

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION—NOT FOR FURTHER CIRCULATION

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What is Wittgenstein's point in the rule-following discussion?

Everyone agrees that the discussion of rule-following, concentrated in Investigations §§185-242 and in part VI of the Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics, is absolutely central to Wittgenstein's later philosophies of language, mathematics and mind. But there is less agreement about its upshot. Competing interpretations range from the rule-sceptical—Kripke's account¹—through the conservative—McDowell's allegedly "fully satisfying intermediate position"²—to the bland—McGinn's anti-psychologism.³ In this note, I return to the station at which an interpretative train of thought of my own came—less kindly, "ground"—to a halt in a paper I wrote over a decade ago, about Wittgenstein and Chomsky.⁴ My hope here is to advance a little bit further down the track.

Borrowing from the discussion in that paper, I'll elicit a number of salient themes in Wittgenstein's remarks, and venture some suggestions about how they should be orchestrated. These suggestions will take us to the place where my previous discussion halted. The different tack which I shall then attempt⁵ will lead us into the territory of Wittgenstein's quietist

1 Reference

2 Reference

3 Reference

4 Wright (1989) "Wittgenstein's Rule-following Considerations and the Central Project of Theoretical Linguistics", in Reflections on Chomsky, ed. A. George, Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell; reprinted in Wright (2001) Rails to Infinity, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard.

5 Specifically—not that I have previously neglected it, exactly—I am going to give centre stage to Wittgenstein's repeated claim that we follow rules "without reasons" or, as he puts it at one place, "blindly". For the idea that concentrating on this element of it may illuminate the overall structure of Wittgenstein's discussion, I am indebted to conversations with Paul Boghossian who repeatedly emphasised his belief in the centrality of the idea—though I do not know to what extent he will agree with my execution of it. Boghossian notes its connection in a couple of places (references) with proposals of his own concerning the epistemology of basic inference, but he has yet to elaborate this.

metaphilosophical remarks in the Investigations, and I'll go on to offer a suggestion about how they should be understood, at least as they apply in the present case. The first Appendix contains some more general reflections on the metaphilosophy.

I'll begin with a statement of one way of seeing the most general, overarching problem about rules.

I The rule-following problem

Philosophical issues to do with rule-following arise for every normatively constrained area of human thought and activity, wherever there is better and worse opinion, correct and incorrect practice. It seems the merest platitude that if there is such a thing as following a rule or complex of rules correctly, or as going wrong, there have to be facts about what the requirements of the relevant rule(s) are. And whatever kind of objectivity can belong to the judgement that someone has proceeded in a manner in or out of accord with the rule(s), it cannot be greater than the objectivity pertaining to such a fact. Yet facts about what rules allow seem on reflection to raise puzzling questions of constitution and epistemology: what could be the nature of a fact which—in a context which we've yet to be placed in or to consider—somehow already makes it true that such and such a response, or course of action, is what will be required of us if we are to keep faith with a particular specified rule? How and when was it settled—again, take a case which no-one has ever explicitly considered—that this is what complies with the rule, when—the Kripkean Sceptic's point—everything we may so far have said or done would cohere with a quite different understanding of the rule? How is the once-and-for-all division of particular possible (so far unmade, unconsidered) responses into those in accord and those out of accord with the rule accomplished? And how, consistently with allowing that distinction an appropriate kind of independence, so that what is in accord with a rule or not really is fixed before any verdict of

ours, can we account for our ability—in the normal case, effortlessly, even thoughtlessly—to be appropriately responsive to it?⁶

There is an understandable tendency of philosophers to miss the issues here. For a rule, it may plausibly be said—at least any rule of sufficient generality and definiteness—is nothing if not something that precisely does mandate (or allow, or forbid) determinate courses of action in an indefinite range of cases that its practitioners will never have explicitly considered or prepared for. So there cannot be a puzzle about how a rule does that, or what settles what its requirements are. To ask how it is settled what complies with the rule is like asking how it is settled what shape a particular geometrical figure has. A figure's shape is an internal property of it. What settles what shape the figure has is simply its being the figure it is.⁷

But the concerns are not to be so easily dismissed. They merely reformulate themselves. If a (suitably precise and general) rule is—by the very definition of 'rule', as it were—intrinsically such as to carry predeterminate verdicts for an open-ended range of occasions, and if grasping a rule is—by definition—an ability to keep track of those verdicts, step by step, then the prime question becomes: what makes it possible for there to be such things as rules, so conceived, at all? I can create a geometrical figure by drawing it. But how do I create something which carries pre-determinate instructions for an open range of situations which I do not think about in creating it? What gives it this content, when anything I say or do in explaining it will be open to an indefinite variety of conflicting interpretations? And how is the content to be got 'into mind' and so made available to inform the successive responses of practitioners?

⁶ The overriding concerns about rule-following may thus be presented as an instance of what Christopher Peacocke has recently termed the Integration Challenge: the challenge of "[reconciling] a plausible account of what is involved in the truth of statements of a given kind with a credible account of how we can know those statements, when we do know them." Peacocke Being Known (Oxford: the Clarendon Press 2000) p.1.

⁷ John McDowell, for one, makes exactly this response in the context of the corresponding issue concerning intention—see pp. 163-4 of his "Intentionality and Interiority in Wittgenstein" in Klaus Puhl, ed., Meaning Scepticism Berlin: de Gruyter 1991) pp. 148-69.

A philosopher who is responsive to these concerns will be exercised—as Wittgenstein himself conspicuously was—by the range of implicit assumptions about the issues which we seem to make in our ordinary thinking about two quite different areas: logic and pure mathematics on the one hand, and ordinary intentional psychology on the other. Ordinary thinking about logic and pure mathematics is highly realist. It views both disciplines as tracking absolutely hard conceptual constraints. Discoveries in mathematics are viewed as the unpacking of (possibly) deep but predeterminate implications of the architecture of our understanding of basic mathematical concepts, as codified in intuitively apprehended axioms. And logical inference, for its part, is seen as the tracing of steps which are, in some sense, already drawn and which we have no rational option but to acknowledge once presented to us. This kind of thinking conceives of the requirements of rules—or at least, the requirements of logical and mathematical rules—as ultra-objective:⁸ as somehow constituted quite independently of any propensities for judgement or reaction of ours. So an account seems wanted of how we might presume ourselves capable of keeping intellectual track of requirements so independently constituted. But both these issues—the ontological and the epistemological—when once exposed to the light, as it were, and so long as we are mindful that an answer to either must sit comfortably alongside an answer to the other, are apt to come across as extremely perplexing.

An essentially similar way of thinking about the requirements of rules is quietly at work in the ordinary notion that mental states and processes are items of direct acquaintance for their subjects but are strictly inaccessible to others, by whom they are knowable only by (rather problematical) inference. It is a usually unremarked part of this way of thinking to have no difficulty with the idea of simple recognition of the character of one's own mental states and processes: privacy is not supposed to be at odds with one's ability to know them for what they are—to the contrary, it's supposed to go hand in hand with the possibility of a special level of cognitive security. Yet a judgement expressing a purported such recognition, insofar as it can be

⁸ What Wittgenstein (Investigations §192) styles "superlative" facts.

correct or incorrect, must presumably be a rule-governed response: there has to be a fact about what one ought to make of a newly presented inner gestalt,—a fact about how it ought to be described—with which one's judgement about it is capable, in the best (normal) case, of correspondence. So again it seems the question has to be faced: what constitutes such a fact?—what can make it the case that, independently of any reaction of mine, the rules of the language in which I give expression to my private mental life mandate certain types of description of an episode therein, and proscribe others; and what enables me to keep track of such requirements? Or again, if it is made definitional of rules to carry such requirements and proscriptions: what can make it the case that specific such rules are associated with particular expressions in the language, and how can they be items of awareness for me in such a way that I can recognise what their specific requirements and proscriptions are?

In its most general form, and independently the subject matter concerned, we can focus the general issue being raised on my assent to a particular token statement, expressed in a language I understand, on a particular occasion of use. In order for this assent to be normatively constrained, and hence a candidate to be correct or incorrect, we have to be able to conceive of whatever constitutes its correctness or incorrectness as in some way independent of my disposition to assent. What are the candidates for such a 'requirement-constitutor'? The question confronts us with a broad dilemma. One thought—the Communitarian response—is that the requirement-constitutor has somehow to be located within the propensities for assessment of the case possessed by others in my language community: that for my assent to the sentence in question to be—in the relevant context—in, or out, of line with the requirements imposed by its meaning is, in one way or another, for it to be in or out of line with others' impressions of those requirements. (Of course, this response cannot engage the case of judgements about one's own mental states, viewed in the Cartesian way.) The other—Platonist—response demurs: it says that even (hypothetically) shared assessments are constitutively quite independent of the requirements they concern—that even in the far-fetched scenario where a whole speech community assents to a particular utterance, and where everybody is clear-headed, attentive, and generally competent, the

communal impression of what ought to be said is one thing and what really ought to be said is something else: something settled just between the character of the context and prevailing circumstances on the one hand and the meaning (= the rules governing the use) of the statement in question on the other, and should therefore be conceived as a matter on which a consensual verdict, in the best case, merely aligns. The dilemma is then that, *prima facie*, there only seem to be these two options; and that while the Platonist line threatens to raise baffling ontological and epistemological problems, any move to Communitarianism promises to struggle when it comes to recovering basic distinctions on which our ordinary ideas of objectivity, the growth of knowledge and the defeat of superstition would seem to depend.

II Three Wittgensteinian themes choreographed

(Any reader with a detailed recollection of Wright (1989) should skip this section)

The most salient concerns in Wittgenstein's discussions do not seem, contrary to Kripke's well-known reading, to relate to the reality of rules, but are, rather, epistemological. Wittgenstein seems concerned to examine the idea that a rule can genuinely be an object of intellection, something whose requirements we keep track of by grace of some intuitive or interpretative ability. Undoubtedly the tone of his writing is negative. The suggestion seems to be that we tend badly to misunderstand the nature of the accomplishment involved in competent rule-following, and that our misunderstandings lead us to a mythology of the character of the constraint imposed by a rule, and of what successfully following it actually consists in. But this needs emphasis: there is nowhere to be found any explicit denial of the existence of such constraints, nor that we actually do successfully follow rules. That's a *prima facie* point against Kripke's reading as an interpretation.

Here is my first theme:

One's own understanding of a rule does not go further than one can explain.
(Investigations 208-10; RFM IV, 8; VI, 19, 23)

The temptation is to think otherwise: that we each know more about e.g. what we mean by many expressions than we need be able to informatively state or otherwise indicate. One source of this temptation is that the explanation of a rule must eventually culminate in, or anyway ultimately be founded upon the giving of illustrations of its (or its more basic, ingredient rules') applications; but any such illustrations are finite, and hence open in principle to an indefinite variety of interpretations. Yet explanations do normally secure mutual understanding. So somehow more is got across—the thought continues—than the explanations can ever make completely explicit. Correct uptake of an explanation is having the right thing come into your mind as a result of the explanation; and the resulting informational state, though it is displayed and expressed in your subsequent practice with the rule/concept concerned, essentially transcends it.

It is important to recognise that this idea of what is involved in successfully giving and receiving explanations is imposed by another notion we find natural. This is elaborated in the 'rules-as-rails' imagery of Investigations 218-9. The idea is that, as Wittgenstein characterises it (in alia voce) at RFM VI, 31:

"Once you have got hold of the rule, you have the route traced for you."

Suppose the rule governing a particular arithmetical series, for example, really is somehow able to determine its every *n*th place quite independently of any judgement or reaction of ours. Then since any feasible illustration of the rule will allow of alternative interpretations, generating conflicting verdicts about what should happen at places which were not explicitly illustrated, the alleged every-*n*th-place-determining 'something' which someone who correctly receives the illustrations somehow comes to have in mind—the "essential thing" which we "have to get him to guess" (Investigations 210)—is clearly at best imperfectly conveyable by illustration.

Sometimes we can say in other words what the intended rule is. But that will help only if the recipient is already a master of the vocabulary used in the alternative formulation. And such mastery cannot always be the product of explicit definition. Sooner or later, we have to hit

concepts which are acquired not by definitions and explanations but just by witness of and participation in illustrative practice.

The upshot is that the picture of rules-as-rails forces us to think of our ability to learn them, and thereby to know in a potentially endless range of cases what moves are in accord with them, as dependent on a kind of sub-cognitive felicity. Explanations come to be viewed not so much as explicitly communicating understanding as triggering a jump into an informational state by which the accord or clash with the rule of any proposed move is settled. Every competent rule-follower, the picture is, is the beneficiary of such informational states—and each of them packs in more information than explanations ever made explicit to him or he can ever make explicit to others. When Wittgenstein sets himself against this idea, as when he writes at RFM IV, 8

If you use a rule to give a description, you yourself do not know more than you say. If you say 'and so on', you yourself do not know more than 'and so on',

his concern is to challenge a dubious epistemological claim; but—the crucial point—he thereby challenges its parent rules-as-rails imagery which is simply a figurative expression of platonism.

Here is the second theme:

It might be preferable, in describing our most basic rule-governed responses, to think of them not as informed by intuition, or insight, but as a kind of decision. (Investigations 186 and 213; RFM VI, 24; Brown Book II, 5)

The point of contrast between 'decision' and 'intuition', or 'insight', is that the latter imply and the former serves to repudiate the suggestion that—even in the most basic cases, where one can say nothing by way of justification for one's particular way of proceeding—rule-following is a robustly cognitive accomplishment, viz. success in tracking an independently constituted requirement. 'Intuition' suggests knowledge in that robust sense—but immediate knowledge, knowledge too basic to admit of any further account. Wittgenstein is saying: don't think of it like that.

Why not? Well, what can we say to explain why these intuitions are reliable, why they are normally in harmony, as they are supposed to be, with the real requirements of a rule? What can be said to explain how a subject's ongoing impressions of those requirements might be non-accidentally correct? The idea that rule-following is at bottom a matter of immediate intuitive knowledge—allowing of no further account—opens it to an awkward sceptical challenge:

If intuition is an inner voice—how do I know *how* I am to obey it? And how do I know that it doesn't mislead me? For if it can guide me right, it can also guide me wrong. (Intuition an unnecessary shuffle.)
(Investigations 213)

You may say: "So what? Sceptical challenges are no novelty in philosophy." But this is nastier than most. Scepticism about other minds, or the material world, arises out of what seems like a mismatch between our conceptions, respectively, of the best kind of evidence we can have for the affected class of judgements and of the nature of the states of affairs which make them true. It can therefore in principle be addressed by showing that there is not really such a mismatch—showing either that the conceptions in question are somehow faulty and do not do justice to the relevant subject matter and our resources for knowing about it, or that it is after all good enough to rely on evidence of the apparently insufficient kind. Such responses may not be easy to construct in convincing detail, but at least we know a range of directions in which to fashion an attempt. Not so in the present case. Here, it seems, there is no possible response. For in the absence of any account of what could constitute the direction taken by a rule autonomously, independently of our most basic responses, there is no material with which to work in order to offset the charge of a mismatch. We simply have no idea what could constitute the direction taken by the rule off its own bat, as it were, if the deliverances of our intuitive faculties were to take us collectively off track—

....no model of this superlative fact.
(Investigations 192)

So we have no way in principle of addressing the question whether our impressions of the matter, as reflected in our basic responses, have any likelihood of reliability.

Note that Wittgenstein said only that it "would almost be more correct to say"—my emphasis—that decision rather than intuition is involved. Such a way of putting the matter has disadvantages of its own, not least its inaccurate suggestion of a felt absence of constraint (see Investigations 219). But at least it would avoid the cognitive vacuum of the alternative.

Here is the third theme:

Supposing that grasping a rule were indeed a matter of coming to have something 'in mind', how would one thereby be enabled to read off, step by step, what its requirements were? (Investigations 198, 209-13, 219, RFM VI, 38, 47.)

This theme is complementary to the second, and elaborates Wittgenstein's critique of a 'tracking' epistemology of basic rule-following. It is in this context that the line of thought is presented on which Kripke based his Sceptical Paradox:

'But how can a rule show me what I have to do at *this* point? Whatever I do is, on some interpretation, in accord with the rule.'—That is not what we ought to say, but rather: any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning. (Investigations 198)

Suppose I undergo some process of explanation—for instance, a substantial initial segment of some arithmetical series is written out for me—and as a result I somehow get the right rule 'in mind'. How, when it comes to the crunch—at an *n*th place which lies beyond the demonstrated initial segment, and which I have previously never thought about—does having the rule 'in mind' help? Well, with such an example one tends to think of having the rule 'in mind' on the model of imagining a formula, or something of that sort. But if so, we should concede that, strictly, merely having the rule in mind is no help. For I can have a formula in mind without knowing what it means. So—the response continues—it is necessary in addition to interpret the rule. But that response sets up the "paradox" of Investigations 198. Any selection for the *n*th place can be

reconciled, on some interpretation, with the rule. An interpretation of this thing I have in mind is of help to me, therefore, in my predicament at the nth place only if it is a correct interpretation. But to invoke the idea of correctness at this point makes the play with interpretation futile. For how am I to know which interpretation is correct? Presumably that is a judgement which must be regulated by further rules, rules for adjudicating among rival interpretations of rules. But then, if these further rules are to be any help to me, I will need to get them 'in mind' too and know in turn how they are properly interpreted—and that is to impose an infinitely regressive structure on one's recognition of the correct application of a rule.

How do these three themes interrelate? Suppose that what I take up from an episode of explanation, if it is successful, does indeed transcend that explanation and any other that I might give in turn. I come to have the right rule in mind but might, save for a kind of felicity, equally well have arrived at a wrong one, despite having overlooked no overt feature of the explanation. This idea, explicitly challenged by the first theme, connects with the second and third in that they jointly confront it with a problem:

How does the explanation-transcendent rule which I supposedly come to have 'in mind' tell me what to do in novel cases?

How does the rule, once 'in mind', help—what is the epistemology of acting on it? If it requires interpretation, that could be done in lots of ways. So how do I tell which interpretation is correct? If that calls for further rules—rules for determining correct interpretation of the original—then won't they raise the same difficulty again, thereby generating a regress? If, on the other hand, it is not necessary to interpret the original rule, then the only possible answer appears to be that I have some unmediated, intuitional contact with its requirements—the thought compromised by the second theme.

So this overall choreography of the three themes suggests itself. It comes naturally to us to think, with the platonist, of the objectivity of many of our practices,—including par excellence logic and mathematics—as residing in our following rules-as-rails, rules which somehow reach ahead of us and determine of themselves their every—both actual and counterfactual—proper

application. But if we have the capacity to keep track of rules when so conceived, we must be capable of somehow getting them 'in mind', notwithstanding the necessarily imperfect character of explanations—ultimately illustrations—of their application. The grasp of such a rule is thus seen as the internalisation of an open-ended set of pre-ordained requirements, an informational state accessible, as Wittgenstein had his interlocutor put it, only by a kind of guesswork. OK, let it be so. The question is then: what does the deployment of this 'informational state' consist in—how does it inform the actual practice of following the rule? Thinking of the rule as literally an object of consciousness—as a formula, or picture, or whatever—either raises the regress-of-interpretations paradox, or requires construal of the rule as 'self-interpreting', as it were; which is to say that the epistemology of it is conceived as intuitional, too primitive and immediate to allow of an account, and hence as vulnerable to the simple sceptical thought—again, not that of Kripke's Sceptic—of Investigations 213. Admittedly, it is more likely for most people, purely as phenomenology, that one thinks of the way in which the rule allegedly informs one's ongoing practice not in terms of something which is literally an object of consciousness—like a formula, or picture, or whispered instructions in the ear (Investigations 223)—but just in terms of a kind of inner confidence or sense of direction as one applies the rule. But that doesn't help to offset the problem. So represented, the epistemology of the step-by-step judgements involved in applying the rule comes across as irremediably intuitional, and thus vulnerable to the same sceptical attack. In short: think of the objectivity of rule-following on the model of the rules-as-rails picture, and you will be completely beggared for any satisfactory account of your ability to stay on track.

This adds up to an arresting and challenging train of thought. But I do not present it as the spine, so to speak, of the "rule-following considerations"—we still have further, crucial themes to consider. It is certainly a very significant component in Wittgenstein's discussion in the relevant sections of RFM and the Investigations, and it brings out one of his most fundamental and explicit preoccupations: the critique of platonism. But its main role in our present discussion is to set our exegetical problem.

III *Brief Comparison with Kripke*

One superficial difference between these ideas and those proposed by Kripke is the divergence in focus between the regress-of-interpretations paradox of Investigations 198-201, deployed in the third theme, and the Kripkean Sceptical Paradox. Kripke's Sceptic challenges his adversary to substantiate a claim to know what rule he formerly followed—the problem is to describe aspects of his former behaviour and/or mental life which take us to an identification of the former rule. The regress-of-interpretations paradox, by contrast, focuses on a particular conception of the path from a rule to a judgement about its proper application in a new case. The rule is assumed, as it were for reductio, to be in place—'in mind'—and the issue is, how does it help to have it there? Further, the problem is conceived as arising as a result of a certain specific (mis)conception of what rules are, one which pictures the relation between receiving an illustration of a practice and going on to participate in it successfully as essentially mediated by cognition of the requirements of something which has been interiorised. So not merely do the two paradoxes centre on different—though of course connected—kinds of question concerning rules, namely:

How is it possible to know which rule I (used to) follow?

versus

How is it possible to know what the rule which I grasp requires of me here?

In addition, while Kripke's Sceptic directs his paradox at the very existence of rules and rule-following, the 201 "paradox" is directed, as the text makes explicit, at what Wittgenstein regards as a misunderstanding of the nature and epistemology of rule-following—something which it should be possible to correct without calling into question the very reality of rules.⁹

⁹ Recall the passage in full:

But I would not be inclined to make too much of these differences. For one thing, the route from the rule 'in mind' to a recognition of its requirements in the present case cannot pose too much difficulty if one is allowed to help oneself to the content of the rule. So Wittgenstein must think that there is a problem about that: a problem about what fixes the content—what makes that interpretation of the rule correct. But that is exactly the question, initially focused on the past, that Kripke's Sceptic raised.

More important: while merely to correct a misunderstanding may have been Wittgenstein's intention, the question is, did he succeed in doing just that and no more than that? For to stress: if the interiorised, explanation-transcendent rule, with all its hopeless epistemological difficulties, is entrained by a platonist conception of the autonomy of rules, then that has to be a casualty too. So the distinguishability of Wittgenstein's view from Kripkean rule-scepticism would seem to be totally dependent on his ability to dislodge the worry that rules are nothing if they are not conceived in the platonist way. Unless that worry is dislodged, then while Kripke's account of the route in, as it were, may have involved somewhat free play with Wittgenstein's text, the terminus of the train of thought which I have described and that of Kripke's Sceptic threaten to be the same.

IV Wittgenstein on the Constitutive Question

Dislodging that worry would seem to require indicating an alternative: a conception of rules and rule-governed practices which allows a sufficient gap between the requirements of a rule and

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.

It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shews is that there is a ways 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.

subjects' reactions in any particular case to make space for something worth regarding as genuine normativity, yet stops short of the spurious autonomy which gave rise to the difficulties.

It seems clear enough what Wittgenstein regards as the sort of considerations which should point us towards the right perspective on the matter. They are the considerations which constitute the fourth theme focused on in my (1989):

Language, and all rule-governed institutions, are founded not in our internalisation of the same strongly autonomous, explanation-transcendent rules, whose requirements we then succeed, more or less, in collectively keeping track of, but in primitive dispositions of agreement in judgement and action. (Investigations 211, 217-9, 242; RFM VI, 39, 49)

The idea of an essential inner process—a cognitive routine—of rule-following is mythical. To express the matter dangerously, we need have nothing 'in mind' when we follow rules. The connection between the training and explanations which we receive and our subsequent practices is no doubt effected in ways which could only be sustained by conscious, thinking, intentional beings; but it is not mediated by the internalisation of explanation-transcendent rules that, in our training, we (something like) guessed at. It is, for epistemological purposes, a basic fact about us that ordinary forms of explanation and training do succeed in perpetuating practices of various kinds—that there is a shared uptake, a disposition to concur in novel judgements involving the concepts in question. The rules-as-rails mythology attempts an explanation of this fact. But the truth is the other way round: it is the basic agreement which sustains all rules and rule-governed institutions. The requirements which our rules impose upon us would not be violated if there were not this basic agreement; they would not so much as exist.

This aspect of Wittgenstein's thought is very familiar from the emphasis placed upon it in the secondary literature and, as the familiar often does, it can seem quite clear. But it is not clear. The difficulty is to stabilise it against a drift to a fatal simplification: the idea that the requirements of a rule, in any particular case, are simply whatever we take them to be. If the requirements of the rule are not constituted, as the platonist thinks, independently of our reaction to the case, what can be available to constitute them but our reaction? But that idea effectively

surrenders the notion of a requirement altogether. And Wittgenstein in any case explicitly cautions against it as a misreading of his intent (Investigations 241; cf. RFM VII, 40)¹⁰. In which case how do matters stand?

Wittgenstein says that the requirements of rules exist only within the framework of ongoing institutional activities which depend upon basic human propensities to agree in judgement; but he reminds us that such requirements are also, in any particular case, independent of our judgements, supplying standards in terms of which it may be right to regard those judgements, even if they are agreed upon, as incorrect. So we have been told what does not constitute the requirement of a rule in any particular case: it is not constituted by our agreement about the particular case, and it is not constituted autonomously, by a rule-as-rail, our ability to follow which would be epistemologically unaccountable. But we have not been told what does constitute it; all we have been told is that there would simply be no such requirements were it not for the phenomenon of actual, widespread human agreement in judgement.

To search Wittgenstein's texts for a more concrete positive suggestion about the constitutive question is to search in vain. His entire later conception of philosophical method seems to be conditioned by a mistrust of such constitutive questions. Consensus cannot constitute the requirements of a rule because we leave space for—and do, on occasion, actually make use of—the notion of a consensus based on ignorance or a mistake. That is a distinction to

¹⁰ Investigations 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. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.

RFM VII 40

A language game: to bring something *else*; to bring the *same*. Now, we can imagine how it is played.—But how can I explain it to anyone? I can give him this training.—But then how does he know what he is to bring next time as 'the same'—with what justice can I say he has brought the right thing or the wrong?—Of course, I know very well that in certain cases people would turn on me with signs of opposition.

And does this mean e.g. that the definition of "same" would be this: same is what all or most human beings with one voice take for the same?—Of course not.

For of course I don't make use of the agreement of human beings to affirm identity. What criterion do you use, then? None at all.

To use the word without a justification does not mean to use it wrongfully.

which our ordinary practices allow content. The thing to guard against is the tendency to erect a mythological picture of the distinction's content, the myth about rule-following challenged by the first three themes. The myth is active in the Platonist philosophy of mathematics, and in the Cartesian philosophy of inner experience. So it is important to expose it. But, once exposed, Wittgenstein seems to be saying, it does not need to be supplanted:

Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a 'proto-phenomenon'. That is, where we ought to have said: *this language-game is played* (Investigations 654).

No further account of the distinction—between an agreed move and a correct move—is necessary. Enough has been done when we have pointed out and defused philosophical misunderstandings of our linguistic practices in a way that avoids misdescription of their details. Our discourse of rules and meanings stands on its own feet. Platonism is a misunderstanding of it; but it does not need an alternative, better explanation to shore it up or otherwise account for the various locutions and distinctions which Platonism misunderstands.

V Wittgenstein's Quietism

The question I want to ask is: did Wittgenstein have any sound theoretical basis for this line? He is saying, in effect, that the problematic we reviewed in the first section is a tissue of confusion: that there is no well-conceived issue about the 'constitution' of facts about what rules require, or about how we might be able to keep track of such facts; that there is no real dilemma between platonist and communitarian views of the matter, and no constructive philosophical work to do by way of attempting to steer between its horns.¹¹ But what is the ground for this claim—is it mere pessimism about the prospects for a constructive account or is it possible to show that the aspiration is here misguided?

¹¹ As I attempted to do in Wright (1989)

The rubric I supplied for the fourth theme emphasised the primitiveness of our basic dispositions of classification and judgement. By this, I mean something coincident with—as I now propose to understand it—the metaphor of blindness which Wittgenstein introduces at Investigations §219. Here is the passage in full:

“All the steps are really already taken” means: I no longer have any choice. The rule, once stamped with a particular meaning, traces the lines along which it is to be followed through the whole of space. — But if something of this sort really were the case, how would it help?

No; my description only made sense if it was to be understood symbolically.—I should have said: *This is how it strikes me.*

When I obey a rule, I do not choose.

I obey the rule *blindly*.

What does Wittgenstein mean by saying that we follow rules blindly? Clearly he is thinking of cases of the utmost level of simplicity, where nothing takes place which would naturally be regarded as working out what the rule requires—cases where one’s response seems to be immediate and one can produce no reason for it, no explicit justification for the claim that it is allowable, or correct. So the cases in point presumably include whatever rules are involved in, for example, the simple classification of colours, or tastes, or secondary qualities generally, as well as in the examples on which Wittgenstein has been concentrating—judgements about what amounts to going on in the same way with respect to very simple diagrammatic or arithmetical series.

It would be a mistake, though, to take the point of the metaphor of ‘blindness’ as concerning the phenomenology of such judgements: that in making them (competently), one is not aware of any mediating process, any route to the judgement which one might recover and cite by way of justification for it, but is just smitten, as it were, by the judgement. This cannot be the whole of the matter. In fact, I do not think it is the point at all. ‘Blindness’, after all, is a poor metaphor for immediacy, and the phenomenology in question is merely that of immediacy. The judgements of a sighted person about her local environment will include many immediate ones; they are hardly blind on that account. Wittgenstein’s point is not (primarily) phenomenological. But then what is it?

Before we take that question head-on, we need to think further about the notion that sets our basic problem: the idea of the facts about what a given rule requires, allows or forbids. Consider instead the more complex kind of case, where one does reason one's way to a judgement about the proper application of a rule—for instance the case of castling in chess. Here we find the following kind of structure of judgement.

Rule: If neither King nor one of its Rooks has moved in the course of the game so far, and if the squares between them are unoccupied, and if neither the King nor any of those squares is in check to an opposing piece, then ...

Premise: In this game neither my King nor this Rook have yet been moved, the squares between them are unoccupied, and ...

Conclusion: I may castle now.

We may call this the modus ponens model of rule-following.¹² Clearly it is of very wide application. In fact, I make so bold as to suggest that it applies in all cases when it is appropriate to think of one's impressions about what is in accordance with a rule as worked out, and when, correlatively, there are explicit reasons to be given for those impressions by citing that working. Notice, however, that it is a feature of the model that one's knowledge of the rule is but one ingredient in one's movement to a correct application of the rule. There is a simple holism, broadly akin to that involving belief and desire in the explanation of behaviour. Just as no behaviour, however bizarre, conclusively defeats the ascription to a subject of, say, a particular desire—you can always compensate by making sufficiently radical adjustments in the ascription of beliefs and other desires to her—so no response, however aberrant, in and of itself defeats the claim that a subject correctly understands and intends to follow a particular rule—you can always make compensating adjustments by ascribing a misapprehension of the initial conditions for the application of a rule, as expressed in the minor premise in the modus ponens model. That makes it very easy to see that in such cases there can be no such thing as (what we may call) pure rule-

¹² Cf. Wright (1989), p. 256

following: that every judgement, or movement, made with the intent of compliance with a rule may go wrong not because the requirements of the rule are mistaken but—quite consistently with correct understanding of the rule—because of misapprehension of relevant features of the circumstances in which the rule is being applied.

Hard on the heels of that thought comes a generalisation: there is no pure rule-following not merely in cases that comfortably fit the modus ponens model but anywhere, however simple or basic the rule(s) involved. Even in cases, like the expansion of an arithmetical series, where there might be no perceptual input—because one is following the rule 'in one's head'—so no relevant risk of a perceptual mistake, judgements about the correctness, or permissibility of a next step will still depend on memory: on not losing track of what one has so far done. To approximate a case of pure rule-following, one would need to consider a rule whose application involves neither perceptual input nor any memory of previous stages, nor even any extended process (of which one might lose track) in executing a single stage—so that each correct application at any stage can be made in a fully informed way without any sensory input or knowledge of anything else one has done or judged. Maybe there could, as a limiting, degenerate case, be such a rule—when every application involves the same move, executed instantaneously in thought, in response to no input. But otherwise, and therefore in every interesting case, the idea of pure rule-following—rule-following where a correct grasp of the rule guarantees correct performance—is chimerical.

So what? Well, the general conception of the problem of rule-following with which we began was as follows: if it is to make sense to think of an activity as subject to rule, then there have to be facts about what the relevant rules require, or permit, and—if we are to subject our practice to those rules—we have to be in position to know what these facts are. So, as I put it, questions of constitution and epistemology seem to be directly raised by the very idea of normative constraint. We want to better understand how facts about the requirements of rules are constituted and how they are accessible to us. But the essential impurity of rule-following raises a question about what exactly are the 'facts about the requirements of rules'—what is their

canonical form of expression? If there is no pure rule-following, we cannot think of these facts as being the very same as the facts that make particular applications of rules, or judgements about what complies with them, correct. For the latter always involve additional elements—concerning context, or history, or the input to which the rule is to be applied.

It may be replied that, at least in cases where the modus ponens model is apt, there are still discrete judgements about what properly belongs to the rule and what belongs to the input provided by a situation in which an application of the rule is at issue. The separation is explicit in the model itself. What properly belongs to the rule corresponds to the conditional premise, Rule, in the modus ponens model—which will either be an explicit statement of the rule or a claimed consequence of one—while what corresponds to the situational input will be the minor premise, Premise. So the issues about constitution and epistemology may therefore intelligibly be focused on the former, or so it would seem.¹³ But the evident problem, of course, is that this way of looking at the matter will not transpose to the basic—"blind"—case. In basic cases—the very simplest kinds of rule-following, gestured at above—the modus ponens model seems inappropriate.

Wright (1989) having reached a similar point—

The ability successfully to follow a rule is thus to be viewed as, at each successive instance, the product of a number of cognitive responses which interact holistically in the production of the proper step. And some of these responses—correctly perceiving the set-up on the chess-board, for instance, or recollecting the expansion of the series to this point—do not strictly pertain to the rule but are possible for subjects who have no inkling of it—

observed something further:

Where R is the rule or set of rules in question, let us call the [other responses] *R-informed*. Now, an R-informed response need not be encapsulable in any judgement which the subject can articulate distinct from the output judgement, as it were—the judgement into which his or her R-informed and non-R-informed responses conjointly feed. In that respect, the chess example, in which the R- and non-R-informed components could be respectively explicitly entertained as the major and minor premises for a *modus ponens* step, is untypical. I cannot always have concepts *other* than those whose

¹³ One corollary of the separation is that the crudest form of consensualism about the requirements of rules need not imply a correspondingly crude consensualism about the truth of judgements informed by rule since the latter need no more be a matter of consensus than is the truth of the relevant minor premises concerning situational input.

governing rules I am trying to observe in a particular situation in terms of which I can formulate a separate judgement of the input to which these rules are to be applied. So I cannot always extricate and articulate a judgement which, conditionally on such a separate judgement of the input, formulates my impression of the requirements of the rules in a fashion which is neutral with respect to the correctness of my R-uninformed responses to the situation.¹⁴

So there is not just the holism to reckon with, blocking the possibility of pure rule-following. In addition, at least in basic cases, the contribution of grasp of the rule to the responses it informs is inextricable from the contribution of one's grasp of the prevailing circumstances. The clean separation effected by the modus ponens model between what belongs to the rule and what belongs to the situation to which it is to be applied is possible only in (relatively complex) cases where the conditions which trigger the application of the rule—those described in the antecedent of the relevant conditional—can be recognised and characterised in innocence of a mastery of the rule. That cannot be the situation generally.

My reaction to this consideration in the earlier paper was to focus on the—for my purposes then—easier case. The thesis I was there aiming to table was that, for the purposes of assessing any potential tension between the 'rule-following considerations' and 'the central project of theoretical linguistics', we should consider the impact of the former upon the status of the judgements—about grammaticality and content—which a systematic syntax and semantics for a natural language will generate concerning each of its strings. And a prime candidate for an encapsulation of that impact was, or so I argued, the thesis that such judgements were response dependent, that they failed ('the order of determination test': I wrote

The test, as so far considered, calls for a class of judgements about which we can raise the question of the relation between best opinion and truth. And the existence of such judgements is just what the inextricability point counsels us not to expect in general. Still, there are extricable cases. The example of castling in chess provided one. And, most significant in the present context, the comprehending response to a novel utterance provides another. Such a response will involve a set of beliefs about the utterance which someone could have who had no understanding of the language in question; but it will also involve a belief about what, modulo the former set, has been said—a paradigm, it would seem, of a rule-informed judgement. Rather than confront the awkwardness presented by inextricability, therefore, let me concentrate for our present purposes on such favourable cases: cases where the acceptability of a rule-informed response can be seen as a matter of the truth of a judgement which the

¹⁴ Reference

responder may be thought of as making. Our question, then, is: what makes for the truth of such rule-informed judgements?¹⁵

—and the counselled answer was, roughly: their being made—or coinciding with the judgements that would be made—under conditions of best judgement. On this view, the well-formedness/meaning of a compound expression are not self-standing properties of it but are constituted in the very impressions of its well-formedness/meaning which competent speakers form under appropriate conditions. That was the suggested lesson of the rule-following considerations as applied to the Chomskyan/Davidsonian enterprise; and the consequent question was whether such a response-dependent conception of the constitution of the syntactic and semantic properties of whole sentences left room for systematic syntax and semantics as genuinely explanatory empirical theories in the manner their principal architects had conceived.

That still seems to me to be a fascinating question to which I do not know of a fully convincing answer. Here, though—where our purpose is to try to get some kind of focus on the impact of the rule-following discussion quite generally—we have no option but to attend instead to the harder range of cases, where the modus ponens model seems to lapse as a framework for the explanation of a rule-governed response for the want of extricable major and minor premisses. This is the change of tack I advertised at the beginning. In these cases, the very want of such extricable judgements forestalls interpreting the impact of the rule-following considerations in the way just canvassed. There is simply no such thesis as that a given range of judgements, R, fail the order-of-determination test unless there is an extricable such range of judgements in the first place. Punkt.

Let us focus on the case of colour.¹⁶ Suppose, undeterred, we stubbornly try to assimilate predications of ‘red’ to the modus ponens model. The correctness of such a predication is thus to

15 Reference

16 Wittgenstein reference

be seen as the issue of an input condition of a certain character together with a rule associating such inputs precisely with the correctness of the predication:

Rule: if ...x..., it is correct to predicate 'red' of x

Premise: ...x...

Conclusion: it is correct to apply 'red' to x.

To conceive of predications of 'red' as rule-governed in the manner of the model accordingly requires an anterior concept, '...x...', whose satisfaction determines an input as appropriate for the application of the rule. But equally clearly, this concept can hardly be anything other than: red! So we get an interesting upshot: the stubborn extension of the modus ponens model to the cases Wittgenstein would seem to have in mind when he speaks of rule-following as 'blind' would demand that we think of linguistic competence in terms, broadly, of the Augustinian picture of language with which the Investigations begins, and from which it is a journey of recoil. The crucial aspect of the Augustinian picture for our purposes, of course, is not the confusion of meaning and naming which Wittgenstein himself fastens on in the immediately succeeding sections of the text, and on which his commentators have largely concentrated. It is the aspect, rather, that is highlighted a little later, at Investigations §32:

...And now, I think, we can say: Augustine describes the learning of human language as if the child came into a strange country and did not understand the language of the country; that is, as if it already had a language, only not this one. Or again: as if the child could already *think*, only not yet speak. And 'think' would here mean something like 'talk to itself'.

In short, the problem with extending the modus ponens model to cover all rule-following, including that involved in basic cases, is that it calls for a conceptual repertoire anterior to an understanding of any particular rule—the conceptual repertoire needed to grasp the input conditions, and the association of them with a certain mandated or permissible form of response which the rule effects. From the standpoint of the Investigations, this is a great mistake. With respect to a wide class of concepts, a grasp of them is not anterior to the ability to give them

competent linguistic expression but rather resides in that very ability. This need not be a commitment to holding that there is never any sense at all to be made of the idea of thought without language. But it is to repudiate the general picture of thought as an activity of the mind which language merely clothes.

If this is right, then a crucial component of Wittgenstein's thought about rule-following depends upon a perspective which, more than half a century after he put his ideas to paper, may have come—whether or not rightly—to seem non-compulsory to many contemporary philosophers: the conception of language not merely as a medium for the expression of thought but as—usually, though not exceptionlessly—enabling thought: as providing its very raw materials. From this perspective, the modus ponens model must lapse for basic cases. Basic cases—where rule-following is 'blind'—are cases where rule-following is uninformed by anterior reason-giving judgement—just like the attempts of a blind man to navigate in a strange environment.¹⁷ In such a case one follows a rule 'without reasons' in the precise sense that one's judgements about the input condition for correct application of the rule are not informed by the exercise of concepts other than that which the rule concerns—that is, the concept whose expression the rule regulates. Such a judgement is an ungrounded response in the precise sense that is not to be rationalised by the modus ponens (as I have suggested: the only possible) model—by the picture of rule and input as components of independent thought. It is still essentially the response of a rational subject, and still to be appraised within the categories of rationality—justification and truth. But it is an action for which the subject has and can have no reason—for the possession of such reasons and their appreciation as such would demand the

¹⁷ Of course, the analogy limps immediately after this point—the movements of the blind man will naturally be hesitant. But in basic rule following "I act quickly, with perfect certainty, and the lack of reasons does not trouble me" (Investigations §212.)

exercise of an anterior concept, in an independent judgement, of what made the action appropriate.¹⁸

So here is the resulting position. All rule-following involves basic rule-following. And basic—'blind'—rule-following, properly understood, is rule-following without reason—not in the sense of being phenomenologically immediate, or spontaneous in the way in which a good chess player may make a clever move without fully rationalising his grounds for it, but in a sense involving the inappropriateness of the modus ponens model. But that model represents the only extant shot—once again, I'm tempted to say, 'the only possible shot'—at the extrication of a class of judgements which would distinctively express the special facts about what rules require that the very idea of normativity seems to call for, and which—if we could somehow extricate them—would provide the necessary focal point for the issues concerning constitution and epistemology at the core of the 'problematic' about rule-following with which we started. So there has to be something wrong with that problematic. And what is wrong, it seems, is that in the basic case we do not really follow—are not really guided by—anything. The problematic invited us to try to construct an account of what, when we follow a particular rule, constitutes the facts about the direction in which, step by step, it guides us and how we are able to be responsive to its guidance. But in basic cases the invitation emerges, from Wittgenstein's perspective on the matter, as misconceived: for it presupposes a false conception of the sense in which basic rule following is rational. Basic rule following, like all rule following, is rational in the sense that it involves intentionality and a willingness to accept correction in the light of inadvertent breaches of the rule. But that is not to say that it involves responsiveness to the requirements of the rule, conceived as instructions, as it were, which can feature in thought and

¹⁸ A similar point should apply, if good, to the exercise of the concepts in the background repertoire with which Augustine accredits us. In basic cases, such exercises too will be blind: for it cannot always be that one's application of a concept is grounded in thoughts that involve the use of other concepts. What is not clear is whether thought, so conceived, should be regarded as involving the following of rules at all. (But that's a can of worms which I won't open here.)

rationally inform one's response. Yet the initial problematic—what constitutes the requirements of rules and how are we able to keep track of them—presupposes otherwise.

In summary: To say that in basic cases, we follow rules blindly or without reasons is to say that our moves are uninformed by an appreciation of facts about what the rules require. This is not meant to imply that it is inappropriate ever to describe someone as, say, knowing the rule(s) for the use of 'red', or as knowing what such a rule requires. Rather, it is a caution about how to understand such descriptions—or better: about how not to understand them. In any basic case, the lapse of the modus ponens model means that we should not think of this knowledge as a state which rationally underlies and enables competence, as knowledge of the rule for castling rationally underlies a chess player's successfully restricting the cases where she attempts to castle to situations where it is legal to do so. In basic cases there is no such underlying, rationalising knowledge enabling the competence. A fortiori there is no metaphysical issue about the character of the facts it is knowledge of, with Platonism and Communitarianism presenting the horns of a dilemma. The knowledge is the competence. Or so I take Wittgenstein to be saying. And that is why his own response to the rejection of platonism is quietist. A non-quietist response would be called for only if platonism had given a bad answer to a good question. Then one would have to try to give a better answer. But the question was bad too. The real error in platonism was not the unsustainability of its sublimated conception of rule-facts, or its vulnerable attendant epistemology. Rather the whole conception of rule-following to which it was a response was already an over-rationalisation—an implicit attempt to impose on rule-following everywhere a rational structure which can only engage the non-basic case.

VI *Matters Arising*

Let me close by noting four issues for further discussion.

- (i) First, if I am right, Wittgenstein's quietist response to his discussion of rule-following—his failure to provide any constructive alternative to a platonist conception of the matter, or even

to evince any sense that such an alternative is wanted—does indeed have a specific ‘theoretical basis’. Appendix I below offers some discussion of Wittgenstein’s quietist tendency in general—of his mistrust of philosophical ‘theorising’ in the very general sense in which, for example, platonism in the present context and dualism in the philosophy of mind provide ‘theories’ to underwrite, or explain, certain very general features of our linguistic practice. So far as I can see, however, the motivation for rule-following quietism which we have just reviewed, though entirely consistent with that general tendency, is of a different character. Somebody could disagree with Wittgenstein’s rejection of the explanatory and theoretical ambitions of philosophy in general, while still accepting that there was, for the special reason outlined, a fatal confusion in the initial problematic about rule-following.

(ii) Should we think of basic—blind—rule-following as rule-following at all? Does not the very idea of following a rule call for some role to be played by the content of the rule in rationalising one's response? Yet what we have been calling basic rule-following is just the case where nothing rationalises one's response: where reasons "give out" not just because one cannot articulate the reasons one has but because the very having of reasons would demand the superimposition of the modus ponens model in circumstances where there are no candidates for its ingredient premisses.

The point is independent of one's view of the Augustinian picture and the thought/language issue. What is the rule that informs a competent subject's judgement—not that it is correct to predicate "red" here but—that this is red?¹⁹ The attempt to impose the modus ponens model is if anything even less appropriate. Of course, there is anyway an awkwardness in thinking of judgement as, like the predication of an expression, a controllable act which one might selectively govern by an adopted rule. But the basic obstacle remains the lack of any

¹⁹ I continue to assume, for the sake of example, that (some) colour judgements should be regarded as basic. This is contestable, of course—one might think that they are rationalised by the exercise of a yet more primitive repertoire of judgements and rules involving concepts of appearance. But that bears on the example, not the point I am using it to make.

suitable background conceptual repertoire—necessary if the input condition and its association with the judgement in question are to feature in a rationalising syllogism—in terms of which the judgement might, even in principle, be controlled. If one rejects the Augustinian picture, then a basic judgement is already a linguistic act and so is not available to rationalise that same linguistic act. But the basic judgement is blind in any case, whatever one thinks of Augustine.

(iii) What is the relation between these ideas and the central motif in John McDowell's Mind and World? McDowell, as is familiar, is exercised in that book by the preconditions for the rationality of our most basic empirical judgements. His concern is to construct an alternative to what he regards as two flawed accounts: the idea of Davidson, that basic empirical judgements are rationally held insofar as and only insofar as they cohere within a wider network of judgements; and a version of the 'myth of the given', according to which basic empirical judgements are rationalised by the experiences which provoke them, even when these experiences are conceived as brute—conceptually inarticulate—inputs to consciousness. The first alternative leaves experience with a role to play only in the causation, rather than in the justification, of empirical belief; and the second tries, hopelessly, to conceive a merely causal relationship as a justificatory one. Mind and World's response is to insist that experience itself must be conceived as a rational (content-bearing) happening, something whose 'impact' on the consciousness of the subject should be conceived as intrinsically drawing on his conceptual capacities.

One may have—and indeed I have elsewhere expressed²⁰—misgivings about the way that McDowell views this dialectical landscape. But the question I want to table here is: is his demand, that we seek out a conception of experience—whatever exactly it takes to accomplish this—which enables it to provide reasons for basic empirical judgements consistent with Wittgenstein's idea that, in cases of basic rule-following, we judge without reason? McDowell, I

²⁰ References

believe, views his discussion as perfectly consonant with the main lines of Wittgenstein's later philosophy; indeed, specialised to the case of 'inner' experience, he regards the conception fashioned in Mind and World as in effect embodying the principal message of Wittgenstein's discussion of 'private language'. Yet there seems to be a flat-out collision: the need to conceive of experiences as standing in rational relations to basic empirical judgements can be no stronger than the need to regard such judgements as made for reasons in the first place. But Wittgenstein seems to be saying not merely that there is no such need, but that the opposing idea is a prime spur to a bogus metaphysical challenge and a prime cause of the confusions that arise when philosophers attempt to meet it.

(iv) Finally, and most crucially, there is the question of the stability of the quietist position which I have represented Wittgenstein as occupying. That position, after all, is not meant to be that of Kripke's Sceptic. It does not involve holding that there are no facts about what rules require. There is still to be something which, if I am to comply with the rules for the use of colour vocabulary in English, I ought to assent to when presented with the given coloured object; still something which, if I am to comply with the rule for the arithmetical series given by 'keep adding 2', I ought to say in the 501st place. There are still these and other facts of the same genre about what is required of us when we follow rules, even when we do so without reasons. Yet when we are concerned with basic rule-following, these facts are nothing to us—they are not appreciated as information and do not rationalise our response. Our response may come to us 'quickly, and with perfect certainty' as Wittgenstein says. But it is not informed by the rule. But then what explains the—presumed—coincidence between these 'quick, perfectly certain' but arational and uninformed responses and the requirements of the rules? If I really follow rules blindly, at least in basic cases, what stops it being just a miracle if my blind-if-confident responses happen to keep track of the rule—as if a blind man, unaided, were to succeed in tracking the exit signs to the taxi rank in a strange airport?

It can thus seem impossible to see how the position I have described can avoid the need for some constructive metaphysics. Surely we have to fashion some kind of understanding of the constitution of the requirements of a rule which—at least in basic cases—allows it precisely to be unmiraculous that competent people stay on track while innocent of any knowledge of those requirements—at least for any sense of ‘knowledge’ which would issue in possession of good underlying syllogistic reasons for following the rule as they do. It has to be no accident that basic—blind—rule-following is massively successful. But how can that be?

We need to be careful. What exactly is the datum to be explained? How do we know, after all, that basic rule-following is successful—if ‘successful’ means: tends to keep track of independently constituted requirements? And why should we care if it is not, provided we march in step sufficiently to ensure that communication does not founder on repeated unintelligible basic disagreements?

So to respond to the problem would be like responding to a traditional sceptic—one who charges that I have no ground for believing that there is an external world whose characteristics are broadly coincident with the way my experience represents them—with the thought that it hardly matters, for my life, if he is right provided my experience continues to sustain in its normal patterns of coherence. Slightly more sophisticatedly: if there really is a datum—the success of basic rule-following—then it better not be conceived as a tendency to alignment between our responses and independently established rule-requirements, as suggested by the analogy of the taxi-seeking blind man. If we so conceive it, it’s not a datum. What is uncontroversial is only that there is massive basic agreement. But that is no miracle: it is just what is to be expected of biologically and neurophysiologically similar creatures, hardwired and trained in similar ways. The philosopher, anyway, owes no explanation of the matter.²¹

²¹ [Wittgenstein references and quotes] Which is not to say this tendency to basic agreement is philosophically unimportant: On the contrary (RFM, VI, 21):

It is of the greatest importance that a dispute hardly ever arises between people about whether the colour of this object is the same as the colour of that, the length of this rod the same as the length of that, etc. This peaceful agreement is the characteristic surrounding of the use of the word “same”.

But this may not seem good enough. If we are to continue to speak, even in basic cases, about the requirements of rules, and about people's responding and judging in ways that do, or do not, accord with them, and if we regard the great majority of the population as routinely able to keep track of the requirements of the rules for, say, describing colours or developing simple arithmetical series, then we are crediting them with an accomplishment which we already describe by means of the imagery of alignment; and the success of our basic rule-following practices thus comes preconceived in terms of such imagery. So we—and Wittgenstein—should either abandon this way of talking or make some sense of it.

At this point we do, I think, confront Wittgenstein's more general quietist tendency discussed in Appendix I below. For Wittgenstein, the suspect notion in this protest is that of the need to 'make sense of' ordinary linguistic practice. Against this, he would be likely to insist that the problematical idiom—the imagery of alignment, etc.—already gets as much sense as it needs from its routine uses within the relevant linguistic practices. The idea that we need in addition to 'make sense' of it is just an example of the misguided drive towards philosophical theory: the urge to construct models to underwrite and explain what we have persuaded ourselves are problematical distinctions (for instance, pain accompanied and unaccompanied by pain behaviour, one and the same bodily movement performed intentionally and non-intentionally, and judgements in and out of line with the requirements of basic rules.)

Nevertheless there's one passage which suggests a different—more constructive—kind of response. This is from RFM VI, 28:

Someone asks me: What is the colour of this flower? I answer: "red", –
Are you absolutely sure? Yes, absolutely sure! But may I not have been deceived

And one must say something analogous about proceeding according to a rule.

No dispute breaks out over the question whether a proceeding was according to the rule or not. It doesn't come to blows, for example.

this belongs to the framework, out of which our language works (for example, gives a description).

and called the wrong colour “red”? No. The certainty with which I call the colour “red” is the rigidity of my measuring-rod, it is the rigidity from which I start. When I give descriptions, *that* is not to be brought into doubt.....this simply characterises what we call describing.

(I may of course even here assume a slip of the tongue, but nothing else.)

Following according to the rule is FUNDAMENTAL to our language-game. it characterises what we call description.

This is the similarity of my treatment with relativity theory, that it is so to speak a consideration about the clocks with which we compare events.

What is interesting here is the comparison between moves made in basic rule-following and what is taken as sure in measurement, relativistically viewed. As far as I know, Wittgenstein nowhere else makes this comparison. Of course it is by no means evident what comparison he has in mind. But the following is suggestive. In shifting to relativistic conceptions of time and space, we refuse content to the absolute standards needed to make sense of the idea that our clocks may or may not keep track of the absolutely correct time, or that our measuring devices may or may not be stable with respect to some absolute spatial metric. Absolute conceptions of space and time provide room for the possibility of certain kinds of transcendental error, occasioned by uniform but undetectable shifts in the values assumed by the absolute parameters: possibilities like that of everything uniformly, but undetectably, increasing in size, or of processes in the universe uniformly, but undetectably, slowing down. According to the absolute conception of a spatio-temporal parameter, P, an entity’s value with respect to P at a time t is determined by a measurement-independent ratio between its relevant quantity at t and that quantity, in respect of P, by reference to which our concept of the relevant unit for P was originally determined. The absolutist idea is that we fix the concept of a metre, say, as: that of the length at [such-and-such a date and time] of [a certain metal bar] at such-and-such a temperature, atmospheric pressure, etc. And then the truth-conditions for a claim about the length in metres of, say, my desktop is matter of the objective ratio between the quantity of space it occupies and that occupied by the relevant rod at the relevant time. The basic relativistic thought is then to abandon this conception of the truth-conditions of such claims as fixed by an external standard, and to view their

meanings as wholly grounded instead in our practices and techniques of comparative measurement.

Notice, however, that it is no implication of this adjustment that we should identify e.g. the length of an object with, say, the value that would be determined as the statistical mean of sufficiently many appropriately meticulous measurements using some specific appropriately rigorous technique—at least, it is no implication that the identification should be made as a matter of conceptual necessity. Such an operationalist account of the concept of an object's length would require our treatment of certain measurement techniques as canonical—as definitive in the determination of length. But so to dignify any specific technique, or range of techniques, is a move we may choose to decline, preferring to leave conceptual space for open-ended improvements, perhaps in the light of unforeseen theoretical developments, in the techniques we actually use. And if we do leave such space, it will always be possible to make sense of the idea of extensive—if marginal—error incurred by a range of measurement practices which are best for their time.

Here are the bare bones of the salient resulting analogy :-

Just as, from the relativistic standpoint, we abandon the idea that our measurement practices answer to absolute and independently constituted determinations of spatio-temporal values, instead regarding those very practices as grounding of our concepts of spatio-temporal parameters and of the content of statements concerning them—yet in doing so incur no commitment to any reductionist account of the truth-conditions of such statements (the length of an object still cannot be identified, as a matter of conceptual necessity, with what we would determine to be its length by contemporary best methods).....

So we should abandon the idea that in basic rule-following, our moves and judgements answer to independently constituted determinations of correctness, instead regarding our propensities to convergence as grounding our concepts of what it is to follow such rules correctly and the content of the judgements on which we converge—yet in doing so we likewise incur no commitment to any reductionist (consensualist) account of the truth-conditions of such judgements (what it is to follow a rule correctly still cannot be identified, as a matter of conceptual necessity, with what we, or most human beings, converge on).....

One crux to any convincing working out of the analogy would be to understand our lacking—if we do—of any definite conception of canonical conditions for the following of basic rules: conditions under which, as a matter of concept, we could not, except intentionally, go wrong. For if we do indeed lack such a definite conception for, say, predications of ‘red’, the explanation cannot plausibly be that it proves expedient, for theoretical reasons, open-endedly to provide for improvements in our assessment of colour—the analogue of the point suggested for spatial measurement and time-keeping in a relativistic setting. And in any case there are, of course, difficulties in fully understanding the relativistic perspective itself. But here I only wanted to log a reminder that Wittgenstein himself seems to make the analogy, and to table it for discussion. Maybe if it can be developed, we shall be able to locate the thrust of Wittgenstein’s discussion of rule-following more sharply.

Appendix I

A Note on Wittgenstein's Later Metaphilosophy

No leading philosopher has been more self-conscious about the nature of philosophy, and philosophical method, than Wittgenstein. This self-consciousness is a product of his conviction that the subject has been, for the most part, practised very badly, that what passes for “philosophical” thought is very often nonsensical, and that philosophy’s problems tend to be philosophers' fault.

1. A more traditional conception sees philosophy as the “Queen of the Sciences”: a region of enquiry in which, as in physics, or mathematics, we aim to discover truths. But the truths at which philosophy aims are of an especially profound kind: philosophy goes after the real essence of things—the nature of truth, what moral goodness consists in, the nature of time, and so on—even, traditionally, the nature and existence of God.

The idea that pure thought could be a self-sufficient tool of enquiry in this kind of way originated before the development of modern empirical science, and doubtless initially drew strength from the failure to distinguish between the empirical and the a priori. But even after that distinction is made, philosophy has clung on to the idea that there is a special province of especially profound truths—the province of Metaphysics—whose secrets are accessible to the traditional methods of analysis, reflection and inference.

Going along with this way of thinking is a certain conception of the objectivity of philosophical problems. Philosophers tend to think of themselves not as creating philosophical problems—in the sense in which a troublemaker creates problems—but rather as their discoverers. The problems are thought of as objectively there, available to be appreciated by anyone of sufficient sophistication and reflective capacity. In this respect, they are thought of as analogous to mathematical problems (as they are usually thought of). Arithmetical concepts, for instance, are available in principle to any rational thinker, to whom it will then be open to wonder

about the number and distribution of the primes, about how many perfect numbers there are, about the truth of what we call Goldbach's Conjecture (that every even number is the sum of two primes), etc. In the same way, according to the traditional conception, there are, for any sufficiently conceptually endowed, reflective thinker, objective problems about the possibility of knowledge of a material world, or of other minds, the nature of causation, the relationship between thought and language, and so on.

It goes with this general conception that philosophical discovery is potentially legitimately revisionary of ordinary ways of thinking and of ordinary practice. If we misconceive the nature of time, for instance, it cannot be ruled out that the misconception may have seeped into quite specialised forms of scientific and mathematical thought; so changes may be enjoined in those disciplines when the misconception is put right. If we are ignorant about the real nature of knowledge, it may be that when we know better, we will recognise that much of our customary application of the notion is misguided—for instance, that we ought not to see empirical science as, even in the best case, producing genuine knowledge.

On the traditional conception of philosophy, then, surprising—disconcerting or exciting—discoveries are on the cards. True, it is hard to think of many such discoveries that philosophers have actually made—they tend to be much better at confounding the argumentative constructs of their colleagues than at construction that actually works. But this lack of progress is not usually seen as a challenge to the picture of philosophy which I am outlining. You might think it would have to bring into question either the adequacy of philosophy's methods to its target subject matter,—the availability of that subject matter to reason and analysis—, or even the very existence of the subject matter: the ontology of deep conceptual truths which are supposed to be philosophy's proper concern. But philosophers are good at thinking up excuses for their lack of progress consistent with the traditional picture: Strawson, for instance, has plausibly claimed that philosophy's slow progress is largely owing to the fact that successive generations of philosophers cannot inherit from their predecessors in the way that is possible in science or mathematics, since each generation has to interpret and understand the problems and issues for

itself—like adolescents, each generation of philosophers has to make its own mistakes if it is to understand why they are mistakes, and this puts limits on the extent to which their wisdom, when they get it, can surpass that of earlier thinkers.

2. Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy, and philosophical method, as it emerges in the Investigations, is strikingly antithetical to all this. Set against the idea that philosophy is to penetrate to the (hidden) essences of certain difficult concepts—time, freedom, meaning, causation, truth, goodness, and so on—we find instead the notion that there are no hidden essences: that when a concept covers a seemingly diverse range of cases, that may just be the whole fact of the matter—there need be no underlying principle of unification. (This of course is the purpose of the notion of family resemblances).

[The traditional questions] see in the essence, not something that already lies open to view and that becomes surveyable by a rearrangement, but something that lies beneath the surface. Something that lies within, which we see when we look into a thing, and which an analysis digs out.

'The essence is hidden from us': this is the form our problem now assumes. We ask: 'What is language?', 'What is a proposition?' And the answer to these questions is to be given once and for all; and independently of any future experience. (92)

For Wittgenstein, the analytical pursuit of these hidden essences is an illusion. Everything we need to know is already on the surface. What the philosopher has to do is not penetrate behind the use of language, but to arrange the manifest facts of its use in the right kind of way, for it is thereby that our perplexities will be resolved.

Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.—Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us. (126)

... we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all explanation, and

description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problem. These are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognise those workings: in despite of an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language. (109).

Notice the conception of a philosophical problem which emerges here. Gone is the traditional idea of the objective conceptual difficulty, appreciable in principle by any rational thinker. It is replaced with the notion, to the contrary, that philosophical problems are muddles: confusions into which we fall, seduced by superficial aspects of our language, and a natural propensity to misconstrue the way it works.

The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language. These bumps make us see the value of the discovery. (119)

A philosophical problem has the form 'I don't know my way about' (123).

The task of the philosopher, then, is not to uncover conceptual truths (and hence conceptual mistakes) but rather to defuse the temptation to certain sorts of muddle:

What we 'are tempted to say' in such a case is, of course, not philosophy; but it is its raw material. Thus, for example, what a mathematician is inclined to say about the objectivity and reality of mathematical facts, is not a philosophy of mathematics, but something for philosophical treatment.

255 The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness. (254-5)

And of course, famously

What is your aim in philosophy?—to show the fly the way out of the fly bottle.
(309)

– somewhere it shouldn't have fetched up in the first place!

Given this conception of the nature of philosophical problems, and of the way in which they are to be resolved, the idea that philosophy might somehow sustain or undermine claims which are in some way foundational for our linguistic practice in a given area, and so prove potentially revisionary of it, is of course quite pre-empted. You get into philosophical trouble by failing to understand the way a particular language game works. Unpicking the knots of confusion, then, cannot possibly issue in a ground for criticism of that language game—

Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is. It also leaves mathematics as it is, and no mathematical discovery can advance it. A 'leading problem of mathematical logic' is for us a problem of mathematics like any other. (124)

So: an unglamorous and atraditional conception of philosophy—of its agenda, and of its proper methods—is being proposed. The business of philosophy is not the pursuit of—a special exalted kind of—truth but the mere dissolution of confusion. Philosophical problems are not standing intellectual difficulties, but the effects of language's 'bewitching our intelligence'. They are to be resolved not by penetrating to conceptual essences, but by a descriptive examination of the surface: reflection on the way language actually functions. And philosophy will give us no theories or explanations—on the contrary, the inclination to theorise, and especially to generalise, across diverse but superficially similar language games and forms of expressions is a prime source of philosophical confusion.

3 So much for Wittgenstein's 'official' conception of what he is about. But it can seem difficult to relate these meta-philosophical pronouncements to the actual course of events in the Investigations. Which exactly are the problems there treated for which the diagnosis is that they arise because we are misled by superficial similarities between different areas of discourse? To what extent can we see Wittgenstein's discussions as assembling reminders of things we know already (109) and thereby correcting our misunderstandings of certain forms of expression?

I think it's fair to say that a real integration of Wittgenstein's official conception of philosophy with his own practice is something which has so far eluded even the better commentary. But we are at least in position to identify two quite striking instances, each a fundamental problem, where Wittgenstein's procedures may be made out to accord pretty well with his official conception of the way philosophical problems arise and how they may be treated.

(i) *Rule-following and the "predetermination" of applications in advance.*

(A) Recall 188 and following. Wittgenstein writes:

188. Here I should first of all like to say: your idea was that the act of meaning the order had in its own way already traversed all those steps: that when you meant it your mind as it were flew ahead and took all those steps before you physically arrived at this or that one.

Thus you were inclined to use such expressions as: 'The steps are really already taken, even before I take them in writing or orally or in thought'. And it seems as if they were in some unique way predetermined, anticipated—as only the act of meaning can anticipate reality.

This passage is concerned with the idea that it can be perfectly proper to say that one meant a pupil, e.g., to continue a series in a particular way at a particular stage even in circumstances when one gave no explicit thought to that particular stage. So I can perfectly properly say, e.g., "Look: I meant you to continue, '1002, 1004, ... etc.'" even in a case where no thought was given to the continuation of the series after 1000. What 188 does is to portray an interpretation—a

particular way of taking—the propriety of such a remark. So the thought is: we are prone to misunderstand claims like, “I meant you to do so and so”, as reporting a queer process of mind which somehow had the power, without involving anything which amounted to an explicit contemplation of the case, to determine what would and wouldn’t do at every nth place. And, as Wittgenstein argues, we are bereft of any conception of what a state of mind could be which would do that, and when we look within, we find nothing remotely resembling such a thing. In short: we are inclined to misunderstand the avowal, “I meant you to do so and so at the nth stage”, as a report of our anterior state of mind which mysteriously anticipated the nth case. But that’s not what the avowal does.

Now recall what happens next:

189. ‘But are the steps then not determined by the algebraic formula?’—the question contains a mistake.

What mistake? As remarked, we are inclined to misunderstand “I meant you to do so and so at the nth place”, or “This formula determines the correct continuation of the series at every stage”. But the misunderstanding comes so naturally that we are inclined to react to criticism of it as though it invited denial of locutions of the kind in question—as though an intention left what should count as implementing it open, or as though formula like $x_n = (x_{n-1})^2$ did not determine the nth element of the series. The "mistake", then, is to think that in discarding the misinterpretation, we have to discard the locution. The locution is in good standing:

We use the expression: ‘The steps are determined by the formula ...’. How is it used?

And what Wittgenstein then proceeds to do is to draw our attention to what the use of such a claim actually accomplishes,—given that what it does not accomplish is to mark the fact that the

formula in question expresses a platonic rule-as-rail. §189 proceeds to explain two harmless, legitimate uses which such locutions do indeed have:

– it may be used to call attention to the uniformity of response which training in arithmetic is intended to and does secure—to such facts as that people will respond alike to the order “add three”, or all work out the same value for y given a value for x and the formula $y=x^2$. The implied contrast is then with the behaviour of people who are bewildered by such orders, or that of people whose responses are positive but various. Alternatively

– we may be effecting a distinction among formulae, contrasting their different kinds of use. For example, ' $y=x^2+1$ ' determines the value of y as a function of x ; whereas ' $y < x^2+y$ ', or ' $y = x^2+z$ ' do not. Dropping the idea of the “rule-as-rail” doesn't mean abandoning the distinction between these two kinds of formula, abandoning the notion of an arithmetical function. (Though it does of course mean that we can't explicate that notion in platonistic terms.)

(B) Another example in the area of rule-following (not explicitly treated by Wittgenstein) would be provided by the fact that, in very many areas, ordinary thought makes space for a contrast between what a majority or even a whole community may think and what it may really be correct to think.

Here comes the misunderstanding. “Correct to think”—that must mean, surely: what the rules governing the use of various relevant expressions require of us, modulo relevant aspects of the world. But now: if that can be independent of our actual considered judgement, then how can we think of the rules other than as determining verdicts in isolation from us and hence as, in effect, the hyper-objective kind of rule-as-rail that Wittgenstein's discussion targets?

That picture, however, is not imposed upon us by the mere legitimacy of locutions like “The currently accepted hypothesis is that P , but we could all be wrong”. Rather invoking the rule-as-rail is an explanation—an interpretation—of what such a locution is expressing, and a

bad one at that, because of its attendant hopeless philosophical difficulties. The therapy is to review the circumstances in which we do have practical use for a contrast between what whole communities, or bodies of experts, may think and what is really the case. When we review the circumstances in which such locutions have their home, we shall see that they are grounded in the defeasibility of ordinary standards of evidence, e.g., and in the consequent improbability of any particular point of view, and that an objectionable platonism simply doesn't have to be in the picture.

(ii) *First-person psychological ascriptions*

An equally important example, however, has to be that of 'avowals'. Some of the features that first person ascriptions of sensation, e.g., distinctively carry include their non-inferential character, their strong authority, and the incongruity of their embedding within expressions of doubt. Those are “grammatical” facts which sustain a superficial analogy with ordinary observational reports made under optimal conditions. So ordinary thought, always prone to generalise, tries to see them as just that—and is rapidly embroiled in all the difficulties of the Cartesian philosophy of mind. The Wittgensteinian solution is to realise that the Cartesian picture attempts a lay-philosophical explanation of something which needs no explanation— aspects of the primitive “grammar” of avowals: the rules of the ordinary psychological language game.²²

4. We are perhaps in a position to shed some light on an outstanding puzzle for the interpreter of the Investigations: the extent to which, his self-imposed 'grammar-descriptive' brief notwithstanding, Wittgenstein indulges in criticism of various notions—for instance, the Cartesian conception of the meaning of ascriptions of mental states. The solution is simply, presumably, that there is no real tension: philosophical puzzles arise, according to Wittgenstein,

²² The example is elaborated in my ()

from bad pictures, misinterpretations, generated by the desire to find explanations for features which belong to the 'grammar' of our language, and to let the—already misguided—search for these explanations be constrained by craving for generalisation. The products of these misguided tendencies are therefore, of course, open to analytical criticism. And they need to be criticised if we are to see them for what they are. The role of 'description' is rather in letting us see sharply what really belongs to our linguistic practices and what to our interpretation of them. With that distinction in relatively sharp relief, it will be possible to understand how our troublesome interpretations flourish by ignoring differences, and also to canvass other pictures—by way of therapeutic counterweight—to allow us to free our thinking from the habits of those interpretations. (It is presumably as such "counterweights"—rather than as alternative theoretical proposals of the very kind he warns against—that we are meant to take Wittgenstein's suggestions, for instance, that avowals are a form of expression, and his analogy between mathematical statements and commands.)

Appendix II

Wittgenstein on Rule-Following: illustrative quotations

First theme:

Investigations

208. Then am I defining “order” and “rule” by means of “regularity”?—How do I explain the meaning of “regular”, or “uniform”, “same” to anyone?—I shall explain these words to someone who, say, only speaks French by means of the corresponding French words. But if a person has not yet got the *concepts*, I shall teach him to use the words by means of *examples* and by *practice*.—And when I do this I do not communicate less to him than I know myself.

In the course of this teaching I shall show him the same colours, the same lengths, the same shapes, I shall make him find them and produce them, and so on. I shall, for instance, get him to continue an ornamental pattern uniformly when told to do so.—And also to continue progressions. And so, for example, when given : to go on:

I do it, he does it after me; and I influence him by expressions of agreement, rejection, expectation, encouragement. I let him go his way, or hold him back; and so on.

Imagine witnessing such teaching. None of the words would be explained by means of itself; there would be no logical circle.

The expressions “and so on”, “and so on ad infinitum” are also explained in this teaching. A gesture, among other things, might serve this purpose. the gesture that means “go on like this”, or “and so on” has a function comparable to that of pointing to an object or a place.

We should distinguish between the “and so on” which is, and the “and so on” which is not, an abbreviated notation. “And so on ad inf.” is *not* such an abbreviation. the fact that we cannot write down all the digits or π is not a human shortcoming, as mathematicians sometimes think.

Teaching which is not meant to apply to anything but the examples given is different from that which ‘*points beyond*’ them.

209. “But then doesn’t our understanding reach beyond all the examples? —A very queer expression, and a quite natural one! —

But is that *all*? Isn’t there a deeper explanation; or mustn’t at least the *understanding* of the explanation be deeper?—Well, have I myself a deeper understanding? Have I *got* more than I give in the explanation?—But then, whence the feeling that I have got more?

Is it like the case where I interpret what is not limited as a length that reaches beyond every length?

210. “But do you really explain to the other person what you yourself understand? Don’t you get him to *guess* the essential thing? you give him examples,—but he has to guess their drift, to guess your intention.”—Every explanation which I can give myself I give to him too.—“He guesses what I intend” would mean; various interpretations of my explanations come to his mind, and he lights on one of them. So in this case he could ask; and I could and should answer him.

RFM

IV, 8 If you use a rule to give a description, you yourself do not know more than you say. I.e. you yourself do not foresee the application that you will make of the rule in a particular case. If you say “and so on”, you yourself do not know more than “and so on”.

VI,17. I can train someone in a *uniform* activity. E.G. in drawing a line like this with a pencil on paper:

... ..

Now I ask myself, what is it that I want him to do? the answer is: He is always to go on as I have shown him. And what do I really mean by: he is always to go on in that way? the best answer to this that I can give myself, is an example like the one I have just given.

I would use this example in order to show him, and *also* to show myself, what I mean by uniform.

VI, 19 ...And again, I don't myself know any more about what I want from him, than what the example itself shows. I can of course paraphrase the rule in all sorts of different forms, but that makes it more intelligible only for someone who can already follow these paraphrases.

VI, 23 You do not yourself understand any more of the rule than you can explain.

"Rules-as-rails"

Inv.218 Whence comes the idea that the beginning of a series is a visible section of rails invisibly laid to infinity? Well, we might imagine rails instead of a rule. And infinitely long rails correspond to the unlimited application of a rule.

219 “All steps are really already taken” means” I no longer have any choice. the rule, once stamped with a particular meaning, traces the lines along which it is to be followed through the whole of space.—But if something of this sort really were the case, how would it help?

No; my description only made sense if it was to be understood symbolically.—I should have said: *this is how it strikes me*.

When I obey a rule, I do not choose.

I obey the rule *blindly*.

Second theme:**Investigations**

186 “What you are saying, then, comes to this: a new insight—intuition—is needed at every step to carry out the order ‘+n’ correctly.”—To carry it out correctly! How is it decided what is the right step to take at any particular stage?—“The right step is the one that accords with the order—as it was *meant*.” —So when you gave the order +2 you meant that he was to write 1002 after 1000—and did you also mean that he should write 1868 after 1866, and 1000036 after 100034, and so on—an infinite number of such propositions?—“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 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.

213 “But this initial segment of a series obviously admitted of various interpretations (e.g. by means of algebraic expressions) and so you must first have chosen *one* such interpretation.”—Not at all. A doubt was possible in certain circumstances. But that is not to say that I did doubt, or even could doubt. (There is something to said, which is connected with this, about the psychological ‘atmosphere’ of a process.)

So it must have been intuition that removed this doubt?—If intuition is an inner voice—how do I know *how* I am to obey it? And how do I know that it doesn’t mislead me? For if it can guide me right, it can also guide me wrong.

((Intuition an unnecessary shuffle.))

214. If you have to have an intuition in order to develop the series 1 2 3 4 ... you must also have one in order to develop the series 2 2 2

RFM

VI, 24. “I have a particular concept of the rule. If in this sense one follows it, then from that number one can only arrive at this one”. That is a spontaneous decision.

But why do I say “I *must*”, if it is my decision? Well, may it not be that I must decide?

Doesn’t its being a spontaneous decision merely mean: that’s how I act; ask for no reason!

You say you must; but cannot say what compels you.

I have a definite concept of the rule. I know what I have to do in any particular case. I know, that is I am in no doubt: it is obvious to me. I say “Of course”. I can give no reason.

When I say “I decide spontaneously”, naturally that does not mean: I consider which number would really be the best one here and then plump for ...

Brown Book

II, 5 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. And the mistake which we here and in a thousand similar cases are inclined to make is labelled by the word “to make” as we have used it in the sentence “It is no act of insight, intuition, which makes us use the rule as we do”, because there is an idea that ‘something must make us’ do what we do. And this again joins on to the confusion between cause and reason. *We need have no reason to follow the rule as we do.* The chain of reasons has an end.

Third theme:

Investigations

198. “But how can a rule shew me what I have to do at *this* point? Whatever I do is, on some interpretation, in accord with the rule”—that is not what we ought to say, but rather: any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning.

“Then can whatever I do be brought into accord with the rule?”—Let me ask this: what has the expression of a rule—say a sign-post—got to do with my actions? What sort of

connexion is there here?—Well, perhaps this one: I have been trained to react to this sign in a particular way, and now I do so react to it.

But that is only to give a causal connexion; to tell how it has come about that we now go by the sign-post; not what this going-by-the-sign really consists in. On the contrary; I have further indicated that a person goes by a sign-post only in so far as there exists a regular use of sign-posts, a custom.

RFM

VI, 38 “I know how I have to go” means: I am in no doubt how I have to go.

“How can one follow a rule?” That is what I should like to ask.

But how does it come about that I want to ask that, when after all I find no kind of difficulty in following a rule?

Here we obviously misunderstand the facts that lie before our eyes.

How can the word “Slab” indicate what I have to do, when after all I can bring any action into accord with any interpretation?

How can I follow a rule, when after all whatever I do can be interpreted as following it?

What must I know, in order to be able to obey the order? Is there some knowledge, which makes the rule followable only in this way? Sometimes I must know something, sometimes I must interpret the rule before I apply it.

Now, how was it possible for the rule to have been given an interpretation during instruction, an interpretation which reaches as far as to any arbitrary step?

And if this step was not named in the explanation, how then can we agree about what has to happen at this step, since after all whatever happens can be brought into accord with the rule and the examples?

Thus, you say, nothing definite has been said about these steps.

Interpretation comes to an end.

VI, 47. “But at every step I know absolutely what I have to do; what the rule demands of me.” The rule, as I conceive it. I don’t reason. The picture of the rule makes it clear how the picture of the series is to be continued.

“But I know at every step what I have to do. I see it quite clear before me. It may be boring, but there is no doubt what I have to do.”

Whence this certainty? But why do I ask that question? Is it not enough that this certainty exists? What for should I look for a source of it? (And I can indeed give *causes* of it.)

When someone, whom we fear to disobey, orders us to follow the rule ... which we understand, we shall write down number after number without any hesitation. And that is a typical kind of reaction to a rule.

.....

I can now determine to follow the rule (–.–) Á.

Like this: -.-.-.-.-.-.-.-
 But it is remarkable that I don't lose the meaning of the rule as I do it. For how do I hold it fast?
 But—how do I know that I do hold it fast, that I do not lose it?! It makes no sense at all to say I have held it fast unless there is such a thing as an outward mark of this. (If I were falling through space I might hold something, but not hold it still.)

Fourth theme:

Investigations

211. How can he *know* how he is to continue a pattern by himself—whatever instruction you give him?—Well, how do I know?—If that means “Have I reasons?” the answer is: my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act, without reasons.

212. 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.

217. “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 in 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.)

242. 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 judgements. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so.—It is one thing to describe methods of measurement, and another to obtain and state results of measurement. But what we call “measuring” is partly determined by a certain constancy in results of measurement.

RFM

VI, 39 It is true that *anything* can be somehow justified. But the phenomenon of language is based on regularity, on agreement in action.

Here it is of the greatest importance that all or the enormous majority of us agree in certain things. I can, e.g., be quite sure that the colour of this object will be called ‘green’ by far the most of the human beings who see it.

It would be imaginable that humans of different stocks possessed languages that all had the same vocabulary, but the meanings of the words were different. The word that meant green among one tribe, meant same among another, table for a third and so on. We could even imagine that the same sentences were used by the tribes, only with entirely different senses.

Now in this case I should not say that they spoke the same language.

We say that, in order to communicate, people must agree with one another about the meanings of words. But the criterion for this agreement is not just agreement with reference to

definitions, e.g., ostensive definitions—but *also* an agreement in judgements. It is essential for communication that we agree in a large number of judgements.

VI, 49 The agreement of humans that is a presupposition of logic is not an agreement in *opinions*, much less in opinions on questions of logic.