Last Lecture

- We considered Kripke’s arguments in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*.
- He presented the rule-following paradox and knocked down potential straight solutions, largely following Wittgenstein.
- He then presented the sceptical solution, which accepts the paradox and takes it as evidence that meaning ascriptions have assertibility-, not truth-conditions.
Talk outline

The sceptical solution

Private Language
First-personal ascriptions

- It will help for us to get clearer on the sceptical solution.
- Kripke treats first- and third-personal ascriptions separately.
- The first-personal:

  "It is part of our language game of speaking of rules that a speaker may, without ultimately giving any justification, follow his own confident inclination that this way (say, responding ‘125’), is the right way to respond, rather than another way (e.g. responding ‘5’). That is, the ‘assertability conditions’ that license an individual to say that, on a given occasion, he ought to follow his rule this way rather than that, are, ultimately, that he does what he is inclined to do. (pp. 87–8)"
First-personal ascriptions

- So a speaker is entitled to say that a solution to a question involving ‘plus’ is correct just when they are inclined to respond with that solution.
- More precisely, consider:
  
  I mean addition by ‘+’.

- This is assertible for a speaker if they are inclined to respond ‘125’ to the question ‘68+57’.

- What else could be relevant to the assertability of first-personal ascriptions?

- The rule-following arguments show that anything else can be made compatible with any meaning.
Third-personal ascriptions

- Kripke invites us to consider a teacher and a pupil, who is learning to add.
- Meaning ascriptions of addition to the pupil are justified when the pupil’s usage accords with the teacher’s.
- When two adults are using ‘+’, A is justified in thinking that B is *not* adding when:
  1. B’s usage has previously accorded with A’s; and
  2. B’s current usage does not accord with A’s.
- So third-personal ascriptions are justified when someone’s usage accords with our own.
- And this can be withdrawn when someone’s usage deviates.
Finally, Kripke comments on the *utility* of meaning ascriptions. We now know when it is appropriate to say \( A \) Smith means addition by ‘+’. But what is the *use* of \( A \)? Kripke says it allows us to make *predictions* about Smith’s behaviour. This is of practical use: after all, if I’m to employ Smith as my accountant, I need to know he can add!
Sceptical solution

The sceptical solution consists in the following claims:

1. “I mean addition by ‘+’” is justified just when I am inclined to add in response to a question.
2. “Smith means addition by ‘+’” is justified when Smith’s usage has previously matched mine and their current usage does not deviate from this.
3. Meaning ascriptions have practical importance.

Before considering Kripke’s private language argument, let’s consider how far Wittgenstein would agree with this.
Kripkenstein

- How plausible is Kripke’s interpretation?
- There are reasons to doubt it.
- First, Wittgenstein is generally taken as an early deflationist about truth.
- E.g. PI §136 seems to equate:
  1. \( P \)
  2. ‘\( P \)’ is true
  3. “‘\( P \)’ expresses a fact”
  4. It is a fact that \( P \)
- So, if 1 is warranted, Wittgenstein would take this as warrant for 4.
- In particular, warrant for ‘Smith means addition’ is warrant for ‘It is a fact that Smith meant addition’.
- Kripkenstein thinks we can have warrant for the former.
- But Kripkenstein certainly wouldn’t want the latter.
Second, Wittgenstein has told us that there can be conflict between understanding and use. This doesn’t seem to be the case for Kripkenstein. Further, Wittgenstein follows the statement of the paradox by noting that there must be a ‘misunderstanding’ (PI, §201). This suggests that he wouldn’t accept a sceptical solution. We will see how Wittgenstein tries to respect meaning-talk.
Talk outline

The sceptical solution

Private Language
As we will see, the next section of PI (202) concerns *private language*.

Kripke believes that this supports his interpretation.

If meaning ascriptions are essentially comparative, then they can only be warranted in a community.

Hence they can never be appropriate in a *private* language.

Hence such private talk is meaningless.
What conclusion is Kripke going for?

The most radical candidate is the ‘Robinson Crusoe’ conclusion:

Someone who is not a member of any speech community means nothing by their words.

This seems implausible.

Kripke is explicit that this is not the target.

And likewise Wittgenstein (PI, §243):

*But it is also conceivable that there is a language in which a person could write down or give voice to his inner experiences – his feelings, moods, and so on – for his own use? – Well, can’t we do so in our ordinary language? – But that is not what I mean.*
Rather, Kripke seems to have been aiming for:

C1 It is inappropriate to ascribe meaning to an individual considered in isolation.

He also argues for the closely related:

C2 Meaning ascriptions to an individual are only justified if there is enough connection to a speech community.
Argument 1

Kripke (pp. 88–9) writes:

Someone – a child, an individual muddled by a drug – may think he is following a rule even though he is actually acting at random, in accordance with no rule at all. Alternatively, he may, under the influence of a drug, suddenly act in accordance with a quus-like rule changing from his first intentions. If there could be no justification for anyone to say of a person of the first type that his confidence that he is following some rule is misplaced, or of a person of the second type that he is no longer in accord with the rule that he previously followed, there would be little content to our idea that a rule, or past intention, binds future choices.
Argument 1

- The first thought here is that people can make mistakes. Someone may
  
  suddenly act in accordance with a quus-like rule.

- In Wittgensteinian terms, for there to be accordance with a rule, there must also be conflict.

- If, under these circumstances, we were not justified in denying that they follow a rule, the institution of meaning ascriptions would be empty:

  If there could be no justification for saying ... that he is no longer in accord with the rule that he previously followed, there would be little content to our idea that a rule, or past intention, binds future choice.
Argument 1

- If this were not the case, there seems to be no difference between following a rule and doing anything at all.
- This all suggests the following premise:
  - P1 The institution of meaning ascriptions requires that it is sometimes appropriate to deny that someone is following a rule.
- How about an individual considered in isolation?
Argument 1

- Recall that first-personal meaning ascriptions are justified solely by your inclination to apply a term.
- So Smith cannot say:
  
  I am not using ‘+’ in accordance with the meaning I attach.
- The fact of Smith’s applying ‘+’ shows that they are justified.
- If Smith sincerely applies ‘+’, they must be justified.
- For first-personal meaning ascriptions, the following seems true:
  
  P2 If meaning ascriptions are solely first-personal, it is never appropriate to deny that someone is following a rule.
Now consider the argument:

P1 The institution of meaning ascriptions requires that it is sometimes appropriate to deny that someone is following a rule.

P2 If meaning ascriptions are solely first-personal, it is never appropriate to deny that someone is following a rule.

∴ C1 It is inappropriate to ascribe meaning to an individual in isolation.

This conclusion seems a reasonable precisification of:

if one person is considered in isolation, the notion of a rule as guiding a person who adopts it can have no substantive content.
The individual cannot be wrong about their first-personal ascriptions.

But can we make mistakes in applying meaning to them?

It depends on the relation between first- and third-personal meaning ascriptions.

If we judge the individual by their standards, then it looks like we cannot make mistakes either.

We can judge them by our standards.

In this sense, we may be warranted or unwarranted in meaning ascriptions to Robinson Crusoe.
Argument 2

- This prompts consideration of:
  - **C2** Meaning ascriptions to an individual are only justified if there is enough connection to a speech community.
  - **C1** suggests that meaning ascriptions cannot be justified without the possibility of *disagreement* (conflict).
  - **C2** suggests that meaning ascriptions lack purpose without reasonable *agreement* (accord).
The entire ‘game’ that we have described – that the community attributes concepts to an individual so long as he exhibits sufficient conformity, under test circumstances, to the behaviour of the community – would lose its point outside a community that generally agrees in its practices. If one person, when asked to compute ‘68+57’ answered ‘125’, another ‘5’, and another ‘13’, if there was no general agreement in the community responses, the game of attributing concepts to individuals – as we have described it – could not exist. (WRPL, p. 96)
Recall also that the purpose of meaning ascriptions is predicting behaviour.

This suggests:

P3 The institution of meaning ascriptions requires that we can make accurate predictions of behaviour.

This is only possible if there is sufficient agreement between individuals’ usage:

P4 If there is insufficient connection to a speech community, we would be unable to make accurate predictions.

So:

C2 Meaning ascriptions to an individual are only justified if there is enough connection to a speech community.
Recall that Smith is entitled to ascribe meaning to Jones if Jones’s usage agrees with Smith’s.
Recall also that the *purpose* of meaning ascriptions is predicting behaviour.
Now suppose that meaning ascriptions could be justified even with significant divergence.
Then we would be continually disappointed as our predictions were proved false.
E.g. Smith would predict that Jones would answer ‘125’ to ‘68+57’.
But this prediction could be false.
So we could go from true to false beliefs.
Kripke has established two conclusions about private languages.

First, it is inappropriate to ascribe meanings to an individual in isolation.

Second, meaning ascriptions are only justified if there is enough connection to a speech community.

These are striking conclusions about the relationship between meaning and community.

But they stop short of radical conclusions like: Robinson Crusoe’s utterances are meaningless.