Es braucht die Regel nicht:

Wittgenstein on Rules and Meaning

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1. Introduction

No part of Wittgenstein's work has drawn as much attention as his remarks on rule-following in the *Investigations*. Not only Wittgenstein scholars but also philosophers with a more passing interest in Wittgenstein have written extensively about these passages. This is not surprising, given that these paragraphs seem both to hold the key to Wittgenstein's later writings and to teach us something important about the nature of meaning and rule-following. What exactly it is that they teach us, of course, is far from settled. Do they lead to a skeptical paradox and introduce a new and troubling type of skepticism, as Kripke's Wittgenstein has it?[1] Or is the upshot rather that meaning is an essentially social matter, as Crispin Wright and John McDowell, among others, have been suggesting?[2] Or that any substantive naturalism about intentionality is bound to fail since meaning and intentional content are irreducible notions, as Paul Boghossian once concluded?[3] These are issues on which there is much disagreement. On one issue, however, there is near consensus: According to Wittgenstein, speaking a language requires being guided by rules.[4] This reading is so widespread that it deserves to be called 'the received view' of Wittgenstein's rule-following remarks.

In this paper we question the received view. The central claim of the received view is that the later Wittgenstein subscribes to the following thesis:

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[1] Cf. Kripke 1982.

[2] Cf. McDowell 1984; 2000; Wright 1984; 1989.

[3] Cf. Boghossian 1989.

[4] See for instance Baker & Hacker 1985, Glock 1996, Hilmy 1987, Kripke 1982, Malcolm 1989, McDowell 2000, McGinn 1997, Stern 1995, and Thornton 1998. There are, however, some dissenting voices - see for instance Hintikka & Hintikka 1986.

(RG) Speaking a language is a rule-guided activity.

We shall argue that the received view involves a serious misinterpretation of the later Wittgenstein's views. On its most intuitive reading, (RG) is very much at odds with central tenets of the later Wittgenstein. Giving up on that reading, however, threatens to deprive the notion of rule-following of any real substance. Consequently, the rule-following considerations cannot charitably be read as a deep and subtle defense of (RG) against the threat of paradox, as proponents of the received view are wont to do. Whatever their upshot ultimately is, when it comes to (RG), the rule-following considerations provide Wittgenstein's deep and subtle reasons for *rejecting* it. (RG) should rather be seen as a distraction, a troublesome piece of doctrine that needs to be cleared away before we can fully appreciate the radical new take on meaning, content, and their determination that Wittgenstein's considerations open up for us.

While we think that Wittgenstein was quite right to reject (RG) – as we have argued elsewhere, (RG) is a very problematic claim in its own right – this shall not be our main topic here.[5] In this paper, we shall mostly be concerned to show how, from within a broadly later Wittgensteinian picture of language and thought, (RG) indeed proves to be the villain of the piece. To this end, we shall first do some exegetical work: After sketching Wittgenstein's views on meaning and rules in the middle period, we shall describe the radical change these views underwent towards the late period, a change culminating in the rejection of (RG) (section 2). In the remainder of the paper (section 3), we shall look at three representatively different ways of interpreting Wittgenstein in accordance with the received view. None of them, we shall urge, succeeds in supplying us with an understanding of rule-following plausibly applicable to linguistic rules; none of them, therefore, succeeds in taking the pressure off (RG).

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[5] Cf. Wikforss 2001; Glüer 1999a; b; 2000a; 2001; 2002; Glüer & Pagin 1999; Glüer & Wikforss 2009.

In a relevantly Wittgensteinian context, (RG) is to be construed as a claim in *foundational semantics*. It is a claim about how, and by what, the meanings of natural language expressions are determined. The proponent of (RG) holds that linguistic meaning is what we like to call 'rule-determined':[6] What determines the meaning of linguistic expressions are rules for their use. More precisely, linguistic expressions 'get' their meanings by our *following*, or our *being guided by,* the rules for their use. One pressing question for anyone who endorses such a view is what it means to follow, or to be guided by, a (meaning determining) rule.[7] This question will form one of the leading themes of this paper.

Part and parcel of the received view is a certain picture of the development of Wittgenstein's views. Wittgenstein's first extensive discussions of rules and rule-following can be found in the so called 'middle period texts'. In these texts Wittgenstein does subscribe to the thesis that speaking a language involves being guided by certain rules, by a 'calculus'. According to the received view, the transition from the middle period view on rules to the later view is relatively smooth. It is argued that while Wittgenstein takes a more relaxed view of linguistic rules in the *Investigations*, rejecting the calculus-conception in favor of the language-game model, he does not reject (RG). As Hans-Johann Glock puts it:

> Wittgenstein did not abandon the idea that language is rule-governed, he clarified it, comparing language no longer to a calculus but to a game. *Unlike these analogies,* the idea that language is rule-governed is *not* just a heuristic device. Understanding a language involves mastery of techniques concerning the application of rules.[8]

This, we argue, is incorrect; the later Wittgenstein does take the analogy between language and a game all the way: For him, there is an analogy, and nothing but an analogy, between the

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[6] For the distinction between rules (or norms) that determine meaning or content, and rules (norms) that are meaning- or content-'engendered', i.e. can be (more or less immediately) derived from something's having meaning or content, see for instance Glüer 1999, Glüer & Wikforss 2009.

[7] In Glüer & Pagin 1999, it is argued that, on a plausible construal of rule-guidance, there cannot be rules performing both these functions at once. Although this is potentially relevant to the present discussion, the considerations below are independent of any claims advanced there.

[8] Glock 1996, p. 151, emphases ours. See also Hilmy 1987 and Stern 1995, p. 120: "There is no sharp transition from the calculus model to the language-game model. (. . .) Wittgenstein does not give up the idea that our linguistic practices are rule-governed, but rather comes to see that rule-governed behavior depends on a practical context."

rules of a game and the meanings of expressions in a language. Wittgenstein's later remarks on rules, far from being a clarification and elaboration of his middle period views, are directed *against* the claim of the middle period that speaking a language is an essentially rule-governed activity. To be sure, Wittgenstein does frame his considerations regarding the determination of meaning in terms of 'rules' – and that might explain the temptation to take him literally here – but he does so precisely because he is exploring the analogy between meaning and rules.

There are various aspects of this analogy. Thus, the meaning of a term determines its correct application in much the same way that a rule determines a set of actions as being in accordance with it. Not only that, meaningfully using or applying an expression is a kind of intentional action – just as following a rule is. Moreover, both meanings and rules are things speakers and rule-followers are said to 'grasp'; hence, in pursuit of the analogy between them, Wittgenstein speaks of 'grasping the meaning of a term' as 'grasping a rule'. That Wittgenstein is pursuing this analogy is perhaps made completely explicit only in his latest writings – *On Certainty*, however, leaves no room for doubt:

> 61. A meaning of a word is a kind of employment of it.
> For it is what we learn when the word is incorporated into our language.

> 62. That is why there is an analogy between the concepts 'meaning' and 'rule'.

But let us begin at the beginning, that is, in the middle period.

2. The Middle Period

2.1 The Importance of Rule Guidance

When Wittgenstein returns to philosophy in the late 1920's the concepts of a rule and rule-following are at the center. This stands in sharp contrast to the *Tractatus,* where rules are mentioned only sparsely and rule-following not at all. Wittgenstein does of course speak of the rules of logical syntax – rules determining the proper combination of simple names as

well as rules determining the combination of elementary propositions into complex ones by means of the logical connectives.[9] But the question of how we as speakers relate to these is dismissed as being philosophically irrelevant, and Wittgenstein speaks indifferently of rules and laws.[10] The claim is merely that a proper analysis of language would reveal an underlying structure of such rules; how we are able to speak in accordance with them, Wittgenstein suggests, is no more a philosophical question than how we are able to speak without knowing how the sounds are produced.[11]

Wittgenstein's emerging interest in rules in the 1920's is a result of his growing dissatisfaction with logical atomism.[12] He starts to question the claim of the *Tractatus* that all elementary propositions are independent of one another and, as a result, the idea that all internal relations can be accounted for truth-functionally. The upshot is that the rules of logical syntax have to be supplemented with further rules, spelling out the inner connections between propositions.[13] The meaning of a sign is no longer identified with the object referred to, but is to be understood in terms of a set of grammatical rules, a 'calculus': "I want to say the place of a word in grammar is its meaning" (PG 23).

Moreover, Wittgenstein suggests that the rules of grammar serve a meaning determining function. There is a temptation, he says, to think that there is a distinction between rules that set up a connection between language and reality, 'rules of projection' such as the ostensive definition "this colour is called 'red'", and the rules of grammar, spelling out the internal

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[9] See for instance TLP 3.325, 3.334, 3.3343, 3.0141, 5.514, 6.124, 6.126.

[10] TLP 4.0141.

[11] TLP 4.002.

[12] See Stern (1995) for an illuminating discussion of how Wittgenstein's rejection of logical atomism led him to appeal to rules.

[13] See for example WVK, p. 74: "What was wrong about my conception was that I believed that the syntax of the logical constants could be laid down without paying attention to the inner connections of propositions. That is not how things actually are. I cannot, for example, say that red and blue are at one point simultaneously. Here no logical product can be constructed. Rather, the rules for the logical constants form only part of a more comprehensive syntax about which I did not know anything at the time." See also PR 76-86.

connections among propositions (PG 46).[14] Thus, it might be thought that the speaker only needs to 'project' the sign onto reality, and that the rest then falls into place: "It may seem to us as if the other grammatical rules for a word had to follow from its ostensive definition; since after all an ostensive definition, e.g. *that is called 'red'* determines the meaning of the word 'red'" (PG 24). But this is mistaken, Wittgenstein suggests, since the ostensive definition in itself cannot establish a connection between sign and reality. Rather, the ostensive definition has to be supplemented by the rules of grammar.

Wittgenstein also stresses that the rules of grammar are 'autonomous' in the sense that they cannot be justified by reference to the nature of the world. This, he suggests, is a direct result of their meaning determining role: "Grammar is not accountable to any reality. It is the grammatical rules that determine meaning (constitute it) and so they themselves are not answerable to any meaning and are to that extent arbitrary"(PG 133).[15] The upshot is a form of deep-going conventionalism. Unlike the rules of logical syntax, which were said to reflect the intrinsic nature of the world, the rules of grammar are conventional, arbitrary, much like the rules of a game.[16] In this respect, rules of grammar and rules of games differ from the rules of cooking. If you do not follow the rules of cooking, Wittgenstein suggests, you cook badly, "but if you follow other rules than those of chess you are playing another game; and if you follow grammatical rules other than such and such ones, that does not mean you say something wrong, no, you are speaking of something else" (PG 133).

With the new picture of language emerging it becomes important to Wittgenstein to say something about what it is to follow a rule. He emphasizes the distinction between being guided and merely acting in accordance with a rule, and argues that it is essential that we as

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[14] This may well be have been the view he held in the *Tractatus*, where the notion of 'projection' plays a central role (see for instance Tractatus 3.11) and it is suggested that once a sign is projected on to an object the logical syntax for the sign is given.

[15] See also PR 7, PG 134 and CLN p. 95.

[16] Of course, the *Tractatus* does not suggest that logical syntax *describes* the world. Nevertheless, logical syntax reflects the intrinsic nature of the world and is therefore not arbitrary or conventional. What is arbitrary is the correlation between a sign and an object, but once this is in place the rules for the use of the sign follow automatically (see for instance TLP 3.334 and 3.342).

speakers are guided by the rules of grammar in our use of language. My use of signs, he says, is in accordance with any number of rules, but what makes representation possible is the fact that I am *guided* by a particular rule, that a particular rule is *involved* in my use. [17] Only then can there be a distinction between acting correctly (in accordance with the rule) and acting incorrectly. The rule, Wittgenstein suggests, must *justify* my use of signs. I use my words in a certain way *because* I am following a certain rule, just as I give a particular answer to a calculation because I am guided by an explicit mathematical rule:

> Every case of copying (acting in *obedience to*, not just in accordance with, particular rules), every case of *deriving* an action from a command is the same kind of thing as writing down the steps that lead to the answer of the sum, or pointing to signs standing beside each other in a table.... "I wrote '16' because it says 'x2' here." That is what every justification looks like.[18]

Someone may learn language by a mere drill, learn to follow the rules of grammar without *employing* them but, Wittgenstein suggests, in such a case the word 'grammar' is used in a 'degenerate' sense: "because it is only in a degenerate sense that I can speak of 'explanation', or of 'convention'" (PG 138).

This raises the question of what it is for a rule to be 'involved' in my use of language, what it is for a rule to guide me. Wittgenstein suggests that intentions play an essential role: Although my use of signs is in accordance with any number of rules, the rule I follow is the rule I *intend* to follow. The intention, he says, "reaches up to the paradigm and contains a general rule" (PG 58). Wittgenstein compares the case where I copy a figure. If I copy, he argues, I must be following a rule of copying, otherwise there will be no criterion for deciding whether the copy is correct or incorrect. And the general rule guiding me is not contained in the process of copying (since the process itself is compatible with any number of rules) but in the intention by which I copy: "An expression of intention describes the model to be copied; describing the copy does not" (PG 99). Acting correctly is acting in accordance with the rule

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[17] See especially PG 50-61 and CLN pp. 37-38.
[18] PG 61.

intended. In Wittgenstein's middle period, therefore, speaker's intentions come to play a fundamental role. "If you exclude the element of intention from language", he writes, "its whole function then collapses" (PR 20).[19]

This appeal to intentions is very natural, as we shall see, if one is to secure the important distinction between being guided by a rule and merely acting in accordance with it. However, falling back on intentions creates a tension in the middle period texts, a tension that clearly worries Wittgenstein. The problem is that he also suggests that following a rule, meaning something by a sign, cannot be accounted for in terms of mental events or processes. We do not have rules running through our heads when we speak, he argues, and even if we did this would involve mental rule expressions (such as a mental chart) and such expressions can always be variously interpreted.[20] To explain meaning by appealing to rules in the mind of the speaker, Wittgenstein suggests, is therefore to embark on an infinite regress of one rule interpreting the next. But if this is so, how could an appeal to intentions help? Intentions, after all, are mental events too and hence the same regress should arise.

This tension is not satisfactorily resolved in the middle period texts. Wittgenstein flirts with the idea that the regress can be avoided by denying that intentions are on a par with other mental phenomena, such as mental images. The intention, he says, never resides in the picture itself since "no matter how the picture is formed, it can always be meant in different ways" (PR 24). When I intend the sign a certain way I do not interpret it, since interpreting involves stepping "from one level of my thought to another", thus embarking on a regress (PG 99). This, Wittgenstein suggests, indicates that intentions are not mere 'inner events', that they cannot be understood from the 'outside', as something which happens, but only from the point of view of the *agent*:

> It's beginning to look as if intention could never be recognized as intention from outside; as if one must be doing the meaning of it oneself in order to understand it

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[19] See also PG 95-99.
[20] See for instance PG 2, 9, 11, 13, 60, 98-99, 104, 112 and CLN pp. 24, 44, 48, 50, 50, 67-68.

as meaning. That would amount to considering it not as a phenomenon or fact but as something intentional which has a direction given to it...that would make the intention reminiscent of the will as conceived by Schopenhauer.[21]

This vaguely Schopenhauerian idea, however, fails to resolve anything and it is clear that Wittgenstein is unhappy with it.

The middle period texts, therefore, are plagued by an inner tension. On the one hand, Wittgenstein insists that guidance by rules is essential to having a language. On the other hand, he acknowledges that we do not seem to be guided by any rules at all when we speak and that, moreover, requiring such guidance leads to a regress of interpretations. For a resolution of the tension we have to look to Wittgenstein's later writings.

2.2 Towards the *Investigations*

It is quite clear that in *The Blue Book* Wittgenstein still holds the view that speaking a language involves guidance by rules. As before, he argues that we must distinguish between "a process being in *accordance* with a rule", and "a process involving a rule",[22] and he suggests that the rule must be *involved* in the processes of understanding and meaning, where "involved" means "that the expression of this rule forms part of these processes."[23] Only then, he argues, can the distinction between correctness and incorrectness be secured. Similarly, Wittgenstein draws a sharp contrast between two types of teaching: Teaching as a mere drill which builds up a psychological mechanism (causing us, for example, to associate the word 'yellow' with yellow things), and teaching which supplies us with a *rule* which is *involved* in the processes of understanding and obeying. What is of interest, Wittgenstein argues, is the latter kind of teaching:

> Teaching as the hypothetical history of our subsequent actions (understanding, obeying, estimating a length, etc.) drops out of our considerations. The rule which

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[21] PG 96-97. See Wikforss 1997 for a more extensive discussion of this parallel between Wittgenstein's middle period account of intentions and Schopenhauer's account of the will.
[22] BB p. 13.
[23] BB pp. 12-13.

has been taught and is subsequently applied interests us only as far as it is involved in the application. A rule, as far as it interests us, does not act at a distance.[24]

Proponents of the received view, according to which Wittgenstein never abandons (RG), often cite this passage in support of their view.[25] But this is an odd exegetical strategy. After all, it is generally recognized that while the *Blue Book* contains seeds of some of Wittgenstein's later views (such as the appeal to language games) there are important differences between this text and the later work. Just as we cannot use the *Blue Book* as a guide to Wittgenstein's later views in general, we cannot use it as a guide to his later views on rules and rule-following.

In fact, the transformation is evident already in the *Brown Book*. Wittgenstein here questions the claim of the *Blue Book* that rules have to be *involved* in our linguistic practices. The expression "A game is played according to the rule so and so", Wittgenstein says, is used in a large variety of cases, including cases "where the rule is neither an instrument of the training, nor of the practice of the game".[26]

> We see that the expression 'A game is played according to the rule so and so' is used not only in the variety of cases exemplified..., but even in cases where the rules is neither an instrument of the training nor of the practice of the game, but stands in the relation to it in which our table stands to the practice of our game 39 [training without any rule-expression being involved]. One might in this case call the table a natural law describing the behaviour of the people of this tribe. Or we might say that the table is a record belonging to the natural history of the tribe. (Brown Book, pp. 97-98)

Although an explicit rule (such as a chart) may be involved in a person's linguistic training, Wittgenstein argues, this is neither necessary (we could, he suggests, even imagine a student reacting naturally to certain signs without any particular training at all), nor is it sufficient since any rule expression can be variously interpreted.

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[24] BB p. 14.
[25] See Baker (1981), p. 64, Bogen (1972), p. 182, and Glock (1996), p. 325.
[26] BB p. 97.

In the *Brown Book,* therefore, Wittgenstein suggests that rules cannot play the fundamental role in our linguistic practices that they had earlier been ascribed. For a fuller development of this, we need to look to the *Philosophical Investigations*, in particular his famous discussion of rule-following. This discussion ends with paragraphs 201 and 202, where Wittgenstein makes two much-discussed but obscure claims: First, that "there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases"; second, that "'obeying a rule' is a practice". Despite the extensive literature on the topic the import of these claims remains less than clear. One problem is that the paragraphs have been seen from the perspective of the received view, according to which Wittgenstein never questioned the importance of being guided by rules. If, instead, the received view is rejected, Wittgenstein's claims can be seen in a new light.

At the center of Wittgenstein's discussion stands the regress problem familiar from the middle period: If meaning is determined by interpretations a regress ensues, and the very idea of a distinction between correct and incorrect applications (between what the word applies to and what it does not apply to) is undermined. While in the middle period Wittgenstein struggles with the regress problem, searching for something that gives a 'final interpretation', he now rejects the suggestion that meaning is determined by interpretations in the first place. The idea that meaning is determined by rules is thus ruled out as an account of meaning determination. For a rule to guide the speaker, Wittgenstein holds, an expression of the rule has to be involved in the speaker's use of terms. However, any expression can be variously interpreted; consequently, the idea that meaning is determined by rules leads to a regress of interpretations:

> 198. "But how can the rule show me what I have to do at *this* point? Whatever I
> do is, on some interpretation, in accord with the rule." – That is not what we ought
> to say, but rather: any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it

interprets, and cannot give any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning.

Thus, Wittgenstein is here rejecting his own earlier idea that meaning is determined by rules that guide our use – instead, he suggests, meaning is determined by this use itself, by the *practice* of applying the sign.

But these paragraphs are directed against much more than (RG); Wittgenstein here rejects *any* account of meaning determination according to which the meaning of a sign is (solely) determined by interpretations of it. Whether or not this determination is supposed to be mediated by rules or not, regress rules out any account that ultimately does not get beyond interpretation. In the light of the analogy between meaning and rule, the idea that rules determine meaning thus has become an object lesson, one example of how *not* to think of meaning determination.

This is not the end of the matter of course, since it remains to be seen precisely how use is supposed to determine meaning. How could my use, which is finite, determine that my words have a certain meaning, have certain application conditions (stretching beyond my finite use)? This, arguably, is one of the central difficulties of the *Investigations*, and it is not obvious what Wittgenstein's final answer is. In the discussion following paragraphs 201 and 202, he famously suggests that human agreement (in primitive reactions and judgments) is essential if we are to secure the distinction between using a word correctly and using it incorrectly. There is, of course, substantial dispute as to the precise role agreement is supposed to play for meaning determination in the later Wittgenstein.[27] We shall not enter that dispute here; suffice it to point out that it is beyond dispute that agreement *does* play some such role, but far from clear how the received view could even accommodate this – if

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[27] Many commentators take Wittgenstein as committed to some kind of communitarian picture of language (for instance, Kripke 1982; McDowell 1984) while others offer more individualist readings (for instance McGinn 1984; Baker & Hacker 1985). For more discussion of these matters, see also Verheggen 1995; 2003, and for a comparison between Wittgenstein's appeal to human agreement and Davidson's appeal to the principle of charity, see Glüer 2000b.

Wittgenstein held that meaning was rule-determined then the question of how use determines meaning would not even seem to arise.

The received view, we have argued, remains stuck in the middle period and thus misses the most exciting point on which the later Wittgenstein changed his mind: His rejection of (RG). In the next section, we shall further strengthen the case against the received view by taking a closer look at three representatively different ways of interpreting Wittgenstein in accordance with the received view. None of them, we shall urge, succeeds in supplying us with an understanding of rule-following plausibly applicable to linguistic rules; none of them, therefore, succeeds in taking the pressure off (RG). These views either come into severe conflict with central claims very close to the later Wittgenstein's heart – or they deprive the notion of rule-following of all substance.

3. Three varieties of received view

As we said above, one pressing question for any version of the received view is what it precisely means to follow a (meaning determining) rule. It seems quite clear that acting in accordance with a rule *R* is neither necessary nor sufficient for rule-following in the sense required here. For a subject *S* might be *guided*, or *motivated*, in her actions by *R*, but nevertheless fail in her effort to accord with *R*. Mere accordance with *R*, on the other hand, clearly is not sufficient to be so guided or motivated.[28] Thus, the received view stands and falls with its ability to supply us with a plausible account of what it is to follow, or be guided by, a rule – in contradistinction to merely acting in accordance with one. This, of course, holds for any account of rule-guided activity, be it linguistic or not. But not only that; intuitively, rule-guidance amounts to the same thing regardless of whether we are guided by

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[28] Cf. Boghossian 2008, 8. In Glüer & Pagin 1999, we distinguish between a subject *S*'s following a rule and a rule's being 'in force' for *S* (as developed in Pagin 1987). Being in force is not the same as being followed in Boghossian's sense, however; a rule can be in force for *S* without in any sense guiding or motivating *S*'s actions.

the rules of meaning, morals, or monopoly. What is required is, thus, a plausible and quite general account of what it is to follow a rule – that is also plausibly applicable to meaning determining rules.

3.1 The IR view

According to the influential interpretation of Wittgenstein proposed by Baker and Hacker, and further developed by their student Glock, there are substantial requirements on rule-following:

> The concept of *following* a rule is applicable only to beings who understand rules, apprehend actions as according or conflicting with rules and intentionally act in accord with rules (Baker and Hacker 1985, 155).

For any particular instance of rule-following, Baker and Hacker suggest to draw the distinction between rule-following and merely acting in accordance with a rule as follows:

> [W]e shall differentiate 'acting in accordance with a rule' (...) from 'following a rule', reserving the latter for cases in which the agent (...) could, and in certain circumstances would, cite it as a reason for actions (Baker and Hacker 1985, 155).

And Glock explains:

> If an agent follows a rule in Φing the rule must be part of his reason for Φing, and not just a cause. He must intend to follow the rule. However, this intentionality is only virtual. He does not have to think about or consult the rule-formulation while Φing, it is only required that he would adduce it to justify or explain his Φing (Glock 1996, 325).

We shall call the basic view of rule-following expressed in these quotes the 'IR view'. It accounts for the difference between following a rule and merely acting in accordance with it by means of the following two necessary conditions:

For any agent S, any type of action Φ, and any rule R:

(I) S follows R in Φing only if S intends to follow R in Φing, and

(R) S intends to follow R in Φing only if R is (part of) S's reason for Φing.

It is intuitively very plausible that, in general, rule-guided Φing is Φing that not only happens to be in accord with some rule R, but can be explained by means of R. It is no less intuitive to think that the explanation in question has to be a *reasons-explanation*. Such an explanation

rationalizes Φing from *S*'s point of view by showing how *R* provided *S* with a reason for Φing. This, again, is the view of rule-following defended by Wittgenstein in the middle period texts, where he argues that for a rule to guide it must serve to justify the speaker's actions. Just like the middle period Wittgenstein, we think that the IR view is true of all uncontroversial cases of rule-following.

Baker, Hacker, and Glock embrace something stronger, however. According to their version of the IR view, (R) above should be replaced by

(R*) *S* intends to follow *R* in Φing only if *S* could cite *R* as her reason for Φing.

But the resulting, stronger IR* view is much less plausible. In particular, it seems doubtful that this is a view Wittgenstein could have embraced when it came to the 'rules' of language. This is not for reasons of phenomenological implausibility; as we already saw above, advocates of the IR view are quite concerned not to 'over-intellectualize' their account of rule-following. Having, and being able to cite, reasons must not amount to having to consciously run through the reasoning in question, or even having to consciously entertain the reasons. Glock again:

> [The agent] does not have to think about or consult the rule-formulation while Φing, it is only required that he would adduce it to justify or explain his Φing. This excludes the idea of rules which are completely unknown to the agent (Glock 324f).

Nevertheless, according to the IR* view it is necessary that *S* be able to *cite R* as his reason. That, we take it, amounts at least to being able to formulate *R*, and presumably also to being able to produce this formulation of *R* when asked why he Φed. This strikes us as too strong a reqirement in general, but it seems particularly doubtful when applied to language.

If there are rules of meaning, they clearly do not have the kind of psychological role for the speakers that is required by the IR* view. Such rules simply would not be accessible in the same way as our reasons typically are. Typically, we have a fairly good grasp of our own reasons, but when it comes to the 'rules' of meaning, quite the opposite is true. Here, we

mostly would be hard-pressed to come up with anything specific enough to even be a candidate for a (meaning determining) rule of language. Indeed, given that having reasons is something we usually consider within the subject's special first-person access, it is hard to imagine how there could be any of the philosophical controversy we in fact see not only about the exact formulation of the 'rules' of language, but even about their very existence.[29]

Moreover, the claim that what he calls 'grammar' lacks precisely this kind of perspicuity is very important for Wittgenstein:

> A main source of failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words. -- Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity (PI 122).

Glock, for one, is quite willing to concede that these passages are in tension with the IR* view. But according to him, the tension is in Wittgenstein. It is a tension created by his "gradual abandonment of the calculus model" (Glock 1996, 70). We don't agree. 'Grammar's' lack of perspicuity is at the very heart of the later Wittgenstein's thinking about philosophy. The IR* view of the 'rules' of language is not only independently implausible, but also too uncharitable an interpretation of Wittgenstein.

Of course, the upshot of these considerations might only be that we should not accept (R*) but go back to the intuitively very plausible original IR view above. Even the weaker IR view might strike the Wittgensteinian as peculiarly uncongenial, however: It sits very uneasily with the general picture of thought and language so crucial to the later Wittgenstein – a picture, indeed, that he was inclined towards in the middle period but, as we have seen above, only came to appreciate the full implications of in the course of the transition to his later views. As Crispin Wright puts it, Wittgenstein has a "conception of language not merely as a *medium for the expression* of thought, but as – usually, though not exceptionlessly – *enabling* thought: as providing its very raw materials" (Wright 2007, 496). Whatever Wittgenstein's view on the matter exactly was, this much should be clear: He considered

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[29] Cf. Boghossian 2008, 14, for analogous remarks about epistemic rules.

anything like the 'Augustinian picture of language' as deeply mistaken – any conception, that is, according to which thought is independent of, and prior to, language:

> And now, I think, we can say: Augustine describes the learning of human language as if the child came into a strange country and did not understand the language of the country; that is, as if it already had a language, only not this one. Or again: as if the child could already *think*, only not yet speak (PI 32).

But how could the IR view avoid an Augustinian picture of thought and language? Meaning rules are such that linguistic expressions get their meaning through speakers' following them. According to the IR view, for any rule-following action A, the relevant rule R needs to be (part of) the reason for which S did A. And whatever having a reason precisely amounts to, it surely amounts to being in some intentional state. This state might be of various sorts, it might be an intention to follow R (as Glock has it), or it might be an acceptance of R of some other sort, but some such intentional state there has to be. Moreover, whatever being able to think precisely amounts to, having states with intentional content surely qualifies. Thus, thought is required for rule-following on the IR view. If rule-following is required for language, IR thus makes thought prior to language. [30,31]

This conclusion, we submit, should be unacceptable to any interpreter of the later Wittgenstein. No doubt there are tensions within his philosophy, tensions that can be seen to

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[30] A similar point is made by Crispin Wright. He argues that if rule-following is generally understood on what he calls the 'modus ponens model' of reason-giving, "a conceptual repertoire anterior to an understanding of any particular rule" will be required (Wright 2007, 496). The 'modus ponens model' construes rules as major premises of (practical) inferences, premises for instance of the form 'If ... x ..., it is correct to predicate 'red' of x' (ibid, 495). Clearly, to reach the conclusion that it is correct to apply 'red' to x, the subject already needs to be able to judge that the antecedent is fulfilled.

[31] A possible line of response would be to conceive of rule-following, thought, and language in terms of some sort of *interdependence*. Baker and Hacker might actually have such a combined IR view of meaning and content determination in mind, since they say both that the 'rules of grammar' determine meaning, and that they "determine" or "fix concepts" (Baker and Hacker 1985, 335; 269).

However, if the relevant rules are to determine both meaning and intentional content, an infinite regress ensues. Assume that to follow rule R_1, S needs to be in intentional state I_1. Since I_1 itself has content, S needs to follow another rule, R_2, in order for I_1 to have that content. But in order to follow R_2, S needs to be in yet another intentional state I_3. And so on *ad infinitum*. (Cf. Boghossian 1989; 2008; Glüer 2002.)

Regresses like the one above remain vicious even when encountered in the course of the so-called "connective and therapeutic analysis" that according to Hacker is to "replace both reductive and constructive analysis" as the method of philosophy (Hacker 1996: 107). The task of such analysis is to clarify "the network of normative concepts (...) by tracing its reticulations, the patterns of internal relations, not by delving beneath it in search of foundations" (Baker and Hacker 1985, 180). The IR view of meaning and content determination does nothing to achieve this goal; rather, it makes rule-following impossible by requiring a subject to already have followed an infinity or rules before she can follow any.

have driven his thought more or less continuously forward through the periods. The IR view, however, ends up with consequences so clearly contrary to doctrines close to the later Wittgenstein's heart – such as 'grammar's' lack of perspicuity and the rejection of the Augustinian picture of language – that we should look for more charitable options.

3.2 Blindness and Quietism

Among others, Crispin Wright and Paul Boghossian have very recently argued that considerations like those just advanced should drive us towards a more radical understanding of Wittgenstein on rules and meaning.[32] The passage crucial to this understanding is the following:

> When I obey a rule, I do not choose.
> I obey the rule blindly (PI 219).

According to Wright, the most basic cases of rule-following cannot be subject to any form of IR condition. On pain of falling into the Augustinian picture of language, basic rule-following must be 'blind':

> So here is what seems to be the resulting position. All rule-following involves basic rule-following. And basic – 'blind' – rule-following, properly understood, is rule-following without reason (...) (Wright 2007, 497).

Consequently, it holds that "in the basic case we do not really *follow* – are not really guided by – anything" (Wright 2007, 497). But if we are not guided by anything, what reason is there to think that basic cases are cases of rule-following at all? Wright thinks that drawing this conclusion would get Wittgenstein completely wrong:

> This is, emphatically, not the claim that it is inappropriate ever to describe someone as, say, knowing the rule(s) for the use of 'red', or as knowing what such a rule requires. Rather, it is a caution about how to understand such descriptions – or better, about how *not* to understand them (Wright 2007, 498).

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[32] Both thus modify to some degree their own previous work on these matters; cf. esp. Boghossian 1989, Wright 1989.

What Wittgenstein tries to teach us, then, is that there was something wrong with the way we conceived of the problem of rule-following in the first place. In particular, it is misguided to try to understand the rationality of basic rule-following along the lines of the IR model. In basic rule-following, the rule does not figure in the reason for the action, does not rationalize it. Basic rule-following nevertheless *is* rational, Wright submits, "in the sense that it involves intentionality and a willingness to accept correction in the light of error" (Wright 2007, 498).

We of course agree that intentional action can be rational, and open to correction, even if no rule is available to rationalize it. But we think it is equally obvious that an action's being rational in this sense is not sufficient for it to be rule-following. Thus, there still is no reason why we should think of basic cases as rule-following at all. Only an account of what distinguishes basic rule-following from merely acting in accordance with a rule can provide us with such a reason. But Wright's Wittgenstein refuses to provide such an account; he turns *quietist* instead (cf. Wright 2007, 498): For basic rule-following, no substantive account of rule-following is to be had.

Most philosophers, us included, do not consider such quietism a viable position. At the very least, it is a position only to be embraced *in extremis*. It might seem that the situation is pretty extreme, however – surely, we cannot conclude that rule-following is impossible? To see that the impression of extremity is misguided, let us present the argument that seemingly got us into it a little more formally:

(RG) Speaking a language is a rule-guided activity.

(2)   Necessarily, there is a difference between rule-following and mere acting in accordance with a rule.

(3)   Intuitively, the IR condition on rule-following is extremely plausible. It applies to all uncontroversial cases of rule-following.

(4)   On a Wittgensteinian picture of language and thought, there cannot be an IR condition on basic rules.

Ergo,

(5)   We have to be quietists about basic rule-following.

Even if we want to hold on to a Wittgensteinian picture of language and thought, it should be clear that (4) follows from (2) and (3) only in combination with (RG). Quietist blindness is forced on us *only* on the assumption that language is rule-guided. This clearly controversial assumption is responsible for our trouble, we submit. In a broadly Wittgensteinian setting, the argument above thus should be construed as a *reductio ad absurdum*. Of (RG).

For what the argument shows is that (RG) makes it impossible to have any substantive, general account of the difference between rule-following and mere acting in accordance with a rule. Without such an account, what *reason* could the quietist possibly give for the claim that language is rule-guided? Or, to turn matters around: What reason could there be to water down the general notion of rule-following to this extreme extent, if all we save is one, clearly controversial case? We think there is no plausible reason to do so. Rather, these considerations provide so much more evidence that the later Wittgenstein did not conceive of language as a rule-guided activity – and for good reason.[33]

4. A New Skepticism?

In his most recent work on rule-following, Paul Boghossian, too, stresses the significance of blindness for Wittgensteinian rule-following. But according to Boghossian, the real problem about blind rule-following arises in complete independence from assumptions concerning the determination of both meaning and content, and it threatens the very possibility of rule-

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[33]   But if the later Wittgenstein was not a quietist, what is the significance of remarks like "I obey the rule blindly" (PI 219)? In the light of the analogy between meaning and rules, remarks like these are further variations on, and possibly further developments of, the main theme of the rule-following considerations: The relation between meaning ('rule') and use ('obeisance') cannot ultimately be established by reasons, intentions, or 'interpretations', if it is to be meaning determining. This is one of the points where the analogy turns up crucial differences: Meaningful use of signs is not like rule-following action in that the latter always requires reasons, while the former in the most basic cases must be blind.

following.[34] Thus, there "really is a skeptical problem about rule-following that can be derived from Wittgenstein's discussion" (Boghossian 2008, 3).[35]

These claims are of great independent interest, of course. If Boghossian is right, there is a fundamental, skeptical problem about rule-following that is not only independent of the controversial assumption that meaning is rule determined, but – more importantly – does not depend on even more controversial Wittgensteinian assumptions about language and thought. Boghossian's skeptical problem is supposed to arise even for those who – along with maybe most philosophers today – have no problem with a basically Augustinian picture of language.

Boghossian's argument proceeds in two steps. First, he provides a new argument for the conclusion that the most fundamental cases of rule-following must be blind. And in the second step he argues that there is no viable view of what blind rule-following consists in. We shall focus on the first step. What interests us most is, of course, whether the need for blindness really can be motivated in complete independence from assumptions about language. Boghossian (2008, 21) argues that the following five claims form an inconsistent set:

(6)   Rule-following is possible.
(7)   Following a rule consists in acting on one's acceptance (or internalization) of a rule.
(8)   Accepting a rule consists in an intentional state with general (prescriptive) content.
(9)   Acting under particular circumstances on an intentional state with general content involves some sort of deductive inference to what the content calls for under the circumstances.
(10) Inference involves following a rule.

Together, these claims engender an infinite regress of the kind familiar from Lewis Carroll:[36] If accepting a rule consists in an intentional state with general content, rule-following always

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[34] According to Boghossian, "Wittgenstein seems to indicate that (...) even if we could simply help ourselves to the full use of intentional contents, there would still be a problem about how rule-following is possible" (Boghossian 2008, 18).

[35] This problem is, however, *not* identical with Kripke's. According to Boghossian, his problem "arises in an especially virulent form for *epistemic rules* (...) [a]nd it cannot be solved, as Kripke's problem can, by our helping ourselves to various forms of anti-reductionist conceptions of meaning or content" (Boghossian 2008, 3).

involves inference. For then, inference "is required to determine what action the rule calls for in any particular circumstance" (ibid, 20). But inference itself always involves following a rule; thus, a vicious infinite regress ensues. Consequently, one of the five claims has to go. According to Boghossian, the only option is to give up (8): "[t]he point that Wittgenstein seems to be making is that, in its most fundamental incarnation, (...) some rule-following must simply be *blind*" (ibid, 22).[37]

The next question of course is how rule-following could possibly be blind. Boghossian goes on to discuss and dismiss what arguably is the only option for rule-following without intentionality: Some sort of dispositional view. Such an account is ruled out, he argues, by the familiar Kripkean considerations.[38] Therefore, we again seem to be left with some sort of quietism, or primitivism, about rule-following – if not outright skepticism.

As we said above, this conclusion would be immensely intriguing if it could be made to stick. *This* rule-following problem is not hostage to any controversial assumptions about language. But that does not mean that it is not hostage to any controversial assumptions whatsoever. Quite the contrary, we think that it stands or falls with a clearly controversial claim. We agree with Boghossian that (6), (7), and (9) are virtually unassailable. Moreover, we still find a version of (8), the IR view, immensely plausible. Therefore, we think that what needs to go is (10): It is not clear to us at all that inference involves following a rule. What Boghossian's argument shows, at most, is that inference is yet another controversial case creating trouble for any substantive understanding of rule-following.

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[36] Cf. Carroll 1895. Opinions as to the point Carroll himself was making in that paper differ widely.

[37] The argument basically is a generalization of Wright's argument for blindness; where Wright urges that blindness is forced *on the Wittgensteinian picture of thought and language*, because the reasoning required by the IR view involves the judgement that the antecedent of the major premise is fulfilled, Boghossian argues for the need for blindness from the assumption that inference is rule-guided, an assumption he deems generally acceptable.

[38] This is a change of mind only insofar as Boghossian now thinks that these considerations are right on target against (personal level) dispositional accounts of rule-following, as opposed to dispositional accounts of mental contents (cf. Boghossian 2008, 24).

Going sub-personal is not an option, Boghossian argues. A sub-personal account of rule-following either involves a sub-personal intentional state with general content, and thus falls prey to the regress argument above, or it collapses into just another version of dispositional account (cf. Boghossian 2008, 25f).

Why should we think that inference involves rule-following? Boghossian provides two arguments. The first is this: "[(10)] seems analytic of the very idea of deductive inference" (Boghossian 2008, 22). That inference involves rule-following is, in other words, simply a conceptual truth. We beg to differ. This is an intuition we do not share. According to us, this is a highly controvertible philosophical claim. One very good reason to think that it is false is precisely that it might well have unacceptable consequences – such as that rule-following in general would be impossible.

Boghossian's second argument goes as follows: "It is of the essence of deductive inference that the reasons I have for moving from certain premises to certain conclusions are *general* ones" (Boghossian 2008, 26, emph. ours). That seems correct, but what does it have to do with rule-following? The passage just quoted continues: "So what we are contemplating, when we contemplate giving up on the Rule-Following picture of deductive inference, is not so much giving on a Rule-Following *construal* of deductive inference as giving up on deductive inference itself." Of course, we cannot give up on deductive inference, but again, what is the connection with rule-following supposed to be? Giving up on rule-following would be giving up on deductive inference only if having a general reason is the same as accepting a rule.[39] But intuitively, that is not the case. Intuitively, generality of content does seem necessary, but not sufficient for rule-acceptance. When I believe that all ravens are black, and that Bertha is a raven, the first belief provides me with a perfectly nice, general reason to believe that Bertha is black, but it is not at all clear that by merely holding true the proposition that all ravens are black, I have accepted any rule. At the very least, we would need further substantial argument at this point.[40]

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[39] That Boghossian might actually be relying on this assumption is further evidenced by the following passage (re-)embracing the normativity of meaning: "When I apply the word 'tiger' to a newly encountered animal, it is very natural to think that my application of the word is guided and rationalized by my understanding of its meaning, an understanding that is *rule-like in its generality*" (Boghossian 2008, 17, emph. ours).

[40] One might, for instance, think that the supposed normativity of belief or content could come to the rescue at this point. Even if that were so (which we doubt very much), it is not clear how it would help

Pending further argument for the claim that inference involves rule-following, we therefore cannot but conclude that indeed, Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations *are* about problems generated by the idea of 'rules' determining meaning (and content). As it is rather plausible to think that meaning and content have close links with inferences, it should perhaps not come as such a surprise that 'rules' of inference might generate very similar problems. Trying to hold on to the received view in the face of these difficulties, the interpretations we have looked at in this paper either come into serious conflict with tenets at the very heart of the later Wittgenstein's philosophy, or deprive the notion of rule-following of all substance.

The ultimate lesson of Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations is that the analogy between meaning and rule, however instructive, spells disaster when taken literally. As we already hinted above, this interpretation receives further support from the latest Wittgenstein's pronouncements on the matter. In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein not only makes it quite clear that what he is concerned with is "an analogy between the concepts 'meaning' and 'rule'" (OC 62). He also spells out what he takes to be the most important conclusion of all these considerations – and now we would like to end by quoting Wittgenstein's final words on the matter in their original German:

46. Das Wichtigste aber ist: Es braucht die Regel nicht. Es geht uns nichts ab.[41]

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Boghossian. After all, his skeptical problem is supposed to arise independently of assumptions about the normativity of meaning and content.

[41] The English translation has: "But the most important thing is: The rule is not needed. Nothing is lacking."

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