any rate, Wittgenstein unambiguously rejects (1).²²⁷ Though they aren't as clear about this as one might wish—in particular, I see no evidence that they distinguish between (2) and (3)—the passages Baker and Hacker cite in support of their conclusion suggest that they take Wittgenstein to accept (3) and reject (4). But they misread the passages they cite in support of their claims concerning Wittgenstein's attitude toward (4).

Consider, for instance, one of Baker and Hacker's favorites: *Zettel* §331.²²⁸ There Wittgenstein criticizes the temptation to attempt to justify our rules of grammar with claims like "there really are four primary colors" (or "1 + 1 really *is* 2"). He goes on to say that "saying the rules of grammar are arbitrary is directed against the possibility of this justification which is constructed on the model of justifying a sentence by pointing to what verifies it." Baker and Hacker take this passage to express Wittgenstein's rejection of the idea that there are facts corresponding to our rules of grammar. After all, they suggest, he comes out and *says* that

²²⁷ Consider, for instance, WITTGENSTEIN, *LECTURES ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MATHEMATICS*, CAMBRIDGE 143 (C. Diamond ed., 1998) (suggesting that to call mathematics arbitrary "is certainly misleading and very dangerous in a way.") See also 166 MANUSCRIPT 12ff (1944) ("in a way ... you might say that the choice of units [of measurement] is arbitrary. But in a most important sense it is not. It has most important reason lying both in the size and in the regularity of shape and in the use we make of a room that we don't measure its dimensions in microns or even in millimeters. That is to say not only the proposition which tells us the result of measurement, but also the description of the method and the unit of measurement tells us something about the world in which this measurement takes place. And in this way, the technique of use of a word gives us an idea of *very* general truths about the world in which it is used."); INVESTIGATIONS at 230 ("if anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize—then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him.")

²²⁸ See also WITTGENSTEIN'S *LECTURES: CAMBRIDGE, 1930-1932* (D. Lee ed., 1980), REMARKS ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MATHEMATICS I-9, and PHILOSOPHICAL GRAMMAR 184 (R. Rhees ed., A. Kenny trans., 1974). It is interesting that most of the passages that Baker and Hacker cite in support of their interpretation come from sources *other* than the *Investigations*.

grammar is arbitrary! But there is a world of difference between saying “the sentence ‘ x really is ϕ ’ doesn’t *justify* the corresponding rule” and saying “the rule could be otherwise.” Wittgenstein suggests that when he says grammar is arbitrary, he is to be understood as making the former claim. To this, Baker and Hacker add that the *reason* claims concerning “reality” fail to justify grammar is that grammar determines what it makes sense to say.²²⁹ But this misses the point. It *does* make sense to say “it’s a fact that $2 + 2 = 4$ ”! But the content of this claim is the same as the content of the statement of the rule itself—“ $2 + 2 = 4$ ”—and consequently the former lends the latter no support.²³⁰

The manner in which grammar is constrained is an important theme for Wittgenstein, most notably in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. Consider, for instance, Wittgenstein’s interlocutor’s protest that, “Then according to you everybody could continue the series as he likes, and so infer *anyhow!*” To which Wittgenstein responds:

In that case we shan’t call it “continuing the series” and also presumably not “inference”. And thinking and inferring (like counting) is of course bounded for us, not by an arbitrary definition, but by natural limits corresponding to the body of what can be called the role of thinking and inferring in our life.²³¹

Here is a theme that Baker and Hacker pay lip service to,²³² but which their conventionalism leaves them unable to make sense of. Wittgenstein insists that if our grammar were radically different, then we couldn’t count ourselves as engaging in the same sorts of

²²⁹ RULES, GRAMMAR AND NECESSITY at 332.

²³⁰ Moreover, while it seems harmless to suggest that there’s a sense in which our methods of representation could have been otherwise—for instance, we could have used Roman instead of Arabic numerals—this doesn’t have to mean that there is *nothing* constraining our methods of representation.

²³¹ REMARKS ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MATHEMATICS at I-116.

²³² They acknowledge this in a footnote, RULES, GRAMMAR AND NECESSITY at 63.

activities. Moreover, radically different sorts of activities—activities constituted by different rules of grammar—wouldn't have the same sorts of applications to ordinary life. Consider the rules of arithmetic. Arithmetic is useful for calculation. If we imagine an activity that has no applicability to calculation then that activity wouldn't be arithmetic (though of course we could call it "arithmetic"). This is important because, as we'll see, when we try to imagine radically different rules of arithmetic—if we try to imagine $3 + 2$ being equal to 6—we think the applicability to calculation out of the thought experiment.

Of course, this isn't to deny that arithmetic could be trivially different. For instance, our number system could be base-6 instead of base-10. Or we could have never adopted Arabic numeration, or recognized negative or irrational numbers. But to think that this means that we have total freedom with respect to the rules of arithmetic is to misunderstand one of Wittgenstein's key points. Again, anything so different from our arithmetic that it could not be used for calculation wouldn't *be* arithmetic.

To dramatize this, Wittgenstein encourages us to imagine a tribe of people who seem to sell lumber, but where the seller sets the price of the lumber based on the area of ground covered by the pile of lumber sold.²³³ Of course, this would be a really silly way of doing business. A seller could extract a large price for a small quantity of lumber by spreading it across the ground. And a buyer could get a large pile of lumber for very little by stacking the planks in a tall pile. But imagine that we can't get the tribe to see this. We try to show them that they could wind up paying a lot or a little for the same amount of wood (by first arranging the wood in a tall pile and then spreading the wood across the ground) and they shake their heads and insist that they're

²³³ REMARKS ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MATHEMATICS I at 143-50 (especially 149 and 150).

right to pay more in the second instance because after all, there's now more wood. What should we say then?

Not surprisingly, Baker and Hacker read this thought experiment as a manifestation of Wittgenstein's commitment to the arbitrariness of grammar.²³⁴ But their interpretation is unnatural and idiosyncratic. The point of the wood seller thought experiment is that it reveals the limits of our capacity to imagine other forms of life. As Stanley Cavell has said, the thought experiment shows that,

It is not necessary that human beings should have come to engage in anything we would call calculation (inferring, etc.). But if their natural history has brought them to this crossroads, then only certain procedures will count as calculating (inferring, etc.) and only certain forms will allow these activities to proceed.²³⁵

There's a further point to be made. It's tempting to think that the wood sellers are just like us in a way, only aspects of their commerce with one another are deeply illogical. But if we attempt to follow this thought through, we will see that it is empty. As Quine notes, "pre-logicality is a trait injected by bad translators."²³⁶ And *illogicality* is too. The fact that our interpretation of the wood sellers would show them to be engaging in behavior that is illogical is really just evidence that we haven't succeeded in translating them. Compare *Investigations* § 206:

²³⁴ See RULES, GRAMMAR AND NECESSITY at 320, 328-29 (suggesting that while the wood sellers' method of calculation seems to lack a point, not everything *needs* a point. And it's possible that their methods of calculation wouldn't much *matter* from an economic point of view. Moreover, we ourselves exhibit similarly wasteful behavior, preferring Prada to Stride Rite, and etc. Finally, many other exotic and seemingly unintelligible behaviors (e.g. telling time in feudal Japan) turn out to be quite sensible if we look from close on).

²³⁵ STANLEY CAVELL, THE CLAIM OF REASON: WITTGENSTEIN, SKEPTICISM, MORALITY AND TRAGEDY 118 (1979). See also David Cerbone, *How to Do Things with Wood* in NEW WITTGENSTEIN.

²³⁶ QUINE, PHILOSOPHY OF LOGIC at 81.

Suppose you came as an explorer into an unknown country with a language quite strange to you. In what circumstances would you say that the people there gave orders, understood them, obeyed them, rebelled against them, and so on?

The common behavior of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language.

Interpretation locates its subject in a space in which we are at home. If we can't understand the wood sellers' activities as belonging to the "common behavior of mankind," then we haven't succeeded in interpreting them. And if we haven't succeeded in interpreting them, we have no business saying what it is that they are doing.

If this is right, then nothing could count as evidence that people were selling wood in this way. Moreover, there is nothing to be meant by the suggestion that *we* could have sold wood in this way. This form of life, though it seems to constitute a genuine alternative to ours, on closer inspection turns out to be a chimera. And this shows that there just aren't the radical alternatives that the conventionalist imagines.

I think it helpful to consider all this in the light of Baker and Hacker's remark that $3 + 2$ could equal 6.²³⁷ On its face, this remark is ambiguous. It could mean that the sign "6" could denote what we denote by the sign "5." Heard in this way, Baker and Hacker's claim is true but uninteresting. Moreover, Baker and Hacker are explicit that they mean something stronger than this.

Alternatively, Baker and Hacker could mean that the sign "+" could stand for a function that is just like addition, only it takes us from the arguments 3 and 2 to the value 6. But Baker and Hacker concede that this function wouldn't be addition—addition, by definition, takes us

²³⁷ RULES, GRAMMAR AND NECESSITY at 326.

from 3 and 2 to 5. So taken in this way, their claim would be that along with addition, we can use *other*, non-standard mathematical functions. Surely *this* is true as well.

Yet another possibility is that Baker and Hacker mean that we could use non-standard mathematical functions though we use no standard ones. This is what Baker and Hacker seem to think. But once again, this idea is vulnerable to Wittgenstein's thought, which Baker and Hacker consistently misinterpret. To say that we could get by using only non-standard mathematical functions is to suggest that we can imagine a form of life into which non-standard arithmetical methods are woven, but standard methods are not. But this means, not just that we can describe beings who quadd, but that we can imagine beings whose nature and environment is such that they are well served by quadding, that we can *find ourselves* in such beings. Once again, quaddition is a *mathematical* function. It is part of *arithmetic*: it belongs to a family of techniques that can be drawn on in *calculating*. But if we try to imagine beings who seem to use only non-standard mathematical functions, we wouldn't be able to characterize what they do as *calculation*.²³⁸ Baker and Hacker admit this,²³⁹ but they miss the significance of this admission. If an activity is characterizable as quaddition only so far as it is arithmetical and if it is arithmetical only so far as it is potentially useful for calculation, then such beings couldn't mean anything *arithmetical* by the claim that " $3 + 2 = 6$." Consequently, the most Baker and Hacker's claim can mean is that the sign-sequence " $3 + 2 = 6$ " can be given a meaning such that it comes out to be true. But this is just a version of the first interpretation of the claim, which Baker and Hacker explicitly reject.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Compare CAMBRIDGE LECTURES, 1932-1935 at 140 ("if a logic is made up in which the law of the excluded middle does not hold, there is no reason for calling the substituted expressions propositions.")

²³⁹ Recall that footnote on RULES, GRAMMAR AND NECESSITY at 63.

²⁴⁰ Again see Id. at 326 ("While $3 + 2 = 5$, indeed, it *must* = 5, *for us*, this doesn't mean that there could not be an arithmetic in which $3 + 2 = 6$ —and this does *not* mean just that '6' means 5!")

There are two further problems with Baker and Hacker's account that I think are worth mentioning. First, Baker and Hacker's account actually sacrifices the advantages conventionalism is commonly taken to have. Second, although Baker and Hacker attempt to distinguish between their view and a more radical form of conventionalism (according to which the truth of empirical propositions as well as grammatical ones is a matter of convention) their view ultimately collapses into this more radical one.

We said that the attractiveness of conventionalism lies in the fact that it seems to dissolve the philosophical problems concerning the epistemological and ontological status of necessary truths. But in fact, Baker and Hacker's version of conventionalism doesn't accomplish even this. To see why, we must remind ourselves that Baker and Hacker look to distinguish their account from that of the "radical" conventionalist.²⁴¹

For the radical conventionalist, one decides (rather than sees) what a rule requires of one at every step. For Baker and Hacker, on the other hand, while we are free to choose our grammatical first principles, once chosen, those first principles constrain our subsequent linguistic behavior. For instance, nothing forces me to recognize the validity of the law of *modus ponens*. But if I do, and if I believe that it's a hot summer day and that Frances sleeps all day on hot summer days, then I *must* also believe that Frances is sleeping. For Baker and Hacker the necessity of this last belief *isn't* a matter of convention. So the problem of the source of the necessity of *these* beliefs remains unsolved.²⁴²

With respect to this problem, Baker and Hacker face a dilemma. On the one hand, they could say that these beliefs are necessary insofar as they *follow* from the beliefs one already has. But if that's an acceptable response, then the claim that we've made a group decision to adopt

²⁴¹ RULES, GRAMMAR AND NECESSITY at 343 (criticizing Dummett's interpretation of Wittgenstein).

²⁴² Compare TRUTH AND OTHER ENIGMAS at 170.

the law of *modus ponens* adds nothing. We could have said that “*q* follows from *if p then q* and *p*” from the beginning without bothering to add that it follows because we’ve made a conventional decision to adopt our logic.

On the other hand, Baker and Hacker could maintain that *all* necessity stands in need of philosophical explanation. But then they must admit that their form of conventionalism fails to furnish the needed explanation since they attempt to make room for necessity that is not a matter of convention. Either the problem concerning necessary truths is legitimate, in which case they have failed to solve it, or there is no problem concerning necessary truths, in which case their conventionalism is an idle wheel.

A final objection: Baker and Hacker can’t really be entitled to claim that a rule determines what accords with it. Consequently, Baker and Hacker are not only unarmed against skepticism—insofar as they have no real answer to Kripke—but in a sense unwittingly aligned with it. For Baker and Hacker, once again, one decides what rules to follow, but not what the rules require of one. Assume, in spite of our worry above, that this is so. But recall that for every expression of a rule and every action, there is an interpretation of the rule we can give according to which the latter is in accord with the former. This means that, since I am free to choose the rules I follow, I must also be free to answer as I please when you tell me to add 3 and 2. If I choose to interpret “add” in the standard way then I should answer “5.” But if I choose a non-standard interpretation then the right answer can be whatever I want it to be. Of course, there would be no incentive for me to give what will no doubt seem to me unnatural interpretations of your words. So it’s not that at any stage bizarre behavior is *likely* to break out. But that’s not the point. The point is that at any stage, we can justify any way of going on.

Consequently, any action is as right as any other. How we act in the light of a rule is completely unconstrained.

By now it should be apparent that Baker and Hacker's proposal leads to trouble. As Wittgenstein likes to remind us, if everything is correct then there *is* no distinction between correct and incorrect: if everything is correct then nothing is. This issue will come up again in our discussion of Wright's interpretation of Wittgenstein, so it is worth considering more carefully. In § 3.0, *supra*, I suggested that one of the principal themes of the rule-following considerations is that intentional psychology in general and meaning in particular are *normative*. Let's focus on meaning. To say that meaning is normative is to suggest that it is the sort of thing in the light of which certain behaviors are correct and others not. That is, if one means something by an expression then one's use of that expression is *constrained*—it's not the case that any use is as good as any other. In spite of their protests, any verbal performance *is* as good as any other on Baker and Hacker's story. Because the "meaning" of our expressions is entirely up to us, our uses of expressions aren't really constrained. Consequently, the idea that expressions have meaning looks like a kind of illusion.²⁴³

This last objection is particularly worth mentioning because it seems as if there's an obvious response to it, a response that will lead us to the next form of antirealism that I want to consider. The response is: the problem with Baker and Hacker's account is that it makes each *individual* responsible for choosing her own rules of grammar. But imagine instead that it is the *community* that gets to decide which rules of grammar the members of that community will follow. In that case, we wouldn't be free to interpret each other's instructions as we see fit. For

²⁴³ Compare *Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy* at 274; *The Face of Necessity* in *REALISTIC SPIRIT* at 259.

while someone could interpret my instructions in a non-standard way, relative to the standard set by the *community's* interpretation, we can see this as a misinterpretation.

3.1.3 Wright's Euthyphronism

If there is to be such a thing as following a rule, one can't always freely decide which rules to follow. The challenge becomes to give an account according to which what we do *is* constrained but where we do not conceive of this constraint platonistically.

Crispin Wright's interpretation of the rule-following considerations attempts to respond to this challenge. According to Wright, we are constrained by our community's decision to adopt a particular set of grammatical conventions.²⁴⁴ Put otherwise, according to Wright there *are* facts concerning what a rule requires.²⁴⁵ However, such facts aren't *objective*.

Wright puts this point in a variety of ways.²⁴⁶ I want to focus on his invocation of Plato's "Euthyphro contrast." In the *Euthyphro*, Plato stages a debate between Socrates (who thinks that

²⁴⁴ Compare LECTURES ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MATHEMATICS at 182-83 ("[T]he point is that we all make the SAME use of [an expression]. To know its meaning is to use it in the same way as other people do.")

²⁴⁵ Wright explains that a discourse is factual if its subject matter is independent of thought (p is true doesn't entail some X believes that p is true) and thought is *fallible* (some X believes that p is true doesn't entail p is true).

²⁴⁶ An earlier Wright understood "objectivity" in terms of "investigation-independence." According to the early Wright, a fact is investigation-independent if an individual can get it right or wrong *in advance* of the emergence of communal consensus on the issue. RAILS TO INFINITY at 10 and 33-4. See also WITTGENSTEIN ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MATHEMATICS 219-20 (1980); and *Strict Finitism* in RAILS TO INFINITY at 250. The upshot of this is that if a fact is "investigation-dependent," then the concept has its extension fixed by the (actual) judgments of the community. This means that the community can't get it wrong. (As Wright famously says, "the community goes neither right nor wrong; it just goes.")

If objectivity is defined in terms of investigation-independence, then the claim that facts about rules aren't objective is trivially false. See, for instance, McDowell's *Wittgenstein on Following a Rule*. Moreover, Wright no longer believes that facts about rules lack objectivity in *this* sense. RAILS TO INFINITY at 6-7 ("that there is no such thing as 'unilateral' recognition of a communal mistake ... is a definite error.") The more recent Wright believes that rules are constrained by the community's *best* opinion. This idea is a departure in two respects: first, communal best opinion is a *dispositional* concept—it runs ahead of that which the community has *actually* said; second, the concept of communal best opinion is the concept of a *counterfactual* disposition. Consequently, what the community *ideally* would say about a particular case is different both from what it has already said and what it would say at present.

This view, I think, isn't vulnerable to the same sorts of objections that are made against the early Wright's view. Nevertheless, I will argue that it is still problematic.

certain actions are loved by the gods because they are pious) and Euthyphro (who thinks they are pious because they are loved by the gods). According to Wright, both Socrates and Euthyphro accept the “basic equation”: x is pious iff x is loved by the gods. But whereas Euthyphro thinks that facts on the left-hand side of the biconditional are “constituted by” facts on the right-hand side—that is, Euthyphro thinks facts about piety are “judgment-dependent”—Socrates denies this.

There are at least two things one could mean when one says that a fact is *constituted by* a judgment (or judgment-dependent). On a weak interpretation, a fact is judgment-dependent when it is *a priori* that it obtains if certain subjects would judge that it obtains under certain (substantively specifiable) conditions.²⁴⁷ Judgment-dependence in this weak sense has no obvious implications for debates about objectivity (as I will argue below). I take it that Wright thinks something stronger than this. When he says that Euthyphro “accords priority” to the right-hand side of the biconditional,²⁴⁸ Wright seems to mean that for Euthyphro, when the gods speak of piety their claims are “tacitly autobiographical.”²⁴⁹ Put otherwise, for Euthyphro, the gods’ claims have a deceptive surface grammar: we take them to be talking about independent facts, but there’s a sense in which they’re really talking about their own psychological constitution.^{250,251} Consequently, we can’t make sense of the idea that the content of the rule

²⁴⁷ Compare *Objectivity and Modern Idealism* at 297.

²⁴⁸ TRUTH AND OBJECTIVITY at 108.

²⁴⁹ *Objectivity and Modern Idealism* at 302.

²⁵⁰ This account of judgment-dependence borrows from Rosen’s illuminating discussion. According to Rosen, when a fact is judgment-dependent then in talking about it, “what we are really talking about is what we [if we are the subjects whose judgments matter] would think of these things under specifiable conditions.” Id. at 302.

One important consequence of this is that, if Euthyphro is right, the phenomenology of judgment about the pious is misleading. As Rosen says, “these practices of judgment ... represent themselves as deliberative inquiries sensitive to reasons ... so the ways the practices of judgment represent themselves, the way we think of ourselves while *engaged* in such judgments, is *deceptive*. We (wrongly) take ourselves to be led, to aim to conform our judgment to independent facts that make our judgment correct or incorrect.” Id. at 303-04.

²⁵¹ Putting the point this way helps to bring out how plainly un-Wittgensteinian Wright’s idea is. In INVESTIGATIONS § 460, Wittgenstein says, “Could the justification of an action as fulfillment of an order run like

explains why everyone agrees about what it requires (or would agree, had the conditions been favorable).²⁵²

In his papers on the rule-following considerations, Wright finds in Wittgenstein material with which to mount a defense of euthyphronism with respect to rules. What this means, once again, is that there's a sense in which talk about rules is autobiographical. Consequently, we can't make any real sense of the idea that the fact that this is what the rule requires *explains* why everyone agrees (or would agree, had the conditions been favorable) that this is what it requires. Wright offers several arguments in defense of euthyphronism, some of them more deeply indebted to Wittgensteinian themes than others. I want to focus on what seems to be the most serious of Wright's arguments. I'll call this the *systematic conceptual error argument*.²⁵³

The systematic conceptual error argument draws on the "principle of charity" considerations we brought to bear against Baker and Hacker's conventionalist reading of Wittgenstein.²⁵⁴

Wright gives several versions of the systematic conceptual error argument. In its simplest form, the argument is: (1) for the proponent of the objectivity of meaning-talk,

this: 'you said 'Bring me a yellow flower', upon which this one gave me a feeling of satisfaction; that is why I have brought it'? Wouldn't one have to reply: 'But I didn't set you to bring me the flower which should give you that sort of feeling after what I said!'" As McDowell notes, we surely do no violence to this thought if we substitute "received approval from the community" for "gave me a feeling of satisfaction." *Wittgenstein on Following a Rule* at 234. Wittgenstein makes related remarks in ZETTEL §§ 428-31 (G. E. M. Anscombe & G. H. von Wright eds., G. E. M. Anscombe trans., 1981).

²⁵² *Following a Rule* in RAILS TO INFINITY at 30 ("[W]e simply find ourselves with a sincere disposition to apply F again in this new case, and that is the whole of the matter.")

²⁵³ This argument is distilled from rather more embellished arguments that one finds throughout Wright's papers on the rule-following considerations. I take it that in focusing on the following themes, I haven't stripped away anything essential.

²⁵⁴ Recall § 3.1.2, *supra*.

communal best opinion and truth are possibly extensionally divergent;²⁵⁵ but (2) we can't imagine how an individual could recognize that the community's best opinion concerning the meaning of a term was wrong—consequently, when it comes to meaning, best opinion and truth go hand in hand.

It seems that Wright thinks (1) goes without saying. His thought seems to be that if the requirements of meaning really are objective, if the rails really extend “of themselves” to new cases, then it *must* be possible for individuals to get things wrong, to jump the track, as it were. This is just what we mean when we say that the rails extend “of themselves.” But an individual is just n percent of the population of a community. And if n percent of the population can go wrong, then n+1 percent of the population must be capable of going wrong as well. In other words, the proponent of the objectivity of meaning seems to be on top of a slippery slope at the bottom of which is the view that it's possible for *everyone* to go wrong. Presumably this wouldn't happen very often. But according to Wright, it's only if we say that consensus *constitutes* the facts that we can be entitled to the claim that it *can't* happen.

Consider an analogy.²⁵⁶ There is a close relationship between my behavior and my character. We might spell out this relationship as follows: while individual actions of mine can be out of character, it can't be the case that *all* of my actions are out of character.²⁵⁷ But,

²⁵⁵ When Wright presents this argument, he claims that (1) is true only of *basic* concepts, concepts whose mastery consists in one's capacity to use them in ostensive contexts. As a result, the version of Wright's argument with which I will be concerned is vulnerable to (Putnam-inspired) worries in a way, it seems to me, that the official version of this argument is not. (For instance, one could complain against my version of this argument that the concept of *momentum* is such that the community's best opinion *could* be misguided. But this wouldn't be a plausible objection to *Wright's* version of this argument since *momentum* is not a basic concept.) Since I take it that Wright isn't really vulnerable to this objection, I will disregard the technical flourishes Wright appeals to in order to defend himself against it. Instead, in order to focus on what I think really goes wrong with Wright's argument, I will assume that (1) is true of *all* concepts.

²⁵⁶ The analogy is Wright's.

²⁵⁷ Indeed, there are limits to the extent to which we would be prepared to say an *individual* action is out of character. Nick Hornby brings out this point nicely when he has the narrator of HOW TO BE GOOD say, “Even though I am, apparently, and to my immense surprise, the kind of person who tells her husband that she doesn't want

according to Wright, this just shows that character is *constituted* by behavior. If my character were conceptually unrelated to the behavior I go on to produce, then it would be possible for me to *never* act in ways that are in keeping with my own character. But this isn't possible. This shows that behavior and character are not independent. Along the same lines, if it is impossible for an entire community to go wrong (in normal circumstances), then that can only be because communal consensus plays a constitutive role. The proponent of the objectivity of meaning denies that consensus constitutes the facts. Consequently, according to Wright, she must deny that it's impossible for the entire community to go wrong as well.

Wright devotes a great deal more attention to defending (2). His point evokes the material we considered in § 3.1.2, *supra*: under normal conditions, we can have no grounds for thinking an entire community is systematically wrong about how to use a term. Someone can be a competent critic of our use of words only if she shares our understanding of their meaning. Furthermore, an important criterion of understanding a word is being able to come out with appropriate judgments. Consequently, the critic who charges the community with error reveals herself not to have *understood* the meaning of the relevant words.²⁵⁸ If someone thought that she discovered that the entire community misunderstood the requirements of the meaning of any word, we would take that to reveal that she never understood what the community meant by the word in the first place.²⁵⁹

to be married to him anymore, I really didn't think that I was the kind of person to say so in a car park, on a mobile phone. That particular self-assessment will now have to be revised, clearly. I can describe myself as the kind of person who doesn't forget names, for example, because I have remembered names thousands of times and forgotten them only once or twice. But for the majority of people, marriage-ending conversations happen only once, if at all. If you choose to conduct yours on a mobile phone, in a Leeds car park, then you cannot really claim that it is unrepresentative, in the same way that Lee Harvey Oswald couldn't really claim that shooting presidents wasn't like him at all. Sometimes we have to be judged by our one-offs." HOW TO BE GOOD 1-2 (2002).

²⁵⁸ Of course, there are exceptions even to this principle. For instance, if there were evidence that the community is under the influence of some hallucinogen, then it might make sense to say that all of them are mistaken about the meaning of some word.

²⁵⁹ Compare *Rule-Following, Meaning and Constructivism* in RAILS TO INFINITY at 67-8.

To take an example, imagine that Frances thinks that everyone misunderstands the meaning of “triangle.” Whereas Frances thinks the word should be used to designate only three-sided figures, everyone else seems to use it to refer, sometimes to three-sided figures and sometimes to four-sided figures. Now, if we were anthropologists viewing this situation from afar, we would probably conclude that Frances is wrong, that the community doesn’t use the word to refer to three-sided figures. (Perhaps the word refers to figures of fewer than five sides? Perhaps it doesn’t refer to shape at all?) What Frances thought of as evidence that everyone is using the word incorrectly is in fact evidence that Frances’s understanding of the meaning of the word is inadequate. Once again, when we try to imagine something recognizable as systematic conceptual error we really imagine something else—our words misfire, missing their intended target. For Wright this means that best opinion *constitutes* the truth.

Wright assumes without argument that the convergence of best opinion and truth requires explanation. This assumption might not be innocent. Consider, for instance, Wittgenstein’s efforts to imagine alien grammars in *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. The point of those passages is that when we try to imagine people who inexplicably always seem to get things wrong, and we can’t bring them to see they’re wrong, then it doesn’t even really make sense to say that they’re wrong; we can’t make sense of the thought that they’re trying (and failing) to do something that we also do. To take one of Wittgenstein’s examples, any reason to think these beings are systematically measuring in crazy ways is really just a reason to think that we were wrong to suppose that they were measuring in the first place.

One conclusion we might draw from thought experiments like this is that systematic conceptual error is impossible, not because what we say is necessarily true, but because there is

no such thing as systematic (unexplained) conceptual error. Like the idea of the logical alien, the idea of a community that only gets it wrong comes apart in our hands. Asking for an explanation of this is a bit like asking for the explanation of a tautology.

There are other problems with the conclusion of Wright's systematic conceptual error argument. An earlier Wright had suggested—or perhaps unwittingly led people to believe that he thought—that the community's verdict is *entirely* unconstrained. As he once said, “the community does not go right or wrong – it just goes.”²⁶⁰ This early view invites a number of objections. For instance, John McDowell argues that if the community can't get things wrong then it can't get things right either.²⁶¹ And if the community's verdicts can't be considered to be right then they don't constrain us.

The more recent Wright purports to have a response to this worry. According to the more recent Wright, the behavior of the community *is* constrained; the community does *not* “just go.” But the community is not constrained by external, independently constituted facts. Rather, the community is constrained by what a *hypothetical* community—a community in a better position to judge—would say.

But the specter of McDowell's argument continues to haunt Wright, even on this more sophisticated story. Wright insists that the community's opinion is constrained by best opinion. But is best opinion constrained? Here Wright faces a dilemma. If he answers “no,” as it seems that he must, then for all the differences between Wright's original and his refined story, he will still be vulnerable to McDowell. Furthermore, to say best opinion is wholly unconstrained is really just to suggest that the rules of grammar could have been otherwise. And, as we've seen, this view runs afoul of the wood-seller considerations in the *Remarks on the Foundations of*

²⁶⁰ *Rule-Following, Objectivity and the Theory of Meaning* in *RAILS TO INFINITY* at 41.

²⁶¹ *Wittgenstein on Following a Rule* at § 10.

Mathematics. Again, those sections seem to show that there's nothing to the idea that our rules of grammar could have been radically different.

Of course, Wright could insist that best opinion *is* constrained. But it's no accident that Wright doesn't say this. If best opinion is constrained then it must be constrained by *something*. But what could be the source of constraint? Here Wright is out of options. If he imagines some other judgment—best opinion*—then we're off on another regress. On the other hand, if Wright were to admit that best opinion is constrained *by the facts*, then he wouldn't be a euthyphronist.

I want to mention one more problem with Wright's response to the rule-following considerations. Like Baker and Hacker's conventionalism, Wright's story is useless as a response to Kripke. Recall that Kripke's skeptic challenges us to identify some fact of past behavior or conscious life that constitutes our having meant something determinate by an expression.

Wright's account is no help here. The challenge, once again, is to find something in virtue of which our use of an expression is constrained. According to Wright, use is constrained by the community's best verdicts. But if we choose to accept the terms of Kripke's skeptical challenge then the *content* of those verdicts is just as much in suspense as the content of my own vocalizations. Put simply, if we can't just assume that Frances means *plus* by "plus" then we can't assume that the community's behavior (patting Frances on the back in some cases and beating her with sticks in others) renders a determinate verdict on Frances's behavior. After all, the community's behavior, no less than Frances's, can be interpreted in non-standard ways.²⁶²

²⁶² David H. Finkelstein makes this point in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Platonism*.

All this has been to say that Wright's account just *can't* be right. Once we see this, I think it also becomes much easier to see what's wrong with the argument that's meant to support it. Put simply, Wright's argument is that best opinion and fact are necessarily co-extensive; therefore the latter isn't independent of the former—so instead it must *reduce* to the former.²⁶³ Here Wright's thought is that something must explain the *a prioricity* of the “basic equation,” and that euthyphronism is the only thing that can.

It seems to me that neither idea is reasonable. As to the first suggestion, it seems to me that Wright is wrong to suggest that only euthyphronism *explains* the relation between best opinion and truth. That euthyphronism fails to genuinely explain the *a prioricity* of the basic equation is, I think, suggested by Wright's problematic attempt to draw an analogy between discourse about rules and first-person avowals. The subjects of first-person avowals, according to Wright, are, like meaning-talk, constituted by best opinion. But one can't help but be struck by the fact that the subjects of avowals are very different from the standard cases of facts that are constituted by verbal performance. As an example of a fact that's uncontroversially constituted by a judgment, consider a simple dinner order like “I'll have the tuna.” Said in the right way (*viz.* audibly) in the right context (seated in a restaurant that offers one but not more than one tuna dish), saying this isn't vulnerable to challenge. You can ask me if I really *want* the tuna, but it wouldn't make sense to challenge my claim to have *ordered* the tuna. And the reason that (in

²⁶³ Note the slide from extension-determination to constitution in the following passage: “when possession of a certain intention is an aspect of a self-conception that coheres well enough both internally and with the subject's behavior, there is nothing *else* [apart from self-conception] that makes it true that the intention is indeed possessed.” RAILS TO INFINITY at 204. *Viz.* when C-conditions are satisfied, intention is reducible to self-conception. Alternatively, though, we might say that there *is* something else besides one's self-conception that makes it true that the intention is possessed—namely, the *intention!* We can happily say that intention and self-conception (and expression of self-conception) are all different sides of the same coin without supposing that everything is reducible to the latter.

the right circumstances) the grounds of my assertion aren't vulnerable to challenge is that my assertion *needs* no grounds—the assertion constitutes the fact.

According to Wright, facts about one's intentional states are in a sense just like this. But Wright seems to overlook important differences. Note, for instance, the difference between the “C-conditions”—the conditions ensuring that a verdict is delivered under optimal circumstances—involved in placing a dinner order and making an avowal. (It seems to me that it's not irrelevant that Wright has so much trouble *giving* the C-conditions for avowals.²⁶⁴ The C-conditions relevant to dinner orders make reference to my physical circumstances, not to my mental states. That is to say, a vocalization doesn't constitute a dinner order if it occurs in the wrong place—i.e. not in a restaurant. But the state of my soul—my sincerity, say, in speaking as I do—fails to figure among the defeasibility conditions for dinner orders. But the C-conditions relevant to avowals *do* make reference to the state of my soul. For instance, my claim to love my job isn't a genuine expression only if I'm being dishonest, or I'm deeply repressed, etc. With avowals, but not with dinner orders, one doesn't have to be in the right place at the right time, but one *does* have to be in the right frame of mind. I think that this should at least suggest that avowals are very different from dinner orders. And if they are then it's at least possible that the set of facts that are *constituted* by undefeated judgment are a proper subset of the facts whose *extension is determined* by undefeated judgment.

Wright's second suggestion, recall, is that once we reject the idea that best opinion and truth can come apart, then euthyphronism is the only position left standing. This looks like an argument from elimination. As such, we ought to be moved by the argument only so far as we're

²⁶⁴ See, for instance, RAILS TO INFINITY at 200-01. The conditions he settles on make reference to the subject's “intentional psychology”, thus failing his *independence-condition*, and involve *attentiveness* to the relevant mental states, thus presupposing a “tracking epistemology”!

persuaded that Wright really considers all the options. But in this case, there's clearly an option that he overlooks. Wright himself suggests that semantic content is in important respects like a secondary quality. That is to say, the content of discourse about meaning is such that one understands "x means ϕ " only so far as one understands how it is when it *seems* to one that x means ϕ .²⁶⁵ If meaning is secondary in this sense, then the possibility of extensional divergence between best opinion and truth is ruled out. The question is: can we make sense of *realism* with respect to secondary qualities?

Perhaps the idea that words have meanings that no one could ever discover is one form that realism with respect to semantic content can take, but surely it's not the only form. One can also imagine a realist thinking that semantic content isn't unknowable, but nor is it reducible to sets of judgments—however artfully specified—concerning semantic content.

By insisting that the objectivity of meaning entails the possibility of the extensional divergence of best opinion and truth, Wright implicitly rules out the possibility of a view according to which claims about secondary qualities are non-autobiographical. But Wright gives no new arguments against this kind of view. Moreover, others have suggested that such a view is not only conceivable but also *correct*.²⁶⁶ So it looks like a failure of imagination on Wright's part to suggest that the realist *must* be committed to deny the *a prioricity* of the basic equations.

To sum up, the realist needn't say that truth and best judgment can diverge. She need only say that the *reason* they converge is that (when C-conditions are satisfied) we can take in how things are.

²⁶⁵ Compare *Wittgenstein's Rule-Following Considerations and the Central Project of Theoretical Linguistics* at 212.

²⁶⁶ McDowell argues for realism with respect to secondary qualities in his *Values and Secondary Qualities* in MIND, VALUE, & REALITY.

At various points in his paper on Wittgenstein and Chomsky, Wright endorses what he calls a “flat-footed response” to Wittgenstein’s skeptical interlocutor. On the flat-footed response, “[a] sufficient answer to [the skeptic] need only advert to my present opinion that I meant and still mean *plus* by “+” and the reasonableness of the supposition, failing evidence to the contrary, that this opinion is best.”²⁶⁷

Wright suggests that the difficult thing is to see how we could be entitled to give the flat-footed response to the skeptic. But euthyphronism does nothing to entitle us to flat-footedness. Euthyphronism is hopelessly flawed. Consequently, if flat-footedness were implausible without euthyphronism it remains so. On the other hand, if the flat-footed response were already plausible, then euthyphronism is superfluous. Either way, euthyphronism adds nothing to our understanding of rule-following.

The varieties of anti-factualism and factualist antirealism that we’ve considered are ultimately unable to account for the sense in which linguistic behavior is constrained by norms. On these accounts, the idea that our linguistic behavior is genuinely meaningful looks like an illusion.²⁶⁸ The failure of these accounts teaches us that claims about rules must be based in fact, and that these facts can’t be reduced to arbitrary conventions or constituted by our opinions.

²⁶⁷ Wittgenstein’s *Rule-Following Considerations and the Central Project for Theoretical Linguistics* at 206.

²⁶⁸ Compare McDowell, *Wittgenstein on Following a Rule* at 248.

3.2 QUIETIST INTERPRETATIONS OF THE RULE-FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS

Quietist interpreters of Wittgenstein think that the mistake that antirealists (and others) make is that they assume that we need to *answer* the regress. For the quietist, the real solution to the paradox is to “unask” the questions that lead to the regress. And we’re entitled to do this because these questions turn out to be a kind of nonsense.

As an example of an expression of the kind of view I’m interested in, consider Diamond’s remark that

for Wittgenstein the sentence “Smith is following a rule that no one but Smith could conceivably understand” is discardable from language, but not because of what it would have to mean if we were to stick to the meanings determined independently for its parts. It is, on Wittgenstein’s view, in the same position as the sentence “Smith is following an abracadabra.”²⁶⁹

While Diamond is speaking here about Wittgenstein’s private language argument, it’s not hard to imagine someone who wanted to extract a general moral from this that would apply just as well to account of the rule-following considerations. The general moral is that inadequate “views” of rule-following—one example of which would be the idea that it is possible to follow a rule privately—are not wrong but meaningless. They are expressed by sentences composed of signs that (in this context, at any rate) have no meaning, as “abracadabra” has no meaning—“names”

²⁶⁹ *What Nonsense Might Be* at 107.

that don't name, "predicates" that don't predicate, etc. It seems that Putnam has something like this in mind when he claims that Wittgenstein,

is not trying to sweep a genuine problem under the rug; what he is rather trying to do is see just what picture "holds us captive"—that is, to find the roots of our conviction that we *have* a genuine problem, and to enable us to see that when we try to state clearly what the genuine problem is, it turns out to be a nonsense problem.²⁷⁰

Like the antirealist, the quietist tries to identify an assumption on which Wittgenstein's skeptical problem depends, an assumption the rejection of which "solves" the problem. I will consider four strains of quietism. I should be clear from the outset, though: the various proposals that I will consider aren't incompatible with each other. On the contrary, there's a sense in which the proposals we will consider compliment, rather than compete with one another. Because quietist resolutions to the regress aren't in competition with each other, it's not at all unusual to find a single author endorsing more than one "solution" to the regress. Nevertheless, I find it useful to make distinctions between the ideas that get emphasized in the course of the quietist's attempts to help us to overcome the regress.

3.2.1 Understanding and Interpretation

John McDowell has argued²⁷¹ that to overcome Wittgenstein's regress, we need only appreciate Wittgenstein's suggestion that,

It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each one contented us at

²⁷⁰ *Was Wittgenstein an Anti-Realist* at 164. See also *Id.* at 148 and 163.

²⁷¹ *Wittgenstein on Following a Rule* in *MIND, VALUE, & REALITY*.

least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*.²⁷²

Wittgenstein goes on to say that when I follow a rule, various interpretations typically don't occur to me. Consequently, I don't "select" from various interpretations. When his interlocutor objects "But this initial segment of a series obviously admitted of various interpretations (e.g. by means of algebraic expressions) and so you must first have chosen *one* such interpretation", Wittgenstein responds "Not at all. A doubt was possible in certain circumstances. But that is not to say that I did doubt, or even could doubt."²⁷³ I don't doubt, and therefore don't interpret, because a connection between the rule and my subsequent action is set up through the way that I have been *trained* to respond in situations like this.²⁷⁴

McDowell summarizes *Investigations* § 201 as follows:

[the need to choose between Platonism and skepticism] seems compulsory only on the assumption that understanding is always interpretation; [Wittgenstein's] aim is not to shift us from one horn of the dilemma to the other, but to persuade us to reject the dilemma by discarding the assumption on which it depends.^{275,276}

On this way of thinking, the assumption that generates the regress is the idea that a rule's expression speaks to us only when interpreted. The alternative to this idea is to understand rule-

²⁷² INVESTIGATIONS § 201.

²⁷³ Id. at §§ 212-13.

²⁷⁴ Compare REMARKS ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF MATHEMATICS VI-35 ("If I am drowning and I shout 'Help!', how do I know what the word Help means? Well, that is how I react in the situation. – Now *that* is how I know what 'green' means as well and also know how I have to follow the rule in the particular case.")

²⁷⁵ *Wittgenstein on Following a Rule* at 238.

²⁷⁶ Kieran Setiya remarked that the kind of quietism I consider here is hostile to a *metaphysical* doctrine, but that these remarks from McDowell concern the *epistemic* problem of how to *justify* one's attempts to follow a rule. This seems right to me. But these problems are not, I take it, completely unconnected. One connection is that if the epistemic problem is taken at face value, then strategies like the ones Kripke considers and rejects—viz. attempts to answer the epistemic problem with a special, metaphysical doctrine—will seem to force themselves on us. The regress shows, among other things, the poverty of such strategies. So quietism with respect to the metaphysical problem, properly thought through, leads to quietism with respect to the epistemic problem, the implications of which McDowell attempts to work through here, and elsewhere.

following, not as an intellectual exercise, but as a *practice*: I am trained to respond in certain ways to certain sorts of expressions, and my behavior does justice to my upbringing.²⁷⁷ In the light of the way I've been taught to respond, it doesn't matter that the expression of the rule by which my action is governed can be interpreted in various ways.

While McDowell's account of the rule-following difficulty is textually responsible, it seems to me that someone troubled by the regress would be unlikely to find it therapeutic. The reason we're liable to be troubled by the regress is that we need to see *how* understanding doesn't require interpretation. Perhaps the regress shows that it's absurd to insist that it *must*. But this is a mere impossibility proof—it tells us that something is false without telling us *why* it is false. Any genuinely therapeutic response to the regress, it seems to me, would need also to address the “why” question.

My point, of course, isn't that Wittgenstein is *wrong*. On the contrary, if we never feel the need to select from among various interpretations of a rule, then there's simply no way of getting the regress going. Furthermore, it will become apparent in § 3.3, *infra*, that I concede that the skeptical questions that lead us to *want* to interpret the rule are misleading. My point is only that we haven't really *earned* the right to this response to the skeptic. McDowell's account refuses to engage with the skeptic's worry; it answers the skeptic with silence. It seems to me that to truly overcome the regress, we need to understand what makes the skeptic's picture of understanding seem compelling.

The frame of mind that makes it tempting to think that rules speak to us only if we interpret them is that of *finding normativity problematic*. So long as we're in this frame of mind,

²⁷⁷ INVESTIGATIONS § 198.

even if we refuse to answer the questions that generate the regress—even if we dig in our heels and refuse to interpret when prompted to justify our understanding of a rule—we will be prone to other sorts of difficulties.

Consider, for instance, the case of the antirealist. The antirealist manifestly does *not* accept the idea that understanding of a rule must be constituted by an act of interpretation. For Wright, to take an example, the correctness of my action is constituted, not by my hitting on the right interpretation of the rule, but by the community judging it to be correct in the right sort of circumstances.²⁷⁸ And yet, as we saw in §3.1.3, *supra*, antirealism is prone to its own version of the regress.²⁷⁹ This seems to suggest that even if we don't start with the assumption that rules need to be interpreted, we may still be vulnerable to the regress (or something very much like it).

The antirealist interpretation of the rule-following considerations tempts us because it's easy to misunderstand Wittgenstein's remarks about the significance of custom. According to Wittgenstein, in following a rule we act in ways that come naturally to us in virtue of the training we've received. But this risks making our rule-governed behavior seem mechanical, like the execution of a bit of programming. If the idea that rules require interpretation "overintellectualizes" our rule-governed behavior, this mechanical conception of rule-following "underintellectualizes" our behavior. Both the overintellectualization and the underintellectualization of following a rule threaten our entitlement to conceive of it as a

²⁷⁸ Wittgenstein *on Following a Rule* at 253 (noting that Wright isn't committed to viewing understanding as interpretation).

²⁷⁹ Consider an antirealist version of the regress: "what makes '2002' the right response?" A: "well, you're to add by twos." Q: "in virtue of what do we get to conclude that that series tells me to add by twos?" A: "the community *ratifies* that you are to add by twos." Q: "but in virtue of *what* do we get to conclude that *that's* what the community ratifies?!"

You might say that the antirealist is still insisting that interpretations are needed here. But here what we mean by "interpretation" has changed. Now "interpretation" means, not some private, intellectual act, but *anything that some person or group of persons does that is meant to constitute the meaning of the sign*. Furthermore, refraining from "interpretation" looks like insisting that *nothing independently constitutes the meaning of the sign*.

manifestation of rationality. But whereas the former might well go hand in hand with insisting on finding a role for interpretation, the latter clearly does not.

It seems to me that both the skepticism of Wittgenstein's interlocutor (who overintellectualizes rules) and the skepticism of the antirealist (who underintellectualizes them) are confused responses to a related problem. The account McDowell gives in "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule" addresses one of these problems, but not the other. This, it seems to me, is symptomatic of its failure to get at the roots of the problem, to address the frame of mind underlying the problem.

I'm not trying to suggest that there are no differences between the sort of mistake that generates the regress and the sort of mistake that prevents the antirealist from truly solving it. But if I'm right that the antirealist account is actually indistinguishable from skepticism,²⁸⁰ then it's worth at least exploring the possibility that the same picture holds them captive.

At any rate, McDowell does not say, nor have we to this point been given any reason to think, that it *makes no sense* to think that rules speak to us only when interpreted. On the contrary, McDowell's suggestion seems to leave it open that it's merely *wrong* to think we have to choose between Platonism and skepticism.

3.2.2 Use

I have suggested that Wittgenstein's remark in *Investigations* § 201 is less to the point than one might wish and, at any rate, leaves the question of the *sense* of the competing philosophical

²⁸⁰ See § 3.1, *supra*.

positions on all fours. Henceforth we will consider explanations that are less close to the surface of the text of the rule-following chapter.

One such explanation can be found in Cora Diamond's work on Wittgenstein. A consistent refrain of Diamond's writings is that the philosophers in Wittgenstein's target sights fail to attend to *what we do*.²⁸¹ Here is Diamond: "we ... make meaning, thought, inference, proof into mysterious achievements that indeed call for philosophical explanation. *Seeing them as they are in our life and giving up the desire for such explanations go together.*"²⁸²

Diamond's thought is that by attending to how we *use* words, we can dispel philosophical confusion. Applied to the rule-following considerations, the suggestion is that by focusing on how we speak of rules when we're not doing philosophy we can see what being justified by a rule *really* looks like. This will enable us to recognize that the regress gets started only if we subscribe to a "fantastic" conception of justification.

Diamond comes the closest to explicitly advocating this as a solution to the problem posed by the rule-following considerations in "How Long is the Standard Meter in Paris?" There she approvingly quotes Goldfarb's remark that Wittgenstein's skeptic "has assumed some notion of accord with a rule, but has divested it of the ways we go about taking things to be in accord or not."²⁸³ "*That*", she adds emphatically, is "what makes it possible for the paradox to appear."²⁸⁴

This diagnosis is different from the others that I will consider. The other diagnoses look to identify an assumption that holds the dilemma in place and which we are free to reject. But

²⁸¹ Other quietists have made this same point. See, for instance, Finkelstein's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Platonism* at 66 and *Wittgenstein's Plan for the Treatment of Psychological Concepts* in *WITTGENSTEIN IN AMERICA* at 229 ("[I]n doing philosophy, we're moved to consider words apart from the contexts in which they have their significance.") See also Cavell in *The Argument of the Ordinary: Scenes of Instruction in Wittgenstein and in Kripke*, *CONDITIONS HANDSOME AND UNHANDSOME* 68 (1990) (speaking of "philosophy's drastic desire to underestimate or to evade the ordinary").

²⁸² *Wittgenstein and Metaphysics* at 13, my emphasis. See also *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 185.

²⁸³ Goldfarb, *Kripke on Wittgenstein on Rules* 488 *JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY* 82 (1985).

²⁸⁴ *How Long is the Standard Meter?* in *WITTGENSTEIN IN AMERICA* at 128.

neglecting use, for Diamond, is more like an act of forgetfulness and less like an assumption. No one (at any rate, hardly anyone) explicitly *assumes* that the use we make of an expression is irrelevant to its meaning.²⁸⁵

In spite of this, this suggestion has much in common with the other quietistic proposals. For while Diamond's proposal isn't that we explicitly assume that use is irrelevant, she does suggest that we are implicitly committed to the possibility that an expression's meaning is independent of the manner in which we use it in ordinary contexts. As Diamond says, "[w]hen we go in for philosophical thinking, the characteristic form of such thought is precisely that the sentence-forms we use come apart from what we have taken to be our aims."²⁸⁶

Diamond's suggestion is not without textual basis. In *Investigations* § 87, Wittgenstein insists that in the normal cases—under normal circumstances of use—expressions of rules have genuine semantic content: "The sign-post is in order – if, under normal circumstances, it fulfills its purpose." And in *Investigations* § 189 he says,

we may say: "These people are so trained that they all take the same step at the same point when they receive the order 'add 3'." We might express this by saying: for these people the order "add 3" completely determines every step from one number to the next. (In contrast with other people who do not know what they are to do on receiving this order, or who react to it with perfect certainty, but each one in a different way.)

Here, the suggestion is that when we can *use* instructions—when they *work*—this tells us that the *do* tell us what we are to do, they determine what is in accord with them at every step. But because we fail to reflect on actual cases of following rules (and learning to follow rules),

²⁸⁵ I'm very grateful to John McDowell for pointing out this dissimilarity between Diamond's diagnosis and the ones I will go on to discuss.

²⁸⁶ *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 198-99.

the thought goes, we fall into a fantasy of what rule-following amounts to. We're then torn between the part of us that wants to say that since we're capable of following rules the fantastic conditions *must* obtain—so our capacity to follow rules is “queer” so there's no such thing as following a rule. Diamond's suggestion is that if we view rules in the context of our lives—and this involves reflecting on cases where we're *ordinarily* prepared to say that someone has successfully followed the rule—we would be able to see our way past this dilemma.

I think that there is much that is right about this account. But I don't think it's liable to be of much help to one troubled by the kind of skepticism that leads to the regress. The difficulty is to spell out what we mean by “use” in an unobjectionable way. It seems to me that a proponent of the thought that we can rid ourselves of skeptical doubt by attending to use faces a dilemma: if we characterize use in austere terms (by focusing on non-semantic facts concerning behavior, or psychological facts concerning what we *take* to be the case) then this solution is unacceptably psychologistic; but if we characterize use in robustly semantic terms then it will seem to beg the question.²⁸⁷

Consider the first horn of this dilemma. There is a superficial sense in which the antirealist is very, very concerned with our use of expressions. On Wright's story, recall, the connection between *what we do* (say “Frances followed the recipe,” nod with approval at Frances's work, etc.) and *the facts* is so strong that we conclude that rule-talk is “euthyphronic,” that the latter is constituted by the former. (That is, being justified just is managing to convince those who are qualified to judge that you are justified in the right sort of circumstances.) But of

²⁸⁷ This needs qualification. I don't mean to suggest Diamond begs the question against Wittgenstein's skeptic. On the contrary, I think she refuses to answer the skeptic. What I am trying to say is only that if you *did* think that the skeptic's question were legitimate, then it seems to me that you wouldn't be satisfied by Diamond's response. (And of course, if you were already immune to skepticism, then you wouldn't be in need of therapy.)

course, if *this* is the sense in which use is important then the truth is constituted by what the majority *take* to be true. In other words, our solution to Wittgenstein's problem looks like a fancy form of psychologism.

Of course Diamond would want to deny that the antirealist has the right way of thinking about Use.²⁸⁸ To wit, Diamond insists that the antirealist's conception of our linguistic behavior is "flat and dead."²⁸⁹ For the antirealist, knowing the meaning of an expression amounts to nothing more than knowing when it's acceptable to produce the relevant noises—knowing when coming out with those noises won't get you beaten with sticks, and etc. For Diamond, on the other hand, knowing the Use of an expression involves much more than this. Diamond suggests that what we attend to in focusing on use is nothing short of the manner in which we "make our minds available to one another through speech."²⁹⁰ But then Use in Diamond's sense is already a normative notion. So there can be no accusation of psychologism.

Because Use is normative, there can be no mystery of how Use can be constrained. On this way of thinking, what we've attended to is our Use of an expression only if we see how that sort of behavior is *rationally appropriate*.²⁹¹

As I said, all this strikes me as right: use (and Use) *is* rationally constrained. But it should be obvious that we can't very well appeal to use in this way if we want to justify our understanding of a rule's demands in a way that would satisfy the skeptic. The skeptic challenges us to defend our understanding of a rule. If we accept the skeptic's challenge, it can't be legitimate to appeal to this understanding in our answer.

²⁸⁸ Henceforth, I will speak of "Use" when I want to refer to Diamond's conception of use.

²⁸⁹ *The Face of Necessity* at 262.

²⁹⁰ This quote is from McDowell, *Wittgenstein on Following a Rule* at 253.

²⁹¹ See, for instance, *Philosophy and the Mind* at 5 ("[A]ttending to what we do *is* relevant to a non-psychological treatment of the mind.")

While our understanding might not need the kind of vindication that the skeptic demands, it would be a mistake to think that Diamond's proposal provides the kind of vindication the skeptic seeks. Since Use is itself a normatively rich notion—since it is the means by which we make our minds available to one another—the skeptic will insist that we need to vindicate our entitlement to our conception of Use as much as anything else. If the skeptic were to concede that we have Use in Diamond's sense at our disposal then skepticism would be trivially refutable. But this is only because the availability of the robust conception of Use stacks the deck against the skeptic.

Of course, we can decide to *ignore* the skeptic. But if this is what we're doing, then attending to use can't be therapeutic in the way that some have suggested. In § 3.2.1, *supra*, I suggested that unless we *earn* the right to conceive of rules as speaking to us even when we haven't interpreted them, the suggestion that this is how it *must* be isn't likely to satisfy us. It seems to me that a similar sort of concern applies here. Because the frame of mind that makes us susceptible to the thinking that leads to the regress is one of finding Use problematic, attending to Use won't help anyone who genuinely needs help. On the contrary, to stress the importance of Use in this context is simply to ignore the “patient's” concern. Perhaps this is justified. But nothing in Diamond's story has shown us why this is so.

We'll be entitled to think of what we do as normative, to see ourselves as capable of following rules (or justifying ourselves), only if we've *already* seen our way past the frame of mind that seems to threaten our entitlement to conceive of our behavior as rational. So it's not at all clear how it is that attending to Use is going to be *therapeutic*. This proposal about use must figure as the conclusion of our story, not as a premise.

Diamond's account brings us closer to the idea that the questions that generate the regress are nonsense. For if philosophy pries words apart from the context of their use (as Wittgenstein sometimes suggests),²⁹² and if meaning just *is* use, then perhaps the words we use to state philosophical problems and formulate solutions to those problems don't take their meanings along with them.

This argument is far too impressionistic to be of much help to the quietist. For one thing, it's not at all clear that when we generate the regress we use words in some exceptional sense. For instance, if a "justification" ordinarily is some story one can give relative to which *this* rather than *that* is the right way to go on, then it seems that we can get the regress going by asking perfectly ordinary questions. Indeed, the question that sets off the regress can be perfectly innocuous. (E.g. *why'd you follow the rule in that way?*)

Even if Diamond's way of thinking about meaning unambiguously ruled out the possibility that we can ask the questions that generate the regress, then to the extent that we feel like we *understand* these questions, we will be inclined to be suspicious of Diamond's way of thinking about meaning. We will certainly not want to disregard our intuitions concerning what makes sense and what does not based on a general account of meaning without first being well-convinced of its credentials.

3.2.3 Squiggle Theory

Another view, closely related to Wittgenstein's suggestion that we need to wean ourselves of the notion that understanding requires interpretation, is that the regress is held in place by the idea

²⁹² See, for instance, INVESTIGATIONS § 38 ("[P]hilosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*.")
See also Id. at § 116 ("When philosophers use a word ... and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home?")

that (1) what's really real are physical signs (written or verbal); and (2) considered as they really are, such signs lack semantic significance. I will call this idea the *squiggle theory*. According to the proponent of the squiggle theory, the words one finds on a printed page, for instance, are really just ink marks, or squiggles—they can't be the sort of thing in the light of which what I go on to do is correct.²⁹³ According to the sort of quietist that I will now consider, if we reject the squiggle theory—if we insist that signs as such can possess semantic content—then the regress will cease to trouble us.

Though they are closely related, the attempt to pin the dilemma on the squiggle theory is different from the attempt to pin it on the view that rules need interpretation in two respects. First, the squiggle theory is more general than the idea that rules need to be interpreted; the former but not the latter remains agnostic with respect to what must endow the sign with content. (Put otherwise, all proponents of the view that rules require interpretation are also proponents of the squiggle theory, but not vice versa.) In this sense, the squiggle theory-based explanation of the regress promises to be an improvement over the previous one. For the antirealist is arguably implicitly committed to the squiggle theory even though she explicitly rejects the assumption that understanding consists in interpretation. Second, the squiggle theory seems to *explain* why it's tempting to assume that rules need to be interpreted. If we're inclined to suppose that a signpost itself, for instance, is a mere hunk of metal—that *it* can't tell me where I am to go—then it will be natural to say that the signpost conveys instructions only when we interpret it.

²⁹³ Applied to problems concerning the meaning of *statutory* texts, the squiggle theory is both disturbingly popular and surprisingly well-rooted in tradition. In the 22nd FEDERALIST, for instance, Alexander Hamilton says, "Laws are a dead letter without courts to expound them and define their true meaning."

David H. Finkelstein is the main proponent of the squiggle theory-based explanation of the regress in the secondary literature.²⁹⁴ According to Finkelstein, “Wittgenstein would have us avoid the paradox of *Investigations* § 201—not by finding a non-interpretive way to bridge a gulf between a rule and its meaning, but—by coming to question the idea that every rule comes with such a gulf.”²⁹⁵ More dramatically, he writes,

A philosopher who asks, “How is it that the statement of a rule is connected to its meaning?” has—even before she’s offered any answer to the question—already succumbed to the idea that some link is needed if our words are to have significance; she presupposes that there is always a gulf between words and their meanings.²⁹⁶

The textual support for Finkelstein’s view is less direct than the support for its cousin, the conception of rules as always needing interpretation. But one can find support if one is willing to look outside the rule-following chapter.²⁹⁷ For instance, in *Investigations* § 454 Wittgenstein asks “How does it come about that this arrow >>>-----> *points*? Doesn’t it seem to carry in it something besides itself?” His interlocutor answers, “no, not the dead line on paper; only the psychical thing, the meaning, can do that.” And Wittgenstein responds, “That is both true and false. The arrow points only in the application that a living being makes of it,” adding, “This pointing is *not* a hocus-pocus which can be performed only by the soul.”²⁹⁸ Here we have Wittgenstein’s interlocutor defending the idea that there is an important distinction between “the dead line on paper” and “the meaning.” Since the meaning possesses what the ink-mark lacks—namely, normative significance—it becomes irresistible either to mystify the ink-mark—to make

²⁹⁴ Note further that other commentators make similar suggestions, though they don’t develop them in any detail. See, for instance, Diamond’s *How Long is the Standard Meter* at 127.

²⁹⁵ *Wittgenstein on Rules and Platonism* at 64.

²⁹⁶ *Id.* at 69. See also *Id.* at 62, 68.

²⁹⁷ I don’t think it irrelevant, though, that Wittgenstein doesn’t make the claims on which Finkelstein bases his interpretation in or even around INVESTIGATIONS § 201.

²⁹⁸ See also INVESTIGATIONS §§ 431-32.

it seem like some spiritual hocus-pocus—or to deny the existence of the meaning. This is how the squiggle theory leads to the dilemma of the rule-following considerations, to our sense that we must choose between platonism and skepticism. But we can overcome the dilemma when we see that it's both true *and* false that the arrow is a dead line on paper. The arrow is a tool. Taken out of the context in which we make use of such tools, it *is* just a dead line on paper. But as long as it remains within that context, it needs no help—no spiritual hocus-pocus—to point.

Finkelstein doesn't claim that it's *nonsense* to suppose that signs are in-themselves mere squiggles. Indeed, the thought that signs are *not* mere squiggles seems more like a platitude than a philosophical insight. To say that signs are not mere squiggles is just another way of saying that *signposts point the way*. And if this thought makes sense then so too must its denial.²⁹⁹

While there's a sense in which the squiggle theory-based diagnosis is more satisfying than the one given by Wittgenstein himself in *Investigations* § 201, it also has the same flaw: the squiggle theory *suffices* to generate the regress but isn't *necessary* to generate the regress.

Pinning the regress on the squiggle theory seems to get the logical relation between the regress and the squiggle theory backwards. The regress threatens to expose a gap between any sign and its meaning. To attempt to blame the regress on the squiggle theory is to suggest that we must *assume* that there is a gap between a sign and its meaning to generate the regress. But this idea, it seems to me, is just wrong.

To see this, consider a slight modification of Wittgenstein's thought experiment in *Investigations* § 143. Imagine that a teacher writes "1, 2, 3, 5, ..." on the board, and then calls

²⁹⁹ Finkelstein himself *adds* to his diagnosis a line that *does* push in the direction of orthodox quietism. I want to postpone discussion of this further idea until the next section.

on you to continue the series. Imagine further that you're worried about your class participation grade. What do you say?

You might be tempted to say that what comes next is 7, since 7 is the next prime number after 5. But then you might also note that what's on the board so far can be interpreted as a part of the Fibonacci series (where the value of the n th member of the series is determined by adding the values of the two preceding members).³⁰⁰ Interpreted as the Fibonacci series, the right answer is 8. So what do you say?

Under the circumstances it would be reasonable to refuse to answer. The question is genuinely ambiguous, and it's prudent to avoid situations where one's grade is based on answers to ambiguous questions. Note, though, that we didn't *assume* that there's always a gulf between signs and their meanings. Rather, reflection *showed* us that there's a gulf (at least in this case). Moreover, the frame of mind from which the gulf emerges is just that of a reasonably (but not phenomenally) sophisticated student worried about her grade. So *pace* Diamond's suggestion, we don't open up the gulf by forgetting how numbers, or mathematical exercises, are *used*.

The quietist would no doubt respond that here we have a real ambiguity, and that the existence of local ambiguities hardly shows that *all* cases are ambiguous. But now imagine that you're in a college math class. You've had some set theory. You know the axioms of ZFC. Imagine now that your teacher writes "2, 4, 6, 8 ..." on the board. Imagine further that you've been dozing off in class, so you're not sure why she's doing this. Perhaps she is annoyed with the class, and thinks this is the best way to make you feel silly and small. Or perhaps she's checking to see if you've really grasped the implications of the downward-Skölem theorem.

³⁰⁰ Viz. the value of the fifth member of the series on the board is the value of the fourth member (5) plus the value of the third member (3).

You're really not sure. She writes that on the board, and she calls on you to continue the series. What do you do?

It seems to me that, once again, it would be reasonable for you to exercise caution in this case. Whatever answer you give, you risk censure. For instance, if you go ahead and answer "10" you might give the impression that you haven't absorbed the lesson that there are *infinitely* many functions that are compatible with what she has written thus far.³⁰¹

We might try to respond to this thought experiment by insisting that instructions that are determinate in some contexts (elementary school math class, for instance) are not necessarily determinate in others (a course on set theory).³⁰² The problem with this response, it seems to me, is that both the elementary school teacher and the college professor are asking the same question: both are asking what is in arithmetical accord with this series. And the arithmetic of the elementary school student is the same as the arithmetic of the student of the foundations of mathematics. Consequently, I don't see how we can say that one and the same question has an answer in some contexts but not others. The truths of arithmetic don't change depending on the context. Rather, in both contexts the answer is the same. What the more advanced contexts threaten to reveal is that what we had hitherto taken to be the answer in fact isn't.

I don't mean to suggest that this example shows that the regress really *is* unavoidable, that we really *do* have to choose between Platonism and skepticism. On the contrary, I think there is an answer to these sorts of worries, which I will sketch in § 3.3, *infra*. What I *am* trying to suggest that we don't have to endorse the squiggle theory to see the worry. In our example,

³⁰¹ At the risk of getting ahead of ourselves, it's worth noting that the idea that meaning-skepticism attempts to view meaning from sideways on (which we will consider in § 3.2.4, *infra*) should also seem inapt. We have assumed the point of view of a set theorist when considering the classroom exercise, not that of God or of a Martian.

³⁰² John McDowell made this suggestion in conversation.

we didn't *presuppose* that there's a gulf between every sign and its meaning.³⁰³ On the contrary, we assumed that by "2" our teacher means *the number two*, and so on. So we grant that signs have meaning (and that meaning is normative) even as we wonder what pattern is formed by signs with that meaning. (Of course, Kripke's Wittgenstein aims to show that we can throw this assumption into doubt. But we don't need to presuppose this in order to get the worry going. Rather, global semantic skepticism figures as the conclusion of Kripke's polemic, not as a premise.)

It doesn't seem right to say that we can ward off skepticism simply by rejecting the squiggle theory. Since the squiggle theory can be independently motivated, in order to get past the squiggle theory, we will need to identify the mistake on which it rests.³⁰⁴

3.2.4 Perspective Independence

The final version of quietism that I will consider is, if not the most popular, certainly the most well-known. On this view, the regress rests on the assumption that how things *really are* is how they are after we correct for the distorting effects of individual points of view.³⁰⁵

This idea requires some clarification. A point of view is a way of representing reality by means of concepts, many of which will turn out to be *parochial*. And a concept is parochial if a rational being could fail to understand what the concept means.³⁰⁶ Parochial concepts include concepts that presuppose special sensory equipment. (That is, color concepts are parochial.)

³⁰³ *Wittgenstein on Rules and Platonism* at 69.

³⁰⁴ Recall § 3.2.1, *supra*.

³⁰⁵ Compare *Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following* at 198.

³⁰⁶ This isn't the only way of understanding what it is for a concept to be parochial. See *Objectivity and Modern Idealism* at 308-09 for an alternate formulation. But I take it that this is the sense of parochiality that is at issue for McDowell.

Moreover, parochial concepts also include concepts whose intelligibility presupposes immersion in a particular culture. (In other words, so-called “thick ethical concepts” are parochial.)³⁰⁷

Because parochial concepts are intelligible to some but not all rational beings, to say that how things really are emerges only when we “transcend” point of view is to suggest that a complete description of the world as it really is would presuppose no special background, no shared sense of what is possible or what matters.³⁰⁸

On the final version of quietism that I want to consider, the rule-following considerations reveal that the effort to radically correct for point of view, to “jump outside one’s skin,”³⁰⁹ is inherently problematic. When we try to jump outside our skins we worry about our capacity to make out the requirements of rules. This is because once we imagine how things might seem to beings very different from us, the regress shows that nothing non-parochial suffices to bring a rule’s content back into focus.

Perhaps what this shows is that the idea that we really can jump outside our skins is a fantasy. After all, Kripke shows that rule-skepticism inflates to global meaning-skepticism. And global meaning-skepticism collapses of its own weight. So if skepticism about rules is the inevitable byproduct of trying to view rules from sideways on, then perhaps the real lesson of the regress is that we needn’t worry about the philosophical problems we *think* we see when we attempt to view things from outside of our own skins.³¹⁰ Moreover, if we don’t need to vindicate our understanding of a rule from sideways on, then the regress lapses and we’re left with no

³⁰⁷ The narrator of Jonathan Franzen’s *STRONG MOTION* makes a related point. In the novel, an antiabortionist attempts to dissuade one of the protagonist’s from seeking an abortion by telling her “we love you.” The narrator characterizes the protagonist’s response as follows: “He leaned over the yellow tape imploringly, but the plane he inhabited did not intersect with hers. He belonged to a species that was not her own, and this word of his, ‘love,’ was simply a function peculiar to his species. ‘We love you’ made as little sense to her now as a whale saying, ‘You strain plankton with your baleen, just like me,’ or a turtle saying, ‘You and I have shared this experience of laying eggs in a sandy pit.’ It was revolting.” 345 *STRONG MOTION* (1992).

³⁰⁸ Compare *Realism and the Realistic Spirit* in *REALISTIC SPIRIT* at 68-9.

³⁰⁹ FREGE, 15 *THE BASIC LAWS OF ARITHMETIC: EXPOSITION OF THE SYSTEM* (M. Furth trans., 1964).

³¹⁰ Compare Crary, *NEW WITTGENSTEIN* at 6.

reason not to think that the demands of rules are real. We just have to be careful to avoid a mistake about the perspective from which such demands are perceptible.

Wittgenstein's support for this idea comes out in his repeated remarks that it's not important that explanations avert all possible misunderstandings. For instance, in *Investigations* § 87 he says, "an explanation may indeed rest on another one that has been given, but none stands in need of another—unless *we* require it to prevent a misunderstanding." And here is Wittgenstein in *Investigations* at p.54:

I see a picture; it represents an old man walking up a steep path leaning on a stick. – How? Might it not have looked just the same if he had been sliding downhill in that position? Perhaps a Martian would describe the picture so. I do not need to explain why *we* do not describe it so.

To convince ourselves that the picture of the old man is ambiguous, we have to imagine how a Martian might view it. But Wittgenstein insists that it doesn't *matter* what the Martian would get out of the picture. Even if Martians would see it differently, this doesn't make it ambiguous.

In general, the suggestion is that we have to think ourselves outside our familiar mindset to see the "ambiguities" on which the regress rests. But the fact that they emerge only from sideways on makes the "ambiguities" dubious. The central claim here is that rationality needn't presuppose universal intelligibility. One's actions can count as going on and doing the same thing, for instance, while conforming to a pattern that only those with a particular upbringing could recognize as such.

I think it helps to have an example of this. Consider a variant on the slab-carrying language-game that Wittgenstein describes in *Investigations* § 2. Frances and I are working in a music store. Frances's job is to show the customer particular guitars, and my job is to fetch the next guitar for the customer to try out. Now imagine we're helping a customer who's interested in rock guitars, and Frances holds up a black Stratocaster and says, "bring me something like this." I might bring her a black Ibanez or a sunburst Les Paul or even a red Gibson Destroyer. Any one of those, let us imagine, would satisfy her. But it would not satisfy her if I brought a black Fender bass guitar. Imagine that I realize this and bring her the red Destroyer.

The idea that the Destroyer constitutes something similar to the Strat wouldn't be obvious to everyone. It's a different color. It was manufactured in a different factory probably in a different part of the world. Both the body and the neck are made of a different kind of wood. Indeed, a Destroyer is a kind of guitar whose shape is so strange that it wouldn't even *look* like a guitar to one who is familiar only with classical and jazz guitars. Consequently, the similarity between the black Strat and the red Destroyer, like the difference between the black Strat and the black P-Bass, is something some can see, but others can't; the similarity is perspective-dependent.

This might lead one to worry that my execution of Frances's order is correct only in a wishy-washy sort of way, that it's less than fully correct. But this worry would be silly. Destroyers and Strats form a family. Both Destroyers and Strats are good rock guitars. The things that one looks to do in rock guitar—play fast in high registers, produce feedback, etc.—can be done well on both, but not on other kinds of guitars. Of course, I have no useful account of the distinction between rock and other kinds of guitar playing. But still, it doesn't seem unfair

to conclude that only someone who hasn't spent much time in a guitar shop (or a philosopher) would think that I haven't done precisely what Frances asked.

One striking thing about Wittgenstein's regress is that it reveals that mathematical reasoning is as perspective-dependent as any; mathematical reasoning also lacks universal intelligibility. But for the proponent of this strain of quietism, far from being a problem, this is the solution to the problem. Since *nothing* is intelligible from sideways on, there must be no special problem with ordinary, non-recursive rules. That is, *nothing* meets the standard that's supposed to make rule-related norms seem problematic. Once we see that the attempt to view rule-following from sideways on makes a problem for our grasp of putatively non-parochial concepts as well as parochial ones, the thought is that we should stop *wanting* to view ourselves in this way.

Again, the suggestion is that if we reject the assumption that instructions must be compelling to inhabitants of *all* points of view—that they must *guarantee* understanding—then the regress can't get started. We manufacture possible misunderstandings by imagining beings very different from us: Martians for instance. If we stop worrying about making ourselves intelligible to all possible beings—as the rule-following dialectic reveals we must—then we should be able to take the abstract possibility of misunderstanding in stride. In that case, we won't have to look for interpretations that would avert all possible (as opposed to actual) doubts as to how to understand a rule.

It seems right to say that there is no guarantee that our efforts to make ourselves understood by very different sorts of beings would be successful. My worry, once again, is that the claim that the problem *depends* on this assumption is either false or unhelpful.

It would be false if we were to insist that we have to step outside of our ordinary ways of thinking altogether to get the regress going. In § 3.2.3, *supra*, I argued that the assumption that signs are mere squiggles suffices to generate the regress. When we abstract from the semantic properties of a signpost and consider only its physical properties, we view the signpost as a physicist would. However, insofar as the explanations produced by physicists represent one way of making things intelligible to humans, we haven't stepped outside of ourselves altogether when we ignore the signpost's semantic properties.

Moreover, just as we don't need to step outside of ourselves to conceive of the signpost as semantically barren, neither do we need to step outside of ourselves to form a conception of what the signpost so conceived is missing. What the signpost *qua* physical object is missing is just the semantic force we take it to have when we view it as we ordinarily would. In

Investigations § 52 Wittgenstein writes,

If I am inclined to suppose that a mouse has come into being by spontaneous generation out of grey rags and dust, I shall do well to examine those rags very closely to see how a mouse may be hidden in them, how it may have got there and so on. But if I am convinced that a mouse cannot come into being from these things, then this investigation will perhaps be superfluous.

What I am saying here is that staying within human ways of making things intelligible, we can make out the “mouse”—the norm—and we can make out the “rags”—the possible configurations of physical fact. Moreover, we don't need to jump outside of our skins to notice that we can't find the former in the latter. So rather than saying the way of thinking that leads to the regress—according to which the rule is detached from its expression—is a symptom of having tried to jump outside of our own skins, it strikes me that we should say that it is a product of combining

an ordinary view of the rule with an extraordinary but still human view of the expression of the rule.

Of course, we don't have to take the problem to be our desire to step outside of *ourselves*. Instead, we can say that the regress has its source in our attempt to step outside of our *practices*.³¹¹ That is to say, while we don't have to step outside of human ways of making things intelligible to see the signpost as inert, we *do* have to step outside of our practice of following signposts. Put simply, if you think of the signpost as a mere hunk of metal, then you are not in the frame of mind you find yourself in when you *follow* signposts. The same is true for the case of the arithmetical series. We don't have to step outside of mathematical thought to see that the next step in the series is underdetermined. But we do need to step outside of the kind of mathematical thought one engages in when one learns to do simple arithmetical exercises. As Wittgenstein says, when we're immersed in the practice it never occurs to us to doubt that there is one right way to carry on.

It seems to me that this suggestion doesn't get to the heart of the matter either. While it might be problematic to want to jump outside one's skin altogether, generally speaking, there's nothing *wrong* with stepping outside of the ways of thinking that characteristically go along with immersion in a practice. After all, one steps outside a practice *whenever* one reflects on the manifest view of some phenomenon. Consequently, sometimes stepping outside of a practice is innocuous, as when the physicist steps outside her dining practices when she thinks of the table

³¹¹ McDowell made this suggestion in conversation. Compare *Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following* at 211 (suggesting that the way not to feel the "vertigo" that our awareness of the perspective-dependence of our practices can engender is not to step outside of our normal immersion in our practices).

as something made up of little bits of matter and lots of empty space. And sometimes stepping outside of a practice is positively required by reason.

Some of the best examples of cases where reason requires us to step outside of a practice come from food criticism. For instance, in his review of Per Se, a restaurant in Manhattan's Columbus Circle, William L. Hamilton characterizes the restaurant's signature cocktail as "elusive to the point of erudition—much to the intention of the house."³¹² Hamilton continues: "It is also so subtle as to be potentially banal. You have to hold its cultured thought tightly, to get to the bottom of it." It's an amusing convention of food criticism that reviewers seem to describe food as if it were some academic theory.³¹³ Needless to say, I have no idea how this came about. I have even less idea what Hamilton is trying to say. (Indeed, I suspect he doesn't either.) But if I'm right, then in order to contemplate whether "so subtle as to be potentially banal" really means *disappointingly weak*, for instance, Hamilton would have to step outside his martini-reviewing practices.

Again, one will need to step outside of one's rule-relevant practices to get the regress going. But in general there's nothing wrong with stepping outside of a practice. (If there were something wrong with it, then the suggestion that we're under a standing obligation to reflect on the relations between our concepts would be unintelligible.)³¹⁴ Moreover, one can step outside of one's ordinary way of viewing things for less philosophically noble reasons. For instance, when the signpost blocks your view of the lake then it's *fine* to think of it as a hunk of metal without bothering to take in its semantic properties.³¹⁵

³¹² *The New York Times*, "Sunday Styles", p. 9, May 9, 2004.

³¹³ Along the same lines, *The Wall Street Journal* once called a wine "cognitive but not visceral." (Alas, I lost the reference.)

³¹⁴ The point that we are under such an obligation is due to McDowell, MIND AND WORLD at I-5.

³¹⁵ Moreover, if you're an engineer, there's nothing wrong with taking in the signpost's structural properties, as the narrator of Franzen's THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CITY does, noting, "[On American Highways] there were, for

If all this is right, then I can't see how it can be *useful* to learn that the paradox looms as a threat only when we step outside of our practices, or even that stepping outside of one's practices goes hand in hand with a way of thinking in which the paradox looms as a threat. Given that we have independent reason to think that it's *all right* to reflect on—and in so doing step outside of—our practices, *this* can't be the source of our difficulties. So whereas the previous diagnoses were underinclusive—failing to take in *all* the ways in which one can fall into the regress—this diagnosis looks overinclusive: it isolates a way of thinking which is surely a necessary condition but just as surely not a sufficient condition of the philosophical trouble Wittgenstein attempts to teach us to solve. (Along the same lines, the paradox looms as a threat only when we use language to motivate it, but no one could seriously suggest that it is our willingness to use language that is the source of our difficulties.)

There is the further question of what McDowell's diagnosis suggests with respect to the *meaningfulness* of the regress. Here we should note that McDowell, though an inspiration for quietists, never explicitly endorses the idea that Wittgenstein's skeptical interlocutor *fails to make sense*.

Others, however, have tried to push McDowell's account—his thought that the mistake is to try to view rules from sideways on—in that direction. For instance, at the end of "Realism and the Realistic Spirit," Diamond says that the key to dissolving the paradox is seeing how the question on which it depends presupposes the availability of an *absolute* perspective—a

instance, the zinc-plated standards of exit signs and mileage signs—upright I-beams whose burrs and pits reflected low-cost fabrication, wide tolerances, U.S. government specifications. The structure of each sign was sturdy enough and the design pleasing enough that it teased travelers with the possibility of being appreciated as a less literal sign of place. But its impersonal adequacy denied that possibility." 512 THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CITY (2001). It goes without saying that any account of the mistake on which the regress rests that would render such reflections unintelligible isn't worth seriously considering.

perspective that *anyone* can share—from which we look down on ourselves and reality.³¹⁶

Elsewhere she tells us that it is an *illusion* to think that we can inhabit such a perspective:

We have ... the idea of ourselves as looking ... at the human activity of following a rule and asking ... whether there is or is not something *objectively* determined as what the rule requires to be done at the next application ... we do not want to ask and answer ... ordinary questions, but to ask what in reality there is to justify the answers we give when we are unselfconsciously inside the ordinary practice. McDowell takes Wittgenstein to have tried to show us how to come out of the intellectual illusion that we are thus asking anything.³¹⁷

Alice Crary pushes McDowell's line even farther than this. For Crary, it's not just a mistake to try to jump outside of our own skins when we're trying to account for what the mathematical series demands of us, or what understanding, meaning and thinking consists in. Rather, it's more or less *always* a mistake to try to jump outside of oneself, and the result is *always* nonsense.³¹⁸

What I want to note is that there is an alternative way of understanding McDowell's suggestion. One might think that McDowell tries to show that the inevitability of the regress once we view rules from sideways on (and our inability to contain the regress of interpretations once it breaks out) proves that such a view of rules can't be *obligatory*. So we don't *have* to view the signpost as a normatively inert object. But this is not to deny that it's legitimate (and in some cases useful) to abstract from the (real) semantic content of the signpost, to view it from sideways on.

The regress teaches us that the kind of intelligibility that signposts genuinely have when viewed as mere hunks of stuff doesn't settle how one ought to go on. This doesn't mean—how

³¹⁶ *Realism and the Realistic Spirit* at 68-9.

³¹⁷ *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 185.

³¹⁸ Crary, *NEW WITTGENSTEIN* at 6 (suggesting that the attempt to view ourselves from sideways on creates the illusion of sense). See also *METHOD* at 81.

could it?!—that we only *thought* that signposts can be viewed as mere hunks of stuff. Rather, it means that this can't be all they are.

If there is to be such a thing as following a rule then their intelligibility *qua* hunks of stuff can't be the *only* kind of intelligibility that signposts have. But this is not to deny that they're also hunks of stuff. So there's a way of claiming that the regress of interpretations rests on a misunderstanding—the misunderstanding is that the physicist says all that can be truly said about the signpost—without having to insist that we only *thought* that we were thinking something when we were worried about the regress. On the contrary, we can claim the regress rests on a misunderstanding without committing ourselves to anything stronger than the idea that it's *false* that rules speak to us only when interpreted.

Even if we agree with everything that McDowell says about the relevance of the absolute conception of reality to the regress, the fact that McDowell's diagnosis can come apart from the use to which Diamond and Crary put it shows that there's room to wonder what it commits us to. We needn't take McDowell's discussion to support Diamond's version of quietism, and indeed I think we shouldn't.

If the skeptic is just *wrong* that signposts by themselves don't point the way, then Wittgenstein's discussion can be viewed as an argument for the irreducibility of the normative to the merely natural (if the merely natural is conceived in a certain way). On the other hand, if we only *think* that we can make sense of the regress, then we lose hold of our sense that it teaches us anything about the plausibility of bald naturalism.³¹⁹

³¹⁹ Of course, we can say that the regress *seems* to teach us something. But I think this is a less attractive characterization. I will explain why in § 3.3, *infra*.

Consider all this from a different angle. Both Diamond and Crary, I'm sure, would concede that, even though we can't get outside of *all of our practices at once* (even if it makes no sense to suppose we can), there's no real difficulty getting outside of our practices *one at a time*. (To deny this, it seems to me, is to insist, not that we must fix the ship while at sea, to borrow Neurath's metaphor, but that we're stuck with the ship we've got.) They would insist, though, that the idea that we can step outside of the frame of mind we occupy when we follow rules and still get the facts in which the content of a rule consists in view is a fantasy.

The question is: why is "fantasy" the right word for the problem? We've seen that there's nothing in principle wrong with wanting to reflect on a phenomenon "from outside." Some things—e.g. the facts of organic chemistry, perhaps some facts concerning patterns of human social behavior—can be explained from outside the practice.³²⁰ One might reasonably wonder if our rule-related behavior is like this, if rule-following can be explained "from without."

McDowell's Wittgenstein shows that the answer to this last question is "no." But even if we're prepared to grant that it's *a priori* that rules doesn't offer themselves up for reflection from without, it's hard to see why we shouldn't count this as an *insight*, as opposed to the repudiation of a bit of nonsense.

³²⁰ Economics often explains social behavior. Physics explains chemistry.

3.3 ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM WITH RESPECT TO THE RULE-FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS

The mistake is to say that there is anything that meaning something consists in.³²¹

Meaning properties appear to be neither eliminatable, nor reducible. Perhaps it is time that we learned to live with that fact.³²²

In § 3.1, I argued that antirealist interpretations of the rule-following considerations are at bottom indistinguishable from skepticism. In § 3.2, I suggested that quietist interpretations “unask” the questions that generate the regress without really showing what’s wrong with those questions.

Below I will sketch an alternative approach. The view I defend is like orthodox Wittgensteinian quietism in all but one respect: I see no reason to insist that the various positions that get considered and rejected in the course of the rule-following dialectic are *nonsense* (as opposed to false). While the difference between claiming inadequate views of rule-following to be *nonsense* (in the Wittgensteinian quietist’s sense) and claiming them to be *false* may seem insignificant, I will argue that the latter position has significant advantages over the former.

³²¹ ZETTEL at § 16.

³²² Boghossian, *The Rule-Following Considerations* at 548.

3.3.1 Anti-Foundationalism

The account I will recommend is a form of *anti-foundationalism* with respect to discourse on rules. For the anti-foundationalist, we're justified in thinking that a particular understanding of a rule is legitimate unless we've been given real reason to conclude that it's not. On this way of thinking, our inability to tell a non-trivial story about what justifies a particular understanding of a rule needn't count against our entitlement to think of that understanding as correct.³²³ (This is anti-foundationalism with respect to the *epistemic* problem posed by the rule-following considerations.) Moreover, we shouldn't think that our inability to tell a non-trivial story about what a rule's content consists in debars us from speaking of there being a fact of the matter. (This is anti-foundationalism with respect to the *metaphysical* problem.)

Anti-foundationalism makes room for the sort of flat-footed response to the regress that we mentioned in § 3.1.3, *supra*. Both the skeptic and the platonist assume that any understanding of a rule needs substantive vindication, vindication that doesn't draw on the conceptual resources of the discourse in dispute. The skeptic, seeing that our efforts to vindicate our understanding of rules all seem to fail, doubts that there can be such a thing as following a rule. The platonist, seeing that we can't dispense with the idea that we can keep track of rules' requirements, invents a special metaphysical doctrine to do the explanatory work she thinks is needed. Both positions are committed to a non-obligatory picture of the epistemology of understanding. The anti-foundationalist, in rejecting this picture, recognizes no obstacle to a naïve factualism with respect to rules.³²⁴

³²³ Compare Putnam, *Was Wittgenstein an Anti-Realist?* at 147.

³²⁴ Something like the epistemological assumptions that the platonist and the skeptic share come under attack in other contexts. See, for instance, McDowell's *Anti-Realism and the Epistemology of Understanding* in *MEANING, KNOWLEDGE AND REALITY* (1998). See also Heck, *Use and Meaning* in *THE PHILOSOPHY OF MICHAEL DUMMETT* (B. McGuinness & G. Oliveri eds., 1994) (discussing McDowell's debate with Dummett).

Both the platonist and the skeptic recognize the legitimacy of the skeptical challenge at the center of the rule-following considerations. But it's far from clear that this is obligatory.

Surprisingly (given where he ends up), Wright puts this point as forcefully as anyone.

According to Wright,

there is an explicit and unacceptable reductionism involved at the stage at which the skeptic challenges his interlocutor to recall some aspect of his former mental life which might constitute his, for example, having meant addition by "plus". It is not acceptable, apparently, if the interlocutor claims to recall precisely that. Rather, the challenge is to recall some *independently characterized* fact, in a way which does not simply beg the question of the existence of facts of the disputed species, of which it has to *emerge*—rather than simply be claimed—that it has the requisite properties (principally, normative content across a potential infinity of situations). The search is thus restricted to phenomena of consciousness which are not—for the purposes of the dialectic—permissibly assumed "up front" to have a recollectable *content*.³²⁵

Wittgenstein's interlocutor assumes that we can't appeal to facts about a rule's content in our efforts to justify our understanding of the rule's requirements. Wittgenstein helps us to see that this assumption involves an "unacceptable reductionism." Moreover, if we can dispense with this assumption, then the skeptical problem lapses. Now, for instance, we could say that there *is* a fact that constitutes my having meant *plus* by "+" (to take the case that interested Kripke). But it's just that: *the fact that I meant plus by "+"*. Nothing more needs to be said about it. Moreover, my instructions constitute something relative to which our student is to write "1002", not "1004", because I told her to "add by twos." When I said that I meant that she is to *add by twos*, and the meaning of my instructions is something with which only the answer "1002" would accord at this point in the series.

³²⁵ Wittgenstein's Rule-Following Considerations and the Central Project of Theoretical Linguistics at 176.

The regress seems to show that if we assume from the start that rules are problematic then no philosophical account will convince us otherwise. Thus, if the skeptic's worries are legitimate then they are unanswerable. But the skeptical conclusion is unintelligible.³²⁶ Consequently, it *must* be a mistake to think that we are confronted with a genuine problem. We can be entitled to reject the problem if we embrace a “default-and-challenge” picture of justification. Under the default-and-challenge standard, our beliefs in general are justified in the absence of a positive challenge.³²⁷ Relative to this standard, there's simply no way to get the skeptical worry going.

Wittgenstein himself endorses an anti-foundationalistic account of rules. In *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* VI-31, for instance, he writes, “the difficult thing here is not, to dig down to the ground; no it is to recognize the ground that lies before us as the ground ... *our disease is one of wanting to explain.*”³²⁸ Implicit in the rule-following considerations is a question concerning the *grounds* for talk about rules. Antirealists like Wright assume that the difficult thing is to *find* the ground, to find that which makes our understanding of a rule's requirements true. Here Wittgenstein suggests that we're faced with a question that admits of a perfectly ordinary answer; the ground is already before our eyes, and the difficult thing is to see this.³²⁹ It's difficult to see this because we assume that there must be some non-trivial explanation of what rules—and facts about content—consist in. But according to Wittgenstein, *this is our disease.*

³²⁶ See, e.g., § 3.0, *supra*.

³²⁷ Compare *Making it Explicit* at 174-76 (formulating the “default-and-challenge” standard).

³²⁸ My emphasis.

³²⁹ Compare *Investigations* §§ 120-130.

This theme also emerges in the sections leading up to the rule-following chapter. In *Investigations* §§ 173 and 175, for instance, Wittgenstein says,

It is as if at first all these more or less inessential processes were shrouded in a particular atmosphere, which dissipates when I look closely at them.

I should like to say: “Sure enough, I was guided here. But as for what was characteristic in what happened – if I say what happened, I no longer find it characteristic.”

When we’re committed to reductionism we light on inessential processes, and try to invest them with special significance (shrouding them in an atmosphere of importance). *This*, we want to say—having this twinge—is what meaning *plus* by “+” consists in.³³⁰ But this is hopeless, and not because we’ve selected the wrong process, as if there were a better twinge out there. That there *is* no twinge that would satisfy us is surely the point of the regress. Consequently, either such facts are irreducible, or there are no such facts. Wittgenstein clearly doesn’t believe the latter.³³¹ So that leaves us with the former.

Can anti-foundationalism be right? In the conclusion of his paper on the rule-following considerations, Boghossian worries that anti-foundationalism might commit us to an unacceptable account of the physical sciences. His worry, as I understand it, is that since (as Davidson teaches us) intentional state attributions explain behavior only insofar as the relevant intentional states *cause* that behavior, we face a dilemma: either intentional states reduce to the sorts of states with which the physical sciences are concerned or the physical sciences don’t

³³⁰ Wittgenstein’s own example in these sections is *reading a passage*. Wittgenstein’s method is to give counter-examples against candidate reductive definitions. See INVESTIGATIONS §§ 153-54 (suggesting that neither does understanding consist in something hidden—for then we couldn’t find it—nor does it consist in public, non-epistemic facts).

³³¹ See, of course, INVESTIGATIONS § 202 (“It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another.”)

manage to catalogue all that is causally efficacious—viz. physics is “incomplete.” The anti-foundationalist, in giving a flat-footed response to the regress, explicitly denies the former, so she must be committed to the latter. But such a view of physics, Boghossian worries, seems fatally problematic.

One quick but not terribly deep problem with this objection is that the idea that we ought to understand physics as delineating the causal layout of the world might turn out to be nothing more than bad philosophy of science.³³²

More significantly, it’s not clear what it means to say that physics is “incomplete.” Clearly anyone who is prepared to say that intentional states are irreducible to physical states is *already* prepared to countenance a view according to which physics is “incomplete” in the sense of *not having something to say about all the facts*. Moreover, it’s not obvious that the claim that physics doesn’t account for all that which exerts causal force is more implausible than the claim that physics doesn’t give an exhaustive list of all that there is. If this were all that Boghossian meant by “the incompleteness of physics,” he wouldn’t be pointing to a problem with anti-reductionism so much as defining it.

It seems to me that we come closer to the spirit of Boghossian’s concern if we understand the proponent of the completeness of physics to think that there is a sufficient physical cause for every physical effect.³³³ Understood in this way, to say that physics is “complete” is to insist that *every event that is describable in the language of physics and that is the effect of some cause is caused by some other event (or series of events) also describable in the language of physics*.

³³² See Russell, *On the Notion of Cause* in MYSTICISM AND LOGIC (1981).

³³³ This formulation is due to Kieran Setiya. I am very grateful to Kieran for helping me to understand Boghossian’s worry.

On the face of it, this position doesn't rule out the possibility that events not describable in the language of physics can have causal force. But the completeness of physics would clearly have implications for the latter view. For if we assume that every physical event has a physical cause, then it seems that intentional states must be at best causally redundant. If physics is complete then even if there is a non-physical cause of some physical effect, there is *also* a physical cause. Consequently, the non-physical cause must be superfluous.

Consider an example. Imagine that we're inclined to suppose that Frances's decision to eat some tuna causes her to walk toward the kitchen. In this case, since Frances must move her legs in order to transport herself to the kitchen, we will also think that Frances's decision causes, among other things, certain of her leg muscles to twitch. But this is a physical effect. Consequently, if we assume that physics is causally complete, then even if there is a non-physical cause of this event—Frances's decision—there must also be a physical cause. And the existence of the physical cause makes the non-physical cause look like an idle wheel.

This sort of objection is important enough that it has generated its own literature, a literature which I won't try to come to terms with here. Hopefully it will suffice instead to point to one way in which some philosophers have been dissatisfied with it. The objection rests on the idea that for the anti-reductionist, it has to be some kind of *coincidence* that both events from the mental order and events from the physical order manage to stand in causal relation to the same physical effect. To take our previous example, if there's both a mental event (Frances's craving for tuna) *and* a physical event that cause Frances to get up and go to the kitchen, then her behavior is like Jones's death, when, for instance, Jones is shot *and* struck by lightning at the same time.

I take it that if we reflect on the case of poor Jones, we can see one problem with Boghossian's objection. The reason it's fair to characterize the circumstances surrounding Jones's death as a "coincidence" is that the two causal factors in his death are *independent* of each other. But now the question is: what reason is there to think that the anti-reductionist supposes that the two sorts of causal stories about Frances are independent in anything like this way? It's far from obvious that whenever two different causal explanations communicate different information—whenever two explanations are not inter-substitutable in intensional contexts—they must be completely unrelated to one another. But if the sort of causation explanations we give when we describe Frances first as an intentional system and then as a physical system are *related*, then it's no coincidence that Frances's behavior has two causes. If this is right, then there's no reason to think that the anti-reductionist can't take Boghossian's worry in stride.³³⁴

Once we set aside worries about its implications for the philosophy of physics, it seems to me that the difficult thing is seeing how we can be *satisfied* by anti-foundationalism. Here I think there are two things to be said. First, Wittgenstein's efforts are largely aimed at showing that we can't imagine what it would be to find external facts for semantic content to consist in. Consequently, it's far from clear that we have any good reason not to be satisfied with anti-foundationalism.³³⁵

I admit that when we're in the grip of the dilemma, the anti-foundationalist, flat-footed response to the questions that generate it won't satisfy us. But it seems to me that this shouldn't

³³⁴ I'm very, very grateful to David H. Finkelstein for helping me to formulate this response to Boghossian's worry.

³³⁵ This is very much like the sort of argument we saw the quietist give at various points. See, e.g., § 2.2, *supra*. I take it that I can appeal to this sort of argument in good conscience since I'm not trying to use it to draw conclusions concerning the *meaningfulness* of rival philosophical theories.

count as a decisive objection to this approach. (At the risk of sounding glib, it seems to me worth bearing in mind that, as Cavell reminds us, our happiness often calls for the transformation, as opposed to the satisfaction, of our desires.)³³⁶

Second, there's no reason to assume that rules must be the sorts of things that are reducible to other sorts of facts. Again, Wright makes a compelling case for this point. Wright has claimed that the reductionism on which the skeptical challenge depends is both unearned and unacceptable.³³⁷ According to Wright, if we restrict our conception of what would count as an answer to the skeptic's question, the fruitlessness of our search shouldn't be surprising. But he argues that this shouldn't be cause for despair: "If the skeptic is allowed to put the challenge in this way, then it is no doubt unanswerable. But so put, it is merely an implicit prejudice against the ordinary notions of meaning and intention."³³⁸ Wright's suggestion is that our failure to vindicate semantic facts in the way the skeptic demands says more about the terms of our investigation than it does about the status of those facts.

Elsewhere, Wright warns against despairing too early of finding answers to philosophical questions.³³⁹ But the point of the regress, it seems to me, is that the search for external facts was hopeless from the start, even when we look for them in new places: communal as opposed to individual patterns of behavior. If I'm right that this is the take-away lesson from the regress, then our embrace of anti-foundationalism would not be premature.

Anti-foundationalism is in many ways similar to quietism. According to the anti-foundationalist no less than the quietist, the thinking that leads to the regress rests on a mistake.

³³⁶ CAVELL, PURSUITS OF HAPPINESS: THE HOLLYWOOD COMEDY OF REMARRIAGE 4-5 (1981).

³³⁷ *Wittgenstein's Rule-Following Considerations and the Central Project of Theoretical Linguistics* at 176.

³³⁸ *Id.* at 176-77.

³³⁹ *Id.* at 191.

Consequently, we need to learn how to “unask” the questions that get the regress started, not to discover new facts that make the regress palatable. There *is* no regress, and he need to learn (or remember) how to see this. The anti-foundationalist agrees with the quietist on this much.

It seems to me that one advantage of anti-foundationalism over quietism is that it is consistent with the core commitments of at least certain strains of antirealism. The antirealist needn't be troubled by the anti-foundationalist's resolution of the regress for at least two reasons. First, based on the account Wright gives in *Truth and Objectivity*, anti-foundationalism just *is* a form of antirealism. Wright's proposal is that realists and antirealists needn't quibble about whether the statements of the discourse with which they are concerned are truth-apt. On the contrary, according to Wright, the real point of contention between the realist and the antirealist is how “beefed up” a discourse's truth predicate is, whether the truth predicate has properties that justify applying the rhetoric of realism to that discourse.

Wright's guiding thought is that the properties of a truth predicate that we can read off from the role it plays in the “Disquotational Schema” are mere platitudes.³⁴⁰ These properties are not enough to earn for that discourse the substantial notion of truth required by the realist. As Wright says, “A basic anti-realism about a discourse ... would be the view that it is qualified by *no* interesting feature serving to give point to an intuitive realism about it—that it deploys minimally truth-apt contents, and that's the whole of the matter.”³⁴¹

Wright's antirealist with respect to rules, then, would insist that we can't “beef up” the truth predicate for discourse about rules—viz. there's no interesting story to be told about how talk of rules aims for truth in an especially weighty sense. This is the idea I want to focus on.

³⁴⁰ Wright gives a list of things we can say of statements in a discourse just in virtue of the availability of a truth predicate in TRUTH AND OBJECTIVITY at 34. This includes: statements of that discourse are truth-apt (obviously); the true ones *correspond to the facts*; some statements may be justified without being true; and etc.

³⁴¹ TRUTH AND OBJECTIVITY at 142.

The quietist agrees that claims about rules can't be beefed up.³⁴² The anti-foundationalist, of course, does too. But the anti-foundationalist insists (*pace* antirealism) that we don't *need* to tell such a story to vindicate the application of the rhetoric of realism to discourse about rules, and (*pace* certain forms of quietism) that this is all we need to see our way past the problem posed by the rule-following considerations.

There is a second, related sense in which anti-foundationalism is consistent with certain of the antirealist's commitments. The anti-foundationalist is happy to say that there's still philosophical work to be done in unpacking the rhetoric of objectivity, in deciding what we mean when we distinguish between "objective" and "non-objective" facts. Thus, there is nothing in anti-foundationalism that is inimical to the notion that philosophy has something to teach us about whether facts about rules are "objective." If, for instance, we stipulate that a fact is objective only if it is *a priori* that (in suitable conditions) differences of opinion always point to "divergent inputs,"³⁴³ then facts about rules will almost certainly *not* qualify as objective. So long as we hold fast to the idea that talk about rules is based in fact, and so long as we don't forget what we mean by "objective," then I don't see the harm in conceding this much to the antirealist.

Of course, Wright claims that if we cannot show that the truths of a discourse are "objective" in the aforementioned sense, then we have no ammunition against euthyphronism. But this last idea is dispensable.³⁴⁴

³⁴² See Diamond, *The Face of Necessity* at 260 (suggesting that once we say that a claim is true, "there's no more air to be pumped into the balloon").

³⁴³ Compare TRUTH AND OBJECTIVITY at 90-3.

³⁴⁴ Recall §3.1.3, *supra*. It's illuminating to compare Wright's account of the realism debate to the one Fine gives in *The Question of Realism*, 1 PHILOSOPHERS IMPRINT 1 www.philosophersimprint.org/001001/ (2001) (last visited 9/6/05). According to Fine, one is entitled to euthyphronism only if the sentences of the "extended discourse" are grounded in other sentences not belonging to that discourse. That is, euthyphronism *presupposes* some form of reducibility.

If we *do* dispense with this last idea, then we're left with the claim that the disquotation schema for normative facts can't be beefed up. There's no reason that antirealists and quietists can't *both* endorse this claim. Once we realize that normative facts in general, and facts about rules in particular, can't be grounded in non-normative facts, the regress lapses.

The antirealists we have considered insist that normative discourses in general and rule-talk in particular are in some sense unlike the sciences. The quietist proposals we have considered share the idea that we shouldn't propose a "solution" to the problem posed by the rule-following considerations, but rather we should see that there is no problem. I have suggested that anti-foundationalism can accommodate both of these ideas.

Of course, this isn't to say that both antirealists and quietists actually endorse anti-foundationalism. On the contrary, the antirealists we have considered propose manifestly non-anti-foundationalistic (actually psychologistic) solutions to the problem. But again, it's entirely consistent with the spirit of certain forms of antirealism to say that talk of rules can be literally true, and that "the rule requires ϕ " is true, when it is, in virtue of the fact that *the rule requires ϕ* .

Moreover, anti-foundationalism remains agnostic with respect to some of the debates between the realist and the antirealist. This leaves room for more philosophical work to be done. After all, to say that my understanding of a rule is true, or based in fact, isn't to say anything about the nature of the relevant fact, or the formal properties of the corresponding truth predicate. Much more can be said, for instance, about whether the fact in which the rule's content consists satisfies the constraints in which Wright is interested (cognitive command, width of cosmological role, etc). Wright, of course, would say that talk of rules satisfies none of

these constraints. Perhaps some realists would disagree. But neither Wright nor his opponent need be committing himself to anything like fantasy here.

Let me be clear. I haven't really argued against quietism yet. (I'll do this in § 3.3.2, *infra*.) Also, I don't mean to suggest (indeed I don't think) that Wright's "realism-relevant constraints" make intelligible a richer notion of "fact," that these constraints are relevant to our understanding of how *real* rules are. For what it's worth, I buy Rosen's criticisms of *this* idea.³⁴⁵ I am, however, saying that genuine questions concerning objectivity can survive even after we've established that certain questions concerning objectivity are potentially misleading.

There is another sense in which I take it that the quietist's accusation of "fantasy" is off-base. The solution to the paradox of the rule-following considerations that I envision does not (or at any rate, not necessarily) commit us to the idea that the putative results of philosophical analysis are *nonsense*. It is perfectly consistent with the spirit of anti-foundationalism to insist that it's *false* that a rule's content consists in facts about my past behavior, about that which passes before my mind's eye, or about how the community behaves.

All this is to say, once again, that there is a distinction between flat-footedness and quietism. Quietists insist that the questions Wittgenstein seems to raise, and consequently all answers to those questions, are nonsense. But I take it that this is an unnecessary, problematic gloss on Wittgenstein's claim that the way of thinking that the regress rests on a "misunderstanding." The assumptions on which the paradox is built shouldn't be taken for granted. But it seems to me that they *can* be taken for granted. The extent to which I take myself to *understand* the suggestion that it would be wrong to do so makes me inclined to reject

³⁴⁵ Recall § 1.0, *supra*. Rosen's idea, recall, was that even if Wright is right about everything, this still wouldn't mean that the facts with which we're concerned when we engage in talk about rules, for instance, are less robustly *real* than any other.

the idea that there's *nothing* Wittgenstein's interlocutors, or subsequent interpreters, are trying to do.

3.3.2 The Contrastive Theory of Meaning

Nowhere, to my knowledge, have proponents of the quietist resolution to the rule-following paradox offered an explicit defense of their insistence that the views of their philosophical opponents are nonsense, as opposed to false. However, the fact that many quietists seem to endorse the contrastive theory of meaning ("CTM") goes a long way toward explaining this commitment.

The early Wittgenstein famously maintained that, "What we know when we understand a proposition is this: we know what is the case if the proposition is true and what is the case if it is false ... Every proposition is essentially true-false ... Thus the proposition has two poles corresponding to the case of its truth and the case of its falsehood."³⁴⁶ The upshot of this is that for the early Wittgenstein, sentences that are *not* essentially true/false—because they are necessarily true, for instance—don't express real propositions. Goldfarb helpfully characterizes the early Wittgenstein's view as follows:

for a sentence to have *content* requires a contrast between what would make the proposition true and what would make it false, and hence requires that there be conditions under which the proposition is true and under which it is false. If there is no such contrast, then there is no claim being made by the sentence; it lacks *meaning*.^{347,348}

³⁴⁶ WITTGENSTEIN, NOTES ON LOGIC: APPENDIX I OF NOTEBOOKS 1914-1916 98 (G. H. von Wright & G. E. M. Anscombe eds., 1979). See also TRACTATUS §§ 2.172-74; 4.12; 4.0641; and 5.634; INVESTIGATIONS § 13 ("When we say: 'Every word in language signifies something' we have so far said *nothing whatever*; unless we have explained exactly *what* distinction we wish to make.")

³⁴⁷ *Metaphysics and Nonsense* at 15.

³⁴⁸ This view seems vulnerable to an obvious objection. The objection is that for the proponent of this view, logical sentences (tautologies and contradictions) must be nonsense. The early Wittgenstein's account of *sinnlos* sentences

Many proponents of the quietist resolution to the paradox give indications of having bought into the CTM. That is, many quietist interpreters of the rule-following considerations suggest that if a sentence isn't possibly true, then it can't be used to say anything. For instance, David H. Finkelstein has said that "it makes sense for me to say [that a sign is without normative significance] only thanks to the *distinction* between squiggles and English words"; and "[i]t makes sense to speak of ... a gulf [between a sign and its meaning] only against a backdrop of cases in which there is no difficulty about what the statement of a rule means."³⁴⁹

I want to focus on Finkelstein's idea that it makes sense to say there's a gulf in a particular case only against a background of cases in which there is no gulf. One implication of this is that if we try to imagine that such a background is missing, we think the meaning of the original claim out of our thought experiment: if we can't imagine what it would be for there *not* to be a gulf between a sign and its meaning, then it doesn't really make sense to say that there is one. Therefore, the idea that it's necessarily the case that there's a gulf between signs and their meanings—like the claim that we could have had different laws of logic—comes apart in our hands.³⁵⁰ (Of course, Finkelstein doesn't actually say that what's true of rules and gulfs is true

was meant in part to respond to this worry. In what follows, I will not be concerned with Wittgenstein's conception of the *Sinnlos*. It's worth noting, however, that Wittgenstein distinguished between logical sentences, which he took to be "without sense" (or *Sinnlos*), and philosophical sentences, which he took to be "nonsense" (or *Unsinn*).

³⁴⁹ Wittgenstein on Rules and Platonism at 66 and 79.

³⁵⁰ Note that it's consistent with what Finkelstein actually says to suggest that since there *is* a background of cases in which there is no gulf, neither the claim "here there is a gulf" nor the claim "there *always* is a gulf" loses its meaning. That is, Finkelstein *could* say that because we *do* have a background of cases in which there is no controversy over what a sign means, the claim that meaning is always a matter of controversy does make sense, but it's just false. (I'm grateful to John McDowell for bringing this to my attention.)

It's not clear whether Finkelstein thinks the claim "there is always a gulf" nonsense or necessarily false. But I don't think it matters. On the latter interpretation, Finkelstein's reasoning seems to invoke a hybrid strain of the CTM, the CTM, as it were, but only with respect to tautologies. But I take it that this hybrid strain of the CTM is just as vulnerable to the objections I will make below.

of all sentences, that *all* propositions must describe a contrast between what would make them true and what would make them false. But I take it that such a view is implicit in his remarks.)

Finkelstein is by no means the only proponent of the quietist interpretation of the rule-following considerations who seems to invoke the CTM. Diamond, for instance, claims

What sentence [a sentence] is ... is not separable from its capacity to say something truth-valued irrespective of the truth values of the ... body of sentences, standing in logical relation to each other ... In so far as we take ourselves to understand it, we take its truth and its falsity *both* to be graspable. Even in thinking of it as true in all possible worlds ... we think of it as itself *the case*; our thought contrasts it with ... a different set of necessities.³⁵¹

Conant also says “For a *Satz* to be contentful [*gehaltvoll*]—to bear on how things are—there has to be room for a distinction between what would make it true and what would make it false.”^{352,353}

The CTM seems to afford the quietist a means of recommending her resolution of the paradox over the one I sketched above. If the CTM is true, then there is something problematic about the very idea of a “necessary truth.”³⁵⁴ If it’s the nature of propositions to describe a contrast, then the best we can say about “necessary truths” is that they *seem* to express propositions. But *truth* is a property of propositions.³⁵⁵ Thus, to say that “necessary truths” aren’t really propositions is to say that they’re not really true. The nature of necessary truths is such that we can’t contrast them with anything, we can’t imagine what it would be for it to be

³⁵¹ *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 195. See also *Realism and the Realistic Spirit* at 52 (“We know what it means to say phi only if we take it to be called into question by the mention of something not-phi”); *The Face of Necessity* at 254 (“when the game doesn’t contain the possibility of denial, the game is not one of *representation*.”)

³⁵² METHOD at 118. Compare TRACTATUS § 4.462.

³⁵³ McDowell himself makes a related claim, saying that a *thought* is the kind of thing with which only *some* states of affairs would accord. *Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy* at 270.

³⁵⁴ In what follows, I mean to speak only of *conceptual* necessity, not natural necessity.

³⁵⁵ Recall *Thought* in FREGE READER at 60 (“A *thought* is something for which the question of truth can arise.”)

otherwise. But for the proponent of the CTM, this just means that they don't express anything.³⁵⁶

If the CTM is true then a non-quietist anti-foundationalism might not be tenable. I have argued, with the quietist, that constructive responses to the regress of interpretations are unnecessary. But for the proponent of the CTM, if I am right that reductive accounts can't work then I must be wrong that they make genuine claims. Moreover, if I'm wrong that the reductionist makes genuine claims, then I must also be wrong about the semantical status of the sentences I take to express my own commitments. (If "x" is a piece of nonsense, then so is "not-x.")

The introduction of the CTM at this point in the conversation can't settle very much, since one's suspicions of quietism will transmit to the theory of meaning that seems to make it obligatory.³⁵⁷ But it's natural to wonder how the CTM came to seem compelling to the early Wittgenstein and his followers.

³⁵⁶ *Throwing Away the Ladder* at 196. It's worth noting that Diamond's account of necessity isn't obligatory, even for the quietist. Consider a deflationist line about speech concerning "which necessities hold," according to which such talk concerns sentences that are true on all interpretations (viz. tautologies). On such an account, there clearly *is* a sense in which the thought that this sentence is a tautology needs to match the facts concerning which sentences *are* tautologies.

³⁵⁷ To wit, the CTM says that all sentences with representational content describe states of affairs that could have been otherwise. Consequently, for sentences expressing the CTM to have representational content, we must be able to imagine that the state of affairs to which they putatively correspond—namely the fact that all meaningful sentences describe contingencies—could have been otherwise. This leaves the proponent of the CTM with a dilemma. If she assumes that the CTM is meaningful by its own standard then she must conclude it is false. (For it to be meaningful by its own standard, we must be able to imagine the corresponding state of affairs—meaning presupposes contingency—to be otherwise. But, of course, if we can, then the CTM is false.) On the other hand, if we assume that the CTM is not meaningful by its own standards then we must conclude that sentences expressing it are nonsense (or at least *sinnlos*). Either way, it's hard to see how the contrastive theory stands on firm enough ground to constitute the basis for a case against the contentfulness of necessary propositions.

James Conant has argued that the CTM, like so much of quietism, has roots in Frege's philosophy of language.³⁵⁸ According to Frege, "A propositional question contains the demand that we should either acknowledge the truth of a thought, or reject it as false."³⁵⁹ As such, "a real proposition expresses a thought. The latter is either true or false: *tertium non datur*."³⁶⁰ Though this point is couched in language to which an intuitionist would object, the basic thought is one with which no one need quibble: one can *proceed* from a proposition to a truth value; objects of thought are possible objects of judgment. In § 2.2, *supra*, we called this the doctrine of the demand for judgment ("DDJ").

On the face of it, the DDJ and the CTM seem to be quite different doctrines. Indeed, on a fairly standard history of early analytic philosophy, Frege was committed to the DDJ, whereas the early Wittgenstein went beyond this to endorse the CTM. Goldfarb is a proponent of this story, claiming,

[Wittgenstein's CTM] goes beyond the idea that the proposition is intrinsically true or false, truth-valued of its very nature; it is also that it has both poles, it must set up a contrast between what makes it true and what makes it false. A proposition is a stipulation of when it's true and when it's not, and you have no stipulation without both parts. Put as starkly as possible, one might say: a proposition *is* a contrast, between what makes it true and what makes it false; hence if there is no contrast, there is no proposition.³⁶¹

In his "The Search for Logically Alien Thought" Conant argues that this bit of potted history has things backwards, that Frege's DDJ *entails* Wittgenstein's CTM. Conant emphasizes

³⁵⁸ Indeed, according to Dummett, Frege actually endorsed the CTM. See DUMMETT, FREGE: PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE 222 (1981). I haven't been able to find Frege saying this directly, though.

³⁵⁹ COLLECTED PAPERS at 373.

³⁶⁰ Id. at 279. Compare TRACTATUS § 4.023. See also *The Thought: A Logical Investigation* in COLLECTED PAPERS at 60.

³⁶¹ *Metaphysics and Nonsense* at 18.

Frege's claim that a judgment *advances* from the sense of a thought to its truth-value. As Conant says,

Ordinarily, when we grasp a thought, we are able to understand it without knowing whether it is true or not. It is this separation between understanding and judging, implicit in the demand for judgment, which enables us, in grasping the sense of a thought, to see that it is either true or false without yet having determined which. Frege's entire account of judgment depends on the idea that we can distinguish a stage of grasping the thought which is prior to the judgments, and which furnishes the act of judgment with something to bear upon.³⁶²

What this really boils down to is this: with ordinary judgment, grasping the thought and taking the thought to be true are separate. (As Ricketts says, "In grasping the thought that *p* we see that either *p* or not *p*, without thereby knowing whether *p*."³⁶³) But if this is right then asserting necessary truths or denying necessary falsehoods risks looking very unlike ordinary judgment.

To see this, consider a special case of necessary truths: tautologies.³⁶⁴ There is obviously nothing it would be like for a tautology to be false. (This is just a consequence of saying that there is no interpretation on which they come out to be false.) So one grasps a tautology only when one sees how it would make no sense to judge it false. But if the separation between understanding and proceeding to truth value is built into the very nature of judgment,³⁶⁵ then it seems that sentences expressing logical truths don't meet the demand for judgment. And if we accept Frege's principle that judgment is the fundamental unit for the transmission of

³⁶² ALIEN THOUGHT at 140.

³⁶³ *The Logocentric Predicament* at 8. See also ALIEN THOUGHT at 137 and METHOD at 10.

³⁶⁴ The early Wittgenstein seems to have thought that *all* necessary truths are tautologies. This undoubtedly explains why he wasn't troubled by the problem that mathematical propositions pose for the CTM. But such a view isn't necessary to the basic thought that Conant is looking to develop.

³⁶⁵ It's worth noting that we haven't seen an *argument* that there must be a separation between understanding and judging. Rather, Conant's claim to this effect is conclusory.

content—that names, for instance, have sense only in the context of propositions—then such sentences must be meaningless.

It seems to me that Conant's idea that the DDJ entails the CTM is problematic for at least two reasons. First, when he explains *why* logical sentences fail the demand for judgment, Conant seems to confuse the idea that *ordinarily there's a separation between grasping and judging* with the idea that *ordinarily one entertains the falsity as well as the truth*. But even when a sentence is necessarily true, its truth needn't be obvious to us. Consider complex tautologies—the kinds of propositions we're given as exercises when we're learning how to use truth tables. In those cases it seems that one can parse the sentence—seeing, for instance, that it's a conditional with a disjunction as its consequent—before one runs through some calculations and sees that it can't fail to be true. Consequently, one might expect that we should be able to conclude that at least some necessary truths can be grasped without being judged, and therefore, by Conant's lights, *do* satisfy the demand for judgment.³⁶⁶

Even if Conant's account of the relation between the CTM and the DDJ didn't exhibit this confusion there would still be the further problem that the CTM and the DDJ are actually incompatible. The DDJ states that all propositions are possible subjects of judgment, that

(1) it is possible to arrive at a judgment concerning any proposition.

For the proponent of the DDJ, (1) is *necessarily* true. So there's nothing with which we can contrast (1). This means that for the proponent of the CTM, (1) is meaningless. So, the DDJ

³⁶⁶ I am grateful to John McDowell for bringing this point to my attention.

itself must be meaningless for the proponent of the CTM.³⁶⁷ Consequently, it's hard to see how one's commitment to the DDJ could lead one to accept the CTM, since when one comes to accept the latter one must, it seems, go on to view one's previous (putative) commitment to the former as nonsense.³⁶⁸

There is a further problem with the CTM that I want to mention. In § 2.2.3, *supra*, I accused the proponent of the CTM of being committed to a problematic view of reasoning. Recall that the point was that for the proponent of the CTM, because sentences about logical aliens are nonsense, our attitudes toward such sentences must fail to rationally impinge on our worldview. And if this is right, then our philosophical account of meaning will *not* "leave everything as it is": what looks to the non-philosopher like a rational inference will turn out to be something else. For instance, imagine that Frances thinks (or, if you prefer, seems to think)

(P1) if there are logical aliens hiding under my bed then they're probably very hungry.

Imagine further that she believes that logical aliens are especially fond of Cheerios and that she currently has enough Cheerios for herself, but not enough for herself and a guest. I take it to be fairly intuitive that if she comes to accept

(P2) there are logical aliens under my bed

³⁶⁷ I am grateful to Nicholas Rescher for bringing this point to my attention.

³⁶⁸ This problem stems from the fact that the CTM, like the principle of verification (at least on incautious formulations), is not self-satisfying.

it would be irrational for her not to accept

(C) I need more Cheerios.

Once again, the problem was that if we give the wrong sort of account of (P2)—if (P2) turns out to be a state without cognitive content—then Frances’s acceptance of (C) based on her commitment to (P1) and (P2) will seem very far indeed from rational thought. The proponent of the CTM maintains that many philosophical sentences putatively expressing “metaphysically necessary truths” in fact fail to express thoughts, that they only *seem* to express thoughts. But if this is right then when we modify our views about the world to cohere with our philosophical “convictions” we will risk seeming worse than irrational—we will risk seeming insane!

Imagine that someone objects to the idea that we can derive general lessons from the reasoning I sketch in the previous paragraph, both because it’s a case of *practical* reasoning, and because Frances might have other, sensible beliefs and desires which justify her endorsement of (C).³⁶⁹ In this case, it’s worth reminding ourselves that this point is quite general, and applies in principle to all sorts of cases where we reason from philosophical premises to non-philosophical conclusions. Imagine, for instance, that Frances decides that if there is no fact concerning the answer to problems in addition then the answer that she gave in eighth grade was as right as any other. So the teacher had no basis for marking the answer wrong. So she shouldn’t have failed the course. So the teacher arbitrarily ended her dream of becoming a marine biologist. Imagine

³⁶⁹ I am grateful to David H. Finkelstein for bringing this worry to my attention. Finkelstein’s thought is that if Frances putatively thinks that there is a logical alien hiding under the bed then surely she genuinely thinks that there’s some funny person hiding under the bed. Finkelstein argued that if we flesh out the background of this case, there will be enough genuine beliefs to license Frances’s acceptance of (C).

further that she reads Kripke and becomes convinced that he—or Wittgenstein as he struck him—is right. So she concludes that her teacher unjustly ended her dream. Frances is wrong, of course. (God save those who would save the world from the work of incompetent marine biologists.) But we can still appreciate that her conclusion was appropriate given her other commitments.

If we think a sentence is *nonsense* then we won't be able to give an account relative to which it's permissible to form a new belief based on one's acceptance of this sentence. This worry is as much with us with respect to the quietist's account of the status of inadequate views of rule-following as it was with respect to the quietist's account of inadequate views of the status of the laws of logic. In both cases, the quietist faces a dilemma: either we reject the CTM, in which case there's no reason to suppose that our philosophical opponents traffic in nonsense, or we reject the idea that philosophy ought to leave everything as it is. Either way, Wittgensteinian quietism turns out to be an unstable position.

4.0 CONCLUSION

I have suggested that it is a mistake to suppose that normative facts are grounded in the facts of some other discourse.³⁷⁰ I have suggested further that there's no reason to think that we can unask rather than answer the skeptic's questions only if those questions are nonsense.

There's a sense in which anti-foundationalism, as I conceive it, incorporates insights from both antirealism and from quietism. The basic insight of the antirealist is that we can't "beef up" claims about a rule's content. The quietist and the antirealist can agree on this much. This core idea gets added to by both antirealism and quietism. For the antirealist, this means that rules must not be factual or objective. For the quietist it means that philosophy can have nothing to say about rules. The embellishments in *both* directions are unwarranted. The core idea is enough: once we appreciate that there's no such thing as reducing facts about rules to facts of a more basic sort, then we can steer clear of the line of thought that generates the regress. Now, when asked what our understanding/meaning/thinking consists in, we can be truly "flat-footed." And if we are, we will escape the very well founded skepticism that Kripke visits on non-flat-footed accounts.

Though the diagnosis I've offered is different from the one offered by the proponent of what I've called the squiggle theory,³⁷¹ there's a sense in which we both wind up in the same

³⁷⁰ This is not to deny that some normative discourses are reducible to one another. For instance, Robert Brandom likes to say that all obligation is conceptual obligation. I have nothing to say against this.

³⁷¹ See § 3.2.3, *supra*.

place. For both of us, rules—and norms—are “already in the world,” and Wittgenstein shows that any assumption to the contrary leads to absurdity. That this *must* be so has, I hope, been established.³⁷² It strikes me, though, that quietists fail to make satisfying sense of this.

Some quietists, as we’ve seen, are given to take Wittgenstein’s suggestion that philosophers ought to advance “reminders” and not “theses”³⁷³ to mean that there’s nothing at the meta-level to say about rules. This just seems wrong. Earlier, I gestured at one group of meta-level questions about rules that survive even if we decide that the questions that generate the regress are misleading. There are other questions about rules and norms that seem to me to survive the anti-foundationalistic resolution of the paradox. For instance, if we grant that rules (and norms) are an irreducible part of the furniture of the world, one might still want to know how they *got* there. This question can seem particularly pressing when one heeds Wittgenstein’s point about the relation between rule-following and training. Training, one might think, can explain how it comes to be that we hardly ever fall out of step with one another, or how we’re ordinarily untroubled by the fact that different interpretations can be given of any rule. But this is because training sets up a disposition. And a disposition is precisely *not* a norm. One can imagine actions that accord with everyone’s dispositions but that are nevertheless incorrect.

In order to think clearly about the significance of training, it seems to me, we need to see that although we’re brought up to behave in conventional ways, convention is not unconstrained. But the only way to make sense of this, it seems to me, is to countenance talk of the manner in which the world, indeed the “*a priori* order of possibilities”, exerts pressure on rational forms of life.³⁷⁴

³⁷² This was meant to be the lesson of §3.1, *infra*.

³⁷³ INVESTIGATIONS §§ 127-28.

³⁷⁴ We can accommodate some of the quietist’s point by conceding that such states of affairs are not intelligible from sideways on.

The moral I draw from the rule-following considerations flies in the face of the received view that the principal lesson of the rule-following considerations is that platonism is hopelessly muddled. Perhaps the lesson is that philosophy has thrown the baby (talk of objective, independent facts concerning the layout of the world) out with the bathwater (the idea that such facts are available for free, they impress themselves on us even before we are brought up into a culture).

Some years ago, when I was just beginning to frame this project, I came across Nick Zangwill's piece on quietism.³⁷⁵ I was surprised by the extent to which what Zangwill was calling "quietism" seemed completely unrelated to the sorts of views I cut my philosophical teeth on during my first few years of graduate coursework here at Pitt. I began my graduate career assuming that the reading James Conant, Cora Diamond and others give of Wittgenstein must be right. Now I end it, apparently, trying to figure out what's wrong with it. But insofar as Conant and Diamond's reading of Wittgenstein more or less exhausted my understanding of quietism at the time, I was surprised by the extent to which Zangwill's piece had nothing to do with the sort of views with which I was familiar. I wrote Zangwill to ask him what he thought of the quietistic interpretation of Wittgenstein and his answer, more or less, was that there are no real arguments to be found in that sort of material. Now, I think Zangwill is just wrong about this, but I think his view is understandable given the sorts of claims that have become associated with Conant and Diamond's reading of Wittgenstein. If one does a quick scan of a representative work in this literature—Crary and Read's *The New Wittgenstein* is a good example of this—one is liable to find a great deal said about how philosophy, as it's traditionally practiced, is *nonsense*, and

³⁷⁵ Zangwill, *Quietism* in MIDWEST STUDIES IN PHILOSOPHY XVII (1992).

philosophy as it ought to be practiced doesn't advance controversial claims. These sorts of claims are liable to give one the impression that quietists think that this is all they need to say, that they deny that we have to *earn* our right to refuse to respond to philosophical challenges.

As I said, I think this is a mistake. The material that inspires the Wittgensteinian quietist is interesting and well worth taking seriously. The quietist's preoccupation with nonsense, it seems to me, has become an unnecessary distraction. In our examination of what seem to me the most important arguments to which Wittgensteinian quietists appeal, we have found nothing to support the broad deployment of "nonsense" as a term of philosophical criticism. Nor have we found very much to warrant a more narrow deployment of "nonsense," as it is understood by the proponent of the Wittgensteinian "austere conception," to the kinds of philosophical mistakes that Wittgenstein explicitly warns against. Indeed, we have found independent reasons to suspect that the Wittgensteinian quietist's conception of philosophy as a process that leaves our worldview completely undisturbed is unsustainable.

By showing that the main thrust of Wittgenstein's arguments can be prized apart from the quietist's preoccupation with nonsense, I hope to have made it harder to resist the idea that Wittgenstein's philosophy (early and late) continues to speak to us.

APPENDIX

THE FITCH ARGUMENT

In § 2.2, I claimed that Frege's polemic against psychologism contains the raw materials for an argument against the intelligibility of logical systems incompatible with our own only to the extent that we are antecedently committed to something like

(P2) every meaningful sentence corresponds to a conceivable state of affairs.

I went on to suggest that taken in concert with the quietist's other commitments, this entails another principle

(P2*) every meaningful sentence is the possible subject of true beliefs

and that *this* principle is vulnerable to an argument against verificationism first given by Fitch.³⁷⁶

In what follows, I consider some criticisms of Fitch's argument. In particular, I consider one suggestion that the argument is problematic, and two suggestions for how to modify the principle of verification to avoid the argument.

³⁷⁶ Fitch, *A Logical Analysis of Some Value Concepts* in JOURNAL OF SYMBOLIC LOGIC 28 (1963).

FITCH'S ARGUMENT

Fitch's argument applies to the principle of verification, according to which all truths can be known. In order to set up the argument, we might translate the principle of verification as *if p then possibly K(p)*, where "K(p)" abbreviates "p is known."³⁷⁷ With this in mind, we should note that

(1) K(p) entails p.

Knowledge is factive; you can't know falsehoods. Moreover,

(2) K(p&q) entails K(p) and K(q).

Knowledge distributes over conjunction. One can't know a conjunctive fact without also knowing the individual facts out of which it is conjoined.³⁷⁸

With this in mind, Fitch's argument is straightforward. Assume for *reductio* that the principle of verification is true and not all truths are known. We might translate this as follows:

(3) for all p, if p then possibly K(p), and there is a p such that p and not-K(p).

³⁷⁷ Note that I haven't specified whether p ranges over sentences, propositions or facts. This is intentional. It strikes me that in all three guises, verificationism can be Fitched.

³⁷⁸ Some have tried to respond to Fitch's argument by denying that knowledge distributes over conjunction. But Williamson suggests (plausibly, I think) that these arguments are problematic. At any rate, rejecting the distribution principle is of no avail to the verificationist. TIMOTHY WILLIAMSON, KNOWLEDGE AND ITS LIMITS 275-85 (2000).

Take this latter conjunct by itself and instantiate a for p and we have $a \ \& \ \text{not-}K(a)$. Apply the principle of verification to this and we get:

(4) possibly $[K(a \ \& \ \text{not-}K(a))]$.

If we read the “possibly” operator in the straightforward way then

(5) there is some world w that satisfies $K(a \ \& \ \text{not-}K(a))$.

Let w be such a world. From (2), we can conclude that

(6) w satisfies $K(a)$.

And from (2) and then (1), we can also conclude that

(7) w satisfies $\text{not-}K(a)$.

From the contradiction, we conclude that if the principle of verification is true then all truths are known.

Michael Fara has pointed out that Fitch’s argument will apply, not just to the principle of verification, but to any operator that is factive, distributes over conjunction, and is possibly but

not actually true of all propositions. That is to say, we can get a version of the Fitch argument going for any operator with the following four characteristics: (1) if $O(p)$ then p ; (2) if $O(p \& q)$ then $O(p)$ and $O(q)$; (3) if p then possibly $O(p)$; and (4) there is a p such that p and not- $O(p)$.

According to Fara, this is significant because *many* operators satisfy these four requirements. Examples that Fara gives include: “John truly believes that...,” “it is truthfully asserted in English that ...,” “it has been revealed by the oracle that...,” and “it has been discovered that” Moreover, still more operators will satisfy all four requirements if we restrict the domain of sentences. For instance, if we let p range over sentences concerning my mental states, then the operator “I am aware by introspection that ...” satisfies all four requirements. According to Fara, this means that Fitch’s argument threatens to take much more than verificationism down with it. But Fara contends that it’s implausible that *none* of these operators are possibly true of all sentences.³⁷⁹ Consequently, there must be something wrong with Fitch’s argument, even when it’s applied to the principle of verification.

One reason why someone might not be moved by Fara’s argument is that all the examples that Fara gives of operators satisfying all four requirements—except for the last—aren’t really different from the original “it is known that” That is to say, with all but the last example, it seems to me that Fara begs the question when he insists that the idea that these operators have property (3) can’t be provably false.³⁸⁰ The only reason to doubt that (3) could be

³⁷⁹ “Whatever their merits as philosophical theses, the Introspectibility Principle, the Discoverability Principle and the Verificationist Principle with which we began are surely not so trivially to be disposed of.” *Knowable But Necessarily Unknown Truths* (unpublished) at 5.

³⁸⁰ John McDowell has suggested that if we are convinced that the truth or falsity of the principle of verification can’t be a matter of mere logic, we can view Fara’s first class of examples—the ones to which Fitch’s argument applies—as “heaping up the implausibility of supposing that the argument *could* be a good one.” (He wrote this in the margin of an earlier draft.) But, once again, the operators “it has been discovered that” and “it is truly believed that” are so close to “it is known that,” Fara’s examples can’t make the argument seem *less* compelling. Put otherwise, Fara fails to heap up any *new* consequences of the argument.

provably false with respect to the “it has been discovered that ...” operator is that we’re already convinced that (3) isn’t provably false with respect to our original “it is known that ...” operator.

Of course, “I am aware by introspection that ...” is genuinely different from “it is known that” And it is plausible that if we restrict our domain to my mental states, then (1)-(4) will apply to “I am aware by introspection that” But now there will be no counterpart of the Fitch argument for this operator. If O is defined on my mental states, then we can generate the putatively problematic fact (p and not-O(p)), but we cannot apply the “Introspectibility Principle” to this fact since p and not-O(p) is not a mental state. For instance, let p be “I like fish.” In that case, O(p) will be “I am aware by introspection that I like fish.” And not-O(p) will be “I am not aware by introspection that I like fish.” But now it’s hard to see how the fact that *I like fish and I am not aware by introspection that I like fish* could be a mental state. Perhaps my love of fish is a mental state. Moreover, my *knowledge* that I am not aware by introspection that I like fish might be a mental state. But it’s hard to see how my mere failure to be aware that I like fish could be a mental state. And if it isn’t, then the conjunctive fact must not be a mental state either.

Fara attempts to use his parody of the argument to establish that we need a new modal semantics. The thought is that since Fitch’s argument works if we accept the standard semantics for modal claims, this shows that we need a new way of thinking about possibility and necessity.³⁸¹ But Fara’s failure to provide a genuinely worrisome parody of Fitch’s argument seems revealing. In general, it seems that the one who wants to attack the Fitch argument in the way that Fara does is forced to choose between operators to which the Fitch argument *does*

³⁸¹ Elsewhere Fara puts this point somewhat differently, encouraging us to distinguish between sentential operators like *it’s possible that*, for which Kripke-semantics is adequate, and auxiliary operators like *–could*, for which we must come up with a new semantics.

apply, but which do the same semantic work as the original operator, and operators which *are* different from the original, but to which the Fitch argument clearly does *not* apply. Either way, there's no reason to worry that Fitch's argument opens the door to all sorts of absurdities.

SOME ATTEMPTS TO BLOCK THE CONCLUSION

It seems to me that the most popular sort of response to the Fitch argument is to argue that it applies only to an inadequate formulation of the principle of verification. That is to say, most verificationists seem to think, not that *nothing* gets refuted by Fitch's argument, but rather that what gets refuted is a view to which no verificationist need subscribe. I will consider two suggestions to this effect below. In both cases, I will suggest that the principle of verification isn't so easily fixed. Moreover, it's not clear that the proposals for how to fix the principle of verification can be of any avail to the quietist, since they either threaten to sever the connection the quietist seeks to establish between conceivability and sense, or they rest on metaphysical commitments with which quietists would be uncomfortable.

Michael Dummett argues that it's a mistake to suppose that the antirealist has to endorse the idea that *all* truths are knowable.³⁸² Instead, according to Dummett, the antirealist ought to maintain that "Tr(A) iff $\langle \rangle$ K(A), if A is a basic statement."³⁸³ Fitch's argument works only if we can generate sentences of a certain logical complexity. Therefore, if we consider verificationism with respect to atomic sentences (or "basic statements"), we block the argument.

³⁸² According to Dummett, "the apparent unreasonable exportation of 'it is known that' across conjunction was effected by [our] careless endorsement of the blanket schema [if A then possibly K(A)]." Michael Dummett, *Victor's Error 2 ANALYSIS* 61 (2001).

³⁸³ *Victor's Error* at 2, emphasis mine.

Dummett's revised verificationism seems to lose hold of a thought that verificationism was meant to capture. By revising the principle of verification, Dummett is effectively admitting that there are facts that are unknowable.³⁸⁴ Consequently, if Dummett is right, then there is nothing incoherent about the idea of a type of proposition (and a class of facts corresponding to those propositions) that isn't subject to "epistemic constraint." So while there might be *some* kind of connection between the ideas of *truth*, *belief* and *evidence*, it's hard to see how it can be the kind of connection that the antirealist seems to envision.

This worry moves Dorothy Edgington, whose response to Fitch's argument we will consider below, to reject Dummett's solution. According to Edgington, if we opt for Dummett's approach, we lose hold of the line of thought, which the antirealist's meaning-theoretic arguments seem to support, that the idea of an inaccessible truth is incoherent since "the items to which truth can be ascribed are not *in rerum natura*. They are products of human thought—linguistic items, or what is conveyed by linguistic items, beliefs."³⁸⁵

It strikes me that the verificationist shouldn't be comfortable turning her back on this point, even when the items to which truth is ascribed concern people's knowledge. But the point that really interests me is more modest than this. If Dummett is right, then the strongest connection the quietist can draw between conceivability and sense is this:

(P2-D) every meaningful *atomic* sentence is conceivable.

³⁸⁴ This is also true of Joseph Melia, *Anti-Realism Untouched* MIND 100 (1991), and J. L. Mackie, *Truth and Knowability* ANALYSIS 40 (1980). Melia and Mackie blame the paradox on the fact that $K(p)$ entails p . Consequently, they propose to formulate the principle of verification in terms of epistemic attitudes other than knowledge.

³⁸⁵ *The Paradox of Knowability* 557 MIND 94 (1985).

But the quietist needs more than this to be entitled to her interpretation of Frege. For the psychologistic logician doesn't need to use atomic sentences to express her views. On the contrary, what the psychologistic logician thinks is that *our logic isn't necessarily valid for all thinking beings*, or that *there may be beings that obey different laws of logic*.

Of course, if existential generalizations are semantically hygienic only if we can produce witnesses to the quantifier (or can imagine producing witnesses), then the quantified sentence will stand or fall with our ability to make meaningful singular judgments concerning logical aliens. But the idea that we always must be able to produce witnesses to existential quantifiers brings us back into the vicinity of an idea that we rejected in § 2.2.3, *supra*. There the idea was that in ordinary mathematical practice there is nothing paradoxical about the idea that we can give a general description of a class of numbers without even in principle being able to produce examples of numbers belonging to that class. But if this is true, then there's no reason not to think that there won't be *other* cases where we can generalize over sets not all of whose members are open to singular thought.

The quietist who wishes to make use of (P2-D) to establish a link between conceivability and sense must also rely on constructivism. And now our previous worries about the possibility of a genuinely Wittgensteinian constructivism once again become an issue. Constructivism is no way to stand aloof from the dirty business of advancing philosophical theses.

Like Dummett, Edgington proposes a different translation of the principle of verification. Unlike Dummett, Edgington's translation purports to save the idea that *all* truth (not just atomic truth) is epistemically constrained. Edgington's proposal is that for all that is true of the actual world, it can be known in some non-actual world that the truth obtains in the actual world. In

other words, we should translate the principle of verification, not as “if p then possibly $K(p)$,” but instead as “if A_p then possibly $K(A_p)$,” where A_p means *p is true in the actual world*. This translation of the principle of verification has the virtue both of blocking the Fitch argument and of seeming to preserve the antirealist intuition (which Dummett’s response to Fitch’s argument, once again, seems to lose) that all truths are knowable.

Edgington’s translation of the principle of verification saves verificationism from Fitch only if we can make sense of knowing things about other possible worlds. It’s not immediately clear that we can. In order to know things about some non-actual world, one might think, we would need to be able to refer to it. (To paraphrase Williamson, if we couldn’t refer to it, how could we think about it? If we couldn’t think about it, how could we know anything about it?) Moreover, reference often depends on causal connection. Clearly we can’t refer to non-actual worlds in *this* way.

The flaws in Edgington’s solution start to show when we consider the obvious response to this worry. The obvious response is: the means of reference to a possible world other than one’s own is *descriptive*—one specifies w by specifying what is true in w . So the counterfactual knowers grasp and know A_p by grasping and knowing that p is entailed by the sentence that describes the actual world.³⁸⁶

There are at least two serious problems with the idea that we can have real knowledge of non-actual possible worlds by means of description. The first problem is it’s not clear that we *can* describe unique possible worlds. For any description of finite length, there are infinitely many possible worlds satisfying that description. How then are we supposed to uniquely specify

³⁸⁶ Compare KNOWLEDGE AND ITS LIMITS at 294.

a particular possible world? And if we can't, how are the counterfactual knowers that Edgington imagines supposed to specify the actual world?

Edgington has a response to this worry, but her response doesn't work. Edgington's idea is that when the counterfactual knowers imagine other worlds, they imagine a world that shares a history with theirs but which is different from theirs in one respect. So counterfactual knowers need not describe the actual world in detail. Rather, they describe one difference from their world and let everything else be as close as possible.³⁸⁷ Edgington insists that it's not unintelligible that counterfactual knowers could come to know things about the actual world in this way.

Edgington motivates this thought with a version of the following thought experiment: imagine that there's a UFO in the tail of the Hale-Bopp comet but that the comet is about to break up, destroying the UFO without a trace. (For the sake of convenience, let *p* be "the Heaven's Gate clan was right.") Imagine further that at time *t* we launch a probe with a test for the presence of UFOs that has a 50 percent chance of reaching the comet. In that case, at *t* there are two possibilities: either (1) the probe reaches the comet and we learn that *p*, or (2) the probe fails to reach the comet, the comet breaks up, and the truth is lost forever.

From the point of view of someone at *t*, there is obviously no guarantee that (1) will come to pass. But since (1) is a genuine possibility, we should be able to say that even if we're at future (2) *p* was knowable. (That is, *p* is known by counterfactual knowers.) Furthermore, if we were at (1), we could say that "if the probe didn't reach the comet, *p* would still be the case, but no one would know that *p*." So if (2) is the actual world, the counterfactual knowers at (1) can have knowledge about the actual world that we ourselves lack: they can know that *p* and

³⁸⁷ Compare KNOWLEDGE AND ITS LIMITS at 295.

actually no one knows that p (though they wouldn't express their knowledge by saying "actually").

Even if we grant all this, however, Edgington's proposal still wouldn't save verificationism. For one thing, as Williamson shows, even if we can single out *some* possible worlds in this way, there's no reason to be optimistic that we can single out all or even most. Consequently, there's no reason to suspect that *all* that is true in the actual world but not actually knowable is counterfactually knowable to be true in the actual world.

Williamson's thought is that even if w is the world closest to ours in which p (which is an unknown truth in our world) is known, that doesn't mean that the actual world is the closest world to w in which p is unknown. Consider an example of this sort of phenomenon.³⁸⁸ Let p be "there is a UFO in space/time at $xyzt$, where $xyzt$ is inaccessible to humans given how fast our spaceships can travel." The closest world to A in which p is known might be very far indeed from A —it might be a Star Trek world in which spaceships can travel at warp speed. Let w be the closest world to A in which p is known. The closest world to w in which p is unknown is probably not A —it is probably w^* , where spaceships have warp drive, but everyone is sleeping when the ship passes by xyz at t . So it's not clear that the closest possible counterfactual knowers have the resources to single out the actual world, even if they don't need to do so by means of a description of infinite length. Consequently, when p describes a point of ignorance in the actual world, A_p isn't obviously counterfactually knowable. Neither is $A(p \ \& \ \sim Kp)$.

More significantly, it strikes me that Edgington's proposal does nothing to save the idea that we can have real knowledge of other possible worlds. Let's assume that there are

³⁸⁸ What follows is a version of an argument Williamson gives in KNOWLEDGE AND ITS LIMITS on 298.

counterfactual knowers who can uniquely specify the actual world by saying “the world that’s just like ours, only there p is false.” Such counterfactual knowers could go on to say that “in the world that is just like ours except for the fact that p is false, $\sim p$.” But it seems a big stretch to say that that would constitute genuine *knowledge* of the actual world. A version of this thought applies to Edgington’s thought experiment. If we’re lucky enough to be sitting in the branch of space/time where the probe reaches the comet, we can say “in the branch of space/time that is defined by the fact that the probe doesn’t reach the comet but that is otherwise indistinguishable from our own, there’s still a UFO hiding in the comet’s tail.” But the fact that we’re right is true by stipulation. Consequently, we might worry that we can’t save verificationism by locating all the knowledge that we lack in other possible worlds, since the “knowledge” that the counterfactual knowers have of us is of the wrong sort.³⁸⁹

I want to mention one more objection to Edgington’s solution. Edgington thinks that by isolating a special set of possible worlds—the ones that are almost exactly like ours—we can make sense of the idea of knowledge of the kinds of facts that the Fitch argument brings into view. She thinks that if we can make sense of knowing some Fitch-type facts, we can make sense of knowing all of them. But this doesn’t seem right.³⁹⁰ To see the problem, consider that there are facts that are invariant across alternate possibilities that are *not* invariant across possible worlds. For example, assume that the fact that the universe will undergo heat collapse in fewer than 10^{20} years is true of all the possibilities that branch out in space/time from our own. Similarly, given the physical constants that our world shares with all possibilities that branch out

³⁸⁹ Consider a different version of this point: Ap entails necessarily(Ap). So the counterfactual knowers in grasping and knowing Ap know what is for them a necessary truth. But for those of us in the actual world, p is a contingent truth. So their knowledge fails to make up for our ignorance; every point of contingent ignorance corresponds to a point of necessary ignorance. But it is a contingent fact that we are necessarily ignorant of such matters. And their knowledge is not knowledge of a contingent fact. KNOWLEDGE AND ITS LIMITS at 270.

³⁹⁰ The argument that follows is Kevin Davey’s. Here, as always, big ups to Kevin.

from our world—Planck’s constant, the speed of light, etc.—it’s reasonable to think that there are limits to the speed of any calculation device in any possible situation that shares a common history with our own (though, of course, we don’t know what they are).

With this in mind, it’s reasonable to think that there are propositions that, owing to contingent features of our situation, aren’t actually verifiable. For instance, the truth-value of the proposition “the value of π at the $2^{2^{100}}$ th place is 4” might well be impossible to determine given the limits of our powers of computation in the actual world. Moreover, one might also think that there are possible *worlds* (but not possibilities) where the truth-value of this proposition is *not* impossible to determine. Imagine a world in which the universe never undergoes heat collapse. In that case, we can imagine that counterfactual knowers in that world would be able to determine the truth of this proposition. But we ourselves cannot.

A proponent of Edgington’s solution might point out that even if what I have said is right—even if there are facts that can’t be known in any possible situation that branches off from our own—it’s still reasonable to think that there are possible worlds in which counterfactual knowers *are* capable of knowing these actually inarticulable facts. This is right. But this doesn’t save Edgington’s solution. There will still be facts concerning the *actual* world that no one in the actual world, *or in any of the branches of space/time connected to our own*, can know. This seems to leave a proponent of Edgington’s solution with the following dilemma: either there are facts (like $A(p \text{ and not-}K(p))$) that no one can know, or people in other possible *worlds*—not counterfactual knowers in other *possible situations*—can have knowledge concerning the actual world. Edgington explicitly denies the latter. So the former must be true. Therefore, Edgington’s solution fails to save the principle of verification.

Even if it weren't problematic, Edgington's formulation of the principle of verification would be of no comfort to the quietist. If the quietist were to attempt to model her understanding of the link between conceivability and sense on Edgington's proposal, she would endorse

(P2-E) every actual state of affairs is conceivable in some possible world that is just like ours with one key difference.

The thought, then, would be that we can concede that there are states of affairs (and meaningful sentences corresponding to those states of affairs) that aren't *actually* conceivable. But we can argue that they are conceivable nonetheless, and look to Edgington-type scenarios to flesh out our understanding of what it would be to conceive of them.

But what sort of conceivability is this, really? If we're modal fictionalists then we think that saying that counterfactual knowers can conceive of such facts is like saying Lord Voldemort can conceive of them. Lord Voldemort, the villain of the *Harry Potter* series, is an extremely powerful wizard. Who can guess at the limits of his powers of conception? It probably goes without saying that he can conceive of things that no mere "muggle" (viz. non-wizard) could understand. What's more, his death and subsequent resurrection have equipped him with a unique set of experiences, even for a wizard. Perhaps his powers of conception exceed even those of his wizard peers?

It seems to me that there's nothing wrong, if, for instance, it helps to suspend disbelief, with distinguishing between the sorts of things of which we can conceive and the sorts of things of which Lord Voldemort can conceive. (That sort of distinction, for instance, might help to explain away the problem with the way time travel figures in the plot of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*.) But, of course, Lord Voldemort isn't real. Consequently, the sorts of

“facts” we putatively bring into view when we say that their nature is such that only Lord Voldemort could conceive of them aren’t genuinely conceivable. My thought is that if we’re fictionalists, then the same thing will be true of Fitch-type facts.

Of course, we don’t have to be fictionalists. If we’re modal realists, then to say that counterfactual knowers can conceive of *p* is to say that *p* is genuinely (though not necessarily actually) conceivable. But now the quietist saves her account of the link between conceivability and sense by committing herself to a robust metaphysics. Such a metaphysics is clearly inconsistent with the idea, which was supposed to be the whole point of postulating a link between conceivability and sense in the first place, that philosophy has no business advancing theses.

Either way, I don’t see how (P2-E) can unproblematically figure in the quietist’s story about how psychologism is nonsense. So, absent some further story, there’s no reason to think that such a conclusion is warranted.

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