

O Pensamento de Wittgenstein

The modern skeptical challenge reflected in the Private Language argument: a retelling of Saul Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*

O desafio cético moderno refletido no Argumento da linguagem Privada: uma interpretação da leitura de Saul Kripke das *Investigações Filosóficas* de Wittgenstein

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ABSTRACT

In the following paper, we explore Kripke's reading of the private language argument. Our reading affirms the following line of thought: the skeptical paradox about rules that Kripke believed to have traced in this argument connects with the old skeptical question of modernity (David Hume), and gives Wittgenstein's work a reflective detachment to think about the conditions under which a semantic enigma may be resolved. We will argue that the answer involves a pragmatic shift that ends for good Wittgenstein's intimate links with the problem of "proposition" and substitute it with another. Our view is that Wittgenstein's reflection on language game proposes a pragmatic substitute for "propositions" to protect rule-consistency in meaning and truth-prediction. The reflective course of the article will go through Gilbert Ryle's philosophy of language and his concept of category mistakes. Finally, we finish showing solidarity with Robert Brandon's interpretation of Wittgenstein.

Keywords: Private-language; Rules; Pragmatism; Normativism

RESUMO

No artigo a seguir, exploramos a leitura de Kripke do argumento da linguagem privada. Nossa leitura afirma a seguinte linha de pensamento: o paradoxo cético sobre as regras que Kripke acreditava ter rastreado neste argumento se conecta com a velha questão cética da modernidade (David Hume), e dá à obra de Wittgenstein um distanciamento reflexivo para pensar sobre as condições em que um quebra-cabeça semântico pode ser resolvido. Argumentaremos que a resposta envolve uma mudança pragmática que termina definitivamente as ligações de Wittgenstein com o problema da "proposição" e o substitui por outro. Nossa visão é a de que a reflexão de Wittgenstein sobre os jogos de linguagem propõe um substituto pragmático para "proposições" que possa proteger a consistência das regras na

predição do significado e das condições de verdade. O curso reflexivo do artigo passará pela filosofia da linguagem de Gilbert Ryle e seu conceito de erros categoriais. Finalmente, mostraremos solidariedade com a interpretação de Robert Brandon de Wittgenstein.

Palavras-chave: Linguagem privada; Regras; Pragmatismo; Normativismo

KRIPKE AND THE REFLECTIVE EVOLUTION OF THE SKEPTICAL PARADOX WITHIN THE PROBLEM OF MEANING

Too much work has been done to decode the passages from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* that came to be known as the *Private Language Argument*. Saul Kripke's work on that argument has some differential features, which he enunciates in the book's preface dedicated to it, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (1982, 1995). First, he is aware that it is not due to the lack of commentaries that the chosen theme stands out. It would not be out of the discussion the usefulness of another book yet on one of the most compelling and fascinating arguments of the twentieth century, even if its purpose were only didactic. In our opinion, modesty has already been overstated. The importance of Saul Kripke's work completely justifies curiosity about his understanding of a classical author. When authors with a reputation for being landmarks in their schools and theoretical lines speak of others, the literary genre of the text does not diminish their relevance. Speaking in the tone of reporting cannot decrease the text to the nature of a mere comment. The way Kripke understands Wittgenstein is itself an object of professional and public interest.

And there is, moreover, an additional richness: the American author recognizes, at the beginning of the work¹, that his argument is not to be confused with canonical readings. The pattern he promises to extract from the text strays from the consensus on the location of the argument in the sections after §243. For him, the substance of the reasoning focuses on the paragraphs preceding that one. In the Introduction, Kripke quotes §202, where Wittgenstein mentions the

¹ KRIPKE, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. 1995, p. ix.

impossibility of following a rule privately. The predominant characteristic of Wittgenstein's argument becomes, in this reading, his broadest conception of the normative nature of linguistic behavior: the domestication of meaning to the rules of a language game. The analogy with a game, which appears in the author's philosophy after 1930, dominates this phase of his thinking, highlighting the need for the *system of rules* to contextualize the meaning (PI § 23, 199, 421). According to this reading option, the text chooses the problem of sensations and private language as a kind of anecdotal simulacrum of the format that assumes problems of technical ambiguity or systematic deceptions in the philosophical reflection of language. It uses the idea of non-publicity, cryptography, or a language outside the access of others to show elements that threaten the normative stability or rule consistency that preserves *meaning*. In the design of the problem of private language, there is the formatting of a persistent obstacle to the vision that Wittgenstein wants to prioritize. This is his conception of language game and his meditation on the conditions of the normative nature of meaning.

The focus on private language (applied to sensations) is then seen as a strategic resource exploited by Wittgenstein, to test the argument with "a convincing counterexample to the previously established conclusions"². As the reflection on rules unifies Wittgenstein's discussion in several directions, there is no divergence of interests when he discusses the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of mathematics³ (Kripke, 1995, p. 4).

² KRIPKE, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. 1995, p. 3

³ See: KRIPKE, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. 1995, p. 4.

MEANING AND NORMATIVITY: THE PROBLEM OF AMBIGUITY AND CONVENTIONS

Kripke's reading must have some answer to the question about what kind of view the *Philosophical Investigations* prioritizes about *meaning*. But first, he needs to pinpoint the question. According to the author, the notion of *rule* manifests in the philosophy of the Austrian thinker the role of the enigma. The first entire quote of the *Investigations* used by the commentator after the Introduction is §201; there, Wittgenstein is concerned about the predictive potential of a rule with respect to action. As Robert Brandom elegantly enunciates in *Making it Explicit*:

Kripke has powerfully expounded the battery of arguments and examples that Wittgenstein brings to bear to establish the point in this connection. There simply is no such thing as the pattern or regularity exhibited by a stretch of past behavior, which can be appealed to in judging some candidate bit of future behavior as regular or irregular, and hence, on this line, as correct or incorrect. (...) To say this is to say that some regularities must be picked out as the ones that ought to be conformed to, some patterns as the ones that ought to be continued⁴.

Although the text does not make this clear, this is a version of the problem of induction, as it was first designed by David Hume: "first, we may observe, that there is no probability so great as not to allow of a contrary possibility"⁵. We can find regularity everywhere. Kripke recognizes this affinity between problems saying: "Wittgenstein's skeptic argues, (...), that there is indeed a problem in 'extending' such a term as 'duck' from ducks seen in Central Park to ducks not found there"⁶. But we will not read Wittgenstein as a Hume commentator. Transferred to the question of meaning, the paradox takes on a singularly innovative format. We need to find the way the problem of *rule-consistency* is attached to challenges in the interpretation of meaning.

⁴ BRANDOM, *Making it Explicit*, 2001, p. 28.

⁵ HUME, 1978, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 135.

⁶ KRIPKE, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. 1995, p. 117.

Perhaps the most straightforward way in which problems of meaning strikes us is *ambiguity*. Most of the divergence and progress in Analytical Philosophy were made through different versions of the challenge of determining meaning or eliminating ambiguity. It can be said that, in its beginning, the nature of the difficulty had a greater apparent relationship with an exclusive theme of classical logic, since the technical paraphrases suggested as solutions to the problem of meaning coincided with the ability to show the bipolar content of the sentences. Alfred Tarski perhaps represents the epitome of this phase⁷. Positivist reductionism also dominated the first phase. W.O. Quine inherited the extensional ambition of this phase but brought some new difficulties to the table. There are regions of discourse – for example, translation – where extensionality is not enough to determine the prediction of meaning nor uniformity in semantic value. Some ambiguities are resistant to mechanical characterization, and unless we want to be caught in an *intensional circle*⁸, we must rely on empirical science and not on dogmatic definitions to eliminate confusion. One cannot solve ambiguity without a great review of the margins of meaning application. If the scientist still cannot solve those extensional problems empirically, he can do it by conventions that simplify the structural unity of our theories in order to eliminate *margins of ambiguity*: "a definition has the peculiarity of being theoretical dispensable; it introduces a

⁷ Alfred Tarski became the most celebrated thinker to generalize Wittgenstein's thesis in *Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus* about the truth-functional character of propositions. He also brought to another level of reflection the discussion about the limits of the classical concept of truth and the extensional premises that govern its notion of semantic value and contribution. To follow that discussion, we recommend John Etchemendy: "By populating a satisfaction domain with the appropriate type of objects – individuals, properties, truth-functions – we take a stand on how the existing categories might be expanded: we condone new members so long as their semantic contribution, their contribution to the true value of sentences, can be charted in a fashion similar to that of the present members" (ETCHEMENDY, *The Concept of Logical Consequence*, 1999, p. 50).

⁸ The *intensional circle* is a convention to interpret how Quine answers to questions about analyticity. If we need to distinguish an analytical truth from a synthetic, we have no option but to check the intensional elements of language, as its modal adverbs, substitutivity, or its semantic definitions (intensional concepts), and see if they can be paraphrased into a logical truth. The conclusion is that we do not get illustrated about any genre of new knowledge about truths independent of experience. We just move inside that circle of intensional concepts. See HAACK, S., chapter 10 of *Philosophy of Logics*.

scheme of abbreviation"⁹. As a reflection on quantification, disjunction, and implication discovered persistent obstacles to mechanical *truth-functional* characterization, responses began to vary. Classical logic and extensional truth functionality were not in the center of the market for solutions anymore. In what we might call the second phase, the latest way to deal with the problem of generality favors the option of considering it as an integral part of the holistic set of support of less general truths. Wittgenstein's reflection on rules helps us understand how we got there.

THE PARADOX

Kripke enunciates at the beginning of his book how Wittgenstein formulated the problem. Imagine that we want to affirm what we mean by stating that $68+57$ is 125. The answer we want to give is that this statement obeys a pattern that we use to organize our standard of response. The question of "meaning" seems harmless because we can often defend what we want to say without having to build proof or determine the exact conditions in which the support of reality verifies it. The argumentative context can be subaltern. So, it seems. This becomes less simple as the questioning deepens. For if we could not enunciate to our challenger how we could repeat the same meaning under some other argumentative circumstances, we would have nothing. We would not be far from having a mere representation of the meaning, understood here as something smaller than a rule for the meaning. And the same is valid if what we have is just a sociological or psychological rule. We would consider a failure to mean *exactly what we mean* the fact that the utterance standardized a condition in which, under a different argumentative circumstance, $68+57$ was 5.

But according to Kripke we cannot respond favorably to our hope of avoiding that the result is in fact five, if a skeptic accuses us that "by the sign of 'plus', I

⁹ QUINE, *The Ways of Paradox*, 1966, p. 105.

always meant 'quus'¹⁰. In Kripke's example, quus is a function that would make the correct answer to that utterance to be 5, and corresponds to the function I've always used in the previous sum examples, assuming I've never added numbers greater than 57. The problem arises when one has no idea whatsoever, aside from past examples, to substantiate the security of what he/she wants to mean: "whatever way you teach him to continue the decorative strip, how can he know how to continue on his own?' If that means 'do I have reasons?', then the answer is: soon I won't have reasons"¹¹.

In answering, however, that this is what he/she has always done, there will always be a way to generalize these examples in contingent ways. The skeptic generalizes the addition as quus. And, in a more annoying step, he completes by saying that quus is what I really mean: "The skeptic claims that I'm misinterpreting my own previous use"¹². For him, assuming that my previous examples have something in common, such as the fact that they were about numbers smaller than 57, nothing guarantees *a priori* that this is not the circumstance that signals the instruction to my action. The whole mythology of 'consciousness' is designed to answer this by saying, 'I know what rule I give to myself. Wittgenstein talks about it with irony: "If that's an inner voice - how do I know how to follow it? And how do I know it is not fooling me? If it can drive me properly, it can fool me, too"¹³. If we go further, we will find that the reflective character of consciousness shows a circular pattern. I could say I was conscious of anything *post-festum*: "we are imprisoned, so to speak, in our own rules"¹⁴. Once we generalize one way of explaining the private code we use to rule our counting behavior, it is not easy to distinguish what is 'conscious' from what is 'mechanical' about it. We can call the rule derived from this last generalized circumstance of quaddition. The difference between the addition

¹⁰ KRIPKE, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. 1995, p. 9.

¹¹ WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §211.

¹² KRIPKE, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. 1995, p. 9.

¹³ WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §213.

¹⁴ WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §125.

and quaddition is the reason for my controversies with the skeptic. Still, it does not correspond to them a rational difference between the facts that would make me judge, in one case, 125, and the other 5. In Kripke's words: "there will be many specific objections to these theories. But all fail to give a candidate for a fact as to what I meant that would show that only '125', not '5', is the answer I 'ought' to give".¹⁵

Kripke acknowledges that, in appearance, the "problem arises only because of a ridiculous model of the instruction I gave myself regarding 'addition'" (p. 15). But that right to create ridiculous private models is exactly what we cannot easily give up. If this model is used and it is all we have, the triumph of the skeptic is inevitable. If the skeptic challenges me to distinguish 125 from 5 in this sense, I cannot point to a mental fact or a theoretical model that fixes that difference. What do I have left to model the instruction? The logical forms? Knowledge of the universals? A universal grammar? The myth of consciousness? Wittgenstein builds several alternatives of response to the skeptic in one of the phases of his book, and all involve failure because it assumes that I would have privileged access to a private region, which the skeptic does not have. The argument is constructed through the challenge: is it possible to generate content for the distinction between what something means, without it being an equally convincing foundation for me to mean something different?¹⁶ Kripke shows how the skeptic has at his disposal a favorable device to overcome our hope by creating conditions to diverge from our hypotheses of meaning constantly and systematically: he can create an entire vocabulary designed to precisely express this disagreement with my rule. The challenge always brings us to the same point: at the end, I do not know anything

¹⁵ KRIPKE, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. 1995, p. 11.

¹⁶ Kripke admits that Wittgenstein's discussion has points of contact with Quine's: "This feature of Wittgenstein contrasts, for example, with Quine's discussion of the 'indeterminacy of translation'" (KRIPKE, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. 1995, p. 14). Davidson's formulation can satisfactorily exhibit those common traits: "Quine and others have shown how to construct systematic examples of alternative schemes of reference such that, if one of them is in accord to all possible relevant evidence, others are" (DAVIDSON, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 2001, p. 227).

more than the mechanical device used to extract that knowledge. That is, the security to say that I intended to say 125 is not part of a private knowledge, which I can use as a pearl of wisdom or reason to defend that position *from the outside*. We are doomed to a dimension of regulative insecurity.

Those disagreements with the skeptic turn into practical ones when the ambiguity in question is relevant for science. Rational discussions about meaning thus involve, intrinsically, the problem of following a rule and possible adjustments to exceptions through the generation of algorithms¹⁷. However, as Kripke himself argues in the sequence, this does not solve the skeptical issue. For it is always possible to create an *algorithm* of systematic opposition to a rule, which generalizes the ambiguity, creating something that works even more damagingly than a common fallacy. It is well known what Wittgenstein thinks about this trick: “an interpretation (...) is a substitution of one expression of the rule for another”¹⁸. It is a philosophical type of deception: “an inappropriate mode of expression is a safe way to remain confused. It prevents the way out of it”¹⁹. As Kripke's says: "I am expounding Wittgenstein's well-known remarks about 'a rule for interpreting a rule'"²⁰. Generalized error is something like mistakes being regularly represented. It is the force of repetition creating the illusion of meaning. They create an illusion of a rule. A philosopher who addressed the issue of systematic ambiguity, Gilbert Ryle, deserves a voice in this reflection.

GILBERT RYLE AND CATEGORY-MISTAKES

¹⁷ Kripke would say: “I do not reply automatically with the answer '125' nor do I consult some non-existent past instructions that I should answer '125' in this case. Rather I proceed according to an algorithm for addition that I previously learned. The algorithm is more sophisticated and practically applicable than the primitive one just described, but there is no difference in principle”. (KRIPKE, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. 1995, p. 16)

¹⁸ WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §201

¹⁹ WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §339.

²⁰ KRIPKE, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. 1995, p. 17.

Wittgenstein asks, in PI §111: “why do we feel a grammatical trick as profound? (and that is, in fact, philosophical depth)”²¹. We may answer this question by evaluating how some problems of meaning turn into deep questions. Gilbert Ryle believed that there is a philosophical way to address the issue of ambiguity. There are, for him, problems about the symbolic place of expressions that are not only technical but that involve questions about the type of homogeneity between the structure of sentences and the structure of facts²². Semantic questions, especially those about *Categories*, for him, are included in these problematizations²³. So, for example, when we ask whether the link between two expressions in a sentence is allowed according to the type (the nature of the category they represent – whether they are material, spiritual, biological, or social things, etc.) we are trying to solve problems of ambiguity and indifference at the root. This type-incompatibility will show its paradoxes when we need to problematize that sentence in *intensional*, modal and temporal contexts. Then we will realize that what we know about the hair of the king of France is different in semantic nature, i.e., with respect to its possible reactions to truth-values, truth-makers, falsifiers, etc., to what we know about the hair of the president of France. So, knowing that the sentence “The president of France is bald” is false is different from knowing what would make “The *King* of France is bald” false. The same rule cannot predict the semantic element. That difference is regarding the type of the expressions, i.e., the type of things we would accept to fill the gap of a propositional function. Of course, that category-mixed behavior in reaction to truth values is not easy to access. One must

²¹ WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §111.

²² See *Are There Propositions?* (1930): “There is no grammatical difference between standard statements and non-standard ones such that from an inspection of the mere grammar of a sentence we can tell if it states a fact or not. But there is a relation between the grammatical structure of a statement and the logical structure of the fact that it states if it states one” (RYLE, *Collected Essays*, 2009, p. 39).

²³ See *Categories* (1938): “The matter is of some importance, for not only it is the case that category-propositions (namely assertions that terms belong to certain categories or types) are always philosophers’ propositions, but, I believe, the converse is also true. So we are in the dark about the nature of philosophical problems and methods if we are in the dark about types or categories” (RYLE, *Collected Essays*, 2009, p. 178).

explore how modal and temporal knowledge of the proposition predicts changes in truth or falsity. And for that, he/she often needs to produce theoretical knowledge of the denoted entity. He/she can achieve that studying the kind of theoretical 'x' can replace the expression: the study may be empirical, but its effects are structural. It has the power to change definitions and categories. Knowledge of a semantic rule that predicts why this proposition is false, rather than contradictory or indeterminate, involves the knowledge that teaches *how to engineer* a paraphrase that determines the category of this expression.

The whole problem appears for Ryle to account for the danger of antinomies: sentences that assign their truths with insufficient ground distance from possible false interpretations of themselves. So, ambiguity in a philosophical sense can influence deep problems in empirical scientific study. The apparent tranquility shared by some orthodox semanticists that there are ways in which uncertainty can be harmless to truth-value assignment is not justified in the scientific practice. Ambiguities can be opportunities for deep revisions in meaning. That revision can make a truth sentence turn into false. The belief that *ambiguous falsehood* (the unpredictable way in which an ambiguous sentence is associated to the value 'false') will never be corrupted by translation, theoretical divergence, and conceptual confusion to the point of turning into a truth, and therefore it is at least *unambiguous* in that aspect, *that belief* is based on an uninformed knowledge about the history of science. This is a hope that the scientist would never encounter similar problems to the layman's in the face of supposed miracles and anomalies. And the idea that incongruous scientific results can be represented semantically without incongruity is a dogmatic philosophical hope. In Ryle's words, an antinomy may arise: "Such sentences, we may say, commit type-trespasses or break type-rules"²⁴. For him, the only way to protect oneself from antinomies is semantic awareness about the nature of categories.

²⁴ RYLE, *Collected Essays*, 2009, p.188.

What we learn from this is that meaning is not more predictable than facts. Truths of meaning can suffer change as well as truths about facts. We must face the type of mistakes that would be born out of semantic skepticism and create antinomies. There is no *a priori* way to prevent a hypothesis of interpretation of the meaning of 'duck' as meaning duckog that derives credibility from the same group of evidence: "Perhaps 'duck', as I learned it, meant duckog, where something is a duckog if it is a duck and has been in Central Park or is a dog and has never been there"²⁵. If we try to resolve the issue technically, as Kripke says: "the skeptic will smilingly reply that once again I am misinterpreting my past usage, that actually 'independent' formerly meant qudependent, where 'qudependent' means ..." ²⁶. Therefore, the practical discussion about which links we will treat as formal and which will be only contingent is not superfluous.

Pragmatism is an excellent place to start solving the paradox. We can start appreciating the question: How would ingredients of incongruent category-types contribute to some *unambiguous* semantic aim (or to the same strategy of meaning)? If the way we mean something is not gratuitous, we must be able to have a category rule to govern that knowledge.

ANTI-INTENSIONAL EXPLANATION OF MEANING AND ITS DIFFICULTIES IN WITTGENSTEIN

Wittgenstein has a normative view of the meaning (PI §81), but much of his book is busy preventing this vision from overflowing into an intensional naïve view. He is concerned with clarifying "the concepts of understanding, wanting to mean (meinen) and thinking. For then it will also become clear what can lead one to think that whoever pronounces a sentence and gives it meaning is performing with it a

²⁵ KRIPKE, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. 1995, p. 117.

²⁶ KRIPKE, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. 1995, p. 17.

calculation according to certain rules"²⁷. Let's right away avoid interpreting this as meaning anything more than this: that the types of relevant crisis in normativity that would make one claim he cannot "mean" something are not solvable in terms of philosophical critique, psychological therapy, or semantic dogma. On the other hand, it is hard to say Wittgenstein avoids all intensional discussion because extensionalism would still be insufficient to explain the role of norms. Let's get back to Ryle's ambiguities of type in order to investigate the matter.

Ambiguity regarding *type* expresses the genre of intensional divergence an extensionalist would have no alternative but to represent in modal or temporal ways, like the type of ambiguity present in "The first man on the moon might not have been an astronaut". Extensionally, one can construe the interpretation of that sentence either as true or false in any interpretation of historical facts. There are support or grounds for both interpretations²⁸. So, there are grounds for an antinomy. The problem is not that the speculative content included by the "might not" cannot have a unified extensional interpretation. It is that to interpret it can bring antinomies. Kant predicted that long ago, and his solution is still educative: we must produce a synthetic judgment to justify the addition of temporal or counterfactual conditions. The criteria of success would be whether that judgment can apply to a "possible experience"²⁹. Since the Kantian solution is not particularly popular nowadays, we may turn to recent extensionalists. The key for solving ambiguity in extensional ways is one or another version of Russell's paraphrases. All that takes is to define the scope of the proposition and distinguish the main problem from the secondary problems. This would solve the issue when one

²⁷ WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §81.

²⁸ As Dummett says: "If we adopt Russell's theory of descriptions, the definite description can be eliminated in more than one way, according to what we take its scope to be" (DUMMETT, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, 1973, p. 114).

²⁹ In the famous section *Transcendental Deduction* from the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant makes his own bid to solve the skeptic challenge. He talks about the ability to prescribe a law to one's own understanding: "categories are concepts that prescribe laws *a priori* to appearances, and thus to nature as the sum of all appearances" (KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1998, B 164).

searches the answer facts would give to ground claims of truth in counterfactual routes of history about the space race. The extensional solution holds good if the ambition is to extend the distance from falsehood that any truth sentence can claim. Of course, this is hardly the only ambition involved in the claims of truth in hypothetical circumstances, but we solved the ambiguity problem.

Extensionalists usually improvise a way out of this problem by these uncomplicated strategies. They avoid evaluating type-differentiations of grades of contribution for truth based on the grounds of counterfactual singularities. They can do it with success except for cases of ambiguity sustained in natural language by using time adverbs and propositional attitudes. Because of that, extensionalism developed in parallel to a very persistent suspicion of natural language. One might say Wittgenstein in *PI* is an extensionalist when analyzing passages like the one previously cited (§ 81), and others like this: “does understanding not go beyond examples? (...) or does understanding of elucidation need not be deeper?”³⁰. He also look pretty hostile to modal explanation of meaning in terms of *potentialities*: “here the word, here the meaning. The money and the cow that can be bought with it”³¹. To be fair, the position of the Austrian thinker is more nuanced. For second Wittgenstein, extensional ambiguity is not just a form of pure logical indetermination, a technical defect of natural language, or lack of rigor in applying rules to examples. There are ways in which a perfect fit between examples and rules still provoke rule-crisis, like the Kripke paradox shows. There are, therefore, more than just extensional difficulties in meaning problems. Indetermination is a symptom of some type of divergence in meaning that can only be expressed by the nature of our pragmatic problems of interpretation: “the more we consider the language in fact, the greater the conflict between it and our demands”³². The way Wittgenstein elusively shift toward pragmatism in *PI* is an evidence of how far he

³⁰ WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §209.

³¹ WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §120

³² WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §107

goes from Russell's *correspondence-theory-of-truth* requirements. The Austrian thinker starts to see unpredictability of meaning as something more than just failure in rule application. It also fails to predict antinomies. The first is a problem of classification. The second is a problem of conflict between rules. One can overcome the first failure with simple scope adjustments. The second failure can only be solved by awareness of the normative tendencies of language: "we call a proposition to what we apply the calculation of truth functions in *our language*"³³. Normative prohibitions in language can look arbitrary only if one is unaware of the practical purposes of the categories that rule the allowed connections. The whole interest in questions of meaning falls, therefore, in the types of contradiction one is trying to avoid: "the daily position of contradiction or its position in the everyday world: this is the philosophical problem"³⁴.

THE SKEPTIC AND RADICAL MEANING INDETERMINACY: RULE-CRISIS

We may now introduce what we understand as a rule-crisis in a Wittgensteinian fashion. Suppose the semantic distribution of truth values cannot be exploited to generate an automatic assignment of truth or falsity to complex sentences according to the truth or falsity of its components. In that case, the problem may be seen from a plethora of perspectives. It is a trivial violation of formal semantics conditions for the recognition of formulas of a language. It is a pedagogical problem in a *Davidsonian* way (*Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages*), since this would amount to a violation of the conditions to learn a language: "we can regard the meaning of each sentence as a function of a finite number of features of that language, we have an insight (...) into what there is to

³³ WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §136.

³⁴ WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §125.

be learned”³⁵. It is also a logical problem since we would have a hard time expressing our inferences correctly with the resources of the language. The simple fact that the language has unpredictable features would make us fail to communicate and interpret sentences in cheap or practical ways. We want to emphasize one aspect of that problem that is more philosophically linked to skepticism. Ryle would say that we have a danger of antinomy, produced by our lack of awareness of the normative aspects of our linking categories. In order to generalize that problem in its most philosophical radicality, we may say we are in a *Wittgensteinian type of rule-crisis*. In this scenario, sentences fail to exhaust or maximize all the contribution of the semantic elements to exclude alternative meanings from our interpretative practices. So, we lose the ability to know what is a rule and what is an exception: “if what is a rule became an exception, and what is exception, rule, (...) - then our normal language games would lose sense”³⁶.

In a rule-crisis, error and falsity are all equivalent in nature. We cannot distinguish what is rational and what is arbitrary in error. Equality in falsehood is the most dangerous way of skepticism: the kind of which would equate high-theoretical science (like non-verified physics) and superstition (non-verified links between things and events). So, equality in falsehood is how skeptical doubts are converted in relativism and skepticism about generality or *a priori* concepts. Indifference in falsehood is the expression of ruling-crisis in semantics. Equality in falsehood is also the way in which indifference about modality is usually represented: when there is no rational line that represents divergence about counterfactuals, we are condemned to the empire of the gratuitous factuality.

³⁵ DAVIDSON, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 2001, p.8.

³⁶ WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §142.

THE PRAGMATIST SOLUTION: BEYOND PLATONISM, GAME-STRATEGY AGAINST PROPOSITIONS

We may say, following Kripke, that the argument of private language is the way Wittgenstein's posthumous work is sensitive to paradox and skeptical challenge. Through the reflection about a skeptical paradox similar to Hume's, this notion represents the construction of a new philosophical foundation for skepticism. There is something in the conception of rule that gives visibility to crises like those that the image of causality provoked in previous modern philosophical reflection. In Kripke's words:

That imagining the pain of others on the model of my own is 'none too easy a thing to do' would simply be a special case of the more general point that applying any concept to a new case is 'none too easy a thing to do'. Or, perhaps, that it is all too easy a thing to do - that I can apply an old term to new cases as I please, unconstrained by any previous intentions or determinations.³⁷

Pragmatism is our last hope to respond to the skeptic because there is no *a priori* guarantee that we can distinguish one set of rules from another according to their effectiveness to apply to examples. The only answer to rule-crisis is our practical aim. There is a significant equivalence in extension in any number of propositional contents. That is nothing more than the 'manifold' aspect of reality when it is not yet conceptualized. That aspect turns into the inability to distinguish one way better than the other to protect truth from falsehood. There are no more structural ways than others to interpret meaning. If we are unable to do that, it is just a *philosophical masquerade* to say we know '*propositions*' when we successfully *mean* something. Success in being rightly interpreted must be grounded in something else. Recent literature had happily brought to discussion the influence of Platonistic realist views from Austrian philosophers³⁸. We may interpret

³⁷ KRIPKE, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. 1995, p. 118.

³⁸ See Barry Smith and Artur Rojszczak In *Truthmakers, Truthbearers and the Objectivity of Truth*: "The concept of the objectivity of truth as it is commonly understood in contemporary philosophy was initially formulated in 1837 by Bolzano in his Theory of Science. Bolzano there presents a Platonistic theory that can be seen as an anticipation of Frege's theory of thoughts or propositions. Bolzano, familiarly, draws a

Wittgenstein as answering those claims in PI: "The proposition, a strange thing.' (...). The tendency to try to purify, sublimate the propositional sign itself"³⁹. The answer is pragmatism.

Pragmatism brought the reasoning of practical social life to epistemological and semantic problems: meaning is *instituted* in order to help produce something similar to *propositions* without its ontological costs. To protect rule-consistency, pragmatism appeals to the institutional-security aspect of practices. But pragmatism also eliminate the platonic need to talk about 'propositions'⁴⁰. It removes the responsibility of realism for the protection of objective meaning. The bankruptcy of propositions can happen with no profit for the skeptic, relativist, or psychologist. For we can retain the *argumentative value* of a sentence in new ways. When a group of sentences increases its predictive complexity during some demonstration, needing auxiliary hypothesis, this can be provided without the need for a timeless or immaterial basis. To talk about propositions is just some superstructural way of narrating complex strategies of meaning and proof. When we talk about a system's formula, that can be understood not as ideal entities with some innate compatibility-incompatibility properties. The proof, when possible, thanks to the structural status of the argument, depends not on its ideal nature but on its *strategic nature*: "a sentence is true if there is a winning strategy in which the first move is the production of that sentence"⁴¹. When discussing semantics and categories, all we are talking about is not the behavior of some ideal content; we are actually discussing *the game*. We filter the core strategy initiated by a

distinction between (1) the proposition or sentence in itself, and (2) the sentence as something that is thought, expressed, or uttered" (p. 229).

³⁹ WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §91.

⁴⁰ We aim to face here the hypothesis that logic is a science of proposition, as enunciated by Ryle in the article Are there propositions: "Logic (and with it mathematics) need no longer be described as a branch of psychology. It has realities for its subject matter; it is in fact largely if not entirely the science of the forms of propositions" (RYLE, *Collected Papers*, 2009, p. 18)

⁴¹ DUMMETT, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*, 1991, p. 34.

sentence to represent its proof-content and the way it can be inserted in a route of increased complexity in the prediction of new truths.

CONCLUSION:

Wittgenstein uses his skeptical paradox to create space for awareness of the prison of rules: "this imprisonment in the rules is what we want to understand"⁴². For him: "our language games are not preparatory studies for future language regulation"⁴³, but "objects of comparison". In order to predict antinomies or to solve non-trivial problems of meaning, accordingly, we need an alternative for intensional concepts like "proposition" with a similar degree of insight into the depths of normative conditions. That is what pragmatism gives us.

We are committed in this article with the opinion that this shift from the question of "essence" of proposition (PI § 64), to language-games, is synchronic with the Wittgensteinian pragmatist turn. But we must qualify the phase of that school we are pinpointing. We are not facing the pragmatism usually invoked to oppose platonism. It is pragmatism as invoked as an alternative or supplement to platonism. In another words, this new appeal to pragmatic conditions is not a contribution to skepticism. It is alternative support for answers against skeptics, relativists, and sophists. So it is a support that teams up with the aims of old platonism. We arrive at pragmatism to answer how we can make *alterity* rational and normative. Without pragmatics, we are blind to *the difference* between generalizations. We are also blind to differences in error. In conclusion, we may say that norms are not platonic contents, though they are the way we distinguish exception from rule in practice. We side with Robert Brandon in this diagnosis:

⁴² WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §125.

⁴³ WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §131.

Wittgenstein's point is then that conceiving such significances in regulist terms, as the invocation of rules of inference does, is not the whole story. Rule-based proprieties of performance depend on practice-based ones. The regulist, platonist, intellectualist conception of norms must be supplemented by that of the pragmatist.⁴⁴

Although we can see evidence of these elements along with the text of PI (§§143-84), it is also important to mention that this interpretation of Wittgenstein fit an intellectual *momentum*. The Austrian philosopher was not a self-proclaimed pragmatist, and it is arguably coherent to say that pragmatism was not, at the time, mature enough to fit the reflections of his later work. However, the most important thing to know is that there was a clear shift towards a pragmatic perspective of semantics in the second half of the 20th century. Wittgenstein's PI belongs to the best candidates for the first elaboration of its radical problems. We may also say that this accompanies a shift to a sociological view of meaning, which runs accordingly to some illuminating passages of PI: "What does it mean to say that in the praxis of language certain elements would correspond to the signs?"⁴⁵. But our emphasis should fall on pragmatism rather than sociology. The first can shed light into semantic problems, while the latter invokes problems of social-normativity – power structures, institutional guarantees, etc. – that cannot be developed further with synchronicity with *Wittgensteinian* themes.

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⁴⁴ BRANDOM, *Making it Explicit*, 2001, p. 22.

⁴⁵ WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1967, §51

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Como citar este artigo

VOLLET, L. R. The modern skeptical challenge reflected in the Private Language argument: a retelling of Saul Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. **Voluntas Revista Internacional de Filosofia**, Santa Maria, v.12, e01, 2021. DOI 10.5902/2179378664926. Disponível em: <https://doi.org/10.5902/2179378664926>. Acesso em: dia mês abreviado. ano.