

The paradox and the solution: Kripke

EPISTEMOLOGY AND FACTS. It may be thought that the sceptic only challenges my *knowledge* of meaning. I do mean a determinate function by ‘plus’, but there is no certainty as to which one it is. There is a fact of meaning, but I cannot prove to you, or even to myself, that *this* is the function I mean. But Kripke makes clear that the issue is not epistemological in the first place. In examining my past mental history I cannot pinpoint any fact of meaning. It is not that our knowledge of meaning is under threat. It is the reality of meaning that we cannot make sense of. Of course, for the purposes of exposition, we had to take our meanings for granted. Otherwise we would not have been able to articulate the distinction between ‘plus’ and ‘quus’. But now this assumption is no longer tenable. It was just that—a pretence.

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SIMPLICITY AND REALITY. You might have thought that the choice between plus and quus may be decided by pragmatic considerations, such as simplicity (another candidate: elegance). For quus we need a special clause, but not so for plus. These considerations are a staple feature of the debate over theory choice in philosophy of science. A naive realist may wish to prefer one theory over another because one is true, and the other false. A more sophisticated realist, especially the one aware of the actual way in which science works, would rather base his choice of pragmatic considerations and use them as a *guide* to truth. This is illustrated by Kripke’s example of electron. There are electrons, but we cannot directly observe them. We rather choose a hypothesis that, having assumed the existence of electrons, provides simple explanations. A higher being would need no such roundabout way, since it could directly observe electrons.

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Remark 1. In this discussion Kripke addresses himself only to ‘realists’, whether about electrons or meaning. What about instrumentalists (mentioned by Kripke only in passing)? Following Kuhn, Feyerabend, and others, an instrumentalist may similarly appeal to simplicity, but deny that the statements are true or false, when truth is conceived realistically. He would deny that these statements accurately describe a theory-independent (mind-independent) reality at all, or even that they purport to do so. Instead, they are descriptions of our observations that have to be judged *entirely* by pragmatic considerations, whether by God or by ourselves. The metaphysical stance of this instrumentalist is not very different from the sceptic’s.

HEADACHE. You might think that simplicity considerations are anyway irrelevant. It is not as though I am weighing alternative hypotheses before meaning plus by ‘plus’ or meaning quus. I know *my* meaning instantly. (Here, again, recall Searle’s argument from the first-person perspective.)

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But how is my instant access to meaning secured? Suppose I have a special feeling, a headache perhaps, every time I hear ‘plus’ or look at the sign ‘+’. It is simply not clear how this helps in telling me what I *ought* to say in each and every act of calculation. In short, no psychological feeling can be relevant to determining the meaning of an expression.

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PLATONISM. Kripke usefully recasts the sceptical paradox in Fregean terms. Might we not identify meanings with Fregean senses and say that the expression ‘plus’ refers to plus, since that is how the Fregean sense determines it? Scepticism about meanings could be avoided, since, as we know, Fregean senses are denizens of the Platonic third realm.

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If this kind of response makes sense at all, the sceptical problem is still with us. For in order to speak meaningfully, a person must be able to ‘grasp’ those senses. The sceptical problem is to explain this grasping.

It is not helpful to present the argument and the dialectic as a whole in this way, of course. Platonism does not descend on us like a revelation on Sinai. Frege introduces it to explain the efficiency of communication. We communicate because both of us have understood the meaning of ‘plus’. But this understanding cannot consist in sharing subjective ideas—hence, the third realm. The sceptic intervenes at this early stage: there is no evidence that we understood the *same* meaning (and more strongly, this kind of understanding is not even intelligible when thought through). True, our communication has to be explained. But the motivation for postulating the third realm disappears.

ANALOGY WITH HUME AND BERKELEY. This is not the place to engage in a prolonged discussion of this issue, so just a few words. The analogy with Hume's problem of induction is obvious. There is a purported fact about the past which we now use to justify a claim about the present or the future. Hume's sceptic (or Hume himself!) and the meaning sceptic both intervene at this point: no justification is possible! But what is Hume's actual position? Should we take our induction judgements (or our belief in the external world) at face value? Perhaps so. We should accept our force together with realizing that no rational justification for them exists. We believe the induction 'blindly'—a Wittgensteinian paraphrase.

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Kripke remarks that Berkeley may be a better analogy here. We examine common sense beliefs, and we accept them at face value. We then claim that any clash that our considered views have with these beliefs is not *really* with them, but a philosophical interpretation of these beliefs. Berkeley, therefore, does not consider himself a 'sceptic'. He rather argues that those philosophical interpretations, when taken to the logical conclusion, lead to scepticism. The analogy with Wittgenstein's argument is presumably that the sceptic can begin his argument only after he has accepted some (wrong) philosophical views about meaning. When these views are removed, the appearance of scepticism disappears too.

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Clearly we cannot get a proper perspective on any of these analogies before we have seen Wittgenstein's (Kripkenstein's) sceptical solution of the paradox.

OUTLINE OF THE SCEPTICAL SOLUTION. Kripkenstein concedes that no fact is to be found in the external world, including my own inner world, that explains (corresponds to, grounds) my current use of 'plus'. Instead, we should *look* at how the assertions are used. There is a far-reaching claim here. There are truthmakers. There are no entities and no metaphysical relations that make propositions true. We should give up the idea that language represents or misrepresents the world. This is all very well, but can we now distinguish correct use from incorrect one? That is, is there any *norm* that a person can, or should, follow in his use of the language?

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When we look at the individual person, we reach the stage where all explanations come to an end. A person uses the words 'blindly', in the sense of not being able (and should not be able!) to provide rational reasons. Still, he is not using them 'incorrectly' (not '*zu Unrecht*'). There are 'assertability conditions' when a person must mean *X* rather than *Y*. If we remain at the level of a single individual, this is all there is to say. All that we say that the current practice leads him the way it leads.

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But this means that rule following has no content when a language user is considered in isolation. Just because a user has a gut feeling, a feeling of irrevocable conviction, does not mean that he is following the rule correctly.

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Remark 2 (Fichte). Is this last claim so obvious? Suppose we did have an explanation given in terms of a logical inference. What should make us believe that the inference is correct, other than a *conviction*? Fichte must be credited with the insight that no matter how rationally justified a claim is, our acceptance ultimately rests on a conviction, a belief with a certain feeling of certainty (the original idea goes back to Descartes, of course).

But the situation changes dramatically, once we consider the user a part of the community of users.

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THE THREE ELEMENTS OF THE SOLUTION.

ROBINSON CRUSOE.

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