



## ANOTHER STRAND IN THE RULE-FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS\*

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper, I intend to show, first, that there is a misconception underlying two opposing readings of Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations, notably Kripke's sceptical reading and Baker and Hacker's reading. I believe that the correct characterization of this misunderstanding is the first step towards the correct way to read the rule-following considerations, since these readings are still subject to a philosophical confusion that Wittgenstein wants to dissolve. Then I present a commentary on the rule-following considerations inspired by the so-called resolute reading, more precisely, by the idea that Wittgenstein's main purpose is to undermine the philosophical illusion according to which we could contemplate our own practices from sideways on, that is, from a standpoint independent of all the human activities and reactions. In my reading I stress an often-neglected aspect of the rule-following considerations, namely the temporal aspect of language.

**KEYWORDS:** Rules; Scepticism; Agreement; Time.

**RESUMO:** Neste artigo, pretendo mostrar, em primeiro lugar, que há um equívoco subjacente a duas leituras opostas das considerações de Wittgenstein sobre seguir regras, a saber, a leitura cética de Kripke e a leitura de Baker e Hacker. Acredito que a caracterização correta desse mal-entendido é o primeiro passo em direção a uma maneira correta de compreender as considerações de seguir regras, uma vez que essas leituras estão sujeitas a uma confusão filosófica que Wittgenstein deseja dissolver. Em seguida, apresento um breve comentário das considerações sobre seguir regras inspirado na chamada leitura resoluta, mais precisamente, na ideia de que o principal objetivo de Wittgenstein é minar a ilusão filosófica segundo a qual poderíamos contemplar nossas próprias práticas de fora, isto é, de um ponto de vista independente de todas as atividades e reações humanas.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Regras; Ceticismo; Acordo; Tempo.

The title of this paper is borrowed from David Stern's "Another Strand in the Private Language Argument". In that paper, he argues that much of what has been written on Wittgenstein's discussion of private language takes for granted a certain orthodoxy about the nature of the so-called "private language argument". The orthodox approaches can be traced to

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early papers by Ayer, Rhees, Malcolm and Strawson as well as more recent contributions by Kenny and Kripke. Despite the differences in their readings, these authors accept some general assumptions about the nature and significance of the argument that can be summarized as follows: 1) the argument begins with a premise, or premises, about the nature of a private language; 2) it leads to the conclusion that such a language is impossible; 3) while the argument is neither fully nor clearly stated in the *Philosophical Investigations*, it is best understood as a deductive, *reductio ad absurdum* argument. These points are based on the assumption that the argument rests on a semantic or epistemic theory that sets limits to what we can say or know. In this sense, the orthodox readers “hold that the proof that a private language is impossible turns on showing it is ruled out by some set of systematic philosophical commitments about logic, meaning, and knowledge.” (Stern, 2010, p. 179) Stern, in turn, advocates a Pyrrhonian reading according to which Wittgenstein’s main contribution is precisely a criticism of the assumptions lying behind the desire for such arguments. The orthodox approaches mistakenly take the narrator’s voice in the dialogue that is characteristic of Wittgenstein’s style in the *Investigations* for Wittgenstein’s own view. Opposing this reading, one should point out, according to Stern, that Wittgenstein’s aim is not to present an argument that leads to a contradiction, but to show that this very argument depends on an overly simple conception of language and experience and that the very idea of a private language is more like an illusion. Read along Pyrrhonian lines, “Wittgenstein’s principal aim is not to provide an argument that a quite specific conception of private language leads to a contradiction, but rather to get his reader to see that the very idea of a private language cannot be coherently formulated” (Stern, 2011, p. 340). Stern recognizes affinities between his Pyrrhonian reading and a resolute reading such as the one advocated by Stephen Mulhall in *Wittgenstein’s Private Language*, insofar as both are inspired by Cavell’s reading of Wittgenstein. My aim in this paper is to propose a reading of the so-called rule-following considerations inspired by Cavell, McDowell and resolute readings of Wittgenstein, such as those presented by James Conant and Cora Diamond.<sup>2</sup> Although several resolute readers have commented on the rule-following considerations,<sup>3</sup> none of them has explored this other strand that Stern points out in Cavell’s reading. In the first part, I intend to show that, despite their differences, both Kripke’s and Baker and Hacker’s reading are subject to Conant’s objection to *pseudo-Tractarian* readings of the “private language argument”. In the second part, I propose an overall reading of the rule-

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<sup>2</sup> This means that I will not rely on the Pyrrhonian reading proposed by Stern. For Stern’s reading of the rule-following considerations, see Stern (2004, p. 139-170).

<sup>3</sup> See Minar (1991) and (1994), Goldfarb (1985), Mulhall (2001) and Lane (2017) and (2020).

following considerations along the lines of the resolute reading, stressing an often-neglected aspect, namely, the temporal dimension of language.

### 1. An Unnoticed Agreement: Kripke, Baker and Hacker

Kripke intends to present an interpretation of two “chapters” of the *Investigations*, namely the rule-following considerations and the so-called private language argument. As a matter of fact, he intends to show that the key to understanding the private language argument is to be found in the sections on rule-following. The sections beginning in §243 should then be read in the light of the preceding sections. First of all, this is due to the fact that the *Investigations* are not a systematic philosophical work. Its “perpetual dialectic”, in which the interlocutor’s voice is never definitively silenced, is a strong indication, according to Kripke, that the same point recurs more than once and at each time it is seen from different perspectives. Kripke summarizes his thesis as follows:

The basic structure of Wittgenstein’s approach can be presented briefly as follows: A certain problem, or in Humean terminology, a ‘sceptical paradox’, is presented concerning the notion of a rule. Following this, what Hume would have called a ‘sceptical solution’ to the problem is presented. There are two areas in which the force, both of the paradox and of its solution, are most likely to be ignored, and with respect to which Wittgenstein’s basic approach is most likely to seem incredible. One such area is the notion of a mathematical rule, such as the rule for addition. The other is our talk of our own inner experience, of sensations and other inner states. (Kripke, 1982, p. 3-4)

According to Kripke, the “sceptical paradox” is the one Wittgenstein mentions in §201: “This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule.” (PI, §201) In order to make clear what exactly is at stake, Kripke gives a mathematical example, despite recognizing that the problem arises for any significant use of language. Take the mathematical function of addition, denoted by the symbol “+” and the word “plus”. Since I have computed only a limited number of times in the past, I might ask if my past applications of the function determine its future applications. Take the computation “ $68 + 57 = 125$ ”. Applying the function to numerals such as 68 and 57, the computation seems correct both in the arithmetic sense of the symbol that denotes the operation and in the metalinguistic sense of the word “plus”, as we used them in the past to refer to the mathematical operation of addition. However, there seems to be no past fact about me that commands me how to apply the function in the present as well as in the future. A sceptic might well question that when I used the function in the past, I did it differently than I believed. What ensures that, when applying the symbol “+”, I did not inadvertently use it to denote

another function? The sceptic imagined by Kripke warns that perhaps all my past applications of the function of addition involved numbers smaller than 57 and that I actually applied another function, say, “quus”, symbolized by  $\oplus$  and defined as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}x \oplus y &= x + y, \text{ if } x, y < 57 \\ &= 5, \text{ otherwise}\end{aligned}$$

Therefore, the doubt falls on any past application: “Perhaps when I used the term ‘plus’ in the *past*, I always meant quus: by hypothesis I never gave myself any explicit directions that were incompatible with such a supposition.” (Kripke, 1982, p. 13) Consequently, when giving one or the other answer to the computation, there seems to be no justification, since there does not seem to be any fact to turn to in order to justify one or the other. Furthermore, Kripke notes that “there is no fact about me that distinguishes between my meaning a definite function by ‘plus’ (which determines my responses in new cases) and my meaning nothing at all.” (Kripke, 1982, p. 21) Even if one tried to answer the sceptic by appealing to a more fundamental rule, which is supposed to explain how the rule for the mathematical function should be applied, the paradox could be restated. The sceptic would simply repeat his argument at this supposedly more fundamental level. If, as Wittgenstein says, “explanations come to an end somewhere”, it seems necessary to find some rule that is not reducible to any other. But this alternative does not seem to be available. In the end, one is left with the same question: “How can I justify my present application of such a rule, when a sceptic could easily interpret it so as to yield any of an indefinite number of other results?” (Kripke, 1982, p. 17).

The way out of this *cul-de-sac* is a “sceptical solution”. Both the paradox and the solution presented by Wittgenstein are similar to Hume’s. Both formulate sceptical paradoxes regarding the nexus between past and future. The former questions the nexus between past “intention” or “meaning” and present or future practice – past intention regarding the function “plus” and the present calculation of, for example, “68 + 57 = 125”. The latter questions the inductive inferential nexus whereby a past event necessitates a future one. On the other hand, both present sceptical solutions to the paradoxes, which do not consist in refuting the sceptical arguments, but, on the contrary, in accepting their premises and in the subsequent analysis of common concepts and practices:

Our ordinary practice or belief is justified because – contrary appearances notwithstanding – it need not require the justification the sceptic has shown to be untenable (...) A sceptical solution may also involve (...) a sceptical analysis or

account of ordinary beliefs to rebut their *prima facie* reference to a metaphysical absurdity. (Kripke, 1982, p. 66-7)

An important aspect of Kripke's argument is the way in which he presents the change in Wittgenstein's philosophy from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*. Following Michael Dummett's interpretation, he maintains that Wittgenstein replaces the question "What must be the case for this sentence to be true?" with two others: "Under what conditions may this form of words be appropriately asserted (or denied)?" and "What is the role, and the utility, in our lives of our practice of asserting (or denying) the form of words under these conditions?". In short, Wittgenstein replaces a picture of language based on truth conditions with a picture based on *assertability conditions* or *justification conditions*. This leads to the following conclusion:

Wittgenstein finds a useful role in our lives for a 'language game' that licenses, under certain conditions, assertions that someone 'means such-and-such' and that his present application of a word 'accords' with what he 'meant' in the past. It turns out that this role, and these conditions, involve reference to a community. They are inapplicable to a single person considered in isolation. (Kripke, 1982, p. 79)

If one person is considered in isolation, the notion of a rule as guiding the person who adopts it has no substantive content, because, first, there are no facts and thus there are no truth conditions by virtue of which we could say that her present action agrees with her past intentions and, second, if this person follows the rule "privately", the most that could be said is that her action is justified by what she herself believes to be its justification. When we move on to the community, however, this picture is reversed. The assertability or justification conditions become public and sanctioned conditions: "Others in the community can check whether the putative rule follower is or is not giving particular responses that they endorse, that agree with their own." (Kripke, 1982, p. 101)

It is well known that Kripke's interpretation has been criticized over and over since the publication of *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* for the first time in 1981. Against such a reading, it has often been argued that Wittgenstein's remarks should not be interpreted as a sceptical argument, but as a *reductio ad absurdum*. Baker and Hacker, for example, argue that in §201 the response to the paradox is advanced in the form of a (literal) *reductio ad absurdum*: "For if every course of action can, on some arbitrary interpretation or another, be brought into accord with the rule, then by the same token it can be brought into conflict with it (...) Hence the very notions of *being in accord with* and *being in conflict with* are deprived of any meaning." (Baker and Hacker, 2009, p. 125) According to the commentators, Kripke's interpretation is wrong insofar as it considers that Wittgenstein subscribes to the sceptical

paradox, that is to say, such a reading is wrong because, first of all, it accepts as a premise the assimilation of the rule to an interpretation. According to them, one must reject the premise that underlies the paradox, and the way to do it would be to show that acceptance of this premise leads to an unacceptable conclusion. In my view, Baker and Hacker are right to say that Kripke's interpretation is wrong. However, I do not agree that the alleged argument presented by Wittgenstein takes the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*. Following the so-called resolute reading of Wittgenstein, I want to present an interpretation that rejects Kripke's sceptical interpretation as well as Baker and Hacker's alternative interpretation. I believe that understanding the misunderstandings of these interpretations allows us to see the right way to read Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations. In other words, I want to show that what is wrong with Kripke's interpretation and its critics may show the right way to understand Wittgenstein's considerations, since these interpretations are held captive by the very philosophical confusion that Wittgenstein wants to dissolve.

One can say that, according to Kripke, Wittgenstein's aim is to show 1) that the possibility of following a rule rests on certain conditions; 2) that the activity of following a rule by a person considered in isolation does not satisfy these conditions; and therefore 3) that such an assumption is impossible. Such a characterization of Kripke's reading is an adaptation of the characterization given by James Conant of orthodox readings of the so-called "private language argument".<sup>4</sup> This adaptation is justified, in my opinion, because Kripke intends, as previously said, to show the right way to read two "chapters" of the *Investigations*, in particular the sections on rule-following and the sections presenting the "private language argument". The argument, according to the orthodox reading considered by Conant, aims to show that a private language is something that cannot be, precisely because it runs afoul of what the *Investigations* teach us must be the case in order for any language to be possible. Although the target is no longer the idea of illogical language, as was the case in the *Tractatus*, but that of a private language, the general conclusion is similar: a private language is something that cannot be, and not just for some contingent reason. The non-contingent nature of this impossibility (and others like it) becomes clear as soon as we realize that when we try to talk about what we imagine as possible, when we imagine that there could be a private language, "we end up speaking nonsense; and we end up speaking nonsense here because we end up violating the conditions of the possibility

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<sup>4</sup> See Conant, 2004, p. 171-2. For a critique of the interpretation of the "private language argument" as a *reductio ad absurdum*, see Baker 2004.

of meaningful discourse.” (Conant, 2004, p. 173) But such an argument seems to be open to the following devastating charge:

The argument seeks to show that the very idea of a private language is inherently nonsensical and thus not a possible topic of discourse; but, insofar as talk of ‘a private language’ is employed with the aim of advancing an argument against the possibility of such a language, the argument would appear to presuppose the possibility of a language in which it is possible to speak of and frame thoughts about a private language – thoughts such as the thought ‘a private language is impossible’. Is the ‘thought’ that ‘a private language is impossible’ a thought or not? Is it something thinkable? The very structure of such an argument – one that aims to show that the very idea of a private language is one that cannot make sense – seems to presuppose the intelligibility of that which it seeks to show is unintelligible. (Conant, 2004, p. 174)

The same objection applies to Kripke’s interpretation of Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations. According to Kripke, the capacity to follow a rule depends on certain conditions, including the *assertability conditions* determined by the community. The act of following a rule by a person considered in isolation does not meet these conditions. However, for such an argument to be valid, the very assumption of a person considered in isolation following a rule must be meaningful, while the argument seeks to show that this assumption is something that cannot be, for the same reasons as “private language” cannot be. In other words, Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations seek to show that if one person is considered in isolation, the notion of a rule as guiding the person who adopts it can have *no* substantive content, but when one speaks of an individual considered in isolation in order to argue against this assumption, one assumes the intelligibility of the idea of a person following a rule in isolation. As Cora Diamond points out, the sentence “Smith is following a rule that no one but Smith could conceivably understand” must be discarded from language not because of what it would have to mean if we were to stick to the meanings determined independently for its parts, but because it is in the same position as the sentence “Smith is following an abracadabra.” (Diamond, 1991, p. 107) We see that the very structure of the argument supposed to be implicit in the rule-following considerations seems to presuppose the intelligibility of what Wittgenstein seeks to show is not meaningful.

The same could be said of Baker and Hacker’s interpretation. According to them, the relation between a rule and its applications is an internal one and the proposition which expresses such an internal relation is a grammatical proposition. Thus, to conceive the relationship between a rule and its applications as external, because it is mediated by an interpretation, would mean to deny a grammatical proposition, and that would mean violating the rules for the use of an expression. From the point of view of the resolute reading,

Wittgenstein's aim was to set us free from the very illusion of such a violation. According to the *Tractatus*, there can be no illogical thought which would violate the logical syntax of language, since what lies beyond the limit of thought is "simply nonsense"; likewise, in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, there can be no violation of the limits of grammar. Now, when criticizing Kripke, Baker and Hacker claim that the sceptical paradox is disguised nonsense. Scepticism about rules would be a negation of a conceptual truth and thus a violation of the limits of sense:

Far from §201 accepting a paradox and by-passing it by means of a 'sceptical solution', Wittgenstein shows that here, as elsewhere, a paradox is a paradox only in a defective surrounding. If this is remedied the appearance of paradox will vanish. For every paradox is disguised nonsense (and this one is barely even disguised!). (Baker and Hacker, 1984, p. 19)<sup>5</sup>

It is widely held to be a conceptual truth that to understand a proposition is to know what would be the case if it were true. The parallel for rules is at least as plausible, namely that to understand a rule is to know what would count as acting in accord with it. What this truism rules out as unintelligible is the supposition that a rule can be grasped in ignorance of how it is to be applied (...) In this way the rule-sceptic comes into conflict with a conceptual truth expressing an internal relation between rules and their applications (...) Rule-following skepticism transgresses the bounds of sense in concluding that there is no scope for objective knowledge about accord and conflicting with rules. (Baker and Hacker, 1984, p. 101)

Nonetheless, Baker and Hacker's reading faces at least four difficulties: 1) they attribute to Wittgenstein a *substantial conception of nonsense*. This conception incorrectly distinguishes between two kinds of nonsense: mere nonsense, which is simply unintelligible for it expresses no thought, and substantial nonsense, which is a "violation of logical syntax" in the case of the *Tractatus*, or a "violation of grammar" in the case of the so-called second Wittgenstein. I will not dwell on this, for this conception has been correctly criticized by James Conant and Cora Diamond<sup>6</sup>; 2) Baker and Hacker base their interpretation on the notion of internal relation, which Wittgenstein himself never mentions in his rule-following considerations<sup>7</sup>; 3) they assume a false asymmetry between grammatical proposition and nonsense. According to Baker and Hacker, the negation of a grammatical proposition is nonsense, while the grammatical

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<sup>5</sup> Baker and Hacker sum up here the difference between two types of nonsense that Hacker attributes to the *Tractatus* in his *Insight and illusion*: "Within the domain of nonsense we may distinguish overt from covert nonsense. Overt nonsense can be seen to be nonsense immediately. Thus, for example, 'Is the good more or less identical than the beautiful?' falls into the class of overt nonsense. But most of philosophy does not obviously violate the bounds of sense. It is covert nonsense for, in a way that is not perspicuous in ordinary language to the untutored mind, it violates the principles of the logical syntax of language." (Hacker, 1986, p. 18)

<sup>6</sup> For Conant's criticism of the "substantial conception of nonsense", see Conant (2001); for a similar criticism of a "natural conception of nonsense", see Diamond (1991).

<sup>7</sup> See Read (2021, p. 230).



proposition itself is not. This goes against what Wittgenstein warning in a manuscript of the so-called middle period: “When we hear the two propositions ‘This rod has a length’ and its negation ‘This rod has no length’, we take sides and favour the first sentence, instead of declaring them both as nonsense” (PG, §83); 4) by asserting that the solution to the paradox is a *reductio ad absurdum*, the commentators are subjected to the same objection as Kripke’s interpretation. One might ask: “how could any *reductio* argument deliver a genuine conclusion, by revealing the sheer nonsensicality of its apparent starting-point?” (Mulhall, 2007, p. 137). The *reductio ad absurdum* argument presupposes the intelligibility of the premise that it is supposed to show as nonsensical, for its premise is the negation of a grammatical proposition and, to this extent, it violates a grammatical rule. Unlike Baker and Hacker, one should say that if the premise of the argument negates a grammatical proposition, this is because the grammatical proposition and its negation are both nonsensical.

In order to avoid such problems, I want to clarify in what sense one must understand Wittgenstein’s claim in §201, according to which “there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an interpretation, but which, from case to case of application, is exhibited in what we call ‘following the rule’ and ‘going against it’” (PI, §201). In other words, I want to show, taking up McDowell’s reading, that the paradox is not compulsory and why it is not.

## 2. Rereading the Rule-Following Considerations

The so-called rule-following considerations begin with the discussion of an example that explicitly takes up the example of §143. In this section we had been introduced to a language game of giving and obeying orders, more specifically to a language game in which A gives an order and B has to write series of signs according to a certain rule of formation. First, B is trained to write the series of natural numbers from 0 to 9; then he must continue the series by himself. However, it may happen that he writes the numbers not in the right order and that the mistakes may be not just random but systematic, for example: instead of writing 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, ..., he writes 1, 0, 3, 2, 5, 4, .... Although there is no clear distinction between a random mistake and a systematic mistake, the difference between them seems to reside in a regularity in the series written by the pupil, that is, in the presence of a certain rule guiding his mistake. In §185 we are introduced to a variation of this language game:

Let us return to our example (143). Now, judged by the usual criteria, the pupil has mastered the series of natural numbers. Next (*Nun*) we teach him to write down other series of cardinal numbers and get him to the point of writing down, say, series of the form

0, n, 2n, 3n, etc.

at an order of the form “+ n”; so at the order “+ 1” he writes down the series of natural numbers. – Let’s suppose we have done exercises, and tested his understanding up to 1000.

Then we get the pupil to continue one series (say “+ 2”) beyond 1000 – and he writes 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012. (PI, §185)

The example is far from fortuitous. Once again, we are presented with a mistake that is not random but systematic. Although the pupil dominates the series of natural numbers, he is introduced *for the first time* to the rule “+2” and nothing seems to prevent him from interpreting the rule as follows:  $n + 2$ , if  $n \geq 0$  and  $n < 1000$ ;  $n + 4$  if  $n \geq 1000$  and  $n < 2000$ ;  $n + 6$  if  $n \geq 2000$  and  $n < 3000$ , etc. There is therefore a disagreement between the rule as it is meant by the instructor and the way the pupil understands the rule. The rule-following considerations begin with a case of disagreement due to the fact that the pupil is introduced *for the first time* to a certain practice of following rules of the form “+n” and therefore he does presuppose a practice of following it. In fact, the disagreement between the instructor and the pupil is established because the instructor presupposes, even if he is unaware, a practice of following the rule, whereas the pupil is not familiar with this practice, since he does not know the past applications of the rule. By using the pronoun “we”, Wittgenstein asks us to take the instructor’s point of view so that we can see what is wrong with his conception. It does not help to say to the pupil “Look what you’re doing!”, “You should have added *two*: look how you began the series!”, because the instructor does not realize, in principle, that he presupposes a regular practice of applying the expression “+2” and the pupil does not.

This very first section of rule-following considerations touches on a fundamental problem pointed out by Stanley Cavell in an often-quoted passage:

We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing ensures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing ensures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. (Cavell, 1976, p. 52)

Put in the terms of §185, the pupil learns the series of natural numbers in a certain context and is expected to be able to project the series in new contexts, that is, he is expected to be able to follow rules of the form “+n”, but nothing ensures that he will make the projection that he is expected to. The narrator’s statement at the beginning of §186 draws the consequence of what was said in the preceding section: “What you are saying, then, comes to this: a new insight – intuition – is needed at every step to carry out the order ‘+n’ correctly.” A remark

published in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* indicates that the intuition mentioned in this section is supposed to play the same role as a feeling of satisfaction would play: “Is it for example a feeling of satisfaction that accompanies the act of going according to the rule? Or an intuition (intimation) that tells me I have gone right?” (RFM VI, §16). There is a problem here though, because an intuition, as well as the feeling of satisfaction, plays the role of *tertium quid* between rule and application.<sup>8</sup> Faced with the question “How is it decided what is the right step to take at any particular point?”, the interlocutor seems to have no other option than to answer that it is necessary to introduce a third element – say, an interpretation – that is supposed to close the gap between rule and application. Now if a rule-formulation can only be understood by means of an interpretation, one could ask how this interpretation is to be understood. If this interpretation in turn is to be understood by means of a new interpretation, the question must be posed at a new, supposedly deeper, level.<sup>9</sup> If it is always necessary to introduce an interpretation as a *tertium quid*, one would fall into an infinite regress: the interpretation is only another rule-formulation, then it must also be interpreted and so on. The same problem can be put in other terms. Suppose we are presented with the series of numbers “3, 5, 7”. There may be a disagreement about which rule one is following, because any finite sequence of numbers is compatible with an infinite number of mathematical series. In other words, any finite sequence of applications is compatible with “a good number of rules.” (BB, p. 13) By considering this sequence in isolation, it is impossible to know whether it is a fragment of the series of prime numbers or of the series of odd numbers.<sup>10</sup> The grasp of the complete set of correct applications is underdetermined by the finite set of present and past applications of the rule. The fact that only finite subsets of the application of the rule are given to us may raise the doubt that at each step a different rule is being followed.<sup>11</sup>

The vertigo caused by the regress may lead one to adopt the opposite view according to which all transitions have already been made. Put in Wittgenstein’s own phrasing: given a rule, it seems, as the interlocutor says in §219, that “All the steps are really already taken”. If we accept this “mythological description”, it is as if the attribution of a meaning to any expression, for example, “+2”, meant that lines were drawn through the whole of space and as if these lines determined all the applications which follow the first number of the series. Let us recall the

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<sup>8</sup> Wittgenstein already criticized the need for a *tertium quid* between expectation and fulfillment in the beginning of the 1930s. See LWL, p. 9. For a commentary on Wittgenstein’s criticism of Russell, see Engelmann (2013, p. 73-7).

<sup>9</sup> See Minar (1994, p. 58).

<sup>10</sup> See Goldfarb (2012, p. 85).

<sup>11</sup> See McDowell (1998, p. 204-5).

metaphor given in §218: “Well, we might imagine rails instead of a rule. And infinitely long rails correspond to the unlimited application of a rule.” (PI, §218) In this description, the meaning of the rule transcends the finite set of its present and past applications and somehow contains all of its possible applications (present, past and future). According to it, following a rule presupposes “mastery of the practice [that] is pictured as something like engaging mental wheels with these objectively existing rails.” (McDowell, 1998, p. 203) In order to make sense of the “mythological description”, the rails must exist independently of the responses and reactions. In other words, the rule can only “seem to me to produce all its consequences in advance” (PI, §238), if we take a point of view which is independent of the responses which characterize the participation in practice. It is as if we could contemplate the relation between our language and reality and, therefore, as if we could contemplate our own practices “from sideways on – from a standpoint independent of all the human activities and reactions.” (McDowell 1998, p. 207) The impossibility of placing ourselves in this standpoint outside our practices means that we cannot instantly grasp the whole series “2, 4, 6, 8, ...”. There is an unbridgeable gulf between the postulation of an infinite series and our ability to grasp only a finite fragment of this series. The disagreement pictured by Wittgenstein in §185 as well as Kripke’s sceptical paradox can be seen as a consequence of this gulf. The paradox also forces the sceptic to contemplate our practices from sideways on, because one can only say that an individual does not follow the rule that he believes he is following by imagining that individual out of the actual practice of following the rule. The sceptic himself faces the following *cul-de-sac*:

Either he stays within our language-games and his words express a doubt but not the sort of super-doubt that he is after (...) or he will be led to speak ‘outside language-games,’ stripping his putative context of use of the concrete specificity (and hence the foothold for our criteria) which permits us to mean what we do on the occasions on which we ordinarily employ the word ‘doubt’ to express the concept of doubt. (Conant, 2005, p. 64)

Contrary to what orthodox readers believe, to equate the rule with an interpretation, even if only as a premise of a *reductio ad absurdum*, also implies to place oneself outside the practice of following a rule. Replacing one formulation with another indefinitely means that our words become idle. Such an assumption does not mean that we are violating a grammatical truth. It means that the sign which is supposed to symbolize the rule does not actually symbolize anything. This sign does not have meaning because one cannot stipulate any context in which it would make sense, for it is taken apart from any practice whatsoever. The regress should be seen as mere nonsense. However, the orthodox reader must assume that, in a certain way, it

makes sense to say the rule *is* an interpretation – even if, according to him, that assumption violates grammar – and that the regress itself makes sense in order to understand the *reductio ad absurdum* as a conclusive argument. In this case, the postulation of an infinite series of interpretations takes the place of the grasp of an infinite series, which means that one is once again placing oneself outside the actual practice of following a rule.

In fact, the rule-following considerations expose a dialectic between two conceptions that we are tempted to adopt if we conceive of rules detached from the actual practices of following them. John McDowell correctly notes that Wittgenstein intends to find a middle way between these conceptions:

Wittgenstein's problem is to steer a course between a Scylla and a Charybdis. Scylla is the idea that understanding is always interpretation. This idea is disastrous because embracing it confronts us with the dilemma: the choice between the paradox that there is no substance to meaning, on the one hand, and the fantastic mythology of the super-rigid machine, on the other. We can avoid Scylla by stressing that, say, calling something 'green' can be like crying 'Help!' when one is drowning – simply how one has learned to react to this situation. But then we risk steering on to Charybdis – the picture of a basic level at which there are no norms; if we embrace that, I have suggested, then we cannot prevent meaning from coming to seem an illusion. (McDowell, 1998, p. 242)

In §§185-242 of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein repeatedly addresses the dialectic between these conceptions in order to unfold its different aspects. One of these aspects, often neglected by commentators, concerns the temporal dimension of language. Cora Diamond is one of the few commentators who is attentive to this dimension in Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following. According to her, the significance of Wittgenstein's later discussions of what it is to follow a rule is to be seen as part of a perspective in which "the timelessness of what belongs to a rule (the timelessness that characterizes logic) is brought into connection with the look of human life containing rules." (Diamond, 1991, p. 5) In this passage, Diamond intends to draw our attention to a change of perspective in Wittgenstein's philosophy that characterizes the passage from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*.<sup>12</sup> This characterization of the change in Wittgenstein's later philosophy is to be read against the background of what he says in the *Investigations*: "We're talking about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not about some non-spatial, atemporal non-entity." (PI, §108) We shall see that Wittgenstein's path to a correct view of the temporal phenomenon of language goes through several stages.

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<sup>12</sup> Later in *Realistic Spirit*, she writes: "The notion of use itself and what is meant by giving or presenting it thus also changes: an expression is not presented timelessly – its use is not given – by the general form of the propositions it characterizes; use can be seen only as belonging to the spatial, temporal phenomenon of language." (Diamond, 1991, p. 33)

In a passage in his *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Wittgenstein explicitly addresses the dilemma pointed out by McDowell from the point of view of the temporal dimension of language:

If it is true that you can understand a symbol now, and that this means you can apply it properly – then, one is inclined to say, you must have the whole application in your mind.

It may be all in your mind: for example, a complete diagram, or a page with rules. I will [say], “Say what you like.”

But suppose we had the page of rules in our mind – does that necessarily mean we’ll apply the word rightly? Suppose we both had the same page of rules in our minds, would this guarantee that we both applied them alike? You may say, “No, he may apply them differently.” Whatever goes on in his mind at a particular moment does not guarantee that he will apply the word in a certain way in three minutes’ time.

Should we then say that a man can never know whether he understands a word? If we say this, where shall we stop? We can’t even say, “We will know it as time goes on.” Suppose there were six uses of the word “house”, and I used it correctly in each of the six ways; is it clear I will use it correctly the next time?

The use of the word “understand” is based on the fact that in an enormous majority of cases when we have applied certain tests, we are able to predict that a man will use the word in question in certain ways. If this were not the case, there would be no point in our using the word “understand” at all. (LFM, p. 23)

The understanding of a symbol seems to imply that one must have all the applications in mind. The apprehension of the whole application is taken as an instant understanding of the meaning of a symbol, that is, in order to grasp the meaning of a word it seems one must apprehend in the present all past, present, and future applications. However, Wittgenstein readily notes that, even if understanding is the instant apprehension of the whole applications, nothing in a diagram or a page with rules says how to apply the diagram or the rules in the future. Whatever goes on in someone’s mind at a particular moment, be it a complete diagram or a page with rules, does not guarantee that he will apply the word in a certain way in three minutes’ time. According to the example given by Wittgenstein, the six past applications of the word “house” do not ensure that the word will be applied correctly in the future. Put in terms of the rule-following considerations, the problem at stake here is the following: How do I know that I follow now, in applying a rule-formulation, the same rule that I followed until now? In his lectures given in 1939, Wittgenstein had not yet found a way out of the dilemma pointed out by McDowell. The last paragraph of the quotation above briefly mentions a point that would be taken up in the following years. The mention of “an enormous majority of cases” anticipates the role that notions such as constancy, regularity and agreement play in the rule-following considerations.

In order to understand what is at stake in this temporal aspect of language in general and in the activity of rule-following in particular, we must have in mind, as Denis Perrin remarks, that the struggle against the myth of the present is at the centre of Wittgenstein's reflection throughout the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>13</sup> Wittgenstein addresses this subject repeatedly in *The Big Typescript*. In chapter 36, he poses the following problem: "The most difficult problem seems to be the contrast, the relationship, between carrying out linguistic operations over time and the instant grasping of a sentence" (BT, p. 113). The problem arises from the attempt to reconcile the immediate experience of meaning, that is, the instantaneous understanding with time that inevitably takes the manipulation of linguistic signs, that is, the temporal extension of language. Unlike the phenomenological project of 1929, in the *Big Typescript* it is no longer the present understanding that poses a problem, but the relation and, at the same time, the opposition between that understanding and the use extended in time. How should one conceive the meaning beyond the present instant? There is a problematic assumption in the very formulation of the question, namely, that meaning is contained in an instant, and this assumption prevents Wittgenstein from finding an appropriate answer at the time he wrote *The Big Typescript*. The solution to the problem will be possible only when one does not conceive of time as an obstacle to meaning, but as one of its criteria: a word has meaning if it has a use that persists in time. This persistence of meaning should not be thought of as a mere reproduction that retains a meaning already apprehended, but as a grammatical regularity, since the former begins with the present instant of understanding and incorporates the temporal extension only *a posteriori*, while the latter recognizes the grammatical status of this temporal extension. In 1933 Wittgenstein did not have a way out of "the most difficult problem", for he still formulated the problem resorting to an assumption of his previous phenomenological project.

Wittgenstein also discusses in the *Investigations* the instant understanding of a word and a rule, but he does so in order to reveal the misleading pictures that accompany this conception of linguistic understanding. In §§138-9, he envisages the first, i.e., the instant understanding of a word:

But we *understand* the meaning of a word when we hear or say it; we grasp the meaning at a stroke, and what we grasp in this way is surely something different from the 'use' which is extended in time!

When someone says the word "cube" to me, for example, I know what it means. But can the whole *use* of the word come before my mind when I *understand* it in this way?

Yes; but on the other hand, isn't the meaning of the word also determined by this use? And can these ways of determining meaning conflict? Can what we grasp *at a*

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<sup>13</sup> See Perrin (2007, p. 166). I follow Perrin's analysis in this paragraph.

*stroke* agree with a use, fit or fail to fit it? And how can what is present to us in an instant, what comes before our mind in an instant, fit a *use*? (PI, §§138-9)

Wittgenstein's target in these sections is the *Bedeutungskörper* (meaning-body) picture of meaning.<sup>14</sup> The possibility of grasping the meaning of a word at a stroke may be seen as a consequence of this picture. There seems to be then a conflict between the grasping of the meaning at a stroke and the use of a word as extended in time. If we must recognize the meaning-body picture as prejudicial, how can we make sense of the idea that we grasp the meaning of a word at a stroke? The mistake lies precisely in seeing this grasping at a stroke as a consequence of the meaning-body picture. One cannot but answer affirmatively to Baker and Hacker's question "for surely the use of a word is something spread out over time, exhibited in the manifold applications of the word in different sentential contexts and circumstances of utterance?". In order to reveal the prejudicial consequences of the so-called meaning-body picture, Wittgenstein does not contrast it with an argument, for there is no sense in opposing a picture with an argument. As the later Gordon Baker says, "a picture is not subject to a *reductio ad absurdum* – in even the loosest sense." (Baker, 2004, p. 275) Since pictures are not correct or incorrect, pictures are to be contrasted with explanations of how we use words and, in particular, how the use is extended in time. According to the picture, the ways of using a word, whatever the context of this use, would be entirely determined by the meaning-body whose form would determine which combinations of other words in a proposition are permitted or forbidden. If one is held captive by this picture, one may believe that grasping the meaning of a word at a stroke is grasping instantaneously its whole use, as if the meaning-body comprised the whole meaning of the word. In §139, Wittgenstein proposes a "picture" (*Bild*), namely, that of a cube, in order to show the following:

The picture of the cube 'under-determines' the truth-conditions of its application and therefore those of the word 'cube': the simple instantaneous fact of the appearance of the mental image of the cube is compatible with multiple conditions of truth of its application and that of the word 'cube'. It is therefore mistaken to consider the phenomenon of instant understanding of a word as if it proved that all the semantic determination of the word was contained in the present moment of this understanding in the form of a body of meaning. However, this mythological version of instant understanding should not be confused with its ordinary version (...) the instant of understanding is embedded in certain circumstances and not isolated as the absolute semantic foundation of a word. (Perrin, 2007, p. 184)

In the rule-following considerations, Wittgenstein shows that this conception of meaning is connected to another prejudicial picture of rules, namely, that of rules as rails

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<sup>14</sup> See Baker and Hacker (2005, p. 294f.).



independent of actual practice, which would determine in advance all future applications. Baker and Hacker correctly point out that the first part of the *Investigations* is concerned with uprooting the *Bedeutungskörper* (meaning-body) conception of meaning in all its forms, while the rule-following considerations are concerned with the *Regelskörper* (rule-body) conception: “It aims to break the hold of a misguided conception of rules as mysteriously, magically, determining or constituting the meanings of expressions, and of understanding as a grasping of rules that then guide us along predetermined rails” (Baker and Hacker, 1984, p. 17). Nonetheless, Baker and Hacker do not realize that Wittgenstein’s concern with the meaning-body conception of meaning as well as his concern with the rule-body conception are part of the concern – that goes back to the middle period – with the temporal aspect of language. We must keep in mind that Wittgenstein does not reconsider the old questions to finally give them an answer. Questions like “But when do we grasp or understand a sentence?!” or “How long does it take to understand a sentence? And if one understands it for one hour, does one then always start out afresh?” (BT, p. 113) are no longer questions that Wittgenstein poses to himself. He puts this kind of question in the interlocutor’s mouth, and this indicates that it is not a matter of giving an answer to them, but of showing what is wrong with the problem itself.

In §§186-201, Wittgenstein addresses the dilemma pointed out by McDowell from the point of view of the temporal aspect of language. In §186, we read the following: “How is it decided what is the right step to take at any particular point?” – “The right step is the one that is in accordance with the order – as it was *meant*’.” (PI, §186) This last claim may be understood in two different senses: either the instructor/interlocutor meant that the pupil should write the next but one number after every number that he wrote or he means that he already knew, at the time when he gave the order, that the pupil should write 1002 after 1000, i.e., he already had anticipated each and every one of its future applications. But in either case, he is subjected to the following objection: the way the rule was meant *in the past* does not bridge the gulf between the rule-formulation and the future applications of the rule. One should note that in §187, Wittgenstein employs the adverb of time “damals” (back then, at the time) in order to highlight the temporal aspect.<sup>15</sup> The instructor does not realize that what is in question is precisely what, at any stage, follows from that sentence or “what at any stage we are to call ‘being in accordance’ with it (and with how you then meant it – whatever your meaning it may have

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<sup>15</sup> In §188 Wittgenstein introduces the temporal distinction between present and future by means of the mind/body dualism: it is as if the mind could anticipate all future applications by flying ahead. Once again, Wittgenstein twice employs an adverb of time – “ehe” (before) – to stress the temporal gulf between present and future applications of the rule.

consisted in).” (PI, §186) If we understand this horn of the dilemma as a sceptical paradox, it could now be extended, for at each new application of the rule we might ask whether or not this application conforms to the rule, that is, at each new application we could introduce a new interpretation to which the present and past applications would conform. In the *Brown Book*, Wittgenstein had already addressed the same point: “the past tense in the word ‘to mean’ suggests that a particular act of meaning had been performed when the rule was given” (BB, p. 142). In other words, it is as if the instructor at the moment of uttering the rule had already anticipated in the present all the future applications. But the problem is that, just as substituting one expression of the rule for another “does not bridge the gulf between it and the real transition”, the mental act of meaning does not either: “If the mere words of the rule could not anticipate a future transition, no more could any mental act accompanying these words” (BB, p. 143). One is therefore faced with the same dilemma: either what is the right step is determined by the fact that at the moment the rule was given the instructor had anticipated all future applications and understanding the rule is grasping its whole applications in an instant or, in order to avoid this assumption, what is the correct step is determined at each present application and one could ask at each step if it conforms to the rule as it was meant at the moment of teaching.

In §§191-197, Wittgenstein considers the claim that “It is as if we could grasp the whole use of the word at a stroke.”<sup>16</sup> Again, the problem at stake is the instant understanding of a symbol, i.e., the claim that understanding a symbol – more specifically, a rule – in the present means that one must have the whole application in one’s mind. In principle, there is “nothing astonishing, nothing strange” about this claim. It becomes strange or misleading when one is “led to think that the future development must in some way already be present in the act of grasping the use and yet isn’t present” (PI, §197). The first thing to notice is that by making this claim, the interlocutor does not have a model of this “inordinate fact”. When asked to give a model, we are seduced into using a super-expression, for instance, that of a machine. The machine as a model for the instant understanding of a rule means that “if we know the machine, everything else – that is the movements it will make – seem to be already completely determined” (PI, §193). It is as if the machine somehow contained in itself its future movements just as the instant understanding of a rule is meant to anticipate in the present all future applications. Therefore, the machine must be conceived of as a super-rigid machine that

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<sup>16</sup> Baker and Hacker correctly note that the German expression “mit einem Schlag” does not mean an insight, but *instant* understanding. See Baker and Hacker (1985, p. 113).

excludes the possibility of its parts bending, breaking off, melting, and so on, just as we are inclined to conceive of a rule apart from its actual use, i.e., independently of all the human activities and reactions, including the possibility of misunderstanding the rule, of interpreting it as the pupil does in §186. By conceiving of the machine as a super-mechanism, we cannot but conceive of it as something different whose movement is “predetermined in a different way from how the movement of any given actual machine is.” (PI, §193) By conceiving of rules in an analogous way we end up conceiving of “time as a strange medium.” (PI, §196)

The difficulty with this conception, to put it briefly, is the following: it is not possible to grasp the whole use of a rule at a stroke, because this use is underdetermined by the definition of the rule. It is not possible to grasp what a rule means at a stroke, independently of all the human activities and reactions, i.e., apart from its use extended in time. Considering the example given by Wittgenstein in §185, McDowell notes that “the evidence we have at any point for the presence of the pictured state is compatible with the supposition that, on some *future* occasion for its exercise, the behaviour elicited by the occasion will diverge from what we would count as correct.” (McDowell 1998, p. 204-5, my emphasis) This is due to the fact that the manifestation of understanding of a rule is accompanied by at most a finite fragment of the potentially infinite range of behaviour. Under the pressure of this challenge, we risk falling on the opposite side of the intolerable dilemma. The interlocutor raises the question “But how can a rule teach me what I have to do at *this* point?” and he answers: “After all, whatever I do can, on some interpretation, be made compatible with the rule” (PI, §198). We are facing here what McDowell calls Scylla, that is, the idea that understanding is always interpretation. The commentary that follows shows that acceptance of this idea would lead to an unacceptable conclusion: “Every interpretation hangs in the air together with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning.” (PI, §198) The idea that the meaning of a rule is an interpretation is nonsensical, because it would mean that there is no determination of meaning. It is not just a matter of saying that the rule may not have the meaning that we believe it has, but of saying that the rule has no meaning at all. It is noteworthy that the rule-following paradox makes its appearance only after the rejection of the possibility of grasping the rule at a stroke and the revelation of the prejudices of conceiving it according to the model of the super-rigid machine. Wittgenstein clearly sees the paradox as part of a larger dilemma. As a matter of fact, he introduces the paradox as a consequence of the untenability of one horn of the dilemma. It is not, therefore, a matter of accepting the paradox or, at least, the premise of the *reductio ad absurdum* according to which the meaning of the rule

is an interpretation. The rule-following considerations must be read as a “winding dialectic”<sup>17</sup> whose purpose is to free us from the prejudices we are led to if we accept one of the two sides of the dilemma.

A proper reading of the last sections of the rule-following considerations shows that Kripke’s interpretation misinterprets the notion of “agreement” and does not take into account the temporal aspect of language in this notion as well as in notions such as “constancy” and “regularity”. §§238-242 not only resume the discussion of the previous sections, but they also allow us to examine them in a new light:

Disputes do not break out (among mathematicians, say) over the question of whether or not a rule has been followed. People don’t come to blows over it, for example. This belongs to the scaffolding from which our language operates (for example, yields descriptions). (PI, p. §240)

One finds the exact same passage in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, but it is preceded by the following remark:

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”. (RFM VI, §21)

In order to say that an individual has followed a rule, that he has assigned a colour to an object, that he has measured the length of a rod, etc., it is necessary that this individual “does the same” (Z, §305), but there also needs to be an agreement among those who apply the rule, among those who assign colours to objects or measure rods, etc. One can only speak of the agreement between a rule and its applications if there is an agreement between those who apply the rule. This seems to confirm Kripke’s interpretation according to which the meaning of a rule is given by the assertability conditions sanctioned by the community. However, one must remember that Kripke speaks of “achieving agreement”, which makes Wittgenstein’s conception of agreement seem too contractual.<sup>18</sup> Contrariwise, as Cavell points out, the agreement on which our criteria are based, namely the agreement in judgments, depends on natural reactions, for example, the fact that we all walk in the same way. Furthermore, this agreement is not something that we come to or arrive at, but a kind of mutual harmony of voices, which exists from top to bottom, “like pitches or tones, or clocks, or weighing scales, or

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<sup>17</sup> James Conant employs this expression to characterize McDowell’s interpretation. See Conant (2012, p. 66).

<sup>18</sup> See Kripke (1982, p. 105).

columns of figures.” (Cavell 1979, p. 32) This is, as Conant puts it, an agreement where “we can form no coherent conception of what it would mean to abrogate it.” (Conant 1990, p. lxix)

If we do not come to an agreement, the absence of agreement on the application of the rules, the assignment of colours to the objects, the result of the measurements, etc. would make it impossible to imagine its non-existence:

“If humans were not in general agreed about the colours of things, if undetermined cases were not exceptional, then our concept of colour could not exist.” No: – our concept *would* not exist. (Z, §351)

The absence of the agreement would not mean that there was somehow the concept of colour, but that it could not have a place in our life. The agreement establishes the limits within which the concept of colour has a meaningful use. Without the agreement, these limits would not be given, that is to say, there would be no concept of colour. The question “Are natural and human regularities a necessary condition for the establishing of a unit of measurement, or is it conceptually possible to have measurement in spite of the absence of such regularities?” is simply meaningless. Wittgenstein rejects the very idea behind the question, that is, the idea that we could separate a complex life with colour terms, a life involving agreement, on the one hand, and the fact that there is the concept of colour, on the other, as if it were possible to conceive the existence of the concept of colour independently of the complex life with colour terms and the agreement in its application.<sup>19</sup> It is precisely this impossibility that Kripke’s sceptical paradox makes seem possible: “If one person, when asked to compute ‘68+57’ answered ‘125’, another ‘5’, and another ‘13’, if there was no general agreement in the community responses, the game of attributing concepts to individuals – as we have described it – could not exist.” (Kripke, 1982, p. 96) If we conceive of the agreement as something we achieve, we could conceive of the agreement as not being given. Indeed, sceptical doubt presupposes that the agreement is suspended. It is as if we could conceive of the suspension of the agreement in order to be able to come to it *a posteriori*. However, this is precisely what, according to Wittgenstein, turns out to be impossible. It is not possible to conceive of the inexistence of the agreement, because that would mean being able to examine the rules in a situation where they would not have the meaning that they actually have. The sceptic’s hypothesis that if an individual is considered in isolation, the rule he follows has no substantive content backfires, because what the sceptic does is precisely to consider the rules regardless of practice and agreement and, therefore, his own hypothesis turns out to be meaningless.

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<sup>19</sup> See Diamond (1989: 19).

The last two sections of the rule-following considerations, in which the notions of “agreement” and “constancy” are introduced, can be read as a dissolution of the dilemma mentioned by McDowell. These sections must be read in the context of one of the major achievements of Wittgenstein’s transition to his later philosophy, which consisted in seeing language as a temporal phenomenon, that is to say as a practice extended in time. This is only possible “by taking seriously the idea that language is a ‘use extended in time’, and consequently, by granting a grammatical status to the temporality of language, in particular to the physiognomic feature of ‘regularity’.” (Perrin, 2007, p. 177) In §241, Wittgenstein says:

“So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?” – What is true or false is what human beings *say*; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree. This is agreement not in opinions, but rather in form of life. (PI, §241)

It should be noted that Wittgenstein says that it is *in* language and not *on* language that human beings agree. The word “in” confirms what was said before: it is not possible to contemplate our own practices “from sideways on”. In other words, we cannot look at the language from the outside, from a standpoint independent of all the human activities and reactions because we are always immersed in linguistic practices. The agreement Wittgenstein is speaking of is neither previous nor posterior to our practices, which means that there is no normativity prior to or below our linguistic practices, and this normativity does not result from a community agreement at which we arrive. The fact that men agree in language means that they agree not only in definitions, but also in their judgments, i.e. in the application of rules and concepts, in the acceptance and correction of mathematical proofs, in the results of calculations, etc.

Agreement in judgments also determines what human beings mean by their rules, concepts, etc. in contexts of use, because one can never know what a rule, a concept, a unit of measurement, etc. means when it is viewed in isolation from the circumstances of application. In another context, Wittgenstein repeats what he says in §241, but he introduces an important variation: “There is a consensus but it is not a consensus of opinion. We all act the same way, walk the same way, count the same way.” (LFM, 184) These words clarify one of the aspects present in the expression “agreement in form of life”: this agreement consists of a variety of activities and presupposes regularity in the exercise of such activities. Counting, as well as giving orders, asking questions, telling stories, etc. “are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing.” (PI, §25)

In §242, Wittgenstein elucidates what it means to say that “it is in language that men agree”:

It is not only agreement in definitions, but also (odd as it may sound) agreement in judgements that is required for communication by means of language. 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 in part determined by a certain constancy in results of measurement. (PI, §242)

The first sentence indicates that there must be a community of reactions in order to declare that we share the same criteria. The agreement in the judgments expresses constancy in the results of the application of colour concepts, rules, units of measurement, etc. It is not enough to learn what “blue” means by looking at a colour chart. We must always be immersed in the game of assigning colours to objects. According to the illuminating example given by Schulte: “what winning and losing mean is learned not by studying rules but by watching people at play and their reactions, and by joining in the game with them.” (Schulte, 1992, p. 119) Likewise, we do not learn what our concepts, rules or units of measure mean except by engaging in the practice of applying concepts, rules or units of measure. As already pointed out, the agreement in question here is an agreement of mutual reactions and this agreement supposes the regularity in the exercise of activities such as assigning colours to objects, following rules or measuring objects, distances, etc. The “constancy” in the results of operations establishes the regularity on which the “phenomenon of language is based” (RFM VI, §39). The words “constancy” and “regularity” express, according to Perrin, the temporal extension of the language:

If the meaning of a term is determined and decided in its use (rather than by means of an original, illusory institution), it is precisely the temporal trait of the “constancy (Konstanz)” of that use that Wittgenstein points out in order to underline the determinate character of this meaning: “agreement in the judgments” consists in its “constancy”; I must at the same time obtain the same results for the same measuring operation at each time and employ the measure in the same way as the other members of the community (...) If a certain frequency in the common application of our expressions disappears, we can no longer say that we share the same criteria. (Perrin, 2007, p. 223)

Although I agree with this interpretation of the temporal dimension of the notion of constancy, I believe that we must reformulate its conclusion. Rather than saying “if a certain frequency in the common application of our expressions disappears, we can no longer say that we share the same criteria”, it would be better to say: if a certain frequency in the common application of our expressions disappears, there would not even be such criteria. This is precisely what Perrin suggests in the following passage:

This word [regularity] expresses the *temporal extension*, since in many cases regularity appears only if units of time are distinguished (we make regular visits to

someone only if we visit them on certain distinct days) – “regular” resembles, for this reason, “constant” (...) If Wittgenstein does not define the rule by regularity, he thinks, however, that the former depends grammatically on the second, that is, that *a rule would not exist without a regularity of regular action*. And this specifically means that the rule must have been applied a number of times for it to receive this status. Consequently, regularity has a clearly temporal meaning, because in assuming it, the rule generally supposes a multiplicity of identical applications and an effective “continuation” (*Fortsetzung*) of the application of the rule over time. (Perrin, 2007, p. 204, my emphasis)

If we go back to §201, we realize that the solution or dissolution of the paradox is already in its formulation. One could say that the error on which the paradox is based is due to the fact, to borrow Diamond’s expression, that the sceptic does not “look in the right place”. The paradox can only be formulated “if we consider the rule *on vacation*, i.e., if we try to understand it outside of any occasion of application.” (Perrin, 2011, p. 98-9) The temptation to say that any action which is performed according to the rule is an interpretation results from the temptation to consider the understanding of a rule independently of the occasions in which the applications of that rule are adequate reactions. Shortly after formulating the paradox, Wittgenstein draws our attention to the fact that “interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning” (PI, §198) or that “one should speak of interpretation only when one expression of a rule is substituted for another” (PI, §201). As we have already seen, such a substitution of one expression of the rule for another never comes to a determination of the meaning of the sign which is supposed to express the rule. An expression of a rule admits interpretations. However, an interpretation requires a context of significant use. According to the example given by Charles Travis, if I say “The sails were red”, someone may ask whether those words are to be understood in a way such as to be true if the sails’ red look was just the work of a sunset, or such as then to be untrue. The correction of the affirmative or negative answer depends on the circumstances in which I spoke (Travis, 2011, p. 310). My words may of course be interpreted, but these words can only be interpreted on the occasion of use where they already have a meaning. The supposition that the meaning of a rule *is* an interpretation, an assumption shared by Kripke’s sceptical paradox and Baker and Hacker’s *reductio ad absurdum*, requires that we conceive the inconceivable, i.e., that we conceive of the rules outside any occasion of use. In addition, the sceptical paradox requires that we deliberately ignore the temporal dimension of the language either because there is no “past fact that *justifies* my present response” (Kripke, 1982, p. 24), or because it does not assign a role to the temporal dimension in the agreement in the judgments. There is, of course, no past fact, as the sceptic argues, but that does not mean that past applications of a rule cannot determine how the rule applies in the future. The



agreement in the judgments expresses that we have applied a rule the same way in the past and that we should continue to apply it this way in the future.

In his lectures on the foundations of mathematics, Wittgenstein introduces a thought experiment which is similar to Kripke's hypothesis concerning an elementary mathematical operation:

Suppose we in this room are inventing arithmetic. We have a technique of counting, but there is so far no multiplication. Suppose that I now make the following experiment. I give Lewy a multiplication. – We have invented multiplication up to 100; that is, we've written down things like  $81 \times 63$  but have never yet written down things like  $123 \times 489$ . I say to him, "You know what you've done so far. Now do the same sort of thing for these two numbers." – I assume he does what we usually do. This is an experiment – and one which we may later adopt as a calculation. (LFM, p. 95)

The assumption that arithmetic is being invented in the present means that we cannot resort to past facts to determine the meaning of the multiplication sign. This seems to confirm what was suggested by the sceptic imagined by Kripke. However, it is important to note that Wittgenstein never raises a sceptical doubt. Although all past applications of the rule have been made with numbers less than 100, this does not mean that we do not know what to do with numbers greater than 100. Past results and a certain technique of applying the rule-formulation gives us everything we need to apply the rule in the future. Wittgenstein goes even further: from the moment we establish a way according to which we must act, according to which we must apply the rule-formulation, "*now* there is a right and wrong. Before there was not." (LFM, p. 95) In other words, right and wrong only exist if there is (temporal) constancy in the way of acting. Paradoxically, Kripke formulates the sceptical paradox in temporal terms, questioning the nexus between past intention or meaning and present or future practice, but the very formulation of the paradox ignores the temporal extension of language. In addition, Wittgenstein formulates the paradox as the counterpart of the conception according to which all transitions have already been made and which are possible to apprehend instantly. If we properly consider the temporal dimension of language and, in particular, the temporal dimension of the agreement in judgments, this conception as well as its counterpart – the sceptical paradox – lose their sense. If the temporal aspect of language is properly considered, the paradox turns out to be a false problem.

Kripke takes the criticism that is carried out in the rule-following considerations to be what this criticism calls into question. Following Conant, it can be said that "what Kripke calls 'scepticism about meaning' is a species of skepticism which Wittgenstein seeks to treat (...) the paradox which Kripke finds in Wittgenstein is one that Wittgenstein seeks to address."

(Conant, 2012, p. 62). As a matter of fact, the paradox in §201 is a version of what Conant calls a Kantian sceptical paradox, which can be formulated in the following question: “How can a sequence of marks or noises so much as seem to mean something?”. However, despite this parallel, the contrast between the Kantian way with scepticism and what one might call the Wittgensteinian way with scepticism is also revealing:

The Kantian way compels the sceptic to progress further and further forward, further and further from the ordinary, and deeper and deeper into philosophical perplexity, to an ever more violent form of questioning, to the point at which the sceptic’s question consumes itself. The Wittgensteinian way adds to this pressure an additional one that seeks to bring the sceptic back to the place where he started, where he already is and never left, but in such a way that he is able to recognize it for the first time. (Conant, 2012, p. 64)

If we look back at the beginning of the rule-following considerations, we can now see that they begin with a case of disagreement. This shows that the agreement in definitions is not sufficient. The instructor says “what I meant was, that he should write the next but one number after *every* number that he wrote” (PI, §186), but the fact that he and the pupil did not agree in this definition is only revealed in the series of applications. It is the disagreement in the judgments that reveals the disagreement in the definition. Wittgenstein points out the role that the agreement in judgments plays in the activity of following a rule, in determining what we call “measuring”, etc. The agreement in judgments reveals that we apply the same rule, that we apply a formulation as the formulation of the same rule, according to the same technique of application. This what Wittgenstein means when he says that “there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an interpretation, but which, from case to case of application, is exhibited in what we call ‘following the rule’ and ‘going against it’” (PI, p. §201).

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