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One keeps forgetting to go right down to the foundations.
One doesn't put the questions marks deep enough down.[i]

Introduction

Was Wittgenstein a realist? Was he an anti-realist? Or did he offer materials to "deconstruct" the debate, being sceptical whether either side had a coherent position, or fought over a coherent issue? The answer, I shall show, is not at all simple. And it bears heavily on the correct interpretation of the famous rule-following passages.

Here is a view of the later work, given forthright expression by Sabina Lovibond:

> What Wittgenstein offers us, in the Philosophical Investigations and elsewhere in his later work, is a homogeneous or "seamless" conception of language. It is a conception free from invidious comparisons between different regions of discourse … On this view, the only legitimate role for the idea of "reality" is that in which it is coordinated with (or, as Wittgenstein might have said — cf. *Philosophical Investigations* *136 — "belongs with") the metaphysically neutral idea of "talking about something" … It follows that "reference to an objective reality" cannot intelligibly be set up as a target which some propositions — or rather, some utterances couched in the indicative mood — may hit, while others fall short. If something has the grammatical form of a proposition, then it is a proposition."[ii]

This view of the later Wittgenstein is not unique to Lovibond. It is a view that many writers have put into the service of a fairly blanket "unpretentious realism" about all areas of discourse. Richard Rorty, who is probably the best known advocate of the view, talks of the Wittgenstein-Sellars-Quine-Davidson attack on distinctions between classes of sentences, an outcome of the impossibility of any "attempt to say 'how language relates to the world' by saying what *makes* certain sentences true."[iii] He presents Wittgenstein as sharing a broadly Davidsonian attitude to any attempt to develop either a substantive realism, or a substantive, anti-realism about such topics as the moral, the modal, or the psychological. These attempts founder through being attempts to "step outside our own skins", contemplating from some superior standpoint how well we are managing to depict reality. But there is no such standpoint. Let us call this attitude to Wittgenstein the received view. On a polemical version of the received view, it is not only that Wittgenstein himself was hostile to theorising in either a realistic or an anti-realistic direction about one area or another, but that he was right to be hostile: we have learned from him that no such issues arise.

It is one thing to deconstruct a debate, but another to announce that one side has won. However, one can see why someone might want to describe this Wittgenstein as an unpretentious realist. For holding, as he did, a redundancy theory of truth he can pass without cost from any assertion p, to "p is true", and to "p is really true/corresponds to the facts/says how things are or really are …". Nothing is *added* by these locutions; hence we can hear Wittgenstein saying things that supposedly define realism — there really are values, numbers, possible worlds, rules, intentions. It is just that an old-style realist thought these things implied a theory, or that they were difficult to say, or took some earning. The new style thinks that they need no theory; they go without saying, once one is committed to the discourse. And since they go without saying, any attempt to rebut them — to say that an

assertion does not correspond to the facts, etc., is merely a way of denying it. It is not a *second order* remark of any kind.

I return to Wittgenstein's use of the redundancy theory in due course, after seeking to show that virtually everything in the received view is false to his later philosophy.

There is just one element of Lovibond's quotation with which I am not concerned. I believe she is right that Wittgenstein was not interested in "invidious" comparisons. He had no interest in the role of philosophy as critic of any aspect of our form of life, and these are the aspects that issue in one linguistic form, one language game or another. Wittgenstein had little sympathy with scepticism about areas, or "error theories", although he did, as I shall show, have sympathy with close cousins: the view that in some areas the surface form of discourse misleads us into bad philosophical theory. What I do deny is that he was not interested in any comparison at all, of a kind that could properly lead us to think that one kind of theory ("realism") sustains the attributions of truth and falsity in one domain, and another kind ("anti-realism") in another.

So do we have, in the later Wittgenstein, a writer bent on showing that reference to an objective reality is something that is aimed at by all indicative sentences, all of which express propositions, in the same way? Even before looking at detail, it ought to seem uncomfortable. At the most cursory glance Wittgenstein's later work is shot through with warnings against taking surface uniformity as a safe guide to deep similarity of linguistic functioning. He wrote that "we remain unconscious of the prodigious diversity of all the everyday language-games because the clothing of our language makes everything alike".[iv] Or "the basic evil of Russell's logic, as also of mine in the Tractatus, is that what a proposition is is illustrated by a few commonplace examples, and then pre-supposed as understood in full generality".[v] He even told Drury that he had thought of using a quotation from King Lear, "I'll teach you differences" as a motto for the *Philosophical Investigations*.[vi] So how could a doctrine that simply ploughs through potential differences of function, usefully be attributed to him?

The defence has to be that the doctrine in question is, as it were, to *little* to be intended to plough through anything. Its import is that terms like "corresponds with (describes, refers to) reality (the facts)" are to be given the same deflationary interpretation as "is true" on the redundancy view. And this, it will be urged, is not a doctrine that irons out differences — it leaves all the room there can be for charting the differences of activity, or differences of "language game" lying behind the emergence of different kinds of content. It is not, for example, that ethics is science, or that mathematics is psychology, but that if each of them issues in propositions, then those propositions equally purport to describe their respective aspects of reality — the scientific, ethical, mathematical or psychological.

Let us suppose we allow this. Its main effect, one might think, is to shift attention away from *proposition* — a term that is now firmly cemented to the notions of reality and fact — and onto the prior question of whether all indicative sentences express propositions — that is, whether they all share the role of purporting to describe reality or the facts. Lovibond canters straight past this one: she leaves no doubt that Wittgenstein offers us a picture in which it is automatic: "if something has the grammatical form of a proposition, then it is a proposition". In other words, her Wittgenstein holds not only (a) that propositions are all equally subject to assessment as true or false, in terms of correlative notions of fact or reality, but also (b) anything with the grammatical form of an indicative sentence expresses a proposition.

Considered by itself (a) by itself is not obviously objectionable, for it may merely ask us to rope together the family of terms: proposition, true, false, description, fact, reality.

However, even here we must be careful. As already explained it is tempting to see (a) as justifying a universal "metaphysically unpretentious" realism. But more accurate theorists (including, we shall see, Wittgenstein) see it as justifying no "ism" at all. It is a name without a doctrine, simply not in the space in which illuminating descriptions of discourse can exist. But this does not mean that there is no such space. Nor did Wittgenstein think that it did. Nor does it follow that descriptions from that space cannot properly be thought of as realistic or anti-realistic. I shall try to justify each of these claims in time, but meanwhile note how very much more ambitious is the conjunction of (a) with (b). For with (b) we have an uncontentious, syntactic, road to propositions, and thence, via (a) to the constitution of reality as represented in our thought.

We might indeed notice that thesis (b) may be ambiguous, depending on whether we use "grammar" in a normal sense, or in a more specialist, Wittgensteinian sense, in which virtually anything philosophical contributes to grammar. I take it that the former reading is intended, firstly because the class of sentences at issue is defined grammatically in that sense (indicatives), but secondly because the latter reading trivializes the thesis (grammatical indicative coming to equal propositions by definition), leaving us to find yet another term for indicatives-by-normal-standards, whose proposition-expressing function needs thought.

I now look in detail at four different areas in which the later philosophy is quite explicitly concerned with the very differences that, according to the received view, it denies. These are the philosophy of ethics, of necessity and arithmetic, of psychology, and of knowledge. They are, in fact, the four areas in which Wittgenstein worked in sufficient detail for us to know how he thought of the family of indicative sentences.[vii] In each of them he explicitly and centrally contradicts the conjunction of (a) and (b), and sometimes each separately.

1. *Ethics*

In the "Lecture on Ethics" Wittgenstein considers what he calls judgments of absolute value, by contrast with the "trivial or relative" sense in which we talk of good chairs, good tennis-players.[viii] He makes many claims about such judgments, the central one of which is that no statement of fact can ever be, or imply, a judgment of absolute value. He considers the "book of the world" as it might be written by an omniscient person, containing "all relative judgments of value and all true scientific propositions and in fact all true propositions that can be made" (note especially the last clause).[ix] Even if we make sure that our book describes all human feelings "there will simply be facts, facts, and facts but no Ethics". "Ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural and our words will only express fact; as a teacup will only hold a teacup full of water and if I were to pour out a gallon over it". Considering statements of absolute value he urges that "no state of affairs has the coercive power of an absolute judge", and goes on to consider various states of mind lying in the region of the ethical (wonder, fear, or a feeling of safety, or of the miracle of existence) en route to the idea that a certain characteristic misuse of our language runs through *all* ethical and religious expressions. It is as if they are similes, but "as soon as we try to drop the simile and simply to state the facts which stand behind it, we find that there are no such facts". He can see "not only that no description that I can think of would do to describe what I mean by absolute value, but that I would reject every significant description that anybody could possibly suggest, *ab initio*, on the ground of its significance". Finally, what it (Ethics) says "does not add to our knowledge in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the

human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it".[x]

I have heard the "Lecture on Ethics" discounted as a "positivist" work, written as it was in 1929-30.[xi] But there is no evidence that he ever changed his view. It is not as if later he said, as the received Wittgenstein ought to say "of course my lecture was hopeless: ethics describes facts — ethical facts. Nor is he *merely* contrasting ethical facts with scientific ones. For he explicitly adds that the book of the world contains not only all scientific truths, but all truths, but still no Ethics. And the *thrust* of the lecture must surely be that it is from a different standpoint than that of description that ethics is found. It is found when it is *felt*, or perhaps even when we think not of description but of *feelings* and the will, and this explains the elusiveness, even the threat of vanishing, of the ethical proposition.

What does happen later is actually highly relevant. In a conversation of 1942, Rhees reports, Wittgenstein considers an ethical dilemma: "Someone might ask whether the treatment of such a question in Christian ethics is *right* or not. I want to say that this question does not make sense".[xii] If we imagine deciding which solution is right and which is wrong, he complains:

> But we do not know what this decision would be like — how it would be determined, what sort of criteria would be used and so on. Compare saying that is must be possible to decide which of two standards of accuracy is the right one. We do not even know what a person who asks this question is after.

And finally, in 1945 a passage that needs full quotation:

> Someone may say, "There is still the difference between truth and falsity. Any ethical judgment in whatever system may be true or false". Remember that "p is true" means simply "p". If I say "Although I believe that so and so is good, I may be wrong": this says no more than that what I assert may be denied. Or suppose someone says, "One of the ethical systems must be the right one — or nearer the right one." Well, suppose I say Christian ethics is the right one. Then I am making a judgment of value. It amounts to adopting Christian ethics. It is not like saying that one of these physical theories must be the right one. The way in which some reality corresponds — or conflicts — with a physical theory has no counterpart here.

This passage contradicts the received view not only on thesis (b), but also on thesis (a). For in it Wittgenstein not only turns his back on the appeal to a moral reality, serving to make one opinion "the right one". He explicitly contrasts the case with that of physics where, he says, there is a different way in which reality does correspond or conflict with theory — the very antithesis of the received view.

What is apparent in this passage, and in others I shall come to in time, is a dismissive attitude, an impatience, with the introduction of truth, reality, or fact as somehow containing the key to the use of the language game. His constant, characteristic, stance is against using facts and the rest as a separate element in our description of the language game, something that we can use to "place" or understand the activity of judgment, or that we can use as a constraint in any such attempt.

2. *Necessity and Arithmetic*

A great deal of the interest of the *Remarks* hinges on a theme to which Wittgenstein constantly returns: the use of the mathematical sentence not as a description, but as a norm, as something that lays down a rule for description, or serves as a framework within which description can occur. Here are four illustrative quotations:

> Let us remember that in mathematics we are convinced of *grammatical* propositions; so the expression, the result, of our being convinced is that *we accept a rule.*

> Nothing is more likely than that the verbal expression of the result of a mathematical proof is calculated to delude us with a myth. (*Remarks*, p. 77, Pt. II, 26).

> Why do you want always to consider mathematics under the aspect of discovering and not of doing? If must influence us a great deal that in calculating we use the words "correct" and "true" and "false" and the form of statements. (Shaking and nodding one's head)… There is no doubt at all that in certain language games mathematical propositions play the part of rules of description, as opposed to descriptive propositions.
> But that is not to say that this contrast does not shade of in all directions. And that in turn is not to say that the contrast is not of the greatest importance. (p. 163 Pt. V, 6)
> To be practical mathematics must tell us facts. — But do these facts have to be the mathematical facts? But why should not mathematics instead of "teaching us facts" create the forms of what we call facts? (p. 173, Pt. V, 15).

> We say: "If you really follow the rule in multiplying, it must come out the same" Now when this is merely the slightly hysterical style of university talk, we have no need to be particularly interested. It is however the expression of an attitude towards the technique of multiplying, which comes out everywhere in our lives. The emphasis of the "must" corresponds only to the inexorability of this attitude, not merely towards the technique of calculating, but also towards innumerable related practices. (*Zettel*, *299)

So: the verbal form of mathematical statements can delude us with a myth; in certain language games mathematical propositions play the part of rules of description, as opposed to descriptive propositions; perhaps mathematics teaches us no mathematical facts, but creates the form of what we call facts; a statement of necessity corresponds only to the inexorability of an attitude, not to anything that the slightly hysterical style of university talk might make of it.

None of these theses make any sense on the received interpretation. For on that view, the indicative form of a mathematical statement makes it a proposition, which makes it automatically descriptive of mathematical reality; equally with a statement of necessity and a modal reality. Yet this is exactly what Wittgenstein is interested in denying. It is not as if he turns around and says "but they have indicative form — so mathematical realism triumphs!" Notice especially the first and second quotations, which openly embrace the possibility of a surprising or puzzling verbal form masking the real function of the mathematical remark, its place in the game. One might almost use as a motto for the *Remarks* section IV 28 "…the

words don't determine the language game in which the proposition functions". And the game is better described in many ways than saying that it is the one in which we attempt to describe the mathematical or modal facts. The "myth" against which he warns us, and that the verbal expression of mathematical statements deludes us into, is precisely the realist's myth of the selfstanding world of mathematical fact, explored as the external world is explored.

Notice again the context in which Wittgenstein invokes the redundancy theory of truth in Pt. I section 5. When the *alter ego* invokes truth ("isn't it true that this follows from that?") Wittgenstein replies that this just means that it does so — but immediately goes on to explore what this comes to, what goes wrong if the game changes, or the background against which it is played shifts. The effect is the same as with ethics: invocation of truth and fact is *useless,* playing no part in an illuminating description of the activity, the form of life, from which the judgment emerges (one could compare this too with the last paragraph of the *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 226).

3. *Psychology*

Are there explicit counterexamples to the received interpretation in this domain as well? Consider what is sometimes called the "doctrine of avowals". Here it is hardly necessary to cite examples — the whole discussion in *Philosophical Investigations*, Part II section ix and x shows Wittgenstein again taking seriously the idea that an apparently descriptive sentence — the first person indicative form of "I believe…", "I intend…" and so on serves not as a description of anything, but as an avowal of a certain kind. "'I intend' is never a description, although in certain circumstances a description can be derived from it". And he emphasizes the problem this puts in front of him:

> Don't look at it as a matter of course, but as a most remarkable thing, that the verbs "believe", "wish", "will" display all the inflexions possessed by "cut", "chew", "run".[xiii]

This is not yet to take on the issue of an irrealist or anti-realist construal of the famous rule-following discussion, and the heart of propositional attitude psychology. My immediate point is much more limited. It is just that once more we have a use of indicative sentences that is *not* correctly thought of in terms of describing a truth or a fact, or corresponding with a state of affairs. To understand the language game in which they occur, we need to see their use in other terms. And this he suggests is the key to the problem of how the intention and its fulfillment seem mysteriously to fit together, although the diagnosis here is certainly obscure.[xiv]

4. *Knowledge*

By now the citation of texts may be becoming tedious, and in any event the discussion of the use of "I know…" and its status of avowal, rather than a description, in *On Certainty* is spread throughout the work. More interesting is the role accorded to those propositions that have the status of hinges, or the riverbed, or framework within which ordinary debate about correctness and mistakes takes place. These include, of course, many (uses of) sentences that have normal indicative expression: cars do not grow out of the ground, the earth has existed for many years, objects don't just appear and disappear, and so

on. On acquiring this status a proposition turns from an empirical proposition into a norm of description.[xv] Of such a matter-of-course foundation, something that goes unnoticed, "there is something misleading" about using the expression "true or false": "Really, 'the proposition is either true or false' only means that it must be possible to decide for or against it. But this does not say what the ground for such a decision is like."[xvi] In the case of framework propositions, the ground is nothing less than a change of form of life, a change of game: something that changes everything. As in the discussion of mathematics, we are told that there is a boundary between a rule on the one hand, and an empirical proposition on the other, although the boundary is not a sharp one: "here one must, I believe, remember that the concept 'proposition' itself is not a sharp one". [xvii]

The impression — for I admit that Wittgenstein never makes the consequence explicit — is very much that in some uses sentences expressing commitments that belong to the methodological framework — the ones of which you could not say "that's false" without being regarded as mad, as changing the game — do not express propositions (one can almost hear Wittgenstein saying that if they cannot be false, they cannot be true either). Changing them is changing the game. And on this, since it gives another important example of a non-descriptive thesis, see *Zettel* *330:

> What does it mean to say: "But that's no longer the same game!" How do I use this sentence? As information? Well, perhaps to introduce some information in which differences are enumerated and their consequences explained. But also to express that just for that reason I don't join in here, or at any rate take up a different attitude to the game.

In sum Wittgenstein is constantly battling with the difficulty of seeing the norm as at the same time a proposition, but he will not surrender the view that a proper view of the language game demands that we respect the difference of function.

5. *The redundancy theory of truth*

The 1945 remark on ethics that I quoted above shows Wittgenstein's dismissive attitude to any invocation of reality and its cognates in these investigations. He does almost exactly the same in *On Certainty*:

> Well, if everything speaks for an hypothesis and nothing against it — is it then certainly true? One may designate it as such. — But does it certainly agree with reality, with the facts? — With this question you are already going round in a circle.[xviii]

He returns to the circle in *203:

> If everything speaks *for* an hypothesis and nothing against it, is it objectively *certain*? One can *call* it that. But does it *necessarily* agree with the world of facts? At the very best it shows us what "agreement" means. We find it difficult to imagine it to be false, but also difficult to make use of it.

And this is almost immediately followed by the pregnant warning that it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part, but our *acting* which lies at the bottom of the language game. Seeing, of

course, implies a relationship to something else, and this is exactly what cannot be usefully invoked in the discussion of knowledge, certainty, and truth.

With this in mind, we can now see the proper place for *136 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. What we in fact have, in the context of *134 – 137 is exactly the same attitude. Proposition, truth, reality, "this is how things are" indeed come in a tight family, but for that very reason none of them is of any help in elucidating the other. To *understand* a language game — to attain the complete clarity we are after, constantly "giving prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook" — we must turn elsewhere, to the more intricate and detailed kind of description Wittgenstein then offers. The constant theme, unmistakeable in each of these works, is that a blanket invocation of a descriptive function, of a concept of a mathematical or ethical or modal "reality" represented in our thought, is absolutely useless. It not only irons out differences, but *precisely because of the redundancy theory* it merely pretends to presenting a theory at all. It fails to go beyond whatever proposition you start with, fails to get out of the circle.

6. *Realism and its Alternatives*

It may be tempting to think that at least in areas in which we do have propositions, realism must win. If "p" and "p corresponds with reality" mean the same, and we accept p, then we accept what many would suppose to be a commitment to realism. But the important point is that no "-ism" at all is involved — all that has so far happened is that you have accepted p. The redundancy theory gives you nothing. It does not give you even an unpretentious "-ism", only for free. But in that case is there nothing that can be opposed, either?

Not in these terms. Accepting the redundancy theory means accepting that truth is not a substantive predicate about which different conceptions might be held. But I have shown that Wittgenstein is intensely interested in what I shall call "non-descriptive functionalism" — the attempt to understand the function or use of commitments in other terms than those of description. Charting their actual role in our activities and our lives shows some to be used as norms, others as rules, as expressions, as endorsements and attitudes, and so on. As I have shown, this is the tool-kit to which he naturally turns whether he wants to inscribe detail.

Now there are two ways that detail can develop. One is to allow the emergence of a proposition — something capable of truth or falsity — as an expression, even given the non-descriptive function of the expression. This is the route I call "quasi-realism".[xix] Another is to insist on a sharp separation of spheres — if a non-descriptive functional story best fits a given sentence then it does not express a proposition and is not capable of truth. Wittgenstein tends to write as if this second option is the better.[xx] But he nowhere, I believe, squares up to the looming problem that it threatens to be a revisionary view (yet philosophy "leaves everything as it is"). Because it is obviously a feature of our language game with "true" and "false" that we pretty promiscuously *call* even bedrock sentences, those functioning as norms, first person statements of intention and the rest, true or false. There may be even better things to say, but one good thing to say is that it is false (not true) that motor cars grow on trees, that I intend to take up tight-rope walking and so on. And it is not just that these are false in certain contexts (which Wittgenstein would allow), but in any normal situation in which the embedded sentence might occur. Nor does Wittgenstein give us any inkling of how much of the propositional appearance of such commitments ought to be abandoned, if we faced up to their non-descriptive function in our lives. One has a strong

sense that he would prefer the answer — "none of it". And that is to embrace the first, quasi-realist alternative. To do philosophy, to understand the language game, we start with the non-descriptive function of these commitments in our activities; the result is an appreciation of just *how* a content emerges, giving us a proposition — something properly called true or false, properly subject to argument and doubt and properly embedded in various contexts. In telling this story *how* a content emerges, no explanatory work can be done by mathematical, ethical etc. "reality". But it does not follow that mention of such a reality cannot be tossed in at the end — for, given the redundancy theory, that is to toss in nothing extra.

A trifling reason for doubting this picture of (part of) Wittgenstein might be that it presents him as too much of a *theorist*, seeking *explanations* rather than descriptions, whereas he frequently rails against any conception of the philosopher as theorist. But this is not a real danger. Even if, when he reflected on it, he mistrusted calling his own activity one of explaining or theorizing, it is certainly one of seeking illuminating descriptions of our sayings and doings, avoiding philosophical traps and puzzles. There is no reason at all why a quasi-realist story, seeking to place the emergence of content in mathematics or ethics or modality, but starting from a firm grasp of a non-descriptive function for commitments in these areas, should not conform to this pattern. It may even be a story of a fairly unsystematic kind, compared with the supposedly more streamlined vehicles of truth-conditional semantics. And of course it is anti-realist in the sense in which Hume presents and anti-realist theory of causation, or Ayer an anti-realist theory of ethics. This completes my proof that Wittgenstein cannot rightly be seen as hostile to finding, if not theory, then at least illumination, in exactly this space. In it no explanatory weight is pulled by thinking in terms of a described reality: the discourse is understood in other terms.

7. *Anti-Realism and Rules*

It will be apparent that if Kripke's Wittgenstein were presented in this guise, he would avoid many of the brickbats hurled at him, and lose nothing fundamental. The root idea is that rule following is to be understood not by searching for the "fact" that it consists in, but by considering the practice of embracing, or dignifying, various activities in terms of correctness and incorrectness, and this idea survives quite intact. The end point would not be expressed by saying that there is no fact or truth that people follow rules. It would be expressed by saying that there is, but since saying that is saying only that people follow rules, that does not amount to an advance. The advance comes by seeing the judgment emerging as the expression of a stance we do take, and no doubt need to take, to the activities of ourselves and others.[xxi]

I do not think it is plain sailing to make quasi-realism work here. The fundamental difficulty is whether we need to understand the activity of dignifying oneself or others as rule followers *in advance* of having any other source of understanding of what it might be to follow a rule. It is not clear that we do have this understanding. For me to deem you to be following the rule for what is to be a tree or a sum of two numbers seems to require my own ability to determinately think in terms of one thing or another. If my own thought is subject to endless indeterminacy, then what I deem you to be doing is so as well, and the introduction of interpersonal attitudes will not help to defeat the Kripkean sceptic.[xxii] He will be within his rights to disallow the resources that even a "sceptical solution", or "assertibility condition" theory needs to provide an answer. Put starkly the problem is that if the "truth conditional" approach fails, finding nothing for the fact that I mean "plus" and not "quus"

to consist in, then assertibility condition approaches seem set to fail too, there being no difference between possible worlds in which I dignify or embrace you as a fellow "plus" follower, and those in which I dignify you as a fellow "quus" follower.[xxiii] However, a quasi-realism as a philosophy of rule following has recently come under attack for other reasons, and I shall conclude by fending these off, partly in order to introduce one more relevant facet of Wittgenstein's thought.

The attack I have in mind is developed by Paul Boghossian in his survey article on rule-following.[xxiv] I follow his numbering in isolating the relevant premises.

Let us suppose that we purse a quasi-realist or projective approach to rule following and meaning by claiming:

(3) For any S, p: "S means that p" is not truth-conditional

Boghossian says that Kripke extends this globally to:

(4) for any S: S is not truth-conditional

This is apparently a much more general doctrine. Whereas the problem of the fugitive fact of rule following might lead us to cast in the direction of (3), surely (4) is a different kettle of fish, and one of doubtful value. What can it mean to say that all sentences have a projective or quasi-realist metatheory? So the question arises, why extend (3) to (4)? Because the global character is *forced*: according to Boghossian (3) entails:

(5) for all S, p: "S has truth conditions p" is not truth conditional

But then "via the disquotational properties of the truth predicate"

"S has truth-condition p" is true if and only if S has truth-condition p

and "since (5) has it that 'S has truth-conditions p' is never simply true" it follows that (4).

Boghossian calls this a "fascinating consequence" and it is one he goes on to rebut, basically on the grounds that we need the idea of at least some sentences being truth-conditional, if only to draw the contrast whereby others might be seen as something else. But is it a consequence at all? To see the difficulty I shall reconstruct the argument in terms nearer those that I advocate. We shall then see that it fails to avoid the trap of use/mention confusion.

Suppose we call commitments — moral, modal, or rule-attributing — for which our metatheory is quasi-realist, QR commitments. As explained, the route to understanding them lies in first considering them in the light of a non-descriptive function they have. Suppose we want to contrast these with more ordinary commitments for which no such theory works — OD, or ordinary descriptive commitments. Derivatively we can call sentences expressing these different kinds of commitments QR on the one hand, and OD on the other. The charge is that if a QR status is given to attributions of rule following, all commitments become QR. But is this so?

In these terms Boghossian's (3), (4), and (5) would translate as:

(3!) For any S, p: "S means that p" is QR

(4!) For any S, S is QR

(5!) For any S, p: "S has truth condition p" is QR

the claim being that (3!) entails (5!) and thence "via the disquotational properties of the truth predicate", entails (4), thus ruling out the existence of OD sentences. But this is not so. For (5!) only gives us that the attribution of a truth condition p to a sentence S is QR. It does not follow that the commitment expressed by S (and thence S itself) is QR.

To see the difference here compare how it goes if instead of QR we substitute a harmless remark about attributions of meaning — say that they are dependent on the use of language in some population. With this reading (3!) is true, and entails (5!). But it does not follow at all that every sentence (e.g. "glaciers flow downhill") says something whose truth is

dependent on the use of language in some population. *That* the sentence says what it does is so dependent; *what* it says is not. Boghossian thinks otherwise because he relies on the "disquotational properties of the truth predicate". But those properties are often poor bridges for entailments, since it is familiar that the sentences that express them are themselves contingent. Consider:

(6!) "Glaciers flow downhill" is true in English iff glaciers flow downhill.

This is true enough, but it is not a necessary truth, which it would need to be to preserve entailment. What makes the left hand side true varies with the uses the English give their words; what makes the right hand side true does not. And equally it might be so that the best theory of the left hand side, since it ascribes a semantic property to a particular sentence, sees it as QR; the best theory of the right hand side may remain OD.

Interestingly enough, Wittgenstein himself returned quite often to just this point. In the *Remarks* he is very careful to distinguish the presuppositions of the game, or things that make measuring and counting possible and that enable our sentences to have the sense they do, from the propositions they express:

> Does this mean that I have to say that the proposition "12 inches = 1 foot" asserts all those things which give measuring its present point?
> No the proposition *is grounded* in a technique. And, if your like, also in the physical and psychological facts that make the technique *possible*. But it doesn't follow that its sense is to express these conditions. The opposite of that proposition "twelve inches = 1 foot" does not say that rulers are not rigid enough or that we don't all count and calculate in the same way.[xxv]

Or, as he puts it in *Zettel*:

> Our language game only works, of course, when a certain agreement prevails, but the concept of agreement does not enter into the language-game… .[xxvi]

Compare finally the famous:

> "But mathematical truth is independent of whether human beings know it or not!" — Certainly, the propositions "Human beings believe that twice two is four" and "Twice two is four" do not mean the same. The latter is a mathematical proposition; the other, if it makes sense at all, may perhaps mean: human beings have *arrived* at the mathematical proposition. The two propositions have entirely different uses.[xxvii]

Paraphrasing we could say that a proposition might be grounded in a technique of mutually holding each other to be subjects of normative appraisal, since without that there would be no such thing as holding a sentence to express it. But none of that would be apparent in its sense. It is simply no part of the way we use sentences to let the human condition underlying their meaning into their sense, any more than natural history is part of mathematics.

Perhaps Boghossian did not intend his (4) to pass over the mention/use division as I am claiming. It is, after all, still talking of whether sentences, not propositions, are truth-conditional. But that is to protect the argument by an ambiguity:

(4a) For any S, p: it is QR whether S means that p.

(4b) For any S, S is QR in the sense that the proposition expressed by S is QR, not OD.

The difficulty is that while (4a) indeed follows from (3), and indeed merely paraphrases it, (4b) does not, yet it is only (4b) that gives Boghossian his subsequent argument that, on an irrealist reaction to the rule following considerations, ordinary descriptive truth disappears.

However, although there is no easy argument against the quasi-realist approach at this point, unease may remain. As usual, appeal to the language-independent Fregean thought or Moorean proposition is only using terms that presuppose a solution, not telling us how to get there. The mutual dignities and attitudes that are the background to verdicts of rule following may seem to be unpromising sources of any such thing. How out of this crooked timber can anything straight be made? How can the OD status of a *proposition* emerge, how can it be *operational*, when all that we have in linguistic behavior is the disposition to assert or withdraw sentences?

8. *Hard Mistakes for Irrealists*

Suppose for example dissent breaks out — someone insists that glaciers do not flow downhill, that they do not flow at all. How can this be uncontaminatedly an OD dispute, if the question of correct application of the terms is QR? Perhaps the dissident refuses the term "flow" — refuses to be impressed by the analogies between the movement of ice and that of liquids. We can mobilize social dissent, take up an admonitory attitude, but given the quasi-realist view of rule following, talk of his making a *mistake* seems only the upshot of these attitudes — a classic QR commitment. Our sense that the dissident is *wrong* loses its hardness, and as it were blurs into mere irritation with him.

Now suppose by contrast that the dissident insists that glacier ice does not move at all. Here we are more in the domain of hard, descriptive mistake — something disproved by ordinary tests for movement. We show him the tests, and he admits he was wrong. He had made a mistake — a hard, OD mistake. Why? Because no question of reinterpretation arises: the *procedures* are agreed and so is their result. If someone suggests that by "move" the dissident might have meant shmove, where something shmoves if… (e.g. if it is not ice, and moves, or is ice, and stays still), we might reply that nothing in the subsequent conversation confirms this or causes us to take any notice of it. We deem the mistake hard when our eyes are shut to any such doubt.

Notice that in neither of these cases is the dissident completely out of court — one can find one's feet with someone who is shocked by the idea of solids flowing, and the second character made a simple mistake. The third case might be someone who denies that glacier ice moves, but does not budge even when given all the evidence. Apparently the methodology of movement has changed; the riverbed has shifted, the door has become unhinged.[xxviii] We are at a loss — all we can do is deem him to be out of the game (see *Zettel* *330, quoted above).

The question is whether these three classifications, together with the blurred borderlines to which they give rise, are just as available to the QR treatment of rule following as to any other theory. The second is the hard one. Here is an approach. When our eyes are shut to possibilities of reinterpretation we deem dissidence to be the making of a mistake, and subsequent events often prove us right, as the dissident himself comes to share our attitude to the original saying. It may seem surprising that we so often shut our eyes to the possibility of reinterpretation, or so seldom avail ourselves of it as an excuse when we make mistakes. It is only seen when scientific or historical change forces us to think of meanings

as flexible. Schoolteachers never think of "quus" type hypotheses in connexion with the mistakes of their pupils. But on a QR treatment, this attitude is entirely defensible. (I doubt whether it is so on a realist view unless some sort of reductionism about meaning is contemplated. For on a non-reductive view, who is to say how many transient facts of meaning may have flitted in and out of control of a subject?) The defense is that we only dignify a dissident as in command of a different concept when we can admit his sayings to be part of a technique — a way of classifying things that has a use. And experience suggests that the mistakes of schoolchildren do not have this property. Since they remain irregular, forgotten, part of no practices, questions of reinterpretation do not arise, and we take ourselves to be in the realm of mistakes. Similarly we know that we cannot make good any such claim on behalf of our own errors, and seldom pretend to be able to do so.

It may be compared to the way in which we properly treat the moral "ought" as categorical. It is binding upon people who may have no desires on which it can catch: we say this to disallow such a defect from serving as an excuse. The comparable hardness of the rule-following "ought" — you ought not to call that an apple; this is the wrong answer — arises because we are sure, as we often are, that no new technique prompted it. Of course, in saying this I am aware that many people find the hardness of the moral ought endangered by a quasi-realist treatment of morals. But their fears are groundless, and equally so in the case of the proposition.

The upshot is that a community can perfectly well distinguish in its attitudes between the embedding of one classificatory scheme or another — something that may in principle be a "soft" question of decision, and that in any case will depend upon human nature and human interests and the use or misuse of a classification that is embedded — something that may well be hard and enable us to conceive of truths and falsehoods which are themselves independent of any such foundation. Perhaps, before Wittgenstein, we might have wanted more — not just rails to infinity, which we can have, but rails laid by no human practices which we cannot.

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i Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, Basil Blackwell, 1977, edited by G. H. von Wright, trans. Peter Winch, p, 62.

ii *Realism and Imagination in Ethics,* Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983, pp. 25-26.

iii *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Brighton, Harvester Press, 1982, p. xviii.

iv *Philosophical Investigations,* Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1953, Pt. II, XI, p. 224.

v *Remarks on Philosophical Psychology,* Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1980, I - *48.

vi M. O'C Drury, "Conversations with Wittgenstein" in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 157. The quotation from *Lear* occurs in Act I, Sc. IV, in which Kent upbraids Oswald. Interestingly, it is an invidious distinction, or at any rate one of rank, that Kent is emphasizing; perhaps the received view will say that this is why Wittgenstein discarded the motto.

vii Perhaps the philosophy of religion is a fifth, and here too the material illustrates the argument.

viii "Lecture on Ethics", *Philosophical Review* 1965, p. 5-6.

ix p. 6.

x p. 12. My previous quotations are from the preceding five pages.

xi Compare also the entry in *Culture and Value* for 1929: "The good is outside the space of facts."

[xii] Rush Rhees, "Some Developments in Wittgenstein's view of Ethics", *Philosophical Review,* 1965, p. 23.

[xiii] *Philosophical Investigations.* p. 190. The point is that it is in its inflexions that the sentence's propositional function seems undeniable — giving rise to the famous Frege-Geach problem with non-propositional theories.

[xiv] *Zettel,* *53. The paragraphs through to *57 are also relevant.

[xv] *On Certainty,* Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1969, *167.

[xvi] ibid, *200.

[xvii] *320. The remarks are the culmination of the discussion arising from *309.

[xviii] *191.

[xix] For an introduction, see *Spreading the Word,* Oxford, Oxford University Press 1984, Chapt. 6.

[xx] I am greatful to Donna Summerfield for emphasizing this.

[xxi] Ourselves and others in order not to prejudge the question of whether a public is necessary, or whether the stance might be taken to his own activities by an individual considered in isolation.

[xxii] A dangerous word, but I take it that by now it is well understood that the "scepticism" is not an epistemological doctrine, but an exploration of the lack of any fact for rule-following to consist in.

[xxiii] This is why I think a quasi-realist approach needs to solve Kripke's other problem, that of the infinitary character of meaning, in order to provide standards for the correct deemings and dignifying. See my "The Individual Strikes Back", *Synthese,* 1984.

[xxiv] "The rule following considerations" *Mind,* October 1989

[xxv] *Remarks,* p. 159, V 1

[xxvi] *Zettel* *403

[xxvii] *Investigations* pt II, xi, p. 226

[xxviii] Both these analogies are used in *On Certainty*