

Foundationalism, Coherentism and Rule-Following Skepticism*

1. Introduction

If one's words mean anything, then it seems as if there should be some facts in virtue of which they mean what they mean. This raises the questions of (1) what are the facts that determine what we mean, and (2) just how do such facts determine what we mean? One popular answer to the first question is that the facts that determine what we mean are the facts about our usage.¹ This leaves the second question to be "how does our usage determine what we mean?", and this question has typically been answered in one of two ways. In particular, the relation between meaning and usage can be understood in either a reductive or a holistic fashion.² These different conceptions of how the facts determine what we mean will bring with them correspondingly different conceptions of how we can justify claims about what we mean by appealing to such facts.

On the 'reductive' picture of how meaning and usage are related, correct usage (and with it meaning) is identified as that usage which agrees with an independently specifiable sub-class of meaning-determining usage. From a given set of facts about a speaker's usage, one should be able to *deduce* what the speaker means by a given word. Consequently, the class of facts that determine what we mean cannot include particular instances of usage that are out of line with what we mean. If some member of a class is out of line with what we mean, then the members of that class could not really have been constitutive of what we meant (at least *qua* members of that class). As a result, the justification of one's usage through the appeal to the meaning constitutive facts will have a 'classically foundationalist' structure. If we assume that we have unproblematic access to the facts about our usage,³ then the reductionist will assume that the process of justifying one's usage through the aspects of our usage that can't be mistaken. The sorts of facts that are in the relevant class of justifiers will be 'incurrigible', since all the aspects of usage appealed to will be in

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¹ Though whether these facts about usage should be understood behavioristically, socially, or intentionally is the subject to some dispute.

² Both views are, in some sense, idealizations, and the possibility of intermediate positions is always open (though for some worries about the stability of such intermediate positions, see Fodor and Lepore 1992).

³ For the importance of this assumption, see the discussion of 'cognitive idealization' below.

accordance with what one means. If what a word means is determined by how one's words are used when they are, say, initially learned, then one can justify any other aspect of one's usage by showing that it agrees with the members of the privileged set. The members of that privileged set cannot, on such an account, be understood as mistaken.⁴

On the other hand, if one understands the relation between meaning and usage in a more holistic fashion, then the class of facts that determine what one means may contain members that are actually out of line with correct usage.⁵ As a result, from the mere fact that a given member of class is not in accordance with what one means, it does not follow that the members of that class could not be *collectively* constitutive of such facts about meaning. If the members of the foundational class are collectively constitutive of what we mean by each word, then whether a particular member of that class is in agreement with what we mean depends upon how it relates to other members of that class. The function from usage to meaning would thus not depend exclusively upon non-holistic properties of our usage of the sort that would allow one to partition the meaning constitutive from the non-meaning-constitutive aspects of usage. The process of justifying one's usage, even under epistemically ideal conditions, would thus have more of a coherentist structure, and the facts that one cites to justify one's usage will typically only give *prima facie* support to that usage. Members of the class of justifiers will be corrigible in the sense that they can turn out to be out of line with what one actually means.

In spite of these difference, both those who have reductive and those who have holistic conceptions of how meaning relates to usage believe that there are facts about what one means, and that one can justify one's usage by appealing to such facts. By contrast, Saul Kripke has, on Wittgenstein's behalf, famously argued for a type of skepticism about meaning, claiming that

⁴ Usage associated with beliefs taken to be part of 'meaning constitutive' definitions are the other obvious candidate for the privileged subset of our usage, though they are a candidate that has been considerably less popular since Quine's attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction in Quine 1951. (The relation between claims of meaning constitution and claims of incorrigibility is discussed in greater detail in Jackman 1996.)

⁵ Holistic accounts should not simply *identify* meaning with the totality of our usage, since meaning would then become unacceptably idiosyncratic and unstable. (Such problems, and how holistic accounts should be understood so as not to lead to them, are discussed in Jackman 1999a.) Of course, some holistic accounts of meaning (particularly those associated with conceptual role semantics) have these undesirable characteristics, but I argue in Jackman 1999a that 'Davidsonian' theories that appeal to the Principle of Charity are not subject to such objections.

nothing could justify one's applying a word in one particular way rather than any other.⁶ Since Kripke presents his skeptical arguments as taking place under conditions of cognitive idealization (that is to say, we are presumed to have complete recall of all current and past facts about our usage, dispositions, and states of consciousness),⁷ the question of what sorts of facts could constitute what we mean can be treated in terms of the question of what sorts of fact we could appeal to (under such ideal conditions) in order to justify particular instances of our usage.⁸ However, even under such conditions of idealization, Kripke assumes a particular model of what justification must consist in, and this brings with it an implicit picture of what the relation between meaning and the class of meaning constitutive facts must be. In particular, it will be argued here that Kripke's argument has bite only if one understands justification in classically foundationalist terms, and that they have little impact on those who understand such justification in a coherentist fashion.⁹ Consequently, Kripke's arguments, if good, lead not to a type of skepticism about meaning, but rather to the conclusion that (at least if you think meaning is determined by use) one should be a coherentist about the justification of our usage.¹⁰

2. Kripke's Skeptic and Past Usage

⁶ Kripke, 1982 (hereafter referred to as "K").

⁷ K pp. 14, 21, 39. For the importance of such idealization in Kripke's argument, see Wright 1984, p. 762, and Boghossian 1989, p. 515. One might also note that the nature of idealization will make reference to facts that may go beyond those available to many purely 'usage-based' accounts of meaning (and include 'states of consciousness, etc.), though I will be focusing on their application to this more limited target.

⁸ Though what he takes to be available under such conditions of idealization reveal some presuppositions about what sorts of facts there could be. For instance, Kripke assumes that *sui generis* meaning facts would not be available to be appealed to under such ideal conditions. This is a non-trivial assumption about the types of facts that can be appealed to (see Boghossian 1989), and it will be argued below that Kripke also makes non-trivial assumptions about *how* the sorts of facts he does admit can relate to facts about meaning. The suggestion that meaning facts should be understood as *sui generis* will be discussed in the final section of this paper.

⁹ Classically foundationalism is often accused of being epistemically too demanding, but this worry about 'raising the bar to high' does not get a grip if we are assuming that the justification is taking place under such conditions of cognitive idealization.

¹⁰ Consequently, Kripke's arguments might also be viewed as suggesting that holistic accounts of meaning are better placed than their reductive counterparts to account for the difference between how we do and how we should use our terms. Holistic accounts of meaning are not without their critics (see particularly Fodor and LePore 1992) and I attempt to answer such criticisms, and deal with this topic further, in Jackman 1996 and 1999a.

Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein is, at best, controversial, and, in what follows, the view will be attributed to "Kripke" or "Kripke's Skeptic." In fairness to Kripke, however, it should be noted that he explicitly withholds his endorsement from the skeptical views he presents (K, 5). That said, according to 'Kripke,' facts about one's attitudes and behavior are unable to fund any distinction between how one *does* and how one *should* apply one's terms (K, 89). In particular, Kripke argues that if, say, "68+57" were a computation that one had never performed before, then no facts about one's attitudes or behavior would serve to answer a "bizarre skeptic" who suggested that, as one used the term "plus" in the past, one meant *quus*, a function much like *plus* but for which the answer one should give for "68 + 57" is "5" (K, 8). This sort of skepticism is not, of course, limited to mathematical examples. The same skeptic might also insist that, in the past, what one meant by "table" was not *table*, but *tabair*, that is "anything that is a table not found at the base of the Eiffel Tower, or a chair found there" (K, 19).

Kripke's skeptic invites an obvious response. Namely, one knows that one previously meant *plus* rather than *quus* by "plus" because, *had* one previously calculated "68 + 57," one *would have* come up with "125" rather than "5." Now remember, to draw his skeptical conclusion about meaning itself (rather than just our knowledge of it), Kripke allows the debate with his skeptic to take place under conditions of cognitive idealization. Consequently, there can be no skeptical worries about what answer one was, in fact, disposed to give to the calculation problem. The fact that one was disposed to answer "125" rather than "5" is thus not open to doubt.

Nevertheless, Kripke thinks that the obvious response misses the point of the skeptic's challenge. The fact that one *would have* applied a term a certain way does not entail that one *should have* (K, 108). According to Kripke, "the fundamental problem" is whether one's "actual dispositions are 'right' or not," whether there is "anything that mandates what they *ought* to be."¹¹

Suppose that I do mean addition by '+'. What is the relation of this supposition to the question of how I will respond to the problem '68 + 75'? The dispositionalist gives a *descriptive* account of this relation: if '+' means addition, then I will answer '125'. But this is not the proper account of the relation, which is *normative*, not descriptive. The point is *not* that, if I meant addition by '+', I *will* answer '125', but that, if I intended to accord with my past meaning of '+', I *should* answer '125'. Computational error, finiteness of my capacity, and other disturbing factors may lead me not to be *disposed* to respond as I *should*, but if so, I have not acted in

¹¹ K, 57. See also pp. 23, 24.

accordance with my intention. The relation of meaning and intention to future action is normative, not descriptive... Precisely the fact that our answer to the question of which function I meant is *justificatory* of my present response is ignored in the dispositional account and leads to all its difficulties. (K, 37)

One can be disposed to make mistakes, so the fact that one's usage corresponds to a past disposition does not entail that such usage must be correct.

However, while this is a fair criticism of Kripke's "dispositionalist," who simply *equates* what one meant with how one was disposed to use one's terms,¹² it is far from clear that the obvious response commits one to this sort of "dispositionalism." By giving the dispositionalist a monopoly on disposition-based responses to the skeptic, Kripke allows dispositions to be *relevant* to correct usage only by being *identified* with such usage. In doing so, he unfairly saddles the obvious response with a commitment to a patently unacceptable view.

To see why, consider a similar skeptic about the relevance of *past* usage. Past usage is an expression of past dispositions, and if the skeptic's argument against the relevance of dispositions were good, one might expect a similar argument against the relevance of past usage to be so as well. Indeed, by focusing on a calculation that lacks precedent, Kripke obscures just how powerful the skeptic's dialectical strategy would be if it were sound. For instance, imagine a skeptic who suggests that, as one used the term "plus" in the past, one meant *gnus*, a function for which the answer one should give for "1 + 1" is "11." Like the initial skeptic, this new skeptic can also make his point with non-arithmetical terms. However, rather than arguing that by "table" one previously meant *tabair*, the new skeptic will make the more radical claim that by "table" one previously meant, say, *toaster*.

This skeptic invites a second obvious response. Namely, one knows that one previously meant *plus* rather than *gnus* by "plus" because one has frequently performed the calculation "1 + 1" and one has always come up with "2" rather than "11". Does the second obvious response commit one to "past-applicationism," the view that one can simply *identify* what one meant by a term with how one used it in the past? If so, the skeptic could, justifiably, claim that one has missed the point of his challenge. What is at issue here is not the answer one *gave* in the past, but rather the

¹² K, 22-6, 30.

answer one *should have given*. Past usage is, after all, not sacrosanct, and most people occasionally misapply at least *some* of their terms. The fundamental problem, this new skeptic will insist, is whether one's past applications were 'right' or not. *If* the second obvious response commits one to past-applicationism, then the manifest fact that one's past applications can be mistaken would preclude one's endorsement of the second obvious response, and, with it, the thought that one's previous usage of a term can be appealed to in order to justify a claim about what one meant by it (and thus apparently that one's past usage of a term is relevant to what one previously meant by it).

However, the conclusion that how one has always applied one's terms in the past is irrelevant to how one *should* have applied them (and the corresponding possibility that one may have *always* misapplied *all* one's terms) might seem like a *reductio* of whatever assumptions led to it. If one's past usage isn't relevant to what one meant in the past, then it is hard to see how anything could be. After all, just as the fact that some of one's beliefs could be false does not entail that they all could be, the fact that one may *occasionally* misapply one's terms does not entail that one could *always* misapply them. The move from fallibilism to global skepticism is usually suspect, and Kripke's skeptic seems to license precisely such a move in the realm of meaning.¹³ Admittedly, some accounts of meaning allow that one might always misapply particular terms, but these are not generalizable in the way suggested by the skeptic's dialectical move. For instance, if reference were determined to be a particular physical relation,¹⁴ investigation of this relation might reveal that a particular word actually referred to something other than what one always applied it too. Still, even if one were willing to grant that reference could be understood this way,¹⁵ the particular physical relation could only be identified as one of 'reference' if it picked out what we intuitively took ourselves to be referring to with *most* of our words. Consequently, such a possibility doesn't allow for a *generalized* separation between actual and correct usage. Secondly, if what we meant

¹³ It is not that surprising that this move turns out to be made against an assumed background of a classically foundationalist account of justification, since such a move is often justified within such a framework.

¹⁴ For a defense of this claim, see Field 1972, Devitt 1980, 1996.

¹⁵ And this is to grant a lot.

were socially determined,¹⁶ we might be understood as always misapplying our own words if we never applied our terms in the socially accepted way. However, the social line is also incompatible with a *generalized* meaning skepticism since it presupposes that at least *most* people are correct in their usage, or at least that the socially accepted usage is correct.¹⁷

Of course, while the claim that our usage could always be mistaken can seem like a *reductio* of at least one of the skeptic's assumptions, the skeptic will insist that the assumption that needs to be given up is the initial assumption that we mean anything at all. However, this bullet is not much easier to bite than the conclusion that we could always be mistaken. While one may not have a choice but to bite one of these bullets if the skeptic's arguments is sound, the unintuitive nature of the choices it offers us gives us reason to examine the skeptic's argument more closely. Since past usage seems clearly relevant to what one meant in the past, but past-applicationism is unacceptable, one should look for an understanding of the second obvious response that does not commit one to past-applicationism. Doing so is likely to lead to an interpretation of the initial obvious response that does not commit one to dispositionalism, and thus go some way towards answering Kripke's original skeptical challenge.

3. Kripke's Classically Foundationalist Framework

The first step towards finding a more acceptable interpretation of the first and second obvious responses is to notice that they commit one to dispositionalism and past-applicationism only if one presupposes a type of *classical foundationalism* about how our usage could be justified.¹⁸ It is characteristic of classical foundationalism that members of the ultimate class of justifiers be

¹⁶ This view has been attributed to Burge (particularly Burge 1979), and, of course, Kripke's Wittgenstein (see, for instance, Davidson 1992, Bilgrami 1992), though both attributions strike me as unfair. (For a discussion of this, see Jackman 1996.)

¹⁷ Furthermore, while Kripke limits his discussion to the inability of facts about the speaker's past behavior and mental history to fund such a distinction, his arguments can be generalized to a social level as well. (For a discussion of this point, see, among others, Blackburn 1984, Boghossian 1989.) Kripke's 'skeptical solution' suggests that making the distinction between actual and correct usage can be 'pragmatically' rather than 'metaphysically' justified.

¹⁸ Some contemporary foundationalists have advanced foundationalist theories that are more forgiving than the classical variety (see, for instance, Audi 1993), but Kripke's reply to the obvious response, and his use of the notion of cognitive idealization, suggest that he could not be presupposing one of these more forgiving conceptions.

incorrigible. If something can be mistaken, it can't, ultimately, have really been a justifier.¹⁹ Justification is not defeasible, and something that initially appeared to be a justifier turned out to be out of line with the facts, then it could not have 'really' been a justifier at all. Consequently, a classical foundationalist about justification must understand appeals to dispositions or past applications as presupposing their incorrigibility (as dispositionalism and past-applicationism do). Since dispositions and past applications are not incorrigible, a classical foundationalist must consider such appeals to be unacceptable (as dispositionalism and past applicationism are). Kripke's equation of the obvious response with dispositionalism shows that he presupposes that attempts to justify our usage should have such a classically foundationalist structure.²⁰

Kripke's classically foundationalist understanding of how we should justify our usage may be encouraged by his assimilation of cases of unprecedented linguistic usage to the question of how one should 'go on' with sequences such as "2, 4, 6, 8..." (K, 18). In such 'intelligence tests,' it is *not* open to question whether the members of the initial sequence are *themselves* correct. The initial series of numbers in the "intelligence test" have just the type of incorrigibility a classical foundationalist about justification requires. One could not, for instance, argue that the next number should be "14" and that the rule involved multiplying the prime numbers by two (adding of course, that the appearance of "8" as the fourth term was a mistake, and that a "10" belonged in that spot). It is part of the 'game' of extending sequences that the rule by which the sequence is extended should be one with which *all* the previous members are in accord.²¹ By contrast, when one applies

¹⁹ This contrasts, for instance, with the coherentist, who can allow that *prima facie* justifiers still provide justification, even if the usage receiving such *prima facie* justification turn out not to be justified 'all things considered'.

²⁰ Classical foundationalists can be understood as assuming that potential justifiers fall into 'epistemically natural kinds' and if some member of a kind (perception, testimony, etc.) can be mistaken, then that kind cannot be the kind that serves as part of a foundational justification. (Clear and distinct ideas and judgments about 'the given' are the paradigmatic instance of a purportedly privileged epistemically natural kind.) In much the same way, Kripke's skeptic (as well as many practitioners of 'information semantics') assumes that our usage must fall into 'semantically natural kinds', and usage can only be relevant if it is an instance of a kind with no mistaken members. Dispositions are thus not an acceptable candidate for a meaning determining kind. (Though Kripke occasionally acts as if past usage is – see the following note).

²¹ This understanding of rule following in terms of intelligence tests would also explain why, in spite of the fact that his arguments work as well against past usage as they do against past dispositions, Kripke takes considerable care to stress that '68+57' is meant to stand for "a computation that I have never performed before" (K, 8), and that the skeptic's claim that "nothing justifies a brute inclination to answer one way rather than another" is made only with the qualification "if previously I never performed this computation explicitly" (K, 15).

one's terms in novel cases, doing so correctly does not require the new usage to be in accordance with a rule from which one's earlier usage had never strayed. Furthermore, in the intelligence tests, not only is past usage 'incorrigible,' but it is also the *exclusive* source of constraint upon the 'rule' by which the sequence is to be continued.²² Past linguistic usage, while relevant to word meaning, should have neither this incorrigibility nor this exclusivity, and a picture of how our claims about what we mean are ultimately justified by our usage that allows for this can be provided by the coherentist.

4. Semantic Coherentism

If one thinks of justification in a coherentist fashion, one need not assume that each member of the class of justifiers is incorrigible. To Kripke's oft-asked question, what *justifies* a particular instance of one's usage, the coherentist's answer is, in some sense, that usage itself. Since it is collectively constitutive of what we mean, our usage does not require any sort of *external* justification.²³ The coherentist can thus treat every one of one's utterances as *prima facie* justified. That is to say, one's usage counts as correct unless it turns out to be incompatible with more deeply entrenched aspects of one's usage. Past usage corresponds to correct usage unless something actually trumps it, and without such a candidate, skepticism about such usage is groundless. One need not find anything in one's past history to show that an aspect of one's current usage is correct, though one's usage may count as incorrect if there are enough aspects of one's past history that conflict with it. By taking all usage to be *prima facie* correct, the coherentist allows past usage to be *relevant* to what one meant without being *equated* with it. The second obvious response does not, then, for the coherentist, commit one to past-applicationism.

In much the same way, the initial obvious response commits one only to treating one's dispositions as having *prima facie* relevance in determining how one's terms are correctly applied.

²² Facts about the correct rule for the sequence reduce to facts about the what patterns are exemplified by the members given thus far.

²³ That is to say, there is no need to justify one's usage by showing it to be the product of *something else* that justifies it, and thus no need to talk of one's usage as justified by rules "guiding", "telling" or giving one "instructions" (K. 23-24, 89). Of course, some classical foundationalists may be able to say this of *some* aspects of our usage (if those aspects are then understood as meaning determining) but they could not say so of all of them.

Consequently, it does not commit one to *equating* dispositions with correct use, and thus allows that “whatever in fact I (am disposed to) do, there is a unique thing which I *should* do” (K, 24). A particular disposition may turn out to be incorrect, but one needs to be given a reason for thinking so. For instance, one may be (perhaps even systematically) disposed to make certain computational errors, but one counts such computations as mistaken because they are out of step with commitments and behavior that one takes to be more central to the proper interpretation of one’s computational practices. Unless the skeptic can give one some reason to think that one’s disposition to answer “125” was similarly out of step with other aspects of one’s usage, the mere reminder that one can be disposed to make computational mistakes is not an adequate rejoinder to the obvious response.²⁴

The claim that one’s dispositions have such *prima facie* relevance should not be confused with the claim that dispositions are, *ceteris paribus*, constitutive of correct use. Kripke deals with the latter suggestion (K, 27-32), but not with the former. This should not be surprising. The claim that dispositions are, *ceteris paribus*, constitutive of correct use still fits into what is essentially a classically foundationalist approach to the justification of our usage. It suggests that certain ‘privileged’ dispositions provide the justificatory foundations for the rest of one’s usage, and that one’s usage is justified if it agrees with the usage in the privileged set. On such an account, the dispositions in the privileged set themselves turn out to be ‘in corrigible.’ Popular candidates for such privileged dispositions are those that one would have under certain ‘optimal’ conditions such as the conditions under which one learned a term, the conditions under which one’s cognitive mechanisms are ‘functioning as they should,’ etc.²⁵ Such accounts are not without their defenders, but Kripke makes a fairly convincing case that (especially for someone who is disposed to make *systematic* mistakes) there is no non-question begging way to specify the relevant *ceteris paribus* clauses (K, 28).²⁶ Such problems do not, however, plague the coherentist, who need

²⁴ And one can assume that the skeptic is working under conditions of cognitive idealization as well. If the skeptic cannot come up with such a conflicting aspect of one’s usage, then there is no such aspect to be found.

²⁵ See, for instance, Dretske 1981, 1986, Fodor 1987, 1990, Stamp 1979.

²⁶ For a discussion of Kripke’s criticisms of such accounts, see Boghossian 1989. For a general discussion of the prospect for and problems with such accounts, see Loewer 1987, 1997.

make no differentiation in kind between those aspects of usage that are meaning constitutive and those that are not.

Unlike the classical foundationalist, who must insist that any candidate justifier was not ‘really’ a justifier at all if turned out to be out of line with correct usage, the coherentist can admit that aspects of one’s usage can provide *prima facie* justification for what is, *all things considered*, a mistake.²⁷ For the coherentist the ultimate *source* of justification is *all* of one’s usage, not just the most coherent subset of that usage.²⁸

Coherentists can thus appeal to dispositions or past usage while accepting the manifest fact that such justifiers can be mistaken. Conclusive justification would involve showing that the justified element coheres best with *everything* in the class of justifiers.²⁹ Nevertheless, giving evidence of coherence with individual elements from the justifying set provides *prima facie* justification that can be defeated only if an incompatible alternative is shown to cohere better. Understood in a coherentist fashion, the first and second obvious responses provide defeasible justification for the claim that “125” and “2” were the correct responses to “68+57” and “1+1” by suggesting that these responses cohere better with the total corpus of justifiers than the skeptic’s alternatives. The justification is defeasible, but the onus is on the skeptic to come up with the defeater.³⁰ Indeed, the two obvious responses are perhaps better understood as showing that the skeptics’ candidates for what one meant in the past are *unjustified* in virtue of their clashing with our dispositions and past usage. That is to say, in giving the obvious responses, one is not so much showing that one

²⁷ *Prima facie* justification is here understood as a type of justification, it is not merely the *appearance* (or illusion) of justification. (Compare the case of practical reasoning, where one can have legitimate reasons for doing a particular act even when, all things considered, one should do something else.)

²⁸ Of course the members of the maximal coherent subset will turn out to be correct, but this does not make them ‘incorrigible’ in any substantial sense. They are no more incorrigible than the members of the set of ‘non-mistaken’ usage are incorrigible. Incorrigibility has bite only if one has independent access to the purportedly incorrigible class.

²⁹ Note that the entire class of justifiers may not be available at any given time, and so mere coherence with past usage and current dispositions may not make for indefeasible justification. The best way to make novel experience cohere with the past may involve characterizing the previously coherent element as mistaken. (For further discussion of the possible relevance of such future usage, see Jackman 1996, 1998a, 1999b, though Ebbs (2000) argues that such cases undermine the whole idea that meaning is determined by use.)

³⁰ Once again, under conditions of cognitive idealization there is no worry about simple ‘burden shifting’ in this case. Both sides can be expected to have access to all of the relevant facts.

meant *plus* as one is showing that one *didn't* mean *gnus* or *quus*.³¹ The skeptical hypotheses each conflict with at least some semantically relevant facts: one's dispositions to use "plus" in the case of the *quus* hypothesis, and one's past usage of "plus" in the case of *gnus* hypothesis. On the other hand, the *plus* hypothesis appears not to conflict with any such facts.

Kripke does, of course, discuss some coherentist attempts to answer his skeptic. Unfortunately, he limits this discussion to the need for one's use of "plus" to cohere with one's use of, say, "add" or "count", and he points out that the skeptic can raise symmetrical doubts about one's past use of these terms as well. The skeptic will, for instance claim that by "count" in the past one meant *quount*, "where to 'quount', say, a group of stones is to count it in the ordinary sense, unless the group was formed as the union of two groups, one of which has 57 or more stones, in which case one must automatically give the answer '5'" (K, 16). As Kripke puts it, "if 'plus' is explained in terms of 'counting', a non-standard interpretation of the latter will yield a non-standard interpretation of the former" (K, 16). However, this only shows that, just as dispositions (when isolated from coherence considerations) will be unable to account for the possibility of misapplications, coherence considerations (when isolated from dispositions) will lend themselves to global permutations. Neither of these facts entail that an account that incorporated the dispositions themselves into what needed to be kept coherent would be subject to either difficulty. If one really were disposed to systematically 'count' in a *quus*-like fashion (systematically taking piles of 68 and 57 stones, putting them together and 'counting' out '5' stones as their combination, etc.), and, indeed, made analogous errors with *all* attempts to reach a result, then the suggestion that one meant *quus* and *quount* rather than *plus* and *count* would have some plausibility.

Though even in such a case, one's probable commitment to meaning by "plus" just what one's peers do (a commitment manifested in one's deference to their correction), may still allow one to count as meaning *plus* by "plus". However, social usage is here treated as having an *indirect*

³¹ In answering Kripke's skeptic, one needn't offer establish a completely determinate meaning for one's term (this issue will be dealt with further below), rather one only needs to show that the contrastive claim that one means, say, *plus* rather than *quus*, is justified.

connection to what we mean by our terms.³² Our commitment to meaning what our peers do is just one of many factors that has *prima facie* weight in determining what we mean, and if it conflicts with other commitments relating to a word that we take to be more central, this commitment can simply be given up. This is, after all, precisely what occasionally happens when we are corrected. On occasion we simply conclude that we mean something different by the term than our peers do. An appeal to social usage is thus not in a position to play a classically foundational role in showing that one's own usage is justified.³³ It is always possible, if unlikely, that an aspect of one's usage that agrees with the social standard may still conflict with what are ultimately more deeply held commitments relating to the term.

Finally, we should consider Kripke's charge that the dispositional response "ignores the fact that my dispositions extend to only finitely many cases" (K, 28). Admittedly, even if coherence considerations determined that one didn't mean *quus* by "plus" or *tabair* by "table", there may remain cases where neither one's dispositions, nor any other aspect of one's usage, will determine whether or not a word should be used in a certain way. However, it is not obvious that the coherentist need worry about such cases. The existence of such cases would, after all, be in keeping with current studies of the psychology of classification that suggest that we conceptualize experience in terms of prototypes rather than in terms of categories determined by sets of necessary and sufficient conditions.³⁴ According to such studies we often lack any firm disposition to place various objects or situations within either the extension or anti-extension of certain terms. In some instances, of course, our other general commitments will ultimately favor including or excluding the questionable item, and we may be able to come up with (on reflection) a clear decision about what to say about the borderline case.³⁵ In other cases, however, it seems quite *plausible* to say

³² For a fuller discussion of this, see Jackman 1996, 1998b.

³³ Such appeals seem to play such a role in Kripke's account of Wittgenstein's position (K, ch. 3). On such an account, agreement with social usage is both necessary and sufficient for one's being properly (if not truthfully) said to be using a word correctly.

³⁴ For a discussion of such studies, see, for instance, Rosch and Mervis 1975, and Lakoff 1987. (Though for some reservations about the extent of their philosophical significance, see Fodor 1998.)

³⁵ Or, possibly, there is currently no answer, but future usage will set the relevant precedent. The total set of relevant facts about usage need not be limited to those that have been settled at the current moment. (For a discussion of this possibility, see Jackman 1996, 1998a, 1999b, Ebbs 2000, Wilson, forthcoming.)

that there is no answer to the question of whether or not the term is correctly applicable.³⁶ Many concepts may turn out to have clear conditions of application only within certain contexts. Once we are outside of these contexts, there may be little reason to insist that there must be a fact of the matter as to whether or not a concept applies to a given item. The skeptic's suggestion was initially paradoxical because it dealt with a case where one had a very clear and firm disposition about the answer one should give. The suggestion that there are no right or wrong answers in certain cases about which one does not, by hypothesis, have any such firm dispositions is considerably less unsettling. The claim that our concepts can have fuzzy borders is hardly as threatening to our intuitive concept of meaning as the claim that they have no borders at all. Consequently, the sorts of limitations on our dispositions described above don't have the sort of bite that skepticism about our intuitive conception of meaning requires.

Kripke claims that an answer to his skeptic must satisfy two conditions: it must both (1) "give an account of what fact it is (about my mental state) that constitutes my meaning *plus*, not *quus*," and (2) "show that I am justified in giving the answer '125' to '68 + 57'" (K, 11). Now it should be clear how the coherentist will respond to these two interrelated conditions. The fact about one's mental state that constituted one's meaning *plus* rather than *quus* is the fact that the former and not the latter coheres best with one's total set of dispositions and usage. This fact is also what justifies one's giving the answer "125" to "68 + 57." One's answer of "125" is both partially constitutive of what one means, and coheres better with the rest of the constitutive elements than any other.

According to the coherentist, then, the constitutive character of our usage in determining what we mean removes the need for it to have any external justification.³⁷ The coherentist can thus allow our usage to be *justified* without there being anything else that *justifies* it. Justification is not something that our usage must earn, but rather is something that it can lose, since the default assumption will be that usage is justified. If asked to justify our usage, we can give evidence for

³⁶ To bring up a philosophically familiar example, this is may be what we should say about some of the more complex 'splitting and fusing' cases of personal identity discussed in Parfit 1984. There simply be no fact of the matter as to whether the concept 'same person' is correctly applied to some of these pairs or not.

³⁷ Once again, some classical foundationalists could make a similar claim about *some* aspects of our usage, but not for all. Within a classically foundationalist framework, either an aspect of our usage is incorrigible, or it needs to be justified in terms of something external to it.

coherence, but this is really evidence for the absence of any defeaters. Kripke's Wittgenstein demonstrates, at best, that one should not be a classical foundationalist about the justification of our usage.

If the justification of our usage cannot be understood in a classically foundationalist fashion, then it seems as if any reductive account of how meaning relates to usage will face serious problems.³⁸ However, there is a danger of taking the lesson of Kripke's argument to simply be that reductive accounts of meaning won't work, and not question the more basic assumption about justification that lies behind it. If one keeps the classically foundationalist picture of justification in place, and merely take reductive accounts of meaning to be shown to be unworkable, it may be tempting to see Kripke's arguments as showing that facts about meaning must be understood as *sui generis*, and that "at some appropriate level" they "must simply be taken for granted."³⁹ One could thus realize that reductionism is vulnerable to Kripke's arguments, but still ignore what might be the underlying problem by working within a classically foundationalist framework in which our claims about what we mean are justified by such *sui generis* facts about what we mean. (Just as our claims about, say, an electron's charge could, under conditions of cognitive idealization, be justified by *sui generis* facts about the electron's charge.) However, the availability of coherentist accounts of justification suggest that the unworkability of a reductive account of meaning does not entail that meaning facts must either be non-existent or *sui generis*, since giving up reductionism does not mean giving up the possibility of providing "substantive answers to the constitutive question."⁴⁰

Kripke's argument undoubtedly shows us something important about meaning. Kripke's skeptic takes it to show that there are no facts about it. Others suggest that they show that content

³⁸ For a similar conclusion about the impact of Kripke's argument on reductive conceptions of meaning, see Boghossian 1989.

³⁹ Boghossian 1989, p. 541. Kripke's skeptic does not start with the bare demand that we reduce semantic facts to non-semantic ones. Rather, he argues that, if current usage is meaningful, then we should (under conditions of cognitive idealization) be able to justify why we use a term in one way rather than another. However, if one is a classical foundationalist about justification, a reductive or *sui generis* account of meaning might seem to be the only thing that could provide what is needed to answer this apparently reasonable demand.

⁴⁰ Boghossian 1989, 543-4.

properties are *sui generis*.⁴¹ By contrast, it has been suggested here that Kripke's argument is best understood as showing that the facts about our usage should be understood as justifying claims about what we mean in a coherentist rather than a classically foundationalist fashion.

Treating such justification in a coherentist fashion allows one to do justice to the 'normativity of meaning' that Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein did much to highlight. Reductive approaches to the relation between meaning and use typically presuppose a type of 'strong naturalism' about meaning facts according to which both the function from use to meaning, and the inputs to that function, can be understood naturalistically. Treating meaning facts as *sui generis*, on the other hand, can be viewed as leading to a 'non-naturalistic' conception of meaning.⁴² The coherentist, on the other hand, has the option of defending a type of 'weak naturalism' according to which the inputs to the function from use to meaning can still be understood naturalistically, while the function itself is not.⁴³ The coherentist can allow that the facts about meaning can be ultimately understood in non-intentional, but not non-normative, terms.⁴⁴ For instance,⁴⁵ the function from usage to meaning takes inputs that can be understood in naturalistic terms (dispositions and actual usage), but the function itself (the sort of rational coherence associated with the Principle of Charity) seems less friendly to any such naturalistic characterizations.⁴⁶ For the coherentist, the 'normativity of meaning' would thus be explained by the fact that it is something normative (rationality) that takes us from the naturalistic facts about usage to the facts about meaning.

⁴¹ Such a view is discussed in Boghossian 1989 and McDowell 1984.

⁴² Semantic properties thus being understood somewhat analogously to the way Moore understood moral properties in his *Principia Ethica* (Moore 1903).

⁴³ As it would not be if the function from usage to meaning were governed by something like Davidson's 'Principle of Charity'. (For a discussion of this, see Jackman, 1999a, 2000, forthcoming.)

⁴⁴ A similar distinction is made by Brandom (1994, 2000), though he makes somewhat different use of it.

⁴⁵ These final suggestions about how one such coherentist account might work are meant to be no more than suggestive, and they are developed in greater detail in Jackman 1996, 2000, forthcoming.

⁴⁶ See, for instance Davidson 1970, McDowell 1985, Putnam 1981, ch. 5.

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