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THE RADICAL READING OF WITTGENSTEIN:
Wisdom, Cavell, Kripke, and Bloor as a School of Wittgenstein Readers

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To the memory of

Richard S. Pierce
1927-1992

my friend and stepfather

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Abbreviations

Wittgenstein:

BB   *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations".* 1958. 2nd ed. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969.

LFM   *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics: Cambridge, 1939.* Ed. Cora Diamond. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976.

NB   *Notebooks, 1914-1916.* Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. Eds. G.E.M.. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright. 2nd ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979.

OC   *On Certainty.* Trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe. Eds. G.E.M.. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969. (Cited by paragraph.)

PG   *Philosophical Grammar.* Trans. Anthony Kenny. Ed. Rush Rhees. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974.

PI   *Philosophical Investigations.* 1953. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. 3rd ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967. (Cited by paragraph.)

RFM   *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics.* 1956. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. Eds. G.H. von Wright, R. Rhees and G.E.M. Anscombe. 2nd ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978. (Cited by section and paragraph.)

RPP   *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology.* Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. Eds. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright. Vol. 1. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980. 2 vols. (Cited by volume and paragraph.)

TLP   *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.* 1922. Trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961. (Cited by proposition number.)

Z   *Zettel.* G.E.M. Anscombe. Eds. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967. (Cited by paragraph.)

The dominant currents in today's academic philosophy have been scarcely touched by the latter [Wittgenstein's new revolutionary philosophy]. The *Investigations* has been read but its message not digested. As has been aptly said, it has been assimilated without being understood.

     Norman Malcolm, *Nothing Is Hidden*

Here I am inclined to fight windmills, because I cannot yet say that which I really want to say.

     Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*

Chapter 1.

Radical Reading and Readers.

"What is the meaning of a word?" This is the first sentence of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Blue Book. His answer is encapsulated in his famous definition, "the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (*PI* 43). This answer is unusual because the use of a word is generally what we take meaning to explain and to guide. If meaning *is* use, then it cannot explain or guide use.

If this were all we knew of Wittgenstein—if like Parmenides or Heraclitus he came to us in just a few fragments—we would already know he must have had a remarkable philosophy. For what appears to be a terse theory of meaning quickly destroys itself, as a theory of *meaning*. To the extent that its function as guide and explanation of use is our primary use for the concept "meaning"—which many of us would grant at first glance— Wittgenstein's account deprives meaning of its use. But if meaning is use and "meaning" has no use, then "meaning" is meaningless. Wittgenstein's philosophy seems on the verge of abolishing entirely the concept of meaning.

What would it be like to abolish meaning? Well, meaning is an abstract concept with intimate connections to a host of other abstract concepts such as language, understanding, thought, truth, rule, rationality, intention, explanation and many others. Surely Wittgenstein's philosophy would radically affect all of these as well, perhaps destructively. But the fertile fragments of Wittgenstein's thought have the further ability to regenerate what they have destroyed. While they leave meaning, as a guide, atrophied,

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use itself stands untouched. And if meaning is use, then the endurance of use brings with it the endurance of meaning. Meaning is transformed rather than abolished. Meaning remains, but as the shadow cast by use, rather than as the light that illumines it. Wittgenstein develops this powerful beginning into philosophical investigations of many of the abstract concepts related to meaning and the issues surrounding them. This new relation between meaning and use are ever at the center of these investigations, representing the fundamental rearrangement of priorities Wittgenstein undertakes.

In this dissertation, I am exploring what I call the "radical reading" of Wittgenstein's later work. I mean the word "radical" not in any political sense but in its primary etymological sense of being concerned with roots and fundamentals, and its consequent sense of producing extreme changes. This reading has been given by a small number of thinkers throughout the short history of Wittgenstein scholarship. These readers generally take the priority of use over meaning (and over all its attendant abstract concepts) to be at the heart of Wittgenstein's philosophy, and generally take a word's "use in the language" to be something practical and social, about which we can make ordinary empirical generalizations and predictions but which has no fixed form except as it occurs in practice over time. So, Wittgenstein's rearrangement of priorities shows our actions and interactions to be fundamental to our thoughts, the abstract to depend on the practical, the timeless to be derivative of the timely.

The radical reading attempts to make clear just how extreme the idea of the priority of use over meaning really is. It entails that we do not use words because they are meaningful but rather they are meaningful because we use

them. In a sense—a logical, not a temporal, sense—we use words before they have any meaning, not even an identity as *this* act of use (which is a kind of meaning), nor even a sameness as some other acts of use (which is also a kind of meaning). As radical readers understand him, Wittgenstein is trying to show us how constantly we presuppose that everything about us is already imbued with meanings to which our actions are responses. The difficult project of reading Wittgenstein is to understand a philosophy that shows us the possibility of meaning without presupposing it, that does not take meaning or identity or sameness as primitive. In other words, Wittgenstein starts from only "a something about which nothing could be said" because it has as yet no meaning (adapting *PI* 304), and shows how we can say meaningful things.

As will become clear, I believe the radical reading of Wittgenstein is correct, and that the full significance and power of his philosophy can only be understood if it is read as radical. Nevertheless, I shall be less concerned to defend this reading—though that will certainly be a part of my task—than to identify it and to show how the resistance it encounters assumes the very priority of abstract, timeless meaning that Wittgenstein overturns. When meaning is assumed to be fundamental, its subordination to action will seem to be equivalent to its total abolition, making the radical reading seem to be an impossible skepticism or nihilism. Consequently, radical readers have generally been ignored or dismissed or misinterpreted, and have not even been recognized as expressing a common reading of Wittgenstein. The result has been a perpetuation of what Wittgenstein complained of in his Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations:* his work circulates in versions "variously

misunderstood, more or less mangled or watered down" (ix-x). This is
testimony to the resilience of the ideas Wittgenstein is opposing, and to the
inherent difficulty of articulating a radical philosophy. It also raises the
question of what tactics will be most effective in making the radical reading
understood. If I were simply to try to say what Wittgenstein means, or what
the radical readers mean, I would just be duplicating their efforts, and
probably not doing it as well as they have. Perhaps, though, there is strength
in numbers (even in a small number). It is easy to ignore and dismiss
isolated pieces of seemingly wild and reckless work. Perhaps, though, works
that have individually failed to convince the academic community (or even,
for the most part, to gain a hearing) can supplement and illuminate one
another when seen, not as isolated instances of excess, but as recurring
instances of a radical theme in the understanding of Wittgenstein.

This chapter begins that task of identification with a basic sketch of the
radical reading of Wittgenstein. In the process, it will introduce the thinkers
who read him this way.

The Radical Reading

I will start with two theme statements, and gradually elaborate. A
passage by Stanley Cavell in "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later
Philosophy" describes Wittgenstein's ideas and eloquently captures both the
heart of the radical reading and the deep problem it must overcome before we
will understand Wittgenstein:

> We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are
> expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into

> further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor and of significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls "forms of life." Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying. To attempt the work of *showing* its simplicity would be a real step in making available Wittgenstein's later philosophy. (160-1)

The heart of the radical reading is that *nothing* guides or secures or stabilizes our projection of words from the past to the future other than the motley of practices which train our responses. Cavell tries to give us the flavor of their diversity and indefiniteness, and it is a very practical and social flavor.

At the risk of deadening Cavell's vivid portrayal, I would point out a number of the specific elements of the process and situation he describes. First, how words are learned and taught is crucial to what they mean. (Cavell footnotes the first sentence to say a little more about this.) Further, the particular contexts in which we use words are likewise crucial. A particularly important claim is that nothing guides our projections, a point I take as expressing the central thesis of the radical reading. (Over the course of this chapter I will introduce six main theses characteristic of the radical reading, of which this is the first. I will introduce a few more in subsequent chapters, and throughout will remark on other typical ideas, perspectives, or tendencies in order to clarify that reading.) Next, the issue of universals— that is, of family resemblance—and the issue of rules are addressed by

Wittgenstein to the same topic: the projection from past use to future use. Further, the factors that influence our projections, and so could potentially explain them, are characteristics of ourselves, not of meanings. It is sharing those characteristics which enables us to coordinate our projections as meaningful communication. Further still, the relevant characteristics are as diverse and personal and communal and ephemeral as our lives. As Cavell makes clear, what rides on these factors is everything connected with meaning; the broadest possible implications of meaning are at stake in Wittgenstein's philosophy. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein's vision is essentially simple; its difficulty comes not from complexity but from our resistance to so terrifyingly vast a change in our own vision. Consequently, the work that needs doing is helping us really see the possibility of accepting Wittgenstein's vision. All of these are elements of the radical reading (and some of them I will designate shortly as major theses).

The first epigraph I chose, from Norman Malcolm, expresses something close to the last point: Wittgenstein has been assimilated without being understood, read but his message not digested (1986, ix). The radical reading has always claimed that almost all of Wittgenstein scholarship has missed the gist of Wittgenstein's philosophy, and that the discussion of his philosophy has barely begun. (This is one of those ideas characteristic of radical readers that marks their similarity.) The concern expressed by Malcolm in 1986 was already a concern in 1961 when Joseph L. Cowan opened his essay "Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Logic" with this sentence: "Large as the name and fame of Ludwig Wittgenstein have become in our day, the radical character and great power of Wittgenstein's criticism of the

foundations of logic seem still inadequately appreciated" (284). Cowan's

article is exemplary of the radical reading of Wittgenstein. He expresses the

radical thesis even more challengingly than Cavell does:

> Wittgenstein's position, to put it with impossible brevity, is that each of
> our judgments is independent. A logical or mathematical proposition
> such as 2+2=4 is true not because of prior "meanings" or "rules,"
> conventional or otherwise, much less some necessary correspondence
> to reality or whatever. . . . What Wittgenstein is asserting is that (in a
> sense) *there is no such thing as a rule.* There is no such thing as (or
> state or condition of) understanding a rule, or knowing a rule, or
> meaning a rule. There is no such thing as behavior guided by, or even
> according to, a rule. There is none of these things in spite of the fact
> that there are many perfectly good and correct uses of the expressions
> "rule," "understanding a rule," " being guided by a rule," and so on.
> (285-6)

In other words, nothing guides us from one judgment to the next. The

failure to appreciate this idea, which Cowan wrote of ten years after

Wittgenstein's death, has persisted and indeed become entrenched in the

years since, so that Malcolm's echo 25 years later is that much more urgent.

These two expressions of the radical reading, by Cavell and Cowan, will

serve for some general observations about that reading and my project in

describing it. Both of them articulate what I called the central radical thesis,

that nothing guides us. Each of them also displays a second major

characteristic of the radical reading: they each immediately juxtapose the

assertion that we are not guided with a description of a sense in which we *are*

guided. So Cavell says, on the one hand, that "nothing insures that we will

make, and understand, the same projections" of words into future contexts,

and then says, on the other hand, that we do make the same projections, "on

the whole," due to "our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of

response, senses of humor" and so on, what he calls "all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life.'" It may appear that the second claim contradicts the first; after all, what is all the whirl of organism here but the mechanism that insures we make the same projections? How, then, can Cavell say that nothing insures our projections and then say that the whirl of organism does? Nevertheless, Cavell clearly believes that the two are consistent with one another. It is a second major characteristic of radical readers that they find some version of both these claims in Wittgenstein's work, and that they insist on their consistency, rather than relinquishing one or the other. They signal their reading's radical character by selecting so seemingly paradoxical a central thesis, but they juxtapose that thesis with the promise of a non-paradoxical account of concept application. This juxtaposition expresses the conviction that these two ideas are compatible, and so claims that the radical thesis is meant seriously and is not just a rhetorical device that will be quietly dropped later.

To understand the compatibility between these two claims that radical readers find Wittgenstein making, it is useful to think of the two claims as answers to two different questions—or two different senses of the same question, e.g. "Why do we project words as we do?" The second radical thesis, then, is that Wittgenstein changes the philosophical question from one (sense) to the other. Thus we find passages such as this famous one:

> "How am I able to obey a rule?"—if this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule the way I do.

> If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached
> bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say:
> "This is simply what I do."
> (Remember that we sometimes demand definitions for
> the sake not of their content, but of their form. Our requirement
> is an architectural one; the definition a kind of ornamental
> coping that supports nothing.) (*PI* 217)

Here the usual and expected philosophical sense of the question is a request

for justification. On the radical reading, Wittgenstein argues that the

"answers" to that question ultimately have no content; they are "a kind of

ornamental coping that supports nothing," and the best answer is that

nothing justifies our actions or guides our judgments or insures our

projections. In effect, philosophical justification is incoherent.

This is not a denial of the normativity of language, but of the

presumption that its normativity depends on a certain sort of justification, for

once I see that such justification is impossible, "my spade is turned" to a

different sense of the question and a different kind of answer: a description of

"simply what I do." Cavell's second answer, his description of "all the whirl

of organism," addresses this other sense of the question of what we do and

why. Cowan presents the same two-part structure: from the point of view of

what can be justified, the answer is that no action can ultimately be justified

as the one that accords with a rule; nevertheless, we can still describe what we

do, what we *call* "accord with this rule" and "following a rule" and so on.

The implication, then, is that our applications of words and rules are not

ultimately *responsive* to normativity so much as *productive* of it. Meaning,

guidance, justification, and so on, have roles in our language-games, but only

subordinately to use: this is what we *call* "justified," this is what we *call* "the same projection," this is what we *call* "coherence among judgments."

Both in the central (now the first) radical thesis and in the relation between that thesis and the appeal to what we do, the passages from Cavell and Cowan have a suggestion of paradox that is also typical of the radical reading. How can every judgment be independent? Surely they would not then be "judgments"! Our usual inclination in the face of paradox is to eliminate it immediately, to change the position until the paradox goes away. We generally take paradox as a sign of error. However, we must not be too hasty here. I am presenting not just a radical position but a reading of Wittgenstein. At the very least, then, we must pause long enough to ask whether the apparent paradox might be an important element of Wittgenstein's work, for if it is, then his radical interpreters are correct to reproduce it. Beyond that, though, the concept of "paradox" itself is quite complex and unclear and is not necessarily logically contradictory (even if *that* concept were clear!). Our intuitions about what is plausible or acceptable or sensible enter into the judgment of what is paradoxical; consequently, what is *radical* can easily appear as, or even shade into, what is paradoxical. If "radical" means at least "inconsistent with some considerable portion of what most of us take to be common sense," then the difficulties and resistance encountered by a radical philosophy will be inevitable. Even if it is supremely faithful to Wittgenstein, it will tend to evince doubt or outright rejection. Being radical, it is *prima facie* implausible, and may well appear paradoxical.

A good illustration of the problem that the radical reading encounters is the bewilderment evinced by Charles Chihara at Cowan's article: "Cowan does not cite passages which really support this remarkable interpretation, and I am at a loss to explain how he came to it" (Chihara 467 n30). One suspects that the "really" here indicates the presence of criteria of evaluation which it would be impossible for a radical reading to satisfy. Chihara's next sentence is even more indicative: "... I do not understand how Cowan can think sufficient grounds for accepting such a paradoxical metaphysical position have been provided by the considerations that he brings to bear on the question in his article." Notice how *far* Cowan is from being able to convince Chihara. First of all, the position he attributes to Wittgenstein is "paradoxical." As Chihara is using that word and as we usually use it in philosophy, it is impossible to accept a paradox. And even if it were in some psychological sense possible, it is definitely logically impossible to provide "sufficient grounds" for accepting a paradox. So Cowan absolutely could not provide anything that would satisfy Chihara (except a retraction). And just for emphasis (since, for him, Cowan's position could not be any worse), Chihara does not even "understand how Cowan could think" his position is adequate. For him, Cowan's position is simply not a possible belief. The radical reading is not just falling a little bit short here; it is way beyond the pale.

If Wittgenstein's philosophy is indeed radical, then we should not take for granted that there is some inoffensive way to express it, nor that immediately resolving all apparent paradoxes will give us a more accurate understanding of it. Wittgenstein himself expresses, in as offensively

paradoxical a manner as anyone else, the thesis that Cavell, Cowan and other radical readers place at the center of his philosophy: "The application (every application) of every word is arbitrary" (Wisdom 1965, 88). This says, I believe, essentially the same thing as Cowan's independence thesis. I will use this statement of Wittgenstein's as the canonical formulation of the first radical thesis.

Wittgenstein expresses this thesis in *Philosophical Investigations* more complexly and ambiguously:

> This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here. (*PI* 201)

The status of the paradox here is unclear and much contested. Wittgenstein says there is a "misunderstanding" involved in the paradox. The radical reading takes that misunderstanding *not* to imply that the paradox is a mistake or false, but that the truth of the paradox requires us to change the philosophical question to one where there *is* "accord and conflict" (i.e. normativity). For radical readers, then, the goal is not simply to dispel the paradox but to learn from it. I will let the paradox stand for a while, at least until we have a clearer picture of the radical reading, and will explore it in detail in chapter two. For now, I will continue introducing the ideas that go along with the paradox, and the readers who are sympathetic to it.

Although I quote Wittgenstein's statement that words are arbitrary, it is not to be found in his writings. It comes to us via John Wisdom, who quotes

it in his article "Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1934-1937." Wisdom suggests, though

somewhat cryptically, the stature of the radical thesis in Wittgenstein's

philosophy:

> 'We have the idea that the meaning of a word is an object' is also connected with 'The application (every application) of every word is arbitrary'. And this is connected with the question, 'Can you play chess without the queen?' (If I were asked to answer, in one sentence, the question 'What was Wittgenstein's biggest contribution to philosophy?', I should answer 'His asking of the question "Can one play chess without the queen?"'.) (1965, 88)[1]

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[1] I shall hereafter take for granted that the statement "The application (every application) of every word is arbitrary" is properly attributed to Wittgenstein. The customs governing authorial attribution are subtle and informal, and this is not a paradigmatic instance. Perhaps the paradigm case would be words published by the author, that are at least not contradicted or repudiated and are preferably reiterated or otherwise further corroborated by the author. In this case, Wittgenstein's words were spoken, not published, and then published by a witness to their speaking, Wisdom. That Wisdom intends the sentences he puts in quotation marks to be direct quotations from Wittgenstein is, I believe, implied here (by conventions of quotation). It is further confirmed by his explicitly claiming that the quotation-marked sentences on either side of the one in question are direct quotations: ". . . a point which on one occasion at the Cambridge Moral Sciences Club he expressed in the words 'We have the idea that the meaning of a word is an object'" (87); ". . . His asking of the question 'Can one play chess without the queen?'" Quotations of an author published by a reputable witness (one with standing in the community)—which Wisdom surely is—are customarily, I believe, considered properly attributed to the author. (The attribution is further strengthened if the forum in which they were spoken, e.g. a meeting of the Moral Sciences Club, also has serious standing.)

That we should take Wittgenstein's statement seriously is our obligation, in the absence of any reason to think he intended it frivolously or as a hypothetical presented for subsequent rejection. That Wisdom took Wittgenstein seriously is clear from references by two of his students, Renford Bambrough and Roger Shiner, to Wisdom's subsequent discussion of Wittgenstein's statement (Bambrough 1972, 76; Shiner 1973, 695). Bambrough and Shiner themselves attribute the statement to Wittgenstein without further ado: "Wittgenstein's paradox that every application of every word is

We are left to figure out the nature of the connections Wisdom claims. Nevertheless, we can at least see that Wisdom puts the radical thesis in high company. He connects it first to the statement "We have the idea that the meaning of a word is an object." This describes an indisputably major theme of the *Philosophical Investigations*, articulated by Wittgenstein in the book's first remark as the theme illustrated by the quotation from Augustine. Then Wisdom connects the radical thesis to what he considers "Wittgenstein's biggest contribution to philosophy." Held firmly between these two, there can be no doubt of the significance Wisdom attributes to Wittgenstein's statement that every application of every word is arbitrary.

Still, that is so far no more than Wisdom's opinion. All I have done is expanded my community of radical readers from Cavell and Cowan to Cavell, Cowan and Wisdom. But that is my present purpose, a purpose I wish to pursue simultaneously with clarifying the radical reading. This dissertation has three general guiding ambitions. The most ambitious is more a wish than an actual goal: to convince my reader that the radical reading is the right or best reading of Wittgenstein. This is too ambitious, though, and will not

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arbitrary has the paradoxical consequence that the pupil has not necessarily disobeyed the instruction 'add 2' if after '1000' he writes '1004'" (Bambrough 1972, 74); "The remark that every application of every word is arbitrary is an alternative point of entry to the understanding of Wittgenstein's account of meaning and generality, universals and resemblances" (1972, 76); "The later Wittgenstein once expressed that [viz. the indeterminacy of rules] by the paradox that every application of every word is arbitrary" (Shiner 1973, 695; cf. also 1974, 193 and 195). Shiner cites Wisdom as his source, but Bambrough does not. This may be an oversight by Bambrough, but I would not presume that it is, since he may have heard Wittgenstein himself. I believe that Bambrough and Shiner are in straightforward compliance with academic convention, and I shall follow their lead in attributing the statement to Wittgenstein without further reference to Wisdom.

really serve as a guide. Prerequisite to that and more modest is the goal of explaining what the radical reading of Wittgenstein is, so that it can be seen as a sensible interpretation, possible even if not convincing. Connected to that and more modest still is my primary goal of showing that the radical reading, sensible or not, exists in the literature, that it exists as a *reading* that connects the work of a small but identifiable group of scholars. That is, I want to constitute these scholars as a school or community or faction. This task needs doing because the thinkers in question have not generally been recognized, even by each other, as sharing a common reading. I will introduce the community of readers while introducing their reading of Wittgenstein.

My claim, then, is that the radical reading has been something of a "subterranean" reading of Wittgenstein's work ever since he was alive. I am going to try to bring it out into the open. There are some difficulties peculiar to such a project. Many of the readers I am assembling seem to perceive themselves as lone voices in the wilderness, quite at odds with the world of Wittgenstein scholarship. ("More nonsense, in my view, has been purveyed in print about Wittgenstein than about any other recent philosopher" (Shiner 1983, 253).) Consequently, each reader develops his own idiom in which to communicate what Wittgenstein is saying. These idioms can be quite divergent, one reason being that the radical readers have quite diverse philosophical interests and agendas outside of their common interest in (and understanding of) Wittgenstein. A more important reason, though, is simply that what they have to say is radical: a radical thought is not easily expressed, and its expressions are therefore likely to be idiosyncratic; the more radical the shared reading, the less evident will be the identity between scholars.

Consequently, it will take a certain amount of creativity for us to recognize the common vision that motivates their assorted writings on Wittgenstein. A certain looseness of fit between their styles is inevitable.

The quotations from Cavell and Cowan provide a good illustration of the task and its difficulties: they are strikingly different in tone, though I believe their content is highly similar. Cowan seems to emphasize the paradox—"each of our judgments is independent"—where Cavell seems to soften or even mask it behind the vague word "insures"—"nothing insures that we will make . . . the same projections." Both depict Wittgenstein as shifting from a question we cannot answer to one that we can, but Cowan dwells on what we *cannot* do by listing numerous variants of "there is no such thing as a rule," where Cavell dwells on what we *can* do by listing numerous factors contributing to coordinating our word use. The ultimate arbitrariness of the applications of our words is claimed by Cowan relatively explicitly, whereas Cavell implies it by speaking of our lack of "insurance" and further supports that implication in the diversity and open-ended nature of his list of influences on our applications. In sum, the identity of Cavell's and Cowan's theses is, on the one hand, plausible and, on the other, not self-evident. More generally, the identity of any scholars as part of the same group, the same reading of Wittgenstein, will never be self-evident.

The grouping of thinkers into schools is the sort of categorization that is ideal for the application of Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblance." Each thinker is obviously unique, and the similarities that ally them are quite diverse. Many characteristics make radical readers all of one school, and I will try to give a sense of why I include each of the readers I include. At the same

time, there is an attraction to the idea of definitive criteria for inclusion. I am inclined to consider some version of the first radical thesis to be a necessary condition, and also some version of the shift of question (which is, however, a corollary to the initial thesis, since that thesis undercuts traditional philosophy and, without a shift, would leave us apparently, and unenlighteningly, in paradox). Nevertheless, both procedures can be useful for understanding what links radical readers together.

That these two procedures—identification by family resemblance or by essential properties—are not really alternatives to one another is another typical thesis of the radical reading of Wittgenstein, one well-illustrated by the comparison of Cavell and Cowan in the paragraph before last. Suppose we do take expression of the radical thesis as the necessary and sufficient condition for inclusion in the school of radical readers. This does not tell us how to identify such expressions. Have Cavell and Cowan each expressed that thesis? We would need to compare the ideas "nothing insures that we make the same projections" and "each of our judgments is independent" to see if they are sufficiently similar to be expressions of the same thesis, and that comparison will consider the whole family of resemblances. Suppose further, though, that we found an apparently identical and definitive property: suppose that Cavell and Cowan had each inserted the phrase ". . . by which I mean that every application of every word is arbitrary." This would still not establish that they had both expressed the same thesis, for it depends on their meaning this additional clarification in the same way; perhaps they had interpreted this statement of Wittgenstein's in ways entirely different from each other. Again we would need to examine their actual uses of the phrase

and judge how similar they were; that is, we would still need to look at the whole family of resemblances between their theses. In this way, family resemblance underwrites essential properties. The radical reading of family resemblance is that it is not just one empirical structure that some concepts have but an account of all language, an account showing that even the sharpest and most well-defined concepts are constituted by judgments of the resemblance among the cases to which we apply them. This perspective on family resemblance as of universal scope and as standing behind essential properties, rather than instead of them, is a third characteristic feature of the radical reading of Wittgenstein.

A corollary to this third thesis is that particular cases and our responses to them are the ultimate determinants of concept application. If family resemblances among cases underwrite all properties, then no properties determine that cases resemble one another. That is, our *reactions* to cases (their uses, in a sense) are ultimate; the *properties* of cases (in a sense, their meaning) are not. As Ilham Dilman puts it, the contribution of family resemblance to Wittgenstein's philosophy is the idea that "the cases in which we use the same word . . . are not all *directly* related," so we cannot look for guidance to anything more general than the cases themselves:

> *In the end* the meaning of any word can only be gathered from the particular cases in which it is applicable—whether or not the word is definable in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions for its application. So Wisdom speaks of the *ultimate* proof that a word is applicable in a particular case as a 'proof by parallel cases': 'With every name we apply we compare one thing with another, with many others' (Wisdom, 1953, p. 274). (Dilman 1981, 173)

Dilman goes on to argue that for both Wittgenstein and Wisdom all thinking and reasoning, including induction and deduction and all applications of rules, comes down to the comparing of examples. In this way, he arrives at another thesis (call it the fourth) typical of radical readers, one we already encountered in Cavell: Wittgenstein's examinations of family resemblance and rule-following are just different approaches to the same issue, the generality of words. Radical readers tend to treat the two issues together, whereas they are more commonly treated separately.

So far, then, we have four major theses characteristic of the radical reading. First, the application of words (concepts, rules) is arbitrary, unguided, uninsured, independent. Second, Wittgenstein shifts the focus of philosophical investigation away from what guides us and onto what we do, which despite the first thesis can still include correct and incorrect concept application. Third, judgments of the family resemblances among cases is required for the application of any word. Fourth, family resemblance and rule following are parts or versions of the same investigation into how we can apply words.

The Readers

Perhaps enough names have now come up, and enough theses been stated, to warrant a more orderly introduction of the Wittgenstein scholars I am linking together into the school of radical readers.[2] Wittgenstein's

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[2] As far as literature expressive of the radical reading goes, I have so far cited Cavell's "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy" (1962) and Cowan's "Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Logic." I would also mention Cavell's *The Claim of Reason* (1979), "Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a

Cambridge colleague John Wisdom could properly be considered the original radical reader of Wittgenstein[3] (though several radical readers show no direct or substantial influence from Wisdom, so the reading remains a reading of Wittgenstein's work alone). An early radical article on Wittgenstein to provoke wide-spread and heated response to the extremity of its interpretation, was written by Wisdom's student, Renford Bambrough. In "Universals and Family Resemblances" (1960), Bambrough argued that Wittgenstein had solved the ancient philosophical problem of universals. It is probably this claim that most heated the response, but what specifically made Bambrough's article radical was his analysis of family resemblance— roughly that described above as the third radical thesis—which undermined the ultimate identity of *any* property at all: "In fact it now becomes clear that there is a good sense in which *no two* members of the Churchill family need have *any* feature in common in order for *all* the members of the Churchill family to have the Churchill face" (1960, 191).

We can see here the close affinity between the radical reading of family resemblance and the first and second radical theses. "Churchill face" is just an example of the application of any word. In this example, the members of the Churchill family are the instances in which a word is applied. So, Bambrough's radical thesis here is that "*no two* instances of the application of a word need have *any* feature in common in order for *all* the applications of

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Philosopher of Culture" (1988), and *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (1990).

[3] I have cited Wisdom's short eulogy "Ludwig Wittgenstein 1934-1937," but all of Wisdom's work from "Metaphysics and Verification" (1938) onward is influenced by Wittgenstein, while very little of it is directly about him.

the word to be correct." In other words, every application of every word is arbitrary (shares no features with any other application), and yet the normativity of word application is not compromised: there are many good and perfectly correct uses of the expression "Churchill face" (paraphrasing Cowan). The claim of arbitrariness does not imply "non-normative"; it implies that the source of normativity is other than the sharing of features.[4]

At the end of his essay, Bambrough suggests that similarities and differences exist prior to language, as relations directly between things in the world. This is an apparently unnecessary and probably indefensible falling away from the radical position, and it is the basis for rebuttals in two essays by Dilman, another student of Wisdom. In "Universals: Bambrough on Wittgenstein" (1978) and "Bambrough: 'Universals and Family Resemblances'" (1981), Dilman develops Bambrough's clear and simple statement of Wittgenstein's radical intent into a thorough and detailed reading of family resemblance and its significance in Wittgenstein's philosophy.[5] In correcting Bambrough's admixture of realism into family resemblance, Dilman argues for a fifth thesis characteristic of the radical

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[4] Later in this essay, Bambrough expresses a realism incompatible with the radical reading and with the passage quoted—for which Dilman criticizes him—but in later essays he is characteristically radical. See especially "Objectivity and Objects" (1972) in which he examines Wittgenstein's comment that every application of every word is arbitrary and in which he also connects universals and necessity as parts of the same issue (in effect connecting family resemblance and rule-following). See also "Principia Metaphysica" (1964) and "Articulation and Justification" (1988). In the third chapter I will discuss his essay "How to Read Wittgenstein" (1974a).

[5] I consider these two essays, more than any of the other literature quoted or mentioned so far, to present paradigms of reading Wittgenstein radically. See also Dilman, "Paradoxes and Discoveries" (1974) and *Induction and Deduction: A Study of Wittgenstein* (1973).

reading: Wittgenstein's philosophy is incompatible with any claims about a pre-linguistic reality; the world and language cannot be separated. Dilman formulates this as Wittgenstein's rejection of the possibility of making "ontological" claims: "I take it (and I stand open to correction) that an *ontological* claim is a claim about a *reality* independent of language, one against which language is measured" (1981, 171-2).

Participating in the debate over Bambrough's essay were two other radical readers: Jamil Nammour[6] and Ardon Lyon.[7] Nammour argues, like Dilman, against claims about a pre-linguistic reality, and Lyon argues for the intelligibility of Bambrough's radical thesis, that no Churchill faces need have any common feature. Both are also among the contributors to two books in honor of John Wisdom: *Philosophy and Life*, edited by Dilman, and *Wisdom: Twelve Essays*, edited by Bambrough. Contributing to the first of these is another student of Wisdom's, Roger Shiner, who has written about Cavell as well as about Wisdom and Wittgenstein, always consistently with the radical reading.[8] These are the readers who bear some clear relation to Wisdom and whose work I will be using. Due to this relation to Wisdom, these writers are already somewhat recognizable as related to one another, or, in other words,

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[6] See Nammour, "Resemblances and Universals" (1973) and "Generality and the Importance of the Particular Case" (1984).

[7] See Lyon, "Family Resemblance, Vagueness and Change of Meaning" (1968) and "Criteria and Meaning" (1969).

[8] See Shiner, "Canfield, Cavell and Criteria" (1983), "Wittgenstein and the Foundations of Knowledge" (1978), "Foundationalism, Coherentism and Activism" (1980), "Wittgenstein and Heraclitus: Two River-Images" (1974), "Critical Notice: James Bogen, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Language*" (1973), "From Epistemology to Romance Via Wisdom" (1984), and "Ethical Justification and Case-by-Case Reasoning" (1988).

as a faction within the world of Wittgenstein scholarship. But others are less easily recognized.

Although the various radical theses are connected and tend to come as a group (a family), I generally rely on some form of the first radical thesis to identify radical readers. A striking expression of that thesis is provided by David Bloor in *Wittgenstein: A Social Theory of Knowledge* (1983). Bloor introduces the term "finitism" to refer to this central idea in Wittgenstein's work[9]:

> This ['finitism'] is the thesis that the established meaning of a word does not determine its future applications. The development of a language-game is not determined by its past verbal form. Meaning is created by acts of use. Like the town, it is constructed as we go along. Use determines meaning; meaning does not determine use. The label 'finitism' is appropriate because we are to think of meaning extending as far as, but no further than, the finite range of circumstances in which a word is used. Beyond these current precedents, meaning, application and reference are not yet determined. (1983, 25-6)[10]

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[9] Bloor takes the term "finitism" from Mary Hesse's *The Structure of Scientific Inference* (1974). He is not claiming—nor am I—any connection between his use of the term and any other of its various uses in various fields. That is, he is not claiming that Wittgenstein is a finitist in any sense other than the one he and Hesse define.

[10] See also Bloor, "Left and Right Wittgensteinians" (1992), "Durkheim and Mauss Revisited: Classification and the Sociology of Knowledge" (1982), "Wittgenstein and Mannheim on the Sociology of Mathematics" (1973), "Wittgenstein on Rule Following: The Old and the New Individualism" (1989), "The Question of Linguistic Idealism Revisited" (1996), "Relativism, Rationalism and the Sociology of Knowledge" (Barnes and Bloor 1982), and *Wittgenstein on Rules and Institutions* (scheduled 1997).

Like Cavell, Bloor puts the point in terms of the transition from the past uses of words to the future uses: nothing about the past or present verbal form, the established usage, determines how we will continue in the future.

Bloor also argues for the corollary, the second radical thesis: that we can still determine correct and incorrect applications of words and concepts. He does this in the bulk of his work which is about the sociology of scientific knowledge. Based on Wittgenstein's philosophy, he argues that meaning— the applications of words, the development of language-games—depends on social relations and can be understood sociologically. This subordination of meaning to social relations is the shift from philosophical justification to empirical description of "simply what we do." For Bloor, Wittgenstein's change of question takes the concrete form of a shift from the philosophical theory of knowledge to the sociology of knowledge: the first radical thesis says that there is and can be no deeper guide than social relations to what is and is not a correct application of words or a correct continuation of past practice. The sociology of knowledge is an investigation of the sort of factors that Cavell lists as coordinating our projections of words: "our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor, [etc.] . . . all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life.'" It provides no justification and is not an answer to the traditional philosophical search for reasons but to the empirical question of what we do.

The social focus of Bloor's work raises a sixth radical thesis: the judgments of the community of language users are an essential element in the determination of concept application. For this reason, aspects of the radical reading are sometimes identified as the "community" or "social"

interpretation of Wittgenstein.[11] To capture the radical perspective, I would put the point in a slightly different way. Wittgenstein's philosophy is pervasively concerned with *normativity*, with how it is that some actions, some applications of words or rules, are correct and others incorrect. This sixth radical thesis, then, is that normativity is a feature of human relations and of nothing else. (Or perhaps more precisely, it is a feature of other things only derivatively of human relations.) Consequently, there is nothing independent of our actions against which the correctness of those actions could be measured; the normativity characteristic of words and rules depends on the responsibilities of people to one another. This thesis is obviously related to the fifth, that ontological claims are impossible. It is also closely connected to the first two: the first radical thesis says that there is no normativity *antecedent* to human actions, so that insofar as we are looking to justify those actions they are arbitrary; the second radical thesis says that the uses of words and rules can nevertheless be normative because human beings impose judgments on one another's usage.

These three theses, the first, second and sixth, appear prominently in the last example of radical reading I will examine: Saul Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (1982). This is perhaps the most debated work of secondary literature on Wittgenstein, yet the most striking feature of that debate is that virtually no one agrees with Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein. (The closest thing to unqualified agreement I know of is Bloor's short review

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[11] This theme is not distinctive of radical readers and in chapters three and four I will discuss some of the others who share it, though indeed each of the radical themes may be held by some other scholars.

of the book (1983b).[12]) Kripke says, "The 'paradox' [of *PI* 201] is perhaps the central problem of *Philosophical Investigations*" (7). Developing that idea, his central and most controversial thesis is that Wittgenstein gives a skeptical argument (the paradox) and accepts that it is unanswerable (a point of agreement between him and Cavell (1979, 45)). This is a version of the first radical thesis, that every application of every word is arbitrary. Kripke argues that this entails that meaning cannot be defined in terms of truth conditions, and that Wittgenstein substitutes an understanding of meaning in terms of assertability conditions. This is the second radical thesis: that Wittgenstein changes the philosophical question from an unanswerable search for justification to a question about what we do. I will treat Kripke's book at length in chapter six.

These, then, are the readers of Wittgenstein I consider like-minded enough to constitute a school: Stanley Cavell, Joseph Cowan, John Wisdom, Renford Bambrough, Ilham Dilman, Jamil Nammour, Ardon Lyon, Roger Shiner, David Bloor and Saul Kripke. I make no claim that this list is comprehensive, and I hope it is not.[13] Some of the scholars on this list are

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[12] The only radical reader to write at length about Kripke's book is Cavell (1990), whose position, both sympathetic and critical, I will examine in chapter three. There are other works in partial agreement with Kripke, more or less heavily qualified, such as Meredith Williams's "Blind Obedience: Rules, Community and the Individual" (1991) and H.O. Mounce's "Following a Rule" (1986).

[13] There are others who perhaps should be included. In particular, Stanley Fish's work, in literary theory and legal theory and the problem of interpretation, addresses many of the same issues as Wittgenstein and his commentators, and does so in a manner entirely congruent with the radical reading. Here, for example, is his version of the first radical thesis: "[T]here is no such thing as literal meaning, if by literal meaning one means a meaning

already generally associated, whereas the linking of others is more surprising. I would say that the interest in assembling these scholars as a reading lies mostly in associating Bloor, Cavell, Kripke, and Dilman (who represents here the various students and readers of Wisdom), for these readers might easily appear to be presenting four unrelated readings. Certainly their styles differ widely, and they seem interested in using Wittgenstein's philosophy in different ways, developing it in different directions: Bloor toward a relativist sociology of knowledge; Cavell toward, say, cultural critique; Kripke toward deeper exploration of some traditional philosophical problems; and Wisdom, Dilman, and others toward, perhaps, a better understanding of philosophy itself. My claim is that it is the same philosophy, the same understanding of Wittgenstein, that they carry in all these different directions.

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that is perspicuous no matter what the context and no matter what is in the speaker's or hearer's mind, a meaning that because it is prior to interpretation can serve as a constraint on interpretation" (4). Furthermore, Fish names Wittgenstein first in a list of prominent members of the intellectual tradition in which he stands (577 n12). I have not included him simply because he has not written directly about Wittgenstein. His alternative formulations of the issues are sometimes useful, however, and I shall occasionally refer to them.

Another student of Wisdom, R.J. Newell, should perhaps be on the list, but he too has written little specifically about Wittgenstein. I am inclined to claim O.K. Bouwsma as a radical reader, but his work is so idiosyncratic (probably even more so than Cavell's) that I have not attempted to defend my inclination, and so have not included him. Similarly, Philip R. Shields gives a religious reading of Wittgenstein in *Logic and Sin in the Writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein* that I suspect is essentially the radical reading, but it is in too distinct an idiom for me to attempt the translation. Sometimes I find hints of radical reading too little developed to warrant inclusion. Carolyn McMullen, for example, expresses the first and second radical theses (and perhaps even the fourth) in "In What Sense Is Logic Something Sublime?" (58-9), but only briefly in an article that is mostly about the *Tractatus*. Hints of the radical reading, undeveloped or contradicted or ambiguous, can be found scattered throughout the Wittgenstein literature.

At the distant boundaries of the family resemblance among these readers, Norman Malcolm's work is sometimes very close to the radical reading, and so is Cora Diamond's. The two of them, however, are generally associated with another, and much more established, school of interpretation, which includes, as Bambrough puts it, "the majority of Wittgenstein's closest disciples" (1974a, 127). In chapter three, I will try to distinguish the radical reading from this other school. The two readings are in many ways quite similar, and Malcolm and Diamond et al. certainly have a legitimate claim on the label "radical." (Warren Goldfarb, for one, uses it frequently.) They infer from something like the first radical thesis to a quite radical rejection of philosophizing in general. Consequently, the most visible difference between the two schools concerns the legitimacy or efficacy of our continuing to do "theory," to do philosophy at all, which the radical readers do not relinquish. I believe this visible difference signals deeper differences not easily articulated but appropriate to the distinction "different schools of thought."

I have now articulated a few theses characteristic of the radical reading of Wittgenstein:

1) Every application of every word is arbitrary, or, in other words, nothing guides our projections of words into new circumstances.

2) Wittgenstein thereby changes the philosophical question from a search for justification (i.e. for a demonstration that our actions are non-arbitrary) to a description of what, in the absence of justification, we do; or, as we might put it, he directs the focus away from *being* and toward *calling*.

3) Family resemblance is an account of all language, of how any language at all can come to have meaning and generality (it is not an empirical description of the structure of some concepts).

4) Wittgenstein's examinations of family resemblance and rule-following both address the same issue, the generality of words.

5) The world and language cannot be separated and compared, and therefore "ontological" claims—claims about a reality independent of language—are impossible.

6) all normativity is constituted by relations between people, so no question of correctness or incorrectness, specifically about the applications of words and rules, can arise independent of a community.

This is a basic introduction to the radical reading.

To go beyond a basic introduction, we must begin to address the impression of paradox here. Specifically, the first thesis may seem too strong, so that the second thesis—or indeed *any* positive statement—seems impossible. In the next chapter, I will examine the nature of paradox in the radical reading and the possibility of positive description. In chapters three, four, and five, I will compare the radical reading with other interpretations of Wittgenstein in the literature. In chapter three I compare it to the established reading with which it has the closest sympathies—that of Malcolm and Diamond—and in particular address the charge that the radical readers are still doing philosophical theory (of a sort Wittgenstein rejects). In chapter four I examine some other "community" interpretations. In chapter five I contrast the radical reading with a more distant and very widely held competitor. I examine a representative of that competing school of

Wittgenstein interpretation, David Pears's *The False Prison*. Lastly, in chapter six, I will examine criticisms (including Pears's) of the only radical interpretation extensively discussed in the literature, Saul Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language.*

Chapter 2.

Paradox and Radicality.

We have seen several versions of the first radical thesis: "every application of every word is arbitrary" (Wittgenstein); "nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections" (Cavell); "each of our judgments is independent" (Cowan); "the established meaning of a word does not determine its future applications" (Bloor). Radical readers also express this as a sympathy for skepticism: Cavell writes of "the truth of skepticism, or what I might call the moral of skepticism, namely, that the human creature's basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing, anyway not what we think of as knowing" (1979, 241); and Kripke says, "Wittgenstein holds, with the sceptic, that there is no fact as to whether I mean plus or [any other rule]" (70-1). Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of the radical reading of Wittgenstein is that it takes him not to draw back from this seemingly paradoxical thesis or to be discouraged by its skeptical quality, nor to try to overcome it, but indeed to accept it and to argue that we can still account for meaning, intending, concept application, rules, judgment, and so on, in despite of the thesis's truth.

The radical reader most associated with the concept of "paradox" is Wisdom. In Wisdom's hands, though, the concept is both more problematic and less unacceptable than it is usually considered. The title essay in his collection *Paradox and Discovery* is all about the importance of paradox to genuine learning and progress. To Wisdom, paradox can be a sign of philosophical penetration as well as of philosophical confusion (e.g. 1953,

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100-1). His respect for Wittgenstein's apparently paradoxical radical thesis is consistent with a respect for paradox generally prevalent in his work. Clearly, though, he uses "paradox" in a broader sense than many philosophers do. In "A Feature of Wittgenstein's Technique," Wisdom says (of Matthew Arnold), "Because what he says is at once reflective and paradoxical, so that the thought it calls for runs counter to our usual habits, we may perhaps call his words philosophical" (1965, 97). In this passage, "paradoxical" is close to synonymous with "radical" (and apparently an essential component of "philosophical" as well). What is paradoxical cannot, then, be assumed to be wrong.

We need to look carefully at the radical thesis, at the nature of the apparent paradox it presents, in order to understand how it can be accepted. In this chapter I will first explore the logic of the radical thesis, then introduce Wittgenstein's positive account of meaning in light of that thesis. I will then consider how the radical reading can hope to make its case compelling despite apparently rejecting the very concept of logical or argumentive compulsion, and end by suggesting an historical perspective on just how radical Wittgenstein's project is. I hope to show that the paradoxical quality of the radical reading does not show it to be unacceptable and is not a symptom of confusion. If Wisdom is right, paradox in Wittgenstein's work is due to its being both radical and profound, and is not something to be explained away.

The Paradox of the First Thesis

If our applications of words, rules and concepts are independent of, undetermined by, and uninsured by past judgments, established meanings, or

indeed *anything*—in a word, if they are arbitrary—then what could possibly distinguish right judgments and applications from wrong ones? How can radical readers assert the first thesis, and then say that there are nevertheless good and correct uses of words and rules. In particular, what makes the radical thesis itself any more right than its negation? This, I believe, is roughly the intuitive response that there is something paradoxical here.

Wittgenstein and his radical readers do not claim that this response is mistaken about the radical thesis so much as that it is mistaken about what normativity requires: "And the mistake which we here and in a thousand similar cases are inclined to make is labeled by the word 'to make' as we have used it in the sentence 'It is no act of insight which makes us use the rule as we do', because there is an idea that 'something must make us' do what we do" (*BB* 143). The same mistake occurs in "What makes the radical thesis right?" There is no *thing* that makes it right, no past or present state of affairs that distinguishes right from wrong judgments or applications (or theses).[1] We might get past this initial intuitive response, then, with a comparably

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[1] Bambrough explores this same issue or a closely related one in an ambitious and remarkable essay called "Objectivity and Objects" (1972). He characterizes the intuition in question here as "the idea that objectivity requires an object," which, he says, "has more than its obscurity in common with Wittgenstein's obscure remark that 'we have the idea that the meaning of a word is an object'" (65). He goes on to discuss the importance of overcoming this intuition:

> The epistemological notion of objectivity is quite distinct from the ontological notion of the existence of objects. But in philosophical discussion the two notions are repeatedly and disastrously confounded. To understand the relation between objectivity and objects is to understand the relation between ontology and epistemology, and to be able to find one's way out of mazes of perplexity about universals and logical necessity. (65)

rough reply that right and wrong can be distinguished pragmatically, by the responses they provoke. (This is the shift of question that the second radical thesis demands.) However, intuitions that are dissatisfied with the thesis will probably be dissatisfied with this reply as well. So although we do not want to surrender the radical thesis to hasty reactions, we need to go further into the intuition of paradoxicality in order to vindicate (or at least understand) that thesis.

Wittgenstein's shift of question seems not fully to meet the criticism against the radical thesis. There still remains a sense of paradox that might be sketched as follows. The first radical thesis denies the possibility of a certain distinction (or set of distinctions) (e.g. arbitrary versus non-arbitrary), and the second radical thesis accordingly shifts our perspective away from requiring it. But once the original perspective is abandoned, the identity of what is being denied is not really fixed, and that distinction can immediately be recreated within the new perspective. A couple of analogies will illustrate this logic. Suppose, for example, that we deny the distinction between public property and private property, arguing that all property is at public disposition. The distinction can be recreated solely by public disposition of public property: "The public assigns discretionary use of this property to John Doe, such property to be known hereafter as 'John Doe's private property'; and it assigns discretionary use of that other property to the Park Service, to be known as 'public property.'" Or suppose we deny the distinction between objective truth and majority opinion. It can be recreated by majority opinion alone: "It is the majority's opinion that '2+2=4' is objectively true, regardless of majority opinion; but the majority believes that 'Bach is a better composer than Bartok'

is only the majority opinion and not objectively true." We might think that the recreated distinction is different and merely uses the same words. Without some fixed meaning, though, the recreated distinction cannot be distinguished from the original, rejected distinction. Without appealing to some independent notion of private property or objective truth—the very possibility that has been rejected—we cannot say that the "new" notions are different from what those concepts always were. Therefore, the shift of perspective vanishes and we cannot say whether anything has really changed. I will try to explain this logic of the radical thesis using Wittgenstein's version: "every application of every word is arbitrary."

We might ordinarily think of word application as occurring on a spectrum from arbitrary to non-arbitrary. Non-arbitrary applications would be in accord with the word's meaning, their correctness would be determined by that meaning—or, to rely less on the abstraction "meaning," non-arbitrary applications would accord with applications of the word on other occasions. Arbitrary applications, in contrast, would be at the speaker's discretion, unconstrained by meaning and determined only by the speaker's desires. "Arbitrary" does not, then, imply "random" or "undirected"; we call the whims of a king arbitrary, and yet they may be influenced by any number of things, and even be predictable. So it would not be correct to equate the spectrum from arbitrary to non-arbitrary with one from unconstrained to constrained, for the contrast here is between constraint *by* people and constraint by meaning *on* people. Nor would it be correct to equate it with a contrast between non-normative and normative. What is in question is not the presence of normativity but rather its *source* and its relation to social

sanctions. Normativity itself only comes indirectly into question: only to the extent that we do not recognize constraint by people as genuine normativity does the radical thesis imply the absence of all normativity.

Given this relocation of normativity to relations between language users, it is natural that radical readers should sometimes put the issue of meaning and correct next use in terms of *responsibility*. If there is nothing deeper than our present actions, nothing beyond our actions which justifies them, then there is nothing to which we are responsible except each other. Bloor compares a passage of Wittgenstein's with one from Michael Dummett's well-known critique of Wittgenstein. Dummett expresses the traditional view: "we have a responsibility to the sense we have already given to the words of which the statement is composed" (Dummett 438). This is the view the radical reading specifically rejects in claiming that nothing guides our projections; how we could fulfill such a responsibility is precisely what it finds Wittgenstein problematizing. Wittgenstein says, "one is responsible to certain things. The new meaning must be such that we who have had a certain training will find it useful in certain ways" (*LFM* 66). Bloor points out the contrast: "But notice the subtle difference between how Wittgenstein and his critic construe that responsibility. For Dummett we have [a] responsibility to the *sense* of existing concepts. For Wittgenstein this ultimately reduces to a responsibility to the *users* of the concept. The responsibility is to 'we who have had a certain training'" (Bloor 1983a, 121). To Bloor, this shift in responsibility is a central theme in Wittgenstein's work, and he expresses it at the beginning of his own book: "The things we had seen ourselves as answerable *to*, we are now answerable *for*. So the body of work that we are

about to examine redraws the boundaries of responsibility; it is a subtle attempt to change our cultural self-consciousness" (Bloor 1983a, 3). If we cannot be responsible to anything but one another, then our very concepts of normativity and justification are subtly changed.[2] The arbitrariness of our word applications implies not a loss of normativity but a different basis for it.

The extremity of the first radical thesis implies that Wittgenstein is *not* trying to move us to a different place on the spectrum from arbitrary to non-arbitrary, a place toward the arbitrary end of that spectrum. On the contrary, the point of the radical thesis is to move us entirely off that spectrum by moving us to the absolute extreme, where the very idea of non-arbitrary application of words (concepts, rules) is completely obliterated (and therefore so is the distinction between arbitrary and non-arbitrary). That is, the radical thesis claims that the idea of constraint by meaning, *as opposed to* constraint by people, is incoherent. Anything short of this absolute extreme, any exceptions or qualifications to the arbitrariness of word application, would

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[2] Fish and Cavell make similar points. Fish says of the first radical thesis:
> [It evokes] an ancient tension between a notion of truth as something independent of local, partial perspectives and a notion of truth as whatever seems perspicuous and obvious to those embedded in some local, partial perspective. It is the difference between a truth that judges human achievements and a truth that *is* a human achievement, inseparable finally from the "mere notions of men." (1989, 5)

(Of course, it is the latter in each case that the radical thesis implies.) Cavell writes about the emphasis in Wittgenstein's work on our responsibility for the stability of meaning, and its connection to our resistance to his radical philosophy: ". . . what I have expressed as my being responsible for whatever stability our criteria may have, and I do not want this responsibility; it mars my wish for sublimity" (1990, 92). Wittgenstein's shift of responsibility to *us* (constraint *by* people) is prominent in the radical reading.

crucially misrepresent the radical thesis by retaining some vestige of the idea of being constrained by meaning. That would leave us still believing that there are two different kinds of constraint, and so would defeat the purpose of the first radical thesis: to eliminate the very idea of constraint-by-meaning as something *given*, so that we can turn to the question of how constraint-by-meaning is *constituted* (i.e. the change that is the second radical thesis).

The first radical thesis, then, is both more extreme and less extreme than it might appear. It might appear to claim that words are relatively more arbitrary than we usually think. But it is more extreme than that: it claims they are absolutely arbitrary. By being more extreme, Wittgenstein eliminates a certain wrong perspective so that we can move on to a new perspective which is fundamentally different. But this new perspective is itself *less* extreme than it first appears. It might appear to imply that anything anybody does is right. But it is less extreme than that: it implies only that right and wrong are dependent on the judgments people make on one another. Only by absolutely rejecting the coherence of the idea of constraint by meaning as opposed to constraint by people (more extreme) can we reconstitute that idea of constraint by meaning on a different basis, as a form of constraint by people (less extreme).

This is a point on which the radical reading has been misunderstood. Wittgenstein is *not* doing what one critic took one radical reader to claim he is doing: "He thinks that Wittgenstein is simply trying to demonstrate that language is much more precariously based than we take it to be when we use it so confidently in everyday life" (Pears 463). Showing language as "much more precariously based" would be moving us along the spectrum toward the

arbitrary end. It should be clear that the metaphor of language being "precariously based" is precisely the wrong metaphor for what radical readers think Wittgenstein is doing, because it retains the idea of language being based, the idea that Wittgenstein eliminates. A better metaphor for the radical thesis is one Wittgenstein himself suggests (for explanations): language "hangs in the air" (*PI* 87) (though Wittgenstein rejects this metaphor too because the physical impossibility still encourages our expectation of a base). The two metaphors have entirely different effects and implications. Imagine a wine glass perched overhanging the edge of a table. Now imagine a wine glass hovering unsupported over the floor. Entirely different things are going on in these two pictures. It is crucial to the radical reading of Wittgenstein that he is not merely trying, say, to increase our respect for social factors in word application or to make us less complacent about the logical determination of rules like "plus two." Rather he removes logic and meaning entirely from the status of being fundamental: they are artifacts of what we do. Hence the extremity of the first radical thesis, which tolerates no hint of exception: every application of every word is arbitrary.

We are so close at this point to two more typical features of the radical reading that it is worth pausing to remark them. (Since the first thesis is at the heart of that reading and touches many aspects of it, our exploration of that thesis will provide us the opportunity to gain a fuller picture of the radical reading generally. There are more resemblances among radical readers than just the six theses presented last chapter, and I will point out other characteristic features in the course of our exploration.)

First, just as the issue here is not about relatively greater or less arbitrariness, so Wittgenstein's discussions of family resemblance and the sharpness or fuzziness of the boundaries of concepts are not in any important respect about *vagueness*. The issue is indeterminacy, not inexactness. It concerns the nature of the boundaries of concepts, whether sharp or fuzzy, not how fuzzy-boundaried concepts can be usable. (This is implied by the third radical thesis described last chapter, that family resemblance is of universal scope.)

Second, the contrast here between non-arbitrary (constrained by meanings) and arbitrary (constrained only by people) illustrates a small point in a debate that is on the margins of the radical reading. Radical readers are generally sympathetic to the claim that Wittgenstein is a "conservative" philosopher. This claim is most prominently made by J.C. Nyiri in several essays and by Bloor (1983a, chapter 8) (whom Nyiri credits as his original source for the idea (Nyiri 1976, 116 n7)). Critics of this claim acknowledge that Wittgenstein was personally conservative, but separate Wittgenstein from his philosophy and deny that his *philosophy* is conservative:[3] "Wittgenstein the man and Wittgenstein the philosopher are two different beings and we should give no theoretical weight to his personal convictions" (Jones 276). In contrast, radical readers, though they do *not* infer philosophical conservatism from Wittgenstein's personal convictions, would tend to agree with Erich Heller's description of him: "The sight of a thought that was detachable from

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[3] See the rebuttals to Nyiri and Bloor by Joachim Schulte, "Wittgenstein and Conservatism," Andrew Lugg, "Was Wittgenstein a Conservative Thinker?", and K. Jones, "Is Wittgenstein a Conservative Philosopher?"

a man filled him with loathing" (91). The disputed claim here is that Wittgenstein's philosophy explains and defends the deep reasons for cultural conservatism, that, as Nyiri says, "Wittgenstein's conceptual analyses can in fact be regarded as a kind of foundation of conservatism" (1982, 61).

In support of Nyiri's and Bloor's view, the first radical thesis provides an example of the way in which Wittgenstein's philosophy is conservative. The idea that every application of every word is arbitrary amounts to saying that the idea of constraint by meanings (or rules) as opposed to constraint by people is unintelligible, that such constraint always necessarily comes down, in the end, to constraint by people. What the radical thesis articulates, then, is a complete rejection of the liberal political principle that society should be governed by laws rather than by men. It says that governance always necessarily comes down, in the end, to governance by men, and so the very concept of governance by laws *as opposed to* by men is unintelligible; this opposition is ultimately a false opposition. (This is also implied by the sixth radical thesis, that only human relations are normative.) If we can take as characteristic of conservatism this resistance to the liberal wish to displace men with laws,[4] then the radical reading finds an argument for at least one

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[4] In general, this debate is bedeviled by vagueness or confusion about the notion of "conservatism" at issue. Nyiri and Bloor clearly ally Wittgenstein with the German conservatism described at length by Karl Mannheim in "Conservative Thought" (1927). (Since this conservatism is part of the wider cultural and historical movement of Romanticism, Cavell's connection of skepticism with romanticism (e.g. 1979, 465) is relevant here.) None of the three rebuttals mentions Mannheim at all, and Jones cites a summary of conservatism by Anthony Quinton which claims that the *liberal* principle I mention—"the government of laws is to be preferred to the government of men" (278)—expresses a central *conservative* theme (puzzlingly, the theme of

element of conservatism generated by the most central themes of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

The puzzling, or paradoxical, quality of the first radical thesis lies in Wittgenstein's having taken an apparently destructive, negative property—arbitrariness—and applied it absolutely universally. It would seem, consequently, to negate and destroy itself. So we must be careful of what Wittgenstein could mean by "arbitrary." I have been using "arbitrary" as meaning, roughly, "constrained by people." But we may be tempted to treat arbitrariness as the antithesis of normativity, and then we cannot understand Wittgenstein. The applications of words and rules are obviously *not* arbitrary in that sense. In fact, it is precisely the non-arbitrary (the normative) characteristic of language that we are seeking to understand. There is a right and wrong about using words. If Wittgenstein's radical thesis is to help us understand language, then the idea that words are arbitrary (in a sense) must help bring us around to seeing in what way they are not arbitrary (in another sense).[5]

We can begin to unravel this puzzle by noting the two different contrasts evoked by the word "arbitrary": the contrast between constraint by meanings and constraint by people; and the contrast between normative and

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mistrusting abstract theorizing, as if laws were concrete and people were abstract).

[5] Both Bambrough and Shiner report that Wisdom commented that "Wittgenstein was using the word 'arbitrary' in a highly arbitrary manner" (Bambrough 1972, 76; cf. Shiner 1973, 695). Since they do not give citations, I presume Wisdom's comment was in lecture or conversation, so I do not know its context or intent. As I understand the radical reading, though, Wisdom's comment should not be a criticism of Wittgenstein's radical thesis but rather a hint at its logic which I am trying to develop.

not. The radical thesis concerns the former, but the impression that it is objectionably paradoxical or self-refuting turns, I believe, largely on thinking it entails the latter. From a certain perspective, the transition from a thesis about constraint to a rejection of normativity seems natural. If it seems intuitively obvious that actions are inadequate to constitute normativity, or that they themselves presuppose normativity, then it will seem obvious that constraint only by people entails no normativity at all. This is the perspective from which the first radical thesis seems intolerably paradoxical.

The seriousness of the clash of intuitions or perspectives here cannot be exaggerated. The status of truth itself is at stake. Truth exists only where there is normativity, a right and wrong in the use of language (cf. *PI* 241), so Wittgenstein's radical thesis is certainly a challenge to the fundamental status of truth, its status as something to which our words conform (*to* which we are responsible). The radical thesis claims that there is something prior to truth, something deeper, which is human action. Not surprisingly, one of the central texts of the radical reading, quoted by most radical readers, is Wittgenstein's statement that "the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting* that lies at the bottom of the language-game"(*OC* 204).[6] The radical perspective is committed to the idea that the issue of constraint (our acting) is logically prior to that of normativity. The idea that either mistaken or correct usage (normativity) *presupposes* that we make judgments in conformity with

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[6] The same idea is expressed by Goethe's line, "In the beginning was the deed," quoted by Wittgenstein in both *On Certainty* (402) and "Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness" (*Philosophia*, vol. 6, nos. 3-4 (1976)) (415).

others (constraint by people) is a common theme in Wittgenstein's work: "If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments" (*PI* 242); "In order to make a mistake, a man must already judge in conformity with mankind" (*OC* 156). From the perspective under attack, though, normativity requires constraint by meanings; the very concept of normativity is connected to the justification of our actions, especially to judging whether one person's actions (e.g. use of a word) conform to those of others. It must, therefore, be prior to those actions. So normativity itself—on this perspective—acquires content only by conformity to something besides other people, basically conformity to the truth or to reality.[7] The clash between these two perspectives will reappear throughout our exploration of the radical thesis.

The contrast between constraint by meanings and by people translates readily into the idiom of *being* versus *calling*. In that idiom, the radical thesis says that there is no sense to the idea of what something really is *as opposed to* what it is called (just as, following Wittgenstein's definition of meaning as use, there is no sense to the idea of what a word really means as opposed to

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[7] The subordination of truth and reality to human action may suggest idealism. There has been some literature on the topic of idealism in Wittgenstein's philosophy, and indeed the radical reading is, by and large, sympathetic to the value of exploring that connection. See G.E.M. Anscombe, "The Question of Linguistic Idealism" (1976), and especially Bloor's further development in "The Question of Linguistic Idealism Revisited" (1996a), and also Bloor, "Idealism and the Sociology of Knowledge" (1996b). Radical readers also sometimes draw an analogy between Wittgenstein and Berkeley (see Kripke (64)). However, Wittgenstein's emphasis on *actions* rather than ideas, and his explicit subordination of ideas, distinguish him from the idealist tradition.

how we use it). Put another way, things do not have identities independent of what they are called ("words are not a translation of something else that was there before they were" (Z 191)). The act of calling is constitutive of identity. The logic of the first radical thesis starts to get complicated by the somewhat disorienting consequence of this: that any distinctions Wittgenstein might deny can be constituted or reconstituted by our use of words, by our acts of identifying and calling. That is, even if there is no such thing as "being" independent of "calling," there is still *what we call* "being" as opposed to what we call "calling" (or "being called"). Likewise, there is what we call "constraint by meaning" as opposed to what we call "constraint by people." So, there may be no such thing as constraint by meaning (as opposed to by people) and yet we may be constrained by people to call this "constraint by meaning" and that "constraint by people," or to call this "arbitrary" and that "non-arbitrary." This may be confusing (and it will get more so), but there is nothing paradoxical (in the strong sense of contradictory) here, and nothing incompatible with normativity, with a contrast between correct and incorrect. The thesis has puzzling aspects, nevertheless, including a logic that might warrant the label "paradoxical" (though in the sense in which Wisdom uses the term).

If we take the logic of the radical thesis only this far, it seems to say that we cannot talk about being, about the way things really are, but that we can speak *as if* that were what we were doing. Given the radical thesis, though, can Wittgenstein say of a certain application of a word or rule that we *call* it "non-arbitrary" and "correct" and "determined by the meaning of the rule," but that *really* it is arbitrary? What would the "really" mean in such a case?

Surely this is precisely the distinction the radical thesis rejects. If it rejects the very idea of *being* as opposed to *calling*, then it cannot say, "This is what we *call* real, but it isn't really real," or "This is what we *call* the correct application of 'plus two,' but really it's arbitrary." That is, in talking about what we call things (the use of a word in the language), we are still telling the way things really are, as much as anything can be such telling. To hold the two apart is implicitly incompatible with the first radical thesis (and is explicitly rejected by the fifth radical thesis, that the world and language cannot be separated and ontological claims are impossible).[8] So the radical thesis cannot seriously deny what it seems to deny. Instead, like the definition of meaning as use, it resurrects what it seems to destroy. We can still make all the usual distinctions: between arbitrary and non-arbitrary, dependent and independent, constrained, guided, insured, determined, or not, and so on. All are now prefaced with "We are constrained by people to call this . . .", but the very universality of this preface renders it vacuous. We can, as it were, factor this phrase out or "divide through" by it and say simply, "This is . . . ."[9]

Though not contradictory, then, the radical thesis does seem to defeat itself in some way. It seems, for example, to defeat its own corollary, the second radical thesis, that Wittgenstein shifts the question from how things are to what we do. As the discussion just presented argues, we can focus on what we do, but the first radical thesis makes it impossible to say that this is

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[8] cf. *OC* 321 and Shiner's explication of *OC* 321, *OC* 83, and *PG* 89 (1978, 111-2).
[9] This characteristic of the radical thesis is explored by Fish in the form of the claim that "theory" has no consequences, and so the rejection of theory also has no consequences. See his essay "Consequences" (1985, 1989), which I will discuss briefly in the next chapter.

shifting away from looking at how things are.[10] If every application of every word is arbitrary, then such claims as "This is the real, honest-to-God, non-arbitrary truth," or "This theory describes the timeless structure of reality" are just as legitimate as (no more arbitrary than) "This is how it seems to me," or "This is simply what I do." Rather than destroying everything in an impossible nihilism—as it might at first appear to do—the radical thesis destroys nothing at all, perhaps even touches nothing at all. This is the paradox.

We seem to be having trouble pinning down the first radical thesis. What exactly does Wittgenstein mean by saying that every application of every word is arbitrary? Clearly there is some sort of ambiguity or instability in the meaning of that thesis. Depending on the context, it seems either a very strong thesis or else an empty one. I believe the qualifying phrase, "depending on the context," is the key to clarifying it. One way to get at what is important about the context is to consider logical priority. If we are asking about word or concept or rule application *prior* to what we do, independent of our judgments of one another, then the radical thesis is a strong rejection of the question, saying such application is arbitrary. In that context, the two senses of "arbitrary" would collapse together because prior to the actions of people "constraint only by people" can entail no constraint at all (applications would then be arbitrary in the strong sense of "non-normative"). That is, if we expect to *justify* our collective behavior, or justify individual behavior

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[10] This point is made by Gideon Rosen (as a complaint) against Robert Brandom's argument for a version of the first radical thesis. I will consider their exchange in chapter four.

without reference to the collective, then the radical thesis rebukes us, saying that "there would be neither accord nor conflict here" (*PI* 201). If, however, we are asking about applications in light of what we do, a context in which justification can only be to one another and relative to what we accept, then the radical thesis does not apply and raises no objection. To express it slightly differently, "*outside* a particular language-game" (*PI* 47) our questions have no answers (the answers are arbitrary, in the strong sense of lacking normativity); within a language-game they are answered according to the customs and norms of the game.

This all sounds deceptively simple, as if we could state the conditions under which the radical thesis implies various things, and in that way pin it down. But the thesis is more difficult than that, and more radical.[11] The trouble is that, taken seriously, it entails that *nothing* can be said outside a particular language-game, or even that the very concept "outside any game" is nonsense. So there are no conditions under which the radical thesis applies. If we think of it as a truth claim, then, it will have no substance because the conditions under which it would be true can never be met. There are no conditions under which every application of every word is truly arbitrary, or each of our judgments independent, or the applications of words undetermined by their established meanings. To those who insist on the relevance of truth conditions, this will make the radical thesis appear all the more paradoxical, or even meaningless. But on the radical reading, it is

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[11] This point is at the heart of the disagreement between the radical reading and that of Malcolm and Diamond et al., which I will discuss next chapter. The radical complaint will be that Diamond thinks we can see just when the radical thesis would and would not apply.

perfectly consistent: the truth of the thesis is only called forth by what we do, and recedes when we change what we do in response to it.[12] Instead of a truth claim, the thesis seems like an argument *in potentia* which depends not on impossible conditions but on the assumptions and intentions of arguers: insofar as arguers aspire to speak outside a particular language-game or to justify rule applications independent of a community of rule-followers, they create the conditions that give Wittgenstein's radical thesis teeth.[13]

The elusiveness of the radical thesis reflects the elusiveness of Wittgenstein's philosophy. The question of what exactly it means is exactly the question it rejects, for implicit in that question is the expectation that the

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[12] Put another way, the first radical thesis is not literally true; but as it itself says (in Fish's version now, quoted in chapter one), there is no such thing as literal meaning, nor, consequently, any such state as being literally true. By literal meaning, says Fish, "one means a meaning that is perspicuous no matter what the context and no matter what is in the speaker's or hearer's mind, a meaning that because it is prior to interpretation can serve as a constraint on interpretation" (1989, 4). I am adapting a loose idea of "literally true" by combining this with *PI* 241: "'So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?'—It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use." The truth of the radical thesis depends on its use in certain contexts against certain philosophical inclinations of speakers and hearers.

[13] The radical reading practices here what it preaches. Kripke argues that Wittgenstein rejects a theory of meaning as truth conditions in favor of "assertibility conditions":

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

The significance of the first radical thesis depends not on any truth conditions but on the conditions under which people might perceive it as a challenge or obstacle to their beliefs.

meaning will tell us what to do, how to respond to it. That is, we assume that knowing the meaning of the radical thesis will guide us in using it, but Wittgenstein overturns that assumption: "the meaning of a word [or thesis or philosophy] is its use in the language" (*PI* 43); "Use determines meaning; meaning does not determine use" (Bloor 1983a, 25). What the radical thesis claims, as well as illustrates, is that nothing is ever really pinned down.[14] Kripke puts the point explicitly in terms of theses (rather than of words), though he expresses the converse problem of pinning down not Wittgenstein's thesis but what it opposes:

> The danger comes when we try to give a precise formulation of exactly what it is that we *are* denying—what 'erroneous

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[14] Radical readers of Wittgenstein take the rejection of fixity as central to the first thesis of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Wisdom claims that "'The application (every application) of every word is arbitrary' . . . is connected with the question 'Can you play chess without the queen?'" (1965, 88). This question challenges fixity using "chess." Dilman emphasizes that the point applies to all words (in a passage that is almost a paraphrase or elaboration of Wittgenstein's radical thesis):

> We think that once we have got hold of the essence, we will be able to continue the series, go on to apply the word correctly in instance after instance without further ado. Wittgenstein replies: "There is no such thing here as, so to say, a wheel that he is to catch hold of, the right machine which, once chosen, will carry him on automatically" (Z. § 304). That is even if all the cases in which it is correct to apply a particular word shared a common essence, this would still not do for us what we hope from it. This hope cannot be fulfilled in the case of *any* word and is a symptom of confusion. (1978, 43)

Bloor illustrates the point by applying it to an example we might think is simple enough to escape the radical thesis: "We can say that all brothers are male. . . . But once the concept of 'maleness' becomes involved in research or speculation about the nature of sexuality, its simplicity vanishes like the morning dew" (1983a, 37). Neither essences nor truth conditions fix meaning, even for a word like "brother."

> interpretation' our opponent is placing on ordinary means of expression. It may be hard to do this without producing yet another statement that, we must admit, is *still* 'perfectly all right, properly understood'. (70)

Both a thesis like "All word application is arbitrary" and an opposing thesis like "A rule determines its applications" can be perfectly all right, properly understood. Our goal, then, must be to understand the radical thesis properly, not to find some way of stating or describing it that will stand impervious to interpretive misconstrual. The thesis, and the reading of which it is a part, specifically reject the idea that proper understanding consists in finding stable expressions.

To appreciate just how radical the first thesis is, we need to go one step further. It is a step that is implied by several of the radical theses presented last chapter and much of the discussion so far, but I will present it explicitly as the seventh radical thesis. It codifies the elusiveness of the first thesis, and is essentially a caution to maintain the radicality of that thesis, a caution against the temptation to fall, unnoticing, back into ways of thinking that it rejects. We can get at the problem by considering an obvious objection to the first radical thesis.

The objection in question is something of a hostile version of the foregoing treatment of the elusive or paradoxical quality of the radical thesis. One might object that the shift from being to calling accomplishes nothing at all because exactly the same issue recurs in this new arena: *is* this what I/we call X? If we can identify a certain object or action as *what we call* X, then presumably we are able to identify the being of at least some things: acts of calling. So being retains its priority. Or if it does not, then what makes

anything what we call X? The very arguments that call into question our ability to identify this as X should equally undermine our ability to identify this as what we call X. Put another way, we could not know what we are constrained by people to call X unless we could recognize X; so X must already have an identity, which is equivalent to our being constrained by the meaning of X.

As far as it goes—which is not far enough—this objection is fairly innocuous, and it shows that radical readers must do something more than simply invoke our customary practices. The intent of the radical thesis is not simply to substitute calling for being, a move we might call "naive conventionalism."[15] Several formulations of the thesis emphasize this. For instance, Bloor's definition of Wittgenstein's finitism as "the thesis that the established meaning of a word does not determine its future applications" (1983a, 25) basically says that conventional usage does not determine future (or correct) usage. Kripke's formulation especially clearly challenges the simple substitution of calling: he frames the whole issue as the problem of how there is any relation at all between what we call "plus" and any new (future) situation. As Kripke argues, Wittgenstein's problem is how "68+57=125" is any more *what we call* "addition" (what I called "addition" in the past) than is "68+57=5" what we call "addition." It seems, then, that the radical thesis undermines calling as much as it does being.[16]

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[15] I will address the radical reading's relation to conventionalism briefly in chapter four.

[16] For this reason, Kripke's introduction of "assertibility conditions" cannot be a simple substitution of conventions for truth conditions (calling for being).

If the radical reading undermines calling as well as being, what has it left itself to say? The trouble here is due to the ubiquity of the habits of thought Wittgenstein is trying to change. When confronted with the rejection of one thing we look for something else with an already given identity. When we ask, "*Is* this what we call X?" we are still looking for a fixed foundation by asking after the identity of our calling, the being of calling. But this is not radical enough; it is a mere displacement of our usual habits back one level. The radical thesis is that *nothing* is really fixed (every application of every word is arbitrary), including what we call X or have called X or customarily call X. The constraint by people that the radical thesis appeals to is not general or past or customary constraints but the action taken right now, every instant. Everything is always radically unsettled. We just *treat* various things as settled, but our treating them so is again only present behavior, constantly required to constitute them *as* settled. This is why each of the expressions of the radical thesis quoted last chapter emphasizes a radical split between the past and the present (future). What is fundamental for Wittgenstein is something that has no past, that exists (which is the wrong word) only in the ever-ephemeral present.

Perhaps the point can be illuminated this way. For Wittgenstein, the question "*Is* this what we call X?" is still too close to what he is rejecting, and cannot be a fundamental question. It is miscast because the word "is" presupposes what has yet to be established. A superior formulation of that question would be "Should I call this X?" This question asks about present behavior. The tradition of thought that Wittgenstein is trying to overturn (the perspective from which the first radical thesis seems intolerably

paradoxical) takes the second question to be derivative of the first: if this *is* (what is called) X, then I should call it X.[17] Wittgenstein's philosophy argues that the first question makes no sense and has no answer until the second has been answered: if I should call it X, then it is X. The contrast between the questions "Is this what we call X?" and "Should I call this X?" and the dispute over their relative priority suggest a particular way of formulating the radical implications of Wittgenstein's philosophy. The former question is a factual one, and the latter is a moral one. The former asks after what is true and the latter asks after what is good. The conflict here suggests the ancient philosophical dispute over the relative priority of the True and the Good. In those terms, Wittgenstein argues against a tradition that gives priority to the True and argues in favor of the antecedent moral component of all truth, that is, the priority of the Good. I will say a little more about this issue later in the chapter. For now, the point is that the notion of "calling" that the radical reading invokes is prior to facts and is missed by questions like "Is this called X?" or "What exactly are we constrained by people to do?"

The priority of action that radical readers find at the heart of Wittgenstein's philosophy is easily lost in the process of philosophically pinning things down. Read radically, when Wittgenstein says that "it is our *acting* that lies at the bottom of the language-game" (*OC* 204), he really means "acting" as immediately present, active, ever-changing behavior, not as past actions or patterns of acting or any other such reification of acting. By our acting is the language-game constantly being created. One way Wittgenstein

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[17] In Bambrough's terms—see footnote 1 above—we have the idea that objectivity [I should call this X] requires an object [it is X].

sometimes tries to get at this idea of an acting (calling) that has no past (is antecedent to facts) is by introducing and then retracting the concept of "decision":

> It is no act of insight, intuition, which makes us use the rule as we do at the particular point of the series. It would be less confusing to call it an act of decision, though this too is misleading, for nothing like an act of decision must take place, but possibly just an act of writing or speaking. (*BB* 143)

> "No; what I meant was, that he should write the next but one number after *every* number that he wrote; and from this all those propositions [the whole even number series] follow in turn."—But that is just what is in question: what, at any stage, does follow from that sentence. Or, again, what, at any stage we are to call "being in accord" with that sentence (and with the *mean*-ing you then put into the sentence—whatever that may have consisted in). It would almost be more correct to say, not that an intuition was needed at every stage, but that a new decision was needed at every stage. (*PI* 186)

One decides on something that is as yet undecided, and so, by one's action, gives an identity to what had none. The idea of a decision here is a device to make vivid that the issue was undetermined, and that no normative element was yet present. One decides what will be right and wrong, and thereby creates the normativity. Having invoked "decision" to emphasize the indeterminacy prior to our acting, though, Wittgenstein immediately retracts it because it is the acting (and not the decision isolated from the acting) that creates normativity. Beyond speaking and writing, our acting importantly includes our correcting of one another and our acceptance of each other's authority and competence. The seventh thesis characteristic of the radical reading, then, is that the acting that Wittgenstein puts at the bottom of the

language-game is the acting itself, as it vitally occurs, not the actions which have already occurred and been given identities.[18]

The Orphaned Name

It will be helpful, in light of our exploration of the first radical thesis, to show briefly how a positive account of concept application—which the first thesis might seem to rule out—can indeed be given, one that is compatible with the radical reading. So, I will give what I consider to be the radical reading of one of Wittgenstein's positive arguments. The point here is merely introductory: it is to give an example of reading Wittgenstein radically and to show that the resulting position is possible.

Wittgenstein gives a simple example of the practical creation of meaning. It so succinctly introduces the basic idea as to be almost a parable, the parable of the orphaned name. Like all good parables, its point is widely applicable: ultimately, Wittgenstein is showing that all language is orphaned from any sort of pre-linguistic reality. The story concerns the builders A and B and their use of proper names for tools. The question is what makes a word meaningful if it is *not* its correspondence to reality. Here is the crux of the matter:

> Now suppose that the tool with the name "N" is broken. Not
> knowing this, A gives B the sign "N". Has this sign meaning

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[18] This is a difficult idea to express, but at least one radical reader has attempted to formally present it as Wittgenstein's epistemology. In "Wittgenstein and the Foundations of Knowledge" and "Foundationalism, Coherentism and Activism," Roger Shiner develops the "activist" theory of knowledge as Wittgenstein's alternative to both foundationalism and coherentism.

> now or not?—What is B to do when he is given it?—We have
> not settled anything about this. One might ask: what *will* he do?
> Well, perhaps he will stand there at a loss, or shew A the pieces.
> (*PI* 41)

Nothing now corresponds to the sign "N." Wittgenstein is challenging our

ordinary assumption that something guides our use of signs. In this example,

no insight into anything about reality, including the past uses of "N," will tell

B how to use the sign "N" now. The practical question comes naturally to the

fore. "One might ask: what *will* he do?"

Whatever B does, it will not alone determine the meaning of "N." But

what B does now may be part of the process of establishing a convention

between A and B as to how to use "N." Wittgenstein suggests one possibility:

"we could also imagine a convention whereby B has to shake his head in

reply if A gives him a sign belonging to a tool which is broken" (*PI* 41). Such

a convention might develop any number of ways. Perhaps B selects this

gesture intentionally to replace the cumbersome fetching of broken tools and

does both gesture and fetching only a couple of times. Perhaps head-shaking

expresses sadness in B and so accompanies his showing of broken tools.

Perhaps B looks from side to side nervously when distressed, and the head-

shaking becomes a stylized imitation of his early quandary about how to

respond. That is, a convention may gradually come into existence, and with

it a new meaning for "N" and other orphaned tool names. Perhaps a series of

broken tools and a series of more or less diverse responses from B—and from

A—will gradually settle on behavior recognized and expected by them both.

In this parable, meaning is created by a practical process which does not

require a correspondence to anything. Head-shaking might move by stages

from a nervous reaction, to something that worked before for getting past this confusion, to a meaningful gesture. As the gesture becomes meaningful, so does "N," which, as Wittgenstein says, we *might* say had become meaningless. In remark 42 he goes on to say that any number of other signs might also now become meaningful, whether or not they originally corresponded with reality. Thus Wittgenstein quickly sketches his argument that meaning is not grounded in the world but in the uses to which we put signs. The correspondence of "N" to a tool is not important, but B's response to the sign "N" is. This culminates in *PI* 43 with Wittgenstein's famous definition: "the meaning of a word is its use in the language." This use is created by the practical interaction over time between particular circumstances and people who have experienced similar circumstances (as they perceive it). The key point is that use can grow out of use; it does not require any external or antecedent guide.

To read Wittgenstein's philosophy as radical requires some care at this point. It can easily appear that an appeal to the use of "N" or the patterns of that use over time or the particular circumstances in which it occurs simply is an appeal to the world and the past as the ground of meaning. After all, use is itself action in the world. To see the radical reading's reply to this objection, we must consider the role that the world plays in Wittgenstein's arguments. Not every reference to the world, the past, or objects treats these things as fundamental or as a ground of meaning. The radical reading does not require Wittgenstein to abjure talking about the world, nor about meaning, objectivity, truth, inference or any other concepts whose status is affected by

his philosophy. As I said of meaning at the beginning of the first chapter, the effect of his philosophy is not to abolish but to transform these concepts.

Consider a simple example of the problem of meaning, such as the question of why we use the word "chair" to refer to many different objects. The radical reading finds Wittgenstein arguing that the answer to this question does not require anything of those objects; they need not have any identity at all antecedent to our calling them "chairs," not even as objects or as existent. That they are in fact existing objects called "chairs" is a status entirely conferred on them by the process of creating meaning, not a prerequisite to that process. What matters is not the objects but what we do: "it is our *acting,* which lies at the bottom of the language-game" (*OC* 204). Certainly Wittgenstein writes frequently of particular cases and objects and actions, and therefore of the world or reality in general. The radicality appears in the *way* Wittgenstein uses these things in his philosophy: they have no presupposed identities; they are not at the bottom of the language-game.

On the radical reading, Wittgenstein does not privilege "patterns" or "circumstances" or "particular cases" over objects. These are neither more nor less problematic than "chairs," and they too get their identities through use. So the force of this argument does *not* rest on the shift from objects to circumstances so much as on the shift from things to acting. If we argue again that actions are themselves things, in a way, then the radical reply is that what matters is not what the actions *are* but what they *do.* (This is the seventh radical thesis.) As long as we treat meaning as dependent on *something about* the objects or the circumstances or the actions, we are still

relying on the traditional philosophical picture Wittgenstein rejects, the idea that language is based on the world, on that something in the particular cases, whether object, circumstance or action. The radical idea is that when a teacher points at something and says a word ("chair"), all that matters is how the student reacts and how the teacher reacts. Maybe the action is repeated many times, maybe not at all; maybe it is accompanied by gestures, clarifications, field trips, sweets, beatings, grades or appeals to outside authorities. The goal is to get the student to use the word the same way the teacher uses it (in the teacher's judgment, initially). The entire process is a negotiation between teacher and student, and eventually the wider community into which the teacher is initiating the student. The world might be a tool in the process, but the world need not be any particular way to serve as tool.

The radical claim that this account presupposes nothing about the world may seem counterintuitive. It may seem that only certain objects with certain characteristics can serve as exemplars, that a chair which disappears periodically (*PI* 80) or will not support weight cannot serve the teacher's purposes. There are two replies to this. In the first place, it is not true that exemplars *must* be any particular way: perhaps the student does not notice the disappearances and intuitively recognizes that the failure to support weight is an incidental mistake, and so comes successfully to understand the word "chair." In the second place, though, the objection that exemplars must have certain characteristics begs the philosophical question: it presupposes the meanings of "support" and "disappear" in explaining the meaning of "chair." Certainly the student may fail to learn the meaning of the word, but we

cannot say that it is because the teacher picked exemplars with the wrong characteristics unless we are already in a position to identify those characteristics. That is, our investigation of how "chair" (which is just an example) becomes meaningful is equally an investigation of "disappear" and "support." It may not assume the meaningfulness of some in its account of others. The radical argument is that an account of meaning that presupposes anything whatsoever about the world will necessarily beg the question it tries to answer. The philosophical question is how meaning is determined in the first place, not how some already determined meanings are passed on to new words. So the meaning of "chair" cannot be explained if supportive objects that do not disappear are presupposed.[19]

Wittgenstein's account does not tacitly beg the question by assuming something like what it is explaining. I mentioned "repeating" the action and using the word the "same" way. Does that mean this account presupposes an identity among different instances of an action? No. The argument reapplies at this level: there is no independent check on sameness and no need for one; if the teacher is satisfied with the student's use of the word, that is what the two of them will call the "same" use. Does the definite article in "the word" imply a prior identity? No, for the same reason. If an outside observer heard teacher and student as making a different sound each time, it would mean

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[19] Approximately this point is made in a somewhat different context by Kripke. Kripke says Wittgenstein argues that the meaning of "plus" cannot be explained by presupposing other meanings, such as for "count" or "independent" (15-7). He says of this point, "Here of course I am expounding Wittgenstein's well-known remarks about 'a rule for interpreting a rule'" (17). If "plus" is a problem, then so are "count" and "independent." Similarly, if "chair" is a problem, then so are "support" and "disappear."

nothing more than that the observer could make no sense of the lesson. The agreement between teacher and student is ultimate in deciding what they will *call* "the same word" as well as the same or the correct use of it. Must "satisfy" or "agreement" be independently determined? No. Even if agreement is ultimate, it is not independent. Suppose the teacher meant "No" but said "Yes" and gave an "A" grade meaning to fail the student. Now we cannot really say what has happened here; we have reached the limits of our simple example. Perhaps the student thinks they agree and the teacher thinks they disagree and they will find out who is right only in a wider context when the student encounters other users of the word. But "who is right" makes no reference to an independent reality. Neither does "agreement," "satisfy," "the word," "repeat," "same," "similar" or "different". All the criteria of identity which make words general are internal to the language-games within which they are used. Read in this radical way, Wittgenstein argues that the process of creating meaning can be quite comprehensible without presupposing anything with an antecedently fixed meaning.

Bloor summarizes the general lesson Wittgenstein gives us as being that words cannot be connected to the world by *translation*, the process of translation being one which would require pre-existing connections in the world that we then translate into words. He is explaining Wittgenstein's comment that "words are not a translation of something else that was there before they were" (Z 191). In elaborating on this passage, Bloor expresses the radical change of perspective Wittgenstein develops: "The point is not that there is nothing in the world but words. The point is that words are

ultimately connected to the world by training, not by translation" (Bloor 1983a, 28). The crucial difference is that translation is of what already has an identity. But any such thing will have the same problem of connection to words that it is supposed to solve. Training, however, does not require a pre-existent "something." Rather it is a process of creating in us a capacity to continually connect words and world in ways acceptable to other people. We make connections each moment, which are not there until, and unless, we make them. Our habitual ways of thinking easily lead us to assume that training must presuppose and depend on reasons and translation. That is, we think of training not as creating connections but as creating the ability to recognize connections that already exist. Training of that kind would be a kind of translation. Bloor reads Wittgenstein as arguing for training as an *alternative* to translation, and in fact as a more fundamental process on which translation depends. This is the rearrangement of priorities the radical reading finds in Wittgenstein. Translation presupposes training, not vice versa.

Training, as radical readers understand Wittgenstein to use the idea, induces the trainee to connect new experience to old in ways that the linguistic community recognizes as correct. What matters is the agreement between the community and the trainee. Wittgenstein says that for people who had a use for a word that linked all that we call red or green or circular, that word would be meaningful and its users would connect phenomena that we would say were unconnected (Z 331; cf. Dilman 1981, 179-80). Neither that community's connections nor our connections reside, so to speak, in the world; they reside in our respective language-games. The normativity

characteristic of meaning and rules, then, can be derived from the interactions among language users. So, although there is no normativity (justification, correctness) in the relation between established meaning and future use when that relation is considered independent of the linguistic community, normativity can appear in the judgments of the language users on one another's actions.

The point here is both central to the radical reading of Wittgenstein and subtle enough to be easily misunderstood. One is tempted to summarize it by saying that a trainee's use of a word is correct if it conforms to communal norms, and such a summary would be correct, in a sense. However, the label "communal norms" is potentially misleading. Those norms can easily be understood as "established meaning," and the radical reading has denied any sense to the idea of "conformity" of future use to such past meanings/norms. The danger here is in too facilely equating the judgments of language users on one another with "communal norms," and in thinking of those norms as "established," thus losing the fluid sense of "users' judgments." The judgments of users occur continually, and should be thought of as undetermined. This is the point that radical thesis seven attempts to codify: occurrent acting, not customary actions, lies at the bottom of the language-game. But communal norms seem like *things*, with already determined identities which already connect judgments together. Where the judgments of users are a means by which they train one another, communal norms seem instead like candidates for translation. This change in connotations leads us back from the radical reading to just another version of the position it sees undermined by Wittgenstein. On the radical reading, then, "training"

is a constant negotiation between people, not a transfer from teacher to student of something with a fixed identity: "communal norms."

If we think of communal norms as something past, fixed, independent of what the members of the community do now—perhaps a reification of the community's history—then, indeed, conformity to those norms cannot be established without begging the question. That is, we cannot *translate* norms into future action. Wittgenstein's radical promotion of training over translation entails that communal norms are no more fixed than is the correct next action. What the members of the community do now determines what the communal norms are, as much as what counts as a correct use by the trainee.

Let us return to Wittgenstein's tale of "N." The story's crisis is the question Wittgenstein asks about B: "what *will* he do?" With this question, Wittgenstein leaves correspondence behind and transfers the source of meaning from reality to language-games, from insight to acting. In the context, we might be tempted to assume the point is limited to special circumstances such as a broken tool since "we have not settled anything about this" (*PI* 41). But the point is general, and the "settled" here can only be meant in a weak sense. Even when the tool is *not* broken, we can still ask after the meaning of the sign "N" with "what *will* he do?" Only in this case the answer is "settled": he will fetch the tool marked "N." But this says no more (and no less) than that B has learned to respond that way, not that "N" has a meaning that "guides" B. Once the practical (present behavior) has been introduced as the source of meaning, it does not discreetly step aside, leaving some autonomous, fixed meaning behind. What it does originally, it can do

again. Whatever is "settled" can be resettled. The practical remains a permanent possibility of change. (And whether an action *is* a change, or is the same, is a question of the same kind as what "N" means; it too is a practical question.) Perhaps the tool marked "N" is heavy and B shakes his head to say he is too tired. Perhaps A calls for the heavy "N" as punishment when he is irritated. Perhaps B knows that A is irritable when hungry and brings A's lunch instead of the tool. One can imagine this convention continuing after the tool marked "N" is broken or obsolete or renamed. Perhaps eventually the sign "N" means "lunch break." The meaning of a sign depends on how people use it, not vice versa, and how they use it depends on countless practical factors.

Wittgenstein continues the parable of the orphaned name in section 79. The situation of "N" is now more complex, for its dead parent was a man instead of a tool and it was not connected to the man by being marked on him but rather by a series of beliefs about him: "So my definition of 'N' would perhaps be 'the man of whom all this is true'" (*PI* 79). The point this time is even more explicit. Not only could practical considerations change the meaning of "N" at any time, but that meaning was never really fixed anyway:

> But if some point [about the man] now proves false?—Shall I be prepared to declare the proposition "N is dead" false—even if it is only something which strikes me as incidental that has turned out false? But where are the bounds of the incidental?—If I had given a definition of the name in such a case, I should now be ready to alter it.
>   And this can be expressed like this: I use the name "N" without a *fixed* meaning. (But that detracts as little from its usefulness, as it detracts from that of a table that it stands on four legs instead of three and so sometimes wobbles.) (*PI* 79)

The responsiveness of the meaning of "N" to practical needs means that the possibility of change was always intrinsic; so there is no principled distinction between the next use and a new or changed use. On the radical reading, what Wittgenstein says of "N" applies to all language, past as well as future: "I use the name 'N' without a *fixed* meaning." Wittgenstein reconstitutes the normativity of meaning as a relation not between past and future actions but between language users.

Wittgenstein's account of meaning of course applies to the meaning of "meaning." Consequently, *PI* 79 helps explain a mysterious comment earlier in the tale of "N." In *PI* 43, Wittgenstein says, "For a *large* class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language." Why does Wittgenstein qualify his definition with "though not for all"? Perhaps he did have something specific in mind, but I suggest that the qualifier is primarily to indicate what *kind* of definition this is: a practical definition that is itself responsive to its uses in the language. If there are indeed exceptions to the definition of meaning as use, they are incidental. But where are the bounds of the incidental? Since he has given a definition of meaning, Wittgenstein is ready to alter it if necessary. But such an alteration will no more seriously change the basic insight that meaning is use than would altering an explicit definition of N's name change what we mean when we talk about N.

The important point I have tried to make with this brief introduction to the radical reading of Wittgenstein's positive position is that this reading argues that an account of meaning can be given which makes no appeal, either tacit or explicit, to anything antecedently fixed (to anything that could

be *translated* into words). To some thinkers, this may seem like an impossibility or a conjuring trick: surely something must be missing from an account that makes language independent of any pre-linguistic reality. The radical reading finds Wittgenstein agreeing that something is lost, but arguing that it is not essential. What is lost is any *justificatory* aspect to the account of meaning: there is no extra-linguistic measure of the correctness of any use of language, not even of the sameness of use on two different occasions. (Every application of every word is arbitrary.) This lack, however, in no way compromises the cogency of Wittgenstein's radical account of meaning. To thinkers who believe that it must, Wittgenstein addresses the closing remark of his parable of the orphaned name. He says, "Should it be said that I am using a word whose meaning I don't know, and so am talking nonsense?— Say what you choose, so long as it does not prevent you from seeing how things are. (And when you see that, there is a good deal you will not say.)" (*PI* 79)[20]

The Path from Error

If critics and readers can "say what they choose," then how is one to contribute to our better understanding of Wittgenstein? Lucid presentations showing the radical nature of his work have already been given, to little effect. (I listed many of those presentations in the first chapter in introducing

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[20] I have altered the translation slightly. The published translation reads "... seeing the facts," for which I have substituted "... seeing how things are." In English, "fact" connotes something specific, independent, and settled, connotations not present in Wittgenstein's "... wie es sich verhält" and which it is my goal in this section to argue Wittgenstein brings into question.

the radical readers.) Wittgenstein's work, when seen as radical, strikes most readers as paradoxical and completely unacceptable. But recognizing this does not tell us why it strikes them so, nor how to overcome that reaction. Cavell's brief summary and analysis—Wittgenstein's work is "as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying" (161)—says something about why, but not something very helpful toward overcoming our fear. I believe a more helpful direction is suggested by O.K. Bouwsma in his 1961 review of *The Blue Book*. Bouwsma asks, "with what expectations would such readers [of philosophy] read [Wittgenstein]?" and answers:

> They are used to proofs, to arguments, to theories, to evidences, refutations, to infallibles, to indubitables, to foundations, to definitions, to analyses, etc. And if in these terms any reader should, having read, seek to turn his reading to some profit and ask himself: What has the author proved, for what has he presented arguments, what is his theory, what has he refuted, and what are his infallibles?, he is certain to be disappointed. (178)

Bouwsma suggests that our difficulty in understanding Wittgenstein comes from the way we read, the expectations we bring to our reading. He directs attention not toward the arguments themselves but toward the uses of arguments (and texts) in the language-game of philosophy. This is an emphasis entirely sympathetic to the radical reading, and to the logic of the first thesis examined earlier: it is the assumptions and intentions of arguers that give the thesis its force.

In trying to find an approach to Wittgenstein's radical philosophy that holds some promise of improving our understanding, we can go a step further than Bouwsma's general evocation of habits. The rearrangement of

priorities that the radical reading finds in Wittgenstein implies that *only* by changing the way philosophers read arguments, and not by producing more arguments for them to read the customary way, can a radical philosophy be understood. The limitations of argument are asserted in Wittgenstein's comment on whether language without fixed meaning is nonsense or not: "Say what you choose." On the radical reading, this is meant seriously. That is, Wittgenstein is not being flippant or irresponsible or lazy in not defending himself against the charge of talking nonsense, for it is a challenge to his *justification* for using "N" as he does, and he has argued that no use of language can be justified (in the required sense; i.e., not just relatively to speakers). Each of our judgments is independent, each word application arbitrary, so no judgment can be forced or justified by other judgments. Larger units of language than just words are equally affected by Wittgenstein's point: judgments of arguments also cannot be forced or justified any more than can judgments of propositions or word use. (Changes at the root affect trunk and branches as well.) The most Wittgenstein can give is not a justification but a prediction: once you see how things are, "there is a good deal you will not say." This could describe quite generally how Wittgenstein's radical philosophy seeks to overcome the resistance it encounters.

The acceptance of arguments cannot be forced on those unwilling to countenance them; that is, the cogency of arguments cannot be demonstrated, proved, justified. (Once again, there are perfectly good uses of "cogent" and "demonstrate," but they are subsidiary to the use of argument in the language, to the conventions and norms of the community of arguers, and it is relative to these conventions and norms, or at least some of them, that

Wittgenstein's arguments are radical.) For this reason, the radical nature of the position Wittgenstein argues is not incidental but pivotal to how he is understood by other scholars. We might think that whether or not the position in question is radical is a minor point: if the argument for it is powerful enough, it should overcome our resistance; the only important question is whether it is right. The primary concern, from this perspective, is the argument itself and its merit; all we can ever do, whether the argument is radical or commonplace, is make its merit perspicuous and our evaluation thorough. This objection is heading for the heart of the matter. For if Wittgenstein is right, this objection is wrong. Or perhaps better, this objection is expressive of a whole manner of thinking that Wittgenstein overturns. Of course a powerful enough argument will overcome. (That claim is tautological.) The question is, what is the source of that power? Implicit in the objection is the belief that the rightness of an argument, its intrinsic merit, is the source of its power. But according to the radical position, the merit or cogency of arguments is no more intrinsic than is the rightness of a projection of words intrinsic in their past uses or the correct classification of objects intrinsic in their characteristics. Wittgenstein overturns all of these by arguing that use in the language is prior to meaning.

The rearrangement of priorities that the radical reading understands Wittgenstein to effect changes the status of arguments themselves. We have traditionally considered arguments to have identities prior to the reactions of readers and to be the objects to which readers respond. Accordingly, we think of the arguments as the first level, the "object" level—the deeper level—and the reactions of readers as the "metalevel," which comes after the fact. If

Wittgenstein is right (as read radically), the deeper level is the reactions of readers. That is, the use of the argument within the language-game that is its context gives the argument itself its meaning and identity. The argument itself is a derivative object. The significance of this point for the radical reading is that the appropriate focus or means for understanding and evaluating the merit of an argument depends on how radical it is. If there is already general agreement at the primary level of reactions as to what the meaning of the argument is—its structure, function, intent and so on—only then will the appropriate focus for evaluation be the secondary level of the argument itself and of its success relative to the accepted norms and standards applicable. The more radical an argument is, and so the more at odds with those norms and standards and the patterns of reactions used to identify arguments, the more relevant will be an examination of the primary level of readers' reactions for clarifying and evaluating the argument. Engagement with readers comes first, and with argument comes second.

Radical readers of Wittgenstein follow his lead (quoted above from *PI* 79) in attempting not so much to compel assent from readers, who will in any case "say what they choose," as to get them more generally to see how things are, and thereby change what they would say. We can see this in the passage from Cavell quoted in the first chapter, in the rhetoric with which he presents the radical thesis: "Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this ["all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life'"]" (1962, 161). Cavell tries to show us the magnitude of Wittgenstein's vision without encouraging our ordinary habits as philosophical readers. He lists "human speech and activity,

sanity and community" as resting on the whirl of organism so as not to list rationality, objectivity, knowledge and truth. These latter are also implied in the list, but they are so much the stuff of philosophical discussion that their appearance could direct us toward too familiar paths. To Cavell, it is a revision of our whole world view that Wittgenstein is attempting, not an adjustment of philosophical theories. He is attempting to show us the issues by a different light.

One of the few authors as eloquent as Cavell, though in a starkly contrasting style, is Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein too tries to describe the problem faced by radical revision, the problem of overcoming the resistance of readers who—as we saw with Chihara's response to Cowan—will not even recognize the new vision as a possibility. Here is the opening section of Wittgenstein's "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough"*:

> One must start out with error and convert it into truth.
> That is, one must reveal the source of error, otherwise hearing the truth won't do any good. The truth cannot force its way in when something else is occupying its place.
> To convince someone of the truth, it is not enough to state it, but rather one must find the *path* from error to truth. (61)

I believe the radical reading tells the truth about Wittgenstein. But that is not enough. Other readers cannot hear the radical reading while something else is occupying its place. I take Cavell's reference to "the work of *showing* its [Wittgenstein's terrifying vision's] simplicity" (161) to have the same object as Wittgenstein's reference to the path from error to truth. For both, the more important focus is not the truth or vision but the path between that truth and

where we are. The arguments themselves are less important than the uses that scholars make of them, the ways in which they read and react to them.

The path to a correct understanding of Wittgenstein will examine and clarify the ways scholars read both him and each other. This is the work that needs doing, and this is the task to which I hope my dissertation can contribute. I am encouraged by Cavell's peculiar phrasing, more modest than Wittgenstein's, that even to *attempt* this work "would be a real step in making available Wittgenstein's later philosophy" (161).

"The Spirit of this Civilization"

Wittgenstein anticipated the difficulty in communicating a radical vision, and described his philosophy in such terms in an early draft of a preface to his investigations:

> This book is written for those who are in sympathy with the spirit in which it is written. This is not, I believe, the spirit of the main current of European and American civilization. The spirit of this civilization makes itself manifest in the industry, architecture and music of our time, in its fascism and socialism, and it is alien and uncongenial to the author. (*CV* 6)

He expected few readers to understand him: "It is all one to me whether or not the typical western scientist understands or appreciates my work, since he will not in any case understand the spirit in which I write"; "For if a book has been written for just a few readers that will be clear just from the fact that only a few people understand it" (*CV* 7). A radical philosophy will face the difficulty that many readers simply fail to understand it, that they find it incomprehensible or obviously unacceptable. But it also faces the correlative danger of *misunderstanding,* that in their attempts to make sense of it

readers will assimilate it to something more congenial (to themselves, not to Wittgenstein). This danger is the temptation to gain understanding (or its semblance) and sympathy for the radical reading at the price of compromising it and domesticating it to the alien and uncongenial spirit of our civilization.

Much of this chapter has concerned the seventh radical thesis: that the acting that Wittgenstein puts at the bottom of the language-game is acting itself, as it immediately occurs, before it has any particular identity. As I said, part of the point of articulating that thesis is to guard the radicality of Wittgenstein's shift to acting (the second radical thesis) lest it become attenuated into something like a simple conventionalism, a shift to customary actions. But the seventh radical thesis is itself quite difficult to understand. So, I will end my introduction of the radical reading by complementing that direct expression with an indirect attempt to guard the radicality of Wittgenstein's shift to acting. To discourage assimilating Wittgenstein's work to an alien and uncongenial modern spirit, I will assimilate it to the very different historical spirit I mentioned earlier: the spirit that takes the Good to be prior to the True. This will at least suggest a way of understanding the fluidity of meaning, the lack of fixity, that is at the heart of the radical reading of Wittgenstein, and a way of understanding a path to truth that is not itself a kind of truth. That is, the priority of the Good suggests "that the human creature's basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing" (Cavell 1979, 241) but is that of acting, or of agency (and hence of responsibility).

The temptation to weaken Wittgenstein's work into something more congenial to us and the temptation to overestimate the importance of truth are both addressed in a passage of *On Certainty* that is commented on by both Bloor and D.Z. Phillips. In "Wittgenstein's Full Stop," Phillips discusses our tendency to tacitly seek philosophical justification even when we think we have accepted Wittgenstein's insistence that we stop with description. Phillips thinks we *say* we are content with description, and need not strive for justification, only when describing what we already agree with; all the while we harbor the assumption that there really is a philosophical justification.[21] He says Wittgenstein brings this out in *On Certainty* by a sudden shift from an example we will agree with to one we will most likely not:

> 608. Is it wrong for me to be guided in my actions by the propositions of physics? Am I to say I have no good ground for doing so? Isn't precisely this what we call a 'good ground'?

> 609. Supposing we met people who did not regard that as a telling reason. Now, how do we imagine this? Instead of the physicist, they consult an oracle. (And for that we consider them primitive.) Is it wrong for them to consult an oracle and be guided by it?—If we call this "wrong" aren't we using our language-game as a base from which to *combat* theirs?

When thinking of physics, we can take an accommodating and indulgent view of Wittgenstein's undermining of philosophical justification and his radical shift from "being" to "calling": we think, "There may not be any

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[21] What Phillips is complaining of is related to a central theme of Bloor's, which he calls "dualism": philosophers take true beliefs (those with which they agree) to require no explanation (to be implicitly justified), while accepting that false beliefs must be accounted for (and so are suitable for sociological explanation). Bloor's rejection of this dualism is codified in his "symmetry postulate," the most controversial postulate of the "strong program" in the sociology of knowledge.

ultimate justification of physics as really being good grounds, but we call this 'good grounds' anyway and that's enough." As Phillips says, though, "just as we are about to accept these conclusions Wittgenstein juxtaposes the following example. . . ." (180) Those who are guided by oracles also call that a justification or good ground. If our intuitions rebel at the symmetry here, it means we had not really accepted Wittgenstein's point at all: we tacitly continued to believe we call the propositions of physics "good grounds" for our actions because they *are* good grounds; but oracles are *not* good grounds; they are *merely* called that by those who believe that sort of thing. Having caught us out, Wittgenstein describes our situation: we followers of physics do not stand in a different relation to an independent reality from that of followers of oracles (we are right and they are wrong), but rather we stand in a certain relation to *them*, in a combative posture toward their beliefs.

Phillips reads this passage as a vivid reminder that the choice between following physics and following oracles cannot be decided philosophically. It is not a question of truth or correctness at all but a question of commitment, and even if we dress our responses up as philosophical justifications, we are still actually engaged in the social activity of training others in our language-games (i.e. to be combatants for our side). Bloor accepts this lesson, that Wittgenstein has shown the issue not to be philosophical, and advocates the next step: trying to understand it empirically, or non-philosophically: "How else could this idea of 'combat' be taken seriously except by appeal to factual data and case studies about the confrontation and conflict of social groups?" (1983a, 208 n1). Phillips and Bloor effect Wittgenstein's shift from being to calling: Phillips reads the passage as showing that we have nothing to say

about what really *are* good grounds outside of a language-game, and Bloor reads it as suggesting that we examine (within the language-game of sociology) what the two groups *call* "good grounds."

Consider two suggestions for what we might do once we stop (philosophically) justifying, say, mathematical calculations. Even for such precisely defined activities, Bloor proposes sociological explanations of why we "make, and understand, the same projections" (Cavell 1962, 160). Wittgenstein imagines the possibility of our feeling astonishment at the agreement of our calculations and giving "thanks to the Deity for our agreement" (*PI* 234). Sociology and prayer are quite different responses to the situation. Which is better? If we say one is better than the other, are we not "using our language-game as a base from which to *combat* theirs"? Then is some sort of quietism being suggested? It would only seem so if we took for granted that combating others ought not to be done. But why should we not combat their language-game, if ours is better? Such questions as these point to the character of Witgenstein's shift to acting. They are questions of morality. At the bottom of the language-game, appeals to truth or evidence or justification can only beg the question, for all those things acquire their status from some language-game or another. At the bottom, we must choose, or simply act, and the choice is a moral choice and the acts are ones for which we are responsible.

The contrast between truth and morality here can capture a great many characterizations of Wittgenstein throughout the literature. One we have seen among radical readers is that Wittgenstein subordinates ontology to practice: our practices are not conformable to or guided by reality, but rather

what counts as real depends on our practices. Similar contrasts abound. One scholar discusses the relation between early and late Wittgenstein using such a contrast: "We can make a broad distinction of uses of language into imperative and indicative uses: uses of language to guide behaviour and uses of language to report facts" (Kenny 121). Here again is the contrast between moral language and truth or factual language; late Wittgenstein overturns the priority of the indicative mood traditionally assumed by logicians, including his early self, in favor of the imperative. Similarly, in his biography of Wittgenstein, Ray Monk discusses Wittgenstein's "view of the relation between 'grammatical' and 'material' propositions":

> The distinction between the two types of proposition lies at the heart of Wittgenstein's entire philosophy: in his thinking about psychology, mathematics, aesthetics and even religion, his central criticism of those with whom he disagrees is that they have confused a grammatical proposition with a material one, and have presented as a discovery something that should properly be seen as a grammatical (in Wittgenstein's rather odd sense of the word) innovation. (468)

That is, at the heart of Wittgenstein's philosophy is his idea that we commonly mistake for questions of truth questions which really concern our actions, our values, our behavior.

Radical readers keep the dependence of truth on morality constantly in focus. Bloor expresses it in various ways throughout his work. He argues that there is an ineradicable normative component even to descriptions of "a *material* reality":

> What is intriguing and sociologically important about our representational practices, as they apply to the real world about us, is that they have an ineradicable self-referential component. That is of course the normative and conventional component; a

> component that is far more subtly intertwined in our thought than standard philosophical forms of "realism" acknowledge. We must simultaneously negotiate our handling of things and our handling of people. (1992, 279)

Truth cannot enter our thought and language isolated from morality. Bloor quotes anthropologist Mary Douglas expressing the dependence of natural laws on moral relations: "Apprehending a general pattern of what is right and necessary in social relations is the basis of society: this apprehension generates whatever *a priori* or set of necessary causes is going to be found in nature."[22]

I assimilate these various contrasts, such as "indicative" versus "imperative" and "material" versus "grammatical," to the contrast and relation between truth and morality not because this latter pair is clearer. On the contrary, they are probably blurrier concepts (though none of the others is very clear either). The difficulty in reading Wittgenstein radically, however, is to recognize the scope his ideas can embrace, that is, to keep ourselves from assuming that only a very limited point is at issue; words like "indicative," "imperative," "grammatical," "material," and "ontology" lend themselves easily to such limitations because they seem to have primarily technical uses. So, the radical reading may be better described by saying that Wittgenstein shows truth to be dependent on morality than by saying, as many would, that he shows essence or ontology to be dependent on action or grammar. Some ways of expressing an idea suggest its scope better than others do. At the same time, any words can be interpreted so as to curtail the significance of

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[22] *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 281; qtd. in Bloor 1983a, 148. A more general version of Douglas's thesis is the main thesis of Bloor's "Durkheim and Mauss Revisited" (1982).

Wittgenstein's work; no expression will be invulnerable to misunderstanding.

One of the ideas informing the project of this dissertation is that there is some value in expressing the same thing various ways, especially something radical. It is simply a difficult task to get people to understand and take seriously ideas that are profoundly foreign to perspectives and assumptions they take for granted. Recognition of these radical ideas as a recurrent reading of Wittgenstein (a school) should both motivate Wittgenstein scholars to take them seriously and enable the several versions of the reading to shed light on each other. We can complement these various expressions of the reading, though, by explicitly situating them in Western intellectual history. The advantage of this is that we can communicate the scope of Wittgenstein's work, not by relying on the words in which the ideas are expressed to have obviously wide applications, but by comparison to familiar landmarks in that history. This will still not really fix the magnitude of Wittgenstein's project, because the status and scope of those landmarks also depends on interpretation and is disputed. But the goal here is not the impossible one of producing a statement impervious to interpretive diminishment, but the more modest one of evoking most readers' intuitions of the radical possibilities available to philosophical treatment by Wittgenstein.

One common effort along these lines is the claim that Wittgenstein is refuting Cartesian philosophy (e.g. Malcolm, Garver and Kenny in O.R. Jones; cf. the editor's introduction 13-14). This is accompanied by the plausible claim that Cartesian philosophy has been in some sense dominant from Descartes

to the present. This summary has the virtue of suggesting Wittgenstein's rejection of the whole sweep of "modern philosophy," since we customarily date modernity from Descartes (and his contemporaries Hobbes and Galileo). Still, the claim seems insufficiently radical. It is quite debatable how much of modern philosophy really is Cartesian, as well as how much of Cartesian philosophy Wittgenstein has addressed, and so how much of modernity really is at stake in Wittgenstein's work. Also, the relation to ordinary life of an academic position like Cartesian philosophy is quite unclear. Cartesian philosophy is an intellectual doctrine explicitly before the minds of philosophers, whereas the radical emphasis on temptations, tendencies and automatic assumptions would suggest something tacitly and thoroughly ingrained in our ordinary thinking (which Cartesian philosophy *may* also be, but may not).

Another historical comparison, closer in spirit, I believe, to the radical reading, is Albert Levi's "Wittgenstein as Dialectician." Levi describes Wittgenstein's development from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations* as a movement from Aristotelian analysis to Platonic dialectic. While I agree with the gist of Levi's article, I believe it needs more specific historical content than just the evocation of Platonic dialectic gives it. So, I suggest a specific philosophical dispute between the Aristotelian and Platonic perspectives and a specific historical development of that dispute as more useful for grasping the magnitude of Wittgenstein's radical vision. In Plato's work (particularly the *Republic* and the *Symposium*), the form of the Good is the highest reality. In various ways over the subsequent centuries, particularly in Neoplatonist and then Christian metaphysics, this idea of Plato's was codified as the

priority of the Good over the True. The emphasis of all the radical readers on the impossibility of ontological claims—the fifth radical thesis—and the similar interpretations throughout the literature that Wittgenstein subordinates essence and truth to communal norms and morality, suggest this ancient philosophical doctrine.

Levi says that the axiomatic method Wittgenstein opposed in mathematics "had dominated Western thinking since Euclid and the *Posterior Analytics* [of Aristotle]" (372). While this may be true in mathematics, the general dominance of Aristotle in Western thinking does not date from his lifetime. Rather his work was largely lost in the West for many centuries, and revived at a specific historical moment. The revival and subsequent dominance of Aristotle was engineered primarily by St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, an event that is very widely considered one of the most dramatic turning points in history. It was roughly the turn of Western civilization from a Platonic culture and a Platonic Christianity dominated by St. Augustine to an Aristotelian culture and a Thomist Christianity. Like any such enormous change, this one was effected by countless events and ideas. But one salient intellectual event was Aquinas's explicit reversal of Augustine's priority of the Good over the True. Aquinas posed the question of their relative priority in his masterwork, the *Summa Theologiae*, (Part 1, question 16, article 4) and argued against Augustine that the True must be prior to the Good. (He explored the issue at greater length in *The Disputed Questions on Truth* (Question 21)). In later centuries, the

issue drops out of the philosophical conversation, apparently settled by Aquinas.[23]

The priority of the Good does, nevertheless, reappear occasionally, for instance in the work of the American Pragmatists.[24] Major elements of our history leave traces, even if they have been repudiated, and presumably some resistance to the triumph of Truth persisted through the centuries. I believe one can find the influence of this resistance in the German conservatism to which Bloor and Nyiri connect Wittgenstein, and in the Romanticism Cavell touches on. But not, I believe, until Wittgenstein do we find so sustained and powerful an attempt to re-establish the authority of practice over ontology, of the imperative mood over the indicative, of grammatical propositions over material, of the ineradicable normative component of representation: in short, we find a sustained and powerful attempt to re-establish the priority of the Good and undo the work of Aquinas.

Whether the thirteenth century really was the turning point we generally perceive it to have been; whether that turn really had all that much to do with Aquinas, Aristotle and Plato; whether Aquinas's overthrow of the

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[23] Aquinas's rearrangement of priorities in favor of Truth paved the way for the explosive growth of science in subsequent centuries. This may be one reason that Wittgenstein's philosophy, especially as read radically, appears to express an anti-scientific spirit.

[24] "[T]ruth[,] the conditions of which the logician endeavors to analyze, and which is the goal of the reasoner's aspirations, is nothing but a phase of the *summum bonum* which forms the subject of pure ethics" (Peirce I §575). "Purely objective truth, truth in whose establishment the function of giving human satisfaction in marrying previous parts of experience with newer parts played no rôle whatever, is nowhere to be found. The reason why we call things true is the reason why they *are* true, for 'to be true' *means* only to perform this marriage-function. The trail of the human serpent is thus over everything" (James 64).

Good for the True was that important an element in his influence; whether that element has continued to be an important doctrine over the centuries; all of these and many more are highly debatable issues. Consequently, there would be ample opportunity for non-radical readers of Wittgenstein to agree with this summary of his relation to our intellectual history, and still to suppress the significance of his work. The point of the summary is merely to make that suppression harder and less plausible than it is when we speak only in academic terms. For most people today, the idea that how things are (the truth) depends on what is good and valuable is virtually incomprehensible; that what is good and valuable depends at least in part on the way things are seems commonsensical. That what is good is relative while what is true is not are practically articles of faith for us. So, I believe the relative priority of the Good and the True continues to be an issue of profound importance in our lives, commensurate with the scope of vision the radical reading finds in Wittgenstein's work.

This historical situating of Wittgenstein is not meant to illuminate the content of Wittgenstein's work. On the contrary, the illumination will more likely flow the other direction: the Good/True priority dispute seems so ancient, abstruse, and alien that it is more likely that we can learn something from Wittgenstein about what that dispute meant than that we can learn from it about Wittgenstein. But here again, the point is not to illuminate Wittgenstein so much as to illuminate and influence *the reading of* Wittgenstein. At the same time as the situating of Wittgenstein in opposition to Aquinas and to the Aristotelian revolution in Western culture helps us to estimate the scope of his philosophical project as the radical

reading sees it, it also helps clarify the difficulty many scholars have in seeing the possibility of reading him this way. It makes clear the tension and the difference between what is radical and what is absurd. Aquinas's victory is so deeply ingrained in our consciousness that it may now seem intuitively absurd to suggest that the True is not prior to the Good. Yet realizing that the issue was a live one in philosophy for many centuries, and contemplating the possibility that a modern philosopher of Wittgenstein's stature could revive it, reminds us that it cannot be absurd, and that we have had seven hundred years of habituation to only one perspective on that issue. After so long, to challenge that perspective will be radical; but the different vision is essentially simple. It is, as Cavell says of Wittgenstein's, "a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying" (1962, 161).

In these first two chapters I have begun my attempt to show how radical readers read Wittgenstein. Let us turn in the next chapters, though, to an examination of how some others read Wittgenstein, to some of the competing readings in the literature. In these chapters we will also see something of how the various factions read each other. I hope gradually to illuminate not only the radical reading but also the general character of the erroneous philosophy which occupies the place of truth and makes correct reading of Wittgenstein so difficult. We must see what obstacles the radical reading actually encounters in the philosophical community, what predispositions it opposes.

Chapter 3.

The Particularists.

It will be helpful in clarifying the radical reading to compare it to other readings of Wittgenstein. I can select only a few samples from the literature, and treat those few only briefly. Still, they can each, by their contrasts, help bring the radical reading into sharper focus. If the broad outlines of that reading are already clear, then the most illumination will come from details. So, readings that are very close to the radical should be most helpful. In this chapter and the next, I shall examine several such readings.

In chapter one, I claimed that the radical reading is quite similar to a standard and widely respected reading (given by, for example, Diamond) from which it nevertheless differs, most obviously in asserting the first radical thesis: that every application of every word is arbitrary. This standard reading also has a claim to being considered radical, in that it takes Wittgenstein to be effecting a revolution that puts an end to philosophy itself, or at least the dominant modern forms of philosophy. Accordingly, it can accuse the radical reading of not seeing how truly radical Wittgenstein is, because the first radical thesis is still a philosophical thesis: we are still doing philosophy. The radical reading does have a reply, which it will be a major task of this chapter to bring out. The crudest version of this reply is: "It's not that simple"; the issue is not a simple yea or nay to philosophy. A slightly less crude version would be: "Excessive zeal in opposition to philosophy can compromise our understanding of other important issues in Wittgenstein's work, even to the point of obscuring the nature of his opposition to philosophy. To stop doing

philosophy is his *goal*, and highly problematic, not a *method* one could simply adopt (cf. *PI* 133)."

The disagreement is real and has been present throughout the history of Wittgenstein scholarship. If the radical reading can be thought of as descending (spiritually, at most, of course) from Wittgenstein's Cambridge colleague John Wisdom, this other more standard reading descends from Rush Rhees, one Wittgenstein's literary executors. It is a prominent feature of Wisdom's entire career that he was an unrepentant philosopher. In the short introduction to his *Paradox and Discovery*, Wisdom writes:

> It is submitted that questions which 'have no answers' may yet present problems which have solutions, that questions which 'have no answers' can and, mostly, do evince some inadequacy in our apprehension of things, and that when this inadequacy is removed by thought, which while it is helped by precedent is not bound by it, we gain a new view of what is possible and sometimes of what is actual. (1965, Introduction)

The following year, Rhees published "Unanswerable Questions," his reply, in a symposium, to Wisdom's student Bambrough. A few years later, Bambrough addressed the issue of Wittgenstein's apparent rejection of philosophical theorizing explicitly and at length in "How to Read Wittgenstein" (1974).

Bambrough defends both the legitimacy and accuracy of reading Wittgenstein as providing "a larger view and a more general statement than his explicit account of his aims and methods allows him to countenance" (126). Bambrough argues of the *Investigations* that the rejection of philosophical theory "is in any case implicitly contradicted by the character and outcome of the philosophical investigations of which the book consists"

(121). However unconventionally, Wittgenstein does address many traditional questions from the history of philosophy. Bambrough explores the "hints in Wittgenstein's text that he had himself aspired after such an overall perspective" (127). His target is the tradition in Wittgenstein scholarship that emphasizes Wittgenstein's attention to particular cases and his antipathy to our "craving for generality" (*BB* 18), the tradition associated with Rhees, whom he names in his conclusion: "All the signs taken together amount to a strong case for rejecting the assumption of Rush Rhees, Norman Malcolm, and in general the majority of Wittgenstein's closest disciples, that he could consistently and would necessarily have been shocked by any attempt to transpose his work" into a more systematic form (127). I will call the reading associated with Rhees the "particularist" reading of Wittgenstein.

Despite this disagreement about what sort of opposition to theory Wittgenstein's work implies, the radical and particularist readings are extremely similar. It is hard to specify their similarity within the structure I have been presenting, because particularists object to the very idea of finding theses or theories in Wittgenstein's work. So I cannot exactly say that they would agree with the seven radical theses I have articulated. Nevertheless, I suggest that the particularist reading finds all of the radical theses to be consistent with Wittgenstein's work. Even the first radical thesis, which they would find highly objectionable *as an asserted thesis*, is importantly implicit in their reading: it is because the consequences of philosophical theory (expressed in the first radical thesis) are so extremely destructive that the particularist turn toward the ordinary, the local, the particular is so uncompromising. In terms of the radical theses, then, one way of

characterizing the particularist reading would be as focusing on the *second* radical thesis, the shift to what we do (which, in this context, we could articulate as the turn toward the ordinary) to the total exclusion of the first. In the next several sections, I will try to bring out the difference between the particularist and radical readings. I will examine their conflict in some detail as it occurs in the particularist criticisms of Kripke made by Cora Diamond. In this first section, I will explore the idea of "theory," which is at the center of the particularist and radical disagreement.

Theory

In explaining how to read Wittgenstein, Bambrough presents a number of arguments, most of them concerning how Wittgenstein speaks in circumstances wherein what he says will be misleading but its opposite more misleading, by which Bambrough suggests we should be wary of taking Wittgenstein's expressed opposition to theory too straightforwardly. In the course of these arguments, he raises the question of what the purpose is of Wittgenstein's emphasis on particular cases. Is that purpose served by a general opposition to theory? Not everything we call "theory" would seem a plausible candidate for rejection. If I say, "This is a modernist novel," I am examining a particular case. But I am also surely involved in theory, in some sense, with so complex a concept as "modernist." Theory and particular cases are not contraries. It takes some work to see what Wittgenstein is opposing. The problem is clearer in a debate that addresses it directly, rather than as it relates to Wittgenstein.

The issue of theory has been extensively and explicitly debated with respect to literary criticism, and some useful ideas and summaries can be found in *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism* (Mitchell 1985). The book consists of the title essay by Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, responses from critics, elaborations from Fish and Richard Rorty, and replies by Knapp and Michaels. Its central thesis is that theory is incoherent. This thesis requires an explanation of what is meant by "theory," which is largely why the book is useful to us here. The authors distinguish two notions of "theory." The notion of theory opposed by Knapp and Michaels, Fish and Rorty—who all characterize themselves as pragmatists—is a notion that Bambrough can agree with Rhees and Malcolm and many other Wittgenstein scholars that Wittgenstein too is against. Knapp and Michaels start with a definition tailored to their field of study: "By 'theory' we mean a special project in literary criticism: the attempt to govern interpretations of particular texts by appealing to an account of interpretation in general" (11). It is the idea that the general governs the particular, or our understanding of the particular, that is objectionable.

Fish agrees with this definition, and elaborates and generalizes it in several ways. He cites E.D. Hirsch's identification of theory with general hermeneutics, as opposed to local hermeneutics: "By 'general hermeneutics,' Hirsch means a procedure whose steps, if they are faithfully and strictly followed, will 'always yield correct results'; 'local hermeneutics,' on the other hand, are calculations of probability based on an insider's knowledge of what is likely to be successful in a particular field of practice" (107). This leads Fish to describe theory as committed to formalizable rules, in contrast to

unformalizable, pragmatic rules of thumb: in theory, we are "given a rule, something that is necessary to do if you want to be right, where 'being right' is not a matter of being in tune with the temporary and shifting norms of a context but of having adhered to the dictates of an abiding and general rationality" (108). Theory, then, "is an attempt to *guide* practice from a position above or outside it" (110), and the rejection of theory can be encapsulated as "every rule is a rule of thumb" (111).[1]

The similarity to Wittgenstein's themes is obvious. In Wittgenstein's famous example, to which he returns repeatedly, the right continuation of the even number series is not really formally determinable, for it depends on the spontaneous reactions of students in the context of learning the rule "plus two." More generally, the paradox Wittgenstein arrives at in section 201 of the *Investigations* is that "no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule." In this context, we might characterize the misunderstanding that Wittgenstein says creates this paradox as the belief in theory, in general hermeneutics, in an abiding and general rationality independent of the temporary and shifting norms of a context, etc.[2] Like Knapp and Michaels, Fish and Rorty, Wittgenstein finds the solution to the failure of formal rules (the failure of theory) in the pragmatic needs of particular contexts, in local hermeneutics

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[1] Here again we see the appropriateness of associating Fish with the radical readers of Wittgenstein. His position—that there is no such thing as a rule, there are only "rules of thumb" is reminiscent of Cowan's elaboration of the first radical thesis.

[2] I will discuss various interpretations of the "misunderstanding" mentioned in *PI* 201 briefly later in this chapter and again in chapter six.

and rules of thumb, or, as he puts it, "in what we call 'obeying the rule' and

'going against it' in actual cases" (*PI* 201) (with emphasis, I believe, on "call").

"Theory" is quite a vague term, and the notion of theory articulated

here excludes a great deal that is commonly called "theory." We often use the

term for any beliefs that are general and concern regularities that apply across

many local contexts. Such general beliefs are not theory in the present sense,

though, because

> the regularities thus uncovered, rather than standing apart from
> practice and constituting an abstract picture of its possibilities, would be
> derived from practice and constitute a report on its current shape or on
> the shape it once had in an earlier period. . . . The result, in short,
> would be *empirical generalities* rather than a general hermeneutics."
> (Fish 115)

The opponents of theory, then, do not oppose generality *per se*, but only

generality which claims to stand in a privileged position of governance over

particularity. What we might call "ordinary theory" is not their target.

This account of what theory is, and so of what Wittgenstein's

opposition to theory amounts to, is entirely compatible with the radical

reading of his work. The wide scope of this opposition to theory can be seen

in Fish's identification of theory with philosophy: "they attempt to do theory,

which is another name for philosophy" (123); "theory (or philosophy) is now

a practice in literary studies" (123). So, the rejection of theory is the rejection

of philosophy. He modifies this identification somewhat because

"philosophy," like "theory," is diversely used: "philosophy (at least in the

analytic tradition) *is* theory, is the foundational project Rorty describes" (126).

We might, then, label the objectionable sort of theory "philosophic theory,"

understood in this foundational sense. Again we hear echoes of Wittgenstein, who sometimes takes his work to be the refutation of philosophy, and sometimes takes it to be a kind of philosophy which opposes another (foundational) kind of philosophy.

We can now describe the radical reading's relation to Wittgenstein on the issue of theory. Wittgenstein expresses opposition both to theory (philosophic) and to thinking in generalities, which would at least sometimes include ordinary theory. Those, like Malcolm and Rhees, who emphasize his focus on particulars take seriously his opposition to both of these. Bambrough argues, as does Fish, that there can be no principled general opposition to ordinary theory since every belief and every concept has generality. The position of Bambrough and the radical readers is that Wittgenstein's opposition to philosophic theory is a major and strong thesis throughout his work, one with which they agree; but his apparent distaste for general thinking (ordinary theory) cannot be a serious proscription, and is not adhered to even by Wittgenstein.[3] It would be better described as a warning that a particular widespread tendency—an attraction to generalities, especially among philosophers—should be treated with caution and suspicion as it tends to obscure and weaken our thinking.

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[3] Bloor also explicitly argues this position. He says, "I propose to take seriously the Wittgensteinian invitation to be descriptive. I shall not construe this to mean 'describe but don't build theories.' I shall take it to mean 'describe, don't evaluate'" (Bloor 1983a, 82). And nine years later he wrote (like Bambrough) of Wittgenstein's "hostility to constructive theory building": "I doubt if Wittgenstein was entirely consistent in adhering to this principle" (Bloor 1992, 280-1).

There are times when it is useful to say, "That is a very American perspective," or "The scientific world view values this." We might be inclined to consider such expressions objectionably theoretical for implying an underlying unity to what are really very diverse phenomena. But if so, what would be wrong here would be the idea of "underlying," not the idea of "unity." Wittgenstein does not and cannot oppose the unifying of diverse phenomena. Part of the point of Wittgenstein's investigation of concepts like "game" is that we use them to unify widely disparate phenomena (ordinary theory), but need not presume any underlying unity guiding our acts of unification (philosophic theory). Such ordinary theory as "There is a medieval quality to this work" is, unlike philosophic theory, entirely derivative of particular cases: it simplifies and summarizes our experience of those cases. It does not attempt to govern particular cases but is governed by them. Rather than banishing ordinary theory in Wittgenstein's name, then, the radical reading would consider it more correct to say of such theorizing what Wittgenstein says of "commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting," that it is "as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing" (*PI* 25).

Presumably the particularists can grant this point without serious dislocation. So, we might imagine it would be easy at this point to reconcile the two readings: the disagreement was a mere confusion over the word "theory," and now we can agree that Wittgenstein opposes philosophic theory but not ordinary theory. But here we bump up against a seemingly minor obstacle, below which lies an enormous iceberg: how do we tell the two apart? The radical reading answers, "We cannot." To sketch the logic of the radical

position here (which I will elaborate further in examining Diamond's article), to presume that there is an underlying unity to philosophic theory which we can discover (and distinguish from the differing underlying unity of ordinary theory) is to commit the very error in question: pursuing philosophic theory. Since, however, there is no underlying unity to guide us, and *we unify* the phenomena under these two different labels, it is our task to decide, on a case-by-case basis, what is philosophic theory and what is ordinary. And since "ordinary theory" is just a fancy label here for the generality that belongs to all words and concepts, that task is all-pervasive. (It is, in a sense, the task of living.) I believe the particularist reading would have to answer the same, and that the radical critique of the particularists develops from charging them with failing to appreciate the great significance of this point: turning away from philosophic theory cannot be accomplished; it is not an act, but a perpetual task, even a perpetual responsibility. Stanley Cavell describes the importance of this problem for Wittgenstein (in concluding an analysis of Kripke that I will examine later in this chapter):

> The idea is rather: See how philosophical explanations will seek to distract you from your interests (ordinary, scientific, aesthetic); how they counterfeit necessity. That the advice is all but impossible to take is Wittgenstein's subject: we do seek, and therewith we demand a finding, and therein comes the skeptical conclusion, or solution: the demand for a philosophical solution is skepticism. (This is of course not true of science nor of art. Then how do you know when philosophy has intervened? Simply as a result of the self-stultification?) (97)

The problem of turning to the ordinary is Wittgenstein's subject, not his policy recommendation.[4]

Wittgenstein's emphasis on attention to particular cases cannot be turned into a general methodology for achieving philosophical understanding. Rather, his point is better served by treating each theory as itself a particular case to be given attention. Bambrough expresses this in the summary of his argument:

> If we firmly grasp the nature of philosophy as he conceived it, and do not allow our choice of idiom to cause us to backslide into confusion about our objectives, in putting on a more formal dress we shall be doing no more than respect the spirit of Wittgenstein's own recognition (PI, I, 48) that avoiding misunderstandings in any particular case is more important than insisting that one or other of two or more ways of expressing a point is the right or best way of expressing it. (129)

The choice of idiom will depend on what we hope to accomplish and the circumstances of our task. The reason Bambrough is arguing for theory connects directly, I believe, to our topic of the path from error to truth, raised in chapter two. He is not opposing close attention to particular cases so much as arguing that—as Wittgenstein said of stating the truth—it is not enough. We can see the point in this passage:

> He chose to undercut the theorising that led to so much confusion and distortion, and the patient descriptions that he offers instead of theorising do achieve what they aim at, provided that they are followed with the patience that went into their compilation.
> Such extreme patience is too much to expect of most philosophers, who are by nature and tradition interested in the

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[4] A great deal of Cavell's work is relevant here. I would mention his discussion of criteria on pages 30 to 36 of The Claim of Reason.

large view and the generality of statement that Wittgenstein opposed. (125-6)

The problem is understated in suggesting that extreme patience is all philosophers would need, but the idea is here that their being captivated by error obstructs their hearing the truth, even when it is told them, and consequently their reading habits must be taken into consideration.

If the radical reading has any quarrel with the close study of particular cases, then, it is only that in the course of that study we must not lose track of its point. In particular circumstances, the pursuit of theory may be the better path to understanding. If most of us habitually acknowledge only "the large view and generality of statement," then to scorn such views is to withdraw from the philosophical conversation. Accordingly, Bambrough argues, Wittgenstein does implicitly address philosophers' interest in the large view and general statement. We could put the point abstractly: even if the truth is relentlessly local and particular, if the error is general and systematic then the path from error to truth must have something of the general and systematic about it.[5] It is the path that is Wittgenstein's subject, not the terminus of that path in a new sort of local, particular truth. This is how Bambrough interprets Wittgenstein's many comments about philosophy: "The conception to which he now opposes himself is one that he had shared with Russell and Ramsey and Moore, and which is embodied in the philosophical tradition that philosophy is the pursuit of *truth*" (120). Wittgenstein's shift, then, is not from, say, abstract truth to concrete, particular truth. It is a much more radical shifting of the very nature and purpose and focus of philosophy

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[5] Later in this chapter, I will discuss this issue, indirectly, in the question of the radical and particularist readings' relations to their readers.

that is the second radical thesis: the shift from meaning to use, from concepts

to activities, or from truth to morality, as I put it last chapter.

Particularism

I have claimed that the radical readers and particularists are

substantially in agreement, and that their difference is not captured in an easy

contrast between doing theory and not doing it. After all, the particularists'

emphasis on particular cases is not really significantly different from

Wisdom's claim that "all reflection comes in the end to a case-by-case

procedure,"[6] which is arguably a "thesis." Nevertheless, there does seem to

be a persistent difference in orientation. The particularist vigilance against

theorizing is not idiosyncratic or paranoid, and the radical engagement with

theory is not careless or contradictory. We might think of this difference of

orientation as revealing different intuitions about where danger lies, about

what sorts of error and confusion Wittgenstein is concerned to make us

conscious of.

I will use a short passage from *Remarks on the Foundations of*

Mathematics to try to bring this out:[7]

> Suppose however there were a tribe whose people apparently
> had an understanding of a kind of regularity which I do not
> grasp. That is they would also have learning and instruction,
> quite analogous to that in § 42. If one watches them one would
> say that they follow rules, learn to follow rules. The instruction

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[6] Quoted in Yalden-Thomson (62). See also Dilman (1981, 173): "Wisdom speaks of the *ultimate* proof that a word is applicable in a particular case as a 'proof by parallel cases.'"

[7] My use of this passage is just heuristic, and I do not claim that the two camps disagree about its meaning, nor that it favors one over the other.

> effects, e.g., agreement in actions on the part of pupil and teacher. But if we look at one of their series of figures we can see no regularity of any kind.
>
> What should we say now? We *might* say: "They appear to be following a rule which escapes us," but also "Here we have a phenomenon of behaviour on the part of human beings, which we don't understand". (VI-45)

I would roughly characterize radical readers as inclining, in the face of such an example, to answer in the first way, and particularists as inclining toward the second.[8]

In answering the first way—that instruction is succeeding even if we cannot follow it—radical readers would be emphasizing that it is the role in social practice that makes for rules and rule following, *not* the existence of a regularity. Regularity is an *artifact*, not a prerequisite, of such practices as Wittgenstein describes the tribe engaging in: whatever we consider correct is what we will *call* "regular." In resisting the second answer—that we just don't understand their behavior—radical readers would be expressing their wariness of sliding into saying that we don't understand *because* there is no regularity guiding their teaching and application of the rule. Certainly "we don't understand" is a perfectly correct answer, but it is a dangerous answer because it tempts us with a philosophical picture Wittgenstein is centrally concerned to exorcise: the picture of our rules (practices) as guided by or corresponding to underlying regularities or patterns.

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[8] I argued in chapter two for the first way, in emphasizing that radical readers insist that *no* antecedent identity is assumed by Wittgenstein, not even that "agreement" or "same" must have content prior to the interaction between teacher and pupil that creates meaning.

The particularists, on the other hand, in saying we don't understand, would be emphasizing our limitation to the particular case in hand, which we in fact do not fully understand. In resisting the first answer, they would express their wariness of thinking that it is general principles or criteria (e.g. "role in social practice") that illuminate particular cases. Certainly there are similarities between what the tribe does and following rules, but it is dangerous to assimilate to our concepts what we could not use and could not incorporate into our practices of rule following. To do so tempts us to think that those similarities *define* rule following, and tempts us to reify "use" into a philosophical theory of meaning ("*They* use it, therefore it is meaningful").

Both reactions are valid, and both dangers are real. Nevertheless, it is not easy to say when either of the threatening errors has been committed. I take this short passage from the *Remarks* as something of a "figure" for several elements of Wittgenstein's philosophy concerning "theory." We could consider the first answer—"They appear to be following a rule which escapes us"—to be a theory. The second answer—". . . we don't understand"—refuses to do theory. The most noticeable thing about this figure, then, is that Wittgenstein is saying it does not much matter which answer we give. Either one could be all right. Figuratively, either the radical or the particularist reading is all right. The belief that it is important which answer we give depends crucially on believing there is a clear difference between doing theory and not. There is, however, a suggestion of asymmetry here in that it seems easier for one who answers in the first way, with a theory, to accept that either answer is correct. The second answer seems more

like a specific refusal of the first.[9] (If this asymmetry is not clearly present in the passage quoted, it is suggested by the rest of remark 45, where Wittgenstein says (and explores), "Instruction in acting according to the rule can be described without employing 'and so on,'" i.e. emphasizing that seeing

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[9] In using this passage as a "figure," I am suggesting a "deflation" of certain debates over Wittgenstein, generally concerning whether Wittgenstein inverts traditional philosophical hierarchies or abolishes them. Fogelin, for example, in "Two Wittgensteins" (Appendix B to *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification*) argues that there is "a conflict [in Wittgenstein's later writings] between doing philosophy and doing away with it" (205). He calls this urge to do philosophy the "non-Pyrrhonian" side of Wittgenstein, "with its roots in German Idealism" (205), and the urge to do away with philosophy the "neo-Pyrrhonian" side. Fogelin thinks the two are deeply incompatible and argues against the non-Pyrrhonian side. The "figure" would deflate this: it says Wittgenstein does not care which of the two versions of him one finds, the "neo-Pyrrhonian" (particularist) or the "non-Pyrrhonian" (radical). The distinction between the two is only as clear as the identity of "philosophy." I believe an examination of Fogelin's argument bears out the imprudence of leaning heavily on this distinction, that is, on the definiteness of the identity of "theory." Fogelin argues that "in a philosophical position certain concepts are assigned a privileged status. This privileged status has at least two sides. First, these concepts are assigned a foundational role within the philosophical position. . . . Second, these concepts are typically *exempted from criticism*" (205-6). Both these aspects of privilege seem extremely elusive in Fogelin's argument. It simply is very unclear what counts as treating a concept as "foundational" and "exempted from criticism," as opposed to, say, using it to explain things.

In a related debate, indirectly about Wittgenstein, John McDowell accuses Robert Brandom of "non-Pyrrhonism"—"Brandom responds to the insight that representationalism will not do with a position that mirrors its structure, but inverts its explanatory order" (1997, 158)—and advocates a sort of "neo-Pyrrhonian" agnosticism, "appropriately modest in its pretensions" (159). Brandom replies very much in the spirit of the radical reading (and more in the spirit of the figure from *RFM* VI-45 than either McDowell or Fogelin): "I undertake commitment to the bolder, riskier program in full awareness of its safer alternatives. . . . Surely this is a laudable explanatory ambition—one whose pursuit ought not to be ruled out in advance by theoretical quietism, however principled. The *only* real question is to what extent the attempt is successful" (1997, 189-90).

a pattern in the instruction is not important, whereas subsequent behavior is.)

I believe there is indeed a subtle asymmetry between the radical and particularist readings, an asymmetry in their relations to their respective dangers, and a consequent asymmetry in their relations to their readers. We might think of it as "rhetorical," or perhaps as a cause of the rhetorical difference between them, the stridently skeptical or paradoxical quality of the radical reading and the quietist quality of the particularist. Roughly, the two readings fall back on different resources when struggling to be understood: the radical reading leans on Wittgenstein's negative arguments, but the particularist must draw on its reader's charitable intuitions. The result is the following asymmetry: if the danger to radical reading is a tendency to slide back into doing philosophical theory, then leaning on the negative arguments will *ameliorate* that tendency; if the danger to the particularist reading is a tendency to treat the particular case as too easily identified, then leaning on readers' intuitions will *exacerbate* that tendency.

The Common Problem

The asymmetry is visible in Cora Diamond's critique of Kripke in "Rules: Looking in the Right Place." I am not claiming that the difference between Diamond and Kripke shows a clear conflict between the particularist and radical readings of Wittgenstein. On the contrary, I will argue that Diamond and Kripke are saying the same thing. But *how* they say it differs in ways that illuminate their respective camps.[10] Far from disputing the radical

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[10] I would make a disclaimer now that will apply throughout this chapter and

reading, Diamond's article largely exemplifies it, with the characteristically particularist emphasis on the second radical thesis, the change of perspective that Wittgenstein is urging. As she puts it, taking her terminology from Rush Rhees, she is exploring what it means to see the rules of grammar as being "rules of the lives in which there is language" (Rhees 1980, 45; Diamond 1989, 12, 14, and 16).

Diamond considers her project here to be starkly opposed to Kripke's: "[Rhees's] remark should suggest that it is very peculiar to think of Wittgenstein as having changed from holding a truth-conditional account of meaning in the *Tractatus* to an account in terms of assertion-conditions in his later writings" (14).[11] She describes what an account in terms of assertion

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in later ones. Because Kripke's book provoked an enormous literature in rebuttal, it is by far the most convenient radical reading to use for comparison with alternatives, and I will so use it frequently. It is not, however, the best or most representative instance of that reading. (In fact, I will argue in chapter six that there is a subtext in Kripke's book that practically amounts to an attempt to sabotage the reading—for example, by selecting peculiarly uncongenial turns of phrase—possibly resulting from Kripke's personal disagreement with Wittgenstein as read radically.) Since I am interpreting Kripke *as* a representative radical reader, my interpretation of his book may strike its critics as excessively generous. There may be some truth to that, but I would vigorously dispute that my charity in any way distorts his book. I will argue, however, that many critics have read the book so *uncharitably* that their interpretations do falsify it, beginning with Diamond.

If I had my choice, I would use Bloor as the paradigmatic radical reader. So far, though, his work has too little engaged the wide community of Wittgenstein scholars. Ever since 1992, however, he has promised in footnotes a forthcoming book on the questions at the center of the controversy stirred by Kripke. It is somewhat mysterious what enables a book to ignite debate, but perhaps Bloor's new book, scheduled for October, 1997 under the title *Wittgenstein on Rules and Institutions* (Routledge), can replace Kripke's book as the representative radical reading.

[11] Kripke claims that Wittgenstein shifts the substance of any account of meaning from truth conditions to "assertibility conditions," which is his

conditions would be, illustrating the sort of approach to problems that she will argue Wittgenstein undermines:

> I am suggesting a contrast, that is, between two kinds of philosophical approach to questions about meaning. Take 'fear'. To give its 'assertion-conditions' would be to specify the kind of behaviour which entitles someone to say of another person that he is afraid, and to give some kind of story about the conditions in which we are entitled to come out with assertions about our own fear. . . . There would be no attempt, though, to include in such an account how the commerce with the word 'fear' is interwoven with the rest of the lives of the people who use the word. No connections would need to be made with the way fear enters the lives and thoughts and interests of human beings. (15)

Certainly this is one plausible way to interpret the expression "assertibility conditions," if we were given the expression without a context. (It might even be a plausible interpretation of the approach taken by Michael Dummett and Crispin Wright, whom Diamond mentions along with Kripke.) The important question for the radical reading and its relation to Diamond, though, is whether this is what *Kripke* means by "assertibility conditions." I will argue that it is not, and that, of the "two kinds of philosophical approach to questions about meaning," Kripke shares Diamond's approach.

Kripke's expression would *seem* to be a perfect example of the approach Diamond is criticizing, for her main goal is to illuminate the subtle shift we make in philosophy from the use of a word (the use itself, as it occurs in life) to the abstraction "conditions of use."[12] The right approach to questions of meaning, which she finds in Wittgenstein, does not ask for "conditions," but

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articulation of the second radical thesis.

[12] I would say that Diamond is arguing for the seventh radical thesis: that Wittgenstein means immediate *acting*, not actions.

looks to the full role of a word in the context of life in which it is used. But the shift to the wrong approach is subtle because the concept of "conditions" is subtle; it suggests the sort of formalizable rules that characterize philosophic theory, yet can also be an innocuous, ordinary word.[13] As always, it depends on how we use the word, so we must look at Kripke's use.

When Kripke introduces assertibility conditions as Wittgenstein's replacement for truth conditions, he calls them "an alternative rough general picture" and says that they are not "a general account of language" but "different activities related to each other in various ways":

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

On the face of it, then, Kripke seems to use the expression "assertibility conditions" to describe exactly what Diamond wants, exactly what she complains he neglects: Kripke asks, "What is the role, and the utility, in our lives of our practice of" using the word "fear," and yet Diamond accuses him of ignoring "how the commerce with the word 'fear' is interwoven with the rest of the lives of the people who use the word." They both seem to want to make the same point.

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[13] Already, then, we can predict problems for Diamond, or at least limitations on what she can hope to accomplish. If her goal is to distinguish two kinds of approach, and the distinction is between philosophic theory and ordinary, then the radical reading claims she should be unable to describe that distinction in any general way; it can only be made on a case-by-case basis.

I do not want to claim that Kripke's choice of terminology here is congenial. In fact, I want to stress how uncongenial it is. "Conditions" has exactly the wrong flavor (that of philosophic theory), and its surface continuity with "truth conditions" obscures the dramatic change from truth to use (assertibility). Nevertheless, his *actual use* of this clumsy expression is to designate the change of perspective that both the radical and the particularist readings find Wittgenstein urging, the change that Diamond is trying to describe in detail. Having introduced the expression, Kripke repeatedly qualifies it in exactly the direction Diamond should find more congenial—for example, calling it an "oversimplified terminology" that should properly speak more generally of "the conditions when a move (a form of linguistic expression) is to be made in the 'language game'" (74). It even seems eventually to vanish as an expression of "conditions": for masters of the language, "the 'assertability conditions' that license an individual to say that, on a given occasion, he ought to follow his rule this way rather than that, are, ultimately, that he does what he is inclined to do" (88). Making the same point another way, Kripke equates "assertibility conditions" with "justification conditions," and then argues that we ultimately follow rules without justification: "The entire point of the sceptical argument is that ultimately we reach a level where we act without any reason in terms of which we can justify our action. We act unhesitatingly but *blindly*" (87).[14] Kripke's "assertibility conditions" turn out not to be "conditions" at all in the sense that Diamond finds objectionable.

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[14] Kripke too is articulating the seventh radical thesis, claiming that Wittgenstein is speaking of our acting as it occurs, not as reified actions or

Another of Kripke's controversial passages is similarly close to Diamond's own position and yet she does not recognize it as such. In addressing the question of whether isolated individuals can be said to follow rules, Diamond first quotes Kripke's view:

> We are told by Saul Kripke that, if we think of him as following rules, 'we are taking him into our community and applying our criteria for rule following to him' (Kripke, 1982: p. 110). This is puzzling, in part because it is not clear what is meant by 'taking him into our community'. How much are we supposed to be imagining into the case? (28)

She goes on to elaborate an interpretation of this that would be a bad philosophical position, and then, despite the fact that "it is not clear what is meant" by Kripke's phrase, she claims that "he seems to mean" this bad position (28). Diamond contrasts this with a correct account:

> What is it like when we do apply our criteria? We have many ways of telling what rule someone is following and whether he is following any rule at all in what he does; but our proceedings are part of our commerce with those who share the life of rules with us. Telling whether someone is following a rule has *this* position in our lives, has *these* connections. We can extend this activity of telling, apply it imaginatively in various ways to other sorts of case. But Kripke has nothing like that in mind. (29)

But what is the warrant for this last sentence, this dismissal of Kripke? Diamond quotes no more from Kripke than the one line, and that seems quite compatible with her own account; the phrase "taking him into our community" seems a very apt one for the process Diamond has described: "We can extend this activity of telling, apply it imaginatively." That we are imaginatively projecting our ideas of the connections that rules have in our

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conventions (conditions). Cavell's reading of these passages from Kripke differs from mine, and I will address that difference later in this chapter.

own lives onto people whose actual circumstances and histories we do not know, is important for Diamond. The proceeding of establishing a rule "has consequences for *anyone* applying that rule": "Look at our engaging, as 'anyones', in practices of inventing rules, teaching them, using them, correcting people and so on: there you will see the relation between the proceeding of establishing a rule and *anyone*" (29). For both her and Kripke, it is important that we apply our rules to strangers by imagining them to be appropriately connected to our life with rules.

So, Kripke's actual use of his expressions "assertibility conditions" and "taking him into our community" are very sympathetic to Diamond's position, yet she interprets them as thoroughly opposed. The significance of Diamond's misinterpretations of Kripke's terminology is that it illustrates a general problem that all the radical readers and particularists face. (Being a radical reader, I am inclined to find a general lesson, rather than resting content with having found that Diamond in particular misunderstands Kripke in particular.) Terminology alone cannot (does not) bear the weight of meaning. We depend on our readers to respond appropriately, to get the idea. Of course, this is true of everybody, but radical readers and particularists see Wittgenstein as asking his readers to get an unusually alien or difficult idea.[15] Kripke failed to get Diamond to respond appropriately, but Diamond is herself just as dependent on her reader, and has the same problem.

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[15] This is not quite right. Wittgenstein said, "I don't try to make you *believe* something you *don't* believe, but to make you *do* something you won't do" (qtd. in Diamond 13, from Rhees 45). The desired response of readers should not be put in terms of "getting the idea."

Diamond's primary goal is to get us to see how typically we respond inappropriately to issues of meaning. The contrast "between two kinds of philosophical approach to questions about meaning" (15) that she is trying to describe is the contrast between doing (philosophic) theory and looking at particular circumstances. Typically we do theory; that is, as she puts it, we separate our lives from our concepts, and then look for a theory about the connection between them:

> *Zettel* §351. . . is a rejection of the question that you are taking to be a real question and of the idea that underlies it: the idea that there being a complex life with colour terms, a life involving agreement, is one thing, and that our having our colour concept is *something else*, standing or not standing in a relation of logical or conceptual dependence to that complex life involving agreement. (19)

Having separated the two, we look for *conditions* under which the concepts apply to the lives. (This is a version of assuming that meaning determines use.) Many scholars would agree with this description of Wittgenstein's diagnosis of philosophical confusion (which is one reason Kripke's choice of the term "assertibility conditions" is so misleading). But Diamond shows how those very scholars turn around and repeat the mistake, e.g. by turning "place-in-life" or "agreement" into a condition: "Here is how not to put it [Wittgenstein's approach]: he says that meaning is given, not by assertion conditions, but by place-in-life" (15). This is not the way because it reifies "place-in-life" and invites the wrong questions (e.g. "What place exactly?"). Wittgenstein's emphasis on agreement has been misunderstood: "[W]e tend to have in mind simply the fact of people agreeing on what they take to be the application of the rule to this and that case, and we treat that sort of

agreement in isolation from the role in people's lives of following rules" (27). The wrong notion of "agreement," a bare fact detached from life, not "woven into the texture of life" (28), leads to bad philosophical questions and to puzzles over normativity. ("If Wittgenstein held that *such* agreement made right and wrong possible, one would indeed have to ask how it could accomplish that" (28).) It is a very important point to both radical readers and particularists. I tried to capture it with the seventh radical thesis: "acting" must not be reified into "actions" or Wittgenstein's point will be lost; the rich context of rules in a form of human life must not be reified into "place-in-life."

The trouble is that hanging over Diamond's whole exposition is the shadow of her having done to Kripke exactly what she is urging us not to do. He too tried to describe the importance to Wittgenstein of a word's being woven into the texture of life, and she reified his description into "assertion-conditions." Actually, my focus on Kripke is something of a dramatization, because the point I am going to try to explain would apply whether or not Diamond had ever mentioned him. The idea (introduced at the beginning of this chapter) is approximately this: there is a sense in which the point Diamond is trying to make simply cannot be made, or what she is trying to say cannot be said (or cannot be said to someone who does not already agree with it); it is somehow self-defeating (the particularist reading cannot escape the radical reading's paradox). This is the common problem for particularists and radical readers. Kripke's presence just makes the problem vivid because he tried to make the same point she is trying to make, and his failure at her hands foreshadows her own situation.

Diamond's problem, in a nutshell, is that she (along with at least all particularists and radical readers) has rejected "conditions" as fixing meaning, and consequently cannot give her reader the conditions that will identify the phenomenon she is describing. To a certain sort of reader, this is a mortal handicap. She says that we separate concepts, such as "agreement" or "fear," from the life into which they are woven, and she accuses Kripke of doing so in appealing to "assertibility conditions." But she could not, on pain of contradiction, say just when such separation has occurred. Of course, the question of what exactly counts as "the abstracting of 'agreement' from the life into which it is woven" (33) is exactly (sic?) the sort of bad philosophical question she is trying to expose. But she cannot (non-circularly) appeal to that until after her point is made, and she cannot make her point until her reader has some idea of what that abstracting is. So Diamond ends up in the position of saying something like, "I can't say what bad philosophical theory is, but I know it when I see it." This may be fine—perhaps (paraphrasing Kripke 88) the "assertibility conditions that license her to say that a given question is philosophically confused are, ultimately, that she does what she is inclined to do"—but it does raise issues with a familiarly paradoxical air.

The mere fact of disagreement over what Diamond sees as bad philosophical theory is not necessarily a serious problem. She sees Kripke's "assertibility conditions" as "explicable independently of what the life is like within which the asserting goes on" (14) (i.e. as an example of that abstracting), whereas I see them as practically a label for what that life is like within which the asserting goes on. Our disagreement need not be resolvable by appeal to definite criteria, or even at all. But it raises the question of what

resources Diamond has to draw on to resolve disagreements or to make her case. Her actual method is to give examples in order to give her reader a feel for when the wrong questions are being asked. In general, I find her convincing and the method successful, because I agree with all her examples except the Kripke one. I also agree with her final summary of the main thesis (which is radical thesis seven): "We do not look at the use; we look for what, in the use, is essential to the logical features that interest us. This is what not looking at the use, but looking at the meaning, comes to for us" (33). I believe this is a very important point. Nevertheless, I cannot imagine how I would defend it against a hostile critic, one who simply did not see a difference between looking at the use and looking at what in the use interests us.[16]

Diamond's position is considerably more problematical (more paradoxical) than her rhetoric implies. She writes as if she could describe the conditions under which one has separated concepts from the stream of life, yet describing conditions is exactly the move that separates them. Put another way, she uses a specific property—the giving of conditions—to argue that relying on specific properties leads to philosophical confusion. The result is that she asks her reader to look at concepts and not to look at them, to look at them enough to get the idea, but not to look too hard. This may work for a sympathetic reader, but it begins to unravel for a puzzled reader trying to get clear.

Take Diamond's example of "fear." She juxtaposes the (general) conditions that entitle us to assert something about fear, with the (particular)

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[16] The "essential" and "logical" in Diamond's summary do not bear any weight; they merely indicate our bad (philosophical) intentions.

connections "with the way fear enters the lives and thoughts and interests of human beings" (15). Which is the better way to understand the meaning of "fear"? The question is at too general a level. We must look at the particular circumstances in which we are trying to understand fear. Thus, if we are exploring fear in the novels of Joseph Conrad, or the relations between fear and trust in marriage, then Diamond's description—the way fear enters our lives and thoughts and interests—may better fit our approach. If, however, we are deciding capital improvements for Chicago Housing Authority property, we may want to specify the conditions that entitle a resident to complain of fearfulness (perhaps to distinguish it from paranoia or duplicity). This is still too general, though. In a particular circumstance, fear in marriage might be better understood by specifying conditions. Perhaps a marriage counselor finds talk of fear in our lives and thoughts to be unhelpfully vague, and wants to speak of the conditions that entitle one partner to be afraid versus the conditions that entitle the other partner to complain of lack of trust. But this also is too general. Perhaps to understand the conditions that make Mary fearful or trusting, one would need to see the complex connections of fear throughout her life that, say, make her see acts of kindness as mere duty and make her need a verbal invitation to voice her fears (as opposed to George's first wife, for whom verbal invitations were confrontational and acts of kindness a proof of sincerity). This is still too general, but going further will lead to impossibly artificial and tedious imaginary examples. The point is that we will never reach a level at which the juxtaposition between generally articulated conditions and connections woven into life will capture the right or wrong way to pursue understanding

the meaning of "fear." The general and the particular are intertwined all the way down, so to speak.

The strain in Diamond's relation to her puzzled reader becomes especially visible when she gives that reader a voice and attempts to respond to objections.[17] She imagines a reader trying to get clear about just what she means by "woven into the texture of life," who asks if the words in the diary of Alexander Selkirk living in isolation have the usual sense, since they are no longer situated in the usual place in life. Diamond replies, "A bad question, again. It rests on the idea that we have or should have a philosophical theory of how using words with such-and-such grammar depends on some set of conceptually necessary conditions. The right story goes by analogy" (30). Now, this is the right answer, but it will not help a reader puzzled by Diamond's many vague references to the texture of life, the place in life, the form of human life, the commerce of a concept with the lives and thoughts and interests of human beings. It defers that question to the further question of what analogies are appropriate. This too is a bad question, but to say so would make explicit the regress that lies here. Instead, Diamond tries to answer it: "What it is for Selkirk to be keeping records . . . is for him to be continuing in a particular direction the life of which English is a part, and which he had shared" (31). She contrasts Selkirk with "a totally isolated individual who had never spoken with another soul" and says that "what

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[17] I will use "puzzled reader" as a term of art in this chapter and the next to refer to a certain (unspecified, but characteristic) response that Diamond and other particularists and radical readers can (and do) anticipate from much of the academic community.

such an individual does is not the continuation of a life with others. It has not that sense" (31). Naturally, her reader remains puzzled:

> 'How do Selkirk's past activities make a difference to whether, in putting down these marks, he is keeping records, in English? How do they affect the logical character of what he is doing now?' In the recurrence of such questions we see the power of what Wittgenstein was battling against. (31)

Again, I agree. But the power of what Wittgenstein was battling against is also shown in Diamond's having attempted to specify "what it is for Selkirk to be keeping records." Once she has done so, her puzzled reader's further questions seem only reasonable.

Diamond's position would be better captured by "I can't explain it; you just have to see from the examples I've given that the objection about Selkirk is a bad question." (That is, "The right story goes by analogy.") The trouble then is that the same goes for each of her examples. (I, for instance, do not see that Kripke has strayed.) Diamond's puzzled reader is not merely obtuse. Rather, that reader comes from a philosophical tradition that sees conditions, criteria, and definitions as perfectly reasonable tools for understanding, and Diamond seems to be trying to replace these tools with something she cannot even adequately identify. She is trying to shift from "philosophical theory" and "conditions" to "analogy" and "life context," but cannot say what the difference is. Such a reader may quite reasonably be frustrated and think, "Diamond seems to suggest that the answer to every problem is just sort of to meditate upon life!"

Let me pause here to regroup. I am not trying to show some problem with the particularist reading of Wittgenstein that the radical reading does

not have, some superiority about the radical reading, nor even to criticize Diamond. Both readings have the same problem with this unconvinced reader. I am also not saying that both readings have a fatal flaw (or any flaw), because I am not saying that they *should* be able to convince this reader. Consider the situation as an instance of the following one: this reader wants a compelling philosophical argument for the thesis that philosophical arguments cannot compel; the fact that we cannot meet that demand does not mean that the thesis is not true. The inability to convince such a reader is far from the end of the matter (though it may appear so to that reader). Furthermore, the topic here is not philosophical positions so much as readings of Wittgenstein. The readings are correct to the extent that their problems are Wittgenstein's problems. In Diamond's article we see the workings in practice of what Wittgenstein expressed in a passage I quoted in chapter two: "Should it be said that I am using a word whose meaning I don't know, and so am talking nonsense?—Say what you choose, so long as it does not prevent you from seeing the facts. (And when you see them there is a good deal that you will not say.)" (*PI* 79) As I said then, the radical reading does not take Wittgenstein's intention here to be flippant. Diamond cannot definitively rebut a critic who says, "All these vague appeals to life are just nonsense." Nor can Wittgenstein.

The Differing Responses

What I have tried to do is to bring out this problem (perhaps "characteristic" is better) that radical readers and particularists have in common—the problem of making themselves understood to a puzzled

reader, especially of making the seventh radical thesis clear: the distinction between acting as it occurs in life and actions that are reified and separated from life—in order to compare how they deal with it (specifically to compare how Diamond and Kripke deal with it). I said earlier that particularists are especially wary of the danger of falling into doing philosophical theory, and that radical readers are especially wary of the danger of assuming that an underlying pattern guides us. The two worries meet in the role of "conditions" in explaining meaning, and confront each other in Diamond's and Kripke's different responses to or uses of this concept. On the one hand, the search for conditions is the misguided pursuit of philosophical theory; on the other hand, identifying conditions as the villain is relying on an underlying pattern (the presence of conditions) to guide us in avoiding philosophical confusion.

I have argued that Kripke and Diamond are making the same basic point: roughly, in order to understand what a word means, we must look to the context in which people use it, and this (Wittgensteinian) insight cannot be captured by formal specifications of what that context is (what the conditions of use are). They both face the same problem: how to understand the first part of this (look to the context) without violating the second part (do not try to specify it). We may be able to do this (we do do it), but there is a sense in which we cannot explain it, cannot specify what constitutes looking at the use without specifying it. (The relation between use and conditions of use (meaning) is like the relation between a person and a picture of the person, which are very different things. Explaining the two is like giving a picture of them, and suddenly they become very hard to tell apart, for a

picture of a person and a picture of a picture of that person are extremely similar.) So how are Kripke and Diamond to explain themselves to their readers?

Diamond approaches the problem straightforwardly. She explains Wittgenstein's point as well as she can, illustrating it with negative examples: cautionary tales of Wittgenstein scholars who have fallen back into the traditional trap of specifying the conditions, and have paid the price in philosophical confusion. To a sympathetic reader she has done a wonderful job, but to an unsympathetic one she has attempted the impossible and inevitably failed. Kripke takes a very different approach. To the traditional reader of philosophy likely to respond to Diamond with, "She makes a lot of vague references to 'life' and expects me to just 'get it'; well, I suspect the reason I don't get it is that her position is incoherent; but that's her problem, or maybe Wittgenstein's," Kripke takes a far more confrontational rhetorical stance.

"Reader," says Kripke, in effect, "you have a problem. It is not my problem or Wittgenstein's or Diamond's, but yours. You have tried to understand meaning by specifying the conditions under which it is correct to use a word—which you call 'truth conditions.' That approach is doomed, because it leads inevitably to paradox. I cannot, on pain of contradiction, tell you exactly what to put in its place. Instead, I am equipping you with this skeptical argument as a tool to test any ideas you might get: whenever you approach any question related to meaning, ask yourself if what you are saying falls afoul of Wittgenstein's skeptical paradox; if it does, then you are still captivated by some variant on the confused philosophical picture of 'truth

conditions.' To get away from that picture requires a very radical change of perspectives, to looking at what we actually do as creating meaning rather than meaning as guiding what we do. Ultimately, then, each of our acts is creative, a leap in the dark, though of course we can empirically study our leaping in the dark to see what sort of generalizations we can make about it. I would call that an investigation into 'assertibility conditions.' (I choose this misleading label as a test, knowing that you will be tempted to interpret it as just the sort of thing the skeptical argument undermines. But I have armed you against that temptation. Were I to choose another label, such as 'the commerce with a word as it is woven into the texture of life,' I would be presenting the more insidious temptation to think that my label has gotten it right and can guide you in your efforts to understand meaning.)"

At the end of this imaginary summary of Kripke's rhetorical relation to his reader, I have given a somewhat fanciful reason for Kripke's choice of the term "assertibility conditions." I do not, of course, know why he chose the terminology he chose. Nevertheless, two elements of my suggestion are *not* fanciful: Kripke does offer Wittgenstein's skeptical paradox as a counter to our inclination to misunderstand what assertibility conditions amount to; and no other choice of terminology would have been impervious to that inclination either. The first of these Kripke explicitly states at the end of the book. He says, "What follows from these assertability conditions is *not* that the answer everyone gives to an addition problem is, by definition, the correct one" (112), and follows this thought up in a long footnote:

> If Wittgenstein had been attempting to give a necessary and sufficient condition to show that '125', not '5', is the 'right' response to '68+57', he might be charged with circularity. For he

> might be taken to say that my response is correct if and only if it agrees with that of others. But even if the sceptic and I both accept this criterion in advance, might not the sceptic maintain that just as I was wrong about what '+' meant in the past, so I was wrong about 'agree'? Indeed, to attempt to reduce the rule for addition to another rule—"Respond to an addition problem exactly as others do!"—falls foul of Wittgenstein's strictures on 'a rule for interpreting a rule' just as much as any other such attempted reduction. (146 n87)

If we take either assertibility conditions or agreement as *conditions* in the traditional sense, then they will be just as hopelessly vulnerable to the skeptical paradox as truth conditions are.[18]

The second point—that any choice of terminology, including Diamond's, is as vulnerable as the expression "assertibility conditions" to our

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[18] Despite Kripke's having given this explicit caution (in advance) against the charge that assertibility conditions fall to exactly the Wittgensteinian arguments he adduced against truth conditions, that charge has frequently been made. I am arguing here that Kripke's text amply refutes any interpretation of them, such as Diamond's, as another set of rules (conditions). There may be some justice, however, from a certain perspective, in complaining that assertibility conditions are ultimately unidentifiable (as is the use of a concept woven into the texture of life). Kripke's failure to satisfy his reader (some readers), then, is comparable to Cavell's position in this passage:

> That a group of human beings *stimmen* in their language *uberein* says, so to speak, that they are mutually voiced with respect to it, mutually *attuned* top to bottom.—I am not unaware that some philosophers will be impatient with the confidence I may seem to place in such a remark, and rather disapprove of my pleasure in such an alignment of words, which is merely metaphorical. So I should emphasize that, while I regard it as empty to call this idea of mutual attunement "merely metaphorical", I also do not take it to prove or explain anything. . . . For nothing is deeper than the fact, or the extent, of agreement itself. (1979, 32)

Cavell's "impatient philosophers" are Diamond's and Kripke's "puzzled readers."

inclination to turn it into theory—is what I have been trying to demonstrate, using Diamond as an example. We can summarize the lesson learned from Diamond's essay like this: there is no principled distinction between the theoretical and the particular (or the philosophical and the ordinary); the distinction depends on how we take things. I will designate this the eighth radical thesis: the philosophical and the ordinary are not (philosophically) separable.

Now I think we can attempt to articulate the difference between the radical and the particularist readings of Wittgenstein. We can put it like this: Diamond's reader is an observer, but Kripke's reader is a participant. Diamond tries to *describe* the contrast between right and wrong here: "we tend to have in mind simply the fact of people agreeing on what they take to be the application of the rule to this and that case" (27); we go wrong in taking agreement as "simply a fact." But this description does not capture the contrast, because facts and conditions can be perfectly innocuous; it is certain uses of them that are problematic (basically their use as the basis for philosophical justifications). Kripke, rather than describing, sets out the skeptical paradox as an attack on the picture of facts as basic.[19] That is, appropriate and inappropriate uses of facts are distinguished by whether or not they lead to the paradox. Diamond shows her reader agreement in the diverse use of rules, and tries to contrast it with the *fact* of agreement in that use. But who can *see* such a contrast? Kripke puts the burden on his reader. He does not try (very hard) to describe the difference between truth conditions and assertibility conditions, because it will all depend on how the reader takes

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[19] I address this claim in detail in chapter six.

any description. He offers instead a technique or a problem (the paradox) that should make any reader who has taken things the wrong way uncomfortable.

Wittgenstein says, in a passage both the radical and particularist readings take as expressing a crucially central idea:

> Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end;—but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game. (*OC* 204)

I believe the basic difference between the radical reading and the particularist—which is played out primarily in their differing attitudes toward theorizing—is that radical readers think particularists ultimately still put some kind of *seeing* at the bottom of the language-game. Specifically, as I have tried to bring out in Diamond, they seem to think we can *see* the difference between the philosophical and the ordinary. Radical readers think the shift from seeing to acting is far more radical and paradoxical (from a perspective that starts with seeing, such as that of the puzzled reader). Putting it another way, both readings understand Wittgenstein to want us to do things in some new way (based in acting). Particularists attempt to do just that, directly. But radical readers say it is not that easy to tell the new way from the old (again, witness Diamond's efforts to describe it). Consequently, the most characteristic feature of radical readings is the two-stage structure (the first and second radical theses): first a refutation of the old, then a gesture toward describing the new. The new needs always to be seen (can only be seen) in the light of the failure of the old.[20] The old and new are not different

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[20] This would be my reading of Wittgenstein's famous comment in the preface to the *Investigations* that "I should publish those old thoughts [the

kinds of things, a difference we could simply see. The difference is in how we take things, in what we do, and so the new is vulnerable at every moment to becoming the old. Diamond shows us how the diverse connections of a concept in our lives can be taken as simply the *fact* that there are those connections, and are so taken by some Wittgenstein scholars. The radical lesson is that the ordinary can *always* be taken as the philosophical.

The rhetoric of such particularist works as Diamond's hints at an ultimate reliance on seeing—the ordinary and particular are treated as somehow unproblematic. This is suggested by her apparent unconcern that what she is trying to describe cannot be described. She refers to an indescribable contrast between the theoretical (conditions in which we use a word) and the particular (connections a word has in our lives) as if implicitly confident that her reader will recognize the difference upon encountering a particular case. But, as we saw with the example of "fear," no particular case is ever particular enough to separate the two. At any level of specificity, the general is already there. I speak of "hints" and "suggestions" because Diamond (as with the particularists generally) is not necessarily committed to any error here; it all depends on how her work is intended (and taken). We can distinguish two interpretations of her position: a strong interpretation that radical readers could consider identical to their own position, and a weak one that radical readers would consider an erroneous reading of Wittgenstein.

Tractatus] and the new ones together: that the latter could be seen in the right light only by contrast with and against the background of my old way of thinking" (x). The radical reading keeps this connection central.

On the strong interpretation, Diamond could reply, "Everything you say is quite right, but I am not trying to give my reader a general method for finding meaning: 'look for the particular role a concept has in our lives, and what you will see will be self-evident.' I am only trying to show some examples of looking for rules in the right place, and in the wrong place, not to give generally applicable definitions of those right and wrong places." Philosophical confusion, as this reply allows, is something we create, and every idea is vulnerable to it. If this is the particularist position, the radical reading is in complete agreement. The weak reading of Diamond's position, however, is that the particular or the ordinary is somehow privileged. We can separate "philosophical theory" from our ordinary lives, and Wittgenstein's arguments apply only to the former; if we stick to the ordinary, we have no philosophical problems. However, this is a version of exactly what Diamond argues we cannot do without losing the sense of the concept in question. Just as with "agreement," or "fear," or "color," "philosophical theory" loses its meaning in separation from its role in our lives (the commerce of the concept of "philosophical theory" with our lives and thoughts and interests). But it is not surprising that Diamond (on this weak reading) should commit exactly the error she is arguing against. The radical reading suspects the particularist reading of ultimately falling back into the error that both of them find Wittgenstein trying to expose: looking for something to guide us, something that will be a foundation for normativity, a distinction between right and wrong that we can simply *see*.[21]

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[21] The error Diamond will have committed if the weak reading of her position is correct has been discussed at length by Fish, who calls this error

The distinction between the strong and weak interpretations of particularism is once again that inarticulable distinction Diamond is trying to make. Is her appeal to the context of life really a look at the use, or is she looking for what in the use interests us (in this case, whether or not the use is ordinary or philosophical)? We have come full circle to my suspecting Diamond of the very error she accuses Kripke of. I argued that if we look at Kripke's full use of the concept of "assertibility conditions," he does not seem to have made that mistake. It is much less clear that Diamond has not. The importance of the difference in rhetoric between the radical and particularist readings is that it is only in light of their full use of the concepts at issue that we can judge whether a fall back into philosophical confusion has occurred.

Cavell

The contrast I have tried to show between the radical and particularist readings of Wittgenstein may seem unsatisfyingly unspecific. I introduced an eighth radical thesis—that the philosophical is inseparable from the

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"antifoundationalist theory hope." (Fish has an essay of that title (in Fish 1989) as well as discussions of the concept in several other essays, including his essay "Consequences" in *Against Theory* mentioned earlier in this chapter.) This is the hope that we can replace theory with a pure or unconditioned or pre-linguistic encounter with particular cases. Fish argues that "the theory hope expressed by some antifoundationalists is incoherent within the antifoundationalist perspective, since it assumes, in its dream of beginning anew, everything that antifoundationalism rejects" (1985, 114) (i.e. "a method independent of belief by which the truth . . . could be determined" (114)). The method is to stick to the ordinary, to encounter each particular case free of philosophical prejudice. Implicitly, this encounter with the particular is a new foundation. I believe "antifoundationalist theory hope" is essentially what Bambrough accuses Rhees et al. of, and generally what the radical reading suspects the particularists of.

ordinary—specifically to distinguish them, but it is surely a vague thesis and distinction, and its introduction seems artificial. So, perhaps some comment is called for on the overall task here of markings schools of thought.

Neither the radical reading nor any other is simply a set of theses, adherence to which distinguishes insiders from outsiders. Theses are just a heuristic device, an attempt to codify for discussion something far more amorphous: a "feel" for Wittgenstein's philosophy. In trying to identify the radical readers of Wittgenstein as a school, I am claiming to find a pervasively similar feel for Wittgenstein among their works, despite apparent differences, even quite dramatic ones. As I said in chapter one, I believe the apparent differences among radical readers are peculiarly dramatic because they have generally written in isolation, not recognizing each other as members of a school, and so have developed independent idioms. (The exception here is among the students of Wisdom.)

The difference between members of one school and those of another can be similarly amorphous. Consequently, there is the potential for members of one group to *seem* more like members of another group than like some other members of their own. In claiming that a thinker belongs to a certain group, then, one expresses the expectation that differences between that thinker and other members of the group will, on closer examination, by and large, diminish in importance, whereas differences with members of other groups will refuse to go away, and may even tend to proliferate. The radical and particularist readings are very close in many ways. It is possible to see many of the radical readers as basically particularists with idiosyncrasies and shortcomings. (The rest can be seen as renegades.) Thus, Dilman is one

of the contributors to *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars: Essays in Honour of Rush Rhees* (the volume in which Diamond's essay appears), and Cavell appears regularly in footnote acknowledgments of particularist works (e.g. Diamond 30). To further identify the school of radical readers, we need to look carefully at the "idiosyncrasies" that do not disappear under scrutiny. I will continue in this section to concentrate on the refusal to reject theory, the most prominent such "shortcoming," especially as it appears in Cavell's work, and especially in his critique of Kripke.

Earlier I quoted Wisdom's declaration of the importance of questions that "have no answers." This declaration and Wisdom's implementation of it in "The Meanings of the Questions of Life" are criticized by Charles Burlingame in "Wisdom in Dark Times." Burlingame's essay illustrates the tendency to minimize the significance of insisting on doing theory: his critique has a chiding quality—Wisdom "could have thought more deeply about the possibility he seems so interested in of gaining 'a new view of what is possible and sometimes of what is actual'" (1, quoting Wisdom 1965, Introduction)—as if Wisdom has merely strayed and can be gently brought back to the fold. That it is the particularist fold is shown in Burlingame's counter proposal: "Rather the problems that most urgently require our attention . . . are precisely that we either have or seek an apprehension of ultimate matters. This very stance . . . makes our questions nonsense and dooms any apprehension we may fasten upon" (1). Burlingame would *remind* Wisdom of this central particularist theme, so that he might curtail his theorizing.[22]

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[22] It is my impression, very generally, that the academic community has

At the same time as a penchant for theory might be thought of as a minor deviation—a quirk of a few "particularists" who have not thought deeply enough—the issue has a remarkable (and suggestive) persistence. Despite Burlingame's chiding and conciliatory tone, he notes that the contention of Wisdom's he is attacking "has been a cornerstone of much of Wisdom's later work" (1). It is not really a minor deviation. The students of Wisdom I have included among the radical readers are also notable for acknowledging (whether casually, like Dilman, or insistently, like Bambrough and Shiner) that they are doing theory, and doing it compatibly with Wittgenstein's work. The issue has become a focus of contention, and thereby a tool to signal deeper commitments. I suspect that the issue is important to Wittgenstein scholars more as an indicator of pervasive patterns of understanding of Wittgenstein—of a "feeling"—than in itself. Despite Burlingame's conviction (probably correct) that his and Wisdom's positions on theory can be reconciled, he feels called upon to argue against theory in a Wittgensteinian context, just as Bambrough and Bloor each feel called upon to argue for it. The issue is a pointer to a division between two schools of thought, a deeper division than perhaps could be articulated as a disagreement over specific theses or interpretations of passages in Wittgenstein.[23] The disagreement between the radical and particularist

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responded to the four subsets of radical readers by tending to assimilate Cavell and Wisdom (et al.) to the particularists, and to dismiss Kripke and Bloor as renegades (of different sorts).

[23] Is not the disagreement over theory itself a specific thesis articulating the division? Not really, because, as I argued in examining Diamond's essay, a consequence of both the radical and particularist readings is that we cannot really define or identify "theory."

readings is of the sort nicely captured by Cavell: "Nothing is wrong; everything is wrong. It is the philosophical moment" (1990, 99).

Some radical readers, especially Bloor and Wisdom, write extensively on the priority of the particular. With Wisdom, this mostly concerns the fundamental status of case-by-case reasoning, the idea that all reasoning is ultimately a comparison of particulars, one with another. With Bloor, the issue is addressed mostly in the somewhat different idiom of the dependence of all meaning on conventions of use in a local context. But he writes also more abstractly on the nature of reasoning, closer to Wisdom: in "Formal and Informal Thought" (1976) he expounds and defends the foundation of all reasoning in comparisons of particulars, which idea he finds in J.S. Mill's *A System of Logic*. It would be difficult to say what a particularist could disagree with in Bloor's and Wisdom's particularism. Nevertheless, there is something pervasively *different* about the treatment of the topic by these radical readers. Where the particular for particularists stands as opposition or alternative to the general, the theoretical, the philosophical, for Bloor and Wisdom the particular is the material out of which we construct the general, the theoretical, the philosophical, which they are accordingly more willing to pursue. This willingness distinguishes radical readers, despite their agreement with particularists on the priority of the particular.

Cavell is likewise persistently interested in the philosophical, which he too insists will not go away. This insistence characterizes much of his work, such as his famous interpretation of *Othello* as an expression or instance of philosophical skepticism (1979, 481-96, but also 432-81). For Cavell, the ordinary—"finding out and declaring the criteria upon which we are in

agreement" (1979, 34)—is never a safe haven easily separated from philosophy:

> Wittgenstein's claim is that philosophy causes us to lose ourselves and that philosophy is philosophy's therapy. These are not so much claims as definitions. . . . For some it will sound like the acceptance of an old joke: Philosophy causes the disease for which it is the cure. . . . This sounds funny only if you take philosophy to be something easy to recognize and confine; but not if "philosophy" means, say, "a need of questioning", a posture anyone may find himself or herself in at any time. What interests Wittgenstein about philosophizing is that it does tend to put the one philosophizing out of agreement with ordinary words (i.e. with his own words when he is not philosophizing), *and* the fact that what he then says is not meaningless, and moreover that what he then says, or the words he then uses, seems to him compulsively true. (34)

I find versions here of various ideas discussed in this chapter (such as Bambrough's and Bloor's view of theory as natural and inevitable, something like "a need of questioning"). Most pertinent is Cavell's little sentence, "These are not so much claims as definitions." It evokes the contrast between seeing and acting. We make claims about what is already there (things we can see), but we define new things. (The structure here is what Wittgenstein describes with "It would almost be more correct to say, not that an intuition was needed at every stage, but that a new decision was needed at every stage" (*PI* 186).) All that is antecedently there is that we lose ourselves and seek therapy, and we call the process (both aspects) "philosophy." On Cavell's radical reading of Wittgenstein, then, it makes perfect sense to say, "Wittgenstein is trying to cure us of philosophical ills," but the point is entirely missed if we gloss that as, "Wittgenstein urges us to stick to the

ordinary and avoid philosophical theory," which makes no more sense than "Don't lose yourself and you won't need therapy."[24]

Cavell's commitment to the radical idea that philosophy, for Wittgenstein, is not to be escaped is present throughout his critique of Kripke in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (1990). There are several reasons examining this critique can help further clarify the radical reading. First, Cavell and Kripke are, in some ways, about as far apart as any two radical readers, yet Cavell's critique shows the character I described earlier of members of a common school: the differences between them tend to diminish upon closer examination. Second, Cavell's main objection to Kripke is that he neglects the ordinary, so perhaps we can see a little more of the relation between the particularist and radical readings. Third, Cavell focuses his critique on the relation between the first and second radical theses, which is among the most difficult (the most paradoxical) elements of the radical reading.

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[24] Here we are on the edge of an issue not as much discussed by radical readers as by particularists: the issue of *therapy*. I suggest that radical readers do not concede (so to speak) this issue to particularists, but that the two readings agree that Wittgenstein's work is therapeutic. However, again, there is a pervasive difference in how they conceive this therapy, with particularists conceiving it as limiting us to the ordinary, and radical readers conceiving it as recognizing our ordinary behavior as responsible for creating the philosophical. Earlier I characterized the difference between the radical and particularist readings as concerning their conceptions of the deepest shift Wittgenstein is making: to radicals, it is the shift from seeing to acting, whereas for particularists it seems to be from philosophy to ordinary life (or at least radicals would infer from the particularist position on philosophy that they have not sufficiently escaped the picture of "seeing"). Now I would suggest another, related characterization: particularists find an emphasis in Wittgenstein on our *limits*, and our impulse to overstep them, whereas radical readers find an emphasis on our *responsibility*.

The first thing to notice about Cavell's critique is how close together he and Kripke are. Whatever his objections to Kripke's reading, Cavell's critique is immensely more sympathetic than any other in the enormous literature on Kripke's book (besides Bloor's very brief review). In particular, they agree on the most controversial part of the radical reading, the first radical thesis:

> Kripke's case is, so far as I know, unique: he, to my mind correctly, takes the *Investigations* as in struggle with skepticism throughout and, as I put the matter, never to repudiate the skeptical possibility. (23)

> Kripke's is the only account I know, other than that in *The Claim of Reason*, that takes *Philosophical Investigations* not to mean to refute skepticism but, on the contrary, to maintain some relation to the possibility of skepticism as internal to Wittgenstein's philosophizing. (65)

Scholars need not have identical positions to belong to the same school, and I am certainly not going to claim that Cavell and Kripke agree on everything. But they agree on this very distinctive point, one I am trying to use as a distinguishing feature of the school of radical readers. The fact that Cavell thinks that he and Kripke are unique among Wittgenstein scholars in their agreement here highlights the importance of the task of assembling and recognizing the *school* of such readers.[25]

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[25] That Cavell finds no other compatriots besides Kripke on a point so prominent in his reading of Wittgenstein implies that Cavell thinks his reading does not belong to any school of Wittgenstein interpretation. He does *not* identify himself with the particularists. His bond with Kripke, however, is less unique than he realizes. Bloor's account, for example, also clearly "takes *Philosophical Investigations* not to mean to refute skepticism," and Bloor's (repeatedly emphasized) "finitism" is probably closer to Cavell's "skepticism" than is Kripke's "skepticism." (The change of label should make no difference, since it is the meaning of the label Cavell examines, as is clear from his arguing that Kripke *misses* "Wittgenstein's sense of the skeptical.")

Cavell claims that his disagreement with Kripke is nevertheless substantial, though it is of the sort that constitutes an amorphously but persistently different "feel" for Wittgenstein:

> [I]f Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein is right, then mine must be wrong.
> Moreover, I do not think it likely that anything simple is wrong with Kripke's reading, anyway in a sense I find nothing (internal) at all wrong with it. (65)

> I broached my sense at once of the nearness and the remoteness of the view taken in Kripke's book concerning Wittgenstein's ideas of privacy, rules, instruction, agreement, skepticism, and the ordinary to and from the view of them taken in my *Claim of Reason*. (xv)

> . . . the all but nonexistent yet all but all-pervasive difference between Kripke's account of Wittgenstein and mine . . . (23)

I will suggest several ways in which their disagreement is less substantial even than it appears, but first I will comment on the relation of their disagreement to the radical reading generally.

Cavell's main objection to Kripke is that he has neglected the ordinary; that is, he emphasizes the skeptical too much, and in such a mistakenly rule-dependent form as to leave criteria and the ordinary without a place in Wittgenstein's philosophy:

> In taking rules as fundamental to Wittgenstein's development of skepticism about meaning, Kripke subordinates the role of criteria in the *Investigations*, hence appears from my side of things to underrate drastically, or to beg the question of, the issue of the ordinary, a structure of which is the structure of our criteria and their grammatical relations. (65)

In terms of the radical reading, Cavell accuses Kripke of emphasizing the first radical thesis—the arbitrariness of words—to the exclusion of the second—

the shift to what we do. Cavell continues this passage with an expression of his own emphasis (on the second radical thesis):

> In my seeing criteria as forming Wittgenstein's understanding of the possibility of skepticism, or say his response to the threat of skepticism, I take this to show rules to be subordinate; but since Kripke's interpretation of rules seems, in turn, to undercut the fundamentality of the appeal to the ordinary, my appeal to criteria must appear to beg the question from his side of things. (65-6)

Cavell has now described two perspectives—basically, the first and second radical theses—from each of which the other will appear to beg the question. At this point, he makes a very interesting move. He subsumes both perspectives in a larger synthesis (or perhaps "tension," since a "synthesis" is precisely what they are not):

> These positions repeat the sides of what I will call the argument of the ordinary, something I will take as fundamental to the *Investigations*. It is an argument I seek a way out of, as I suppose the *Investigations* does in seeking to renounce philosophical theses. (66)

This is the heart of Cavell's exploration of Kripke's reading and his own relation to it. (The lecture on Kripke is entitled "The Argument of the Ordinary.")

What Cavell has summarized here is the characteristic structure of the radical reading. As I said in chapter one, when first introducing the reading, radical readers characteristically find both the first and second radical theses in Wittgenstein, and insist that they are not contradictory, that we need not resolve the (superficial) conflict by rejecting one of them. I found this structure explicitly in Cavell, Cowan, Bloor, and Kripke. Clearly, since I find it in Kripke and Cavell does not, I am reading Kripke differently from the way

he does.[26] The point I want to emphasize is that it is Cavell, and not Kripke, who is the more representative radical reader here; accordingly, if Cavell's criticisms of Kripke are right, and the conflict between them is as large as he thinks it is, then it is Kripke, and not Cavell, who would have to be rejected from the ranks of radical readers.[27]

Cavell reinforces several times that he takes the argument of the ordinary to be as central and as irresolvable as the paragraph just quoted suggests:

> My tack in approaching Kripke will be, in a sense, as indirect as the description of what I am calling the argument of the ordinary suggests it must be, an argument neither side should win. (69)

> [Kripke] avoids the seriousness of Wittgenstein's investment in the ordinary so completely that Wittgenstein's sense of the skeptical is itself avoided, namely as a perspective that interprets itself in contrast with, in a paradoxical relationship to, the ordinary. (23)

> Since criteria and skepticism are one another's possibility, criteria cannot be meant to refute skepticism; on the contrary they show skepticism's power, even something one might call its truth. I sometimes think of this theme as our disappointment with our criteria. (64)

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[26] But as I said earlier, I am interested in Kripke *as* a radical reader, and so am inclined to read him somewhat generously.

[27] Another noteworthy feature of Cavell's analysis is his idea that the *Investigations* seeks a way out of the argument of the ordinary at the same time as that argument is fundamental to it, that it seeks to renounce philosophical theses and cannot. This would support Bloor's and Bambrough's claims that Wittgenstein cannot coherently reject theory completely, and that, in the larger context of his work, he does not seriously intend to.

If Kripke is really a radical reader, his position on the argument of the ordinary should be less one-sided than Cavell thinks it is. The second radical thesis is as important as the first.

Cavell's main objection is that Kripke gives rules too important a position in Wittgenstein's philosophy. Specifically, he thinks Kripke takes rules as required to generate the skeptical paradox, whereas he himself takes the possibility of skepticism to be internal to the ordinary, without appeal to rules. Furthermore, I believe Cavell thinks that rules are an essential part of Kripke's skeptical solution as well. I am unclear exactly how, and to what extent, Cavell thinks Kripke depends on rules, so I am unsure whether to dispute the claim or to grant it but argue that it is unimportant.[28] For example, Cavell says, "Knowing how to go on with a series is, I still think it is worth saying (as in *The Claim of Reason*, p. 122), like—a figure of speech for—knowing how to go on with a word in further contexts" (78). I do not know if Cavell takes Kripke to disagree with this. The radical readers in general do believe this, even take it for granted.[29] It is certainly implied by

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[28] Some of Cavell's criticisms may be sound, and yet unimportant in that Kripke could easily change to a position closer to Cavell's, and a more charitable reading could take him as having intended such a position.

[29] In this they contrast, for example, with John McDowell, whom I will discuss in the next chapter. McDowell, unlike Cavell, takes the series case and the general case to be importantly different:

> The most straightforward sort of case . . . is the continuation of a numerical series as constituting a pattern to which understanding of its principle commits one. In the general case, the 'pattern' idea is the idea of a series of things that, given the way the world develops, it would be correct to say if one chose to express a given concept; outside the series-expansion case, this idea is obviously metaphorical at best. (1984, 359 n3)

(But see also 334, where he acknowledges their similarity.)

the fourth radical thesis—that Wittgenstein's discussions of rule following and of family resemblance address the same issue, the generality of words. In reading Kripke as a radical reader, I am inclined to take him to agree with Cavell and the rest of the radical readers here. Nevertheless, it is an area where Kripke does diverge somewhat from the radical reading. Specifically, Kripke does not seem to accept the fourth radical thesis. He thinks Wittgenstein's arguments early in the *Investigations* are importantly incomplete. (From the point of view of the radical reading, I would say the weakest part of Kripke's book is his discussion (81-5) of the structure of the *Philosophical Investigations* in which he devalues the early sections (1-137) and promotes the rule-following sections.[30])

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[30] This brings up another incidental resemblance among radical readers. They tend to emphasize the importance of the early sections of the *Investigations*. Kripke is working somewhat in this spirit when he pushes the center of gravity (as I would call it) of the book up to the rule-following sections, in opposition to a tradition of locating it in the later private language argument. (Many Wittgenstein scholars have come to agree with Kripke on this, even if not with his reasons.) He is, however, out of step with other radical readers in refusing to locate the center any earlier, specifically in denying that the key rule-following arguments are essentially presented in the early treatment of ostension (or of family resemblance). Bloor, for example, seems to lean quite heavily on the first 45 remarks of the *Investigations* (and on *BB*).

Radical readers do not discuss the *Tractatus* much, and we could say that they reject the view that the first 137 remarks are primarily a critique of Wittgenstein's earlier work (as Kripke and many others say). But I think it would be more correct to say that they take seriously Wittgenstein's belief that the *Tractatus* had captured the essence of a whole way of thinking that has overwhelmingly dominated modernity (or modern philosophy, at the very least), and that therefore it is true but misleading to say he is critiquing the *Tractatus*, since his critique applies no less to Descartes's *Meditations* or Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* or thousands of other products of modern thought.

Even if Cavell has correctly identified a weakness in Kripke's overemphasis on rules, the point is not essential to Kripke's analysis and does not mark a break with Cavell's. Cavell considers rules to be simply among many things that Wittgenstein investigates grammatically:

> ... to apply his entire discussion of rules, for example, to questions of what counts as obedience, following, interpretation, regularity, doing the same, ordering, custom, technique, example, practice, explaining, understanding, guessing, intuition, possibility, intention ... no one of which is less or more fundamental than the concept of a rule, and each of which is to be investigated grammatically (hence by way of eliciting criteria). Why things look otherwise to Kripke—how they can, and so consistently—would have to be made out ... (68)

I do not see that things do "look otherwise to Kripke." As I read Kripke, he presents simplified and formalized "formulations and recastings of the argument" (Kripke 5) for heuristic purposes. (The subtitle of Kripke's book is "An Elementary Exposition," and I believe the qualification is intended seriously.) Following an arithmetical rule is a particularly clear and simple example of Wittgenstein's investigations, and many other concepts (such as regularity, doing the same, ordering, custom) can be described in terms of rules. But they need not be, and Kripke is not committed to the concept of a rule being more fundamental than the others. To the extent that Kripke does focus too exclusively on rules, it can be treated as Dilman treats Bambrough's

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Talk of a center of gravity, or of building up to the rule-following arguments, suggests a view of the *Philosophical Investigations* as an edifice. I believe this is the wrong metaphor. Radical readers might be said to locate the "center of gravity" in remark 1, with the contrast of Augustine and the five red apples; but putting the center at the very beginning, at the edge, suggests falling, and perhaps that is a better metaphor: the *Investigations* as not an edifice but an avalanche.

lapse into realism: as a genuine lapse, but one which can still be isolated from the basic position, to which it is inessential.

As I read Kripke, then, there is some justice in Cavell's dissatisfaction with the emphasis in Kripke's book, the dissatisfaction voiced in passages such as these:

> I will simply say, starting out, that Kripke's account, in drastically underestimating, or evading Wittgenstein's preoccupation with the ordinary (hence with "our criteria," which articulate the ordinary), evades Wittgenstein's preoccupation with philosophy's drastic desire to underestimate or to evade the ordinary. (68)

> Kripke's concentration on rules and his postponement of, and casualness about, the role of criteria in establishing the basis, hence the nature, of the "agreement"—whatever necessity in agreement human beings have—apart from which there is no common world of things and others, takes away, to my way of thinking, the *Investigations'* originality. (24)

As I said earlier in examining Diamond's article, Kripke's treatment of assertibility conditions is quite rudimentary, a gesture in the direction that Wittgenstein carries the philosophical conversation. In his explorations of criteria, grammar and the ordinary, Cavell pursues the conversation in that direction with a subtlety and detail absent from Kripke's book. Nevertheless, Cavell wants to claim more than just that Kripke has neglected the most interesting and original aspects of Wittgenstein's work.[31] He wants to claim

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[31] If we grant so much against Kripke, perhaps it is important to say this for him: his book is almost certainly the most "successful" work ever written about Wittgenstein, if we measure success by the volume of response provoked. This is not a spurious measure of success, for it measures the engagement of the academic community with a basically sound reading of Wittgenstein. Kripke has engaged Cavell's "disapproving philosophers" (1979, 32) to an extraordinary degree, certainly far more than any radical or

that Kripke is committed to a distorted view of those aspects, that rules continue to have the pride of place in Kripke's skeptical solution that they have in his formulation of the skeptical paradox. I will raise two points in reply, one just a doubt and the other a specific rebuttal to his reading of Kripke.

The doubt concerns Cavell's use of "solution" in reference to Kripke's "skeptical solution." It seems to me that he repeatedly equivocates between a traditional notion of "solution" as something that *refutes* the paradox, and Kripke's use of "solution" as crucially modified by "skeptical" to *not* refute the paradox. For instance, Cavell continues the passage just quoted like this:

> Rules are not a (skeptical) solution to the problem of meaning (call it, for Wittgenstein, the question of what a word is); apart from a certain appeal to rules (the kind I believe Kripke makes for Wittgenstein, but which I believe Wittgenstein precisely repudiates) there would be no skeptical crisis of meaning (of the kind Kripke develops). (24)

Kripke would agree entirely (except for the contention in the remark "the kind I believe Kripke makes for Wittgenstein"). As I discussed earlier with respect to Diamond, Kripke specifically repudiates any interpretation of the skeptical solution as rules: such an interpretation "falls foul of Wittgenstein's strictures on 'a rule for interpreting a rule' just as much as any other such

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particularist readers besides Cavell, and probably far more even than Cavell. *The Claim of Reason* may well be the "best" work ever written on Wittgenstein, but that is even harder to measure. And if it is the best, this may mean only that Cavell has told (more of) the truth about Wittgenstein, and yet that Kripke has more effectively put us on the path from error to truth (to use the imagery from "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*" I used in chapter one).

attempted reduction" (Kripke 146 n87). Kripke rejects the picture of the ordinary as fundamentally rule-governed just as Cavell does.

I suggest that a correct reading of Kripke would recognize that the "certain appeal to rules" that Cavell objects to, which he thinks "Kripke makes for Wittgenstein," is made by Kripke *not* for Wittgenstein but for those philosophers who typically misinterpret Wittgenstein, the ones identified by Cavell earlier in the same paragraph: "philosophers have typically taken them [Wittgensteinian criteria] . . . to answer the question of skepticism (and this should include Kripke's version of skepticism. . . .)" (23-4) Cavell does not specifically count Kripke among those philosophers, but does seem to suggest that he, like they, takes his solution "to answer the question of skepticism," and that would be incorrect. Kripke's "appeal to rules," rather, shows those philosophers that there cannot be an answer to skepticism, not of the sort they are expecting. Kripke's version of Wittgensteinian criteria— assertibility conditions—does not answer it, not in the sense of a "solution" as an escape or refutation. Read this way, Kripke is closer to Cavell than Cavell thinks, for the emphasis on rules does not carry over into Kripke's skeptical solution.

When Cavell comes to his specific examination of Kripke's book, he focuses on pages 87 to 91, which, I believe, he importantly misreads. He summarizes his dissatisfaction with Kripke's skeptical solution this way:

> Kripke introduces the idea of a practice licensing the application of a rule in the way it strikes one, in the case of "one person taken in isolation" (p. 88); when that one is shown "interacting with a wider community," then while his inclination is no longer the basis for licensing what he does, what he does is licensed or not on the basis of the inclination of another

> (cp. p. 91). This is supposed to be a solution to the problem of the privacy of language. On the view I recount of the *Investigations*, this public licensing would be no step beyond privacy. (70)

The misreading is primarily contained in the assertion that "what he does is licensed or not on the basis of the inclination of another" (though also in the immediately previous clause, "his inclination is no longer the basis for licensing what he does"), and the misreading considerably exacerbates Cavell's perception of the distance between Kripke and himself.

Kripke uses an example wherein Jones is adding and Smith is judging (90-1). Contrary to Cavell's gloss, Kripke is *not* claiming that Jones's behavior is licensed or not by Smith's inclination (nor that Jones's inclination "is no longer the basis for licensing what he does"). What Smith's inclination licenses, according to Kripke, is Smith's own attribution (or not) to Jones of correct addition; Smith's inclination licenses Smith to challenge Jones. It is *never* the case, for Kripke, that Smith's inclination licenses Jones's behavior. Even here, in the case where Jones is "interacting with a wider community," it is still Kripke's position that Jones is licensed to act on the basis of his own inclinations (though now "subject to the correction of others" (90), which does not imply "licensed" by others). Each person's inclinations license that person, both in adding and in challenging another's adding. Kripke is specifically avoiding the idea that one person's actions are licensed by another's inclinations, because it would immediately generate a regress. He avoids it both here in the passages Cavell examines and in the long footnote at the end of his book, where he explicitly rejects the idea: "Such a rule, as Wittgenstein would emphasize, also describes what I do wrongly: I do not consult others when I add. (We wouldn't manage very well, if everyone had

to follow a rule of the proposed form—no one would respond without waiting for everyone else.)" (146 n87) Mutual licensing would indeed, as Cavell complains, "be no step beyond privacy," (70) and seem "more skeptical than the problem it is designed to solve" (75). But it is not Kripke's position. Public checks, or the inclinations of another, do not license the actions of an individual, and Cavell misreads Kripke in attributing this to him.

Cavell has many things to say about the difference of his sense of Wittgenstein from Kripke's. I do not claim that this misreading of Kripke accounts for all the difference between them, but I do claim that it significantly contributes. To see this, we can compare Kripke's example of Smith and Jones with what Cavell puts up as a *contrast* to Kripke. Cavell quotes *PI* 155 as typical of Wittgenstein's thoughts on our "confident inclination" and "going on":

> When he suddenly knew how to go on, when he understood the principle, then possibly he had a special experience . . .—but for us it is the circumstances under which he had such an experience that justify him in saying in such a case that he understands, that he knows how to go on. (*PI* 155; qtd. on 74)

Here Wittgenstein marks the difference between what licenses *him* and what licenses *us* in judging him. But, contrary to Cavell's apparent intention in quoting this passage, the position does not seem very different from Kripke's:

> 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. (Kripke 91)

Smith, in the role of Wittgenstein's "us," judges whether the circumstances under which Jones acted warrant granting Jones authority.[32] But in both passages, Wittgenstein's "he" and Kripke's "Jones" rely on their own experience and inclination, not on us and Smith.

Contrary to Cavell's reading of him, Kripke continues, in the community context, to treat each person's inclination as "the basis for licensing what he does." In this community context, though, Kripke does qualify this license as "subject to correction by others" (90). This leaves an open question in Kripke's account: if Jones is inclined to answer one way and Smith is inclined to challenge, then whose inclination determines what is right? This, I believe, is a question that radical readers and particularists will agree is a bad question. (To attempt to answer it is to give a rule for interpreting a rule.) Kripke does not try to answer it. The closest he comes is saying, "Of course if we were reduced to a babble of disagreement, with Smith and Jones asserting of each other that they are following the rule wrongly, while others disagreed with both and with each other, there would be little point to the practice just described" (Kripke 91). Here again we see the idea discussed earlier, that assertibility conditions ultimately cannot be explained; they do not bear the weight of philosophical justification; they soften and vanish rather than hardening into "conventions." As always with radical readers, because of the first radical thesis, because they take *Philosophical Investigations* not to intend to refute skepticism, if we push the demand for philosophical justification too hard, we start to get a sense of nothing but

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[32] I am not at all confident about just what contrast Cavell is trying to show with this quotation from *PI* 155, but I think it is worth noting how little distance he has achieved from Kripke.

voices in the void (if that). As Cavell says, from that perspective—from that side of the "argument of the ordinary"—appeals to the ordinary (or to assertibility conditions) can only appear to beg the question.

I find in Kripke's ever-possible "babble of disagreement" another point of similarity to Cavell. Here is Cavell's final paragraph of chapter one of *The Claim of Reason*:

> I find my general intuition of Wittgenstein's view of language to be the reverse of the idea many philosophers seem compelled to argue against in him: it is felt that Wittgenstein's view makes language too public, that it cannot do justice to the control I have over what I say, to the innerness of my meaning. But my wonder, in the face of what I have recently been saying, is rather how he can arrive at the completed and unshakable edifice of shared language from within such apparently fragile and intimate moments—private moments—as our separate counts and out-calls of phenomena, which are after all hardly more than our interpretations of what occurs, and with no assurance of conventions to back them up. (36)

Nothing backs up our inclinations (which "are to be regarded as primitive" (Kripke 91)) or our interpretations of what occurs (Cavell). Bloor too puts such a picture at the heart of his reading of Wittgenstein, in the concept of "meaning finitism":

> What is the connection between finitism and the institutional account of normativity and content [i.e. meanings are institutions]? . . . The argument is that institutions are themselves things that have to be sustained in being on a moment-by-moment basis. They, too, do not and cannot exist independently, or in advance, of the acts of reference which constitute them. Institutions depend on our moment-by-moment continuing belief in them in the same way that, according to some theologians, the world is maintained in being at each moment by God's thoughts. (1996b, 850-1)

Here our acts of reference, each a mere moment of belief, are all that sustain the whole institution of language. I take this suggestion of voices in the void to be the direct expression of (or equivalent to) taking seriously Wittgenstein's claim that "it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game" (*OC* 204), the extremity of which, I believe, only the radical readers have fully appreciated.

Certainly Cavell and Kripke explore Wittgenstein's work in strikingly different styles and with different emphases. Nevertheless, they agree on Wittgenstein's relation to skepticism, a point that, for each of them, informs their entire reading, and a point which sets them apart from almost all other Wittgenstein scholars (except, I am arguing, other radical readers). So they start with a striking similarity as well. I have argued that their similarity becomes more apparent if we correct a few misreadings of Kripke by Cavell, and read a few other moments of Kripke a little more sympathetically, and perhaps acknowledge a few shortcomings in his book which are inessential to his central positions and are places where he falls short of the radical reading proper. When we clear up these differences, their agreement on the importance to Wittgenstein of the first radical thesis, of skepticism or philosophical theory, is strengthened. It is this point that most distinguishes radical readers from particularists and other readers of Wittgenstein.

In his treatment of the (unbreakable) relation of skepticism and the ordinary, Cavell repeatedly marks the difference between the radical and particularist readings. In the passage I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, for example, he expresses the central particularist theme, and then immediately takes a radical perspective on it:

> The idea is rather: See how philosophical explanations will seek
> to distract you from your interests (ordinary, scientific, aesthetic);
> how they counterfeit necessity. That the advice is all but
> impossible to take is Wittgenstein's subject: we do seek, and
> therewith we demand a finding, and therein comes the skeptical
> conclusion, or solution: the demand for a philosophical solution
> is skepticism. (This is of course not true of science nor of art.
> Then how do you know when philosophy has intervened?
> Simply as a result of the self-stultification?) (97)

Certainly Wittgenstein attacks philosophical explanations (the particularist

theme), but that they are inescapable (the radical theme) is Wittgenstein's

subject.

The relation between the first and second radical theses Cavell calls

"the argument of the ordinary" and claims engages the *Investigations*

throughout: "It is exactly as important to Wittgenstein to trace the

disappointment with and repudiation of criteria (which is how *The Claim of*

Reason interprets the possibility or threat of or the temptation to skepticism)

as to trace our attunements in them" (92). Cavell follows this statement of

the coexistence of the two sides with an elaboration that is characteristically

radical, and yet also distinctively his own:

> We understandably do not like our concepts to be based on what
> matters to us (something Wittgenstein once put by saying
> "Concepts . . . are the expression of our interest" (§570)); it makes
> our language seem unstable and the instability seems to mean
> what I have expressed as my being responsible for whatever
> stability our criteria may have, and I do not want this
> responsibility; it mars my wish for sublimity. The human
> capacity—and the drive—both to affirm and to deny our criteria
> constitutes the argument of the ordinary. And to trace the
> disappointment with criteria is to trace the aspiration to the
> sublime—the image of the skeptic's progress. I am the
> instrument of this argument, I mean no one occupies its
> positions if each of us does not. So it is nowhere more than in

> each of us, as we stand, poor things, that the power of the ordinary will or will not manifest itself. (92-3)

I would use this passage in a last attempt to articulate the difference between the radical and particularist readings of Wittgenstein. In failing to appreciate the impossibility of escaping theory, "the aspiration to the sublime," particularists take too complacent a view of the ordinary as well. The ordinary becomes for them, contrary to Cavell's image, an abstract "place," the "realm of the ordinary," the "context of life." By not being radical enough, they end up also not being particular enough. For the ordinary is not a realm and exists nowhere besides in each of us, in particular, as we stand, responsible for each of our judgments and for every application of every word.

Chapter 4.

Other Fellow-Travelers.

There are several Wittgenstein readers who are probably neither radical readers nor particularists, yet who are close to them, primarily by virtue of sharing their recognition of an essential "community" or "social" orientation to Wittgenstein's philosophy. What separates scholars who agree on a social orientation is roughly their attitudes toward the skeptical paradox, or the first radical thesis. We might mark the divisions as follows. The shared social orientation is basically a shared acceptance of the second radical thesis: that Wittgenstein is turning from seeing to acting, from philosophical justification to simply what we do. But now there are three different attitudes toward the first radical thesis (which then imply three different perspectives on what the ("shared") second thesis really amounts to). The radical readers see the first and second radical theses as *corollaries:* it is only *because* we accept the first thesis that it is possible to turn to the second; only if every application of every word is arbitrary can the social practices of using words (of calling things what we call them) really be at the bottom of the language-game. As Cavell puts it, "criteria and skepticism are one another's possibility" (1990, 64). In a second position, particularists see the two theses as *competitors,* but in the weak sense of belonging to separate realms, the first to the philosophical and the second to the ordinary. They agree with the radical thought that "Wittgenstein discovers the threat or the temptation of skepticism in such a way that efforts to solve it continue its work of denial" (Cavell 1990, 23), but take the lesson to be that we should *avoid* the first thesis

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even if we cannot actually deny it; they infer a kind of quietism about philosophy and an exclusive focus on the ordinary. A third possibility sees the first and second theses as *contraries*, so that the turn to the second requires a *rejection* of the first, and accordingly Wittgenstein's philosophy must implicitly reject or refute, or otherwise significantly circumvent, the skeptical paradox.

I will examine, as a representative of this third position, John McDowell's "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule." In the course of doing so I will touch on the work of Crispin Wright, Meredith Williams, and Robert Brandom (as well as, again, Kripke). I do not claim that they are a school, but treat them as a heterogeneous group, from which we can learn further about the radical reading. If the radical reading is right, then the third position should be unstable, because its acceptance of the second radical thesis should work against its rejection of the first. It will have with a tendency to collapse into the radical reading. We will see this in McDowell's difficulties in distancing himself from Wright and Kripke. I will summarize McDowell's analysis and try to show that his differences from the radical reading are not where he claims they lie, and then to show where they do lie.

McDowell and the Radical Reading

As McDowell reads him, Wittgenstein presents us with a dilemma. Understanding a sign (word, rule, expression) means being able to apply it correctly, which means applying it the way it is usually applied, the same way it has been applied in the past. We extend its applications (or the "pattern" of

its past applications) to new circumstances. The trouble is that any amount of information about how the sign was applied in the past can be so interpreted that *any* new application would be the "same" as the old, *any* new application will extend the pattern. How, then, can we pick out any particular action as correct, as the one that accords with the sign's meaning? The first horn of the dilemma is the possibility that we cannot, that words and rules have no determinate applications, that "there would be neither accord nor conflict here" (*PI* 201). This is Wittgenstein's paradox.[1] Since this first horn of the dilemma is clearly intolerable, "the attempt to resist the paradox of §201 will drive us to embrace a familiar mythology of meaning and understanding, and this is the second horn of the dilemma" (McDowell 1984, 332). The mythology is of a "super-rigid machinery" that is impervious to interpretation, that unfailingly connects future applications to past: "Every sign is capable of interpretation; but the *meaning* mustn't be capable of interpretation. It is the last interpretation" (*BB* 34; qtd. in McDowell 332). We are faced, then, with a dilemma between a paradox and a mythology.

The center of McDowell's reading of Wittgenstein is his contention that Wittgenstein intends us to avoid this dilemma altogether. The dilemma is predicated on a misunderstanding to which Wittgenstein refers in the second paragraph of *PI* 201: "the point of the second paragraph of *PI* §201 is precisely that it [the paradox] is not [compulsory]. The mythology is wrung from us, in our need to avoid the paradox of the first paragraph, only because

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[1] Technically, Wittgenstein presents this as the *answer* to the paradox, not as the paradox itself, but McDowell does not make anything of that distinction.

we fall into the misunderstanding" (332; cf. 338). McDowell takes the misunderstanding here to be the idea that understanding is always interpretation. Once we assume that understanding is interpreting, we are caught in the dilemma of either a regress of interpretations (the paradox) or an ultimate interpretation (the super-rigid machinery). But Wittgenstein presents the dilemma as a refutation of the misunderstanding that leads to that dilemma: "What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*" (*PI* 201).

The problem, then, is: what is this other way of understanding, of grasping a rule? McDowell cites *PI* 202 ("And hence also 'obeying a rule' is a practice") as the direction Wittgenstein goes after diagnosing the dilemma as produced by the misunderstanding: "The diagnosis prompts the question 'How can there be a way of grasping a rule that is not an interpretation?', and I think the thesis that obeying a rule is a practice is meant to constitute the answer to this question" (339). By now this move should look familiar: it is Wittgenstein's shift of question described by radical thesis two. All of the radical readers and particularists agree with McDowell on this point, so this will not be where his divergence from them lies. However, we should expect McDowell, like Diamond, to have a hard time satisfactorily stating the point. Furthermore, if the radical (and particularist) reading is right, the point cannot serve McDowell as an *answer* to or refutation of the paradox. But this is getting ahead.

McDowell argues that there is a tendency to overreact against interpretations, to overshoot this appeal to practice and appeal instead to

brute behavior. This, he believes, makes the characteristic normativity of language inexplicable. So a correct reading of Wittgenstein reveals a middle course between understanding as interpretation and understanding as behavior. McDowell characterizes this search for a middle course as an attempt to navigate between Scylla and Charybdis:

> Scylla is the idea that understanding is always interpretation. This idea is disastrous because embracing it confronts us with the dilemma of §4 above: the choice between the paradox . . . and the fantastic mythology of the super-rigid machine. . . . But then we risk steering on to Charybdis—the picture of a basic level at which there are no norms. . . . [T]he key to finding the indispensable middle course is the idea of a custom or practice. How can a performance both be nothing but a 'blind' reaction to a situation, not an attempt to act on an interpretation (avoiding Scylla); and be a case of going by a rule (avoiding Charybdis)? The answer is: by belonging to a custom (*PI* §198), practice (*PI* §202), or institution (*RFM* VI-31). (342)

This passage summarizes the structure of McDowell's reading, the relations among the various positions. Wittgenstein's position is the middle course: "What I have claimed might be put like this: Wittgenstein's point is that we have to situate our conception of meaning and understanding within a framework of communal practices" (342). Since McDowell uses Wright and Kripke as foils against which to articulate the reading he thinks correct, each of them has his place in the structure too: Wright falls into Charybdis, and Kripke is impaled on the first horn of the dilemma (the paradox).[2]

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[2] Charybdis, as McDowell identifies it, is not readily distinguishable from the paradox. Charybdis is "the picture of a basic level at which there are no norms" (342), and that would be a reasonable paraphrase of the paradox as well: "no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule" (*PI* 201); in other words, there are no norms. Though McDowell has reasons to distinguish them, and

With this basic structure in mind, I will examine McDowell's criticisms of Kripke, and then his relation to the radical reading more generally. I will argue that McDowell misinterprets the status of the skeptical paradox in Kripke's book and consequently dismisses the skeptical solution instead of recognizing its great similarity to his own appeal to practice. I will use only the things McDowell says about Kripke in his article, which are enough for the tension and weakness in his interpretation of Kripke to appear.[3] In outline, McDowell initially gives a summary of Kripke that is accurate, but very much like his own position. Subsequently, he changes his description of Kripke's position to one that is inaccurate, but vulnerable to the criticism he wants to make against it.

In *PI* 201, Wittgenstein presents the paradox, then goes on to say there is a "misunderstanding" involved. The cornerstone of McDowell's reading is the idea that the presence of a misunderstanding constitutes a rejection of the paradox, and he takes the misunderstanding in question to be the assumption that understanding is always some sort of interpretation: "The right response to the paradox, Wittgenstein in effect tells us, is not to accept it but to correct the misunderstanding on which it depends: that is, to realize 'that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*" (331, quoting *PI* 201). The criticism McDowell wants to make against Kripke is that Kripke says Wittgenstein accepts the skeptical paradox of *PI* 201, that "Kripke's reading

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there are subtle differences, on the last page of his article Charybdis does collapse into the paradox and Wright ends up with Kripke in the paradox.
[3] McDowell's misinterpretation of Kripke is very common, and in chapter six I investigate it, and the textual evidence from Kripke's book against it, in much more detail.

makes no room for" the idea that the paradox is a product of misunderstanding (331).[4]

This criticism of Kripke, however, is inconsistent with the initial summary of Kripke's position that McDowell had given a page earlier. In that initial summary, it is clear that Kripke does indeed see the skeptical paradox as a product of misunderstanding:

> The 'sceptical paradox', which we are to accept, is that there is no fact that could constitute my having attached one rather than another determinate meaning to the 'plus' sign. We are inclined to understand this as a concession that I have attached *no* determinate meaning to the 'plus' sign: but the suggestion is that this is only because we adhere, naively, to the superseded truth-conditional conception of meaning. (329-30)

In this summary, McDowell contrasts "there is no fact that could constitute my having attached a determinate meaning" with "I have attached no determinate meaning," and says we are inclined to slide from the former to the latter only because we take for granted a truth-conditional conception of meaning. That is, McDowell says here that Kripke is *not* claiming that there is no meaning,[5] but only that a certain misunderstanding (a truth-conditional conception of meaning) inclines us to confuse that intolerable conclusion

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[4] It is not important to the basic structure here that Kripke and McDowell agree on what the "misunderstanding" is, and I will compare their different versions of it shortly. But it can cause confusion if we take it as *obvious* what the misunderstanding is, as McDowell seems to, and then cannot find that particular misunderstanding discussed in some reading. So, for example, McDowell says, "The fundamental trouble is that Kripke makes nothing of Wittgenstein's concern to reject the assimilation of understanding to interpretation" (343), whereas his critique of Kripke really turns on Kripke's not seeing *any* misunderstanding as involved in the paradox.

[5] The modifier "determinate" is not really doing any work here and would best be dropped to avoid confusion.

with Wittgenstein's rejection of *facts* as constituting meaning. So, in this summary, Kripke clearly sees the paradox as a product of a misunderstanding, which he specifies.

This initial description of Kripke's argument seems so strikingly incompatible with everything else McDowell has to say about Kripke, that a charitable reading of McDowell may require interpreting this passage as not saying what it seems to say.[6] Nevertheless, whether McDowell intended it or not, this reading of Kripke is correct (a claim I shall argue in detail in chapter six).

One of the noteworthy features of this initial summary by McDowell is that it succinctly captures the logic of radical argument discussed above with respect to Diamond and Kripke, the difficulty in articulating their central claim to a reader who fundamentally disagrees. In McDowell's summary, it is adherence to the truth-conditional conception of meaning that inclines us to slide from "no facts constitute meaning" to "there is no meaning." But the idea that facts constitute meaning *is* the truth-conditional conception of meaning. So the truth-conditional conception is itself what inclines us to

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[6] There would be some room to maneuver in explaining it away. For instance, McDowell says here that the skeptical paradox is "that there is no fact that could constitute" meaning, whereas I take it he meant to identify the paradox with the idea that there is no meaning, which he does throughout the rest of the article (e.g. 342: ". . . the paradox that there is no substance to meaning"; but see footnote 10 below). He has specifically distinguished the two, and said that we slide from the former to the latter because of a misunderstanding, so the distinction between them is important. Most importantly, though, the former is not obviously paradoxical (or at least not intolerable) whereas the latter is. So, there is some confusion in McDowell's initial summary of Kripke, both in the summary itself and in its relation to the rest of his critique of Kripke.

misinterpret any attack on that truth-conditional conception as an attack on all meaning. It protects itself by refusing to recognize itself as an object of criticism. So, a hostile reader, one who adheres to the truth-conditional conception of meaning (what I called Diamond's "puzzled reader," Cavell's "disapproving philosophers"), will understand the radical attack on that conception to be an intolerably paradoxical attack on all meaning. The object of attack, because it is being used by the reader in interpreting the attack, becomes invisible to the attack.

After his initial summary, McDowell changes his reading of Kripke. Having started out with a clear distinction between "facts do not constitute meaning" and "there is no meaning," McDowell soon drops the distinction and reads Kripke as claiming the latter for Wittgenstein. (Since it is adherence to the truth-conditional conception of meaning that inclines us to slide from the former to the latter, it will be no surprise that McDowell's slide between them indicates that *he* ultimately holds a truth-conditional conception, which we will see in his critique of Wright.) There does seem to be a specific passage in which he drops the distinction by claiming that Kripke is not entitled to it (though he gives no argument):

> It is natural to suppose that if one says 'There is no fact that could constitute its being the case that P', one precludes oneself from affirming that P. . . . Given this supposition, the concession that Kripke says Wittgenstein makes to the sceptic becomes a *denial* that I understand the 'plus' sign to mean one thing rather than another. And now—generalizing the denial—we do seem to have fallen into an abyss: 'the incredible and self-defeating conclusion, that all language is meaningless' [(Kripke 71)]. (330)

The key phrase here is "Given this supposition." It should be clear from McDowell's (correct) initial summary that Kripke *rejects* that supposition, for the supposition here is essentially identical to what Kripke rejected there: that "there is no fact that could constitute determinate meaning" is a concession that "there is no determinate meaning."

Quite aside from McDowell's summary, though, it is clear from a basic outline of Kripke's book that the rejection of that supposition is absolutely fundamental to his entire reading of Wittgenstein (and to the radical reading generally): the skeptical solution claims assertibility conditions despite the rejection of truth conditions; in other words, I can assert that P despite there being no facts that could constitute its being the case that P. (This "natural supposition" is basically the supposition that the first radical thesis precludes the second radical thesis. So, this is the very supposition that defines the position of which I take McDowell as a representative, and distinguishes it from the radical and the particularist readings of Wittgenstein.) On Kripke's radical reading, Wittgenstein's skeptical paradox shows that no fact could constitute its being the case that P, and Wittgenstein's skeptical solution says we can nevertheless assert P on the basis not of facts but of (our perceptions of or habituation to) communal norms for the assertion of P. Put another way, the supposition McDowell mentions here is (virtually) what Kripke identifies as the *misunderstanding* that Wittgenstein argues leads to paradox. So, *of course*, "given this supposition" we fall into the abyss; that is precisely Kripke's point.[7]

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[7] Once again, it would seem charitable to try to find some way to interpret McDowell as not really attributing that supposition to Kripke, and again there

Because McDowell moves away from his initial summary—in which the paradox is created by a misunderstanding, the truth-conditional conception of meaning—to a more general skeptical paradox, he dismisses the skeptical solution as hopelessly inadequate "to claw ourselves back" from the abyss (330). Thus he concludes that Kripke's reading comes to rest at the paradox: "So there are three positions in play: the two horns of the dilemma, and the community-oriented conception of meaning that enables us to decline the choice. Kripke conflates two of these, equating the paradox of *PI* §201—the first horn of the dilemma—with Wittgenstein's conclusion" (342-3). But in the structure of Kripke's reading, the skeptical paradox is *not* Wittgenstein's conclusion; Wittgenstein's "conclusion" is quite clearly the skeptical *solution,* according to Kripke, and the skeptical solution is very like "the community-oriented conception of meaning" that McDowell himself identifies as Wittgenstein's conclusion. Therefore, the basic structure of Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein is actually very similar to McDowell's own.[8]

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is some room to maneuver. The whole passage might be interpreted as not really claiming that Kripke accepts it (e.g. the next paragraph does begin with "In any case. . ."). Nevertheless, from that point on, McDowell treats Kripke as committed to the unqualified rejection of meaning, and he drops any reference to facts or truth conditions in subsequent paraphrases of Kripke. There is also a later passage that refers back in such a way as to imply that McDowell does indeed attribute the supposition to Kripke (337, the passage containing "here as before (cf. §4 above)").

[8] It would be more correct to the radical reading to say with Cavell that *neither* is Wittgenstein's "conclusion," and that the paradox and the solution are permanently in argument with one another. But Kripke does, like McDowell, present Wittgenstein as reaching a "conclusion" (e.g. he uses the word "solution"), and even in Cavell there is clearly an asymmetry: the ordinary is what we seek; skepticism is a problem, for which we need therapy. So, we might say that the skeptical solution is Wittgenstein's conclusion, or

Beyond the similarity of basic structure, though, there are two obvious areas where McDowell and Kripke may yet diverge significantly. First, how similar are Kripke's and McDowell's interpretations of the "misunderstanding" that leads to paradox (i.e. of what must be rejected)? Second, as McDowell puts it, "The diagnosis prompts the question 'How can there be a way of grasping a rule that is not an interpretation?'" (339). So, we may ask how similar Kripke's and McDowell's answers to this question are: how similar are Kripke's skeptical solution (assertibility conditions) and McDowell's community-oriented conception of meaning (rule-following as practice)? There are indications with respect to each of these that McDowell and Kripke are still close together.

On the first question, what they say explicitly seems quite different, but there are suggestions of an implicit similarity. McDowell says the misunderstanding is thinking that understanding is always some kind of an interpretation; Kripke takes the misunderstanding to be that meaning is constituted by facts or truth-conditions. Both of these are very complex thoughts, and intimately connected with many philosophical issues that concern Wittgenstein, so I will not go far into their possible relations.[9] I will

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we might say that neither is a conclusion, but the one way of presenting the radical position that is definitely wrong is to treat the skeptical paradox as Wittgenstein's conclusion.

[9] I will discuss the "misunderstanding" more generally in chapter six. There is one persistent source of confusion, though, I will comment on now. If one claims that a misunderstanding leads to the paradox, is that not ipso facto to reject the paradox? The radical reading says, "No." It all depends on how *radical* the misunderstanding is. If it is minor—what we might call a "mistake," something we might simply correct—then we could correct the mistake and thereby reject the paradox. If the misunderstanding is pervasive

only remark a passage where McDowell himself seems to run them together, suggesting that they amount to practically the same thing.

McDowell says at one point (speaking for himself), "Suppose we are not disabused of the misunderstanding—that is, we take it that our problem is to find a fact that constitutes my having given some expression an interpretation with which only certain uses of it would conform" (331-2). Here he glosses the misunderstanding in almost exactly Kripke's terms (actually a combination of his and Kripke's). It would seem that McDowell sees "interpretation" and "a fact that constitutes my having given an interpretation" as virtually interchangeable. Furthermore, later on that page, McDowell has a footnote that says, "Kripke cannot distinguish rejection of the 'superlative fact' of *PI* §192—rejection of the mythology—from refusing to countenance a fact in which my attaching a determinate meaning to 'plus' consists—acceptance of the paradox" (360 n18). If we put this footnote's gloss on the *paradox* together with the gloss on the *misunderstanding* quoted above, we can see that McDowell has placed himself in the quandary he thinks Kripke is in: "refusing to countenance" the misunderstanding (the search for facts that constitute meaning) is equivalent to "acceptance of the paradox." That is, there is no room for a "middle course" between the misunderstanding and the paradox, because refusing the one is acceptance of

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and fundamental, though—as "facts constitute meaning" may be—so that we cannot correct it, or we do not know what it would mean to correct it, or correcting it would so pervasively change everything we understand that the correction would be virtually equivalent to accepting the paradox anyway, then acknowledging the presence of such a misunderstanding does not constitute rejecting the paradox.

the other.[10] We see here, then, that McDowell's position seems inclined to collapse into the radical reading. In any case, McDowell's and Kripke's differing expressions of the "misunderstanding" do not seem to indicate a real gulf between them.

On the second question—how similar McDowell's and Kripke's alternatives to misunderstanding are—the key consideration is a negative one: we cannot say that the two disagree, because both are quite vague about what the new way of grasping a rule amounts to. I discussed last chapter Kripke's vagueness about what assertibility conditions are. More importantly, I argued that the radical reading understands it to be impossible to give a general (philosophical) statement of what this other way of grasping a rule is (what the ordinary is, how one obeys a rule in practice or in the context of life, what it is for acting to be at the bottom), for any such statement will inevitably be an interpretation and hence indistinguishable from the old way. Quite in line with this radical position, McDowell does not really attempt an answer. This is intentional on his part, not an oversight.

McDowell raises the problem of distinguishing following a rule (a normative notion) from "mere behavior" or "brute movement" (339), and

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[10] This point is inconclusive for several reasons. For one, McDowell mentions "interpretation" in the gloss on misunderstanding but not in the footnote. For another, this gloss on the paradox, with its reference to "facts," matches that in the initial summary of Kripke (329) but differs from all his later glosses on the paradox. Perhaps in both places McDowell considers this to be *Kripke's* gloss on the paradox. Nevertheless, since McDowell argues on 330, as discussed above, that the "supposition" (which he accepts) entails that Kripke's gloss (no facts) collapses into the stronger claim (no meaning), the only "middle course" he could take here would be to reject the "suppostion" and accept the paradox ("no facts" version), i.e. take Kripke's position.

says that the context of customary practice provides the distinction. He follows this immediately with the question, "Now how exactly is this to be understood?" (340). He does not try to answer this question so much as to show that it is the important question. McDowell says a little about what the appeal to practice is *not* (and quotes Wittgenstein doing something similar): "the agreement that is necessary for the notion of following a rule to be applicable is not agreement in opinions"; "If I am drowning and I shout 'Help!', how do I know what the word Help means? Well, that's how I react in this 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" (*RFM* VI-35); "What Wittgenstein is trying to describe is a use of language in which what one does is 'to use an expression without a justification'" (all on 340). The appeal to practice, then, is not to agreement in opinions and it does not claim to be justifiable, but we are told nothing more positive. McDowell concludes his discussion this way: "Until more is said about how exactly the appeal to communal practice makes the middle course [between Scylla and Charybdis] available, this is only a programme for a solution to Wittgenstein's problem. But . . . the programme is Wittgenstein's own" (342).[11]

The appeal to communal practice, then, is just an outline of the answer to how we can avoid the misunderstanding that leads to paradox. Perhaps

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[11] McDowell admits that we may be "at a loss as to how he might have thought the programme could be executed" (342), but then promises to give suggestions in later sections. The later suggestions, however, turn out to be at a comparable level of vagueness: "In the different picture I have described, the response to Wittgenstein's problem works because a linguistic community is conceived as bound together . . . by a capacity for a meeting of minds" (351).

"outline" is still too strong, and it is just a pointer to (in Diamond's phrase) the right place to look for an answer. So, on the question of what Kripke and McDowell offer as alternatives to interpretation, neither says very much, and once again, no important difference between them appears. From the basic structure of McDowell's reading, supplemented by a brief look at the two most important areas of potential disagreement, then, he seems still to be very close to Kripke and to the radical reading generally.

Divergencies and Anti-Radical Intuitions

To begin to see where McDowell departs from the radical reading, we need to look more carefully at the second point. A superficial similarity here was to be expected, since McDowell's shift to practice is essentially the second radical thesis and, as I said at the start of this section, all the parties involved here agree on that thesis. Beyond the superficial, though, the various positions' perspectives on the agreed upon shift to practice are colored by their *disagreement* on the relation of that shift to the first radical thesis (the skeptical paradox). McDowell thinks the appeal to practice is an answer, a rebuttal to the paradox. I believe this gives him a pervasively different, and untenable, view of this shift to practice. The evidence is everywhere, but none of it very definite. It is perhaps clearest in a few passages like this one (McDowell is explaining *PI* 198 where Wittgenstein says the connection between rule and action may just be that "I have been trained to react to this sign in a particular way, and now I do so react to it," which raises for

McDowell the problem of the difference between following a rule and mere behavior):

> The reply—which corresponds to the first sentence of §202—is that the training in question is initiation into a custom. If it were not that, then the account of the connection between sign-post and action would indeed look like an account of nothing more than brute movement and its causal explanation; our picture would not contain the materials to entitle us to speak of following (going by) a sign-post. (339)

It is the phrase "contain the materials to entitle us" that clashes, I believe, with the radical understanding of the shift to practice.

In attempting to say what is wrong here, I believe I am attempting to articulate the inarticulable distinction I said Diamond and Kripke could not articulate. Nevertheless, I shall attempt it. There are two different conceptions of what the appeal to a context of practice or custom is. In one (McDowell's), the appropriate context is a criterion or condition for the action to be meaningful. It is the *idea* or *fact* of the context of practice that provides the distinction between following a rule and mere behavior (McDowell's idea that a custom provides "the materials" suggests that it is an issue of facts): certain requirements must be met, and when they are met we have rule-following. This conception of the appeal to practice is a *philosophical* one, an abstract account of what constitutes rule-following (McDowell's claim that the facts "entitle us" suggests that the issue is one of justification), which is why it can be conceived of as a refutation of the paradox.

The other conception of the appeal to practice (the radical reading's) is a practical or *ordinary* conception. Rather than the context of practice providing the materials (the criteria) that distinguish rule-following from

mere behavior, *we make* that distinction in practice. Nothing provides the conditions that distinguish the two, and nothing entitles us to make the distinction (we are not justified). We simply do call some things "obeying the rule" and others "going against it" when the practical need arises (*PI* 201). What the context of a custom does provide is the materials for ordinary justifications of ourselves to each other ("I thought this way would be fastest because those crest-shaped signs always mean an expressway"). Wittgenstein's point is not that the concept of "practice" provides philosophical materials but that engagement in practice provides ordinary materials.[12] The spirit of Wittgenstein's appeal to practice is closer to this: "When someone whom I am afraid of orders me to continue the series, I act quickly, with perfect certainty, and the lack of reasons does not trouble me" (*PI* 212), than it is to a philosophical answer to the question, "How can there be a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation?" (Yet my quick continuation of the series is also an action according to the rule and is not an interpretation.)

The radical reading of Wittgenstein's response—"obeying a rule is a practice" (*PI* 202)—is not "This is the answer to the philosophical question" but rather "There is no philosophical answer; the problem is a practical one." Wittgenstein gives versions of this response repeatedly: "The question contains a mistake" (*PI* 189; followed by various practical circumstances that

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[12] The seventh radical thesis—that immediate *acting* itself, not *actions*, lies at the bottom of the language-game—applies here. I am suggesting that McDowell appeals to a reification of practice, the *concept* of "practice" whereas the radical reading of Wittgenstein is that he appeals to the immediate, moment-by-moment acting that is practice.

yield various answers); "To the *philosophical* question . . . the correct answer is: 'That depends . . . .' (And that is of course not an answer but a rejection of the question.)" (*PI* 47; to the question of what is "composite").

In examining Diamond's essay, we found that no particular form of words would capture the right or wrong way to approach meaning, no form would necessarily either do justice to the context of life or isolate conditions of use from life. It depended on how scholars take the words, what they do with them, and what sorts of questions they go on from them to ask. The point still applies here: McDowell's use of phrases like "contain the materials that entitle us" may have the wrong feel and may be an important signal that his reading of Wittgenstein has gone astray, but it is hardly conclusive (just as Kripke's phrase "assertibility conditions" has the wrong feel but turns out on examination *not* to signal a false reading of Wittgenstein). Of course, I chose that passage from McDowell and made the effort to illuminate what is wrong with it specifically because I believe it does signal an important misinterpretation of Wittgenstein that manifests itself in his pursuing the wrong questions and expecting the wrong sort of answers. The particular element that best shows this is his concern with the question of "illusion."

McDowell introduces the problem of illusion as his main criticism of Wright's reading of Wittgenstein. Wright gives what we might call a "conventionalist" reading, according to which the normativity of language is defined in terms of conformity with one's community of speakers. McDowell argues that this position obliterates norms:

> The problem for Wright is to distinguish the position that he attributes to Wittgenstein from one according to which the

> possibility of going out of step with our fellows gives us the *illusion* of being subject to norms, and consequently the *illusion* of entertaining and expressing meanings. (336)

The issue is not incidental to McDowell. He mentions the problem that meaning could be an illusion repeatedly (e.g. 342, 343, 347, 353) and argues at length that Wright's position "could not leave a residue recognizable as a conception of meaning and understanding at all" (334; see especially sections 1, 5, and 10). This whole issue of "illusion" brings out the extent of McDowell's conflict with the radical reading, the conflict suggested by his looking to practice as an answer to skepticism.

McDowell's concern with the distinction between actually being subject to norms and the illusion of being subject, and between following a sign-post and brute movement in response to it, evokes the traditional formulation of that distinction by Kant, the distinction between acting from a conception of a rule and acting merely in accord with it. (McDowell does not explicitly mention Kant, but Williams and Brandom do.) I suggest that this distinction can be usefully treated as another signal of pervasive differences between readings of Wittgenstein: the radical reading (and, I believe, the particularist as well) sees Wittgenstein as basically rejecting this Kantian distinction, or rejecting it as basic. Of course, there is a trivial sense in which "acting from a conception" is simply a synonym for "subject to normative assessment"; we do distinguish "following" from "according" in that we treat only some actions as correct or incorrect with respect to the rule. The question is what constitutes that distinction. The Wittgensteinian point is that there is no characteristic of the action (no fact about it) such as the active presence of the

rule itself or a conception of the rule, that distinguishes following from accord; rather, according with the rule in certain circumstances is what *we call* "following" the rule. The sort of picture of normativity suggested by "acting from a conception," as if a mental guide were the crucial thing, is what Wittgenstein is trying to replace with an emphasis on practice. Recall *PI* 155, quoted by Cavell: "—but for us it is the circumstances under which he had such an experience that justify him in saying in such a case that he understands"; "he" may act from a conception of the rule or not (or think he does), but for us that is beside the point. If his fellows pelt him with pebbles when he gets out of step and desist when he changes his behavior, then the question of whether this subjection to norms is an illusion or not is nonsense.[13]

Consider the sorts of examples Wittgenstein uses. In *RFM* VI-42 Wittgenstein asks exactly this question of the difference between following a rule and according with it: "Under what circumstances should we say: someone gives a rule by writing down such a figure? Under what circumstances: someone is following this rule when he draws that sequence? It is difficult to describe this." He goes on to give an example of the difference between following and according:

> If one of a pair of chimpanzees once scratched the figure |–| in the earth and thereupon the other the series |–| |–| etc., the first would not have given a rule nor would the other be following it, whatever else went on at the same time in the mind of the two of them.

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[13] Almost all of what Cavell says of "criteria" is relevant here.

> If however there were observed, e.g., the phenomenon of a kind of instruction, of shewing how and of imitation, of lucky and misfiring attempts, of reward and punishment and the like; if at length the one who had been so trained put figures which he had never seen before one after another in sequence as in the first example, then we should probably say that the one chimpanzee was writing rules down, and the other was following them.

The difference lies entirely in the circumstances and in how elaborately the actions resemble what we customarily call "giving and following a rule." Wittgenstein makes no reference to anything like a "conception" of the rule, let alone to its having an essential role as a guide. He then continues with an explicit rejection of that kind of view: "43. But suppose that already the first time the one chimpanzee had *purposed* to repeat this procedure? Only in a particular technique of acting, speaking, thinking, can someone purpose something. (This 'can' is the grammatical 'can'.)"

Wittgenstein gives another such example in *The Blue Book*: what makes an action an instance of "copying"? Copying would be equivalent here to applying a rule: "It might have been that he was told to paint a portrait of N, and sat down before N, going through certain actions which we call 'copying N's face'. One might object to this by saying that the essence of copying is the intention to copy" (*BB* 32). In this example, *intending* to copy would be *acting from a conception* of the rule, and *resembling* the original would be *according* with the rule. Obviously, resemblance is not enough to make something a copy, but neither does a reference to intention tell us anything. As Wittgenstein says, "An obvious, and correct, answer to the question 'What makes a portrait the portrait of so-and-so?' is that it is the

intention. But if we wish to know what it means 'intending this to be a

portrait of so-and-so' let's see what actually happens when we intend this"

(*BB* 32). As with the monkeys, he answers with a variety of actions none of

which is importantly different from "according": we might call them

"according" with various usual circumstantial features of copying:

> So what do you do when you try to copy the ellipse? Well, you
> look at it, draw something on a piece of paper, perhaps measure
> what you have drawn, perhaps you curse if you find it doesn't
> agree with the model; or perhaps you say "I am going to copy
> this ellipse" and just draw an ellipse like it. (*BB* 33)

Cavell discusses these passages from *The Blue Book* in exploring

Wittgenstein's notion of "criteria" (1979, 42-3). His discussion is directed

against Malcolm's concern with "certainty," but I believe it would work

similarly against McDowell's concern to escape "illusion." The criteria that

distinguish "following" a rule from merely "according" with it are our

ordinary ways of judging that someone intended to act in accord with the rule

(i.e. in step with others whom we judge to follow it) rather than accidentally

doing so.[14]

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[14] Perhaps one way to put the radical reading's disagreement with the Kantian
distinction is that the distinction implies the wrong order of priority:
following versus *merely* according, as if according were simpler, more
primitive. I suggest that the radical reading thinks "according" (merely
according) with a rule is analogous to "pretending" to be in pain, or, better, to
"displaying pain behavior": it is a derivative notion, possible only after we
already have the primary notion of following a rule or being in pain. The
wrong picture thinks of "according with a rule" or "displaying pain behavior"
as already having an identity, to which something else is added (the
conception of the rule; the pain itself). On the right picture, "following the
rule" and "being in pain" are the fundamental notions which then give
identity to *"pain* behavior" (and "pretending to be in pain") and "acting
according to a *rule,* but only accidentally."

The shift to practice, to acting, to what we do, brings with it as its price the loss of any further or higher standard by which to distinguish the illusion of practice from real practice. This is basic in the radical reading. It is the acceptance of the first and second radical theses as corollaries. It is what Cavell claims with "criteria and skepticism are one another's possibility." If practice is fundamental, then normativity is *always* vulnerable to "coming to seem an illusion" (McDowell 342). The radical reading's reply to McDowell on illusion is given by Cowan to Dummett's objection "that if Wittgenstein were right, human communication would be in constant danger of breaking down" (Cowan 293; cf. Dummett 337). Cowan has various things to say about what is wrong with this way of putting it, but eventually concedes that meaning *is* what McDowell would call "an illusion":

> Thus a final answer to Dummett in this matter must be simply to say that he is entirely correct. This is exactly what Wittgenstein is driving at. There is no foundation for human communication. Disagreement is possible at any point. This is what Wittgenstein presumably means when he says that if language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but in judgments. In other words, only agreement can guarantee agreement. (294)

The radical reading takes Wittgenstein not to deny the charge of Dummett and McDowell, but to grant it and then turn to the question of what makes them think that something more is either necessary or possible. (Cavell: "We understandably do not like our concepts to be based on what matters to us . . . ; it makes our language seem unstable and the instability seems to mean what I have expressed as my being responsible for whatever stability our criteria may

have, and I do not want this responsibility; it mars my wish for sublimity" (1990, 92).)

McDowell's concern with "real" normativity, as opposed to the possibly illusory normativity that comes of expressing ourselves in step with our fellows (which is basically practice) implies a commitment on his part to some other authority besides practice. This other authority is "patterns" in the world. McDowell's alarm over "illusion" leads him to embrace a picture of understanding that is virtually the antithesis of Wittgenstein's: "Understanding is grasp of patterns that extend to new cases independently of our ratification, as required for meaning to be other than an illusion" (353). Essentially, McDowell puts himself back in the bind that the turn to practice was supposed to get us out of. (Independent "patterns" are essentially "truth conditions," so McDowell has reverted to a truth-conditional conception of meaning.) We saw that McDowell's explicit reading of Wittgenstein, seems to be reasonably close to the radical reading. But interspersed with that reading, and working against it, is a critique of Wright and his "illusion" of meaning that does not employ the reading so much as undercut it.

McDowell tries to defend a certain "familiar intuitive notion of objectivity" which, he says, requires "the notion of how the pattern of application that we grasp, when we come to understand the concept in question, extends, independently of the actual outcome of any investigation, to the relevant case" (325). The problem, basically, is that "patterns" are virtually the paradigm in Wittgenstein's work of what requires *interpretation* to be connected to a concept (and so to have any identity as patterns). This is

evident in numerous examples, such as the student's response to the "pattern" of examples of adding two (*PI* 185), and our connection of the "pattern" that is a cube with the concept "cube" (*PI* 141). With such cases, Wittgenstein argues that the idea of "grasping the pattern" requires our interpreting the pattern and so fails to connect concepts to applications. We might paraphrase Wittgenstein's conclusion in *PI* 201, that "there must be a way of grasping a rule that is *not* an *interpretation*"—which McDowell makes the centerpiece of his reading—as "there must be a way of grasping a rule that is *not* grasping a *pattern*." So, McDowell's acceptance of Wittgenstein's turn away from interpretation (toward practice) and his defense of (independent) patterns are flatly opposed to one another.

As a result, McDowell finds himself in an impossibly delicate position trying to say just how a pattern extends to the next case:

> What Wittgenstein's polemic against the picture of the super-rigid machine makes untenable is the thesis that possession of a concept is grasp of a pattern of application that extends *of itself* to new cases. . . . In Wright's reading, that is the same as saying that it deprives us of the conception of grasp of ratification-independent patterns. But rejection of ratification-independence obliterates meaning altogether. . . . In effect, the transcendental argument shows that there *must* be a middle position. Understanding is grasp of patterns that extend to new cases independently of our ratification, as required for meaning to be other than an illusion (and—not incidentally—for the intuitive notion of objectivity to have a use); but the constraints imposed by our concepts do not have the platonistic autonomy with which they are credited in the picture of the super-rigid machinery. (352-3)

On the one hand, a pattern must not extend "*of itself*," but on the other hand, it must extend independently of us (our ratification). (And the constraints

imposed by our concepts are *not* "autonomous," but they *are* "independent.") Surely this position is untenable. If we do not extend patterns, and their extensions are not intrinsic, then it is difficult to see what agency is left to extend them. McDowell would seem to want to say that the next case extends the pattern by virtue of our practice of applying the pattern, but again it is difficult to see how this appeal to practice can avoid being one or the other of the two rejected alternatives. Either *we* apply the pattern in practice (which seems very close to—i.e. describable as—our ratifying the new case as an extension of the pattern), or else our practice itself has a pattern that extends *of itself* (independently of our actually following our own practice) to the new case. McDowell wants to reject both and claim a middle course, but he seems to be committed to the latter.[15]

In the intuition that patterns must be independent of us—expressed by McDowell as the "intuitive notion of objectivity," and in his argument that dispensing with independent patterns makes normativity an illusion and obliterates meaning entirely—in this intuition we can glimpse one of the deep sources of resistance to Wittgenstein's radical vision. I would put the basic idea like this: if we can make sense of things, then there *must* be some order to the universe; it just cannot be that the universe has no order at all to it. It is this intuition that Wittgenstein sets himself firmly against with his first radical thesis: "The application (every application) of every word is arbitrary." The point is not to claim (absurdly) that the universe is devoid of order; the point is to reject the intuition that the order in language (thought,

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[15] This is one manifestation of his view of practice I tried to bring out earlier: he does not turn to practice as *acting*, but to the *fact* or *concept* of practice.

concepts) is in any way a reflection, a representation, an effect, a product, a correspondent of order in the universe. Inevitably, to one who refuses to even entertain the possibility that this intuition could be challenged (let alone relinquished), Wittgenstein's thesis seems like nihilism or chaos or in any case seems to obliterate meaning and understanding and is absurd.[16]

The intuition being challenged has many manifestations. A traditional one is the idea that induction requires regularity, that there is a contingently occurring regularity to events that makes inductive inferences possible. One obvious line along which the radical reading of Wittgenstein might be carried, then, is further exploration of such ideas of his as that the claim that the future will be like the past is grammatical and not empirical. For now, though, I want to relate the intuition being challenged to the two senses or connotations of "arbitrary," which I discussed in chapters one and two: roughly, "discretionary" and "non-normative."

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[16] Diamond analyzes essentially this intuition quite clearly in "Realism and the Realistic Spirit" (1986) (especially pages 220-4). She finds this intuition to be diagnosed by both Wittgenstein and Berkeley as a "fantasy of the way language itself works" (222) that leads philosophers (realists here, and ultimately empiricists) to postulate underlying "somethings" that guide us ("matter" for Berkeley's opponents; "active general principles" for Peirce): "We think that our practice—whatever it is—is just a way of getting at something we have an idea of: what really IS, what really is out there and independently real" (222); "Any observed regularity might be mere accident, a weird coincidence not to be betted upon to happen again; to take it to be *not* that, as we do in predicting, is to believe in something *else*, the connection underlying the observed regularity" (223). This intuition is, then, according to Diamond, what Wittgenstein diagnoses as an "idle wheel," and "what it is that opposes such an examination of details in philosophy" (220, quoting *PI* 52, Wittgenstein's famous image of the mouse coming out of grey rags and dust).

How could the intuition in question possibly be wrong? The idea is that there must be *sufficient* order for us to make reliable predictions (e.g. use words). So, imagine there were less order, insufficient order. Imagine orderliness on a scale, and different possible universes with different degrees of it. Would we not expect that creatures of a universe with far less order than ours, adapted to that universe, would perceive it as "sufficiently" ordered for their predictions? This is the counter-intuition that I suggest the radical reading would attribute to Wittgenstein. The thought would seem to apply to every place on the scale. As we converge on total disorder (whatever that might be), the local creatures would always perceive their surroundings as sufficiently ordered. The orderliness (or lack of it) in the universe is not a source of the orderliness of language. "Order" is not an absolute attribute of our universe (or any); it is a relative attribute *within* the universe.

Perhaps if creatures from a far more orderly universe could visit and observe us, they might perceive us as not having any agreement among ourselves in our use of language. Perhaps they would see each of us as using each word with such careless indifference to the gross dissimilarities (as they perceive them) from other uses of the word that they would declare normativity to be clearly an illusion among us, that there is no right or wrong to our usage but merely the most ephemeral and chaotic expediency. Perhaps creatures from a *less* orderly universe would perceive our language usage as having the law-like regularity of the sun's rising, possibly a suitable object for causal explanation, but hardly normative. (Did the sun rise correctly today?)

The radical idea here, then, is that the order in the universe (patterns in the world) is irrelevant to the orderliness of language (i.e. normativity). One way to express this disconnection is to say that, insofar as patterns are supposed to guide word applications, the applications are arbitrary: they are not guided by patterns at all. If one holds the intuition being rejected—that for us to make sense, the universe must have order—one will infer from this claim of arbitrariness (the rejection of order and patterns) the claim that words cannot be normative. In opposition to that intuition, the radical reading says that normativity lies exclusively in human relations. So, "arbitrary" in the sense of "at speaker's discretion" does not imply "arbitrary" in the sense of "non-normative," and only if one presupposes the intuition being rejected would one be inclined to slide from the former to the latter.[17]

There is a subtler way that the intuition insinuates itself, though. It lies behind the idea that "arbitrary" as "discretionary" is not really all that radical, and that the first radical thesis interpreted that way is much weaker than the idea of "arbitrary" as "non-normative." This form of the intuition is also present in McDowell's position. We can think of the error in McDowell's position as having two versions or two levels. At one level, he simply holds two flatly conflicting views: the radical reading, which makes practice (speaker discretion) fundamental; and, at the same time, the view that

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[17] This is, of course, a version of McDowell's initial summary of Kripke: the truth-conditional conception of meaning takes order in language as derived from order in the universe, and the slide it inclines us to make from "no facts" to "no meaning" is the slide between the senses of "arbitrary." The intuition itself is another version of the belief that radical theses one and two are contraries: if normativity requires patterns, then thesis two requires the rejection of thesis one.

understanding is grasp of patterns that extend independently. At a second level, though, these two conflicting views merge; the latter belief in patterns (required because of the intuition) distorts the former view of practice as fundamental into the view I tried to bring our earlier in McDowell: implicit presumption that practice follows patterns, which is why it can safely (i.e. without disturbing the intuition) be treated as "fundamental" (which it no longer is, since patterns are).

I mentioned the sense of "arbitrary" as "non-normative" in anticipation of some philosophical readers taking it that way, and to warn them that this is not what the first radical thesis means. But I do not mean to endorse this as a legitimate sense of "arbitrary," nor to claim that the word is ambiguous and the radical thesis misleadingly expressed. On the contrary, "arbitrary" as "discretionary" is the *only* ordinary sense of the word; Webster's Dictionary, for example, gives five definitions and all (except perhaps the fifth, mathematical definition) are related to "discretion" and to the idea of an act of will *as opposed to* the extension of a rule. Nevertheless, one can anticipate that, because of the prevalence of the intuition Wittgenstein rejects, philosophers will interpret "arbitrary" as implying "random," "chaotic," "unpredictable," and similar connotations (resulting in "non-normative"). But on the radical reading, *acting* lies at the bottom of the language-game, (not patterns), so our arbitrary acts of word application (arbitrary because nothing deeper guides them) are only as "random" as our wills and as "chaotic" as our behavior, and are only "unpredictable" insofar as we are unable to predict each other. Once we abandon the disputed intuition, the

philosophers' inference to "unpredictable" would require the tacit assumption of something like an evil demon thwarting our every act, rather than the inference following naturally from our lack of a benevolent guide (in the form of an antecedent pattern).

As for the first thesis seeming considerably weaker when it means that word application is at speakers' discretion, I believe this only seems weak if, like McDowell, one tacitly takes speakers' discretion (acting, practice) as guided by underlying patterns. That is, one can only see the thesis as weak if one has dodged the force of its displacement of patterns with practice by—in the words of Stanley Fish—regarding "the intentional circumstances of production [i.e. practice] . . . as a new (and higher) set of formal facts [i.e. patterns], a new text whose meaning can now be read off" (1989, 7). In "Going Down the Anti-Formalist Road," the introduction to his essays, Fish summarizes (or rather gives a whirlwind tour of) the significance of the first radical thesis by tracing the argument from a "speaker-relative theory of presupposition" (which is a consequence of the first thesis with "arbitrary" as "speaker's discretion") to the elimination of literal meaning:

> It might seem that the thesis that there is no such thing as literal meaning is a limited one, of interest largely to linguists and philosophers of language; but in fact it is a thesis whose implications are almost boundless, for they extend to the very underpinnings of the universe as it is understood by persons of a certain cast of mind. (1989, 4)

He goes on to illustrate these boundless implications with a Minnesota court ruling on the effect of allowing oral evidence to alter the literal meaning of a contract: ". . . the rule of law would give way to the mere notions of men as to

who should win lawsuits. . . . general disaster would result. . . ." (4) He then

argues for the equation of this loss of literal meaning with the overturning of

formalism and foundationalism, and quotes Roberto Unger on the

significance of this overturning:

> "Those who dismiss formalism as a naive illusion . . . do not
> know what they are in for . . . they fail to understand what the
> classic liberal thinkers saw earlier: the destruction of formalism
> brings in its wake the ruin of all other liberal doctrines of
> adjudication."   (5, quoting Unger, *Knowledge and Politics*
> (Boston, 1975), p. 92)

The first radical thesis with "arbitrary" understood in the "discretionary"

sense is by no means a weak thesis. Perhaps in discussions that touch on

skepticism we become inured to such extreme claims that anything short of

an open declaration of chaos seems weak. But the strongest claims are not

really those wild ones—for they become mere intellectual puzzles—but

rather the slightly "weaker" ones that cannot be dismissed out of hand and

yet are still too strong to accept without serious dislocation of our habits and

intuitions.

McDowell and Wright

Wright's conventionalism bears an obvious resemblance to the radical

reading, particularly in its prominent espousal of the first radical thesis:

"Nothing, therefore, in the previous use of the statement, or of its

constituents, or in the prior streams of consciousness of competent speakers,

is, if its meaning is in conjunction with the facts to determine its truth-value,

sufficient to fix its meaning" (Wright 1982, 250; qtd. in McDowell 357); "To put

the point in its most general form: there is in our understanding of a concept no rigid, advance determination of what is to count as its correct application" (Wright 1980, 21; qtd. in McDowell 325). Wright also asserts the second radical thesis: his claims that meaning depends on what we do (our "investigations") are a version of that second thesis, not necessarily all that different from McDowell's version. (Given what I argued above about the vagueness of McDowell's specification of his "community-oriented conception of meaning," he is no more in a position to distinguish that conception from Wright's "ratification-dependent" conception of meaning than from Kripke's "assertibility conditions." Admittedly, Wright's terminology is possibly even more uncongenial than Kripke's, but there is nothing inherently or necessarily wrong with calling my acting as I have been trained to a "ratification" of my training.) In general, then, Wright is closer to the radical reading than McDowell is. Nevertheless, I suggest that essentially the same thing is wrong with Wright's reading as is wrong with McDowell's.

Wright's terminology makes us suspect immediately the error that I had to tease out of McDowell's rhetoric above: calling our practice "ratification" of meaning suggests clearly what is only murkily suggested by saying our practices "contain the materials that entitle us to speak of" meaning. Both treat the context of practice as a condition that must be met for a word to be meaningful (for an act to be the following of a rule). This sets both of them apart from the radical reading. Ultimately, both of them rely on patterns (though of different sorts) rather than acting as the basis of meaning. This may seem confusing because Wright specifically rejects patterns, and

McDowell criticizes him specifically for that rejection. But McDowell's similarities to Wright often appear just when he takes himself to be rejecting Wright's position.

Wright's total rejection of patterns as guiding our applications of concepts is in perfect accord with the radical reading (being essentially the first radical thesis). The radical objection is only that he fails to keep faith with this rejection of patterns. This is apparent in his notion of conventions as the source of normativity. As McDowell describes it, Wright argues that norms can be defined in terms of conformity with one's community:

> If we regard an individual as aiming to speak a communal language, we take account of the possibility that he may go out of step with his fellows; thus we make room for an application of the notion of error, and so of right and wrong. But it is only going out of step with one's fellows that we make room for; not going out of step with a ratification-independent pattern that they follow. (328)

The trouble with this is that being in or out of step with one's fellows is just as problematic as being in or out of step with the past applications of a word, or with its meaning. The entire question is begged if we presume to know (or presume there is an antecedent identity to) what use of a word is "the same" as some other people's uses. Kripke makes this point, as I discussed in the last chapter: "Indeed, to attempt to reduce the rule for addition to another rule— 'Respond to an addition problem exactly as others do!'—falls foul of Wittgenstein's strictures on 'a rule for interpreting a rule' just as much as any other such attempted reduction" (146 n87).[18]

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[18] I am accepting McDowell's description of Wright's position as generally accurate. It is quite similar to the descriptions given by other critics, such as

It is a recurring pattern in McDowell's critique of Wright that he grants Wright's characterizations of what happens and then disputes that they are sufficient to distinguish illusory from real normativity. I believe the radical reading would dispute just what McDowell grants Wright, i.e. those things on which they agree. Granting those characterizations begs the question; that is, *if* they were granted, they *would* be sufficient, but the radical reading thinks it is a misunderstanding of Wittgenstein to grant them. Thus, McDowell grants that we can distinguish "going out of step with one's fellows." In such passages, he describes what Wright claims lies at the "basic level": "The picture Wright offers is, at the basic level, a picture of human beings vocalizing in certain ways in response to objects. . . . There are presumably correspondences in the propensities of fellow members of a linguistic community to vocalize. . . . But at the basic level there is no question of shared commitments" (336). Furthermore, he warns against reading the crucial passage from *On Certainty* 204—". . . it is not a kind of *seeing* on our

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Diamond (1981). Nevertheless, as I have argued, and will argue in chapter six, critics of Kripke are also in wide agreement and yet they are mistaken in their interpretations of him, so perhaps Wright's critics are similarly mistaken. His apparent acceptance of the idea of conformity with one's fellows as a simple fact seems so flagrantly inconsistent with his espousal of the first radical thesis that it would seem that a more charitable reading of him must be possible. However, my own reading of Wright has not encouraged me to undertake that task. His notion of "conventions" does not seem compatible with the radical reading. His "conventions" seem to be "patterns," as opposed to, say, Bloor's "conventions" which are "institutions" or "obligations." (See, for example, the quotation from Bloor at the end of the last chapter.) Wright's "conventions" seem to be facts rather than tasks, and incompatible with acting being at the bottom of the language-game.

part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game"—in the way he imagines Wright would:

> Now there is a temptation to understand this on the following lines. At the level of 'bedrock' (where justifications have come to an end), there is nothing but verbal behaviour and (no doubt) feelings of constraint. Presumably people's dispositions to behaviour and associated feelings match in interesting ways; but at this ground-floor level there is no question of shared commitments—everything normative fades out of the picture. (341)

The radical objection to these pictures, however, is not that they contain too little to constitute true normativity, but that they assume too much.

In each of these passages, McDowell makes a key "concession" to Wright: "we make room for going out of step"; "there are presumably correspondences"; "people's dispositions match in interesting ways." But he then claims that this is "at best a thin surrogate" (328) for true normativity, which really requires "shared commitments" in order not to be an "illusion." But if there really were "correspondences" and if people's behavior did "match," then the question of normativity has already been answered: there is already agreement and disagreement, sameness and difference, correct and incorrect. It is a different and narrower use of the word "normative" to demand "shared commitments" over and above there being a right and wrong. To use Kant's distinction again, McDowell seems to grant Wright that there is no problem with what "accords" with the rule, but denies that he can get from "accords with" to "follows." On the radical reading, Wittgenstein finds the deep problem to be in understanding how any act can be related to a rule (say, "+2") so that *either* "according" *or* "following" is possible. The

problem of distinguishing the two is the dependent additional problem of the circumstances under which we distinguish "intentional" from "accidental" accord with a rule. What is wrong with Wright, as McDowell presents him, is not the lack of shared commitments at the basic level, but the presumption, shared by McDowell, that people's dispositions match in interesting ways at the basic level.

On the radical view, then, Wright and McDowell have made the same mistake. If Wright assumes that people's dispositions "match," then he is assuming a "pattern." (This behavior matches the pattern, and that behavior does not.) The disagreement between them is merely what sort of patterns are basic. McDowell takes the patterns of practice as basic, and accuses Wright of trying to "dig below bedrock" (cf. *PI* 217 and *RFM* VI-31) in taking the patterns of "mere behavior" as basic. But taking *any* patterns as basic is still taking understanding as interpreting (*PI* 201), still "a kind of *seeing* on our part" (*OC* 204). Shared commitments may fade out of Wright's picture, but normativity does not: contrary to McDowell's description, Wright's conventionalism does not try to found the normative on the non-normative, but to found one sort of normativity—practice—on another sort—patterns of behavior.

In McDowell's (Wittgensteinian) terminology, we could say that the radical reading sees both McDowell and Wright as "digging below the ground." This is another idea on which McDowell takes himself to differ from Wright, but nevertheless is virtually the same:

> But if we respect Wittgenstein's injunction not to dig below the ground, we must say that the community 'goes right or wrong'

> (compare W[right 1980], p. 220) according to whether the object in question is, or is not, *yellow;* and nothing can make its being yellow, or not, dependent on our ratification of the judgement that that is how things are. In Wittgenstein's eyes, as I read him, Wright's claim that 'for the community itself there is no authority, so no standard to meet' (W, p. 220) can be, at very best, an attempt to say something that cannot be said but only shown. (353)

Despite McDowell's disagreement with Wright, there is an obvious symmetry in their claims here. Compare McDowell's statement that "we must say that the community goes right or wrong according to whether the object in question is or is not yellow" with Wright's "for the community itself there is no authority, so no standard to meet." If Wright's claim is "below ground," then so is McDowell's. I believe the radical reading would agree with McDowell's use of the say/show distinction here. However, McDowell's identification of the standard "according to" which the community must judge is as much "something that cannot be said but only shown" as Wright's denial of that standard is.

McDowell mentions the say/show distinction only in passing, and I shall do the same. It is another of the family resemblances among radical readers that they generally believe that this distinction continues to be important to Wittgenstein in his later philosophy, though he no longer discusses it in that form.[19] I believe the idea of *acting* as at the bottom of the language-game is another form of the idea. That is, the distinction between *acting* and actions, which the seventh radical thesis emphasizes, is the

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[19] The say/show distinction is a central topic in Philip Shields's *Logic and Sin in the Writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein,* and I take his treatment there to be consistent with the radical reading.

distinction between what shows itself and what can be said. (Perhaps Wittgenstein dropped discussion of the say/show distinction because "show" misleadingly suggests being able to "see" what is shown, and the metaphor of "seeing" is too powerfully entrenched in the wrong picture of meaning.) If we draw this connection between the two idioms, we can redescribe the radical position on patterns: the turn to *practice* in Wittgenstein is to what shows itself (as it occurs, moment-by-moment), but *patterns*, whether of practice or of behavior, can be said.[20]

We might, then, put the radical objection to McDowell and Wright like this: though they may disagree about what is at "bedrock," both are trying to say what it is; but "bedrock" cannot be described, only shown. The advantage of this idiom, I believe, is that it brings out the indispensable role of "us," the ones to whom bedrock is shown, the observer, the theorist. This is important because it may look as if the radical reading is trying to banish normativity even more stringently than Wright is. (This is the intuition challenged in the last section: that rejecting patterns *must* be a rejection of normativity, that "arbitrary" must imply "non-normative.") What the radical reading disputes is McDowell's and Wright's location of normativity *within* the picture of "bedrock" (either of their pictures), rather than with the audience to whom the picture is shown. The say/show distinction, then, points to another manner of speaking—the reference to the observer—which I take as also

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[20] We can also redescribe in this idiom the radical position on theory and the ordinary: thinking we can *see* the difference between theory and the ordinary is thinking we can *say* what can be said and what can be shown.

equivalent to the "seeing" versus "acting" idiom that I have primarily used in elaborating the radical reading.

McDowell defends his locating of norms at "bedrock" by quoting *PI* 289, and summarizing its point:

> "To use an expression without a justification does not mean to use it without right."
> And it seems clear that the point of this is precisely to prevent the leaching out of norms from our picture of 'bedrock'—from our picture, that is, of how things are at the deepest level at which we may sensibly contemplate the place of language in the world. (341)

I believe the radical reading would agree with McDowell here, and yet find that (among other things) his belief that Wright's picture is such a leaching out of norms shows that he has subtly misunderstood the point. It is because it is "our picture" that it is normative, not because norms exist at bedrock. In the remark following the one McDowell quotes, Wittgenstein suggests this (if somewhat enigmatically):

> To use an expression without a justification does not mean to use it without right.
> 290. What I do is not, of course, to identify my sensation by criteria: but to repeat an expression. But this is not the *end* of the language-game: it is the beginning.

In the exploration of meaning, we are both the observers and the phenomena. In *PI* 290, locating normativity *within* the picture, within the phenomena, would be "to identify my sensation by criteria." That is not where the normativity lies; it lies with me as observer in that I "repeat an expression." The normativity in my repeating of the expression is not derived from the phenomena, which would be to make my repeating the *end*

of the language-game. My *acting*, as the observer, my repeating the expression, is the beginning of the language-game (is at the bottom).

As I said, talk of "the theorist" is another artifice to get at what the radical reading thinks Wittgenstein means by putting acting at the bottom of the language-game. Our habits of philosophical discourse implicitly assume the perspective of the neutral, invisible observer who does not affect the phenomena. On the radical reading, were there, *per impossibile*, such an observer, it would find no normativity anywhere in the phenomena observed.[21] Our acting, *as it is observed*, as it is part of the phenomena, is mere actions (not "acting" as the seventh radical thesis emphasizes). Accordingly, practice, *as phenomenon*, is also "mere behavior," as McDowell is so concerned to avoid. In the jargon of "calling" ("taking as") versus "being," it is not by *being* part of a custom, practice, or institution that a performance becomes a case of going by a rule—*pace* McDowell (342)—but rather by our *taking* it (we observers) as part of a custom, practice, or institution.

Wittgenstein's turn to practice, as the radical reading understands it, has quite a different character from that given it by McDowell, or by Wright on McDowell's reading of him. For both of them, practice is not acting, in the radical sense, but is the patterns of actions. So, while their readings of Wittgenstein are both quite similar to the radical reading, in principle, they ultimately diverge significantly from it. We might ask if something like their readings might still escape the objections I have raised from the radical

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[21] Kripke dramatizes this point by saying that even God could not know whether I meant plus or quus (40-1 and elsewhere).

reading's perspective. Some brief observations on the work of Williams and Brandom will suggest it could.

Brandom and Williams

The error of relying on patterns, of which I have accused McDowell and Wright, is often called "regularism." The topic is of considerable importance in Brandom's *Making It Explicit*. He is trying to give an account of the normativity of language that builds on Wittgenstein's philosophy and is not vulnerable to the attacks Wittgenstein brings to bear against regularism (and the related "regulism"): "[O]ne of the projects pursued in the rest of this work is to come up with an account of norms implicit in practices that will satisfy the criteria of adequacy Wittgenstein's arguments have established" (29-30). The arguments referred to he calls the regress argument against regulism and the gerrymandering argument against regularism.

Regulism about norms is the view "that proprieties of *practice* are always and everywhere to be conceived as expressions of the bindingness of underlying *principles*" [i.e. rules] (20). The problem with regulism is that rules "must be applied to particular circumstances, and applying a rule in particular circumstances is itself essentially something that can be done correctly or incorrectly. . . . The rule determines proprieties of performance only when correctly applied" (20). But then, if all norms are rules, as regulism maintains, "applications of a rule should themselves be understood as correct insofar as they accord with some further rule" (20). Thus, we have a regress of rules for applying rules, the upshot of which is that regulism

cannot be right: "The conclusion of the regress argument is that there is a need for a *pragmatist* conception of norms—a notion of primitive correctnesses of performance *implicit* in *practice* that precede and are presupposed by their *explicit* formulation in *rules* and *principles*" (21).

Regularism is a weakening of regulism in the hope of avoiding this regress. It substitutes "conforming" to a rule for "obeying" a rule (using terms from Wilfrid Sellars, whose arguments, in addition to Wittgenstein's, Brandom is following). This is Kant's distinction between acting in accord with a rule and acting from a conception of a rule. Regularism tries to explain following a rule in terms of according with it:

> If the practices in which norms are implicit are understood simply as regularities of performance, then there is nothing the practitioner need already understand. If such regularities of performance can be treated as practices governed by implicit norms, then there will be no regress or circularity in appealing to them as part of an account of knowing-that, of expressing norms explicitly in rules and principles. (26-7)

Following a rule correctly is simply continuing the pattern of regular applications of that rule: "A norm implicit in a practice is just a pattern exhibited by behavior. To violate that norm, to make a mistake or act incorrectly according to that norm, is to break the pattern, to act irregularly" (28). Wittgenstein's argument against this is that any pattern can be gerrymandered so that any action conforms to it: "The problem is that any particular set of performances exhibits many regularities. . . . Any further performance will count as regular with respect to some of the patterns exhibited by the original set and as irregular with respect to others" (28). Regularism cannot explain normativity unless it illicitly presupposes is:

There simply is no such thing as *the* pattern or regularity exhibited by a stretch of past behavior, which can be appealed to in judging some candidate bit of future behavior as regular or irregular, and hence, on this line, as correct or incorrect. . . . [S]ome regularities must be picked out as the ones that *ought* to be conformed to, some patterns as the ones that *ought* to be continued. The simple regularity view offers no suggestions as to how this might be done and therefore does not solve, but merely puts off, the question of how to understand the normative distinction between what is done and what ought to be done. (28)

As McDowell says, "It will take repeated engagements to come to terms with Brandom's huge, cohesive, quirky and brilliant book" (1997, 157), and I cannot do an extensive analysis of it here. I only want to make a few points about the radical reading and Brandom's relation to it, most of which are illuminated in these few pages about regularism and regulism. Basically, I believe Brandom is probably a radical reader.[22] But there are questions, and

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[22] Generally, I expect radical readers to assert something like the first radical thesis, and it is not easy to say whether or not something in Brandom's book amounts to doing so. One suggestion of such an explicit thesis is Dennett's "stance stance": "Dennett's most controversial claim is his stance stance—his claim that there is no room for a distinction between actually being an intentional system and being appropriately treated as one" (57). This seems close to the first radical thesis, and the priority of *calling* over *being*, but only if its radicality is not drained away by that "appropriately." Brandom asks after basically that: "[I]s the taking of a stance merely . . . attributed, so that it can be correct to adopt the stance that someone is adopting the intentional stance? Is it in this sense stances all the way down?" (59). The radical reading would say, "Yes." This raises the problem of "original intentionality" (60), which will be central for Brandom: "The theory developed in this work can be thought of as an account of the stance of attributing original intentionality" (61). Here, then, is one way in which a version of the first radical thesis might be asserted by Brandom.

This sort of radical insistence on the priority of calling sometimes leads to charges of "idealism." So it might also illuminate Brandom's similarity to

even easy ways to disqualify him. He says (of his project to give "an account of norms implicit in practices"): "Wittgenstein, the principled theoretical quietist, does not attempt to provide a theory of practices, nor would he endorse the project of doing so. The last thing he thinks we need is more philosophical theories" (29). This suggests that Brandom *reads* Wittgenstein as a particularist, but he disagrees with Wittgenstein (as he reads him), in which case his own position could be exactly that of the radical reading and yet he would not be a radical reader of Wittgenstein. (That is, we might call him a radical Wittgensteinian, but he is a particularist *reader* of Wittgenstein.)[23] A more substantial potential deviation from the radical reading, though, concerns what he expects to accomplish with his "theory of practices." Let me block out (far too simply) the basic positions here.

Earlier I quoted McDowell saying, "Until more is said about how exactly the appeal to communal practice makes the middle course available, this is only a programme for a solution to Wittgenstein's problem. But ... the programme is Wittgenstein's own" (1984, 342). I said that the vagueness of his appeal to this program is one of his similarities to Kripke (and Diamond). But the radical reading (and the particularist) entails that the program cannot really be carried out, and McDowell diverges from them in

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the radical reading to compare the relation of Bloor's sociology of knowledge to "idealism" (Bloor 1996a, 1996b) with the relation of Brandom's "strong inferentialism" to "hyperinferentialism" (Brandom 1994, 131-2; cf. McDowell 1997).

[23] In this sketch, Brandom would be something of an opposite to Kripke, who is a radical *reader* of Wittgenstein, though he does not agree with Wittgenstein (as he reads him) and so is not personally a radical Wittgensteinian.

taking his own vagueness to be a temporary condition. Brandom's enormous book may well appear to be the carrying out of exactly that program. In fact, McDowell's paragraph describing the need for a middle course (between Scylla and Charybdis) that leads up to his announcement of Wittgenstein's program, is quoted by Brandom leading up to *his* announcement of his own project of providing a theory of practices. So, Brandom does seem to take himself to be carrying out McDowell's program, though he disagrees with McDowell in that McDowell says this is Wittgenstein's program and Brandom says Wittgenstein would not endorse it.

Here are the basic positions. Both the radical reading and the particularist say this project cannot be carried out.[24] The particularists draw from this the quietist conclusion that we ought not to attempt it. The radical readers draw the conclusion that whether or not we should attempt it depends entirely on the practical benefits we can expect from the attempt. They think that to reject the attempt because it will fail to reach the real truth is to remain committed to the belief that there *is* such a thing as the real truth (and that it is the source of benefits), and so to betray Wittgenstein's radical philosophy. The attempt may well yield as much of what we *call* "truth" as

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[24] Here is a very crude attempt to say why. If norms implicit in practice really are prior to explicit meaning, then they cannot be made explicit, for if "they" are the same whether implicit or explicit, then their implicitness was not really essential, and the implicit is not really "prior" to the explicit. Rather, to think this was possible would be to assume that norms are basically an explicit kind of thing that just happen sometimes to be implicit. This is not to take seriously the idea "implicit in practice." (I believe McDowell's (implicit) assumption that practices are patterned is ultimately a version of this mistake.)

anything ever does. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. By his attempt at a theory, then, Brandom demonstrates that he is not a particularist (though, again, he does seem to *read* Wittgenstein as being a particularist). He may still be a radical, though. It depends, as I said, on what his theory is supposed to accomplish. Let us look at his similarity to and difference from the radical reading on a few points.

The first point is a small one about Kant's distinction. I said earlier that on the radical reading Wittgenstein does not think that that distinction addresses the important philosophical problem. If this is right, then nothing of much interest should change by the shift from regulism to regularism. That is, there is no special problem about following a rule that is not also a problem for according with a rule, and Brandom's summaries bear that out. The gerrymandering argument is not merely that we cannot get from conforming to obeying, from the non-normative to the normative. It is stronger than that: "There simply is no such thing as *the* pattern or regularity exhibited by a stretch of past behavior" (28). The emphasis on "the" is unnecessary (and slightly misleading) because the problem is one of identity, not uniqueness. If we cannot identify the continuation of the pattern, then we equally cannot identify the past behavior *as* a "pattern" or as "regular."[25] Certainly the Kantian distinction can be quite innocuous and unobjectionable. But it seems uncomfortably sympathetic to the idea that normativity is something *added* to an existing, non-normative regularity,

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[25] This is sometimes expressed as the idea that there is an "internal relation" between a rule and its application, or a pattern and its extension, an idea to which I shall return shortly.

whereas Wittgenstein's insight is that "regularity" and "accord" are already normative notions.

In keeping with this perspective, the radical reading does not find a strong distinction between regulism and regularism, nor between the regress and gerrymandering arguments. Brandom also weakens these distinctions in at least two ways. First, examining a refinement of regularism in which normativity is explained by sanctions on behavior, he shifts from the gerrymandering to the regress argument:

> Sanctions theories fund this crucial distinction [between "accord" and "follow"] by means of the distinction between producing a performance and assessing it. But assessing, sanctioning, is itself something that can be done correctly or incorrectly. If the normative status of being incorrect is to be understood in terms of the normative attitude of treating as incorrect by punishing, it seems that the identification required is not with the status of *actually* being punished but with that of *deserving* punishment, that is, being *correctly* punished. (36)

The regress argument can be brought to bear against any putative determinant of correctness, whether principles of practice, as in regulism, or assessments of performance, as in regularism. Second, Brandom makes the same basic move against each of them: he distinguishes the "theorist" from the "practitioner," and claims a different status for the actions of the theorist:

> For the only one who needs to understand how to apply correctly the rule conforming to which makes performances count as regular is the theorist who describes the regularity in terms of the rule. The norms implicit in regularities of conduct can be expressed explicitly in rules, but need not be so expressible by those in whose regular conduct they are implicit. (27)

(It will be important for Brandom's argument that the theorist does have a different status, and that the question of regularity does not simply reappear unchanged at the metalevel of the theorist.) Despite his emphasis on the importance of Kant's distinction, then, Brandom agrees with the radical reading of Wittgenstein that the fundamental problem appears for "according" as well as for "following," and that no appeal to patterns or regularities will meet Wittgenstein's arguments.[26]

Williams, in "Blind Obedience: Rules, Community and the Individual" (1991), presents the structure of Wittgenstein's arguments much like Brandom does, and I want to address this same issue of the distinction between the two arguments (against regulism and regularism) as it appears in her essay. She "separate[s] two arguments that are often treated as the same" (95), the Regress Argument and the Paradox of Interpretation. These are essentially the regress and gerrymandering arguments Brandom describes: the Regress attacks the idea of a certain sort of thing that "can serve as a guide for certain future actions" (95), i.e. the "principles" of regulism; and the Paradox attacks the claim of that thing to "set a standard for the correctness of those actions" (95), by arguing that any action can be gerrymandered to conform or

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[26] Brandom actually develops Kant's distinction in quite different ways, with which the radical reading has no quarrel: "Kant's principle that we are the ones who act not only according to rules but according to a conception of them is the claim that we are not merely *subject* to norms but *sensitive* to them. This principle has been taken over here by saying that we are characterized not only by normative *statuses*, but by normative *attitudes*" (33). In Brandom's hands, Kant's distinction "has been deintellectualized by replacing grasp of principles with mastery of practices" (32) and loses most of its anti-Wittgensteinian flavor.

conflict with the standard. Williams is more explicit than Brandom about attributing some significance to separating these arguments: "The plausibility of the Humean reading [i.e. Kripke's] turns in part on having treated these two arguments as the same" (122); "What happens if you slide the two arguments together is that there is a natural move from the fact that we can't find an interpretation to stop the regress to the claim that the very distinction between correct and incorrect has collapsed" (123).[27] This is not merely a general criticism of the Humean reading, but part of a specific effort to distinguish it from her own reading: "What I want to show here is that Wittgenstein's appeal to blind obedience as the way to address the problems of the Regress and Paradox is not part of a sceptical conclusion" (121). The "appeal to blind obedience" here is a reference to her own reading: "Both the normativity and necessity of rule-governed action are to be explained in terms of blind obedience" (120). The effort at distance is required because her reading is very like the radical reading, yet she considers Kripke to be advocating a causal explanation of meaning.[28]

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[27] The "natural move" that Williams describes evokes both the move from "discretionary" to "non-normative" (as an interpretation of "arbitrary") and the connection in *PI* 201 between "grasping a rule is an interpretation" and "there would be neither accord nor conflict here." On the radical reading, the forces that incline philosophers to that "natural move" are extremely powerful and pervasive in our intellectual lives. That is, the "misunderstanding" (*PI* 201) that leads to paradox is not a "mistake," as would be suggested by Williams's claim that we mistakenly slide the two arguments together.

[28] I am not endorsing Williams's reading of Kripke, which I believe shares some of the distortions of Kripke I found in McDowell. Rather I believe her situation is like Cavell's: she finds herself quite close to Kripke even on her own reading of him, and her position is even closer to Kripke as I read him,

Along with greater explicitness about the separation of the two arguments comes greater explicitness about their relation, and greater ease than with Brandom in seeing the difficulty of separating them. Williams says, "It is important to see that the interpretations themselves could be transparent (and so would not generate a regress) and yet the action could be made out to accord or conflict with the given interpretation" (122-3, cf. 96). Unless I misunderstand the word "transparent," this should not be possible, for fixing an interpretation of a rule is determining whether an action accords or conflicts with it. If the interpretation is transparent, then we know what action to take. Williams gives an example, but it does not seem to support her claim: "For example, any finite numerical sequence can be made out to conform to more than one mathematical formula" (123). This is true, but the mathematical formula here is the interpretation and the numerical sequence is the action, and it is *not* true that any finite numerical sequence can be made out to accord or conflict with a *given* mathematical formula. On the contrary, if a mathematical formula is transparent (i.e. we understand it), then it exactly determines the numerical sequence that is its expansion. That is, given the interpretation (formula), the next action (number) at any point is fixed. The radical reading does not dispute the arguments Williams attributes to Wittgenstein, only her strict separation of them, and consequent severance of the relation between actions and interpretations of rules.

Earlier in her essay, Williams gives the standard objection to this severance as presented by Baker and Hacker:

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and to other radical readers such as Bloor.

> The relation between a rule and the instances of its application
> is, as they repeatedly assert, an internal relation. Minimally, this
> means that rule and its applications cannot be treated as two
> independent things: ". . . to grasp a rule is to be able to say what
> accords with it. There are not two separate operations of
> understanding, only one—an ability to judge that *this* and *this*
> accord with the rule that . . ." [Baker and Hacker 1984, 96] (101)

She has substantial criticisms of their treatment of "internal relations"—

which Baker and Hacker say "are the product of grammar" [124] (qtd. on

102)—culminating in "What we have here is the mystification of grammar,

captured in the phrase, 'the autonomy of grammar'" (103). Radical readers,

Bloor in particular, would agree entirely with her criticisms of Baker and

Hacker. However, criticizing their mystification of internal relations does not

entail rejecting the claim that rule and application are internally related, and

the radical reading agrees with them on that point. Bloor treats this issue at

length in "Left and Right Wittgensteinians" (1992) where he argues that the

social or community view that Baker and Hacker reject does not substitute

"extrinsic" relations for internal, but rather de-mystifies their account by

showing how internal relations are socially constituted: "From the

sociological standpoint socialization, consensus, and the like, far from being

outside the internal relationship, are actually *constitutive of it*" (272);

"[W]ithout such a theory the notion of an internal relation between a rule

and its application is powerless to illuminate the relevant phenomena" (272).

Both points are close to Williams's position: the second is very like her

criticism of Baker and Hacker for mystification; and Bloor argues for the first

using the importance of the teaching and learning process in establishing

conceptual content, a point central to Williams's reading of Wittgenstein as

well. She summarizes this point in virtually the same terms as Bloor does: "The connection between a rule and an action is to be explicated in terms of the kind of training a person has into a social custom" (Williams 116).[29]

Williams's stress on the separation between the Regress and Paradox arguments does distance her position both from Baker and Hacker and from Kripke. But the cost of this distance seems to be commitment to the claim that we can understand (an interpretation of) a rule and still not know what actions accord with it. Without that separation and its attendant claim, she would still be very far from Baker and Hacker, but would be slightly closer to the already-very-close radical reading.

To return to Brandom, another aspect of the radical reading that appears in both Williams and Brandom is the perspective of the theorist. In Williams, this appears as the importance of how "we" take things: "The normativity of Robinson Crusoe's behavior is derivable not from the mere complexity or publicness of his behavior, but from the assimilation of that behavior to the complex practices of what we do" (110); "That his behavior is seen as corrective depends upon how *we*, as a matter of course, would take the master-pattern" (111). Earlier I argued that giving an essential role to the theorist, or the observer, or to "we" who judge, is a version of Wittgenstein's shift from *seeing* to *acting*, and that it is on this point most particularly that the radicality of Wittgenstein's philosophy turns. That radicality is most easily lost by implicitly importing "patterns" or "regularity" into the theorist's

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[29] Williams addresses this issue in detail in "The Significance of Learning in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy" (1994b).

perspective. I will try to illuminate this using Brandom's response to regularism.

What is crucial for the radical reading is that the shift to the theorist is a complete change of question: where we were asking what is *true* of the practitioners, we now ask what the theorist *does*. Brandom answers regularism by distinguishing performance from assessment, normative status from normative attitude: where the gerrymandering argument said that the normative *status* of any performance could be anything (correct or incorrect), the theorist takes up a normative *attitude* toward the performance and assesses it (takes it or treats it) as correct or incorrect. We might now have two ideas about this theorist's position, and about normative attitudes. One is that there is still a question of whether the *correct* normative attitude is taken, whether the theorist has assessed the performance correctly. This supposes that there is (must be) a *pattern* or *regularity* to the theorist's attitudes, that is, the theorist's *acting* is not really the bottom of the language-game because there is an antecedent regularity to which that acting conforms. As mentioned earlier, this regularist version (36) reintroduces the regress and leaves normativity inexplicable. The second is that there is no further notion of correctness beyond what the theorist takes as correct, for the very content of "regular" is created by our "taking as correct." Normativity is not constrained by regularity but is, rather, prior to it and defines it. This is the radical position, and also Brandom's: "In order to respect the lessons of Wittgenstein's pragmatism about the normative, assessing must be understood as something *done;* the normative must be construed as

somehow implicit in the practice of the assessor, rather than explicit as the endorsement of a proposition" (33). Brandom's radical position is evident, then, from this early discussion of Wittgenstein's arguments and the priority of norms implicit in practice:

> To foreshadow: On the broadly phenomenalist line about norms that will be defended here, norms are in an important sense in the eye of the beholder, so that one cannot address the question of what implicit norms are, independently of the question of what it is to acknowledge them in practice. The direction of explanation to be pursued here first offers an account of the practical attitude of *taking* something to be correct-according-to-a-practice, and then explains the status of *being* correct-according-to-a-practice by appeal to those attitudes. (25)[30]

Whatever nuances and complexities may attend this position over the course of the book, it remains of paramount importance and emerges intact at the end of the book:

> With the collapse of external into internal interpretation—its revelation as a special case of the sort of interpretation that goes on all the time within the practices of a discursive community—those proprieties are assimilated to the ordinary scorekeeping proprieties in play in *our own* discursive practices. The norms turn out to be ... here. (648-9; Brandom's ellipsis marks)

The point I want to make about this shift to the theorist—"we" are the theorists—whose judgments are not subject to further assessments for correctness or conformity to regularity (other than more of the same by others of us), is that it entails that Brandom's project is *not* the carrying out of the

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[30] This order of explanation—the status of *being* depends on the act of *taking*—is the radical priority of *calling* over *being* that I introduced in chapter two.

program McDowell says is Wittgenstein's and which the radical and particularist readings say cannot be carried out.

Perhaps the best way to see this is to bring back the "puzzled reader" to whom Kripke and Diamond could not explain themselves. What Kripke and Diamond cannot do is explain to this reader the source of meaning, of normativity. Diamond cannot explain the difference between looking at the context in life that does indeed give a word (e.g. "fear") meaning (that is, its "commerce with the lives and thoughts and interests of human beings"), and looking at the *conditions* of the word's use (which lead to philosophical confusion by virtue of being now "separate from life" and meant to explain or justify the word's use). Kripke, similarly, cannot explain to this reader what "assertibility conditions" are without turning them into "conditions" (in the bad sense that Diamond criticizes), which would "fall foul of Wittgenstein's strictures on 'a rule for interpreting a rule'" (146 n87).

The analogy in Brandom is to explaining normative attitudes. Brandom puts himself in the company of Kripke and Diamond by recognizing that normative attitudes are the crucial point, the source of normativity, but he also recognizes that a puzzled reader can easily take this point the wrong way:

> Specifically, it is necessary to make sense of the idea of practically taking or treating performances as correct or incorrect. Third, taking or treating performances as correct or incorrect, approving or disapproving them in practice, is explained in terms of positive and negative sanctions, rewards and punishments. This tripartite strategy is endorsed and pursued in the rest of this work. There are reasons not to be happy with the regularist way of working it out that has just been sketched, however. (36)

He goes on to give the puzzled reader's rebuttal that this just pushes the problem back one step: "If the normative status of being incorrect is to be understood in terms of the normative attitude of treating as incorrect by punishing, it seems that the identification required is not with the status of *actually* being punished but with that of *deserving* punishment, that, is, being *correctly* punished" (36); the regress applies once more (and Brandom "falls foul of Wittgenstein's strictures on 'a rule for interpreting a rule'"). The radical and particularist claim is that Brandom cannot ultimately answer that reader. To repeat the caution I gave last chapter, this does not mean there is nothing more to say—Brandom has hundreds of pages of things to say—and it does not mean that that reader is right. It only means that what Brandom says will not (because it cannot) constitute what that reader would consider an "*account* of norms implicit in practice." We could not, of course, prove this as a specific claim about Brandom, without somehow anticipating the whole future of what promises to be a long and copious debate. Nevertheless, the expected conflict is already marked out in at least one recently published response to Brandom.

Gideon Rosen, in "Who Makes the Rules Around Here?", his contribution to a symposium on Brandom's book, gives the "puzzled reader's" response. Rosen asks, "But what exactly is this phenomenalism? How precisely are we to understand the pervasive metaphors of creation, imposition and institution?" (164) The "exactly" and "precisely" signal Rosen's expectation of a certain kind of answer, a kind that the radical reading thinks Wittgenstein has demonstrated can never be given. So, as with

McDowell's question, "Now how exactly is this [appeal to practice] to be understood?", the radical reading can anticipate that Brandom will not be able really to answer Rosen's question. Rosen goes on to make a series of points, most of which a radical reader of Wittgenstein would say are wrong but unanswerable. They are wrong in the sense that they presuppose the traditional notion of understanding that Wittgenstein undermines, but they are unanswerable because one who holds that notion will not recognize Wittgenstein's undermining of it as any more adequate than Brandom's account of norms.[31] That Rosen holds this view is pervasively evident, such as in his emphasis on facts and his automatic equation of normative attitudes with "the pattern of normative attitudes" (165). From Rosen's perspective, Brandom cannot succeed:

> One normative status is explained in terms of another. The trouble is that as soon as one takes this normative turn, the status of one's phenomenalism (or subjectivism) as a humanized alternative to hard-core realism is thrown directly into question. . . . [U]nless more is said, a view like [Brandom's] . . . does nothing to explain how anything *we do* serves to institute a norm. . . . It does not help to add that the desert in question is desert *by our lights;* since the question is precisely how facts about what is deserved by our lights, or according to our practices, might be instituted by what we do. (167)

Brandom's (radical) move to the theorist's perspective can only appear to Rosen as succumbing to the "temptation here to take refuge in regress" (167):

> But this does not help. It is true that for any given normative fact, the regress permits us to cite another fact in virtue of which

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[31] Recall the radical logic as we saw it earlier in McDowell's reading of Kripke: the truth-conditional conception of meaning inclines those who hold it to interpret any attack on it as an absurd attack on all meaning.

it obtains. But at no stage is this further fact one that is in any clear sense *of our making*. The regress provides no insight in to how anything *we do* determines what is correct according to the norms implicit in our practices" (168).

That is, Brandom cannot show that the theorist's assessments are not guided

by, say, Platonic Ideas.

Rosen goes on to give the puzzled reader's summary of Brandom's

book:

> Brandom knows this, of course. The heart-stopping final chapter of *Making It Explicit* is structured as a mystery/thriller. Six hundred pages into our story, the "source" of normativity is still a fugitive on the lam. We know it's holed up somewhere "in us". But every time we turn over a rock in the hopes of confronting the fact about us in virtue of which some normative fact obtains, we find ourselves face to face, not with a fact about what we have done, but with a fact about what it is *proper* for us [to] do; which means the fugitive is still at large. The closing pages purport to effect a capture. But I must confess that when the alleged source was finally flushed into the open,[32] I had difficulty identifying it as the quarry I'd been gunning for. (168)

I do not believe Rosen has made any "mistake." It is just that he was gunning

for a different quarry from Brandom: he was gunning for a *justification* of

"Wittgenstein's pragmatism about the normative" (Brandom 33), and

Brandom did not capture it. Rosen correctly identifies their disagreement as a

fundamental difference of perspective: "One man's vicious explanatory circle

is another's illuminating display of connections between idioms" (170). To

the puzzled reader (such as Rosen), Wittgenstein's (and Brandom's) radical

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[32] Here Rosen quotes the passage I quoted ending "The norms turn out to be
. . . here."

philosophy will always appear to be viciously circular (or otherwise unintelligible).

Rosen's article brings out one more important connection between Brandom and the radical reading of Wittgenstein. It is what Rosen perceives (correctly, in my view) as the *essence* of Brandom's project, and which he sets himself against: the contention that the normative is prior to the intentional. His article sets out to defend the status of the intentional, and that is where he arrives in the last paragraph: "But if this is right, the intentional must eventually be invoked, even in the simplest cases, in a way incompatible with Brandom's program. In my view it would be no disaster if this result were inescapable. This would mean rejecting Brandom's thesis of the strict priority of the normative to the intentional" (170). This is the thesis and program Rosen had set out in the opening paragraph:

> The governing project of *Making It Explicit* is to show that intentionality is not a primitive feature of the world, but rather admits of "explanation" in more basic terms. What distinguishes Brandom's reductionism from more familiar brands is its starting point: not the austere idiom of natural science, but rather a deontological idiom. Talk about belief, meaning, intention and truth is to be explained in terms of talk about correctness and incorrectness, obligation and permission. (163)

This way of putting it evokes again the ancient debate that, in chapter two, I said Wittgenstein's work evokes: the question of the priority of the Good or the True. I argued there that Wittgenstein's philosophy makes the question "Should I call this X?" prior to the question "Is this (what we call) X?" Both

Brandom and Wittgenstein are arguing for the priority of the Good over the True.[33]

Since we have a reply to Rosen from Brandom, the opportunity has been given to test the contention that Brandom cannot answer Rosen's objections. The most striking thing about Brandom's reply, however, is that he does not even attempt to rebut Rosen's specific arguments. Instead, he recapitulates his own arguments, which presumably will not convince Rosen if the book failed to do so. He does make the key radical point, that Rosen has not appreciated the significance of the shift to the theorist:

> The most theoretically weighty application of the methodological phenomenalism that Gideon Rosen so ably expounds is at the metalevel, that is, as applied to the meaning-

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[33] A suggestive connection is made by Rosen, then, in several times evoking Plato and arguing that Brandom fails to separate himself from "hard-core realism": Brandom's "phenomenalism (or subjectivism) as a humanized alternative to hard-core realism is thrown directly into question. Plato et al. resist any attempt to define the Good as that which would be valued under this or that naturalistically specifiable circumstance" (167). (I would say "Plato et al. *also* resist . . ." because this resistance to "the austere idiom of natural science" that Plato et al. share with Brandom is what Rosen says "distinguishes Brandom's reductionism from more familiar brands"(163).) Plato is the original theorist of the priority of the Good, which is what makes Rosen's accusation that Brandom cannot separate himself from Plato suggestive. Rosen takes it that "Brandom sides with the Enlightenment against Plato and Religion" (164), but that is surely too simple (and the passage Rosen quotes in support of it is not Brandom but Brandom's summary of Pufendorf). These are just hints of future topics, though. In my view, to have developed a serious Wittgensteinian pragmatism is an enormous accomplishment, but hardly the end of the investigation. Remember that the radical reading thinks we have barely begun to understand, or discuss, Wittgenstein. The relations between Wittgensteinian pragmatism and Plato and Religion is as yet undiscovered country. Perhaps Diamond's "Realism and the Realistic Spirit" (1986) is a foray onto the edge of it.

> theorist. What is offered is not in the first instance an account of what it is for there to *be* conceptual norms, but only what [it] is for the theorist to *take* there to be such norms. (1997, 194)

What is offered will *never* amount to what many philosophers would consider "an account of what it is for there to *be* conceptual norms," and consequently will never be more than what McDowell would reject as merely an account of how "the possibility of going out of step with our fellows gives us the *illusion* of being subject to norms, and consequently the *illusion* of entertaining and expressing meanings" (1984, 336). The shift of priority from being to taking is a fundamental shift, and everything in the theory after that will be different from what was expected or demanded by those who give priority to being. Brandom consistently keeps the central radical point in focus: the normative attitude of the theorist—what we do in "taking as"—is fundamental to the normative status of *being* this or that.

Williams makes basically this same radical point the focus of her essay "The Significance of Learning in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy" (1994b):

> Discussions of learning, of how we typically are trained, occur in contexts [in Wittgenstein's work] in which the issue is the problem of normativity, of how to make or sustain a substantive contrast between correct and incorrect uses of words. The contention of this paper is that understanding the role learning plays sheds light on the nature of normativity itself. . . . I shall argue that learning plays a *constitutive role* in that how we learn concepts is constitutive of what we learn. (175)

Though her relation to the radical reading is somewhat complicated by her taking from Sellars the notion (which Brandom ignores) of "pattern-governed behavior," this notion does not signal a form of regularism: the patterns are constituted by training and depend on "peaceful agreement"

(*RFM* VI-21) among people, "agreement in our reactions to pointing or judgments of sameness or reactions to pain" (190). This way of speaking can be ambiguous as to whether the radical priority of acting is maintained: "agreement" and "harmony" must not themselves be treated as *facts*, which would imply an antecedent pattern or regularity at the level of the theorist; "judgments of sameness" are as constitutive of "agreement" as vice versa.[34] The radical point is, in Brandom's terms, that the theorist's normative attitude of *taking as* regular, or the same, or part of a pattern, or in agreement (accord), is constitutive of *being* those things. This point appears in Williams in slightly different terms.

Though she pervasively refers to "regularity" and "patterns," these are not prior to normativity. Regularity and normativity are intimately related, but regularity is never a given:

> Use cannot be identified with regularity though it requires regularity. It requires what I shall call "normative regularity," that is, regularity that reflects a correct and incorrect way of going about things. This cannot be identified with "descriptive regularity." (Indeed, Wittgenstein would hold that descriptive regularity presupposes normative regularity.) Normative regularity, for Wittgenstein, is displayed in the de facto agreement and harmony of actions of a community of people. (1994a, 103)

There are two kinds of regularity here: normative and descriptive. Williams makes the shift to the priority of our normative attitudes in claiming that "descriptive regularity presupposes normative regularity." The question for

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[34] cf. *PI* 224-5: "The word 'agreement' and the word 'rule' are *related* to one another, they are cousins. If I teach anyone the use of the one word, he learns the use of the other with it. The use of the word 'rule' and the use of the word 'same' are interwoven."

her relation to Brandom and the radical reading is whether her term "normative regularity" implies that she has taken "the regularist way of working it out" (Brandom 36) in which the theorist's normative attitudes must themselves conform to a prior regularity. We can see that she has not, because she places the priority on the "normative" in "normative regularity": the "regularity" here "*reflects* a correct and incorrect way" (i.e. normativity) and "is displayed in the de facto agreement and harmony of actions." Whatever we take as correct we will ipso facto take as regular.[35] Agreement and harmony are not themselves bare facts, but are a "shared sense of the obvious" which "itself cannot be described or captured in a set of rules without distorting the very way it functions as a background. It can, in short, only be shown" (1994b, 195). As I said earlier, the priority of "showing" over "saying," which Williams invokes here, is a version of the radical priority of *acting,* and implicitly appeals to the observer to whom what is shown is shown (i.e. to the observer's *acts* of normatively assessing and *taking* what is shown *as* (in this case) shared and agreed upon).

Williams's references to the "fact" of agreement, then, do not imply an implicit regularism that would separate her from Brandom and the radical

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[35] Diamond makes this point against Ramsey's empiricism: the implicit assumption that there is a regularity in our own use (normative attitudes) is empty:

> we can tell ourselves that there is a generalisation that we know to fit our behaviour: we do so-and-so whenever such-and-such. But *whatever* we do in following that rule, we shall take that generalisation to apply. . . . Any application of a term that seems appropriate to us will also seem to belong to the regularity that our use of the term exhibits to us, or appears to, when we take ourselves to be attending to our own use. (1986, 234)

reading. We can see this explicitly in a passage describing the learning

relation so central to Williams's work:

> But it [what the teacher is inclined to say] shares certain features
> with a justification, namely, it is the arbiter of what is correct.
> That it can serve this role is due to the fact that the teacher's own
> inclinations are in harmony with the inclinations and
> judgments of the community of which she is a part. Her
> judgments have authority because they are representative of the
> judgments of the community. They carry weight for the pupil,
> independently of whether they are properly authoritative,
> however. Her judgments determine a normative practice for
> the pupil just in virtue of the learning relation that obtains.
> (1994b, 193)

So, the "fact that the teacher is in harmony with the community" here is not

really fundamental. Normativity lies in the interaction—the learning

relation—between teacher and pupil. Whether she is *properly*

authoritative" is a *subsequent* issue which will in turn depend on

interactions between the teacher and other members of the community; it

will not ultimately rest on any "fact" of agreement between her and the

community.[36]

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[36] This passage raises an issue treated in Brandom's book: the distinction
between *I-we* and *I-thou* relations. Brandom criticizes Kripke and others for
speaking of the community as if it were an actor:

> This tendency to talk of the community as somehow having
> attitudes and producing performances of the sort more properly
> associated with individuals is neither accidental nor harmless.
> This *façon de parler* is of the essence of the communal
> assessment [i.e. regularist] approach. It is a manifestation of the
> orienting mistake ... of treating *I-we* relations rather than *I-thou*
> relations as the fundamental social structure. (38-9)

The criticism is properly directed against regularist positions such as Wright's.
Williams frequently adopts this manner of speaking too: e.g., "the potential
discrepancy between the behaviors of the individual and that of the
community creates the logical space for the distinction between correct and

I started this chapter examining a position that is different from both the radical and particularist readings of Wittgenstein by virtue of considering the first and second radical theses to be contraries. On that view, the turn to practice or to a social reading of Wittgenstein would require rejecting the skeptical paradox. This is antithetical to the radical reading, for which the two theses are corollaries, not contraries. I do not know if either Brandom or Williams should be considered radical by this measure. They both distance themselves from Kripke's skeptical reading, as they understand it. Nevertheless, we should look at the positions more loosely. As I said earlier, the grouping of thinkers into schools is based on a "feel" for Wittgenstein that is generally similar among members of a school.

Much of what radical readers say of Wittgenstein will be said by other readers as well. The feeling, as I perceive it, of radical readers is that others seem often not to appreciate the extremity of what is being said. But perhaps those others simply do not emphasize the extremity. For instance, Brandom quotes a quite radical summary from Sellars:

> Sellars is clearly after such a notion of norms implicit in practice: "We saw that a rule, properly speaking, isn't a rule unless it lives in behavior, rule-regulated behavior, even rule-violating behavior. Linguistically we always operate within a framework of living rules. (The snake which sheds one skin lives within another.) In attempting to grasp rules as rules from without, we are trying to have our cake and eat it. To describe rules is to describe the skeletons of rules. A rule is lived, not described." (25)

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incorrect action" (1991, 121). Nevertheless, as the passage on the teacher's authority shows, it is *I-thou* relations that are fundamental for her, and *I-we* relations that are derivative. (I believe the same is true of Kripke.)

There is nothing to suggest that either Sellars of Brandom does *not* appreciate how extreme Sellars's point is, but it is not easy to be sure. From the radical perspective, it is important that the "framework of living rules" ("norms implicit in practice") includes the practice of *describing,* so it is also true of descriptions that only their skeletons are really described. A rule is lived, not described; so a description also is lived, not given. Sellars's point implies a pervasive and radical change in our ideas of our relation to language, not a change in our ideas about rules and principles that leaves "describing" untouched.

Sellars and Brandom may well be in perfect agreement with the radical reading here. Nevertheless, Brandom immediately continues in a way that makes one uncertain:

> This line of thought, common to Wittgenstein and Sellars, raises the key question of how to understand proprieties of practice, without appealing to rules, interpretations, justifications, or other explicit claims that something is appropriate. What does the practical capacity or 'know-how' to distinguish correct from incorrect performances (for instance—but this is only one example—applications of a rule) consist in? (25)

That is, Brandom responds to Sellars's radical dislocation of rules (and describing) by saying, "Given that a rule is lived, not described, the key question is how to describe what it is to live a rule." Has Sellars's point been lost? Has Brandom circumvented the shift to living and restored describing to the preeminent place?[37] I believe the particularists would say he has. I

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[37] Sellars's shift from describing to living is another way of putting the shift to the priority of showing over saying. So the question is whether Brandom is now trying to say what can be shown, or rather say exactly what showing is.

believe the radical reading would say it is not so simple: describing is a part of living, so describing what it is to live a rule is not an alternative to living it but is a part of living it. Nevertheless, this describing will not accomplish more than the describing of the *skeleton* of what it is to live a rule.

I suggest that Sellars's point, that only the skeletons of rules can be described because the rules themselves are lived, implies that only the skeleton of what is implicit in practices can be made explicit. What you can make explicit is not really the norms themselves that are implicit in practice, just as it is not really the rules that you describe. This connects, I believe, directly to Diamond's main thesis in "Rules: Looking in the Right Place" (even Sellars's terminology suggests Diamond's): when we separate a concept from its context in life in order to describe it, we lose the concept itself. The radical point (that I argued last chapter Diamond did not seem fully to appreciate) is that making explicit the norms implicit in practice (the commerce of a word with our lives) is *inherently* to make those norms into skeletons (conditions); it is not only when we do it badly that this results. As the radical reading sees it, we cannot do what Diamond seemed to think we should: examine meanings leaving them securely in their contexts of life. That would be, as Sellars says, "to have our cake and eat it." And we also cannot (as Brandom may want) make them explicit without making them into "conditions," because, as Sellars says, we can only "describe the skeletons of rules" (meanings). Again, though, this is no reason, according to the radical reading, not to try. (Therefore, the radical reading has no cause to criticize Brandom for going straight on to doing that.)

I have focused on Brandom's giving primacy to our (the theorist's) normative assessments and attributions. This is the key radical element. Though Brandom adopts a fairly understated tone, we can even see this as a version of the first radical thesis. There is nothing to which the theorist's assessments are answerable. Nothing guides or corroborates, guarantees or insures them. They are just the theorist's "out-calls of phenomena" (Cavell 1979, 36), and they are not constrained by a pattern of other theorists' out-calls. They are "arbitrary" in that they are at the speaker's (theorist's) discretion; so, every application of every word is arbitrary. Since the same is true of other speakers, though, there is nothing to prevent them from assessing one another, at each one's discretion, and applying sanctions where they think they should. So arbitrary (discretionary) applications can be constrained by people (are still normative), and we can see here the natural connection of radical thesis one to radical thesis two, the turn to practice.

What "[g]iving pride of place in this way to normative attitudes in the understanding of normative statuses" (Brandom 37) entails, though, is that the status of the attitudes themselves—Are they right?—can never be non-circularly justified. Consequently, readers committed to the idea that normative *status* should have pride of place and is to be found outside our attitudes in the patterns or regularities of the world—in the *truth*, to which our attitudes should conform—such readers will be puzzled by this theory and by how anyone could consider it adequate as an account of meaning. Accordingly, I have claimed that the radical reading (and the particularist, and Brandom) cannot answer that puzzled reader's objections. I should qualify

that claim, though, because there is a reflexive element at work here. I have been implicitly accepting the puzzled reader's standards for what would count as answers (i.e. the demand for justification), but the radical reading takes Wittgenstein to reject those standards.[38] If we really give pride of place to our normative assessments, then there is no autonomous normative status to the puzzled reader's objections nor to our answers to them. Rather, the measure of their adequacy is our attitude, not vice versa. We severally (and thereby collectively) assess objections and answers, and take up an attitude toward them. Whether Brandom's theory or the radical reading of Wittgenstein can, or indeed has, answered the puzzled reader, then, awaits the fortunes of each of them at the hands of the community.

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[38] I believe that, as I have been using the "puzzled reader," meeting the puzzled reader's demands would amount to refuting the skeptical paradox.

Chapter 5.

The Anti-Skeptical Reduction of Wittgenstein.

The issue of skepticism never seems to be far away in the work of radical readers of Wittgenstein, nor of others close in spirit to such readers. Norman Malcolm ends his explication in *Nothing Is Hidden* of Wittgenstein's later philosophy with a section entitled "Wittgenstein's 'Scepticism'" (232-5), in which he says, "something which might be called 'scepticism' emerges from Wittgenstein's reflections. . . ." (232). At the same time, he asserts that Wittgenstein's skepticism "is not what in philosophy is usually meant by Scepticism" (232). Dilman—more radical than Malcolm— writes this first sentence to the Preface of his *Induction and Deduction: A Study in Wittgenstein:* "It is a central contention of this book that the questions raised by philosophical scepticism are at the core of philosophy and that to come to terms with them is to further the kind of understanding that one seeks in philosophy" (v). In this chapter and the next, I will examine the "skeptical reading" of Wittgenstein, which I take to be an instance of the radical reading. This chapter will examine the rejection of the skeptical reading by a large faction of the world of Wittgenstein scholarship, a faction further away from the radical reading than those considered in chapters three and four.

Something of a skeptical aura has always surrounded Wittgenstein and his work, perhaps from as early as his student days when he refused to admit to Bertrand Russell that it was certain that there was no rhinoceros with them in the lecture room (Monk 39-40). The impression of skepticism one gets

from Wittgenstein's work, and the impression that this impression is slightly

off the mark, were remarked by Bouwsma in his review of *The Blue Book*.

Bouwsma wrote the following description of the probable reactions of

philosophers to the book, a description which is as applicable to the rest of

Wittgenstein's later work as it is to *The Blue Book*:

> The author has neither proved nor refuted anything. And he
> has presented nothing as infallible, nor a theory. What is such
> an author doing in philosophy? A skeptic one might admit. He
> understands the questions and understands what ignorance and
> knowledge are. He has busied himself about the questions. He
> has said: 'We do not and cannot know,' presumably a respectable
> answer. The skeptic has tried and failed and investigated the
> nature of his failure. Man cannot know as he cannot fly. He is
> not an angel. And this author? This author spends seventy and
> more pages lolling. (Bouwsma 178-9)

Wittgenstein's work naturally evokes comparison with the skeptic. He says

things that make him sound like a skeptic, and yet not quite. He hasn't

busied himself with quite the right questions, or in quite the right way. So

Bouwsma expects us to find Wittgenstein like a skeptic, but not a skeptic,

given the idea of the skeptic implicit here.

Several decades later, Wittgenstein's relation to skepticism has become

a main axis of controversy in interpreting him. Commentators on later

Wittgenstein have divided on this axis into two camps. The division is quite

strong in that each camp includes a whole constellation of associated ideas

about the major themes in Wittgenstein. The debate has centered on the

paradox Wittgenstein summarizes in section 201 of *Philosophical*

Investigations, in the middle of his examination of following rules: "This was

our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule."

The major generator and focus for this debate has been Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, which has provoked a huge body of critical commentary. What is widely called the "skeptical" interpretation of Wittgenstein is specifically Kripke's reading, according to which Wittgenstein presents a skeptical problem about rules and finds a "skeptical solution" in the agreement of the community as to correct rule application. Since social practices are crucial for the "skeptical solution," the skeptical interpretation is sometimes called the "community" reading as opposed to the "individualist" reading. As I said in chapter four, the community camp would include, besides the radical readers, most or all of the scholars I have considered up until now. Many in this camp, such as Malcolm, resist the label "skeptical," which their opponents try to foist on them via their clear sympathy with much of Kripke's reading. They generally find "community" or "social" a more congenial label.

Opponents of Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein on rule-following and private language generally interpret Wittgenstein's central arguments as having a *reductio ad absurdum* structure. They read Wittgenstein as showing the absurdity of certain philosophical ideas about rules and meaning, not as showing a general indeterminacy about rules. Accordingly, Wittgenstein has refuted some philosophical theories, but he has not introduced any essential role for the community in fixing the meanings of rules. Many call this simply the "anti-skeptical" reading; Bloor

calls it "anti-sociological." I will follow (or extrapolate from) David Pears in calling it the "reductive" reading: "Kripke does not construe it as any kind of a reductive argument" (Pears 1988, 463). Wittgenstein's work, on this reading, is *reductive* (to absurdity) of various traditional philosophical theories.

The reductive reading seems to be gaining in popularity, so much so that one commentator could write in 1991, "The idea that Wittgenstein's rule-following remarks are designed as a reductio, not a sceptical problem, is becoming something of a consensus" (Luntley 170). The members of this consensus make up what I will refer to loosely as "individualist" readers of Wittgenstein. Among the prominent proponents of the reductive interpretation are G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker, who criticized Kripke's book in their 1984 *Scepticism, Rules and Language* and elaborated the reductive reading in *Wittgenstein, Rules, Grammar and Necessity* (1985), and Colin McGinn, who gave a similar reading in *Wittgenstein on Meaning* (1984). Though of course there are differences among the commentators in this camp, as there are among Kripke, Malcolm and Bloor in the other, there is considerable agreement. Accordingly, I shall address the individualist reading at large primarily through a representative work: David Pears's 1988 *The False Prison* (especially volume II, on Wittgenstein's later work).

The confrontation between the reductive and skeptical readings of Wittgenstein is easily the most active and voluminous engagement of the individualist reading with the radical reading. I hope through an examination of Pears's criticisms of Kripke, and of some key elements in his reading of Wittgenstein generally, to illuminate the ways in which many

Wittgenstein scholars systematically curtail the radical significance of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

Reductive and Skeptical Agreement

In *The False Prison*, Pears identifies the private language argument as the heart of Wittgenstein's later work: "The private language argument is the centre-piece of *Philosophical Investigations*" (361). This is Pears's most important move, locating himself within what has been the dominant tradition since the early reviews of *Philosophical Investigations*. He does interpret a wide range of Wittgenstein's philosophy, but about a third of volume II of *The False Prison* (328-422) is explicitly devoted to the private language argument (*PI* 243ff) and far more is implicitly directed that way. For example, the themes which Pears refers to repeatedly as "the two main lines of thought in *Philosophical Investigations*" (e.g. three times on page 268) culminate in the private language argument (cf. 207-14).

On Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein, the rule-following sections (*PI* 138-242) are the center-piece of *Philosophical Investigations*. They present a skeptical problem and a skeptical solution to that problem which together imply the private language argument of the subsequent sections. So, contrary to Pears's interpretation, Kripke reads the private language argument as a particular instance of a more general argument about following rules. He presents the rule-following argument as a form of skepticism: the meanings of rules cannot guide our applications of them because any rule can be so interpreted as to make any application at all accord with it. This skeptical

problem finds a social solution in the agreement in judgments of the linguistic community. The private language argument which follows is an application of the more general argument to the case of sensation language. So, in asking what gives words sufficient "stability" to be useful in communication, the skeptical reading finds "external" standards (e.g. reality) impossible and turns instead to communal judgments ("internal" standards).

Pears correctly recognizes Kripke's skeptical interpretation as "a social theory of rule-following" (chapter 14, especially pages 382-8). It is one of his major objectives to oppose this social interpretation of Wittgenstein. He concentrates on the same two parts of *Philosophical Investigations* as Kripke does, but finds somewhat different purposes: the purpose of the private language argument is to refute "classical phenomenalism"; the purpose of the rule-following argument is to refute "Platonism." Precisely what the disagreement between the reductive and skeptical readings turns on, just how the two interpretations come to diverge so dramatically, is not as obvious as many scholars take it to be. I will argue that Pears, like many others, misrepresents his essential disagreement with Kripke, and thereby obscures the primary technique by which he limits the radical import of Wittgenstein's work. We can start to see this by bringing out the extensive *agreement* between the two sides.

A theme Wittgenstein raises often is how language can mislead us into expecting quite different things to be the same. The reverse problem, though a less major theme in his work, will be useful for clarifying the conflict between the reductive and skeptical readings. Wittgenstein imagines

situations in which language could make the same thing appear quite different. In writing of our tendency to give primacy to assertions, he says, "We could imagine a language in which *all* statements had the form and tone of rhetorical questions" (*PI* 21). He goes on, "We might very well also write every statement in the form of a question followed by a 'Yes'; for instance, 'Is it raining? Yes!'" (*PI* 22). Questions in these circumstances are just statements in a different form. Wittgenstein asks (of a closely analogous form), "What makes it the one or the other?" (*PI* 21). He answers earlier in the paragraph, "Well, it is the part which uttering these words plays in the language-game" (*PI* 21). I will try to use Wittgenstein's example of statements in question form to illuminate one misunderstanding of the skeptical reading.

The nominal dispute between the skeptical and reductive readings is whether the basic structure of Wittgenstein's rule-following argument is a skeptical or *reductio ad absurdum* structure. What is supposed to be the difference between these structures? A *reductio ad absurdum* argues from premises to an absurdity, and infers from this consequence that at least one of the premises must be false (or some step in the argument invalid). By convention, the suspect premise is usually identified ahead of time and an effort made to allow no other dubious premises or argumentative steps into the process. The argument to absurdity is only a part of the process, the point of which is to disprove the suspect premise. In the skeptical structure that Kripke delineates, Wittgenstein argues to a skeptical paradox at *PI* 201. This is a "skeptical problem" because the paradox here is an absurdity, and so

requires a "skeptical solution." The paradox is only a part of the process, the point of which is to force us to change our understanding of "meaning."

On the surface, these structures are extremely similar. Each argues to an absurdity, which requires that we change something in the presuppositions which entailed that absurdity, so as no longer to entail it. There may certainly be differences, but it is *not* the case that the absurdity plays different roles in the two structures or that the two structures stand in different relations to the absurdity. That is, it is not the case that one of them asserts the absurdity while the other does not. To see this, we can compare them to Wittgenstein's imagined situation where all statements are in the form of questions. The fact that an apparent question has been posed—Is it raining?—does not mean one really has. Rather the apparent question is an incomplete statement, for the part which uttering these words plays in the language-game is that of a statement (when followed by "Yes"). Similarly, in both the reductive and skeptical structures, an absurdity is (apparently) asserted. But whether or not one really is depends on the role which uttering that absurdity plays. In both structures, its role is to signal a problem, an intolerable consequence, which requires a solution in which the absurdity is no longer asserted.

Kripke is widely perceived as claiming that Wittgenstein asserts an absurdity, about which I will have more to say in the next chapter. Not only proponents of the reductive reading but even those whose interpretations of Wittgenstein are quite close to that of Kripke attribute this claim to him. For example, Malcolm does:

It seems that Kripke reasoned as follows:

1   In order for a word to have meaning there must be
      something in one's mind that guides one's application of
      the word.
2   Wittgenstein has shown that there is nothing in one's
      mind that guides one's application of a word.
3   Therefore, Wittgenstein has shown that no word has any
      meaning.

But instead Kripke should have drawn the conclusion that the
first premise of this reasoning is false. (1986, 162)

The important feature of this summary is that Malcolm stops at the skeptical

problem ("no word has any meaning"), and so portrays Kripke as stopping at

the skeptical problem, as if the analysis were complete at that point. But that

is like stopping, in our analogy, after "Is it raining?" and claiming that a

question has been asked; it is stopping at the utterance (or partial utterance)

but before "the part that uttering these words plays in the language-game" has

been considered. When we consider the part played by Wittgenstein's

skeptical paradox in Kripke's interpretation, the salient feature is that it is a

problem: it is not a stopping point but a crisis requiring a change in our whole

understanding of "meaning." That change is the "skeptical solution," which

includes rejecting Malcolm's first premise, just as Malcolm urges.

Many of Kripke's critics seem, like Malcolm, to read him as having

completed his reconstruction of Wittgenstein with the skeptical problem.

Pears, for example, does so in emphasizing how different is Kripke's skeptical

argument from his own *reductio:*

> Kripke does not construe it as any kind of reductive argument.
> He thinks that Wittgenstein is simply trying to demonstrate that
> language is much more precariously based than we take it to be

> when we use it so confidently in everyday life. So he reads this part of *Philosophical Investigations* as a dramatization of our insecurity intended to pose a sceptical problem, by making it look as if there is nothing between us and linguistic chaos. (463)

Stuart Shanker, in *Wittgenstein and the Turning-Point in the Philosophy of Mathematics*, provides a useful accompaniment to Pears; he presents many of the same criticisms of Kripke, but in a more condensed form (13-25). Shanker is, if anything, even more direct:

> Interestingly, Kripke never considers—if only to dismiss—the possibility that this passage [*PI* 201] is the culmination of a sustained *reductio ad absurdum*. On the contrary, his whole reading proceeds from the conviction that Wittgenstein has ruthlessly mounted a sceptical campaign in order to expose us to the extraordinary possibility that, as Kripke describes it: 'There can be no such thing as meaning anything by any word. . . .' (p. 55). . . . Before we abandon all hope that language is conceptually possible, however, the worry must surely arrest us that the problem is spurious precisely because Kripke has ignored the intention of the argument, interpreting as proven the very premise that we are intended to reject. (14-5)

To Shanker, the skeptical reading simply asserts the absurdity. But this is no more accurate than saying that the statement "Is it raining? Yes!" simply asks a question.

The conflict between the skeptical and reductive readings is not a simple, head-to-head dispute about whether the paradox of *PI* 201 is true or false. On the contrary, the basic structure of the two readings is fairly similar. We might expect, then, considerable agreement between them on many substantive issues, which indeed we find. *The False Prison* pervasively reveals Pears's difficulty in specifying his disagreement with Kripke. One repeatedly finds expressions of agreement with the substance of Kripke's

interpretation combined with disagreements with his skeptical mode of stating it. Most of Pears's comments on Kripke's book seem to be reactions against the word "skepticism" and the connotations which he considers that word to carry. He thoroughly agrees with Kripke that only internal standards are possible, but objects to the perceived spirit in which the point is made in Kripke's skeptical reading of the argument:

> The main difference lies in the assessment of this conclusion. Kripke's verdict is that the best available resources are not really adequate. (443)

> [A]ccording to him [Kripke], . . . we must rest content with a second-best, internal stabilizer. (442)

> Wittgenstein's whole treatment of language-games indicates that he did not regard them as precarious systems struggling to meet some external standard of accuracy, but, rather, as self-correcting standard-setters. To put the point more concisely, he did not share Kripke's view that the way we go on in daily life is only a second-best substitute for genuine regularity. [Footnote:] i.e. he is not doing what Kripke says he is doing. . . . (457-8)

> The divergence on the positive side is not about the meaning of what Wittgenstein says but about the spirit in which he says it. If Kripke were right, the text should be read as a sceptical complaint that our predicament is so precarious without the extra resource of Platonism. . . . (464)

Many more such passages could be cited. Pears openly admits there is little difference between the reconstructions of Wittgenstein's specific arguments. The difference he emphasizes is in attitudes to these arguments. But Kripke never calls the skeptical solution "second-best" or not "genuine" or "precarious" or "not really adequate." (If there is the occasional hint of dissatisfaction in Kripke's prose, it is important that this is not part of his

interpretation of Wittgenstein, is not attributed by him to Wittgenstein, but rather is expressive of his *criticism* of Wittgenstein.) Even if he had used these words, though, Pears's disagreement with them would still amount to a fairly insubstantial difference in how he and Kripke feel about the state of affairs they agree Wittgenstein has demonstrated we are in. Since Kripke does not use such words, there is not apparently even this difference in feeling.

Perhaps Pears's most striking expression of agreement with the skeptical reading is this remarkable passage introducing and summarizing Wittgenstein's analysis of rule-following:

> When Wittgenstein reveals the true nature of our predicament, as he sees it, people tend to feel anxiety or, at least, surprise: 'Is it possible that so much should be contributed by me?' They then begin to experience the intellectual vertigo for which they convince themselves that Platonism is the only effective antidote. But his view of their case is quite different: the cure is unworkable, but, fortunately, the malady is an illusion, because he is only telling them something which they really knew already, but which they would rather not hear. Except for a few eccentrics, they all responded to their original training by taking the same lines through the infinite field of alternatives that lay before them. When they are being subjected to the steadying force of social conditioning, they do not feel that too much depends on them. It is when they sit back and theorize about their practices that they begin to think that there ought to be real barriers already lining the routes which they agree in taking. . . . They must actually do something, because they themselves by what they do will contribute something indispensable to making an instruction a guide pointing one way rather than another. (440-1)

What is remarkable about this passage is that it could have been written by Kripke; it has the important elements of his interpretation of Wittgenstein.

The "true nature of our predicament" is that "what [we] do will contribute something indispensable to making an instruction a guide," without which a rule yields only an "infinite field of alternatives." And what we do, the route taken through that field, is determined by how we "all responded to [our] original training." Our true predicament sounds very much like the skeptical problem, and the answer here sounds like the skeptical solution. In fact, the whole passage is fairly true to the radical reading of Wittgenstein, although Pears writes it as a description of his own reading. We will return to this important passage shortly, for if Pears is right in this passage, as I believe he is, then he is wrong to attribute the reductive structure to Wittgenstein's argument.

Tactics of Reduction

Because of the great similarity between skepticism and *reductio ad absurdum*, no very substantive difference appears between Kripke and Pears in their specific accounts of Wittgenstein's argument. Rather, Pears's criticisms of Kripke all seem to dissolve into vague, rhetorical attacks on his use of the word "skepticism" and on the tone and "spirit" of his interpretation of Wittgenstein. In a sense, it is right that Pears's criticisms should so dissolve, because the real difference between him and Kripke *is* in the spirit of their interpretations. And that difference may be unimportant to the details of the arguments narrowly examined and yet very important to the roles and implications arguments have in a wider philosophy. The larger difference between the reductive and skeptical readings of Wittgenstein lies

not so much in "the meaning of what Wittgenstein says" as it does in the scope of his project—as discussed in chapter two—"the range of application of the point that is made" (Bambrough 1960, 92). Pears uses many tactics to restrict that range, but three of them are his most important means to undermining the radical power of Wittgenstein's philosophy. In this section, we will look first at his exemption of logic from the range of application of Wittgenstein's rule-following argument, then at his circumvention of social conditioning by the introduction of an alternative process for individuals to establish stable meanings, and finally at his blanket restriction of Wittgenstein's project to the refutation of narrowly defined philosophical theories.

Wittgenstein's examination of rule-following prominently features the importance of agreement. Perhaps his best known and most striking statement about this idea is in the pivotal section 242 of the *Investigations*, the last of the hundred-odd sections on rule-following before the private language argument starts at 243: "If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish logic but does not do so." Agreement in judgments is a crucial concept to those who emphasize the generality of Wittgenstein's challenge to our traditional notions of rule-following and, therefore, of logic: agreement in judgments among the members of the linguistic community is constitutive of the meanings of rules and is thus conceptually prior to logic. The importance to Wittgenstein's work of this priority of agreement can hardly be exaggerated.

Roughly, it implies the whole radical reading: the social interpretation of meaning, Kripke's community solution, Bloor's relativism, and so on. Pears sets out to undermine this dependence of language on agreement in judgments.

The essential move in Pears's argument here is his assertion that the logical relations between sentences are "safe, surveyable territory" (384 and again on 385); only the applications of logic in practice are questionable. Pears makes this assertion in the course of attempting (383-6) to explain how his reading of Wittgenstein can be reconciled with Wittgenstein's comment that the dependence of language on agreement in judgments "seems to abolish logic, but does not do so." This passage is problematic for Pears because, on his reading (for reasons we will get to with his third tactic for limiting Wittgenstein's significance), logic should never have been at issue at all: only Platonism should be at issue in the rule-following argument.

To see why Pears might consider his assertion—that logical relations are safe and surveyable—to be compatible with Wittgenstein's philosophy, let us consider that assertion step by step. Pears's first step in rescuing logic from Wittgenstein's rule-following argument is to distinguish logical relations in the abstract from the practical applications of logic to concrete circumstances. This step might, in principle, be innocuous, analogous to reminding us that human agreement does not determine truth. He then says that only the practical applications of logic are problematic and are Wittgenstein's concern. This too, though somewhat dubious, could be made innocuous, for we can, if we wish, formulate the substance of the issues here solely in terms of the

practical applications of logic. While neither of these steps would probably be made by a radical reader, both can be defended as merely stipulatory, as merely specifying the arena within which the issues will be formulated. However, Pears tacitly changes them, without argument, from stipulations to strong claims: having set aside logic in the abstract as unproblematic, he then transfers the substance of the issue out of the arena and over to this set-aside logic, that is, out of the reach of Wittgenstein's philosophy. He does this by declaring logical relations between sentences to be "safe, surveyable territory." Once again, we could make this claim out to be innocuous by evacuating each term here of substance; it might then merely mean such things as that we know from the grammar of our logic that if sentence A contradicts sentence B we will not consider them both to be true. But the implication of the word "surveyable" is that the sentences whose relations we can survey are concrete sentences with established and knowable meanings; one presumes, on reading Pears, that he is writing about ordinary sentences, such as "4+2=6." If that is the case, then Pears's claim is far from innocuous and equally far from compatible with Wittgenstein's philosophy. The logical relations between such sentences as "4+2=6" and "1004+2=1008" are precisely what Wittgenstein examines and claims depend on agreement in judgments.

The effect of Pears's protection of logical relations between sentences and his restriction of Wittgenstein's argument to the practical problem of applying logic is that it makes agreement in judgments merely *independent* of logic rather than conceptually prior to logic. That is, the indeterminacy of practical applications of logic means that logic cannot compel our judgments;

conceptually, however, logic would still be determinate. The implications of this restriction are enormous: instead of a radical dependence on social conditioning, Wittgenstein's argument now entails simply the independence of agreement and logic. This is a banal thesis at best, asserting merely that people need not be logical. Importantly for Pears, though, it allows logic to have authority even if no one at all accepts its authority:

> If everyone else started to improvise wildly, but, by shere coincidence, in perfect unison, I would not necessarily be wrong if I rejected the tyranny of the majority. On the contrary, if in these circumstances, I accepted it, and we all continued to speak with one voice, it would not be the voice of science but, at best, of art. (387)

Pears's metaphysical commitments are quite clear in this passage: by insisting that logical relations between sentences are "safe, surveyable territory," impervious to Wittgenstein's rule-following argument, he protects the idea that there is a correct scientific method, even if there are no scientists but only artists. (Put in these terms, the radical reading says Wittgenstein shows that we are all necessarily artists first, and scientists second.)

To reconcile *PI* 242 with his reading, Pears attempts to limit the significance of agreement in judgments to a merely practical, and not a conceptual, significance. Given how prominent in Wittgenstein's philosophy is agreement, Pears's reading here is somewhat strained, as he acknowledges: "At this point those who credit Wittgenstein with a social theory . . . may claim that, when all has been said, it cannot be denied that in the passage quoted from *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein does imply that logic, and, therefore, language depends on agreement in judgments" (385-6).

Following this acknowledgment, though, he immediately restricts the point's significance to language in its employment as "a means of communication," and then reasserts that there still "might be a language used in solitude which depended on its rule-governed applications" (386). When all has been said, Pears does not believe—contrary to the passage on "the true nature of our predicament" quoted from him in the last section—that following rules depends on social conditioning and on how we all responded to our original training.

What, then, does enable us to follow rules correctly? This brings us to Pears's second tactic for limiting Wittgenstein's philosophy. His protection of logic from agreement in judgments is just part of the much larger project in *The False Prison* of defending rule-governed, solitary language against Wittgenstein's private language argument, a project to which a great deal of the book is devoted. Perhaps the mainstay of this effort is the idea of "calibration on standard objects." This phrase occurs repeatedly throughout volume II. It is Pears's alternative to Kripke's "community solution" or, more pertinently, to Wittgenstein's "agreement in judgments." Calibration on standard objects is supposed to provide the stabilizing resource which a private language lacks. Accordingly, a solitary language (for which such calibration would be available) would be possible, where a private one would not. Pears attributes this view to Baker, Hacker and McGinn, as well as holding it himself (362). Agreement in judgments, on the other hand, is lacking for both solitary and private languages, which would make both of

them impossible, if that is the crucial resource. He attributes this view to Kripke and Malcolm (362).

Pears's argument that Wittgenstein would accept calibration on standard objects is entirely negative: he acknowledges that such an idea is nowhere mentioned in *Philosophical Investigations* and then argues that it is not actually refuted there. Even as a negative argument, it is a strain for him to interpret Wittgenstein as not outright rejecting calibration on standard objects (for example, see his discussion on 372-4). Beyond just its absence from the *Investigations*, though, there are several problems with Pears's attribution of this idea to Wittgenstein.

First, he simply takes for granted that objects can perform the service he requires of them, providing a criterion for right and wrong applications of words:

> The point made in Chapter 14 about learning how to use a word was that it is possible only when there is an independent criterion for 'the same again'. This independent criterion is available for physical objects and their properties, and also for anything which has an identity connected with the identities of physical objects and their properties. (416)

This is one of those passages in which interpretation of Wittgenstein looks more like rejection of Wittgenstein. In either case, chapter 14 gives no argument to support the extraordinary claim that an independent criterion for "the same again" is available for physical objects, etc. Nor is one found earlier. Rather, Pears treats it as an assumption from the start; for example, he refers to "standard material objects which might be assumed to provide the same stimulation on every occasion of perception" (333). Yet it is

precisely this assumption which a social interpretation finds Wittgenstein attacking. Pears does realize that the *identity* of sensations is the target of the private language argument (e.g. 326), but seems not to consider the idea that the identities of the referents of *all* terms (including physical objects, etc.) might be targets. This is how Kripke interprets the rule-following argument, which is why private language is just a special case. On the social interpretation, Wittgenstein is asking how anything has an identity, and so how any word has meaning. Pears fails to engage Kripke's argument to the extent that he fails to take seriously the question of identity for anything other than sensations.

Second, Pears is rightly concerned to emphasize that the criteria for correct application of a word are internal to language-games. He takes "as criteria the two stabilizers, agreement in judgements and calibration on standard objects" (442). He says that Wittgenstein argues for the adequacy of these two internal stabilizers, and that, for those who inferred "some other, external standard . . . , he would challenge them to specify that external standard" (442). But it is hard to see why "calibration on standard objects" should be considered "internal." That would seem to leave very little as "external." (Wittgenstein should easily win his challenge!) And if such calibration is internal, what makes it internal? Is it that the identities of standard objects are determined by the language-game? But then calibration on standard objects is not independent of agreement in judgments, and a solitary language is as impossible as a private one.

Third, we should step back from argument and textual analysis and make sure we have not missed the forest for the trees. Simply in light of the most general understanding of Wittgenstein's work, consider the idea that we can establish the meanings of words by "calibration on standard objects": it is truly difficult to imagine any idea more completely antithetical to everything in Wittgenstein's later philosophy than this one. The idea that meaning can be established that way has all the faults of Augustine's view of language which Wittgenstein presents as his target in the very first paragraph of *Philosophical Investigations*.

Pears's third tactic for curtailing the significance of Wittgenstein's philosophy lies right at the heart of the reductive reading. As we have seen, skepticism and *reductio ad absurdum* are structurally very similar arguments. They are not, however, identical, at least not in the form Pears gives to the *reductio*. Although the two stand in the same relation to the absurdity (the paradox), they stand in very different relations to the *sources* of absurdity and, consequently, to the significance and accomplishment of Wittgenstein's arguments.

Conventionally, a *reductio ad absurdum* argument begins with a specification of the suspect premise. The concept is that, once an absurdity has been derived, we can presume that this premise is its source. Skeptical arguments contain no such specification or presumption. Here is the real difference between the reductive and skeptical readings. Pears describes the criteria for a reductive argument:

> Indeed, the [private language] argument must have a certain independence, because it is a *reductio ad absurdum* argument,

> and it is essential to such arguments that the thesis under attack should be clearly formulated, and that all the premisses should be unequivocally identified. If these conditions were not met, an argument of this kind would be frustrated, because the impact of the absurdity would be uncertain. It would be possible that all that it showed was that the original thesis was not stated precisely enough, or perhaps what would have been proved to be absurd would be an extra premiss which had not been formulated in spite of the fact that the argument needed it. A *reductio* has to avoid these uncertainties. (329)

Skepticism fails to meet these criteria: it is less specific, upon reaching its crisis, about what change is called for. Skepticism differs from a *reductio*, as Pears understands it, in that skepticism does not specify precisely what is under attack. The important difference between the two kinds of argument is captured not in the status they accord the absurdity but rather in their differing explicitness about what originally generates that absurdity. At the end of a *reductio*, we should have isolated the culprit which creates the absurdity, and the culprit should be a "thesis," "clearly formulated" and "unequivocally identified." We would need, then, simply to reject that clearly formulated thesis and our problem would go away.. Skepticism, in contrast, leaves us knowing only that something has gone wrong. The possibilities are wide open. The culprit may not even be an isolable thesis, easily abandoned. It is possible that the problem being revealed is a pervasive malaise in the way we think about the entire topic at issue.

Pears claims that the rule-following sections of the *Investigations* are a *reductio ad absurdum* of Platonism. This means that Platonism is the source of the "paradox" at *PI* 201: "This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord

with the rule." The essential idea of the reductive reading is that Wittgenstein assumes the truth of a theory (his target, Platonism) and then derives an absurdity from it (the paradox of *PI* 201, the indeterminacy of rules); this justifies rejection of the theory (e.g. Pears 463). The crucial point for this reading is that Platonism is prior to the paradox. This is the distinction that Pears, Baker, Hacker, McGinn, Shanker and others make between the skeptical reading of the rule-following sections and their reductive reading: as they read Wittgenstein, the paradox only arises given the assumption of Platonism.

Pears's treatment of Platonism, and thereby of Wittgenstein's rule-following argument, is a vivid case study in the suppression of Wittgenstein's philosophy. The stringent restrictions he places on the *reductio ad absurdum* form of argument become a license for imposing corresponding restrictions on Wittgenstein's work. We can see this clearly if we trace the fortunes of Wittgenstein's argument against Platonism through Pears's book. Let us start with the way Pears undermines his own general introduction to Wittgenstein's position on rules.

Earlier I quoted the passage in which Pears summarizes Wittgenstein's position, a passage strikingly compatible with the radical reading. The passage is not, however, consistent with the reductive reading. The relations among the ideas do not fit the reductive structure:

> When Wittgenstein reveals the true nature of our predicament, as he sees it, people tend to feel anxiety or, at least, surprise: 'Is it possible that so much should be contributed by me?' They then begin to experience the intellectual vertigo for which they convince themselves that Platonism is the only effective

> antidote. But his view of their case is quite different: the cure is
> unworkable, but, fortunately, the malady is an illusion. . . . (440)

The inconsistency turns on the question of which is prior: our predicament or the illusory antidote. The reductive reading requires that Platonism be the source of the paradox. But in the passage quoted, Pears reverses this. He makes the paradox prior to Platonism. Platonism is a subsequent attempt to cure the anxiety brought on by the paradox, which is now characterized as our "true predicament." Pears gets Wittgenstein right in this passage. Yet the reductive reading he espouses overturns this passage and claims that the illusory antidote is prior to the malady and is an essential cause of it.

The malady Pears describes, our anxiety about our true predicament, is cured not by rejecting a false philosophical theory, Platonism, but by recognizing "the steadying force of social conditioning": "Except for a few eccentrics, they all responded to their original training by taking the same lines through the infinite field of alternatives that lay before them" (440). Pears takes precisely Kripke's position here on the rule-following sections of *Philosophical Investigations:* divorced from our training in practices of responding to rules in particular ways, those rules have no determinate meaning. The paradox at *PI* 201 is generated merely by this neglect of social conditioning: "they themselves by what they do will contribute something indispensable to making an instruction a guide pointing one way rather than another" (441). The paradox does not require any particular philosophical theory such as Platonism; our "true predicament" and the "malady" which gives us such anxiety over that predicament are firmly in place without (before) any such "unworkable cures" as Platonism.

In the passage quoted, Pears suggests that Wittgenstein's target is the *malady*, our intellectual vertigo, which inclines us to discount social conditioning and seek illusory antidotes like Platonism. This would seem to give Wittgenstein's philosophy a wide-ranging significance. Pears effectively nullifies this passage in the following chapter, though, by insisting that Platonism, rather than the malady, is the target of Wittgenstein's rule-following argument. It is the adoption of the *reductio* which drives this diminution of Wittgenstein's target. The *reductio* form, with the strictures Pears places on it, could not produce anything but very limited implications. It refutes one clearly formulated, unequivocally identified thesis. And that's all it does. Though the use of *reductio* is Pears's most important tactic, it is not his only one. We have already seen how he circumvents much of the substance of the quoted passage using the tools of "safe, surveyable" logical relations and "calibration on standard objects" to dispense with its whole social and practical orientation. Through the aid of all these tactics, the general picture is suppressed and a specific attack on a single philosophical theory is substituted.

In order to see just how diminished Wittgenstein's philosophy is by the reductive reading, we need to consider how significant the refutation of a philosophical theory might be. Perhaps if a theory is deeply integrated into our lives, its refutation would be an important accomplishment. At least on the surface, this would not appear to be the case here: "Platonism" is a label claimed by almost no one in recent times, except some mathematicians. Perhaps, though, it is implicit in positions which do not use the label. Pears

does say this in one isolated remark: "Wittgenstein's account of rule-following has been pitted against Platonism, because that is the centre of the dispute between naturalists and anti-naturalists" (520). We cannot say if this rescues some significance for the rule-following sections of the *Investigations*, though, because it is quite unclear what the scope of that debate might be, and Pears does not develop the point. We *can* say that Wittgenstein's naturalism is very widely acknowledged and is in no way dependent on the reductive reading. For example, Bloor announces it as his central concern on the first page of his book: "Of the many aspects of Wittgenstein's writing to which scholars have drawn attention there are two which seem to me of outstanding importance. These might be called the *sociological* and *naturalistic* sides of his thought" (Bloor 1983a, 1). He footnotes that sentence to cite works by Pears, P.F. Strawson, Malcolm, P. Jones, and Kripke as exemplary.

We have already seen Pears claim positions shared with the radical reading, and then contradict or tacitly circumvent those positions. The same thing occurs with his reference to Wittgenstein's naturalism. Having given Platonism a potentially important role, he undermines that potential:

> Wittgenstein explicitly extends his naturalistic account to logic. . . . Those who find this paradoxical are usually less reluctant to accept his naturalistic treatment of rules governing our descriptive vocabulary. . . . The doubters are ready to concede the point about rules for the use of descriptive words, because they recognize the flimsiness of Platonism when it is brought in to explain the grip that these rules have on our minds. . . . But people are more impressed by the other side of Platonism, its explanation of the grip that logic has on our minds. (532-3)

The "doubters" (presumably the anti-naturalists) will readily give up Platonism for descriptive words because that side of Platonism is recognizably "flimsy." But if the side that supposedly holds it will readily give it up, then this flimsy sort of Platonism cannot be "the centre of the dispute between naturalists and anti-naturalists." So, Pears has undermined the significance of Wittgenstein's refutation of Platonism, at least for descriptive words: the refuted theory, or at least that side of it, is neither the center of an interesting debate nor strong and interesting in itself.

Since "people are more impressed by the other side of Platonism," by its application to logic, perhaps *that* is the center of the debate, and Wittgenstein will have accomplished something by refuting that more impressive side. But Pears does not accept that Wittgenstein *has* refuted Platonism as applied to logic; rather he considers this other side of Platonism to be "The Next Problem" for which the final chapter of his book is titled:

> [Wittgenstein] extends the same treatment to logical and mathematical rules. They too cannot be explained as reflections of the objective structure of reality, because they too rest on our pre-linguistic tendencies. It is at this point that the next problem surfaces. Did Wittgenstein really think that this treatment could be extended to logic and mathematics? And if so, was he right?
> These are questions beyond the scope of this book. (530)

Whether or not Wittgenstein has succeeded in refuting the more impressive side of Platonism is left an open question in *The False Prison*.

When we trace through Pears's entire treatment of Wittgenstein's rule-following argument, we find that the important effect of imposing the *reductio* form on it is that "it is essential to such arguments that the thesis under attack should be clearly formulated, and that all the premisses should

be unequivocally identified" (329). Thus, the reductive reading can presume that Wittgenstein's purpose is to refute some such clearly formulated target as the philosophical theory of Platonism. This is already a drastic reduction in the argument's significance from that accorded it by the radical reading, but Pears continues to narrow its scope by claiming it really only refutes one side of Platonism, and that the "flimsy" side which is—his statement to the contrary notwithstanding—not the center of any significant debate. The contrast with the radical treatment of the same topic, Bloor's for example, could hardly be more stark: where Bloor and the radical reading find Wittgenstein attacking that in Platonism which it shares with most of modern philosophy (its epistemology),[1] Pears and the reductive reading find him attacking Platonism only at its weakest and least interesting.

It is important to reemphasize that the choice to read Wittgenstein reductively is in no sense required, nor even justified. As we have seen, the

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[1] Contrast Bloor's summary (of the "plus two" argument):

> The trouble with Platonism is not that its ontology is obscure (which it is), but that its epistemology is circular. . . . Let us suppose mathematical objects can be quite literally perceived. Suppose the answers are indeed already written down faintly, and continuing the series just means copying them out. The objection of circularity still holds. This cannot explain how we know that what we are copying is the correct answer. . . . This is brought out in the even more compressed version of the argument that Wittgenstein gave in his 1939 *Lectures*. The Platonist says that 25x25 is *already* 625, but 'then it's also 624, or 623, or any damn thing' [*LFM* 145]. The problem is picking out the *right* archetype from all the other wrong, but possible, archetypes which are, so to speak, adjacent to it. (1983a, 86)

The radical reading stays focused on the issue of normativity, where Platonism of logic and mathematics has the same problem as Platonism of descriptive predicates.

reductive reading has two main components: the idea that the paradox is an absurdity which refutes whatever conditions led to it; and the idea that those conditions must be a specific, clearly formulated thesis. The first component is a correct interpretation of Wittgenstein, and as such is not surprisingly shared with the opposition, the skeptical reading. The second is a gratuitous presupposition of those theorists who espouse the reductive reading: Wittgenstein certainly nowhere explicitly formulates the targets Pears finds. Pears and other reductive readers argue solely on the basis of the *first* component that a reductive reading must be correct, misrepresenting the skeptical reading as rejecting that first component; they thereby import the *second* component, without argument, into the interpretation of Wittgenstein. Similarly, the other two main tools Pears employs in the suppression of Wittgenstein's philosophy are also introduced without argument: the assumption that logical relations between sentences are "safe, surveyable territory," and the assumption that "calibration on standard objects" can stabilize meaning.

The Importance of Blurriness

We have now examined several specific elements of Pears's *The False Prison* and seen how they contain and diminish the significance of Wittgenstein's philosophy. I chose Pears's book as representative of the large group of scholars who read Wittgenstein's major arguments as *reductio ad absurdum* arguments. In many ways, it clearly is representative: first, of course, in choosing the *reductio* form, but also, for example, in arguing that

the private language argument is the center of *Philosophical Investigations* and that a solitary, rule-governed language is not excluded by Wittgenstein's private language argument. Nevertheless, the details of readings will vary even among sympathetic scholars; some elements, such as Pears's appeal to calibration on standard objects, may not be representative. To reinforce the applicability of the tendency we have found in Pears's book to the reductive reading generally, I will try in this section to give a more general examination of the relation between Wittgenstein's philosophy and the very idea of argument by *reductio ad absurdum*.

I will assume that the *reductio* has the strictures on its formulation which Pears describes. As argued above, those strictures are primarily (or entirely) what distinguish the reductive from the skeptical reading, and it is those strictures which most drastically diminish Wittgenstein's philosophy.

Right away, we can see a general incompatibility between the idea that Wittgenstein's major arguments are of the *reductio ad absurdum* form and a common picture of who and what Wittgenstein and his philosophy are. Pears displays this problem vividly, for his actual reading of Wittgenstein contrasts sharply with the picture he presents of Wittgenstein in the very first paragraph of his book, even the first sentence.

> Open any of Wittgenstein's books and you will realize
> immediately that you are entering a new world. . . . There will,
> of course, be arguments, but not the kind that we have learned
> to expect. They will be arguments with strange shapes, not
> designed to connect explicit premisses with judicious
> conclusions, like those of other philosophers. (3)

Initially, then, Pears describes Wittgenstein in terms very reminiscent of Bouwsma's (quoted at the beginning of this chapter). But over the course of several hundred pages, Pears loses this picture of Wittgenstein. In its place he puts exactly what he had said Wittgenstein is not: he interprets the major themes of *Philosophical Investigations* as *reductio ad absurdum* arguments, the favored form of Socrates and perhaps the most traditional shape of argument in the history of philosophy. He insists that this *reductio* structure depends crucially on explicit premises: "[A]ll the premisses should be unequivocally identified" (329). The penalty for inexplicit premises (which must be avoided at all costs) is insufficiently judicious conclusions: "[T]he impact of the absurdity would be uncertain" (329). Wittgenstein's exciting new world, described in Pears's first paragraph, turns into the same old philosopher's study over the course of his interpretation.

Certainly one need not accept the common picture of Wittgenstein. But if one does, like Pears, consider Wittgenstein a philosopher of great importance and originality, then adopting the *reductio* form for his major arguments will tend to create stresses and contradictions in one's interpretation. We have seen some of these in Pears's book, especially in the passage emphasizing social conditioning—so reminiscent of Kripke and Bloor—a passage from which Pears quickly retreats. We also saw him describe the refutation of Platonism as important, and then gradually bleed that importance away. This treatment of Platonism is an instance of a tension or confusion surrounding the use of *reductio* we can find expressed in general terms at the beginning of Pears's second volume. The tension here

concerns the nature of these philosophical theories that Wittgenstein is supposed to be refuting, which is essentially the issue of what Wittgenstein's targets are and, therefore, of the difference between the radical and reductive readings.

On the one hand, the significance of refuting theories is intrinsically limited: "The point to be made now is a general one about the structure of his late philosophy: he evidently believed that, if an argument like this one [the private language argument] succeeds in refuting a so-called 'theory', it does not inflict any real loss on us" (214). The reason is that these "philosophical theories that are swept away had neither substance nor foundation, and we are no worse off without them" (214). On the other hand, what we lose, though it may not be "real," is not trivial: "Whether we remain in the business of philosophizing is another question, the answer to which will depend on what there is to take the place of traditional theorizing" (214). The generality of this comment clearly shows Pears's awareness that Wittgenstein is challenging "philosophizing" and not just specific philosophical theories, such as classical phenomenalism and Platonism. But the *reductio* form of argument allows no room in Pears's interpretation for that awareness to be developed, for "philosophy" is by no stretch a "thesis," "clearly formulated" and "unequivocally identified." Rather, it must remain "another question."

The implicit structure here seems to be that the refutation of specific theories can somehow entail the abandonment of a general theoretical approach to philosophy. But the "entailment" involved here is mysterious, and therein lies the trouble: the strictures on *reductio* specifically prevent it

from addressing such vague and equivocal issues as "philosophizing,"
including the relation (presumably one of entailment) between this
philosophizing and specific philosophical theories. We have already seen
one instance of the retreat from such vague issues: Pears initially describes the
target of Wittgenstein's rule-following argument as a "malady" and
"intellectual vertigo," but then formulates the argument itself as directed
against Platonism for descriptive predicates.

A few pages earlier, Pears had located the vagueness and unclarity not
in philosophizing but directly in the philosophical theories themselves: Pears
says, in "summ[ing] up Wittgenstein's case against philosophical theories,"
that "their implications are not determinate, so that we really would not
know exactly what would have to be the case if they were true" (207).
Although the indeterminacy Pears describes need not weigh against
philosophical theories themselves,[2] it does weigh against any effort to prove
such theories true or false. That is, it renders them unsuitable as targets for
reductio ad absurdum, for if philosophical theories are indeterminate, then it
is unlikely that Platonism or classical phenomenalism or any other
philosophical theory can meet the criteria of clear identity which a *reductio*
requires. It does not much matter that Pears at one point locates the
vagueness and generality in the theories and at another in philosophizing,

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[2] Only if philosophical theories *ought* to be determinate would the
indeterminacy to which Pears alludes weigh against them. That is, it *would*
weigh against philosophical theories, *if* one held the position Wittgenstein
expresses in the *Tractatus,* which Pears had quoted a few pages earlier: "Its
[philosophy's] task is to make them [thoughts] clear and give them sharp
boundaries" (*TLP* 4.112, qtd. in Pears 200), a task Wittgenstein has rejected in
his later philosophy.

but it does matter that it is the vague, general, indeterminate process which is Wittgenstein's concern. Wittgenstein is attacking philosophical theories at their broadest, or, equivalently, the philosophizing that lies behind those theories at their narrowest, or the malady that makes us seek security in philosophical theories; Pears correctly suggests all of these things at various times. But he imposes a structure on Wittgenstein's philosophy that cannot address *any* of these because it requires a clarity and determinateness that could only attach to philosophical theories at their narrowest.

Wittgenstein treats this issue of the indeterminateness of philosophical theories relatively explicitly at *PI* 76-9. There he talks of drawing sharp pictures "corresponding" to blurry ones. If the blurry are blurry enough, the specification of corresponding sharp ones becomes arbitrary: "Anything—and nothing—is right" (*PI* 77). That Wittgenstein intends the point to apply to philosophical theories is confirmed by his next sentence: "And this is the position you are in if you look for definitions corresponding to our concepts in aesthetics or ethics" (*PI* 77). (Pears applies the point to philosophical theories generally.) We might express the troubles of the reductive reading, then, in Wittgenstein's terms: the objects of Wittgenstein's concern—our malady, philosophizing, indeterminate theories—are all of them blurry; the objects of *reductio ad absurdum* must be sharp. In other words, if we sharpen up Wittgenstein's targets so that a *reductio* can address them, we will no longer be addressing Wittgenstein's targets: "Anything—and nothing—is right."

If we take Wittgenstein's discussion of blurriness in *PI* 76-9 to be making a substantial and wide-ranging point, as I believe we should, we can find there the fundamental disagreement between the radical and reductive readings, and the reason the reductive cannot but rob Wittgenstein's work of its significance. The blurriness which interests Wittgenstein here is produced by the wealth of associations, uses and connections something has in our language-games. The richer and more diverse its roles, the blurrier its image. Wittgenstein illustrates this idea in section 79 by considering the proposition "Moses did not exist." The meaning of the proposition is unclear because of the many and various roles—historical, religious, cultural, symbolical— which "Moses" plays in our society. "Moses" is a blurry concept (and so is "the existence of Moses"). Of the many features we attribute to Moses, all are relevant and none is necessary: "And according as we assume one definition or another, the proposition 'Moses did not exist' acquires a different sense, and so does every other proposition about Moses" (*PI* 79). If we try to prove or refute the proposition, our efforts are thwarted by the variability of the subject: "Has the name 'Moses' got a fixed and unequivocal use for me in all possible cases?—Is it not the case that I have, so to speak, a whole series of props in readiness, and am ready to lean on one if another should be taken from under me and vice versa?" (*PI* 79).

Any argument which relies crucially on "unequivocally identified" premises, as Pears says *reductio ad absurdum* does, will be impotent to argue about Moses. And of course, Moses is just an example. Anything with deep and complex associations in our lives (language-games) will be impervious to

such arguments. The point is an application of the larger idea, which Wittgenstein addresses throughout his later work, that things acquire their identities through the complex of roles they play in our language-games. (That is, meaning is use.) In the discussion of blurriness then, we can find an important theme of Wittgenstein's philosophy which we might put roughly like this: the more fundamental, the more important, the more deeply and intimately and widely integrated into our lives something is, the less well-defined it is and the less its identity is captured by a label.[3] Consequently, the more fundamental and widely connected is a thesis or theory, the less relevant is precision in specifying it. The *reductio ad absurdum* form of argument, with the strictures about precision which Pears places on it, cannot be used to prove anything fundamental.

The character of *reductio* arguments, then, would explain why the Wittgenstein of Pears's interpretation has accomplished so little. Wittgenstein has himself shown that the very idea of a *reductio ad absurdum* of any deep and important idea is incoherent. So, in order plausibly to attribute the *reductio* form to Wittgenstein's main arguments, Pears must shrink Wittgenstein's targets and ambitions down to a size suitable to that form. That is why Pears's reconstruction of Wittgenstein's rule-following argument ends up arguing merely against the flimsy side of Platonism (Platonism of descriptive predicates). Here is a theory held by virtually no one, and whose connections to any important roles in our language-games

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[3] Bambrough expresses this theme in the article we examined in chapter three, "How to Read Wittgenstein": "Philosophy, he [Wittgenstein] says, does not call for subtlety, for the making of fine distinctions" (119).

were long ago sundered, if they were ever there. Consequently, it can be precisely formulated for attack by *reductio:* unlike Moses, Platonism will hold still because it is already dead.

When Platonism is connected to the living, as with the Platonism of logic and mathematics, the *reductio* becomes much less effective and much less appropriate as a tool for addressing such a theory. I suggest that if Pears developed the role he claims for Platonism at the center of the debate between naturalists and anti-naturalists, the *reductio* would again start to lose its grip. Socrates only ever used *reductio ad absurdum* for the small, local steps within an argument. Wittgenstein shows us why that is its proper use and why it would be futile as a global strategy. It should be clear that *reductio ad absurdum* is *not* the form of Wittgenstein's main arguments.

Unlike Pears, Bloor keeps sight of our malady as the center of Wittgenstein's concern. The opening sentences of his interpretation show that focus:

> To do justice to the contribution that society makes to our knowledge, and to understand Wittgenstein's account of these matters, we must first surmount an obstacle. We must learn to expose the habits of mind and the techniques by which social processes are systematically misdescribed or passed over. In some accounts of knowledge they are rendered almost completely invisible. 'There is', said Wittgenstein, 'a kind of general disease of thinking which always looks for (and finds) what would be called a mental state from which all our acts spring as from a reservoir.' He gave a simple illustration. 'Thus one says, "the fashion changes because the tastes of people change". The taste is the mental reservoir' (*BB*, p. 143). (Bloor 1983a, 6)[4]

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[4] These are the opening sentences of chapter 2 where the analysis starts;

A "malady," "intellectual vertigo," a "general disease of thinking": these characterize Wittgenstein's target. It is not a target which can be "unequivocally identified" and it does not meet the criteria Pears says a *reductio ad absurdum* requires. Possibly, though, Pears is too strict in his criteria. That may be, but loosening those strictures will not rescue the general idea that Wittgenstein argues by *reductio ad absurdum*, because the reductive reading requires those strictures to distinguish itself from the skeptical reading. Skepticism imposes no such strictures and its targets may be quite equivocal. The identification of those targets is less a precondition than an object of the argument, and a general disease of thinking would be a plausible target. So let us look more closely now at that skeptical reading.

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chapter 1 is a five-page general introduction.

Chapter 6.

The Skeptical Reading.

Since its publication over a dozen years ago, Saul Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* has endured an almost constant barrage of criticism. It is surely the most cited secondary work in Wittgenstein studies. There is, of course, nothing remarkable about academic controversy. What is remarkable is that the academic world has been virtually unanimous in its rejection of Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein, and yet the book endures as an object apparently worthy of further attack. Though undefended by its author and attacked from all sides, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* still shows an impressive vitality. Why?

No doubt the reasons are many and complex, but I shall address only one. The single most emphatically declaimed and widely reiterated criticism of the book is the protest, "But Wittgenstein, *pace* Kripke, does not endorse the skeptical paradox of *PI* 201!" My thesis is that this reaction to Kripke is more properly a reaction to Wittgenstein, for Wittgenstein himself anticipates it from his imaginary interlocutor; the very accuracy of Kripke's reading provokes the powerful resistance he encounters. I suggest that the strength and uniformity of the opposition to *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* is a measure not of how wrong the book's reading of Wittgenstein is, but rather of how deep in our intuitions is the attitude Wittgenstein captures and critiques in the interlocutor. To develop this idea, I shall examine the role Kripke assigns to the skeptical paradox in Wittgenstein's work. This is discovered especially in the central pages of

Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language,[1] approximately pages 60 to 79, which start with the notorious claim, "Wittgenstein has invented a new form of scepticism," and end (roughly) with, "The sceptical paradox is the fundamental problem of *Philosophical Investigations.*"

The disputed passage reads, "This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule" (*PI* 201). Kripke's critics claim that he has misinterpreted this passage and its context. A few quotations—a very few of the many available—will show the prominence of the criticism in question.

> Wittgenstein makes it clear immediately that the stated paradox arises from a 'misunderstanding', i.e. a false presupposition; so he cannot really be *endorsing* the paradox, as Hume embraces his own sceptical claims about causation. (McGinn 68)

> But he [Kripke] insists that 'the skeptic' argues that there can be no such fact as that he meant addition in the past by '+' and that the skeptic's argument is not only invented but accepted by Wittgenstein. Kripke could not, however, quote anything to the effect that 'there can be no such fact, etc.' (Anscombe 1985, 348)

> But it is clear that Wittgenstein is not proposing his 'paradox' full voice; it arises only for those who accede to the terms of the demand for that in which following a rule really consists. (Goldfarb 488)

> The interlocutor continues to feel that Wittgenstein is denying something. He responds to the question 'How do I know that in working out the series +2 I must write "20004,20006"?', as if Wittgenstein is endorsing a skeptical view . . . [Footnote:] This is essentially the interpretive route taken by Kripke. (Floyd 161)

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[1] Unless otherwise specified, all page numbers in this chapter refer to *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language.*

> From what remarks did Kripke get the impression that
> Wittgenstein was endorsing a form of philosophical scepticism?
> (Malcolm 1986, 154)

> It is a widely shared belief that Kripke exegetically misrepresents
> the gist of Wittgenstein's later writing. For instance, almost
> every commentator has pointed out that Kripke apparently
> ignores the second part of *PI* 201 (that 'there is a way of grasping a
> rule which is *not* an *interpretation*') where Wittgenstein makes
> it clear that he does not underwrite the sceptical paradox stated
> in the first part of 201 but that he connects it with a faulty
> conception of understanding. (Puhl 5)

This last is from the editor's introduction to a book largely about Kripke's

reading of Wittgenstein. All these commentators and, as the last says, many

others insist that Wittgenstein did not endorse, accept, underwrite or lend

full voice to the paradox. Their basic argument is put most simply by Colin

McGinn: "the stated paradox arises from a 'misunderstanding', i.e. a false

presupposition; so he cannot really be *endorsing* the paradox. . . ." Kripke is

therefore wrong to claim that Wittgenstein does endorse the paradox.

Furthermore, he could only have arrived at this false claim by overlooking or

ignoring Wittgenstein's clear statement that there is a misunderstanding

involved. As Klaus Puhl says, "almost every commentator has pointed out

that Kripke apparently ignores" the misunderstanding.

Now, one is tempted to jump right into various objections to this basic

argument. As discussed last chapter and in chapter four, Kripke's exposition

is not completed with the skeptical problem. Furthermore, the basic

argument is also clearly incomplete. It requires at least one more premise,

something like, "One cannot endorse what one knows to arise from a

misunderstanding." Some such premise must be true if we are to infer from

the misunderstanding that Wittgenstein does not endorse the paradox.

Furthermore, this tacit premise must be not only true but so *obviously* true that Kripke can be presumed to share it. Otherwise we could not infer from his endorsement that he has overlooked the misunderstanding. But is the tacit premise true, let alone obvious? Well, could a psychiatrist endorse a court's finding that a patient is not guilty by reason of insanity, while yet holding that the distinction between sane and insane was a misunderstanding of the human psyche? The answer is probably, "Perhaps," which shows that we are heading into complicated territory. The temptation to move quickly into a meditation on the nature and circumstances of endorsement should be resisted. So subtle a topic threatens to obscure our issue before the basic outlines are clear.

The basic outlines cannot be taken for granted here for at least two reasons. First, it is extremely implausible to claim that Kripke has "overlooked" a misunderstanding that Wittgenstein prominently and explicitly mentions in the very section that Kripke himself argues is the pivotal section of Wittgenstein's entire book. Second, as I will argue, the criticism of Kripke in question is wrong even on the surface, and as we explore deeper and more nuanced aspects it more closely approaches the reactions of Wittgenstein's interlocutor. To see the basic outlines, then, consider three basic questions. Does Kripke ignore (or fail to recognize the significance of) the misunderstanding? Does he claim that Wittgenstein endorses the skeptical paradox? If so, is he wrong? When I refer in what follows to "Kripke's critics," I mean those who answer, "Yes," to at least the last two and generally to all three of these questions.

The Role of Misunderstanding

The first question is the easiest, for the answer is plain in the text of *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Throughout chapter 2, where he presents the argument for the paradox, Kripke repeatedly expresses the target of skeptical challenge in a very particular way: it is not meaning or rules themselves which are challenged, but the idea that *facts* determine meaning. Especially at summaries of the argument, such as pages 21 and 39, he is careful to emphasize this. So right from the beginning Kripke has a misunderstanding in mind, a misunderstanding about the relation between facts and meaning. I call this the "the target of skeptical challenge" because Kripke uses skeptical argument, or rather claims that Wittgenstein uses skeptical argument, also in a very particular way: it is a tool for revealing (and refuting) misunderstanding. Kripke presents Wittgenstein as the creator of a valid argument from a certain picture of meaning to a skeptical paradox, an argument which *therefore* demonstrates that that picture of meaning is a misunderstanding. Consequently, once he has presented Wittgenstein's argument and arrived at the central pages of his book, Kripke can and does formulate the skeptical paradox as a product of misunderstanding:

> Wittgenstein thinks that any construal [of ordinary expressions about meaning and rules] that looks for something in my present mental state to differentiate between my meaning addition and quaddition . . . *is* a misconstrual and attributes to the ordinary man a notion of meaning that *is* refuted by the sceptical argument. (66)

So it is a "misconstrual" of the nature of meaning which leads to skepticism. (Kripke's central example concerns a hypothetical quus (quaddition) function according to which 68+57=5, if the symbol "+" stands for that function.)

Even in the boldest skeptical claim of the entire book—a passage much denounced by the critics—Kripke does not lose touch with Wittgenstein's point that it is a misunderstanding which produces skepticism. Kripke says,

> Wittgenstein holds, with the sceptic, that there is no fact as to whether I mean plus or quus. But if this is to be conceded to the sceptic, is this not the end of the matter? . . . Has not the incredible and self-defeating conclusion, that all language is meaningless, already been drawn? (70-1)

As the rhetoric of the passage makes clear, this is *not* the end of the matter. Instead, Kripke immediately proceeds with a closer and more detailed examination of precisely the misunderstanding he has been carrying all along: the presumption that meaning comes from facts. He pursues this examination by comparing the *Philosophical Investigations* with the *Tractatus*, in which the misunderstanding in question had been a central thesis: "The simplest, most basic idea of the *Tractatus* can hardly be dismissed: a declarative sentence gets its meaning by virtue of its *truth conditions*, by virtue of its correspondence to facts that must obtain if it is true" (72). At the end of the comparison of the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, the bold statement of (apparent) skepticism quoted above (from pages 70-1) has explicitly become a conditional; the skeptical paradox is conditional on a misunderstanding which Wittgenstein had held in the *Tractatus* but has rejected in the *Investigations*:

> Now if we suppose that facts, or truth conditions, are of the essence of meaningful assertion, it will follow from the sceptical conclusion that assertions that anyone ever means anything are meaningless. On the other hand, if we apply to these assertions the tests suggested in *Philosophical Investigations*, no such conclusion follows. (77)

So it is only if we misunderstand the role of facts or truth conditions, as Wittgenstein had in his early philosophy, that we find ourselves in a skeptical paradox.

I have now marked the presence, throughout Kripke's exposition of the skeptical problem, of his awareness that a misunderstanding creates that problem. He includes references to the misunderstanding at *every* relevant point, and several times states it explicitly. In perhaps his final summary of the skeptical problem, he remarks it clearly:

> The sceptical paradox is the fundamental problem of *Philosophical Investigations*. If Wittgenstein is right, we cannot begin to solve it if we remain in the grip of the natural presupposition that meaningful declarative sentences must purport to correspond to facts; if this is our framework, we can only conclude that sentences attributing meaning and intention are themselves meaningless. (78-9)

We cannot solve the skeptical paradox, "*if* we remain in the grip of the" misunderstanding, "*if* this [misunderstanding] is our framework." So the text clearly answers our first question, "Does Kripke ignore the misunderstanding?" The answer is, "No."

But Which Misunderstanding?

Since Kripke's references to facts and their relation to meaning are not especially difficult or ambiguous, and since the cumulative textual evidence is quite compelling and there is no contradictory textual evidence, I believe the main conclusion here—that Kripke has not overlooked or ignored the misunderstanding—is indisputable. I will take his statement of the "simplest, most basic idea of the *Tractatus*" as his statement of the

misunderstanding that leads to paradox: "a declarative sentence gets its meaning by virtue of its *truth conditions*, by virtue of its correspondence to facts that must obtain if it is true" (72). (McDowell calls this "the truth-conditional conception of meaning," as we saw in chapter four.) I have not, however, considered at all the question of whether Kripke is correct in his identification of what the misunderstanding *is*. That is a much larger question in Wittgenstein interpretation, and quite disputable. Nevertheless, to say he has *mistaken* the misunderstanding is very different from, and does not warrant, saying he has overlooked or ignored that a misunderstanding is crucial to the paradox.

A critic might stubbornly insist, then, that while Kripke has connected the paradox to *a* misunderstanding, he has overlooked *the* misunderstanding which Wittgenstein mentions. Some do. For instance, according to McGinn's reading of *PI* 201, "when we ask what the misunderstanding is, we are told that it is the mistake of assuming that grasping a rule is placing an *interpretation* upon a sign" (McGinn 68). This is the same construal of the misunderstanding that we saw from McDowell in chapter four. McGinn contrasts this with the misunderstanding Kripke emphasizes (actually with two of them compounded here), and says, "If Kripke were right, Wittgenstein ought to be found saying after his statement of the paradox: 'What this shows is that grasping a rule is not a fact about an individual considered in social isolation'; but this is *nothing like* what he actually does say" (McGinn 69). So, before leaving the first question, we should consider whether Kripke has connected the paradox to the wrong misunderstanding.

Let us consider, then, what the misunderstanding Wittgenstein refers to in *PI* 201 might be. Here is the full paragraph:

> 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 contented us at 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*, but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases.

McGinn and McDowell read this as telling us that the misunderstanding is the idea that grasping a rule is an interpretation. As I read this paragraph, though, it does not tell us what the misunderstanding is at all. Wittgenstein tells us *that* there is a misunderstanding, and then immediately describes one of its symptoms (which McGinn and McDowell take as the misunderstanding itself), followed by something we can learn from that symptom. What we learn is not necessarily the full nature of the misunderstanding. That cannot be established from this passage alone; it requires a reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

Since the misunderstanding must imply its symptom, the very *least* it could be is what McGinn and McDowell takes it to be: the idea that understanding (grasping) a rule is an interpretation (i.e. the misunderstanding is identical with its symptom). It could, however, be something much larger. As a somewhat extravagant illustration of just how large the misunderstanding mentioned could be, and how variable the possibilities here, imagine that Wittgenstein were a writer given to purple prose. In the paragraph quoted, replace the phrase "... there is a misunderstanding here ..." with "... the vast network of corrupting pictures

which is modern civilization is once again at work here. . . ." The passage as a whole remains pretty much unchanged by this substitution. So, there is a range of reasonable interpretations of the misunderstanding, and Wittgenstein does not tell us what it is. Since McGinn and McDowell equate the misunderstanding with its symptom, their reading of the misunderstanding is the "minimalist" reading, what we might call the path of least significance.

The radical reading takes Wittgenstein to argue that the paradox (roughly, the first radical thesis) requires a profoundly radical change of perspective (the second radical thesis). Accordingly, it takes the misunderstanding that leads to the paradox to be nothing like a mistake that we might simply correct. Rather, the misunderstanding is something so fundamental to our customary ideas about meaning and understanding (and all the related concepts) that its rejection throws into question whether or not we are still speaking about the same things. I take it that this is one sort of situation to which Wittgenstein's question, that Wisdom considers so profound, would apply: "Can you play chess without the queen?" (Wisdom 1965, 88). Can you play philosophy without the misunderstanding? There is no correct answer. (Scholars who take the paradox of *PI* 201 to be a mistake take the correct answer to be "Of course"). I believe it is arguable, consistently with the radical reading, that the full nature of the misunderstanding mentioned in *PI* 201 is the primary quarry of all of Wittgenstein's later philosophy.[2]

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[2] The magnitude of the misunderstanding accounts for the unapologetic tone of the first radical thesis ("every application of every word is arbitrary"). Insofar as the misunderstanding is fundamental to the language-game,

I just suggested one fanciful interpretation of the misunderstanding (a network of corrupting pictures). A less fanciful but similarly extreme interpretation might be "There is a truth to be found." Kripke's version might be expressed, "There are facts and truth-conditions that give content to our concepts and assertions." To expand the comparison group, I would say that in Brandom's *Making It Explicit*, the role of the misunderstanding is played by the idea that "cognitive contentfulness is fundamentally representational" (94). I suspect that all of these versions entail that understanding is interpreting; that is, they all entail the symptom that Wittgenstein mentions in *PI* 201. Yet they seem to be different from each other. So which one is right? Which one is Wittgenstein talking about? I believe the answer is either "All of them" or "The question contains a mistake." If the misunderstanding has the status the radical reading attributes to it, then no particular expression of it will pin it down.[3] It will

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asserting that the paradox follows from the misunderstanding is virtually equivalent to asserting the paradox: insofar as we are playing the game at all, the paradox is true. Thus, all of the radical readers, and Wittgenstein himself, assert some version of the first radical thesis without apology or qualification. This does not mean there are no qualifications or conditions (there are always conditions, simply because there is always a context); it means that rejecting those conditions amounts to saying, "We need not play this game." This radical perspective on the misunderstanding evokes Wittgenstein's well-known comment at *PI* 133: "The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question."

[3] This characteristic was discussed in chapter two with respect to the first radical thesis. Recall the passage quoted from Kripke: "The danger comes when we try to give a precise formulation of exactly what it is that we *are* denying [i.e. the misunderstanding]—*what* 'erroneous interpretation' our opponent is placing on ordinary means of expression. It may be hard to do

function like Moses in *PI 79*: "Has the name 'Moses' got a fixed and unequivocal use for me in all possible cases?—Is it not the case that I have, so to speak, a whole series of props in readiness, and am ready to lean on one if another should be taken from under me and vice versa?"[4]

Kripke has not, then, strayed when he modestly enlarges the scope of the misunderstanding beyond just the words of section 201 by connecting it with other themes in the rule-following sections of the *Investigations*. This may be more than the minimalist interpretation of the misunderstanding wishes, but it is certainly not the irresponsible flouting of the text that

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this without producing yet another statement that, we must admit, is *still* 'perfectly alright, properly understood'" (70).

[4] I suggested that McGinn's and McDowell's version of the misunderstanding was minimal, and that these others are more general. But any particular version has the same flexibility that the misunderstanding itself has: how narrow or broad it is depends on how it is taken. Brandom presents the representational picture of cognitive contentfulness as "the master concept of Enlightenment epistemology" (6) and as "the still-dominant tradition" (94). This certainly looks like the right level of generality for the radical reading. Nevertheless, his reading of the history of philosophy whittles away at that dominance as it teases out a competing "inferentialist" tradition. So, whether his rejection of the representationalist tradition is radical enough or not depends on whether the inferentialist tradition that escapes rejection still contains too much of the misunderstanding that Wittgenstein attacks. Early rationalists, for instance, seem, in Brandom's reconstruction, to take inferential relations as given: "These *inferentialists* seek to define representational properties in terms of inferential ones, which must accordingly be capable of being understood antecedently" (94). If this means that inferential properties are somehow immediately recognized, then this position would have the same characteristic the radical reading objects to in Wright: it begs exactly the question at issue in presupposing the identity of something (inferences, conventions, similarities). If, however, how those inferences are made is also part of Brandom's analysis of the social practices of deontic scorekeeping—which I believe it is—then he is in accord with the radical reading.

McGinn suggests it is when he claims, "[B]ut this is *nothing like* what he [Wittgenstein] actually does say" (69).

There are several reasons why McGinn's charge here fails as a defense of the claim that Kripke has ignored the misunderstanding. First, Kripke is giving a *reading* of Wittgenstein, not a line-by-line commentary. He calls this, in his introduction, "my formulations and recastings of the argument" (5). It is not to be expected that he would describe the misunderstanding using Wittgenstein's words. Wittgenstein criss-crosses a lot of terrain concerning rules. Kripke represents the argument in the idiom of mainstream Anglo-American philosophy, structuring his version to emphasize and clarify those implications of most concern to such an audience.

Second, McGinn seems to think that Wittgenstein is simply telling us the answers to the hard questions raised in his philosophy; he thinks "we ask what the misunderstanding is" and "we are told" what it is. If Wittgenstein means X, "Wittgenstein ought to be found saying" X. But what Wittgenstein is saying is precisely what is in dispute. A common theme in Wittgenstein studies—one which radical readers would argue is due to Wittgenstein's radicality—is how elusive an author he is and how alien to his philosophy is this model of an author telling his readers what to think. McGinn would seem to have little patience for Wittgenstein's attitude, or for Kripke's suspicion that "to attempt to present Wittgenstein's argument precisely is to some extent to falsify it" (5).

Third, thinking Wittgenstein is straightforwardly telling the answers tempts one to read rashly, as I think McGinn does here. As I argued above,

the text of *PI* 201 is not nearly so definite about what the misunderstanding is as McGinn takes it to be.

Fourth, it is not true that the misunderstanding Kripke presents is *"nothing like"* the misunderstanding Wittgenstein mentions in *PI* 201. Wittgenstein says interpretations do not determine meaning. Kripke says facts do not determine meaning. To connect the two, we only need a claim like "All facts are interpretive," a claim which, when added to what *PI* 201 says explicitly, yields Kripke's reading. This is one of a family of claims which have dramatically affected almost every area of intellectual life in this century. I could not summarize this movement any better than by quoting Fish speaking of

> the anti-foundationalist arguments that have recently become so powerful in philosophy, literary criticism and elsewhere. Those arguments are as varied as they are complex, but in whatever form they take, their presence is signalled by such assertions as 'there are no unmediated facts,' 'all activity is irremediably interpretive,' 'there is no such thing as a neutral observation language,' 'there is no escaping politics,' 'all descriptions are from a perspective,' etc. It is now almost obligatory to genuflect in the direction of these or similar pronouncements. . . .
> (1989, 436)

Many would consider Wittgenstein a major figure, if not *the* major figure, in this twentieth century anti-foundationalist movement. In *PI* 201, Wittgenstein is going a step past "facts are interpretive" to "and furthermore, interpretations do not determine meaning." This is the more radical step and Kripke structures his reading to highlight one of its radical implications: meaning is not determined by facts or truth conditions.

Instead of being read radically, though, Wittgenstein's point can be made out to be very limited, perhaps a gentle caution against divorcing signs

from practices. This can be done by taking "interpretation" in a narrowly circumscribed sense, or even as an idiosyncratic technical term of Wittgenstein's own. A narrow or technical sense of "interpretation" would be inappropriate to the first step (facts are interpretive); it would thus leave the second step (interpretations do not determine meaning) both isolated and narrowly construed, and therefore barren of radical import. Kripke circumvents the temptation to such a misreading of Wittgenstein by not separating the two steps. Instead, he keeps the relation between facts and meaning integral throughout his formulation of Wittgenstein's argument. He apparently knows, as does Fish, that many in his audience are inclined to forget, or resist, the whole family of anti-foundationalist arguments. Fish continues the passage above with a statement of his essay's thesis: ". . . and yet more often than not those who perform these genuflections almost immediately betray the larger insight from which they derive." Kripke tries to make such a betrayal of Wittgenstein as hard as possible.

The fifth reason to doubt the Kripke-has-the-wrong-misunderstanding argument is that it severs the two original criticisms of Kripke: that Wittgenstein does not endorse the paradox, and that Kripke ignores the misunderstanding. If we grant that Kripke connects the paradox with *any* misunderstanding, even the wrong one, and we still maintain that Kripke says Wittgenstein endorses the paradox, then we must infer that Kripke rejects the easy inference "misunderstanding undermines endorsement." But unless we can take that for granted, the basic argument mentioned earlier does not suffice to establish that Wittgenstein himself does not endorse the

paradox. So that must be argued separately from Kripke's overlooking the misunderstanding.

The significance of this severance of the original criticisms is that it removes any temptation to think that the critics were merely unclear when they said Kripke overlooks the misunderstanding, that they really meant he overlooks *Wittgenstein's* misunderstanding, though he does see another one. Such a reinterpretation is inconsistent with a striking feature of most claims that Kripke missed the misunderstanding: that claim is treated as intimately linked to his mistake of thinking Wittgenstein endorses the paradox, as so immediate a consequence of that mistake as to be almost a paraphrase of it (e.g. the Puhl quotation at the beginning of this chapter). So the critics are not unclear but wrong when they say that Kripke overlooks or ignores the misunderstanding.

Beyond the Simplest Level

The second basic question was whether Kripke claims that Wittgenstein endorses the paradox. The critics seem astonishingly confident that the answer is "Yes." But, as argued last chapter, this is because they have stopped at the skeptical problem, without considering "the part which uttering these words plays" (*PI* 21). The textual evidence considered in answering the first question suggests that if there is a simple answer to our second question it is "No." For example, in his comparison of the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, Kripke makes it clear that it is only "if we remain in the grip" of a certain picture of meaning (found in the *Tractatus*) that the skeptical conclusion is inescapable. "On the other hand, if we apply to these

assertions the tests suggested in *Philosophical Investigations*, no such conclusion follows" (77). Kripke is saying that the picture of meaning Wittgenstein presents in the *Investigations* does *not* entail skepticism, that it shows us how to *escape* the skepticism entailed by the *Tractatus*. This looks like the opposite of an endorsement. Rather than endorsing skepticism, it endorses abandoning the picture which leads to skepticism: "The picture of correspondence-to-facts must be cleared away" (79).

This, then, is the simplest level, the basic outlines of the controversy between *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* and its critics. A great deal more needs to be said, for although the book does not answer the endorsement question "Yes" as the critics claim it does, its full answer is also not simply "No" (as they would answer). Nevertheless, deeper investigation will not compromise this basic picture. According to Kripke, Wittgenstein argues from a certain picture of meaning to a skeptical paradox; if meaning were determined by truth conditions or a correspondence to facts, then there could be no meaning; therefore this picture of meaning—which is espoused or assumed by much of modern philosophy, including the *Tractatus*—must be wrong. Far from endorsing skepticism, Kripke's Wittgenstein uses the skeptical paradox of *PI* 201 as a positive refutation of whatever led to that paradox (in this case, a misunderstanding of the nature of meaning).

We need to go beyond this simplest level, though, because so far we have not illuminated either the extraordinary hostility evoked by Kripke's book or its great vitality. On the contrary, if we focus just on the status of the paradox, Kripke and his critics seem to agree completely and the whole controversy seems a simple mistake: the critics have simply confused validity

and soundness, have mistaken a claim that the paradox follows validly from widely held beliefs about meaning for a claim that the paradox is a sound inference from true beliefs. To stop here would do justice to neither side. The critics are correct in thinking that their disagreement with Kripke has something to do with differing attitudes toward the paradox, but not that "Yes" versus "No" on skepticism captures that difference. The real controversy is only obscurely referred to by all this talk of "endorsement." It is better understood as revolving not around whether Wittgenstein "endorses" the paradox, but rather around the *scope* of the paradox, or the scope of what must be cleared away to avoid the paradox: in effect, the scope or significance or depth of the misunderstanding.

If the endorsement question does not capture the difference between Kripke and his critics, it can nevertheless point us in the right direction. Let us elaborate what the question of endorsement amounts to. The critics ask Kripke (or Kripke's Wittgenstein), "Are you really endorsing the paradox?" But what is the paradox? Wittgenstein says, "This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule" (*PI* 201). So the critics' question amounts to "Are you saying 'no course of action could be determined by a rule'?" And this question should look familiar. It is essentially the question which opens *PI* 189 in the voice of Wittgenstein's interlocutor: "'But *are* the steps then *not* determined by the algebraic formula?'" Wittgenstein answers this question neither yes nor no but "The question contains a mistake" (*PI* 189). By the very act of conceiving their disagreement with *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* in terms of whether or not the paradox is endorsed, the critics take

on the role of Wittgenstein's interlocutor. Put simply, the difference between Kripke and his critics on the endorsement question is the difference between Wittgenstein and his interlocutor.

In responding to the question in *PI* 189, Wittgenstein brings out that the use to which the concept "determine" will be put and the context of that use are crucial to the answer to the question. Yet the interlocutor asks it as if the answer were simply yes or no. Readers of Kripke's book widely respond in exactly the natural way Wittgenstein anticipates here. Kripke's critics ask about endorsement as if the paradox were simply true or false, rather than entailed by (or true over) a certain range of ideas about meaning (covering the *Tractatus*) and not by a different range (advocated in the *Investigations*). The situation here resembles the one Wittgenstein considers in *PI* 47 concerning the question of whether something is "composite": "That depends on what you understand by 'composite.'" The endorsement question, the status of the paradox, depends on our application of the word "determine."

Wittgenstein's own answer—"The question contains a mistake"—can easily sound like "Yes and no," and so of course can sometimes sound like "Yes" and sometimes like "No." It is hardly surprising, then, that readers who naturally expect a simple "No" read Kripke's complex account as if it must amount to a simple "Yes." Rather it shows how deep and common are the interlocutor's intuitions. An interesting illustration of this idea occurs in a footnote commentary by Kripke on the interlocutor's question. Speaking for himself and *not* for his book, Kripke says, "In spite of Wittgenstein's interpretation within his own philosophy of the ordinary phrase 'the steps are determined by the formula', the impression persists that the interlocutor's

characterization of his view is really correct" (70 n58). So Kripke, personally, shares with his critics their intuitive response to the philosophical position he is presenting. I will consider the significance of his divided allegiance in the final section of this paper. Meanwhile, we will understand Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein and its real disagreements with his critics better if we keep Wittgenstein's more enigmatic answer in mind as we examine what Kripke says which *sounds* to critics like an endorsement of skepticism.

Wittgenstein and Hume

One of Kripke's vehicles for explaining Wittgenstein is the analogy he draws between Wittgenstein and Hume. Hume is well known as a skeptic. The analogy might suggest, then, that Kripke considers Wittgenstein also a skeptic. But Kripke rejects this: "Wittgenstein never avows, and almost surely would not avow, the label 'sceptic', as Hume explicitly did" (63). This may look as if Kripke is either calling Wittgenstein a skeptic in spite of himself or limiting his analogy between Hume and Wittgenstein. But it is instead preparatory to maintaining the analogy in the unexpected direction: Hume too did not simply answer "Yes" to the endorsement question:

> Yet even here the difference between Wittgenstein and Hume should not be exaggerated. Even Hume has an important strain, dominant in some of his moods, that the philosopher never questions ordinary beliefs. Asked whether he "be really one of those sceptics, who hold that all is uncertain", Hume replies "that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I, nor any other person, was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion." (63)

There are several important ideas in this passage. One is Kripke's identification of skepticism with the questioning of ordinary beliefs, which I

will consider in the section after next. For now, notice that it is the aspect of Hume in which he is *not* a skeptic, or not *simply* a skeptic, which Kripke cites as analogous to Wittgenstein.

Kripke gives only a rough sketch of Hume's philosophy and does not follow the analogy into much detail. It is not my task here to go further than Kripke did into this issue, but I will refer the reader to a more detailed treatment of Hume in the work of Richard H. Popkin, especially the first eight or so essays of *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*. Popkin's treatment is still, I believe, compatible with the analogy to Wittgenstein. For example, Wittgenstein's anti-skepticism, sometimes cited against Kripke's analogy, has a parallel anti-Pyrrhonism in Hume. Just as Kripke's Wittgenstein does not infer from the skeptical argument that all language is meaningless, so Hume does not infer the classical Pyrrhonist conclusion that all belief should be suspended. Rather, parallel to Wittgenstein's rejection of meaning as a product of facts, Hume rejects the idea of belief as a product of reason. Once again, the issue is the scope of the Pyrrhonist conclusion, and so of what must be cleared away. Hume's early critics failed to recognize this distinction between total skepticism and skepticism of reason: "The critics also assumed, or acted as if, Hume himself, or the mythical 'sceptic,' *believed* the skeptical conclusions, and hence could be disposed of by pointing out the sorts of mad behavior that would ensue" (Popkin 67). Similarly, Kripke's critics often take his skepticism to be a total denial of meaning *per se*, rather than of the correspondence-to-facts picture of meaning:

> Rather he concludes with 'the paradox' that there is no such thing as meaning, so language cannot be possible. But *this* is not scepticism at all, it is conceptual nihilism, and, unlike classical

> scepticism, it is *manifestly* self-refuting. *Why* his argument is
> wrong may be worth investigating (as with any paradox), but
> *that* it is wrong is indubitable. It is not a sceptical problem but an
> absurdity. (Baker and Hacker 6)

To both Hume and Kripke, and contrary to the presumptions of their critics,
total skepticism is a step in a philosophical argument, a step at which it is
impossible to stop.

In the passage from Hume which Kripke chooses to quote, Hume calls
the question of whether or not he is a skeptic "entirely superfluous." He does
not either deny or endorse skepticism but rejects the question entirely. Here
we encounter a stronger reason to draw an analogy between Wittgenstein and
Hume: Hume's answer seems to be heading toward Wittgenstein's "The
question contains a mistake." Kripke's critics, in contrast, often seem inclined
to see skepticism as *false*. Of course, this gives them a different attitude
toward the skeptical paradox and a different idea of what it means to say, as
Kripke does, that Wittgenstein uses a skeptical argument. To the critics (or at
least some of them), skepticism is a possible position which Wittgenstein
does not hold. To Kripke (and, according to Kripke, to Hume and to
Wittgenstein), total skepticism is an absurdity which no one could hold: "the
sceptical conclusion is insane and intolerable" (60).

The Skepticism in Question

As we go deeper into *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, the
question of Wittgenstein's endorsement of skepticism leads us to the question
of what the two sides think skepticism is. There is apparently more than one
kind of skepticism here. I will give a rough division into two and a half

kinds, which I will call A, B and B+. (B+ and its relation to B will be treated in the next section.) The first kind (A) is referred to by Bouwsma in the passage quoted in the last chapter:

> A skeptic one might admit. He understands the questions and understands what ignorance and knowledge are. He has busied himself about the questions. He has said: 'We do not and cannot know,' presumably a respectable answer. The skeptic has tried and failed and investigated the nature of his failure. Man cannot know as he cannot fly. (Bouwsma 179)

Skepticism A is a philosophical position which one might seriously hold. It concerns doubt and (possibly excessive) cautiousness and contingent impossibilities. As Bouwsma says, one might admit it. One might be tempted to think that Wittgenstein does hold it. Kripke's critics sometimes try to soften his claims to make him sound as if he is discussing this weak, cautionary skepticism A:

> He [Kripke] thinks that Wittgenstein is simply trying to demonstrate that language is much more precariously based than we take it to be when we use it so confidently in everyday life. So he reads this part of *Philosophical Investigations* as a dramatization of our insecurity intended to pose a sceptical problem, by making it look as if there is nothing between us and linguistic chaos. (Pears 463)

If Kripke really were claiming that Wittgenstein's central concern is with our precariousness and insecurity, that is, with skepticism A, then his reading would indeed have discouraging weaknesses.

What Kripke actually deals with is a strong, absurdist skepticism B. It is not a position at all but a paradox. It cannot be "endorsed." It is the unacceptable outcome of some arguments which reveals that mistakes were made along the way, or intolerable commitments were made at the start. It

concerns conceptual, not contingent, impossibilities: if a certain conception of "knowledge," "rule," or "meaning" leads to skepticism, then that conception is incoherent. Where skepticism A says we just don't happen to have knowledge ("as we cannot fly"), skepticism B says even God could not know what we meant because there is no fact as to what we meant (14, 21, 39, 40-1, 50, 67). A good antidote to the sort of mushy, anxious, fretful skepticism A in the quotation above is to think of skepticism as the robust descendant of Zeno and Parmenides. The earliest models for the stronger skepticism B are perhaps Zeno's famous paradoxes in which he argued that Achilles could not catch a tortoise, that an arrow could never leave a bow, and so on. Zeno did not caution that it is harder than you think for Achilles to catch the tortoise because there are so very many finite distances to cover. Nor did he argue that Achilles cannot catch the tortoise as he cannot fly. He cannot catch the tortoise because the concept of "motion" is incoherent.

It is perhaps debatable which kind of skepticism, A or B, is truer to the history of modern academic debates about skepticism. But Kripke's assimilation of Wittgenstein's radical argument to an extreme skeptical tradition coming from Zeno is certainly not the abuse of terminology which some critics have claimed. In fact, it is again consistent with his analogy to Hume. Popkin traces the historical line of descent from Zeno to Hume through Pierre Bayle, the dominant figure in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century skepticism, whose articles on Pyrrho and Zeno were particularly influential. (We even find here a pedigree for Kripke's repeated claim that Wittgenstein's skeptical argument is more general than a merely epistemological argument, that it is ontological, a point he dramatizes with

the assertions that God could not know meanings.) Popkin describes Bayle's

radical skepticism and its impact on Hume:

> The seventeenth-century skeptics before Bayle were concerned
> primarily with epistemology. . . . Bayle not only took over this
> aspect of seventeenth-century skepticism, but he made it part of
> a massive, all-encompassing attack on all attempts to
> comprehend and explain man's world. Bayle's aim was to undo
> the very effort to find rationality in the universe. . . . Bayle's
> efforts were to provide the high road to complete Pyrrhonism,
> undermining completely the brave new world of seventeenth-
> century metaphysics, and leaving man, in spite of his claims to
> the contrary, afloat in 'a sink of uncertainty and error.'
> (Popkin 25-6)

> Hume, like many of his contemporaries, was immersed in
> various skeptical themes raised by Bayle. . . . Hume's *Treatise*
> reveals all sorts of gleanings from Bayle's interminable erudition
> and argumentation, especially in parts II and IV of Book I, where
> Hume leans heavily on the articles *Zeno of Elea, Pyrrho,
> Rorarius,* and *Spinoza.* (Popkin 152)

Book I, part IV of Hume's *Treatise* is what Kripke particularly cites as

analogous to Wittgenstein (63-4 n52 and n53). It is the strong skepticism B, a

tradition going back to Zeno, which Kripke claims Wittgenstein takes to an

even greater extreme.

Kripke's critics sometimes seem to feel that he *should* be discussing

skepticism A. One such expression was quoted above complaining, "But *this*

is not scepticism at all, it is conceptual nihilism. . . . It is not a sceptical

problem but an absurdity" (Baker and Hacker 6). Another rejects Kripke's

version of skepticism by arguing that "what Kripke describes as 'scepticism'

denies even the absolute minimum of shared knowledge: the possibility that

we can understand one another" (Shanker 18). (It is surely odd to hear that

denying shared knowledge *disqualifies* an argument from being skeptical!)

But Kripke makes clear his distance from skepticism A, announcing explicitly that he means something different from and stronger than what some people take skepticism to be: "Wittgenstein has invented a new form of skepticism. Personally I am inclined to regard it as the most radical and original sceptical problem that philosophy has seen to date" (60).

Unlike his critics, Kripke does not *contrast* the skeptical problem with absurdity. Only skepticism A contrasts with absurdity. On the contrary, the very point of skepticism B is to produce (to reveal) absurdity. Accordingly, a passage from Wittgenstein's *Notebooks 1914-1916* often cited against Kripke actually supports him: "Skepticism is *not* irrefutable, but *obvious nonsense* if it tries to doubt where no question can be asked" (*NB* 44; also *TLP* 6.51). Wittgenstein, like Kripke, sees skepticism not as a false (or true) position but as an absurdity. Wittgenstein does not mean by "nonsense" that skepticism is silly and inconsequential, nor that it *is* refutable. The distinction between the false and the nonsensical is crucial in Wittgenstein's philosophy and he is here removing skepticism from the category of things to which "true" and "false" apply. This notebook passage should be understood to be rejecting skepticism A as a confused misunderstanding of what skepticism is about. It foreshadows *PI* 189: "The question contains a mistake."

Immediately after the notebook entry quoted (and after its one sentence continuation), Wittgenstein says: "All theories that say: 'This is how it must be, otherwise we could not philosophize' or 'otherwise we surely could not live', etc. etc., must of course disappear" (*NB* 44). With this comment, he dismisses some of the attitudes expressed toward Kripke's (and his own) use of a strong form of skepticism: complaints about "conceptual nihilism" and

"denying even the absolute minimum of shared knowledge" "must of course disappear." Despite, the strenuous efforts of Kripke's critics, there is nothing implausible about interpreting Wittgenstein as using a skeptical argument in one of his central themes.

Endorsing the Paradox

On Kripke's understanding of skepticism, it is perfectly reasonable that a skeptical paradox can be produced by a false theory of meaning and still pose a serious problem. Its seriousness depends on the importance of the conditions (the false theory) which produce it. That Kripke knows that a misunderstanding of meaning produces Wittgenstein's paradox has been amply demonstrated; that he still considers it serious appears strikingly in the Humean terminology he adopts: the solution to the paradox is a "skeptical solution," which employs "skeptical accounts" and "skeptical analyses" and "skeptical interpretations." Where the critics think we put an end to the paradox by simply correcting the misunderstanding which leads to it, Kripke fastidiously labels all our subsequent activities as "skeptical." It is as if our recovery from the misunderstanding leaves its mark on us, like alcoholics who soberly and deliberately drink only fruit juice ever after. It is this dramatic impact of the paradox on our subsequent thinking which makes the question of endorsement in Kripke's reading so persistent.

I have suggested that the difference between Kripke and his critics is in their perceptions of the scope of the paradox's implications, or equivalently the scope of the misunderstanding which leads to paradox and so "must be cleared away" (70). It is in this difference of scope that we can see what

Kripke's frequent use of "skeptical" amounts to. This difference *can* be characterized as concerning endorsement, though not if "endorsement of the paradox" is taken to imply assertion that the paradox is true. Rather, the paradox can be conditional on a misunderstanding and yet be endorsed, if endorsement is understood as concerned with scope or significance instead of truth. One endorses not the truth of the paradox but its power or pertinence. Consider the following two conditionals: "If you want sprinkles on your ice cream, you'll have to go to the store and get them"; "If you want to get ahead in this world, you have to have a college education." We would not say that the first endorses going to the store. Since you might reasonably give up sprinkles, it is just a conditional. But we would say that the second endorses going to college, since getting ahead in this world is presumed important. Endorsement here, though conditional, is on a sliding scale relative to the importance of the conditions.

It is in something like this sense that *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* can be said to claim that Wittgenstein "endorses" the paradox. It does not claim that he advocates "the incredible and self-defeating conclusion, that all language is meaningless" (71), but that he treats the paradox as a serious problem requiring far-reaching changes in how we think about meaning and many related concepts. The demotion of facts and truth conditions to a derivative and not a fundamental role in the production of meaning is no small affair. So the misunderstanding which leads to the paradox is not some straightforward belief or superficial theory which we can abandon as easily as sprinkles on our ice cream. Instead it is a pervasive aspect of our ordinary ways of thinking. Kripke calls such a position

"skeptical" in part because he considers the denial of ordinary beliefs to be characteristic of skepticism. (Recall his description, quoted above, of Hume's anti-Pyrrhonist strain: "that the philosopher never questions ordinary beliefs" (63).) Furthermore, the particular ordinary beliefs at issue are intimately connected to what we generally consider skepticism to concern: as Kripke presents both Hume and Wittgenstein, they are making radical attacks on ordinary ideas about reason and facts, respectively (attacks in which total skepticism is a step).

A preoccupation with ordinariness is central to skepticism B. Skepticism A, since it is possible, must be concerned by such questions as "Is it true?" and "Is the argument valid?" and "Is the author endorsing it?" But for skepticism B, truth is not at issue; it is "entirely superfluous." Of course skepticism is not "true"; it is absurd! And of course if an argument is invalid we must change it. Only after we have a valid argument to absurdity does the serious question even arise: how ordinary are the beliefs which lead to skepticism? How much of what we believe must we change in order to avoid absurdity? How radical a critique of our habits of thought does skepticism constitute? To Kripke, Wittgenstein's argument is "the most radical and original sceptical problem that philosophy has seen to date" (60). It is radical because of the wide range of changes it demands. Introducing his own reading of Wittgenstein, which is quite sympathetic to Kripke's, Bloor puts the point explicitly:

> The significance of Wittgenstein's project should not be missed.
> It represents a determined assault on some of the most cherished
> myths of common sense, and on some of the most tenacious
> elements in our philosophical tradition. If what he says is true,

> or anywhere near the truth, the great categories of objectivity
> and rationality can never look the same again. (1983a, 2)

Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein is "skeptical," then, not because he makes Wittgenstein out to assert an absurdity but because the absurdity follows from—and constitutes a refutation of—fairly ordinary ideas. I will call this position "skepticism B+".

Skepticism B is a step in the argument of skepticism B+. They emphasize different aspects of the same skeptical tradition: B emphasizes the absurdity and B+ the conditions which lead to that absurdity. B+ goes beyond the absurdity itself, incorporating it into a wider exploration of the purpose of discovering absurdity and of the changes it forces on us. This is the focus of Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein. We might roughly discern a change in emphasis within *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language:* Kripke quite reasonably concentrates more on the absurdity itself in chapter two (7-54) where he presents the skeptical problem, and more on its source in chapter three where he presents the solution. Nevertheless, even while arguing for skepticism he is preparing a skepticism B+ position. As demonstrated earlier, he keeps the correspondence-to-facts picture of meaning ever before the reader as the target of Wittgenstein's paradox.

The reason for distinguishing B and B+ is to make explicit an otherwise implicit terminological ambiguity in the skeptical tradition in which Kripke locates Wittgenstein. That tradition asserts, "An absurdity follows from ordinary beliefs." This assertion is ambiguous between B and B+ depending on how ordinary the beliefs in question are taken to be: it can be taken either to support the absurd or to challenge the ordinary.

Consequently, it creates dual meanings for terms like "skeptic." The skeptic is both the one who argues to absurdity and the one who then argues back from absurdity to the falseness of some underlying assumption. The analogy to the term "alcoholic" may be useful again. Though the term may evoke images of the staggering drunkard, it also includes the controlled tea-totaler who lives a careful response to addiction. The dual meaning of "skeptic" explains Popkin's reference to the skeptic as "mythical": "The critics also assumed, or acted as if, Hume himself, or the mythical 'sceptic,' *believed* the skeptical conclusions" (Popkin 67). The skeptic B is mythical, or a hypothetical construction of the argument. But if we call Bayle or Hume or Wittgenstein a "skeptic," we mean a skeptic B+, not a skeptic B. The meaning of "skeptic" has shifted from a self-contradictory advocate of absurdity to one who recognizes the gravity of changes to our common beliefs required to escape absurdity.

Treating skepticism solely as an assertion of absurdity, and not also as a challenge to ordinary beliefs, robs it of its critical force. This again is a means to the suppression of Wittgenstein's radical philosophy, and those who are committed to beliefs which the argument attacks will of course be most inclined to overlook its critical intent. Anti-skeptical critics, both of Hume and of Kripke, have often refused to acknowledge the two different usages of "skeptic" and have claimed confusion or contradiction on the basis of this ambiguity in the skeptical tradition. They blend the two usages and defuse the critical force by pretending that the beliefs which purport to lead to absurdity are not merely fairly ordinary but so absolutely unimpeachable that the skeptical connection of those beliefs with absurdity must intend to assert

the absurdity. B+ then blends into B giving us a naked paradox, which may be an interesting oddity but is not yet a cogent attack on ordinary beliefs. The key move in this strategy is exaggerating the ordinariness of the conditions which lead to skepticism. This is why the misreading by Kripke's critics is so important, and so revealing. By ignoring Kripke's clear and repeated references to the picture of meaning as based on facts, they try to make the source of absurdity out to be meaning *per se*, something too ordinary to challenge. The conservative tendency is apparent: they exaggerate an argument for radical change into the extremity of an endorsement of absurdity. In this way, Kripke's radical reading of Wittgenstein as challenging our common beliefs is misportrayed as simply absurd, with the consequent inference that Wittgenstein must not have meant that and Kripke must be wrong to argue that he did.

A closer look at the question of endorsement has led us to the question "Is Wittgenstein denying ordinary beliefs?" And this question is quite sensitive to the range covered by the word "ordinary." There is a spectrum of ordinariness, and Wittgenstein is challenging beliefs that are on it—what Bloor calls "some of the most cherished myths of common sense" (1983a, 2). But his challenge does not go to the spectrum's extreme, and *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* nowhere denies such ordinary beliefs as that 68+57=125. For convenience, then, we might label the extreme "unimpeachable ordinary beliefs"—beliefs so fundamental that to reject them would be "insane and intolerable"—as distinct from "commonly accepted beliefs." Among these latter will be some cherished myths and tenacious philosophical elements which might appear to be unimpeachable but are not.

Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein faithfully reproduces the subtlety of his use of the skeptical paradox. In a sense, it is not endorsed: it is conditional on a misunderstanding. In another sense, endorsement is not undermined by conditional status; endorsement is of the paradox's efficacy in affecting our ordinary beliefs: Wittgenstein's solution to the paradox is skeptical precisely insofar as the misunderstanding which creates the paradox is deep and pervasive in our thinking.

The Gap in the Reading

If we are to understand *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* and how the critics could so mistake its position, it must be admitted that there are more causes than the subtlety of Wittgenstein and Kripke and the conservatism of the critics. Though Kripke's basic interpretation is quite coherent, he is not always entirely clear and consistent in details. In this and subsequent sections I will bring out some of the ways Kripke obscures his book's analysis, weaknesses which help mislead his readers into thinking he is endorsing an absurdity.

My account so far has not been simply descriptive of Kripke's own explanation for why he calls Wittgenstein's solution "skeptical." I have given a sort of "unofficial" account consistent with the overall argument of *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. But Kripke himself, in treating the analogy to Hume, attempts to explain the sense in which both Wittgenstein and Hume are "skeptical" *without* the denial of ordinary beliefs. Here is a preliminary attempt:

> When Hume is in a mood to respect his professed
> determination never to deny or doubt our common beliefs, in
> what does his 'scepticism' consist? First, in a sceptical *account* of
> the causes of these beliefs; and second, in sceptical analyses of
> our common notions. (64)

This answer is obviously inadequate, due to circularity: what would make an

account or an analysis "skeptical" is precisely what is in question. Yet no

further explanation of skeptical accounts or analyses follows.

A page later, Kripke makes another attempt, this time to explain

Hume's use of the phrase "skeptical solution." He contrasts a "skeptical"

solution with a "straight" solution. Again the explanation is inadequate.

Supposedly a skeptical solution "conced[es] that the sceptic's negative

assertions are unanswerable" (66), whereas a straight solution disputes them.

The difficulty is in identifying negative assertions which are both skeptical

and conceded by Wittgenstein. We might assume first that the negative

assertions are the skeptical paradox, in effect the absurdity, skepticism B. But

that cannot be right because the skeptical paradox, as we have seen, follows

only from some background—including a misunderstanding—that Kripke

says Wittgenstein disputes.

Consistent with the reading of *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private

Language* I have been giving, Kripke does not intend "conceding that the

sceptic's negative assertions are unanswerable" to imply conceding an

absurdity. In fact, his next two sentences clearly assume that the skeptic's

negative assertions are merely that a certain kind of justification of ordinary

beliefs has been "shown to be untenable" (66), that ordinary beliefs "cannot be

defended in a certain way" (67). That is, Kripke is clearly assuming the

structure of the skeptical argument that I have labeled "skepticism B+": a

certain defense or justification entails absurdity and is therefore untenable. Kripke's skeptic does not stop at absurdity but rather infers the falseness of what led to absurdity. However, if this is what the skeptic's negative assertions amount to, then just as with "skeptical" accounts and analyses the question has been begged as to why someone who asserts them is a "skeptic."

So Kripke's "official" explanation fails to justify calling the book's reading of Wittgenstein "skeptical." If we looked no further, this failure would imply that the book's central themes are all stated in a confused and misleading terminology. There does seem to be a minority opinion to that effect, though I have only seen it obliquely referred to in print: "[Footnote 31:] I disagree with the suggestion I have on occasion heard, that Kripke's attribution of skeptical intentions to Wittgenstein should be overlooked as not being a significant aspect of his interpretation" (Teghrarian 201). We should, however, look further.

Instead of jettisoning the book's major terminological conventions, I have treated Kripke's failure to explain his use of "skeptical" as a mere oversight, easily corrected by the larger text. I have tried to fill in the missing account without drastically altering his overall approach to Wittgenstein. Kripke is describing the skeptic B+, but incompletely. To justify his use of the label "skeptical," he needs the supplement implicit in the rest of the book, which rests on the challenge to our ordinary beliefs constituted by deriving the paradox from a picture of meaning pervasive in our thinking. I interpret *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* as arguing that Wittgenstein demonstrates that perspectives to which we are deeply committed lead to skepticism, and so, in a sense, that Wittgenstein denies ordinary beliefs.

Kripke's gestures toward a more formal definition of the sense in which Wittgenstein's work is skeptical are no more than gestures. Conceding that skepticism is entailed by some background, while ignoring the ordinariness of the beliefs in question, means nothing; the philosophical force lies in conceding that we are deeply committed to that background and cannot easily let it go. This is what gives sense in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* to the claim that "[t]he sceptical paradox is the fundamental problem of *Philosophical Investigations*," and that Wittgenstein's solution to that problem is plausibly labeled "skeptical."

The Ordinariness in Question

Kripke's account of his Humean terminology leaves a gap at precisely the question of ordinariness. This gap is a pointer to where we should look for what sounds (misleadingly) to Kripke's critics like an unacceptable interpretation of Wittgenstein. Over the course of pages 64 to 70, Kripke gives a fascinating and confusing discussion of Wittgenstein's position on ordinary beliefs. He presents it as a philosophical tactic he thinks Wittgenstein employs, a tactic typified by the work of Berkeley: "In some ways Berkeley, who did not regard his own views as sceptical, may offer an even better analogy to Wittgenstein" (64). The gap which is just an oversight in Kripke's explanation of his Humean terminology becomes an acute tension in this indirect treatment of Wittgenstein via Berkeley.

Kripke examines Berkeley's philosophical analyses of common notions, and gives the following paraphrase of Berkeley's main claim: "When the common man speaks of an 'external material object' he does not really

mean (as we might say *sotto voce*) an *external material object* but rather he means something like 'an idea produced in me independently of my will'" (64). He follows with this evaluation:

> Berkeley's stance is not uncommon in philosophy. The philosopher advocates a view apparently in patent contradiction to common sense. Rather than repudiating common sense, he asserts that the conflict comes from a philosophical misinterpretation of common language. . . . The practice can hardly be said to have ceased today.
>
> Personally I think such philosophical claims are almost invariably suspect. What the claimant calls a 'misleading philosophical misconstrual' of the ordinary statement is probably the natural and correct understanding. . . . Be this as it may, the important point for present purposes is that Wittgenstein makes a Berkeleyan claim of this kind. (65)

Considerable potential for confusion lurks in the words "this kind," for Kripke has not made Berkeley's tactic clear. What kind of ordinary claims are Wittgenstein and Berkeley attacking? Is it unimpeachable ordinary beliefs or commonly accepted ones? Kripke muddies the distinction between the two in this passage while acknowledging that that distinction is important to Wittgenstein and Berkeley.

Obscuring the nature of Berkeley's argument starts with the paraphrase. Personally I have never heard a common man, or indeed anyone except a philosopher, speak of an "external material object." In common speech, it would be quite unclear what "external" could mean in that phrase, certainly not what it means in philosophical speech. So Kripke has obscured whether the context is really a common or a philosophical one. More importantly, though, by his repetition of the phrase, first in the (supposedly) common speech and then as one of the philosophical interpretations of that

speech, Kripke implies that the common speech already has a natural and correct philosophical interpretation. Implicitly, then, challenging that interpretation is equivalent to repudiating the common speech. Kripke's paraphrase *should* be worded something like, "When the common man speaks of a cow he does not mean an external material object but an idea produced in him independently of his will." By being clearer and more accurate, this version shows Berkeley's contentious philosophical interpretation in opposition to another contentious (if less so) philosophical interpretation, not in opposition to cows. By his presentation of Berkeley's claim, which is analogous to Wittgenstein's, Kripke implies what he had so consistently avoided in his direct presentation of Wittgenstein's argument: that it is ordinary beliefs of the simplest and most unimpeachable sort which are under attack, rather than commonly accepted ideas about those beliefs.

We are beginning to encounter a more interesting reason for the critics' confusion about what Kripke is attributing to Wittgenstein. Kripke acknowledges that at least some of the subsequent two-paragraph evaluation of Berkeley is personal commentary, not explication of Wittgenstein. But what is wrong here is not what he claims but what he presumes, and thereby insinuates: he encourages a misperception in his readers that Berkeley and Wittgenstein are attacking unimpeachable ordinary claims such as "68+57=125" and "Cows are material objects." He encourages this by presuming that the philosopher *ought* to avoid, and that Berkeley and Wittgenstein try to avoid, denying ordinary beliefs. This would not make sense if the beliefs in question were merely commonly accepted. As I have been reading *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Wittgenstein

spurns the fear of transgressing the ordinary, considering that fear to be misformulated. Far from avoiding such transgressions, the Wittgenstein Kripke has presented aggressively attacks commonly accepted beliefs, while taking the denial of unimpeachable ordinary beliefs to be absurd, logically impossible, "entirely superfluous." That is, one is never in danger of denying more than one is allowed. (The situation is reminiscent, at the least, of Wittgenstein's early rejection of Russell's Theory of Types as a misguided attempt to legislate on something which is a matter of *possibility*, not *permissibility*.) Accordingly, when the interlocutor asks if Wittgenstein is denying the undeniable—that formulas determine steps—Wittgenstein replies that "The question contains a mistake" (*PI* 189). He goes on to show that unimpeachably ordinary senses of "determine" are not at issue here at all. Rather it is myths and philosophical elements which have crept into our use of "formulas determine steps" which he is after.

In contrast to his usual emphasis on the radical nature of Wittgenstein's argument, Kripke sounds in this analysis of Berkeley very like his own critics, those who treat skepticism as a possible position which ought to be avoided. Especially with the phrase "Rather than repudiating common sense," Kripke presumes that we *can* repudiate common sense (which he has implied is unimpeachable). He is dangerously close to denying his own major theme that endorsing an absurdity is impossible. We can, of course, ignore this whole passage as personal commentary, expressive of Kripke's personal disagreement with Wittgenstein's argument. But the mischaracterization of Berkeley and Wittgenstein here introduces confusion into his subsequent explication. It does so by suggesting that unimpeachable

ordinary beliefs are at stake and that Wittgenstein is trying to avoid denying them.

The confusion Kripke has introduced resurfaces in the transitional paragraph which concludes his analogy to Berkeley before summarizing Wittgenstein's position. The mischaracterization that had been Kripke's personal commentary before now extends to Wittgenstein, who accordingly finds it "difficult to avoid . . . denials of our ordinary assertions" (69). This confusion leads Kripke to a particularly poor attribution of inconsistency to Berkeley:

> Berkeley runs into similar difficulties. Partly he avoids them by stating his thesis as the denial of the existence of 'matter', and then claiming that 'matter' is a bit of philosophical jargon not expressive of our common sense view. Nevertheless he is forced at one point to say—apparently contrary to his usual official doctrine—that he denies a doctrine 'strangely prevailing amongst men'. [Footnote:] Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, §4. Of course Berkeley might mean that the prevalence of the doctrine stems from the influence of philosophical theory rather than common sense, as indeed he asserts in the next section. (69-70)

The striking thing about this passage is that Berkeley has *not* made a mistake, and his position is indeed analogous to Wittgenstein's as *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* usually presents it. Yet Kripke treats it as a mistake and buries Berkeley's explicit corrective in a footnote without comment. Berkeley's discrimination among prevailing doctrines between common sense and philosophical theory corresponds to my separation of ordinary beliefs into unimpeachable ones and commonly accepted ones. That discrimination—especially since it occurs so early in his treatise—implies that it is *not* Berkeley's "usual official doctrine" to accept whatever is "prevailing

amongst men." Such a doctrine would surely be foolish! Kripke has made the same conservative error that his critics do of exaggerating prevailing opinion into unimpeachable common sense, and so of inferring that a radical critique of it must be a mistake.

The Elusive Ordinary

Berkeley suggests that falsehoods become prevailing beliefs through "the influence of philosophical theory." In this too he is close to Wittgenstein. It is well known as a major theme throughout Wittgenstein's later work that apparently ordinary claims can illicitly metamorphose into philosophical ones by their application to unwonted circumstances. So Wittgenstein repeatedly reminds us of the contexts of use which give words their meanings. We can go another step deeper into both the strengths and weaknesses of *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* by dwelling a little on its treatment of this issue.

The same words which in one context express something unimpeachable can express a dubious philosophical theory in another. An "ordinary" statement, such as that a formula determines the steps in its expansion, turns out to have more complexity than Wittgenstein's interlocutor appreciates; various contexts can give it aspects which are unimpeachable and other aspects which are just prevailing myths. When the interlocutor asks "But *are* the steps then *not* determined by the algebraic formula?" (*PI* 189), the question contains a mistake because, in the context, it tries to attach a philosophical significance to the concept "determined" which is unsupported by the ordinary uses of the word. The same is happening

when Kripke's critics ask the endorsement question, "Are you endorsing the paradox? Are you saying 'no course of action could be determined by a rule'?"

In the first sixty or so pages of his book, Kripke shows Wittgenstein attacking the commonly accepted belief that truth-conditions determine meaning, a particularly tenacious element of our philosophical tradition. The paradox is thus a serious argument with a serious target, and yet is not an attack on unimpeachable ordinary beliefs. Later Kripke confuses the issue by implying that Berkeley and Wittgenstein really *are* dealing with unimpeachable ordinary beliefs which they are struggling to avoid denying. *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* does regain its footing, however, and recognizes explicitly Wittgenstein's real targets:

> We do not even wish to deny the propriety of an ordinary use of the phrase 'the fact that Jones meant addition by such and such a symbol', and indeed such expressions do have perfectly ordinary uses. We merely wish to deny the existence of the 'superlative fact' that philosophers misleadingly attach to such ordinary forms of words, not the propriety of the forms of words themselves.
>   It is for this reason that I conjectured above (p. 5), that Wittgenstein's professed inability to write a work with conventionally organized arguments and conclusions stems at least in part, not from personal and stylistic proclivities, but from the nature of his work. (69)

Kripke is led to the impossibility of straightforward statements of Wittgenstein's themes by his discussion of Wittgenstein's and Berkeley's treatment of ordinary beliefs. The very same words can be ordinary or philosophical, depending on the uses to which they are put; so any statement might or might not capture what Wittgenstein is denying, depending on its context. The pattern of ambiguity we are finding—in "endorse," in "skeptic,"

in "ordinary"—is both typical of Wittgenstein and crucial to the radical reading of him in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language.*

The sentence just quoted, about Wittgenstein's inability to write conventional arguments, opens a particularly rich and complex paragraph. If there is a pivotal paragraph in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language,* I would say it is this one. (We have encountered it before: it contains Kripke's misguided criticism of Berkeley for denying prevailing beliefs, as well as the footnote reference to Berkeley's rebuttal; it also contains the footnote expressing Kripke's *personal* opinion that Wittgenstein's interlocutor is right.) The paragraph ends with a statement of the elusiveness of Wittgenstein's targets. Because Wittgenstein is after the philosophical connotations commonly attached to ordinary beliefs, any articulation of his targets can be interpreted as those ordinary beliefs themselves:

> The danger comes when we try to give a precise formulation of exactly what it is that we *are* denying—*what* 'erroneous interpretation' our opponent is placing on ordinary means of expression. It may be hard to do this without producing yet another statement that, we must admit, is *still* 'perfectly all right, properly understood'. (70)

The problem is again the problem of radical critique: "precise formulations" will be "understood" according to prevailing conventions which a radical critique challenges as not "proper." That is, *how* a formulation should be understood (its meaning) is at issue in a radical critique.

One reason for the importance of this paragraph is that here Kripke further elaborates that moment in Wittgenstein's philosophy that he is almost universally condemned for overlooking, the second part of *PI* 201. The end of Kripke's pivotal paragraph strongly echoes Wittgenstein:

> 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 contented us at 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*, but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases. *(PI 201)*

The danger Kripke warns of in attempting a precise formulation of Wittgenstein's intentions is the very problem Wittgenstein describes more generally as a symptom of misunderstanding: we expect an interpretation, an articulated expression, to fully capture what we have understood when we grasp the meaning of a sentence (whether it is a rule in mathematics or in chess, or a thesis in philosophy, or any ordinary statement). But every interpretation turns out to be inadequate; something inarticulate is required.

Kripke develops the second part of *PI* 201 (as well as the first part) in Wittgenstein's complex relation to ordinary beliefs. As Kripke says, no *interpretation* can specify the difference between unimpeachable ordinary beliefs which are "perfectly all right" and philosophically corrupted common beliefs which Wittgenstein attacks. Excessive faith in interpretations inclines us to produce yet another one as each previous one turns out inadequate. Wittgenstein calls this a product of misunderstanding and Kripke calls it a danger which tempts us "to some extent to falsify" Wittgenstein's philosophy (5). We can see from the last sentence of Kripke's paragraph that he uses "interpretation" in a wide sense which includes any "statement." As I said earlier, a wide sense of interpretation which makes "facts" interpretive is intrinsic to Kripke's reading of the misunderstanding that leads to paradox. We might now infer that Kripke also reads the *third* paragraph of *PI* 201 as

including "expression" under "interpretation." To summarize this point, then, Kripke reads *PI* 201 as saying we cannot take interpretations as determinative of meaning (or rules) on pain of creating a skeptical paradox, and "interpretation" here includes at least "facts," "truth conditions," "statements" and "expressions"; "interpretation" does *not* include "actions" (*PI* 201) or "practices" (*PI* 202). Clearly we have not exhausted this topic.

The Two Voices

In Kripke's treatment of Berkeley and the theme of questioning ordinary beliefs, there is at least the hint of contradictions with his direct treatment of Wittgenstein. If, as Kripke insinuates, Berkeley were denying that cows are material objects, and Wittgenstein were analogously denying that 68+57=125, then they would indeed seem committed to an "insane and intolerable" (60) skeptical position, to "the incredible and self-defeating conclusion, that all language is meaningless" (71). This might seem to excuse the critics' dismissive attitude toward Kripke's whole reading of Wittgenstein. But as with the suggestion that the skeptical terminology is all insignificant, such a dismissal is premature. We must not too hastily conclude that the contradictions, if they exist, are *within* Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein. We must consider whether they are not rather *between* that reading and something else in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, namely Kripke's personal commentary.

The tension in the book will be clearer if we distinguish between the author and the narrator. We are often unconcerned with this distinction in philosophical writing because we consider such writing to be

straightforwardly didactic and consider the narrator to speak for the author.
But they are distinct, and in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* the
distinction is unusually prominent and important. It is also explicitly
delineated. Kripke says in the Preface:

> It deserves emphasis that I do not in this piece of writing attempt
> to speak for myself, or, except in occasional and minor asides, to
> say anything about my own views on the substantive issues.
> The primary purpose of this work is the presentation of a
> problem and an argument, not its critical evaluation. Primarily I
> can be read, except in a few obvious asides, as almost like an
> attorney presenting a major philosophical argument as it struck
> me. (ix; cf. 5)

I will call the two narrative voices (somewhat in violation of literary
etiquette) Kripke's voice and the book's voice. The distinction between these
two narrative voices is important because they are at odds over the legitimacy
of Wittgenstein's position on ordinary beliefs.

Kripke, the supposedly neutral spokesman for the book's position,
sometimes presents his client's case as weaker than it really is. In the
discussion of ordinary beliefs—and in the central pages generally (pages 60
to 79), far more than in the rest of the book—Kripke's voice is often present,
and not just in obvious or minor asides. We have already heard it in his
mistreatment of Berkeley where he insinuates that arguing to absurdity is an
error Wittgenstein tries to avoid rather than a tactic he deliberate employs.
The book normally has a quite coherent position on ordinary beliefs:
unimpeachable ordinary beliefs are in no way Wittgenstein's target, and to
deny them is absurd and impossible; Wittgenstein argues to an absurdity, and
thereby demonstrates the falseness of those commonly accepted beliefs which
support that argument. Kripke even goes so far as to imply that denying

"prevailing doctrines" is an error Wittgenstein wants to avoid. He thereby loses sight of the radical intentions *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* usually emphasizes. My claim here is that these implications or insinuations are expressive of *Kripke's* voice but not of the book's voice.

Kripke's interference with his book's message reaches its peak in the pivotal paragraph discussed in the last section (69-70). In fact, the paragraph is virtually a battleground for the two voices. At the same time as this paragraph (and the one before it) describe the inherent ambiguity of interpretation, and the consequent subtlety of Wittgenstein's separation of philosophical error from ordinary belief, the paragraph is strangely ambivalent, as though Kripke were frustrated by and unwilling to accept Wittgenstein's position. We hear Kripke's voice insinuating the alien idea that ordinary beliefs can, but should not, be denied. Over the course of the two paragraphs, Kripke subtly shifts the concern from the danger of being *misunderstood* as denying ordinary assertions—"We merely wish to deny . . . [what] philosophers misleadingly attach to such ordinary forms of words" (69)—to the danger of *actually* denying them: "If, on the other hand, we do not state our conclusions in the form of broad philosophical theses, it is easier to avoid the danger of a denial of any ordinary belief" (70).

This shift of emphasis leads him to open the next paragraph with another remark much attacked by the critics (probably justly this time): "So Wittgenstein, perhaps cagily, might well disapprove of the straightforward formulation given here. Nevertheless, I choose to be so bold as to say: Wittgenstein holds, with the sceptic, that there is no fact as to whether I mean plus or quus" (70-1). The word "cagily" here has provoked vigorous response.

And indeed, it would seem inappropriate if the danger Wittgenstein is avoiding is that of being misunderstood. It *could* be appropriate, though, if the danger were that of denying ordinary beliefs. It is Kripke's voice, not the book's, inviting the reader to slide from the former to the latter. More importantly, though, by calling his formulation "straightforward," Kripke implies that it is ordinary, that the words have their ordinary employment. This implication is reinforced by allying Wittgenstein "with the sceptic," since the reader is likely to take this skeptic to be someone who would assert the ordinary absurdity, "all language is meaningless" (71).

Kripke's formulation is *not* straightforward. As we have just seen, the ordinariness of a statement depends not on the form of words but on how it is employed. Kripke's formulation follows 70 pages of philosophical discussion preparing the reader to recognize that "fact" is the key word in "there is no fact as to whether I mean plus or quus," a word which in this context is loaded with philosophical significance. And the "sceptic" Wittgenstein is with here is not the skeptic who says, "all language is meaningless," but the skeptic from Kripke's two failed attempts to explain his Humean terminology, the skeptic who argued that a certain justification of ordinary beliefs is untenable and that they "cannot be defended in a certain way" (67). That is, it is the skeptic from this earlier formulation: "his [Wittgenstein's] solution to his own sceptical problem begins by agreeing with the sceptics that there is no 'superlative fact' ([*PI*] 192) about my mind that constitutes my meaning addition by 'plus' and determines in advance what I should do to accord with this meaning" (65). In fact, Kripke's dramatic and controversial formulation (70-1) may be pithier, but it basically does not go

beyond this earlier and more careful formulation: it merely reiterates it. There is nothing actually *wrong* with the more dramatic—it does state the position of *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*—but by his phrasing, by saying Wittgenstein "cagily" avoids a "straightforward" alliance "with the sceptic," Kripke's voice encourages the reader to forget the previous 70 pages and to misunderstand his book's position. Some critics required little encouragement.

I have argued that the sense in which *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* gives a "skeptical" reading depends on the book's willingness to follow the critique of philosophical confusion into its impact on ordinary beliefs. This willingness sets the book apart from a great deal of literature on Wittgenstein, but also aligns it unexpectedly with parts of the world of Wittgenstein studies with which it is not usually associated. I believe we can situate the disagreement between Kripke's book and its critics in a more general picture described by Philip R. Shields in *Logic and Sin in the Writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein*. Shields argues that the mainstream of Wittgenstein commentary has gone astray in seeing Wittgenstein as primarily attacking philosophy using ordinary language as his guide and weapon. Shifting the focus from Wittgenstein's attack on philosophy to his insights about ordinary life is a central theme in Shields's book. He consistently opposes the idea that Wittgenstein sees ordinary language as a limit to philosophical implications (cf. Shields 19-20). Further, though, he generalizes this issue into a critique of a common perspective on the basic intentions of Wittgenstein's philosophy, a perspective which sees Wittgenstein treating philosophical problems as mere illusions to be

dispelled. We saw this perspective in the work of Pears, for whom Wittgenstein's goal is to sweep away philosophical theories that have "neither substance nor foundation" (Pears 214). Shields describes as "fairly characteristic of what I would consider the received interpretation" (52) this tendency to construe "the sources of problems" discussed by Wittgenstein

> along Greek lines as riddles and deceptions that require cleverness and resourcefulness to unravel, rather than being construed along Judeo-Christian lines as temptations that require determination of the will. Perhaps the most famous expression of what one could call the 'Greek' model of Wittgenstein's philosophical intentions is the remark: 'What is your aim in philosophy?—To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle' (*PI* #309)....
>
> This way of putting the matter seems to trivialize the philosophical problems.... If philosophy only rids us of philosophical problems, then it is only of use to philosophers.... The fly in the fly bottle metaphor seems to imply that philosophical problems are arcane scholastic preoccupations that have nothing to do with the cares and concerns of normal human life—after all, only flies get caught in fly bottles.
>
> Although Wittgenstein does occasionally speak of philosophical problems as illusions, such ways of speaking are few compared to his tendency to speak of a perverse will. (55)

Here are echoes of Cavell, for whom Wittgenstein's philosophy is "as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying" (1962, 161).

Despite persistent misrepresentation by its critics, and even the occasional obstruction by its own author, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* powerfully illuminates Wittgenstein's skeptical paradox as a refutation not just of arcane philosophical theories but also of common inclinations difficult to resist. The specific inclination most centrally challenged is our inclination to seek facts or truth-conditions that will justify

our next use of a word, our next application of a rule. (Facts, in these circumstances, are what Shields calls an "idol": something in which we put our faith but which cannot bear the weight.) In this focus on the inadequacy of facts, Kripke's book expresses and continues the hostility to ontological claims presented as the fifth radical thesis.

Kripke compares his role to that of an attorney. But I prefer an older image. Plato compared authors to mothers and their works to offspring. *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* is the intellectual child of Kripke by Wittgenstein. Observing the fortunes and vitality of the book since its birth seems to me fancifully to suggest a particular mythical child. Like Hercules's mother Alcmena, Kripke seems the unwilling and even hostile vessel through which an extraordinary child has come into being. And Kripke—whose own intuitions are more sympathetic to his critics than to his book—is, like Alcmena, the weakest of the family trio. But the infant Hercules needed no help from his mother to handle the serpents which attacked him. Likewise, with no help from its author, the reading of Wittgenstein which Kripke produced has easily gotten the better of its critics so far. I believe it is—along with the entire radical reading—still in its infancy.

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