

## FACTS, TRUTH CONDITIONS, AND THE SKEPTICAL SOLUTION TO THE RULE-FOLLOWING PARADOX

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### Introduction

In chapter 2 of *Wittgenstein: On Rules and Private Language*,<sup>1</sup> Saul Kripke presents a skeptical argument, inspired by Wittgenstein's rule-following paradox, for the paradoxical conclusion that there are no facts about what we mean by our words. In chapter 3 Kripke outlines what he calls a "skeptical solution" to the paradox. What makes the position skeptical is that it purports to accept the startling conclusion that there are no facts about meaning; what makes it a solution is that it nevertheless defends the correctness of ordinary meaning ascriptions, such as the claim that I mean, and have meant, addition by '+'. On the face of it this is extremely puzzling. If I really have meant addition by '+', then surely it is true that I have meant addition by '+', in which case it is a fact that I have meant addition by '+', and hence there is a fact about what I have meant by my words.

This puzzle reflects a deep interpretive problem arising from an (acknowledged) unclarity in Kripke's discussion regarding what conception of fact is involved in the skeptical argument in chapter 2, and the skeptical solution in chapter 3. I will argue that this unclarity reflects a fundamental tension in the text. On the one hand, there is a very natural and minimal conception of fact talk according to which the skeptical argument presents a powerful and troubling line of reasoning for a truly radical skeptical conclusion. However, on this interpretation the skeptical solution is utterly implausible, even incoherent, thus leaving a "straight solution"—of the sort I argue for in "Skepticism about Meaning: Indeterminacy, Normativity, and the Rule-Following Paradox"<sup>2</sup>—as the only appropriate response to the paradox. On the other hand, there is a different interpretation in which the facts maintained to be superfluous by the skeptical solution play a contentious explanatory role in theories of meaning and understanding. On this interpretation the skeptical solution has some important, though circumscribed, lessons to teach—lessons which can, to some extent, be established independently, as I will try to show. Unfortunately, this

interpretation also faces a fundamental difficulty. If one adopts it, then it is hard to make sense of the original skeptical argument at all, let alone to see it as presenting any genuinely skeptical, or truly surprising conclusion.

In this paper I will flesh out these two interpretations and try to determine to what extent the tension between them can be resolved. I will begin by reviewing the apparent structure of the skeptical argument and the basic strategy of the skeptical solution. I will then articulate two different versions of the skeptical solution, based on two different conceptions of the sorts of meaning facts they are taken to deny. After evaluating and drawing out the positive lessons to be learned from each version, I will close by taking up the question of whether it is possible to give a single coherent interpretation of Kripke's text.

### The Initial Skeptical Argument and Radical Skepticism about Meaning

The main skeptical argument developed by Kripke in chapter 2 can be reconstructed as being of the following form:<sup>3</sup>

- P1. If in the past it was a fact that I meant addition by '+', then either:  
 (i) this fact was determined by non-intentional facts of the following sorts:  
 .....  
 or  
 (ii) the fact that I meant addition by '+' was a primitive fact; that is, a fact not determined by non-intentional facts.
- P2. It is not the case that non-intentional facts of type (i) determined that I meant addition by '+'.
- P3. It is not the case that the fact that I meant addition by '+' was a primitive fact.

- C1. Therefore, in the past there was no fact that I meant addition by '+'.

Much of chapter 2 is devoted to canvassing the potential meaning-determining facts needed to fill out premise 1, and to establishing premise 2 by showing that none of these facts really do determine meaning. For example, even if we grant that whatever I meant by '+' must conform to my past calculations using that symbol, these calculations are not sufficient to determine that I meant addition by it, since the values of the addition function far outstrip the limited number of calculations I have made. Nor can we appeal to the beliefs we used sentences containing '+' to express, or to the computational algorithm we associated with the sign. The problem is that beliefs and algorithms, like ordinary words and sentences, are things that have content. As such their contents are as subject to the challenge of Kripke's skeptic as is the content of '+'. This skeptic may, for the

sake of argument, grant that in the past we associated '+' with a formula, or set of instructions, whose present content yields the sum of any pair of natural numbers as arguments, but he will question whether that formula, or those instructions, had that same content in the past, and he will challenge us to specify the relevant content-determining facts. Similarly, he may agree that in the past we used the sentence ' $9 + 16 = 25$ ' to express a belief, but he will question whether the content of that belief was about the addition function (as opposed to some other function that gives the same value for that pair of arguments), and he will not be satisfied until we have identified the facts that determine the content of that belief. In short, if we propose any intentional fact as that which determined what '+' meant in the past, Kripke's skeptic will respond by reformulating his original problem so as to apply to the content of that fact. Having started by challenging us to find facts that determined the content of our words, the skeptic will continue by challenging us to find facts that determined the contents of all of our mental states. Thus, if we are ever going to be able to answer the skeptic, we must find facts that determine content in general—linguistic and otherwise.

Further potential meaning-determining facts discussed by Kripke include my verbal dispositions to use '+'—specifically, my past dispositions to answer the question *What is  $m + n$ ?* for arbitrary numerals  $m$  and  $n$ .<sup>4</sup> Although I actually performed relatively few such calculations, I was disposed to perform a great many more. Suppose, for example, that I never performed the particular calculation ' $68 + 57 = 125$ '. Still, if I had been asked, 'What is  $68 + 57$ ?' I would have answered '125'. In light of this, Kripke considers the view that what one means by '+' is determined by the answers one is disposed to give to the full range of such questions (the dispositional analysis). On this view, the fact that in the past I meant addition by '+' was determined by the fact I was disposed to answer any question *What is  $m + n$ ?* by giving the sum of the numbers denoted by  $m$  and  $n$ .

This view is rejected for three reasons. First, one can mean addition by '+' even if one is disposed to make some errors in calculation in a few cases (the error objection). Second, one can mean addition by '+' even though, when the numbers get extremely large, one has no dispositions to answer the question *What is  $m + n$ ?* (the finitude objection). Third, even if one's dispositions to calculate with '+' exactly matched the addition function, one could not conclude from that fact that the answers one was disposed to give were the correct answers, and so one could not conclude that one meant addition by '+' (the normativity objection).<sup>5</sup>

Having rejected verbal dispositions as meaning-determining facts, Kripke's skeptic considers the suggestion that what one means by a word is determined by the mental images or private, introspectable experiences one associates with it. This suggestion is easily dispensed with since (i) in the case of many words we mean something definite even though no distinctive mental images or experiences are associated with them, and (ii) even if in some cases a private mental occurrence is psychologically associated with a word, such an occurrence can't determine what we mean by the word unless the occurrence is interpreted in a

certain way—i.e. unless the mental occurrence is itself assigned a meaning or content, in which case it becomes the subject of skeptical doubt of precisely the sort it was invoked to resolve.

In light of all of this Kripke's skeptic takes himself to have eliminated all reasonable candidates for facts that might determine what I meant by my words in the past. Since he dismisses as hopelessly mysterious the idea that meaning facts might be wholly undetermined by other facts, he draws the skeptical conclusion that there are no facts about what I meant by '+', or any other word, in the past.<sup>6</sup>

From here it would seem to be a short step to the conclusion that I didn't mean addition, or anything else, by '+' in the past. After all, one is inclined to suppose, if in the past I meant something by '+', in particular if I meant addition, then surely it was a fact that I meant addition, and so there was a fact about what I meant. However, since precisely this transition is supposed to be put into question by the skeptical solution, it is useful to articulate a line of reasoning that would justify it, and that may serve as a target for the proponent of the skeptical solution to attack.

#### *Extension of the Original Skeptical Argument*

- S1. Since there is no fact that I meant addition or anything else by '+', the sentences *I meant addition by '+'* and *I meant something by '+'* do not correspond to facts.<sup>7</sup>
- S2. Therefore, *I meant addition by '+'* and *I meant something by '+'* are not true.
- S3. So, *I did not mean addition by '+'* and *I did not mean anything by '+'* are true.
- S4. Thus, I didn't mean addition by '+'; indeed, I didn't mean anything by '+'.

The original skeptical argument purports to show that there was no fact that I meant addition by '+', and by parity of reasoning, no fact that I meant anything else either. The extension of that argument uses this putative result to deny all meaning ascriptions that attribute any meaning to my use of '+' in the past. On the assumption that there is nothing special about me, '+', or the past, this result generalizes to all speakers, expressions, and times. Since presumably the argument can be repeated for other content-bearing acts and states, the result also generalizes to assertions, beliefs, and other intentional phenomena. This is radical skepticism about meaning in particular, and content in general.

Such thoroughgoing skepticism about intentionality is extremely implausible, even pragmatically self-defeating in a certain clear sense; but it is not internally inconsistent, nor is it unfamiliar. Since according to this radical skepticism no one ever means, asserts, or believes anything, it follows that if one has succeeded in stating (asserting) the skeptical position, or arguing for it, then one has refuted it. The skeptic's position is self-undermining not in the sense that it is

internally inconsistent, but in the sense that it is inconsistent with the supplementary claim (which must be rejected by the skeptic) that he, or anyone else, has stated the skeptical position, argued for it, or believed the conclusion. (Of course, since rejecting that so & so is also a propositional attitude, crucially involving the notion of content, the skeptic must also reject—as we would put it—the claim that he has rejected anything.)

What about the notion of truth? It is used by the skeptic in the extension of the original skeptical argument, where certain sentences are said to be true. Can the skeptic consistently make such a claim? It all depends on what one means by calling a sentence 'true'. A good case can be made that our ordinary notion of truth applies to sentences only derivatively: a sentence is true, as used in a context C, if and only if what it says, the proposition it expresses, as used in C, is true; a sentence is false, as used in C, if and only if what it says, the proposition it expresses, as used in C, is false; and a sentence is not true and not false, as used in C, if it expresses no proposition in C—for example, because it is meaningless, or because, like imperatives and interrogatives, its being meaningful does not consist in its being used to express propositions. Since the claim that a sentence expresses a proposition entails that it has meaning, or content, the skeptic cannot accept the claim that any sentence expresses a proposition. Thus, on this ordinary conception of truth talk, the radical skeptic about intentionality cannot consistently characterize any sentence as true.

However, this does not prevent him from replacing our ordinary truth predicate with a Tarski-style truth predicate applying to his own language. With such a predicate the skeptic could, in principle, secure all the advantages of disquotation and semantic ascent, without characterizing any of our ordinary semantic notions as applying to anything. When the truth predicate of the skeptic's sentences is understood in this way, he can consistently assert S3 in the extension of the original skeptical argument, even if that assertion is extremely implausible and, from our non-skeptical point of view, pragmatically self-undermining.<sup>8</sup>

Such a position is perversely limited in how it allows one to characterize the linguistic and other intelligent activities of oneself and others. However the position is not merely hypothetical, and is hardly unknown in philosophy. I believe that the best way to make sense of Quine's various skeptical doctrines, including the indeterminacy of translation and the inscrutability of reference, is to see him as being an eliminativist about all our ordinary semantic and intentional psychological notions, and as proposing to replace them with various non-intentional and behavioristic substitutes.<sup>9</sup> This is not, of course, the position of Kripke's Wittgenstein.

#### **The Apparent Strategy of the Skeptical Solution**

Kripke's Wittgenstein is a proponent of the skeptical solution. The key elements of this putative solution are (i) an acceptance of the conclusion of the original skeptical argument—namely that there are no meaning facts, and hence



no facts corresponding to our use of sentences that ascribe meanings to our words, and (ii) a refusal to adopt the radical skeptical position arising from the extension of the original skeptical argument, and an insistence that our uses of some meaning ascriptions, like *in the past I meant addition by '+'*, are fully justified and correct, whereas potential uses of other ascriptions, like *in the past I meant quadruplication by '+'*, are not.<sup>10</sup> What is supposed to make the combination of (i) and (ii) possible is a conception of meaning ascriptions in which their uses are not seen as attempts to state facts, and so do not require facts for their justification. Since meaning ascriptions have legitimate uses, they are perfectly meaningful, even though their meaning does not consist in standing for possible facts the existence of which would make them true. Instead, they are said to have a kind of meaning that does not conform to the classical truth-conditional conception of meaning.

Kripke gives a brief overview of this position in the following passages:

I choose to be so bold as to say: Wittgenstein holds, with the skeptic, that there is no fact as to whether I mean plus or quus. But if this is to be conceded to the skeptic, is this not the end of the matter? What **can** be said on behalf of our ordinary attributions of meaningful language to ourselves and to others? Has not the incredible and self-defeating conclusion, that all language is meaningless, already been drawn?

In reply we must say something about the change in Wittgenstein's philosophy of language from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*. Although in detail the *Tractatus* is among the most difficult of philosophical works, its rough outlines are well known. To each sentence there corresponds a (possible) fact. If such a fact obtains, the sentence is true; if not, false....

The simplest, most basic idea of the *Tractatus* can hardly be dismissed: a declarative sentence gets its meaning by virtue of its **truth conditions**, by virtue of its correspondence to facts that must obtain if it is true. For example, "the cat is on the mat" is understood by those speakers who realize that it is true if and only if a certain cat is on a certain mat; it is false otherwise. The presence of the cat on the mat is a fact or condition-in-the-world that would make the sentence true (express a truth) if it obtained.

So stated, the *Tractatus* picture of the meaning of declarative sentences may seem not only natural but even tautological. Nonetheless, as Dummett says, "the *Investigations* contains implicitly a rejection of the classical (realist) Frege-*Tractatus* view that the general form of explanation of meaning is a statement of the truth conditions. In place of this view, Wittgenstein proposes an alternative rough general picture. (pp. 71-73)

Kripke describes this alternative general picture of how a sentence gets its meaning as one in which truth conditions are replaced with justification conditions, or conditions of the proper use.<sup>11</sup> The application of this picture to meaning ascriptions, and to the skeptical paradox, is sketched in the following passage.

Now the replacement of truth conditions by justification conditions has a dual role in the *Investigations*. First, it offers a new approach to the problems of how language has meaning, contrasted with that of the *Tractatus*. But second, it can be applied to give

an account of assertions about meaning themselves, regarded as assertions **within** our language. Recall Wittgenstein's skeptical conclusion: no facts, no truth conditions, correspond to statements such as "Jones means addition by '+'"....Now if we suppose that facts, or truth conditions, are of the essence of meaningful assertion, it will follow from the skeptical conclusion that assertions that anyone ever means anything are meaningless. On the other hand, if we apply to these assertions the tests suggested in *Philosophical Investigations*, no such conclusion follows. All that is needed to legitimize assertions that someone means something is that there be roughly specifiable circumstances under which they are legitimately assertable, and that the game of asserting them under such conditions has a role in our lives. No supposition that 'facts correspond' to those assertions is needed.<sup>12</sup> (pp. 77-78)

With this in mind we may look back to the extension of the original skeptical argument to see how the radical skeptical conclusion may be blocked. Whereas S1 may be accepted (and perhaps even S2), S3 may nevertheless be rejected.

- S1. Since there is no fact that I meant addition or anything else by '+', *I meant addition by '+'* and *I meant something by '+'* do not correspond to facts.
- S2. Therefore, *I meant addition by '+'* and *I meant something by '+'* are not true.
- S3. So, *I did not mean addition by '+'* and *I did not mean anything by '+'* are true.

Moreover, uses of *Soames meant addition by '+'*, and *Soames meant something by '+'*, may be regarded as correct and justified, whereas uses of the negations of these sentences are not. On this interpretation, the proponent of the skeptical solution rejects the skeptic's radical claim that no one means anything by their words as based on an incorrect conception of meaning.

### The Tension in the Skeptical Solution: What is a Fact?

The skeptical solution denies that there are meaning facts. But in what sense of "fact" is there supposed to be no fact that I meant addition by '+'? Kripke's Wittgenstein does not deny that one can correctly say things like *it is a fact that Soames meant addition by '+'* or *Jones was unaware of the fact that Soames meant addition by '+'*. One can correctly say these things provided one doesn't misconstrue them as involving some mistaken, philosophically contentious sense of "fact". The problem is that we are not told what this mistaken sense of "fact" is.

Kripke addresses this point immediately after describing Wittgenstein's skeptical solution as a position that accepts the hypothetical skeptic's conclusion that there are no meaning facts, and in particular no fact that constitutes my having meant addition by '+'. Kripke says:

Admittedly, I am expressing Wittgenstein's view more straightforwardly than he would allow himself to do. For in denying that there is any such fact, might we not be

expressing a philosophical thesis that doubts or denies something everyone admits? We do not wish to doubt or deny that when people speak of themselves and others as meaning something by their words, as following rules, they do so with perfect right. We do not even wish to deny the propriety of an ordinary use of the phrase 'the fact that Jones meant addition by such-and-such a symbol', and indeed such expressions do have perfectly ordinary uses. We merely wish to deny the existence of the 'superlative fact' that philosophers misleadingly attach to such ordinary forms of words, not the propriety of the forms of words themselves.<sup>13</sup> (p. 69)

Our problem in understanding the skeptical solution lies in understanding the sense of "fact" in which meaning ascriptions do not state facts, and in which one can correctly deny instances of

1. If S, then it is a fact that S.

such as

2. If I meant addition by '+', then it is a fact that I meant addition by '+',

In trying to spell out this crucial sense of "fact", one is pulled in two directions.

On the one hand, we may build a substantial amount into the notion of a fact. For example, we might restrict the facts under consideration to facts intrinsic to me. If we do this, then it is not unreasonable to deny meaning ascriptions like (2). Under this interpretation such denials do not amount to the claim that there are no meaning facts, but only to the claim that if there are meaning facts, then these facts include social, causal, or historical elements external to the individual. Unfortunately, although this claim about meaning facts is coherent and plausible, it does not provide a good interpretation of the skeptical solution outlined by Kripke. First, the view that meaning facts include social or other elements extrinsic to the individual does not, in and of itself, threaten the orthodox, truth-conditional construal of sentences as getting their meanings by virtue of standing for possible facts. Even meaning ascriptions may be treated as fitting this model, as long as it is recognized that the possible facts they stand for are at least partially social, or extrinsic to the individual. But it is a central feature of the skeptical solution that it is supposed to constitute a radical alternative to the truth-conditional conception. Second, in giving the skeptical argument, Kripke did not invoke anything like the now familiar twin-earth or arthritis examples that are designed to show that meaning is not individualistically determined.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, the considerations adduced by Kripke's skeptic to show that facts about me don't determine meaning carry over to social facts of the same type. For example, the error, finitude, and normativity objections to the view that my dispositions to calculate with '+' determined that I meant addition also apply to the view that the dispositions of the community to calculate with '+' determined its meaning. Thus, if the original skeptical argument succeeded in showing that facts about me don't

determine meaning, then analogous reasoning would show that facts about me and my community don't either.<sup>15</sup> But it is the essence of the skeptical solution that it should survive, and in fact be motivated by, the reasoning of the skeptical argument.

Perhaps some other substantive conception of meaning facts can be found for the skeptical solution to deny. Suppose, for example, one admits both that meaning ascriptions express propositions, and so are proper objects of assertion and belief, and that there is a certain minimal sense of "true" and "fact" according to which for any sentence S that expresses a proposition,

M. *S iff it is true that S iff it is a fact that S iff the proposition that S is true*

is regarded as unproblematic, and perfectly correct.<sup>16</sup> On this view, there is a certain minimal conception of truth and facts according to which meaning ascriptions have truth conditions, and many such ascriptions state facts. However, there is at least one way of understanding the classical truth-conditional conception of meaning in which it makes claims that are considerably stronger than this. According to this strong version of the truth-conditional conception, the facts correlated with sentences play an **explanatory** role in meaning and understanding: a sentence *s* is meaningful **because** it stands for a potential fact the obtaining of which would make *s* true: a person understands *s* **in virtue of** knowing that *s* is true iff the fact in question obtains. Perhaps the philosophically contentious sense in which the skeptical solution denies that there are meaning facts is one in which it is assumed that any potential meaning fact must be explanatory in this way.<sup>17</sup>

On this interpretation, the skeptical solution doesn't deny that there are facts about meaning, in the perfectly ordinary and minimal sense of (M); it simply denies that these facts play a certain explanatory role. As before, such a denial is not patently unreasonable. However, as an account of the skeptical solution, this interpretation faces a difficulty of its own. In giving the original skeptical argument Kripke seemed to be willing to consider any non-intentional fact as a candidate for being a meaning-determining fact. Moreover, the argument did not focus on the explanatory role posited by the strong version of the truth-conditional conception of meaning. Thus, if the interpretation is to succeed, care must be taken to show precisely how the denial of **explanatory** meaning facts connects with the skeptic's original argument.

This brings us to the other direction in which one is pulled in trying to make sense of the skeptical solution. Instead of trying to build some contentious philosophical substance into the notion of a fact, we might simply accept the minimal conception (M), and see the skeptical solution as denying that there are meaning facts in even this minimal sense. The virtue of this interpretation is that it fits very well with the original skeptical argument. When, in giving the argument, we raised the question of whether one or another set of facts determined meaning facts, we didn't explicitly assume anything about these facts beyond their being,

or corresponding to, true claims. Thus, the import of the original skeptical conclusion was naturally taken to be tantamount to the claim that there are no true propositions to the effect that I meant so and so in the past. Consequently, if we interpret the skeptical solution as denying that there are meaning facts even in the minimal sense of (M), then the skeptical solution will be in apparent agreement with the conclusion of the original skeptical argument—as it is supposed to be.

However, now we face a different problem, since it is not easy to see how one can characterize a use of the meaning ascription *Soames meant addition by '+'* as perfectly correct and justified, while rejecting the claim that it is true, or a fact, that Soames meant addition by '+'. Given (M), we can do this only if we deny that meaning ascriptions like this express propositions. Such a position would be genuinely surprising. We know, of course, that some meaningful sentences, such as imperatives and interrogatives do not express propositions. But meaning ascriptions seem quite different from these.

Perhaps, they could be thought of as performatives, along the lines of 'I hereby name this barge the Hillary', or 'I hereby pronounce you husband and wife'. According to some analyses, utterances of these sentences are not attempts to describe any act of naming a barge or marrying people. In general, according to these analyses, utterances of performative sentences are not seen as expressing propositions, or purporting to describe states of affairs, and so they are not taken to be candidates for truth and falsity. Rather than describing certain acts, performative utterances in appropriate circumstances are seen as constituting the performance of those acts—in our examples, naming a barge and marrying two people. With this in mind, one might suggest that saying *Jones means addition by '+'*, is performative in the following way: to utter such a sentence in appropriate circumstances is to take Jones into one's linguistic community, to certify him as a competent user of '+', and to license him to use '+' to do what we call "adding". One way of interpreting the skeptical solution is to view it as treating meaning ascriptions roughly along these lines.

In the sections that follow I will examine different interpretations of the skeptical solution. I will begin with the interpretation according to which meaning ascriptions are said not to express propositions, or to state facts in even the minimal sense (M), but rather are claimed to have some other non-descriptive, perhaps performative, kind of meaning. I will argue that this interpretation fails in several respects—in particular, the position outlined lacks crucial features that Kripke attributes to the skeptical solution, it is implausible on its face, and it can be shown to be incoherent.

Next, taking George Wilson's insightful interpretation of Kripke as a point of departure,<sup>18</sup> I will articulate a view which grants that meaning ascriptions do express propositions, and may state facts in the sense of (M), but denies that these facts play the explanatory role demanded by a certain strong version of the truth-conditional conception of meaning. Accordingly, I will distinguish strong and weak versions of the truth-conditional conception and present an independent argument that the strong version cannot be maintained for all proposition-expressing sen-

tences. This will result in a modest, but I hope reasonable, skepticism about the role of truth conditions in explaining meaning and understanding.

Finally, I will take up the question of how this modest skepticism relates to Kripke's skeptical solution. I will argue that my modest skepticism about truth conditions lacks certain essential features of the skeptical solution as Kripke describes it. In particular, its rejection of explanatory truth conditions does not apply to all sentences, and is substantially more limited in scope than Kripke's skeptical solution is supposed to be; moreover, Kripke's skeptical argument cannot be seen as providing an argument for the modest skepticism I describe. In the last section of the paper I will assess where the apparent failure of these two interpretations of the skeptical solution leaves us, and I will try to bring together the positive lessons to be learned from Kripke's discussion.

### The Minimal Conception of Facts and the Non-Descriptive Version of the Skeptical Solution

According to this interpretation, meaning ascriptions like *in the past I meant addition by '+'* do not to express propositions, or purport to state facts in even the minimal sense (M), but rather are claimed to have some other, non-descriptive kind of meaning. The suggestion that they might be given a performative analysis is meant to illustrate this possibility, without ruling out other potential alternatives. The important point is that utterances of meaning ascriptions are not seen as attempts to describe any state of affairs, or to make any claim about the way the world is. Rather, since they have some other, non-descriptive function, they may be perfectly correct, even though they do not correspond to facts, and are not properly assessable as true or false. Because of this, one who took this position could, in principle, accept the conclusion of the original skeptical argument, while blocking the extension of that argument, thereby avoiding the need to deny such ascriptions as *in the past Soames meant addition by '+'*.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, there several intractable problems that make adopting this picture untenable. First, as I tried to show in "Skepticism about Meaning: Indeterminacy, Normativity, and the Rule-Following Paradox",<sup>20</sup> the original skeptical argument is flawed. Given our ordinary, minimal conception of facts (M), one cannot establish that there are no facts about meaning. But if one can't establish this conclusion, then one doesn't need some special non-descriptive analysis of meaning ascriptions in order to be able correctly to characterize my past use of '+' as meaning addition.<sup>21</sup>

Second, there is reason to think that the non-descriptive analysis of meaning ascriptions is indefensible on its face. If the skeptical argument motivated the claim that meaning ascriptions are non-descriptive, then a parallel argument would motivate the claim that propositional attitude ascriptions are too. But surely, sentences ascribing beliefs, assertions, and intentions to agents purport to describe those agents in ways that may be true or false. All of these sentences, along with meaning-ascribing sentences, are routinely characterized by ordinary speakers as



being assessable for truth; all are unproblematically embeddable in ordinary truth-conditional constructions, such as antecedents of conditionals, in ways in which interrogatives, imperatives and pure performatives—like 'Hello'—are not; and all may themselves appear as objects of propositional attitude verbs, like 'know' and 'believe', which are used to indicate our cognitive relations to facts, and to propositions generally. Satisfaction of prosaic conditions like these is all that is required for a sentence to be truth-assessable, and to belong to fact-stating discourse, when the notions of truth and facts are understood in the ordinary, minimal sense characterized by (M). Since meaning and propositional attitude ascriptions satisfy these conditions, they qualify as fact-stating.

Third, in addition to rendering the skeptical solution implausible, the non-fact-stating interpretation of meaning-ascribing sentences robs the skeptical solution of its intended philosophical power. The goal of Kripke's Wittgenstein was to **replace** what he regarded as a radically defective philosophical conception of meaning with a fundamentally different conception. It is no **defect** of the truth-conditional conception that it does not apply to interrogatives, imperatives, or some performatives. If, for some reason, one thought that it did not apply to meaning and propositional attitude ascriptions, because they too do not purport to be fact-stating, this would not **discredit** the truth-conditional conception, but simply limit its scope. A skeptical solution that amounted to no more than this would tell us **nothing** about the vast range of non-content-ascribing, yet philosophically significant, discourse. For all that we would be told by such a solution, perception sentences, ascriptions of feelings like pain, and mathematical sentences might continue to be analyzed as fact-stating, and full-bloodedly truth conditional. But if that were the case, then the skeptical solution could not play the crucial role intended by Kripke's Wittgenstein in the private language argument, for example, or in the philosophy of mathematics.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, as if all this were not enough, the non-descriptive version of the skeptical solution is incoherent. One way to bring out this incoherence is with the following argument: Consider the sentence, 'no meaning ascription expresses a proposition', used in stating this version of the skeptical solution. It makes a theoretical claim about a certain class of sentences, and so must itself be proposition-expressing and fact-stating. Thus, its negation, 'some meaning ascription expresses a proposition', ought have the same status. This sentence is an existential generalization whose instances are sentences of the form, 's is a meaning ascription and s expresses a proposition'. Surely if the existential generalization expresses a proposition, then some of its instances do too, in which case some sentences of the form 's expresses a proposition' must express propositions. But these are meaning ascriptions of a certain sort, which, by the non-descriptive version of the skeptical solution, do not express propositions. Thus we have it that some sentences both express propositions and do not express propositions.

This contradiction follows from the non-descriptive version of the skeptical solution plus a very plausible set of supplementary assumptions (3).

- 3a. Since the sentence 'no meaning ascription expresses a proposition' is used to make a theoretical claim about a certain class of sentences, it must express a proposition, and purport to be fact-stating.
- b. If s and s' are negations of one another, then one expresses a proposition (and so purports to be fact-stating) iff the other does so as well.
- c. An existential generalization expresses a proposition only if some of its instances do.
- d. A conjunction expresses a proposition only if both of its conjuncts do.
- e. A sentence of the form 's expresses a proposition' is a meaning ascription.

It is hard to see how any of these could plausibly be denied. The non-descriptive version of the skeptical solution, as I have presented it, doesn't deny that some sentences are used descriptively, express propositions, and purport to state facts. But if some sentences have these features, then 'no meaning ascription expresses a proposition' should one of them, in which case (3a) is acceptable. Since (3b-e) are too, the argument can plausibly be taken to be a *reductio* of the non-descriptive version of the skeptical solution.

It is also possible to give a different argument with the same result, which does not appeal to any supplementary premises beyond the non-descriptive version of the skeptical solution itself. The first step in the argument is simply a statement of the view that meaning ascriptions are non-descriptive, and so do not express propositions.

- (i) No meaning ascriptions—e.g. *Soames means addition by '+'*, '*+*' means addition, '*2+2=4*' means (expresses the proposition) that the sum of two and two is four, '*2+2=4*' means something / expresses some proposition—express propositions.

Next we observe that, according to the skeptical solution, sincere utterances of the particular sentences mentioned in (i) are correct, even though they do not state facts and so are not true in the ordinary sense. The reason for this is that they have some other, non-descriptive function, and so are not even attempts to state facts. Indeed, the skeptical solution tells us that it would be incorrect to seriously utter the negations of the sentences mentioned in (i). This gives us (ii).

- (ii) It would be incorrect to say: *Soames does not mean addition by '+'*, '*+*' doesn't mean addition, '*2+2=4*' does not mean (express the proposition) that the sum of two and two is four, '*2+2=4*' does not mean anything, or express any proposition.

Now consider another class of meaning ascriptions—e.g. sentences of the form *s means something*, *s expresses a proposition*, *s means that p*, *s expresses the proposition that p*, where 's' is replaced by a name of one of the meaning ascriptions mentioned in (i). These are meaning ascriptions about meaning ascriptions.

So, by (i) they do not express propositions and are not candidates for truth or falsity in the ordinary sense. This gives us a variety of results of the sort (iii).

- (iii) The following sentences do not express propositions: "'+' means addition means something", "'+' means addition expresses a proposition", and so on.

But the fact that these meaning ascriptions about meaning ascriptions don't express propositions doesn't give us any more reason to reject them than there is to reject the original meaning ascriptions about sentences that are not themselves meaning ascriptions. According to the skeptical solution, there is a role in our lives for meaning ascriptions about ordinary sentences like ' $2 + 2 = 4$ ' which justifies our use of those meaning ascriptions. But surely if this is so, then there is a role in our lives for meaning ascriptions about some sentences that themselves contain the word 'meaning', or the phrases 'expresses a proposition', and 'expresses the proposition that'. Hence there ought to be a role for the meaning ascriptions of the sort given in (iii) that justifies their use. In particular, the skeptical solution should be construed as legitimating (iv).

- (iv) Serious uses of (a) are correct and corresponding uses of (b) are incorrect.
- (a) '+' means addition means something  
'+' means addition expresses a proposition
- (b) '+' means addition does **not** mean anything  
'+' means addition does **not** express a proposition

Thus we have from (i) that '+' means addition does **not** express a proposition; whereas from (iv) we are licensed to say: "'+' means addition does express a proposition". Similarly, from (iv) we have it that the characterization gotten from (i) is a mistake. So we have it that  $\neg S$ , but it is incorrect or mistaken for one seriously to utter that very sentence. In addition, the proponent of the skeptical solution must say something of the form *s does not express a proposition* on the basis of (i) and something of the form *s does express a proposition* on the basis of (iv). According to the non-descriptive version of the skeptical solution, this may not be a case of asserting contradictory propositions. Presumably, though, it is still incoherent—like ordering someone both to close the door and not to close it.

For all these reasons the non-descriptive version of the skeptical solution must be rejected. As a philosophical position to be evaluated on its own merits it is incorrect and indefensible. As an interpretation of Kripke's text it fails to make sense of important aspects of his discussion—such as the claim that it is only when one employs a philosophically contentious sense of "fact" that it is denied that there are facts,<sup>23</sup> the claim that the skeptical solution represents a radical rejection of the truth-conditional conception of meaning and a proposal to replace it with something else, and the claim that the proposal in question has far-

reaching consequences for other philosophically significant regions of discourse. These failures give us good reason to look for another interpretation.

### The Explanatory Conception of Meaning Facts: An Anti-Truth-Conditional Version of the Skeptical Solution

What we need is an interpretation according to which the skeptical solution grants that there are facts about meaning, in the minimal sense (M) of "fact" discussed above. The needed interpretation should grant that the meaning ascription, *in the past Soames meant addition by '+'* expresses a proposition, and is true iff in the past I meant addition by '+'. It should also grant that I did mean addition by '+', and hence that it is a fact (and it is true) that in the past I meant addition by '+'. Nevertheless, such an interpretation must be skeptical in the sense of providing us with a reason to revise some of our fundamental views about meaning. In order to determine whether such an interpretation can be constructed, we must answer two questions: (i) If the original skeptical argument is not intended to show that there are no meaning facts, in the minimal sense of "fact", what is it supposed to show? (ii) If the skeptical solution is to be seen as compatible with the claim that sentences, including meaning ascriptions, have truth conditions in the minimal sense just illustrated, in what respect does it represent a radical rejection of the truth-conditional conception of meaning, and a proposal to replace it with something else?

In order to investigate these questions we will begin by examining George Wilson's illuminating interpretation, presented in "Kripke on Wittgenstein and Normativity."<sup>24</sup> There Wilson argues that the lesson of Kripke's original skeptical argument is **not** that there are no meaning facts, but rather that **if we accept a certain natural, but decidedly non-trivial conception of meaning**, then—because of the considerations in the skeptical argument—there are no meaning facts. Anyone who accepts the relevant conception of meaning will have to accept that there are no meaning facts, and will be under great pressure to acquiesce in the conclusion that no one ever means anything. Since this is not the position of Kripke's Wittgenstein, the skeptical argument is viewed as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the initial conception of meaning, and the skeptical solution is put forward as a conception of meaning that replaces the one rejected.

For Wilson the target of the *reductio* is something called "classical realism", according to which what it is for a sentence to be meaningful is for it to have "classically realist truth conditions". What these are turns out not to be fully specified, and it will be important to make this notion as clear as possible. However, certain things are evident from the outset. First, Wilson regards the *reductio* as being designed to establish the global conclusion that **no sentence** has classically realist truth conditions. Second, it is **not** supposed to follow from this conclusion that no sentences are true, or that none state facts, in the ordinary, minimal sense illustrated by (M). Moreover, since the conclusion of the *reductio* is global,



it is seen as automatically applying to different domains of discourse—meaning ascriptions, mathematical sentences, psychological sentences, and so on. Thus, on Wilson's interpretation, conclusions established by the rule-following considerations are properly seen as being directly relevant (at least potentially) to philosophical analyses across all domains.

Wilson first gives a brief overview of his interpretation, as it applies to Kripke's example of the plus sign, and then provides a generalized statement of the argument, as it might apply to any predicate. The situation with '+' is characterized as follows:

The skeptic, it seems, begins with a skeletal but plausible conception of what it is to mean something by a term. Restricting ourselves, first of all, to the exemplary case of addition, the conception runs as follows. If, during a certain period, I meant addition by '+', then, during that time, I must have adopted some **standard of correctness** for my actual and potential applications of the term. Meaning something by '+' essentially involves having a policy about what is to count as a correct and incorrect application of the expression. ... What I must do to establish the standard for myself, the skeptic maintains, is to adopt a **rule** or a **commitment** to the effect that **correct answers** to queries of the form  $j + k = ?$  are given by the values of the addition operation for the pairs of numbers that, query by query, are in question. Having adopted this linguistic rule for '+', correct applications of the term are **governed** by the infinite table of values that addition generates. Alternatively, we can say that, in meaning addition by '+', I must successfully 'single out' the addition function and, correlatively, form the **intention or purpose, concerning just that function**, that it is to determine correct applications of my use of the term....

It is precisely at this juncture that the skeptic interposes his disturbing challenge. It is my contention that the skeptic does not doubt that the skeletal conception of what is involved in meaning addition by '+' is right. What he does doubt is that this conception can be intelligibly filled in with an account of **how** I (or any other speaker) achieve the adoption of the specified linguistic policy or commitment. What, he asks, does my adopting such a conception concretely consist in? In particular, what are the facts about me in virtue of which **it is addition** that governs correct applications of '+' for me and not some other initially similar but divergent arithmetic operation?<sup>25</sup>

Wilson generalizes this discussion by formulating how the skeptical argument should be construed, when applied to any predicate. His "classically realist" conception of meaning is seen as incorporating the following conception of normativity.<sup>26</sup>

#### *The Classically Realist Conception of Normativity*

$N_s$  If  $x$  means something by a (general) term  $\phi$ , then there is a set of properties  $P_1 - P_n$ , that govern the correct application of  $\phi$  for  $x$ .

Next comes the characterization of what it is for a set of properties to govern the correct application of a predicate.<sup>27</sup>

#### *Government*

Gov. A set of properties  $P_1 - P_n$  governs the correct application of a term  $\phi$  for  $x$  iff  $x$  has the intention (has adopted the linguistic commitment) that  $\phi$  correctly applies to an object  $o$  iff  $o$  has  $P_1 - P_n$ .

At this point, Wilson assures us that "the skeptic insists that, if certain properties are to function as conditions of correct applicability for  $x$ 's use of  $\phi$ , then there must be concrete facts about  $x$  which establish that it is just those properties which she has successfully singled out and about which she has formed a proper semantic commitment. The existence of conditions of applicability for a term must be intelligibly **grounded** in facts about the speaker's psychology and/or social history."<sup>28</sup> This leads to the "grounding constraint".<sup>29</sup>

#### *Grounding*

G. If there is a set of properties,  $P_1 - P_n$ , that govern the correct application of  $\phi$  for  $x$ , then there are facts about  $x$  that constitute [establish, determine]  $P_1 - P_n$  as the conditions that govern  $x$ 's use of  $\phi$ .

According to Wilson, the skeptic then closes the trap by arguing that there are no facts that ground the speaker's use of  $\phi$ . Wilson calls this the "basic skeptical conclusion".<sup>30</sup>

#### *The Basic Skeptical Conclusion*

BSC. There are no facts about  $x$  that constitute [establish, determine] any set of properties as conditions that govern  $x$ 's use of  $\phi$ .

The skeptic concludes from  $N_s$ , Gov, G, and BSC that  $x$  doesn't mean anything by  $\phi$ . Since the argument is supposed to apply for arbitrary choices of speaker and term, the radical skeptical conclusion is that no one ever means anything by any term. Of course, Kripke's Wittgenstein is no skeptic. Thus, Wilson interprets him as rejecting these conclusions, and as treating the skeptic's argument as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the classically realist conception of normativity,  $N_s$ , which is supposed to follow from the classically realist conception of the meaning of a sentence as consisting of its truth conditions.

What is the classically realist conception of meaning as truth conditions, such that  $N_s$  may properly be seen as following from it? Consider the following, minimal interpretation of the truth-conditional conception.

#### *A Minimal Truth-Conditional Conception*

A. (i) A normal declarative sentence is meaningful iff it expresses a proposition; it is true iff the proposition it expresses is true. The proposition that  $P$  is true iff  $P$ ; hence if a sentence  $s$  expresses the proposition that  $P$ , then  $s$  is true iff  $P$ .

- (ii) A speaker understands a sentence *s* that expresses the proposition that *P* iff the speaker knows that *s* expresses the proposition that *P*, and hence knows that *s* is true iff *P*.
- B. (i) A predicate is meaningful iff it expresses a property; it (correctly) applies to an object iff the object has that property. An object *o* has the property of being *F* iff *o* is *F*; hence if a predicate  $\phi$  expresses the property of being *F*, then  $\phi$  (correctly) applies to an object *o* iff *o* is *F*.
- (ii) A speaker understands a predicate  $\phi$  that expresses the property of being *F* iff the speaker knows that  $\phi$  expresses the property of being *F*, and hence knows that  $\phi$  (correctly) applies to an object *o* iff *o* is *F*.
- C. Similarly for other categories of expressions.

This statement of the truth-conditional conception fits well with Wilson's formulation of  $N_s$  and his characterization of what it is for properties to govern the use of a predicate. Putting these two together— $N_s$  and Gov—we get the claim that if *x* means something by a (general) term  $\phi$ , then there is a set of properties  $P_1 - P_n$ , such that *x* has the intention (has adopted the linguistic commitment) that  $\phi$  correctly applies to an object *o* iff *o* has  $P_1 - P_n$ . This is close to what is stated in B above. Presumably, a speaker who knows that  $\phi$  correctly applies to an object *o* iff *o* is *F*, and who intends to use  $\phi$  in accord with its meaning, will intend to use it in such a way that it correctly applies to an object iff that object is *F*. Thus  $N_s$  would appear to be a natural consequence of the minimal truth-conditional conception of meaning—in which case a denial of  $N_s$  would be a denial of the minimal truth-conditional conception.

However this cannot be what Wilson has in mind. Putting aside ontological issues about the nature and existence of properties and propositions, which do not play a role in the argument, the minimal truth-conditional conception is virtually undeniable.<sup>31</sup> It is obvious that sentences and predicates do have truth and application conditions of this sort, and speakers do have the relevant beliefs and intentions. Try this for yourself. All of you who understand the predicate 'red' (and also what it means for a predicate to apply to an object), ask yourselves whether you know that the predicate 'red' correctly applies to an object iff it is red. The answer, of course, is that you do. The skeptical solution cannot plausibly be seen as denying this triviality. If the minimal truth-conditional conception is at stake, then the proper response to the skeptical argument is to deny principle G, provided that the determination relation is taken to be something strong and restrictive like *a priori* consequence, and to deny BSC, if the determination relation is construed as something weaker, like necessary consequence.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, if one is trying to construct an interpretation of the argument according to which a skeptical solution to the paradox is to have any plausibility, one must come up with a stronger, more substantial, and more plausibly deniable interpretation of the "classically realist conception of normativity" and "classical realism about truth conditions" than we have come up with so far.

Although Wilson does not provide fully explicit formulations of the needed principles, his discussion does contain strong hints that point in a promising direction. In the passage quoted above about the skeptic's conception of what is necessary if I am to mean addition by '+', Wilson speaks of my **adopting** a certain policy, which involves my **singling out** a certain function to govern the application of the term, and thereby **establishing** a standard of correctness.<sup>33</sup> The picture he paints seems to be one in which my meaning addition by '+' is **explained** by my having the relevant intentions about the addition function; I mean addition by '+' **because** I have independently singled out the addition function and decided to use '+' to stand for it.<sup>34</sup> In general the idea seems to be that in order to **bring it about** that I mean something by a word, I must **first** pick out a property and form the right sort of intention. There is even a hint of this explanatory picture in one of the passages from Kripke quoted above, which is also cited by Wilson.

The simplest, most basic idea of the *Tractatus* can hardly be dismissed: a declarative sentence **gets its meaning by virtue of its truth conditions, by virtue of its correspondence to facts that must obtain if it is true.** (p. 72, my boldface emphasis)

Let us put these hints together in an attempt to extend the minimal truth-conditional conception of meaning into something more substantial. We may take the expanded conception to incorporate everything included in the minimal truth-conditional conception given above, plus the following claims.

#### *The Explanatory Version of the Truth-Conditional Conception of Meaning*

- A<sub>E</sub> (i) A speaker *x* who understands a sentence *s*, which expresses the proposition that *P*, does so **because** *x* knows that *s* expresses the proposition that *P*, and hence is true iff *P*. *X*'s knowledge of these facts **explains**, and is **prior** to, *x*'s understanding of *s*.
- (ii) If a sentence *s*, as used by a speaker *x*, means that *P*, then *s* has this meaning for *x* **because** *x* has the intention that *s* is to express the proposition that *P*, and hence to be true iff *P*. In general, a sentence that expresses a proposition is meaningful **because** speakers have a system of intentions the content of which assigns that proposition to the sentence. These intentions **explain**, and are **prior** to, the fact that the sentence means what it does.
- B<sub>E</sub> (i) A speaker *x* who understands a predicate  $\phi$  that expresses the property of being *F* does so **because** *x* knows that  $\phi$  expresses the property of being *F*, and hence (correctly) applies to an object *o* iff *o* is *F*. *X*'s knowledge of these facts **explains**, and is **prior** to, his understanding of  $\phi$ .
- (ii) If *x* uses  $\phi$  to mean the property of being *F*, then *x* does so **because** *x* has the intention that  $\phi$  is to be understood as expressing the property of being *F*, and hence as (correctly) applying to an object *o* iff *o*

is F. In general, a predicate is meaningful **because** speakers have **prior** intentions that the predicate is to be understood as standing for a certain property.

C<sub>E</sub> Similarly for other categories of expressions.

If this is what classical realism is, then, presumably, the normativity premise used in Wilson's version of the skeptical argument will have to be strengthened as well. This can be done by retaining the original wording of N<sub>1</sub>, while strengthening the definition—Gov—of what it is for a set of properties to govern the correct application of a predicate.

Gov<sub>E</sub> A set of properties  $P_1 - P_n$  governs the correct application of a term  $\phi$  for  $x$  iff  $x$  has a grasp of  $P_1 - P_n$  which is **prior** to  $x$ 's understanding of  $\phi$ , and  $\phi$  has the meaning it does for  $x$  **because**  $x$  has the intention (has adopted the linguistic commitment) that  $\phi$  is to be understood as (correctly) applying to an object  $o$  iff  $o$  has  $P_1 - P_n$ .

With this understanding of Wilson's notion of the government of a predicate by a set of properties, his "classically realist conception of normativity", N<sub>1</sub>, is strengthened so as to express the following claim: if  $x$  means something by a (general) term  $\phi$ , then  $x$  does so **because** there is a set of properties  $P_1 - P_n$ , of which  $x$  has a **prior** grasp, and  $x$  has the intention (has adopted the linguistic commitment) that  $\phi$  is to apply to an object  $o$  iff  $o$  has the properties  $P_1 - P_n$ . Since this claim is a consequence of the expanded truth-conditional conception of meaning, denying it amounts to rejecting that conception. Moreover, on this strengthened interpretation, both N<sub>1</sub> and the truth-conditional conception are substantive proposals that can be denied without absurdity.

### An Argument Against the Explanatory Version of the Truth-Conditional Conception of Meaning

I will now present an independent argument against the explanatory version of the truth-conditional conception of meaning. The argument is limited in the sense that it does not purport to show that there are no sentences, expressions, and speakers that fit the explanatory account, but only that the account fails for some sentences, expressions, and speakers. Later, I will examine the scope of this failure, and extract the lessons to be learned from it, including the relationship between the position arrived at and Kripke's skeptical solution to the problem posed by his original skeptical argument.

The argument is based on examples like (4).<sup>35</sup>

- 4a. Pluto is a distant planet
- b. 'Pluto' refers (in English) to Pluto
- c. 'Pluto is a distant planet' is true (in English) iff Pluto is a distant planet
- d. 'Pluto is a distant planet' means (in English) that Pluto is a distant planet

I believe all of these things. The reason I do is not that I have seen or had direct contact with the planet Pluto. On the contrary, my only contact with Pluto has been indirect, mediated by representations of it. The most important of these has been the name 'Pluto'.

In general, my beliefs about Pluto are linguistically mediated. I believe that Pluto is a distant planet because I have read or been told that it is. I have encountered the sentence 'Pluto is a distant planet' in reading or in conversation; I have understood the sentence, and I have accepted it. It should be noted that this understanding did not consist in my associating an identifying description with the name 'Pluto', and a descriptive proposition with the entire sentence. In acquiring the belief, I may well have come to believe descriptive propositions as a result of accepting the sentence. Still, my belief that Pluto is a distant planet cannot be identified with any such descriptive belief. Even if the description I associate with the name turns out to be inaccurate and doesn't, in fact, pick out Pluto, my belief that Pluto is a distant planet is about Pluto (though the descriptive beliefs acquired at the same time may not be). Similarly, even if the descriptive beliefs turn out to be false, my belief that Pluto is a distant planet may remain true. Finally, the proposition I express by 'Pluto is a distant planet' is the same as the proposition that others express by the sentence, even if the descriptions we associate with the name are different.

In short, the **explanation** of my belief that Pluto is a distant planet is based on three facts: (i) the fact that I accept the sentence 'Pluto is a distant planet', (ii) the fact that the sentence means (expresses the proposition) that Pluto is a distant planet, and (iii) the fact that I am a competent speaker, and hence understand the sentence. Moreover, my understanding the sentence is not a matter of my using it to express descriptive propositions that I might have come to believe on independent grounds. Analogous points can be made regarding other attitudes I might have taken toward the proposition. If I had come to wonder whether Pluto was a distant planet, or doubt that it was, my having that propositional attitude would have involved my having a certain attitude toward a sentence that expressed it. The point illustrated here is that the only epistemic connection I have with certain propositions is mediated through sentences that express them.

This point can be extended to the other examples (4b-d). For instance, I believe the propositions expressed by the semantic claims (c) and (d). However these beliefs do not **explain** my understanding of sentence (a). I don't understand the sentence 'Pluto is a distant planet' **because** I have those beliefs. Rather, it is the other way around. My belief in the propositions expressed by (c) and (d) is (in large part) due to my understanding and accepting sentences (c) and (d), and to the fact that they mean what they do. Moreover, part of what it is for me to understand the semantic sentences (c) and (d) is for me to understand the non-semantic sentence (a), which is a constituent of both. Thus, the direction of explanation in this case is not from semantic beliefs to linguistic competence, but from linguistic competence to semantic beliefs.

If this is right, then a natural picture of language and linguistic competence associated with the explanatory truth-conditional conception is mistaken. Ac-



cording to the picture, we have the ability, prior to acquiring language, to apprehend objects, grasp properties, entertain propositions, and form beliefs. In setting up a language, we adopt certain conventions according to which individual expressions and sentences come to stand for these antecedently apprehended objects, properties, and propositions. Learning the language involves learning for each expression, and for each sentence, which antecedently available object, property, or proposition it stands for.

The most fundamental thing wrong with this picture is that in the case of at least some terms and sentences, we do not apprehend the objects, properties, or propositions they stand for prior to understanding the terms or sentences themselves. As a result, coming to understand these individual terms and sentences does not consist in searching through our stock of previously encountered objects, properties, and propositions to find the ones assigned to them. Rather, coming to understand the terms and sentences is a matter of satisfying conventional standards regarding their use. Just what these standards are is something that needs to be filled out in greater detail. However, whatever they are, once they are satisfied, one is counted not only as understanding new expressions and sentences, but also as cognitively relating to new objects, properties and propositions.

### The Scope of the Failure of the Explanatory Version of the Truth-Conditional Conception

The above argument against the explanatory version of the truth-conditional conception of meaning is modest, and does not pretend to be global in scope. In the example about Pluto, my beliefs are linguistically mediated, but they need not have been. Presumably, these beliefs could have been acquired through direct, non-linguistic contact with the planet. Many of my beliefs about individuals are like this. For example, my beliefs about Plato are linguistically mediated; but they are also dependent on the fact that others had direct contact with the man, and passed the name down to me.

Some of my beliefs about natural kinds also fit the above pattern. For example I believe that tungsten is a metal with some industrial use, which is found somewhere in South America, among other places. However I can't give an accurate description that uniquely picks it out. Nevertheless, I satisfy whatever minimal criteria there are for understanding the term, in the sense of being able to use it with its conventional meaning. When I do use it in a sentence, the proposition I express is one that directly involves the natural kind itself, despite the fact that I don't have any direct epistemic contact with the kind. In general, my beliefs about tungsten, including semantic beliefs analogous to (4b-d), are linguistically mediated, and are explained, in part, by my understanding and accepting various sentences containing the word 'tungsten'. Thus, the explanation of my understanding of this word posited by the explanatory version of the truth-conditional conception of meaning is incorrect.

How far, one wonders, could this critique be expanded? Are there linguistically mediated beliefs about objects with which no one is, or could be, in direct

epistemic contact—e.g., mathematical objects and unobservable, theoretical entities in science? It seems reasonable to suppose that there are. After all, there are such objects, and we do have beliefs about them. It is not farfetched to suppose that we acquire these beliefs in virtue of understanding and accepting sentences about them. How this all comes about is, of course, a large and perplexing question. However, it is not implausible to think that, somehow, using a mathematical or scientific term in a certain way counts as referring to one or another mathematical or theoretical object, and expressing a belief about it, despite the fact that the referent of such a term cannot be "read off" our use of it, as well as the fact that we have no direct apprehension of the object in question.

The upshot of these considerations is (i) that the explanatory version of the truth-conditional conception of meaning sketched above definitely is incorrect for certain sentences, expressions and speakers (the Pluto and tungsten examples) and (ii) that it seems reasonable to suppose that the range of discourse for which the conception fails may turn out to be large and substantial (the scientific and mathematical cases). This is not to say that sentences in this range—whatever its precise boundaries—don't have truth conditions; nor is it to say that speakers who understand those sentences don't know what they are. The sentences in question do have truth conditions, and speakers who understand the sentences know them. But, in the cases we are concerned with, knowledge of truth conditions doesn't **explain** understanding, and intentions to use sentences in such a way that they have certain truth conditions don't explain how we endow sentences with meaning. Corresponding conclusions hold for predicates and other types of expressions.

This raises the question of how linguistic competence and understanding is to be explained in the types of cases we have been considering. Here I must confess that I know of no satisfying general answer to this question that is clear and illuminating. Nevertheless, it seems plausible to suppose that, at least in some cases, one's position in a larger linguistic community, and one's mastery of the conditions of use imposed by that community, rather than any privately arrived at semantic beliefs, play a primary role in explaining one's linguistic understanding. In this respect, the position we have arrived at resembles the skeptical solution proposed by Kripke's Wittgenstein.

However the position also differs from that of Kripke's Wittgenstein in that our critique of the explanatory version of the truth-conditional conception of meaning is not global, and does not call for a wholesale rejection of that conception. In fact, our critique does not apply to Kripke's paradigmatic example of the plus sign. On the contrary, my understanding of '+' conforms to the explanatory version of the truth-conditional conception.

According to that conception, if in the past I meant addition by '+', I did so **because** I had a **prior** grasp of the addition function, and I formed the intention to associate the symbol with that function. What did that prior grasp of the function consist in, and how did I succeed in associating it with '+'? The obvious answer—which clearly guided Kripke in selecting this example in the first place—is that in the past I associated the plus sign with a rule, or algorithm, that

determines the sum of any two numbers. For most of us, the rule was probably one we learned in the first grade, involving stipulated values for combining single digits, rules about carrying, and the like. However, the details are not important, and for present purposes we might as well assume that the rule I memorized was the standard number theoretic characterization (+).

(+) For all natural numbers  $x$  and  $y$ ,  $x + 0 = x$  &  $x + y' = (x + y)'$

Of course, we may assume that I understood the rule (+) as having a certain content. I interpreted it as saying that for any natural numbers  $x$  and  $y$ ,  $x$  plus zero equals  $x$  and  $x$  plus the successor of  $y$  equals the successor of  $x$  plus  $y$ . In effect, I defined the function designated by '+' to be that binary numerical function on the natural numbers which when applied to the pair consisting of a number  $x$  and zero always gives the value  $x$ , and when applied to the pair consisting of a number  $x$  and the successor of  $y$  always gives the successor of the value it gives to the pair of  $x$  and  $y$ . If this is right, then in the past I meant addition by '+' because (i) I had the intention to use '+' to stand for the function uniquely determined by the content of the rule (+), (ii) the content of that rule determined the addition function, and (iii) I understood that content. All of this is fully in accord with the expanded truth-conditional conception of meaning. Thus, what that conception tells us about the meaning of '+' is **correct**. The plus sign did, and does, stand for the addition function; and it did, and does, so because of beliefs and intentions regarding its use which **explain**, and are **prior** to, my understanding of the symbol itself.

It is undeniably true that this explanation of my past use of '+' presupposes that the rule, (+), had a certain content, which I understood. In particular, it presupposes that in the past I understood the successor symbol "'" to stand for the successor function, '=' to stand for the identity relation, the numeral '0' to denote the number zero, and the quantifiers to range over the natural numbers. It is also true that we can raise the same question about my understanding of these terms that we did regarding '+'—namely, did my understanding of them conform to the explanatory truth-conditional conception of meaning? The crucial point to notice here is that for the purpose of determining whether my use of '+' conformed to that conception, it doesn't matter how we answer this question.

Perhaps no further rules guided my use of the successor symbol, "'". Perhaps in addition, there is no other way in which I could be credited with an independent, prior grasp of the successor function, and a decision to use "'" to stand for it. If so, then my understanding of the successor symbol cannot be explained on the model of the explanatory truth-conditional conception of meaning, but rather must be explained in some other way.<sup>36</sup> But no matter how it is explained, it remains true that I did mean successor by "'". That much must be granted by any non-revisionary account of our ordinary meaning ascriptions—any account that acknowledges that they express facts in the minimal sense (M). But then, given that the terms occurring in the rule used to define '+' did mean what I took them to mean, and were used to express beliefs independent of, and prior to, my use of

+', one must grant that my understanding of the plus sign **did** meet the conditions imposed by the explanatory truth-conditional conception.

This point illustrates an obvious, but important lesson. No defensible grounds exist for a **global** rejection of the explanatory role of truth conditions for sentences, or of the explanatory character of the reference and application conditions for individual terms. Some sentences do have explanatory truth-conditions in the sense required by the explanatory truth-conditional conception, and some terms have explanatory reference or application conditions. In light of this we need to ask, "What, if anything, does the limited skepticism that we have arrived at regarding truth conditions have to do with Kripke's skeptical solution to the rule-following paradox?"

### The Anti-Truth-Conditional Version of the Skeptical Solution Revisited

According to our reconstruction of Wilson, Kripke's skeptical argument is a *reductio* of the explanatory version of the truth-conditional conception of meaning, and the skeptical solution is an alternative conception according to which our meaning what we do by our words is not explained by any prior intentions to use them to stand for antecedently apprehended objects, properties, or propositions. Having shown that this interpretation of Kripke has the virtue of locating the target of the skeptical solution as a contentious view about meaning that really does have to be rejected, we are now in a position to see the problems with the interpretation.

First, Wilson quite reasonably interprets Kripke's Wittgenstein as arguing that **no** sentences have "classically realist truth conditions" and **no** expressions have "classically realist" reference, application, or satisfaction conditions.<sup>37</sup> However, as we have just seen, some expressions, such as the symbol '+' and the word 'addition', do have reference conditions that play a significant role in explaining how they are used and understood—i.e. conditions that fit the explanatory truth-conditional conception. By extension, some sentences containing these expressions have similarly explanatory truth conditions.<sup>38</sup> This suggests either that the skeptical solution fails in an utterly obvious way to establish what it sets out to achieve, or that its real target is not the explanatory truth-conditional conception of meaning characterized above, but something else.

Second, Kripke's Wittgenstein does not attempt to provide the sort of argument that is required to show the incorrectness of the explanatory version of the truth conditional conception. The key claim made by this conception is that one kind of intentional fact—namely, semantic beliefs and intentions relating sentences and expressions to propositions, properties, and objects—is prior to, and part of the explanation of, another kind of intentional fact—namely, understanding sentences and expressions, and meaning something by them. To show the incorrectness of this claim one must argue, as I did above, that in at least some cases the alleged explanatory priority does not exist (either because both types of fact are on a par, or because the order of priority is reversed). Kripke's Wittgen-

stein does not do this. Instead, when it is suggested that my past meaning of '+' may have been determined by beliefs or algorithms I associated with it, he, along with the skeptic, dismisses the suggestion by pointing out that the same skeptical question can be raised about those beliefs or algorithms, since they too have content. But, from the point of view of the explanatory version of the truth-conditional conception of meaning, this is beside the point. Since anything intentional has content, one can always ask for the non-intentional basis of that content. This observation, so prominent in Kripke's skeptical argument, is irrelevant to the issue of whether some intentional facts are explanatorily prior to other intentional facts. Moreover, no attempt is made anywhere else in the skeptical argument to show that semantic beliefs and intentions fail to have the priority required by the explanatory version of the truth-conditional conception.

The reason for this is that Kripke's skeptic is simply not concerned with such questions of priority. He is looking for the non-intentional basis of all intentional facts, and suggesting that there isn't any. Because of this the skeptical argument cannot be seen as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the explanatory truth-conditional conception—or, at any rate, it cannot be seen as a *reductio* of the special explanatory part of the conception that distinguishes it from the minimal truth-conditional conception. But to say this is just to say that Kripke's actual skeptical argument does not conform to our reconstruction of Wilson's interpretation.

The third problem with the interpretation is that it cannot make sense of the extended discussion of the dispositional analysis. According to the interpretation, the skeptic takes the explanatory version of the truth-conditional conception of meaning for granted, and relies on it for the following strengthened version of Wilson's "classically realist conception of normativity".

*The Strengthened Version of the "Classically Realist Conception of Normativity"*

If  $x$  means something by a (general) term  $\phi$ , then  $x$  does so **because** there is a set of properties  $P_1 - P_n$ , of which  $x$  has a **prior** grasp, and  $x$  has the intention (has adopted the linguistic commitment) that  $\phi$  is to apply to an object  $o$  iff  $o$  has the properties  $P_1 - P_n$ . (This condition is stated for predicates, but a similar condition would be stated for other types of expression—e.g. function signs, like '+'.)

According to our reconstruction of Wilson, the skeptic treats this as a central, unargued assumption in the skeptical argument. However, if that were so, then he would have no need to argue against the dispositional analysis at all. On the one hand, the only candidates for meaning-determining facts allowed by the assumption are those that determine explanatorily prior semantic beliefs and intentions governing '+'. On the other hand, the dispositional analysis does not even attempt to specify such facts. Thus, if the skeptic were taking the assumption for granted, he could simply dismiss the dispositional analysis as not addressing the problem of meaning, as he conceives it. Kripke's skeptic does not do this; rather

he sees the dispositional analysis as requiring extensive, independent refutation. This is evidence that his argument does **not** assume the strengthened version of the "classically realist conception of normativity", and **cannot** be regarded by the proponent of the skeptical solution as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the explanatory version of the truth-conditional conception of meaning.

**Is There a Single, Coherent Interpretation of Kripke's Text?**

So far we have considered two interpretations of the skeptical argument and the skeptical solution. According to the first interpretation, the skeptical argument purports to show that there are no meaning facts, in even the minimal sense (M) of "facts"; the skeptical solution maintains that meaning ascriptions are non-descriptive, and do not purport to express truths. On this interpretation, the skeptical argument proves to be a highly interesting, though fundamentally flawed, attempt to establish a truly radical conclusion; the skeptical solution, on the other hand, is incoherent, and represents no serious alternative to the truth-conditional conception of meaning. According to the second interpretation, the skeptical argument assumes from that outset that if there is such a thing as meaning, then facts about meaning must conform to the explanatory version of the truth-conditional conception; the argument purports to show that, on this assumption, there is no such thing as meaning. On this interpretation the skeptical solution treats the skeptical argument as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the explanatory version of the truth-conditional conception of meaning, and tries to sketch an alternative conception. Unlike the first interpretation, this interpretation is able to view the skeptical solution as containing at least a modicum of sense; it is seen as an attempt to refute a contentious conception of meaning that really is incorrect. Unfortunately, as we have seen, this interpretation cannot, in the end, be sustained. Whatever may be assumed about meaning in the skeptical argument, and whatever may be the target of the attempted refutation in the skeptical solution, it is not the explanatory version of the truth-conditional conception of meaning.

Both interpretations we have considered make sense of part of the text, while failing to make sense of the text as a whole. Can we do better? Let us consider a third interpretation that combines important elements of the previous two. Recall the formulation of the skeptical argument according to the first interpretation.

- P1. If in the past it was a fact that I meant addition by '+', then either:  
 (i) this fact was determined by non-intentional facts of the following sorts:  
 .....  
 or  
 (ii) the fact that I meant addition by '+' was a primitive fact; that is, a fact not determined by non-intentional facts.  
 P2. It is not the case that non-intentional facts of type (i) determined that I meant addition by '+'.



P3. It is not the case that the fact that I meant addition by '+' was a primitive fact.

C1. Therefore, in the past there was no fact that I meant addition by '+'.

On the analysis given in my "Skepticism about Meaning: Indeterminacy, Normativity, and the Rule-Following Paradox", this argument suffers from equivocation about what is meant by 'determine'. On the one hand, we may say that a set *F* of truths determines a claim *M* iff it is possible to demonstrate *M* from *F*—i.e. iff *M* is an *a priori* consequence of *F*. On this interpretation I argue that P1 and P2 may be true, but P3 is false. On the other hand, we may say that a set *F* of truths determines a claim *M* iff *M* is a necessary consequence of *F*. I argue that on this interpretation P1 and P3 are true, but P2 is false.

Let us concentrate on the epistemological version of the argument—in which the determination relation requires the ability to demonstrate something from the underlying facts. One of the main reasons for thinking that, on this interpretation, P2 may be true is brought out by the difficulty one encounters in specifying a set *F* of non-intentional facts that would satisfy the corresponding (epistemological) version *N<sub>E</sub>* of the normativity requirement.

*N<sub>E</sub>*. If a set *F* of facts determined that (in the past) one meant addition by '+', then knowing the facts in *F* would, in principle, provide one with a sufficient basis for concluding (demonstrating) that one ought to give the answer '125' to the question 'What is 68 + 57?', and similarly for all other questions of this type, provided one intends to use '+' with the same meaning it had in the past.

What makes this constraint so powerful is that for every set of non-intentional facts that one can think of it appears that knowing those facts is **not** sufficient for demonstrating which answers to the relevant questions about the application of '+' are correct, and hence ought to be given.

With this in mind, let us reformulate the skeptical argument so that it explicitly assumes both *N<sub>E</sub>* and the claim that meaning facts are not (epistemologically) primitive. The argument begins with a super-normativity premise, *N<sub>plus</sub>*, incorporating these assumptions.

*N<sub>plus</sub>*. If in the past I meant addition by '+', then there is a set of non-intentional facts such that knowledge of those facts would, in principle, provide me with a sufficient basis for concluding (demonstrating) that I ought to give the answer '125' to the question 'What is 68 + 57?', and similarly for all other questions of this type, provided I intend to use '+' with the same meaning I did in the past.

On the new interpretation we are constructing, Kripke's skeptic assumes *N<sub>plus</sub>* from the outset. In accord with *N<sub>plus</sub>*, he insists that the facts he is looking for must

be non-intentional, since otherwise his skeptical worries would apply to them. Having limited the field in this way, he spends most of chapter 2 arguing for the following anti-reductionist premise AR.

AR. There are no non-intentional facts such that knowledge of them would, in principle, provide me with a sufficient basis for concluding (demonstrating) that I ought to give the answer '125' to the question 'What is 68 + 57?', and similarly for all other questions of this type, provided I intend to use '+' with the same meaning I did in the past.

Since the skeptic accepts both *N<sub>plus</sub>* and AR, he concludes that I didn't mean addition by '+' in the past. By analogous reasoning he concludes that I didn't mean anything else by '+' either, and that, in general, no one ever means anything by any word. The proponent of the skeptical solution, on the other hand, does not draw any of these skeptical conclusions. Although he agrees with the skeptic about AR, he rejects the skeptical conclusions, and treats the argument as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the super-normativity premise *N<sub>plus</sub>*.

This interpretation has two main virtues; it makes reasonable sense of the skeptical argument, and it treats the skeptical solution as rejecting a misguided conception of normativity that fails not only for '+', but for all expressions. However, it also suffers from two fundamental defects: (i) there is no reasonable version of the truth-conditional conception that is committed to the super-normativity principle *N<sub>plus</sub>*; hence rejection of that premise does not motivate the sort of attack on the truth-conditional conception, and construction of an alternative account of meaning, that is advertised in Kripke's skeptical solution. (ii) the claim *N<sub>plus</sub>*, for which we have a plausible *reductio*, has very little independent plausibility; hence a solution that rejects it hardly qualifies as even mildly surprising, let alone skeptical.

So, in the end, we have three interpretations. Each has important virtues; each has fundamental defects. None is completely satisfying. The reason for this, I suspect, is that, like many leading works in philosophy, there is no single, coherent line of argument that runs through the whole of the text. Rather, Kripke's text is a fabric through which the different threads of these three interpretations are woven together. If this is right, then the proper response is give up as illusory the attempt to find a single unifying interpretation, to distinguish instead several illuminating partial interpretations, and to discover what there is to learn from each. That is what I have tried to do.<sup>39</sup>

## Notes

1. Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1982.
2. In *Meaning and Reference*, The Canadian Journal of Philosophy, Supplementary Volume 23, edited by Ali A. Kazmi, 1998.
3. Kripke formulates the skeptical paradox, in the first instance, as a paradox about what I meant by my words in the past, as opposed to what I mean by them now. The ad-

vantage of this formulation is that it allows us to take the meanings of the words we use in stating the argument for granted while the argument is being given and evaluated. Hence we avoid a potential source of confusion that might result from relying on the meanings of certain words in stating the argument while at the same time questioning what those words mean. Of course, if the argument of Kripke's skeptic were good, then one could hardly resist extending the conclusion drawn about the past to the present and future as well. Thus nothing of philosophical significance is lost by formulating the skeptical argument as being about the past.

4. Boldface italics are used to indicate corner quotes; 'm' and 'n' are metalinguistic variables ranging over numerals.
5. For discussion see my "Skepticism about Meaning: Indeterminacy, Normativity, and the Rule-Following Paradox", *op. cit.*
6. The text is somewhat equivocal on this point. On page 51 Kripke says:

Perhaps we may try to recoup, by arguing that meaning addition by 'plus' is a state even more *sui generis* than we have argued before. Perhaps it is simply a primitive state, not to be assimilated to sensations or headaches or any 'qualitative' states, nor to be assimilated to dispositions, but a state of a unique kind of its own.

Such a move may in a sense be irrefutable, and if it is taken in an appropriate way Wittgenstein may even accept it. But it seems desperate; it leaves the nature of this postulated primitive state of 'meaning addition by "plus"'—completely mysterious.

The passage continues with more discouraging words on how problematic it would allegedly be to take meaning facts to be primitive. I believe that the most natural interpretation of Kripke's argumentative strategy here is to see him portraying the skeptic as rejecting the claim that meaning facts are primitive, while holding the possibility open that there may be an interpretation of what such primitiveness would amount to according to which Wittgenstein—the proponent of the skeptical solution—may accept the claim that meaning facts are primitive. I will explore this possibility in the final section of the paper.

7. Italics are used here (and elsewhere) to indicate single quotes. Occasionally they are also used for other purposes—e.g. to mark the use of a foreign word or phrase. I trust that the context will make it clear which use is which.
8. Another option for the radical skeptic would be to reformulate the extension of the original skeptical argument so as not to appeal to any notion of truth. For example, he might simply accept the premise that if in the past I meant addition by '+' then it was a fact that in the past I meant addition by '+'. This plus the original conclusion that there was no such fact, will allow him to conclude that in the past I didn't mean addition by '+'. Similar reasoning would apply to other meaning ascriptions.

The internal consistency of the radical skeptical position is a point that appears to be missed by Paul Boghossian in "The Rule-Following Considerations," *Mind*, vol. 98, 1989 and "The Status of Content" *The Philosophical Review*, XCIX, No. 2, 1990. In the former, he considers the radical skeptical position of eliminativism about meaning as involving a kind of "error conception of discourse about meaning". There he asks whether the lesson of the skeptical argument could simply be the adoption of the radical skeptical position, and concludes that it could not. (For Boghossian, what he calls "the error conception" is one of three possible responses to Kripke's skeptical paradox, the other two being the skeptical solution—which

Boghossian calls "non-factualism about content"—and a "straight solution" to the paradox.)

Could not the moral of the skeptical argument be understood to consist in an error conception of meaning discourse? It could not, for an error conception of such discourse, in contrast with error conceptions of other regions, is of doubtful coherence. The view in question would consist in the claim that all meaning-attributions are false:

- (1) For any S: *S means that p* is false.

But the disquotational properties of the truth predicate guarantee that (1) entails

- (2) For any S: S has no meaning.

(1) implies, that is, that no sentence whatever possesses a meaning. Since, however, a sentence cannot be **false** unless it is meaningful to begin with, this in turn implies that (1) cannot be true: for what (1) says is that some sentences—namely meaning-attributing sentences—are false. p. 523

A slight variation of the same argument is given in more detail in "The Status of Content."

Consider first an error conception. As the preceding discussion has argued, this amounts finally to the claim that

- (4) All sentences of the form "S has truth condition p" are false,

where S is to be understood as ranging over sentences in the language of thought, or neural structures, as well as over public-language sentences. But now (4) would seem to have the immediate consequence that **no sentence** has a truth condition. For whatever one's conception of "true"—whether robust or deflationary—a sentence of the form "S has truth condition p" will be true if and only if S really does have truth condition p; this is, of course nothing but a reflection of the truth predicate's disquotational properties, properties it possesses on any conception of truth. And so, since **all** sentences of that form are held to be **false**, for no S and for no p does S have truth condition p. Now, however, a problem would seem immediate. For (4) implies, that is, that no sentence whatever has a truth condition. But what (4) **says** is that all truth-condition-attributing sentences are false. And these sentences cannot be false unless they have truth conditions to begin with. Hence, (4) implies both that truth-condition-attributing sentences have truth conditions and that they don't have them. This is a contradiction. pp. 174–5.

Though I agree with Boghossian that the skeptic's position is, in a certain sense, "of doubtful coherence", and hence must be rejected, it seems to me that the conclusion drawn in the quoted passage is too strong: there is no contradiction of the sort maintained in the radical skeptical position arising from Kripke's skeptical argument. The crux of the matter concerns the notions of truth and falsity employed by Boghossian. If these are our ordinary notions, as I have described them in the main text above, then Boghossian's contention that it is inconsistent to claim that a meaningless sentence is false is correct—since to say of a sentence *s* that *s* is true (or false) is to say that *s* expresses a proposition that is true (or false), and so *s* is meaningful. However, when this notion of what it is for a sentence to be true is involved, the proponent of the radical skeptical position holds that **no** sentences are true, and therefore denies the inference from *s* to the claim that *s* is true, used in Boghossian's argument. Moreover,

the radical skeptic would not formulate his thesis as the doctrine that meaning ascriptions are false (in the ordinary sense); rather he would simply claim that no sentences mean anything. Thus, if the notions of truth and falsity employed in Boghossian's argument are the ordinary ones, then the argument misstates the radical skeptical position and employs an inference that would be denied by the radical skeptic.

On the other hand, the radical skeptic is free to replace the ordinary notions of truth and falsity with Tarski-type substitutes for his own language that do not presuppose any intentional notions. Let 'TRUE' and 'FALSE' be such predicates. A skeptic who says that there is a TRUE sentence written on the blackboard says something trivially equivalent to the following: either 'Snow is white' is written on the blackboard and snow is white, or 'Grass is green' is written on the blackboard and grass is green, etc. (Sentences of other languages could not be dealt with using the same predicate.) When this notion of truth is employed the skeptic will accept the inference from *s* to the claim that *s* is TRUE, and vice versa. He will characterize meaning ascriptions as not TRUE and, depending on how FALSITY is defined, he may even characterize them as FALSE. However, now there is no contradiction in claiming that a sentence is both meaningless and TRUE (or FALSE). Similarly, the claim that there are conditions under which a sentence is TRUE, as well as the claim that the sentence has TRUTH conditions, are not conceptually tied to any claim about the meaning of the sentence. Thus, if Boghossian's argument is taken to involve notions of truth and falsity that the radical skeptic is willing to embrace, then a key premise in the argument must be rejected. As a result, no contradiction of the sort Boghossian is looking for can be derived from the skeptic's position.

9. This includes replacing the ordinary notion of truth, which is tied to content, with a Tarski-style predicate, which can be defined using only logic, set theory, syntax, and non-intentional object language concepts that Quine is willing to countenance. Ordinary reference is similarly replaced with Tarski-style disquotational reference for one's own present language, while talk of the reference of other speakers and languages is understood to involve indeterminate translation into one's own language plus disquotational reference in the home language.
10. Quaddition is an arithmetical function that agrees with the addition function on all pairs of arguments to which I have applied '+', and which gives the value 5 to all other pairs of arguments.
11. See pages 73 and 74.
12. A word of caution is needed here regarding Kripke's talk about **assertions** that someone means something, and about substituting conditions of legitimate **assertability** for truth conditions. Although Kripke here speaks as if, according to the skeptical solution, meaning ascriptions are used to assert propositions, as opposed to performing other non-assertive speech acts, earlier he has warned us that in talking about assertions and assertability conditions in connection with the skeptical solution he is adopting an oversimplified terminology. Thus, on pages 73 and 74 he says:

Of course Wittgenstein does not confine himself to declarative sentences, and hence to assertion and denial, as I have just done. On the contrary, any reader of the earlier parts of *Philosophical Investigations* will be aware that he is strongly concerned to deny any special primacy to assertion, or to sentences in the indicative mood. (See his early examples "Slab!", "Pillar!", etc.) This in itself plays an important role in his repudiation of the classical realist picture. Since the

indicative mood is not taken as in any sense primary or basic, it becomes more plausible that the linguistic role even of utterances in the indicative mood that superficially look like assertions need not be one of 'stating facts'. Thus, if we speak properly, we should not speak of conditions of 'assertion', but rather, more generally, of the conditions when a move (a form of linguistic expression) is to be made in the 'language game'. If, however, we allow ourselves to adopt an oversimplified terminology more appropriate to a special range of cases, we can say that Wittgenstein proposes a picture of language based, not on truth conditions, but on assertability conditions or justification conditions: under what circumstances are we allowed to make a given assertion? (my boldface emphasis)

In light of this warning we are well-advised, at this point, to leave it as an open question whether, according to the skeptical solution, utterances of meaning ascriptions are to be regarded as assertions proper, or as performances of some other speech act.

13. The passage continues:

It is for this reason that I conjectured above (p.5), that Wittgenstein's professed inability to write a work with conventionally organized arguments and conclusions stems at least in part, not from personal and stylistic proclivities, but from the nature of his work. Had Wittgenstein...stated the outcomes of his conclusions in the form of definite theses, it would have been very difficult to avoid formulating his doctrines in a form that consists in apparent skeptical denials of our ordinary assertions...If on the other hand, we do not state our conclusions in the form of broad philosophical theses, it is easier to avoid the danger of a denial of any ordinary belief...Whenever our opponent insists on the perfect propriety of an ordinary form of expression...we can insist that if these expressions are properly understood, we agree. The danger comes when we try to give a precise formulation of exactly what it is that we are denying—what 'erroneous interpretation' our opponent is placing on ordinary means of expression. It may be hard to do this without producing yet another statement that, we must admit, is still 'perfectly all right, properly understood'. (pp. 69–70)

14. For examples of this sort see, Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'", *Language, Mind, and Knowledge*, edited by Keith Gunderson, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) 1975, and Tyler Burge, "Individualism and the Mental," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. IV, 1979.
15. Kripke explicitly recognizes this on pages 110–111, where he says:

Finally, the point made in the last paragraph, that Wittgenstein's theory is one of assertability conditions, deserves emphasis. Wittgenstein's theory should not be confused with a theory that, for any *m* and *n*, the value of the function we mean by 'plus', is (by definition) the value that (nearly) all the linguistic community would give as the answer. Such a theory would be a theory of the **truth** conditions of such assertions as "By 'plus' we mean such-and-such a function,"... The theory would assert that 125 is the value of the function meant for given arguments, if and only if '125' is the response nearly everyone would give, given these arguments. Thus the theory would be a social, or community-wide, version



of the dispositional theory, and would be open to at least some of the same criticisms as the original form.

16. Propositions, as I am conceiving of them here, are objects of belief, assertion, and other attitudes, as well as being potential bearers of truth value. So in cases in which it is correct to report someone as believing or asserting (the proposition) that so and so, the sentence one uses in ascribing the content of that belief or assertion should typically be regarded as expressing a proposition.
17. Note, on this account, the potential fact associated with a sentence plays two conceptually distinct (though related) explanatory roles. In evaluating the correctness or incorrectness of strong versions of the truth-conditional conception of meaning, the possibility should be left open that there may be cases in which the potential fact in question plays one of these explanatory roles but not the other. For example, there might be a sentence *s* (or other expression *e*) that was originally endowed with meaning by an initial speaker or group of speakers who antecedently grasped a certain potential fact (or property/object) and stipulated that *s* (or *e*), was to stand for it—even though later speakers are able to understand *s* (or *e*) without having any such antecedent grasp of the potential fact (or property/object.) in question. In such a case it would be plausible to maintain that the potential fact associated with the sentence played the initial meaning-endowing explanatory role, but not the role of explaining subsequent understanding. There may be other situations in which neither role is played by such a potential fact.
18. "Kripke on Wittgenstein and Normativity," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, XIX, 1994, 366–90; "Semantic Realism and Kripke's Wittgenstein," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LVIII, 1998, 99–122.
19. An interpretation of the skeptical solution along roughly these lines is given by Crispin Wright in "Kripke's Account of the Argument Against Private Language," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1984, 759–778 and by Paul Boghossian in "The Rule-Following Considerations," *Mind*, 98, 1989, 507–549.
20. *op. cit.*
21. Kripke's Wittgenstein might, of course, be forgiven for not noticing this. Hence this is not a criticism of the interpretive hypothesis that attributes the non-descriptive analysis of meaning ascriptions to him. However, it is a criticism of that analysis when put forward as the proper response to the skeptical argument.
22. Crispin Wright and Paul Boghossian, who interpret the skeptical solution along roughly the non-descriptive lines sketched above, provide arguments—not found in Kripke's text—that a non-descriptive analysis of meaning ascriptions leads immediately to a non-descriptive analysis of all sentences. See page 769 of Wright (1984), and pages 524–525 of Boghossian (1989).

The basic idea may be illustrated by considering Wright's argument in the following form (which is here expressed in a slightly different way than the way he presents it): Suppose that *s* is a descriptive sentence—e.g. 'snow is white'—that expresses a proposition and purports to state a fact. Now consider the material biconditional whose left side attributes truth to *s* and whose right side is *s* itself—e.g. '*snow is white*' is true iff *snow is white*. It would certainly seem that this biconditional ought to be accepted. Suppose further that we assume, independently of the skeptical solution, that if *B* is a descriptive sentence that expresses a proposition, then the sentence *A* iff *B* is acceptable only if *A* is descriptive, and expresses a proposition. It then follows that the left side of our original biconditional, which attributes truth to *s*, must also

be taken to be descriptive, and hence to express a proposition. However, this is problematic. For if we are here employing the ordinary notion of truth, according to which a sentence is true if and only if it expresses a true proposition, then a sentence of the form '*s* is true' is equivalent to a sentence of the form *there is some proposition p such that 's' expresses p and p is true*. Since a meaning ascription of the form '*s* expresses a proposition' follows from this sentence, there are grounds for the proponent of the non-descriptive version of the skeptical solution to classify the corresponding sentence of the form '*s* is true' as being non-descriptive. (We are here tacitly assuming that any sentence from which a non-descriptive sentence follows is itself non-descriptive.) But now we have characterized the claim that *s* is true as both descriptive and non-descriptive. If one takes the correctness of the skeptical solution as given (and also accepts the supplementary principles appealed to in the argument), one may regard this as a *reductio* of the claim that there are any non-descriptive sentences that the skeptical solution doesn't apply to, and hence that its application is universal.

I don't think this is the best way to view the matter, however. What this reconstruction of Wright's argument shows is that the non-descriptive version of the skeptical solution, together with (i) a certain set of supplementary assumptions and (ii) the claim that there are some descriptive sentences that express propositions, is incoherent. However, the non-descriptive version of the skeptical solution can be shown to be incoherent on independent grounds, as I argue below. Thus the incoherence reached in this reconstruction of Wright's argument is better blamed on this version of the skeptical solution than on the claim that there are sentences it doesn't apply to. Wright seems to share this view, since he goes on to express skepticism that we can make sense of a universal non-descriptivism. (pp. 769–770)

23. This point is made by Alex Byrne in "On Misinterpreting Kripke's Wittgenstein", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LVI, No. 2, June 1996.
24. *op. cit.*
25. Pages 368–369.
26. Page 370.
27. Pages 369–370.
28. Page 370.
29. Page 370.
30. Page 370.
31. In "Semantics and Semantic Competence", *Philosophical Perspectives* Vol. 3, 1989, at pages 585–587, I raise a limited, somewhat technical, objection that could be extended to even the minimal truth conditional conception. I argue that in certain unusual cases one can know that *s* expresses the proposition that *P* (this could be extended to cases in which one can know that *s* both expresses the proposition that *P* and is true iff *P*), without understanding *s*—though it still holds that if *s* means that *P* and one understands *s* (as well as what it is for something to mean that, and be true iff, *P*), then one will be in a position to conclude that *s* means that *P* and is true iff *P*. The argument makes some controversial, but I believe defensible, assumptions about the proper semantic analysis of various constructions which are not directly relevant to the issues discussed here. Since the correctness or incorrectness of the argument does not affect the main issues related to the interpretation of the skeptical solution, I will put the argument aside for present purposes.

Another technicality that I will put aside in discussing the minimal truth-conditional conception involves liar paradoxical sentences, and other sentences that contain partially defined predicates. I have argued in chapters 6 and 7 of *Under-*

*standing Truth*, Oxford University Press, forthcoming, that some sentences of this type express propositions, but cannot correctly be characterized either as true or as not true. Such sentences are indeterminate—i.e. they are not determinately true and not determinately untrue. If *S* is such a sentence, and *S* iff *S* and '*S* is true iff *S*' are normal material biconditionals, then it is not unreasonable to regard these biconditionals as being indeterminate as well. If this is right, then when such a sentence is in question, A(i) and A(ii) of the Minimal Truth Conditional Conception will express claims that are indeterminate, and so cannot correctly be asserted, provided that the biconditionals they contain are treated as material biconditionals.

Fortunately, this complication need not affect our attempt to make sense of the skeptical solution. For one thing, on the present interpretation of that solution meaning ascriptions are true, and hence not indeterminate. Thus the complication does not come into play. For another thing, we could always reinterpret the biconditionals used in the statement of the minimal conception so that such a biconditional is true just in case both sides are true, both sides are not true, or both sides are indeterminate. Such biconditionals may not be the usual material biconditionals, but they are perfectly legitimate.

32. See my "Skepticism about Meaning: Indeterminacy, Normativity, and the Rule-Following Paradox", *op. cit.*
33. Page 368.
34. This is spelled out explicitly, and in greater detail, by Wilson in "Semantic Realism and Kripke's Wittgenstein," *op. cit.* See in particular his footnote 8.
35. The argument that follows is taken from my discussion of this issue in "Semantics and Semantic Competence," *Philosophical Perspectives*, 3, 1989, 575–596. The next several paragraphs paraphrase the material found there on pp. 588–90.
36. For Kripke's Wittgenstein, it is part of the skeptical solution that a certain range of linguistic behavior, together with a certain pattern of activity relating that behavior to my nonlinguistic activities, simultaneously constitutes my understanding the successor symbol, my knowing that it stands for the successor function, and my possessing the various elementary arithmetical beliefs involving the function. The proponent of this view rejects the idea that understanding the symbol, and possessing the relevant arithmetical and metalinguistic beliefs, are themselves mental states that causally explain the corresponding linguistic and non-linguistic behavior. Instead, on the picture he advocates, the linguistic and nonlinguistic behavior provide the only warrant possible for the claim that one understands the successor symbol, and has the relevant metalinguistic and arithmetical beliefs.
37. See pages 374 and 375 of "Kripke on Wittgenstein and Normativity".
38. For example, I understand the sentences  $2 + 2 > 3$  and *in the past I meant addition by '+'* because I know that they express the propositions that two plus two is greater than 3, and that in the past I meant addition by '+'; moreover my knowledge that they express these propositions is due in part to the fact that I have an independent grasp of the addition function that explains my understanding of '+' and 'addition' which occur in these sentences.
39. Early versions of this paper were given in January of 1996 at the Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, in Mexico City, and in March 1996 at Reed College. The paper was later revised and expanded, and much of the new material was presented in my graduate seminar at Princeton in the fall of 1996. I would like to thank Chrys Gitsoulis, Jim Pryor, and Alex Byrne for reading and commenting on a draft of this paper.