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THE SKEPTIC PARADOX AND KRIPKE'S READING OF WITTGENSTEIN

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***Abstract*:** In this paper, I will critically examine Saul Kripke's unconventional interpretation of Wittgenstein. I will focus on Kripke's claim that Wittgenstein formulated a skeptical paradox on language and also its skeptical solution. The correctness of Kripke's interpretation depends on the validity of this statement. I will show that in *Philosophical Investigations* there is no textual evidence for this claim. In the second stage of my argument, I will apply a wittgensteinian „therapy" to the paradox of rule-following, based on a reading of *On Certainty*.

Keywords: skeptic paradox, skepticism, Wittgenstein, Kripke.

Kripke warns his readers that *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*" is hardly a commentary on Wittgenstein's later philosophy, nor even on *Philosophical Investigations*".[2] But Kripke conceives his endeavour as an effort of elucidation, and this exactly is the main purpose of a philosophical interpretation: „It is my hope that much of this material (the topics not considered in his book – my note) becomes fairly clear from an understanding of Wittgenstein's view of the central topic".

It is true, although, that Kripke seems to be undecided in respect with the ultimate goal of his book. He even wrote that the skeptical argument is „not Wittgenstein's, nor Kripke's".[3] This affirmation contradicts other formulation, where he states that „If the work has a main thesis of its own, it is that Wittgenstein's sceptical problem and argument are important, deserving of serious consideration".[4] He even acknowledges that his work is the exegesis of the W's skeptical argument: „Since Wittgenstein has more than one way

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[2] Kripke, S., *Wittgenstein on rules and private language*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1982, pp. vii.

[3] Kripke [1982] pp. 5.

[4] Kripke [1982] pp. ix.

of arguing for a given conclusion, and even of presenting a single argument, to defend *the present exegesis* I need not necessarily argue that these other commentaries are in error"[1] (emphasis added). This quote suggests that the reason for wich Kripke hesitates to attribute the paradox to W is the relative indeterminacy of W's formulations. This suggestion is sustained by other formulation, where Kripke admits that „at times I became unsure that I could formulate Wittgenstein's elusive position as a clear argument".[2]

Many of Kripke's readers choose to lay aside the question of who's the author of the skeptical argument, and talk, instead, of „Kripkenstein's" skeptical challenge, reiterating Kripke's indecision on this matter. But I think that this question is rather an idle one: his book's title shows in an unequivocal manner, that it about W's views on particular philosophical themes, and in this way, its interpretative goal. Furthermore, W's name is cited a few dozen of times throughout the book. So, I will cut the gordian knot choosing to read Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein as an interpretation, and I will focus on its main theme: the skeptical paradox. My decision opens the possibility to assess its correctness, wich is an important task, considering that it is one of the most influential interpretations of W's philosophy.

I. KRIPKE'S THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

Kripke's reconstruction of the so-called wittgensteinian skeptical paradox can be read as a thought experiment, meant to embody the skeptical paradox allegedly espoused by W himself.

I will show that in this mind experiment, Kripke addresses rule-following in abstraction of any (social) context and that this stage-setting of the experiment is consequential for his argument.

So, in this experiment, we have „a single individual, considered by himself and in isolation"[3], who is asked by a skeptical-minded experimentator to justify his following the mathematical rule of „plus". Kripke writes many times in his book about the „isolation" of the subject of the experiment, but never explains it, wich suggests that it should be taken as intuitively clear. Anybody will understand it in an ordinary way, as speaking about a person physically separated by other people, or in a factual impossibility of communicating with any other persons. What is not at all clear is the strategical use wich Kripke makes of this expression, and this will become apparent in the following.

Again, what we have here is a person (the subject of the experiment) asked to justify an ordinary calculus, more precisely: to explain that he really followed the rule of addition and not some other rule of calculus, similar to addition, but with different results. The isolation of the subject means that he

[1] Kripke [1982] pp. 2.
[2] Kripke [1982] pp. 1.
[3] Kripke [1982] pp. 68.

cannot ask a friend to confirm the calculus, nor read a book of mathematics, nor try an internet search engine. The condition of isolating the subject of the experiment means that he is not entitled to appeal to any of the normal context of justification of following a rule, in particular a mathematical rule. He is cut off from the community of speakers and cannot make use of the social ways of answering the skeptic's question. But what is more important, the isolation is not strictly spatial: the subject cannot invoke any socially acquired capacity or attainments. He couldn't give trivial answers like „I've studied mathematics", „I remember the rule of addition", „I know to calculate" or „I performed addition many times at school and other places".

This limitation of Kripke's experiment resembles John Rawls' veil of ignorance in that the subject of the experiment knows nothing about those social abilities which in an ordinary situation will determine his answer to the questions posed inside the experiment.

So, what seemed at first to be a casual turn of phrase, appears to be a much more problematic one. The subject is not only physically secluded from society. His isolation is in fact a veil of ignorance regarding some social abilities. An important thing to note, though, is that Kripke doesn't justify this stage-setting of the experiment. In the case of Rawls' experiment, the veil of ignorance's justification is that it effects for the subjects an unbiased stance about the principles meant to allocate the benefits of the social cooperation. Kripke equivocates on the meaning of the term „isolated", luring the reader to take it in its ordinary sense, but in fact using it to set unjustified limitations to his experiment.

I will not discuss the particular answers to the skeptic's challenge analysed by Kripke and in which way they fail to meet the skeptic's demands. They depend of the logical space created by Kripke's strategical decisions about the conditions of his thought experiment – namely, the exclusion of the social abilities of the subject.

Later, I will show that the „skeptical solution" consists in importing in the experiment what was previously abstracted: the social element of understanding. Kripke's scenario goes like that: first, he speaks about understanding of rules *without* social abilities: the result is that there is nothing left to understand and the skeptical conclusion is that there are no rules (and no meaning, as we shall see); in the next stage, we have understanding-*cum*-social abilities, and the result is that the rule-following is conceivable again.

II. A SKEPTICAL PARADOX IN *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS?*

The starting point of Kripke's interpretation is paragraph 201 from *Philosophical Investigations* [PI, from now on]. There is, allegedly, the most important textual evidence that W commits himself to a skeptical position about rule-following and, by extension, to meaning and language. Kripke

takes this paragraph as a key of understanding not only the text where W talks about rule-following, but also the paragraphs about other minds or other topics. Here it is:

> „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. The answer was: if every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule, then it can also be brought into conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here."

A remarkable fact about how Kripke makes use of this paragraph is that he cites only a passage where W refers to a skeptical paradox, but not that part where W openly rejects it:

„That there is a misunderstanding here is shown by the mere fact that in this chain of reasoning we place one interpretation behind another, as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another lying behind it. For what we thereby show is 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'.

That's why there is an inclination to say: every action according to a rule is an interpretation. But one should speak of interpretation only when one expression of a rule is substituted for another."

One possible reaction is to suspect an interpretative trick on the part of Kripke, or even to accuse him of intently falsifying the wittgensteinian text.[1] It is true that the freestyle method of interpretation assumed by Kripke at the very beginning of the book cannot authorize the excluding of those views of the author who don't fit into the interpretative scheme.

However, I consider that the ommited text from paragraph 202 is relevant to the question if W *proposed* a skeptical paradox. W himself takes the paradox to be a „misunderstanding", not a problem. In order to clarify W's authorial intention in this passage, it is important to address a very important question: What does „paradox" mean for W? What is his approach towards paradoxes in PI and other writings? I found extensive textual evidence in other writings proving that W never takes paradoxes as problems in need of a theoretical answer. Here are only a few quotes:

> „Something surprising, a paradox, is a paradox only in a particular, as it were defective, surrounding. One needs to complete this surrounding in such a way that what looked like a paradox no longer seems one."[2]

> „My question really was: ‚How can one keep to a rule?' And the picture that might occur to someone here is that of a short bit of handrail, by means of which I am to let myself be guided further than the rail

[1] this is the position of Baker and Hacker in their book, *Skepticism, Rules and Language*.

[2] Wittgenstein, L., *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics,* Blackwell, Oxford, 1956, pp. 410 [RFM from now on].

> reaches. [But there is nothing there; but there isn't nothing there!] For when I ask 'How can one...', that means that something here looks paradoxical to me; and so a picture is confusing me."[1]

> „But I did not utter the sentence in the surroundings in which it would have had an everyday and unparadoxical sense (...)."[2]

The second fragment, from Remarks, is relevant for the matter because it says that the paradoxical question about rule-following originates in a *confusion*; it confirms the PI's dictum that the paradox is a „misunderstanding".

The other two parallel W's method of dissolving philosophical theories, expounded in PI 116: „What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use". Both of them indicate that a paradox appears when it is formulated in the absence of a context, of the „surrounding" of the communicating practices. A paradox or a philosophical problem is not solved by a theory or an argument, but *dissolved* by reconnecting the expressions of the paradox with the contexts of use. There may be *possible* contexts, when treating the paradox as a possible speech act in a certain situation governed by the actual rules of language or the rules of a possible language-game.

The part of the paragraph 202 left uninterpreted by Kripke could be taken as an exemplification of the method of treating paradoxes drafted in RFM. There, W invokes the ordinary contexts of following rules in order to dissipate the „misunderstanding" wich is the rule-following paradox: „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'". This isn't a wittgensteinian solution of the paradox, neither an attempt of finding it, but an instance of his general approach to paradoxes. If one takes the paradox from the beginning of the paragraph to be a philosophical problem tackled by W, one is apt to ignore the rest of the paragraph, which doesn't even try to offer an argumentative solution. This is an insoluble difficulty for Kripke's interpretation.

But how can one understand this appeal to „everyday use"? Is everyday use taken by W as a source of rules of meaning, a procrustean bed of sense, a standard used by him in order to assess the significance of the philosophical problems (including paradoxes)? This is the line of interpretation taken by Baker and Hacker, for instance. I will sometimes refer to their way of understanding W's philosophy in order to clarify my interpretative approach. From their perspective, W's indication that „one needs to complete this surrounding" would probably (they didn't actually analyse this formulation) mean this: one should clarify and tabulate the rules of everyday words used in paradox, to show, eventually, that the paradox is not meaningful because of breaking these rules.

[1] RFM, pp. 430.
[2] Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations, Blackwell*, Oxford, 1953, pp. 410 [PI].

Contrary to their viewpoint, W doesn't focus on tabulating rules for the use of words in order to show that philosophical problems and paradoxes are species of grammatical nonsese. This would make him an ordinary language philosopher. For W, language use is not, simply, a source of grammatical rules. W cautions his reader many times not to think about the practice of language as stricly regulated by rules. Kuussela (2008) claims that W uses the idea of language qua rule-normated practice as an image wich could be used in various ways in order to clarify philosophical confusions. W often appeals to the analogy between language and chess, but the limits of this analogy shows in the fact that language is not a strong regulated practice, like chess. If language „moves" would be taken by W as entirely defined by rules, then an interpretation of his philosophy as centred on the conformity with grammatical rules would be adequate.

The main purpose of W in tackling philosophical problems or paradoxes is to dissolve them, not to solve them by finding philosophical solutions. It is worth emphasizing that W usually tackles philosophical questions, not philosophical „answers" or theories. He doesn't construct a battlefield with the traditional theories to demonstrate that philosopher's language is nonsense by piecemeal showing that their words break ordinary language rules. W endeavours to dissipate the *need* to ask philosophical questions. His aims at clarification, not at regulating the philosopher's language.

Suming up, from the wittgensteinian perspective, a paradox *seem* to be a problem only in a defective surrounding. Paragraph 202 does contain a skeptical paradox, but it's not assumed as a problem by W, and that shows a critical flaw of Kripke's interpretation.

However, W doesn't appear to be really concerned with the therapeutic task of dissipating the paradox of rule-following in PI. The main goal of the paragraphs about rule-following is rather to dissolve some philosophical problems about understanding (this idea needs to be elaborated, but this task exceeds the limits of my present purpose). I will try to show, in the last paragraph, that *On Certainty* can be used to reconstruct the wittgensteinian treatment of the skeptical paradox about rule-following.

III. THE (LACK OF) INTELLIGIBILITY OF KRIPKE'S PARADOX

The kripkean skeptic claims that it is *possible* that in the past, the subject of the experiment meant another rule by the sign of plus, namely the rule of quus, wich gives the same results as plus for a limited range of numers, and different results for numers outside the range:

„x quus y = x plus y, if x, y < 57
= 5 otherwise".[1]

[1] Kripke [1982] pp. 9.

Speaking about past cognitive performances instead of actual ones is only an argumentative device used by Kripke so as „to avoid confusing questions about whether the discussion is taking place ‚both inside and outside language'".[1] If the subject of the experiment wouldn't be only a dummy figure, we could ask if the discussion between him and the skeptic is taking place in the same language-game, in the same community, following the same rules for using words. In a real situation, questions about following the rule of quus instead of plus, in the past, would probably be followed by the subject asking the skeptic if he and the skeptic speak the same language. That wouldn't be a „confusing question about whether the discussion is taking place ‚both inside and outside language'", but about the linguistic or cultural frame of the discussion.

The skeptic's hypothesis that the subject of the experiment always meant quus in the past amounts to a skeptical doubt about his lacking justifications for using correctly the sign „+" in present.

This sound so odd, that one could ask what prompts the skeptical doubt. Kripke writes that this hypothesis is based on the simple logical possibility: „Ridiculous and fantastic though it is, the skeptic's hypothesis is not logically impossible".[2] The wording of the skeptical hypothesis contain no logical contradiction, and, it could be added, is prima facie intelligible for any reader.[3] From a logical point of view, everything is possible wich is not contradictory. But is it enough for enouncing a reasonable doubt to invoke a logical possibility? W „describes"[4] the practice of uttering doubts as regulated by stronger requirements than the simple demand of logical consistency. Doubts have to meet the requirement of justification in order to be accepted as meaningful in non-philosophical contexts of communication.

There is still one more way of taking the kripkean paradox as context-defective. I wonder if the pasages which contain the skeptic's interpreting „plus" as „quus", „count" as „quount" and so on, are really intelligible. Does the kripkean skeptic understand his own questions? After all, what does understanding „quus" consist in? The simple possibility to formulate some mathematical definition of quus? Is it a „mathematical" formula? Or is „quounting" a mathematical practice? Doesn't understanding Kripke's argument depend, after all, on the possibility of responding such questions?

And now, I will address a wittgensteinian question: Could one know only the rule of quus and nothing about the mathematical system of wich they are a part? In Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, W says: „If we only had the rule 25 x 25 egal 625, this would be nothing; it would be nothing we

[1] Kripke [1982] pp. 12.
[2] Kripke [1982] pp. 9.
[3] it could be argued that a row of signs without meaning is not logically contradictory; which is why I added this condition of intelligibility, not contained in Kripke's formulation.
[4] I choose to use this word instead of terms which could suggest that W has a philosophical position – as „argues", „claims", etc.

could do anything with."[1] By analogy, we could say that if we had only the rule of quus, this wouldn't be enough to have a mathematical system or practice. Because of the context-deficiency of Kripke's experiment, we couldn't ascertain that the skeptic takes quus as part of the actual system of mathematical rules or as part of a different mathematics. „The use wich we can make of this mathematical rule depends entirely on the mathematical system in wich it is embedded", says W, and without knowing this context, we don't know what sense to make of a discourse about quus or quount. The lack of intelligibility of skeptic's discourse is not internal to skeptic's discourse; it reveals a lack of intelligibility of Kripke's use of the skeptic hypothesis. One could substitute „abracadabra" for quus in Kripke's paradox and nothing changes, fundamentally.

IV. THE SKEPTICISM ABOUT RULE-FOLLOWING AS A KIND OF RADICAL SKEPTICISM

The skeptical challenge is not solely one about mathematical rules or about rule-following. It is a form of radical skepticism. Kripke writes that „the skeptical problem applies to all meaningful uses of language"[2] and that „if the skeptic is right, the concept of meaning (...) will make no sense".[3] Kripke's affirmations imply that the skeptic hypothesis about the rule of quus can be reformulated for all kinds of words and that that particular paradox is only an exemplification of the skeptical viewpoint.

Strikingly, the conclusion of the skeptical argument expresses the thesis of a „conceptual nihilism", as P. M. S. Hacker puts it.[4] And this kind of skepticism „is manifestly self-refuting"[5], as Hacker says, and Kripke would agree, to some extent.[6] Kripke doesn't see that if the skeptic's argument is self-defeating, it is also pointless, and its „skeptical solution" would be also pointless.

In order to continue the philosophical dialogue, it is necessary to take the paradox as concluding with a weaker skeptical conclusion, in order to avoid the conceptual nihilism. But for that, I will make use of the concept of knowledge. If „the skeptical problem applies to all meaningful uses of language", its conclusion is that the uses of language are not supported by *knowledge* of meaning. I will show in the final section that W wouldn't disagree with it.

[1] Wittgenstein, L., *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge, 1939*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1976, pp. 137.
[2] Kripke [1982] pp. 7.
[3] Kripke [1982] pp. 13.
[4] Hacker [2002] pp. 272.
[5] Hacker [2002] pp. 272.
[6] „Has not the incredible and self-defeating conclusion, that all language is meaningless, already been drawn?", Kripke [1982] pp. 71.

W's therapeutic approach of skepticism makes use of this idea to show that skeptic's questions are misplaced.

V. THE „SKEPTICAL SOLUTION"

Kripke's mind experiment addresses rule-following in abstraction of any surrounding; this is what confers to the rule-following its paradoxical character and the air of unintelligibility. Later, what was initially abstracted – the context – is brought back under the name of the skeptical solution.

Kripke writes that the skeptical solution should be taken as the explanation of the fact that people succeed in communicating, which apparently contradicts the idea that „the language is meaningless" (the strong skeptical conclusion) or that people have no knowledge of language rules (the weaker conclusion). I will simplify Kripke's argumentation, leaving out its formulation in terms of „truth conditions" and „assertability conditions".

The key concept in the „skeptical solution" is that of agreement. There is no philosophically satisfying answer to the problem of justifying knowledge of meaning, runs the kripkean line of thought. But what could explain the fact that people understand each other? „The success of the practices (...) depends on the brute empirical fact that we agree with each other in our responses", says Kripke. This response appears to be affected by a vicious circularity: what explains human agreement in verbal interaction? Answer: the fact that they „agree with each other" in their responses.

I think that the skeptical solution could be read as a rough, sketchy image of the context or the surrounding of human communication, or, for that matter, rule-following behaviour. Kripke's skeptical solution offers a oversimplified image of the surrounding of human communication: „The solution turns on the idea that each person who claims to be following a rule can be checked by others. 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."[1] The complexity of language-games and practices is reduced to a strange mimetic effect by which individuals correlate their linguistic responses.

I will conclude this paragraph saying that, apart from a superficial similarity between some wittgensteinian and kripkean formulations about „agreement", in W's text one cannot find a solution of a skeptical paradox, but only a therapeutic contextualizing of some skeptic questions. In fact, the age-old model of philosophizing as setting a problem and solving it shows its limits in Kripke's interpretation of W. The wittgensteinian way of doing philosophy cannot be modeled by the binomial problem-and-argument without distorting it.

[1] Kripke [1982] pp. 101.

VI. THE THERAPEUTICAL APPROACH TO SKEPTICISM IN ON CERTAINTY AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE PRESENT DISCUSSION

The purpose of this section is to show the relevance of *On Certainty* [OC, from now on] for assessing the correctness of Kripke's interpretation. I'll try to construct a wittgensteinian therapeutic answer to Kripke from the perspective of OC.[1] However, my evaluation of Kripke's interpretation doesn't depend on the results of this investigation; I've already shown in the previous sections that Kripke's interpretation is flawed in important aspects. So, my reconstruction could be read independently of the evaluation of Kripke's text as an interpretation. Even if one takes Kripke's essay as not having a hermeneutic goal, it could be useful to read it from OC's perspective in order to a more profound understanding of the differences between Kripke and W.

My first concern is about the method of reading the text of OC. Interpreting W as espousing philosophical theses and arguments wouldn't be consistent with W's way of doing philosophy, because his aim is conceptual therapy or clarification of philosophical confusions, not theorizing. Arguments and theories are the specific means of a *theoretical* approach, not a *therapeutic* one.

The first thing which can be said from the beginning is that OC doesn't contain a refutation of skepticism, even if some of its formulations can be wrongly interpreted, for instance, as a theses about the nonsensicality of skeptical doubts. The wittgensteinian therapeutic approach of skeptical doubts, in OC, is to contextualize them by showing what would be the point of uttering them in ordinary or fictitious situations of communication. He tries to conduce the reader to realize that the skeptic doubts are „idle" (OC, 117), that the skeptical doubts have no consequence for the human practices. Or that these practices aren't endagered by the skeptical questioning.

The common view about OC is that W offers an argument by which skeptical doubts are meaningless: the ordinary language contains rules for formulating doubts and the skeptic's questions are nonsense, insofar as they are breaking these rules.

When reading OC from this perspective, what is striking is that W's primary objective is not to formulate such rules and show, from an authoritative position, that the skeptical philosopher breaks them. I am not even sure that in OC he ever does formulates a grammatical rule. It should be recalled that W considers grammatical statements as meaningless. Even if this idea is open to various interpretations, the question is – how could one use nonsensical statements in order to assess the nonsensicallity of some philosophical statements? When W's philosophy is taken as having its centre of gravity in enouncing grammatical rules, as a way of establishing a philosophical order of meaning, one is making a similar mistake as when taking W as espousing

[1] an interesting questions would be if OC and PI share the same method and goals of philosophising, and the same concepts; but it should be devoted an entire study on its own.

philosophical thesis. Instead, talking about a wittgensteinian method of contextualizing paradoxes and philosophical questions is perfectly consistent with W's emphasis on the therapeutic aim of his philosophy. Contextualizing a paradox or a philosophical problem, should be emphasized, is a descriptive approach of the language and is compatible with W's principle of leaving everything as it is.

Many particular paragraphs from OC speak about mathematical statements and their status as *certainty*. This has a very different meaning than the traditional appraisal of mathematics as a model of certainty. Traditional philosophers conceive mathematical judgments as certain knowledge. In OC, certainty and knowledge have different statuses:

'Knowledge' and 'certainty' belong to different categories.(308)

In order to understand W's statement, I will try to make a preliminary determination of these two concepts. It's important to note that here we don't have a theory of certainty or knowledge. W painstakingly tries to clarify the difference between them by making use of ordinary speech examples, but without taking ordinary language as a model or source of categories for philosophical thinking. If „knowledge" is a key word for many practices, „certainty" is rarely used outside philosophical contexts and it appears that for W it is more of a tentative concept than a clear-cut category. W tries to describe by „certainty" what doesn't stand at the surface of the ordinary language, and many times in OC he expresses dissatisfaction in relation with his own conceptual delimitations. If „to know" is used in assertions which could be given a justification in one way or another, certainty is not necessarily verbal or propositional, cannot be asserted and doesn't depend on justification. Furthermore, people aren't aware of many certainties sustaining their communicating practices, simply because they are never formulated. However, even when expressed in language, certainties don't need justification: they are taken for granted by the community.

Some certainties manifest themselves in action: this is the „animal" or „primitive" certainty, shown, e.g., in one's way of moving around objects, taking their existence as granted (never doubting it). There are also certainties of a different kind, closer to the propositional realm: e.g. certainties pertaining to the domain of mathematics. I'm not sure if it's appropriate to talk about mathematical judgments as having propositional content; W never says that, and the argument between some interpreters about the „essence" of certainty, as being or not propositional, seems to be beside the point. There are also some certainties expressed by statements traditionally taken as based on experience, or having empirical content. One of the main purposes of OC is to show that those certainties with empirical appearance have, strikingly, the same status as the mathematical judgments. As it is usually read, OC's target is epistemological and, because of that, its relevance to the debate

around rule-following is not immediately apparent. For my construction of a therapeutic wittgensteinian answer to Kripke's skeptic, the talk about mathematical certainty in OC is of vital importance, because the kripkean skeptic questions our capacity of following a mathematical rule. But if mathematical judgments are certain, they are unquestionable. To show what W means by this, and that this is not a theoretic answer to the skeptic, it is necessary to develop an extensive interpretative work on the text of OC.

I will begin with the following question: How does W understand the mathematical certainty? Or: what is „certain" about mathematical statements? There are plenty of wittgensteinian dicta about mathematical certainty. I choose two of them:

> *This is how calculation is done, in such circumstances a calculation is treated as absolutely reliable, as certainly correct.* (39)

> *The mathematical proposition has, as it were officially, been given the stamp of incontestability. I.e.: „Dispute about other things; this is immovable – it is a hinge on which your dispute can turn."* (655)

Here, we can see that W carefully contextualizes his assertions („in such circumstances"), in order to prevent the misunderstanding of reading them as theories or generalizations. For the traditional philosophers, mathematical propositions are intrinsically certain, no matter how people use them in various contexts. For W, instead, certainty is not an inherent attribute of mathematical propositions. Perhaps it is misleading to conceive mathematical certainty (in the wittgensteinian sense) as a property of the proposition. This would open up the possibility of questioning about certainty as an essential or contextual (accidental) property of propositions and would entangle W's concepts in endless scholastic quibbling.

Another aspect of mathematical certainty: it seems more appropriate to take the certainty of calculation as prior to the certainty of mathematical statements – occasionally, competent speakers utter false mathematical statements, but they can correct them through verification by calculus. The procedure of calculation is usually taken as certain, and, by derivation, its result as a particular mathematical proposition is also certain.

Writing about calculus, W is not trying to determine the „essence" of the calculus, to define its meaning or to lay down a theory about it, W is searching for the context, the „surrounding" of the practices where calculus has its natural place and where there is nothing problematic in understanding what does it mean to calculate or to do maths. This isn't a dogmatic stance, where W would state what can be meaningfully said and what not; he doesn't say that philosophically theorizing about calculus, without taking into account the ordinary or the mathematician's practices or the use of the verb „to calculate", makes no sense. W's appeal to the circumstances of use doesn't orig-

inate in a theoretical endeavour to make order in the human communication; his purpose is entirely therapeutic, not theoretical.

The statement of mathematical judgments' status as certainties is the result of looking upon the context of the language-game with numbers, geometrical figures and so on. Certainty is not gained as a result of one's epistemic efforts or someone's chain of justifications. This status is localized at the level of the language-game itself, it is not the product of the cognitive performance of some individual. Particularly, certainty is not the product of experience, of inductive reasoning:

> *Perhaps I shall do a multiplication twice to make sure, or perhaps get someone else to work it over. But shall I work it over again twenty times, or get twenty people to go over it? And is that some sort of negligence? Would the certainty really be greater for being checked twenty times?*(77)

The answer is negative, of course. Mathematical propositions are certain because of the functioning of our language-game. The traditional philosopher would ask for an explanation, searching for a fact underlying this functioning. W would leave this question unanswered. First, if one needs a causal explanation of human agreement in mathematics, this is at most a scientific kind of problem. Second, if one is searching for an explanation in terms of reasons, the chain of reasons must stop somewhere, namely, where W speaks about *certainties* or *rules*.

At this moment, it is useful to compare W's approach of the matter with the skeptic's.

Kripke acknowledges that there could be no philosophical task of understanding the causal, neurological mechanism of understanding rules[1] (particularly, mathematical rules). The only alternative available, in W's view, is to question about reasons. But the language-game or practice of mathematics is sustained by no other reasons than the mathematical rules. The game of evaluating or justifying following rules in mathematics ends by invoking mathematical rules, and *these are the ultimate reasons in this language-games*. Kripke's skeptic asks for some more fundamental reasons than the mathematical rules. From W's viewpoint, the skeptic's questions are not to be answered, but countered with a description of the mathematical language-game's functioning. In PI, 217, we find a clear formulation of this viewpoint:

> *„How am I able to obey a rule?" – if this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule in the way I do.*
> *If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: „This is simply what I do."*

[1] Kripke [1982] pp. 97: „The rough uniformities in our arithmetical behavior mayor may not some day be given an explanation on the neurophysiological level, but such an explanation is not here in question."

> *(Remember that we sometimes demand definitions for the sake not of their content, but of their form. Our requirement is an architectural one; the definition a kind of ornamental coping that supports nothing.)* (217)

What accounts for this need for an explanation which doesn't satisfy with the reasons which function as the certain ground of various types of knowledge? W suggests that the philosophers are deceived by the analogy between the „architectural" demand for definitions and explanations (even in the case of certainties) and the everyday process of asking for reasons in actual practices of evaluating knowledge claims. What is a valid procedure for treating knowledge claims is taken to be, by the traditional philosophers, a universal requirement of the rational thinking. This requirement is built in the traditional concept of rationality, which is challenged by W, not by offering an alternative theory about rationality, but by a description of what „rationality" means for ordinary people:

> *There cannot be any doubt about it for me as a reasonable person. – That's it.* – (219)

> *The reasonable man does not have certain doubts.* (220)

This is not a description of rationality in terms of necessities. W doesn't establish some necessary conditions for rational thinking. „The reasonable man" is a description which fits most of the participants to a practice; and „does not have certain doubts" is not to be taken as „it is necessary for rational thinking not to entertain certain doubts". The shift from „rational man" to „reasonable man" is suggestive: W doesn't speak of rationality in general, as philosophers do. Instead, he speaks about the „reasonable man", which is an expression indicative for the common way of understanding reason.

So, while the philosophical concept of reason legitimates doubt as being constitutive to rational thinking, the everyday perspective shows that it is not necessary to answer particular doubts in order to think or act rationally.

Read in a therapeutic key, W's way of countering the philosopher's paradoxical questions is to show that rational thinking doesn't necessarily require answering philosopher's questions. When the skeptical philosopher asserts that it is *necessary* to answer his questions, as a requirement of rational thinking, W counters him by demoting his necessities to the rank of simple possibilities without consequence for the actual form of life or actual practices.

> *What I need to shew is that a doubt is not necessary even when it is possible. That the possibility of the language-game doesn't depend on everything being doubted that can be doubted*. (392)

I will take an example, in order to clarify W's viewpoint: the skepticism about external world. Here, the skeptic says that if one cannot answer his questions and doesn't justify the belief in the existence of the world, the

language-game with the concept of „knowledge" is a simulacrum. There is no „real" knowledge, only an apparent one, without an ultimate explanation of the fact that we take external world to exist. But it would be misleading, W suggests, to think that the skeptic position can be charged by arguments. W shows that it is not necessary to answer the skeptical questions and that this suffices to neutralize the skeptic's claims.

This is a problem of interpretation of the utmost importance: to show that W's viewpoint is not a dogmatic theory, not one supporting necessities. Even his explicit qualifications of skeptical doubts as nonsense should be taken carefully as tentative assessments of the skeptic's elusive standpoint. There is important textual evidence which could be used to counter the reading of OC as a *refutation* of the skeptic's assertions and questions as being „nonsense". Significantly, W *doesn't* say, in paragraph 392 – amazingly, after so many paragraphs of dealing with the problem! –, that he has already shown that „doubt is not necessary", but that this task is an unaccomplished one: „what I need to show". A therapeutic approach doesn't end with a clear-cut conclusion. More important, though, in order to assess the therapeutic character of W's considerations are the next three paragraphs:

> *If you demand a rule from which it follows that there can't have been a miscalculation here, the answer is that we did not learn this through a rule, but by learning to calculate.* (44)
>
> *If a doubt would be unreasonable, that cannot be seen from what I hold. There would therefore have to be a rule that declares doubt to be unreasonable here. But there isn't such a rule, either.* (452)
>
> *But then can't it be described how we satisfy ourselves of the reliability of a calculation? 0 yes! Yet no rule emerges when we do so. – But the most important thing is: The rule is not needed. Nothing is lacking. We do calculate according to a rule, and that is enough*. (46)

These paragraphs suggest that one cannot refute the skeptical arguments by argument, because we don't have „a rule that declares doubt to be unreasonable here". An anti-skeptical philosophical argument should invoke a reason for non-doubting. But the chain of reasons ends at certainties. There isn't a more fundamental domain of an ultra-certainty, consisting in rules which could be invoked in defending certainties against skeptical doubt. Certainty cannot meet the challenges addressed to knowledge claims and there is no need to. Which is to say, one cannot ask for grounds of a certainty. In some circumstances, one could justify following a rule at most by a practical purpose:

> *49. But remember: even when the calculation is something fixed for me, this is only a decision for a practical purpose.*

When a community chooses a certain metrical system, one cannot ask if that particular system is true or fits reality. That is, you cannot ask for the epistemic grounds of measuring in inches or in centimeters. The chess' rules are also fixed for everybody, and equally one cannot ask for an epistemic justification of its rules. W contends that it is the same way with *some*, or the majority of our certainties (he wouldn't say *all*; this would be a philosophical thesis). These analogies can be used with the purpose of clarifying the confusion which originates the skeptical doubt, but not for stating dogmatically that skeptical questions are meaningless.

A skeptical doubt about mathematical rule-following equals with asking for a more fundamental rule than those used in ordinary mathematics. But even if one could give an answer, the skeptic would continue by questioning about following super-rules. W would contend that there is no need of a super-rule in the first place:

> *But can it be seen from a rule what circumstances logically exclude a mistake in the employment of rules of calculation? What use is a rule to us here? Mightn't we (in turn) go wrong in applying it?*(26)

If the rules which have the status of certainty in our practices would be questioned, it would be of no use to conceive a more fundamental, philosophical rule, because then the skeptic would ask the same questions we formulate in respect with the rules of the actual language-games. If the actual rules wouldn't be considered as „fixed" (synonym for „certain", here) because of the possibility of questioning them in the way of the skeptic, yet another, more fundamental one couldn't solve the problem: the skeptic would simply change the target.

Traditional philosophers usually accepted that skeptical challenges are in need for a rational answer. But when one tries to offer a counterargument, one has already made the most important concession to the skeptic: that it is necesary to answer his questions in order to establish the rationality of our knowledge or communication practices. W acknowledges his own temptation to offer arguments to the skeptic:

> *Naturally, my aim must be to say the statements one would like to make here, but cannot make significantly.* (76)

Where the skeptic tries to evaluate an entire language-game and concludes that there is something wrong with it, the most natural answer is to tell him that it is as good as it is needed, as long as it meets a practical purpose in the life of a community. Languages or language-games are not theories, but means of communication. This is the firm ground which serves to W in order to resist the temptation of conceive a theoretical argument against skepticism: his viewpoint on language as basically in order as long as it could function as a means of communication in practices.

To say that people are maybe wrong in the belief that they correctly apply mathematical rules sounds no more paradoxical than the hypothesis that maybe people always played chess, or another, game, wrong:

> *This is a similar case to that of shewing that it has no meaning to say that a game has always been played wrong.* (496)

What could this hypothesis mean? Let's imagine this situation: there is an old book with the entire set of the rules of chess, elaborated by the inventor of the game, and people who discover it surprisingly find that the actual rules of chess and the original one are not the same. Would people say that the moderns play chess wrong? Categorically not; the original chess handbook would be considered a historical curiosity, and chessmen would continue to play by the actual rules. Chess is a custom, and the meaning of the expression „rules of chess" is given by the community's use of it.

So, in the surrounding of the ordinary speaking about chess' rules, the skeptical hypothesis about chess has no practical consequences, and loses its paradoxical appearance. But the skeptic wants to say that by this appeal to ordinary context of speech one misses his point. What would that be? Let's go back to the chess example. The new formulation of the skeptical argument about chess says that chessmen could play wrong without someone being aware of it or ever prove it. So to speak, even without breaking the original rules of the game. This argument parallels the kripkean skeptic's affirmation that his quus-hypothesis is not about memory. In both cases, the skeptic's challenge doesn't depend on factual aspects of the rule-following, like the accuracy of the subject's memory or the possibility of there being some written rules unknown to the chess players from the present. So, in this case, the community could go wrong in playing chess even if there is no evidence of not following the original rules of chess.

In this case, one wouldn't know what to do with this hypothesis. The kripkean skeptic's or the chess skeptic's doubt implies that it is conceivable that one could take a step outside language in order to evaluate it. W counters this viewpoint saying that there is „no higher position than, simply, the human language-game" (paragraph 554). In the same paragraph, W emphasizes this idea, saying that „God himself couldn't say anything to me" to answer the skeptic's questions. Maybe God could know the answer for the skeptic, but we wouldn't understand it because we wouldn't figure out the grammar of his words.

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