

# Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy

Volume 9, Number 3

## Editor in Chief

Audrey Yap, University of Victoria

## Editorial Board

Annalisa Coliva, UC Irvine

Henry Jackman, York University

Frederique Janssen-Lauret, University of Manchester

Kevin C. Klement, University of Massachusetts

Consuelo Preti, The College of New Jersey

Marcus Rossberg, University of Connecticut

Anthony Skelton, Western University

Mark Textor, King's College London

Richard Zach, University of Calgary

## Editors for Special Issues

Sandra Lapointe, McMaster University

Alexander Klein, McMaster University

## Review Editors

Sean Morris, Metropolitan State University of Denver

Sanford Shieh, Wesleyan University

## Design and Layout

Daniel Harris, Hunter College

Kevin C. Klement, University of Massachusetts

ISSN: 2159-0303

[jhaponline.org](http://jhaponline.org)

© 2021 Miloš Šumonja

## Kripke's Wittgenstein and Semantic Factualism

Miloš Šumonja

Recently, two new portrayals of Kripke's Wittgenstein (KW) have emerged. Both understand KW as targeting the Tractarian picture of semantic fact as a speaker's mental representation of the truth-conditions of the sentences he uses. According to the factualist interpretation, KW holds that meaning ascriptions are legitimate descriptions because semantic facts are not entities that explain people's linguistic behavior. The second, Alex Miller's non-standard non-factualist interpretation, sees KW as claiming that because no fact can explain our linguistic behavior, meaning ascriptions express a speaker's attitudes towards his interlocutors rather than stating what they mean. This paper advances the minimal factualist interpretation by elaborating two points: that Miller's reading of the skeptical argument contradicts semantic non-factualism; and that KW's view of meaning is based on a primitivist rendition of the skeptic's insight that nothing justifies our use of language, which allows him to assert that semantic facts exist simply because we ordinarily say so.

# Kripke's Wittgenstein and Semantic Factualism

Miloš Šumonja

## 1. Introduction

According to the standard interpretation (see [Ahmed 2007](#); [Blackburn 1993](#); [Boghossian 1989](#); [McGinn 1984](#); [Wright 1984](#)), Saul Kripke's famous study *Wittgenstein on rule and private language* (1982) presents two notorious views on language. Firstly, Kripke's Wittgenstein (KW) formulates a skeptical argument for the paradoxical conclusion that there are no facts about meaning (semantic facts), and thus no meaning at all. Secondly, in order to solve the skeptical paradox, KW puts forward a non-factualist explanation of meaning ascriptions, whereby he claims that the role of sentences like 'Jones means addition by "+"' is not to describe facts about Jones, but to express a speaker's agreement or disagreement with his interlocutor's use of a given word. In short, KW unleashes and then tries to contain his skeptical argument against the existence of semantic facts by presenting its conclusion as a thesis that meaning ascriptions have no truth-conditions, which he accepts and then develops in a non-factualist account of the way we talk about meaning (semantic non-factualism).

In various forms, a number of authors have argued that semantic non-factualism is an incoherent position, which, contrary to its skeptical outlook, actually includes a statement of a fact concerning meaning—that ascriptions of it do not state facts ([McGinn 1984](#); [Wright 1984](#); [Boghossian 1989](#)). That is, the skeptical solution appears flawed because it spells out the difference between ascriptions of meaning, to which the skeptical conclusion pertains, and descriptive language games, in

terms of 'facts' or 'truth-conditions', whose appropriateness in semantic discourse—where the said difference is supposedly constituted—is compromised by the skeptical argument. The perceived failure of the standard non-factualist interpretation prompted two revisionist readings, both predicated on a similar understanding of the skeptical argument.

In the factualist interpretation, KW actually argues that meaning ascriptions have truth-conditions, but takes them to be different from those disputed by the skeptic ([Davies 1998](#); [Kusch 2006](#); [Wilson 1994, 1998, 2003, 2011](#); [Byrne 1996](#)), who targets the truth-conditions of meaning ascriptions from inside the Tractarian picture of meaning as determined by a sentence's correspondence to the language-independent facts that must obtain if it is true. Hence, if one is to acknowledge that nothing can fix the identity of facts a speaker has in mind when uttering a certain sentence, and still escape the skeptical paradox, he must reject the truth-conditional account of meaning, not just limit its application. Consequently, KW resorts to justification conditions as a criterion of meaning throughout the language—a criterion which, according to the factualist interpretation, allows for meaning ascriptions to be as fact-stating as any other class of sentences usually deemed so.

Alex Miller's non-standard non-factualist interpretation ([2007](#); [2010](#)) also starts from the idea that by accepting the skeptical conclusion, KW, in effect, repeals the explanation of meaning *via* truth-conditions. However, for Miller, no plausible form of semantic factualism can spring from KW's turn to justification conditions, because any such position is bound to fall prey to the skeptical argument. Therefore, meaning ascriptions must be considered as expressive in their nature, although the traditional way of deciding whether a given discourse is descriptive—that is, by assessing its correspondence to a realm of language independent facts it purports to describe—becomes unavailable in the skeptical solution. For, Miller contends, because the non-factuality of meaning ascriptions is ascertained in a prior inves-

tigation of semantic facts, it is inherited by the skeptical solution as somehow deeper than in the rest of the language, in which no sentence whatsoever has the Tractarian truth-conditions.

This paper advances two sets of claims. Against Miller's interpretation, it will be argued that it fails to explain KW's motive for advancing semantic non-factualism, and what makes meaning ascriptions different from factual sentences in the framework of the skeptical solution. In the standard interpretation, KW turns to semantic non-factualism in order to escape the skeptical paradox—this reason for denying the factuality of meaning ascriptions disappears in the reading of KW's argument to which Miller subscribes. Secondly, Miller's attempt to extract a post-Tractarian criterion for distinguishing between factual and non-factual sentences (criterion of bifurcation) from the skeptical argument is plagued by the conflict between what it supposes about the language in general, and what it claims about meaning ascriptions.

On the other hand, it will be argued that in his critique of the factualist interpretation, Miller loses sight of a primitivist, or anti-reductionist, strategy of the skeptical solution. What the skeptic demands is a justification of meaning that is both metaphysical and epistemological. He asks for facts that *ad infinitum* determine the objective conditions for the correct use of a word, but also make them epistemically transparent to a speaker, providing him thereby a reason for his linguistic actions. Although KW acknowledges that such facts do not exist, he argues that—considering their agreement—our unjustified linguistic actions are not incorrect. For, according to KW, our agreement in primitive responses marks the limit of the explanation of meaning. It is the point where the skeptical challenge reveals itself as unjustified in terms of our ordinary criteria for what counts as a justification for what we say. If so, there is no further reason for doubting that facts and truths—in the theoretically 'innocent' sense captured by deflationary notions of truth and truth-conditions—about what we mean exist simply because we say that they do in our everyday language.

## 2. The Skeptical Argument in the Factualist Interpretation

The factualist interpretation presents KW as arguing against the Tractarian picture of meaning, understood as a philosophical articulation of the commonsensical semantic idea that our words have any meaning at all because, in using them, we answer to some language independent standards for their correct application. George Wilson, a pioneer of this approach, whose reconstruction of the skeptical argument Miller addresses, maintains that KW targets the Classical Realism (CR), a conception of meaning according to which:

CR: If a speaker S means something by a sentence 'X', then there is a possible fact X that governs the correct application of 'X' for S.<sup>1</sup>

So, if Peter means something by the sentence 'Snow is white', then there is a possible fact—*snow being white*—that governs Peter's correct application of the sentence, in the sense that, if it obtains, it makes an utterance of the sentence correct.

However, as Wilson points out (1994, 370; 1998, 107), for a certain possible fact to guide S's correct application of 'X', there must be some fact about S which establishes that he has indeed adopted just *that* possible fact as a standard for his correct application of 'X'. Hence, KW's skeptic challenges the proponent of CR to adduce facts which can satisfy what Wilson dubs the 'grounding constraint':

G: If there is a possible fact X that governs the correct application of a sentence 'X' for speaker S, then there are facts about S that constitute X as the possible fact that governs S's use of 'X'.

---

<sup>1</sup>In this section, I follow Miller's convenient simplification (Miller 2010, 168–70) of Wilson's formulation of CR and the skeptical argument (Wilson 1994, 370–71; 1998, 106–9), originally given for the case of predicates. The other factualist expositions of the skeptical argument (Kusch 2006; Davies 1998), although somewhat different, do not diverge from the one given here in any crucial sense.

After considering a number of candidates, the skeptical argument shows that no such fact can be found, thus resulting in what Wilson calls the Basic Skeptical Conclusion (BSC):

BSC: There are no facts about S that constitute any possible fact X as the possible fact that governs S's use of 'X'.

Now, when paired with CR, BSC leads to KW's infamous skeptical paradox, which Wilson calls the Radical Skeptical Conclusion (RSC):

RSC: No one ever means anything by a sentence.

In the standard non-factualist interpretation, RSC is the skeptical conclusion that KW provisionally accepts. Consequently, the task of the skeptical solution is to account for our everyday language game of ascribing meaning, while accommodating the finding that no one, in fact, means anything by any linguistic expression. Whence the motivation for an explanation of meaning ascriptions like this: although we talk *as if* there are semantic facts, in reality, when asserting that a speaker means something by a term, we express agreement with his linguistic behavior.

According to Wilson (1994, 372), however, KW accepts BSC but rejects RSC, which he considers to be 'incredible and self-defeating' (Kripke 1982, 71). Furthermore, Wilson argues (1998, 108), because KW rejects the conclusion that all language is meaningless, he *a fortiori* rejects the theory of meaning which, *via* the skeptical argument, leads to it—and this is Classical Realism. Thus, KW and his skeptic part ways after BSC:

KW's Skeptic: CR, G, BSC; therefore, RSC.

KW: G, BSC, not-RSC; therefore, not-CR (Miller 2010, 171).

So, in Wilson's interpretation, the task of the skeptical solution is to explain why BSC does not imply RSC (Wilson 1994, 372). According to him, KW's answer is that BSC concerns semantic facts of the kind required by CR. Only if one thinks of meaning as a speaker's link to some possible fact, the conclusion that nothing

about a speaker can constitute such a link results in RSC. If we discard CR and its notion of semantic fact, BSC entails simply that no sentence has CR truth-conditions. The logical space for a factualist position emerges because an alternative conception of meaning, which is given in the positive part of the skeptical solution, entails an alternative criterion for judging a sentence as descriptive (Wilson 1998, 114).

### 3. The Factualist Interpretation of the Skeptical Solution

Wilson discusses two possibilities for developing a factualist interpretation of meaning ascriptions inside the framework of the skeptical solution. One is to understand the replacement of truth-conditions with justification conditions as a change in the source of meaning—it is not some extra-linguistic entities, but the general patterns of our language community's use of a given word that provide us with its correctness conditions. While the proponent of CR analyzes the content of meaning ascriptions as

MA: A speaker S means  $\Phi$  by a predicate 'Φ'.

in terms of facts about S which ground the relation of semantic guidance between S (his use of 'Φ') and property  $\Phi$ , KW, according to Wilson, takes MA to state that:

- (i) facts about how S actually ascribes 'Φ' to candidate instances are in adequate alignment with the justification conditions in his community for judgments about suitable test cases that they are so and so;
- (ii) facts about S's use of 'Φ' reflect adequate sensitivity to the role and utility of 'Φ' within the wider activities of the linguistic community (Wilson 2011, 74).

Thus, Wilson portrays KW's proclamation that the skeptical solution describes everyday facts as to when and why we ordinarily use meaning ascriptions as saying that:

The new skeptical solution tries to explain the content of meaning ascriptions in terms of their role and utility in the relevant language games, [which] are explained in terms of the requirements that our use of standard criteria for meaning ascriptions engender and enforce (Wilson 1994, 385–86).

The other possibility Wilson (2003, 180) raises is that KW credits the meaning ascriptions with the fact-stating role simply because they satisfy the minimal conditions prescribed by the deflationary account of truth-aptness, to which he apparently commits by saying that ‘to affirm that a statement is true. . . is simply to affirm the statement itself, and to say it is not true is to deny it’ (Kripke 1982, 86). So, because any class of declarative sentences that has justification conditions *eo ipso* has truth-conditions, the meaning ascriptions, the circumstances of whose use the skeptical solution describes, should be regarded as fact-stating.

For reasons to be discussed later, Wilson prefers the first, substantial form of semantic factualism, although he admits that KW apparently advances the second, minimal form (Wilson 2003, 181).<sup>2</sup> Miller, on the other hand, finds both unsustainable.

#### 4. Miller’s Critique of the Factualist Interpretation

Miller’s critique of the first form of factualism calls attention to its susceptibility to the skeptical argument. According to Miller (2010, 175), Wilson’s explanation of semantic facts in terms of ‘requirements that our use of standard criteria for meaning ascriptions engender and enforce’ suggests that KW’s non-Classical Realist conception of language goes as follows:

NCR: If a speaker S means something by a sentence ‘X’, then there are requirements—engendered and enforced by the use of standard criteria for ascriptions of meaning in S’s language community—that govern the correct application of ‘X’ for S.

<sup>2</sup>That is, Wilson thinks that minimal semantic factualism is a correct interpretation of KW, but not a position on meaning that one should draw from the skeptical argument. See Section 9.

If so, and the idea that something independent from a speaker’s inclinations has to ground and guide his linguistic behavior indeed frames the skeptical solution, then the familiar question reappears: which facts about a speaker make *this*, and not *that*, requirement into a language rule he is following? And, since all the possible answers remain the same as in the original skeptical argument, BSC and RSC once more close the search for what meaning is. As Miller correctly points out (2010, 180), Wilson’s interpretative maneuver of turning the justification conditions into a content of meaning ascriptions is at variance with what KW tells us about the strategy of the skeptical solution:

It is important to realise that we are not looking for necessary and sufficient conditions (truth conditions), or an analysis of what such rule-following ‘consists in’. Indeed such conditions would constitute a ‘straight’ solution to the skeptical problem, and have been rejected (Kripke 1982, 87).

Furthermore, whereas the first form of factualism fails to satisfy the skeptic, but at least tries, the second, supposedly minimal form simply takes for granted the existence of semantic facts by awarding meaning ascriptions with seemingly inconsequential deflationary truth-conditions. Drawing on Crispin Wright’s (1992) work, Miller remarks that, according to deflationism about truth-aptness, in order to have truth-conditions, and so potentially be descriptive, a sentence has to fulfill the next two conditions:

Discipline: There must be acknowledged standards for the proper and improper use of sentences of the discourse: the discourse must be disciplined, in the sense that there must be standards in force with respect to which uses of the discourse’s sentences are judged to be appropriate or inappropriate.

Syntax: The sentences of the discourse possess the right sort of syntactic features: for example, they must be capable of conditionalisation, negation, embedding in propositional attitudes, etc. (Miller 2010, 179).

It is fairly obvious that meaning ascriptions satisfy the ‘syntax’ condition. The sentences ‘Peter doesn’t mean addition by “+”’, ‘If Peter means addition by “+”, he will answer “125” when asked “68+57=?”’, ‘Michael doesn’t believe that Peter means addition by “+”’, are all grammatically well-formed. The matter of the discipline condition looks straightforward as well: KW’s justification conditions refer precisely to the circumstances in which people rightfully, or appropriately, use meaning ascriptions such as ‘Peter means addition by “+”’. Hence, the advocate of the minimal semantic factualism purports to advance a theoretically innocent doctrine which adds nothing substantial to the skeptical solution.

Miller’s objection to this interpretation is the following: in honoring meaning ascriptions with deflationary truth-aptness, the minimal factualist account of KW, instead of elaborating, presupposes the skeptical solution. He notes that in order to provide for meaning ascriptions’ discipline, the justification conditions have to act as the standards for distinguishing between someone’s correct and incorrect applications of a linguistic expression (Miller 2010, 179). And the existence of such standards is exactly what the skeptic contests by asking which facts about us make them a source of semantic guidance.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, because minimal semantic factualism simply postulates justification conditions without offering any explanation of how they inform our linguistic behavior, it actually seeks to smuggle the facts about meaning in a supposedly empty notion of deflationary truth-conditions.

Moreover, Miller further claims (2010, 179–80), in a sense of taking for granted what the skeptical solution needs to explain, the view in question is comparable to the semantic primitivism, an answer to the skeptical challenge according to which meaning

<sup>3</sup>In the sense that it presupposes the notion of syntactical rules, which have to be correctly applied in the construction of grammatically well-formed sentences, the same holds for the ‘syntax’ condition as well. See Miller (2010, 179).

is an irreducible and *sui generis* mental state of a speaker. Since KW and his skeptic dismiss the latter position as ‘mysterious and desperate’ (Kripke 1982, 51), the minimal semantic factualism appears to be a non-starter as an adequate interpretation of the skeptical solution.

In sum, Miller argues that both forms of factualism fail to present a solution to the skeptical paradox, and thus concludes that semantic non-factualism is the best interpretation of what KW has to say about meaning. However, he does not reject the factualist approach *in toto*. Because the standard non-factualist interpretation identifies the skeptical conclusion with the skeptical paradox, which unacceptably entails that KW considers all language as meaningless, Wilson’s way of distinguishing BSC and RSC remains a blueprint for Miller’s account.

## 5. Miller’s Non-standard Non-factualist Interpretation

In order to extract semantic non-factualism out of Wilson’s view of the skeptical argument as *reductio ad absurdum* of the Classical Realism, Miller begins his account with factualism about meaning ascriptions, to which KW’s skeptic is implicitly committed:<sup>4</sup>

F: Ascriptions of meaning are factual.

Then, he ties F to the Classical Realism—F if and only if CR—and thereby gets the starting point of the skeptical argument, which, as in Wilson’s interpretation, takes two different paths. Whereas KW’s skeptic argues:

KW’s Skeptic: F, F iff CR, G, BSC; therefore, RSC;

KW, according to Miller, claims:

<sup>4</sup>Here, I rely on Miller (2007) because it makes the similarities and differences with Wilson’s exposition of the skeptical argument easier to follow than Miller (2010).

KW: F iff CR, G, BSC, not-RSC; therefore, not-CR; therefore, not-F (Miller 2007, 194).

So Miller obtains an interpretation of the skeptical argument that rejects F as well as CR, while respecting Wilson's distinction between BSC and RSC. But, how are we to understand semantic non-factualism derived in this way?

For Miller, the key to distinguishing between factualism and non-factualism in general is the 'explanatory direction' one takes in accounting for the characteristic judgments of some language game (Miller 2010, 183). The factualist explanation first determines the nature of facts that make up the content of a given judgment, and then elaborates their use. The non-factualist explanation, on the contrary, starts with an idea about the role a class of judgments plays and ends by explicating their content. That is to say, KW repudiates semantic factualism by reducing CR to the absurdity of RSC, and then, basing it on the notion of justification conditions, expounds his non-factualist account of meaning ascriptions, whose content is explained away with the help of the deflationary conception of truth.

Lastly, Miller insists upon retaining Wilson's insight that KW's rejection of CR does not imply that all sentences are equal in the framework of the skeptical solution. However, whereas Wilson views his argument about the skeptical solution instituting its own post-CR criterion for deciding whether a discourse is descriptive as opening a logical space for an alternative kind of semantic factualism, Miller seeks a way of separating meaning ascriptions from other classes of declarative sentences in a semantic regime where apparently no sentence really has factual content, at least not in the sense in which the advocates of CR think. So, he introduces a difference between *shallow* and *deep* non-factualism. Miller's final touch is this: non-factualism about meaning ascriptions is *deep* because it emerges from considerations regarding the nature of meaning and truth-conditions, unlike non-factualism in other parts of the language, which is *shal-*

*low* because it represents a simple consequence of an argument establishing *deep* semantic non-factualism (Miller 2010, 187–88).

In the rest of this paper, I defend the minimal factualist interpretation of the skeptical solution. The plan is to, firstly, show that Miller's interpretation of the skeptical argument cannot motivate and institute semantic non-factualism as the skeptical solution. Secondly, I shall elaborate the strategy of the skeptical solution, which is to use the notion of a form of life as an explanation-stopper in order to delegitimize the skeptic's challenge, while accepting the conclusion that nothing justifies our linguistic behavior.

## 6. Critique of Miller's Interpretation

Miller wants to distinguish two forms of non-factualism at work in the skeptical solution. The first concerns the whole of the language and is an immediate result of the basic skeptical conclusion that nothing can determine which possible fact a speaker has in mind when uttering a certain sentence:

not-CRTC: No sentence has CR truth-conditions.

The second form also stems from BSC and concerns meaning ascriptions. According to Miller, KW's semantic non-factualism represents the claim that:

not-F: Meaning ascriptions do not have CR truth-conditions.

It is important to highlight that, for Miller, not-F is not just a simple consequence of not-CRTC, as for the advocates of both factualist interpretation. Rather, it is supposed to state an additional implication of the skeptical conclusion about what kind of sentences meaning ascriptions are within the framework of the skeptical solution. However, I think that, when considered in terms of the *reductio* reading of the skeptical argument, such a reading of not-F is neither possible as a statement of semantic non-factualism, nor necessary as a solution for the skeptical paradox.

To see why, note first that not-F seems *prima facie* quite compatible with the factualist view that:

SF: There are facts about a speaker S that meaning ascriptions of the form ‘S means X by “X”’, *when they are correct by the criteria of the skeptical solution*, describe truly.

For, as indicated above in connection to Wilson’s position, what KW discards along with CR is the whole theoretical construction erected on the basis of the Tractarian assumption about metaphysical correspondence between language and world. Which is to say, CR is being abandoned in the skeptical solution not only as an explanation of meaning, but *a fortiori* also as a view of truth and bifurcation:

The skeptical paradox undermines the very notion of ‘fact-stating discourse’ understood in the ‘Tractarian’ sense, [so that] we cannot import the ‘Tractarian’ distinction between ‘fact-stating discourse’ and ‘non-fact-stating discourse’ discourse into the context of SOL . . . In moving to the latter [post-Tractarian] from the earlier ‘Tractarian’ model, we not only revise our account of the manner in which discourses are justified or grounded: we also, crucially, revise our conception of the relationship obtaining between the legitimization of a discourse and its status as ‘fact-stating’ (Davies 1998, 130–31).

True enough, one could argue that the point just made at most proves that the question about which kind of sentences meaning ascriptions are is to be left open before the skeptical solution provides an answer, which may turn out to be non-factualist. But even at the negative stage of his discussion, KW gives us reason to think otherwise. In particular, when clarifying his compliance with the skeptical conclusion, he says to agree ‘with the skeptic that there is no “superlative fact” . . . about my mind that constitutes my meaning addition by “plus”’, but then immediately qualifies any reasoning about the nature of meaning in terms of such facts as a ‘philosophical misconstrual’ (Kripke 1982, 65–66) of our everyday expressions like ‘the fact that Jones meant addition by such-and-such a symbol’. As Byrne has pointed out

(1996, 342), when taken in conjunction with KW’s embracement of deflationism, this insistence of his on wishing ‘merely to deny the existence of the “superlative fact” that philosophers misleadingly attach to such ordinary [descriptive] forms of words’ (Kripke 1982, 69) indicates that some ‘non-superlative’, or non-explanatory, semantic facts exist within the non-CR framework of the skeptical solution after all.

Thus, according to the minimal factualist interpretation, the skeptical argument mandates the replacement of the CR views of semantic factuality and semantic fact with deflationist ones, which simply trace the properties of our ordinary meaning talk, in particular its apparent truth-aptness. Nevertheless, while they rightly emphasise the implications of the skeptical argument that the standard non-factualist interpretation overlooks, these initial considerations are hardly decisive against Miller’s position. His non-factualist interpretation is particularly engaging, if intricate, precisely because it tries to meet their challenge.

## 6.1. Miller’s account of semantic factuality

The argument pointing out that the skeptical solution entails non-CR view of truth and factuality pushes Miller to go beyond his own formulation of semantic non-factualism (as not-F) and further explain what semantic property he is denying to meaning ascriptions. To say that they do not have CR truth-conditions is not enough, for in that respect meaning talk is no different from talk about chairs or stones. Now, having in mind that Miller dismisses both versions of non-CR semantic factualism as victims of the skeptical argument, it is tempting to think he takes not-F as actually saying the opposite to SF:

NF: There are no facts about a speaker S that meaning ascriptions of the form ‘S means X by “X”’, *even when they are correct by the criteria of the skeptical solution*, describe truly.

And yet, because NF follows from not-F only if CR criteria of factuality remain in force in the skeptical solution, Miller (2010,

188) rejects it as a statement of KW's semantic non-factualism. Instead, he agrees with the minimal factualist interpretation that KW 'sees talk of meaning facts and true ascriptions of meaning as legitimate but harmless' (2010, 184). After all, Miller is well aware that KW is a deflationist about the notions that carry the explanatory load in CR. Whence he seeks to find a non-truth-conditional, or a non-factualist explanation of language bifurcation that will render meaning ascriptions non-factual, the latter being how KW solves the paradox in both Miller's and the standard interpretation. This, however, implies that his alternative view of factuality and non-factuality has to bear some significant relation to the considerations of the skeptical argument. Because it represents the skeptical solution, Miller's non-CR criterion of bifurcation, whatever it may be, has to somehow reflect the skeptic's reasons for denying the factuality of meaning ascriptions. Admittedly, Miller provides two explanations that fit this line of reasoning: an account of the difference between factualism and non-factualism *via* the notion of 'explanatory direction', and the definition of 'deep' non-factualism. Nevertheless, neither appears satisfactory.

As for the 'explanatory direction' view, Miller apparently transposes Blackburn's (1984) quasi-realist metaethical explanation of the difference between descriptive and expressive sentences to the skeptical solution. Blackburn's thesis is that when talking about stones or chairs, we must think of ourselves as causally influenced by them, which implies that we talk descriptively. Conversely, we talk about moral (and maybe meaning) expressively because no fact we are causally influenced by in such situations can be identified with it. To Miller's credit, KW indeed argues that, since there are no facts of the kind demanded by the skeptic, conditionals about meaning such as:

If Jones means addition by '+', then he will answer '125' to  $68 + 57 = ?$

are not to be assimilated to conditionals about events in the physical world such as:

If the temperature drops below 0 degrees Celsius, then water will freeze.

For, as it is stated, the first conditional 'makes it appear that some mental state obtains in Jones that guarantees his performance of particular additions such as "68+57"—just what the skeptical argument denies' (Kripke 1982, 94–95).

There are several problems in applying the standard non-factualist recipe to the skeptical solution, all rooted, in the last instance, in the crucial disanalogy between the two positions—KW is global and not local skeptic about truth-conditional view of language. So one might start by asking what Miller's understanding of discourses that fall on the other side of his bifurcation line from meaning ascriptions is: what is the counterpart of Blackburn's 'going on from facts to judgments' explanation of factual statements in the framework of the skeptical solution, what is it about, and how is *that* different from what the explanation *via* truth-conditions is about? Miller gives no clear answer to these questions, but he should: it is vital for his non-factualist position to be able to elaborate the contrast between meaning ascriptions and *really* descriptive discourses while respecting the conceptual limitations that the skeptical conclusion imposes.

We can develop Miller's view in two ways here. First is to simply follow the argument of metaethical expressivism, and, like many of its main proponents (for example, Blackburn 1984, Kraut 1990, and Dreier 2004), consider the statements about causal relations as a measure of semantic factuality. As already suggested, Miller has strong exegetical reasons to do so. In part, the skeptical solution certainly can be summarized by claiming that, despite their grammatical appearance, meaning conditionals do not describe the causal relations between facts about a speaker and his uses of language, but serve to express other people's attitudes towards his past and future linguistic behavior. Furthermore, from Miller's non-factualist viewpoint, this interpretative strategy has an important virtue of elegantly linking the skeptical argument

to the semantic role of meaning ascriptions: because we cannot reduce meaning to a causal relation, meaning ascriptions are not factual statements.

Trouble is, KW's point in claiming that no mental or physical state can have the consequences of meaning is that the CR notion of semantic fact as a speaker's link between the sentences he uses and their truth-conditions is misconceived for the language in general, not that just for meaning ascriptions. On the one hand, an important part of that point is that we cannot save CR by disavowing its initial idea about meaning as a mental state, which admittedly is the skeptic's main target, and by reducing meaning to a causal relation—for, that clearly cannot be the answer to the question about 'what *tells* me that I should say "125" and not "5"?' (Kripke 1982, 21, my emphasis). On the other hand, an important consequence of that point is that KW rejects the idea that our ability to state facts corresponds to and stems from the relation of meaning which we somehow create between our words and the language independent world. By the same token, he admits no general criterion for judging the objectivity of the semantic content that is independent from the reasons we usually adduce when talking about the world within a particular language game. Rather, according to KW, we are to assess the pretension of a given sentence to convey the state of affairs in a certain respect by the criteria of a discourse to which it belongs.

But, maybe I am fundamentally misconstruing Miller's position. In his latest contribution to the KW debate, Miller (2020, 27) suggests that 'the kind of sceptical solution discussed in the text may be a relative of the "global expressivism" or "global anthropological pragmatism" discussed in a series of fascinating works by Huw Price'. So, arguably, the point of his analogy between the skeptical solution and metaethical expressivism is actually the one made by both KW and Price, which is that whatever the theoretical story behind a particular discourse is, it will be about the role that the judgments of that discourse play in our lives, and not about semantic facts. However, the advocate of minimal

factualist interpretation can happily embrace this view of language, and argue, against Miller and with Price, that 'it implies [that] for *no vocabulary at all* can it be theoretically informative to say that it has a semantically-characterised function' (Price 2015, 139). For, Price's global expressivism and KW's skeptical solution both entail minimalism about content, facts and truth-conditions, which calls into the question the existence of the very kind of differences between language games that any local non-factualist account presupposes.

Now, in outlining the potential problems for his expressivist interpretation of the skeptical solution, Miller wonders in his most recent paper 'does its global nature mean that in any given attempt to carry out its explanatory project the "tool-kit" of admissible materials that can figure in its explanations turns out to be empty?', and concludes that '[i]f so, the sceptical solution, construed as we have construed it, appears to be in serious trouble' (Miller 2020, 17). Considering that in a footnote attached to the quoted sentence he refers to Blackburn's critique of Price (Blackburn 2013, 77–83), Miller apparently thinks that if a) meaning is use; and b) we, in fact, use our ordinary descriptive language to describe the physical world; then c) both the skeptical solution and the global expressivism self-defeatingly imply commonsensical semantic realism. Let me first borrow a part of Price's response to Blackburn here (2015, 140), and ask: if we grant that KW successfully reconstructs the sense of realism in the supposedly problematic semantic discourse, why think that he needs to change the explanatory direction in answering on what for him is a much easier question of which purpose our ordinary descriptions serve? Miller's reason is, I believe, that he understands his global non-factualist (expressivist) skeptical solution as a local non-factualism (expressivism) about semantic discourse stretched across the language—as if KW is saying about the whole of language what the standard non-factualist interpretation takes him to be saying about meaning talk, as if the globalization of skepticism about semantic facts means skept-

ticism about all the facts, and as if the skeptical solution seeks to address the worry that our language as whole is not *really* about facts by saying what is it for. But, KW is not skeptical about the *reality* of semantic or any other facts, but about the idea that the *meaning* of our talk about semantic or any other facts can be explained in terms of any kind of substantial relation between our language and the world (that we are aware of). In upholding the conclusion that we cannot establish the meaning of a word simply by pointing at an object and uttering its name, the skeptical solution remains an expressivist story about ‘under what circumstances the form [of language] is introduced into discourse, and what role, what utility, the practice of so introducing it has’ (Kripke 1982, 134)—even when it is told by using ordinary descriptive language. So, as I see it, KW has no reason to honor the assumption about our words needing and having a footing in a ‘real’ world—which he finds theoretically superfluous at best, and erroneous at worst, to begin with.<sup>5</sup>

What about Miller’s second attempt at establishing semantic non-factualism? Here, he argues that non-factualism about meaning ascriptions is deeper than, say, non-factualism about ascriptions of colorhood, because it directly stems from an argument concerning the nature of meaning and truth-conditions,

---

<sup>5</sup>Moreover, from Miller’s perspective, arguably more interesting than Blackburn’s argument is Price’s attempt to accommodate the bifurcationist intuition by differentiating between a general notion of description or ‘internal representation’, thought of as a move in a language game which is constrained by our collective linguistic practice; and its sub-species, a more narrow notion of ‘external representation’, which is understood as a tracking device responsive to our physical environment (Price 2013, 35–38). Now, if Miller were to accept Price’s criterion of new bifurcation, my reply would be that his interpretation either a) ultimately characterizes what are pragmatic differences in semantic terms of language-world relations, and thus is a sophisticated version of the standard non-factualist view, or b) is a sophisticated version of the minimal factualist view, which dissolves the ground for bifurcation precisely by reminding us that even the descriptions that appear as external own their meaning to the internal constraints of language. It seems to me that Price’s position could be pressed in an analogous way.

whereas the latter represents just an instance of a global non-factualist regime ruling the skeptical solution, and not a result of some argument concerning the nature of colorhood. Yet, if what comes out of the KW’s investigation into the nature of truth-conditions (as thought of by the proponents of CR) is that they bear no meaning for the language, then how could such a discovery imply a bifurcation criterion referencing just CR truth-conditions?

Miller could reply that it is not CR truth-conditions, but an argument concerning CR truth-conditions that he invokes in distinguishing deep and shallow non-factualism. Still, considering its conclusion, that no sentence at all has truth conditions, it is hard to see why a mark of that argument should be somehow deeper in semantic discourse. On the other hand, if it was, then Miller’s deep non-factualism thesis, however construed in the first place, would have to imply that meaning ascriptions compare unfavorably to shallowly non-factual sentences with respect to the ability for describing facts. In consequence, the difference between the two forms of non-factualism would emerge as a deep fact about semantic discourse and language in general—a fact about semantic role of meaning ascriptions constituted in the region of meaning and truth-conditions, where, as Miller himself admits, there is nothing to describe.

## 6.2. Miller’s account of semantic facts

The argument demonstrating that a deflationary notion of semantic fact is available within the skeptical solution challenges Miller to explain his non-factualist thesis that ‘KW blocks the route to RSC by rejecting factualism about ascriptions of meaning’ (2010, 182). To see the problem more clearly, remember that Miller adopts the *reductio* reading of the skeptical argument, according to which the skeptical paradox is a result of an assumption that the meaning of a sentence is given by its truth-conditions, and the conclusion that no fact about a speaker

can determine what those conditions are. So it follows that KW closes the route from BCS to RSC by rejecting CR (and its notion of semantic fact), not semantic factualism. For, if saving the idea of meaning from the skeptic were to depend on the fate of semantic factualism as such, it would be enough to exclude meaning ascriptions from the CR's scope of application—there would be no reason for KW to reject CR altogether.<sup>6</sup>

Miller discusses the above objection, and replies that any account of meaning worthy of a factualist name has to rely on the notion of semantic fact as a generator of the conditions of true application, so that '[i]f we avoid RSC by giving this [notion of semantic fact], there is no clear sense in which a factualist account of meaning remains on the table' (2010, 190). The thought expressed here underlies Miller's critique of minimal semantic factualism and testifies to his *a priori* interpretative decision about what the strategy of the skeptical solution can be in regard to the terms of the skeptic's challenge.

For, what Miller's argument—that to be awarded even with the minimal truth-conditions, meaning ascriptions have to be shown as contentful first—actually supposes is that the options for a skeptical solution are either to say what meaning is, and thus become exposed to the skeptic's line of questioning; or avoid meeting the skeptical challenge, which is no solution at all. But if it really were so, one could protest that, however and whichever way non-factualist, Miller's own interpretation either is or is not a substantial account of meaning ascriptions, and so itself has to face a choice between giving a 'straight' answer or no answer to the skeptic. On the other hand, and more importantly, I think that Miller's dilemma is false, as his own argument against the substantial form of non-CR semantic factualism indi-

---

<sup>6</sup>This is the point Boyd seems to overlook when arguing that, although no sentence in the skeptical solution has CR truth-conditions, and not-F and NF are not equivalent, KW still has to maintain that meaning ascriptions are non-descriptive because that idea is 'the key for resolving the paradox' (2017, 3).

cates. In the conclusion of that argument, he correctly diagnoses Wilson's exegetical omission by citing KW's statement that the skeptical solution is *not* an explanation of meaning and meaning ascriptions' content. *It is not about semantic facts*. That said, it is surprising that Miller chooses to disregard KW's words in his critique of the minimal form of factualism, which does not explain our linguistic behavior by invoking facts about meaning, although it does admit their existence.

## 7. KW's Semantic Factualism

In this section, I argue that KW answers the skeptical challenge by rejecting its terms and advancing minimal semantic factualism. Let me start with what, I think, is the key interpretative question about the skeptical solution: why does KW say that it is not about semantic facts? Or, how can the skeptical solution incorporate the skeptical conclusion, and still be any solution at all?

The skeptic confronts KW with a choice between finding semantic facts and abandoning the idea of meaning. Considering KW's agreement with the skeptical conclusion, that choice, if accepted outright, would make the skeptical solution impossible—to have any solution at all, KW would have to provide a *straight* one. Furthermore, as suggested above in connection with Miller's interpretation of KW's strategy, a non-factualist compromise to the effect that we have a right to talk about meaning *as if* semantic facts exist would not appease the skeptic. For, like Miller himself argued in his other work on the rule-following skepticism (2011, 459–60), even non-descriptive sentences presuppose that a speaker correctly (or incorrectly) uses them, and thus invite the question as to which facts about him make it so.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>Boyd (2017) thinks that a non-factualist interpretation can be defended by admitting that no fact can determine which justification conditions a speaker has in mind when using a linguistic expression, but still claims that meaning as such is factual in a sense that sentences like 'A linguistic expression "X" is warranted in conditions X' do state facts. As he explains, when 'the skeptical

Things look different if we understand KW's concession to the skeptic as conditioned upon a revision of paradox-inducing assumptions regarding meaning and facts about it (which the skeptic and a proponent of CR share). In this view, KW agrees with the skeptic that it is impossible to factually ground a relation of meaning between a linguistic expression and a speaker's use of it, but disagrees that doing so is necessary to prevent semantic nihilism. Consequently, according to my interpretation, KW's way around the skeptic's dilemma leads to minimal semantic factualism, the thesis that facts about what we mean exist, but cannot explain our linguistic behavior because it cannot and need not be explained in the way that the skeptical challenge demands. I will try to elaborate this train of thought by answering the question that poses itself naturally: if not about semantic facts and explanation of meaning, what is the skeptical solution about?

Here again, Miller provides an important clue when comparing the minimal factualism about meaning ascriptions with semantic primitivism in that the advocates of both positions bypass the grounding constraint. However, what needs to be added is that they do so not simply because of some failure to even appreciate, let alone engage, the challenge posed by the skeptic, but because they consider his demand for a metaphysical justifica-

---

solution says meaning is to be understood in terms of warranted use, this is supposed to be an objective claim about the nature of language' (2017, 11). Boyd is right that, in the skeptical solution, justification conditions are not what a speaker associates with a linguistic expression when using it. But he is wrong that they make up the nature of language. If KW's point in arguing against facts about meaning that guide and justify our linguistic behaviour were that it is our (collective) use of a word that *determines* its meaning, then his solution would be a straight and dispositionalist one, which is something he explicitly denies (see Kripke 1982, 111). Instead, for KW, the meaning-use connection, which Boyd misinterprets but correctly identifies as the gist of the notion of justification conditions, is, I think, in that the meaning of a linguistic expression cannot be understood separately from the way we use it, not that the former can be reduced to the latter.

tion of our ordinary talk about meaning as misplaced for reasons constitutive of their respective views. When a primitivist asserts that nothing else makes a speaker S's use of a linguistic expression 'X' correct except S's grasp of 'X' 's meaning, he is refusing to specify facts which help S to connect 'X' and his use of it in *these*, and all other possible circumstances, because he thinks what the meaning of 'X' for S is, in fact, is that in S's mind which guides his use of 'X' in all possible cases. In effect, semantic primitivism restates the skeptical problem as its solution, and is therefore 'irrefutable' (Kripke 1982, 51), in a sense that the skeptic himself concedes that meaning, if anything, is something in S's mind which determines his use of 'X' in all future cases. For the same reason, however, semantic primitivism is 'desperate' as well—for, even if meaning indeed were an unanalyzable mental state of its own kind, the skeptic could still ask how can *that* tell us which action is correct in *these* circumstances, and what makes it do so?

Still, as Miller fails to mention, KW crucially qualifies his agreement with the skeptical argument against primitivism by stating that 'if it is taken in an appropriate way, [he] may even accept it' (1982, 51). Surely, KW is not accepting semantic primitivism as a 'straight' answer, or an explanation of what meaning is. Therefore, 'an appropriate way' of taking the primitivist view is to interpret it against the background of the skeptical conclusion. It follows that KW, like semantic primitivist, thinks that meaning is irreducible, but not because it is such a thing—that possibility is eliminated by the skeptical argument since it implies that there is no meaning—but because it is not a thing at all (at least not in a sense which the skeptic presupposes). If so, the negative argument of the skeptical solution is this: that, in spite of BSC, all language is not meaningless proves that the justification for our ordinary talk about meaning demanded by the skeptic is not needed. In KW's words:

A skeptical solution of a skeptical philosophical problem begins on the contrary by conceding that the skeptic's negative assertions

are unanswerable. Nevertheless our ordinary practice or belief is justified because—contrary appearances notwithstanding—it need not require the justification the sceptic has shown to be untenable (Kripke 1982, 66).

Because the skeptic's demand for a grounding meaning fact, and *a fortiori* the skeptical paradox, both stem from a 'philosophical misconstrual' of our ordinary talk about meaning, the Classical Realist view of meaning as determined by truth-conditions, this account has to be replaced with an alternative one, focused not on what meaning in fact is, but on the way we actually talk about it:

[The skeptical solution] replaces the question, 'What must be the case for this sentence to be true?' by two others: first, 'Under what conditions may this form of words be appropriately asserted (or denied)?'; second, given an answer to the first question, 'What is the role, and the utility, in our lives of our practice of asserting (or denying) the form of words under these conditions?' (Kripke 1982, 73).

Accordingly, the justification conditions merely describe the everyday circumstances in which we ascribe meaning to ourselves and each other. Usually, we speak unhesitatingly and mostly agree about what our words mean (Kripke 1982, 91, 96); we do not tolerate disagreements concerning meaning, and find ourselves obliged to seek their resolution by asking and giving those reasons which are considered criteriological in our language community (Kripke 1982, 91–92, 99–100); and we signal our trust in others behaving as we do by ascribing meaning to them (Kripke 1982, 93).

Most significantly, all what is described transpires although we usually speak as we see fit, without any independent justification for our actions. KW's skeptical truth about meaning is that nothing links linguistic expressions and our ongoing use of them, except from the training we have received when entering our language community. Nonetheless, according to him, to

use a word without any independent justification is not to use it wrongly:

[T]he basic point [of the skeptical solution is] that I follow rules 'blindly', without any justification for the choice I make. . . [but that] nothing is wrong with this situation, provided that my use of 'five', 'red,' etc. fits into a proper system of activities in the community (Kripke 1982, 81).

We understand each other because, as a matter of fact, we agree in our primitive responses and share a common form of life, something not to be explained but accepted as the given:

We respond unhesitatingly. . . and we *agree* in the unhesitating responses we make. . . There is no objective fact—that we all mean addition by '+', or even that a given individual does—that explains our agreement in particular cases. Rather our license to say of each other that we mean addition by '+' is part of a 'language game' that sustains itself only because of the brute fact that we generally agree (Kripke 1982, 96–97).

The *strategy* of the skeptical solution, then, is showing that nothing in our language depends on facts which the skeptic and the advocates of CR take as constitutive for meaning. Its *method* is to provide an overview of how and why we in fact speak about 'correct' and 'incorrect' uses of linguistic expressions—to describe meaning as it appears to us in the everyday use of language, as organically interwoven in our ways of relating to each other and the world in general. The *insight* thus conveyed is that the meaning of a linguistic expression is the use people make of it—which would be highly dubious, if it were an answer to the question about the nature of language. But it is not.

Contrary to what Miller claims in his critique of minimal factualism, KW is clear in that his notion of justification conditions is not prescriptive. Different to CR truth-conditions, the justification conditions are not what the language rules consist of: 'One must bear firmly in mind that [the skeptical solution is] no theory of truth conditions—necessary and sufficient conditions—for the

correctness of one response rather than another. . . ' (Kripke 1982, 111). Because KW's justification conditions are not an independent source of meaning to which we mentally relate in our linguistic practice, and thus the grounding constraint has no theoretical foothold, the skeptical solution is immune to the skeptical argument.<sup>8</sup> By the same token, since sentences like 'S means X by "X"' are not supposed to explain S's use of 'X' by stating facts about S that govern his behavior, it is perfectly legitimate to award meaning ascriptions with deflationary truth-conditions.<sup>9</sup> But the facts about how S understands 'X' are not reducible to the facts about how he uses 'X'. Rather, they are the same in that both

---

<sup>8</sup>One could argue that the notion of normativity that Miller invokes does not include a justificatory constraint but only a 'very platitudinous connection between meaning and correctness conditions' (Miller 2010, 178), which need not include a mental relation. Now, it is true that Miller accepts the possibility for the facts about a speaker's social history to constitute language rules, apparently without any mental relation required. But the point Miller thus makes is, as he himself makes clear in a footnote, precisely that, regardless of how we explain normativity '[a]ny account of the standards that sort an individual speaker's uses of an expression into the categories correct and incorrect will be incomplete without an account of that speaker's relationship to those standards' (Miller 2010, 189–90, fn11). KW examines two available views of the relationship Miller mentions, dispositional and mental, both of which he discards; the first, it should be noted here, because its 'candidate for a "fact" that determines what I mean. . . fails to satisfy the basic condition on such a candidate. . . that it should *tell* me what I ought to do in each new instance' (Kripke 1982, 24). Moreover, Miller discusses whether Wilson can account for normativity by referencing only 'our use of standard criteria for meaning ascriptions', without anything outside our ongoing linguistic practice requiring a particular course of action from us, but concludes that such a position cannot be an expression of semantic factualism (Miller 2010, 178). So, after all, it seems to me that Miller's argument indeed presupposes that our intuitive notion of a language rule, as expressed in conditionals like 'If Peter understands "+" as addition, he will/must answer "125" to "68+57=?"', necessitates the same kind of facts as CR, the ones which can inform and justify our linguistic behavior. I will return shortly to the question of how the minimal semantic factualism explains the connection between meaning and correctness conditions.

<sup>9</sup>As for the 'syntax' condition, 'it is just a primitive part of our language game, not susceptible of deeper explanation, that truth functions are applied to certain sentences' (Kripke 1982, 86).

pertain to everyday circumstances in which S's interlocutors feel justified in ascribing S with mastery of 'X', and are framed only by the primitive agreement between S and those judging him in their shared form of life. Or, to put it differently, semantic facts do not guide a speaker's linguistic behavior from the 'inside' of his head, but are rather shown in it.

It might be objected that Miller's dilemma for the skeptical solution—either specify facts about meaning and face the skeptical argument, or leave the skeptical challenge unanswered—finally catches up with the minimal semantic factualism at the point when KW seemingly refers to our common form of life as an ultimate ground for the way we speak. For, *our way of doing things with language* would not be much of a justification for meaning—the skeptic could ask what ground is there for claiming that our way is the *correct* way?

Here, I believe, KW's primitivist strategy for avoiding the trap of the skeptical challenge finally comes to fruition. In describing our language as rooted in our form of life, KW establishes the point at which any further request for a justification of a given linguistic action becomes unjustified. That point is reached when all the usual justifications are ruled out as unsatisfactory—and the skeptical problem posed. When all the reasons explaining some linguistic action are exhausted, then all the reasons for questioning it are exhausted as well. The skeptic's spade is turned because:

It is not for us to say, on the basis of any *a priori* conceptions. . . what it is for me to apply the rules 'in the same way' in new cases. If our practice is indeed to say [*that*]. . . in certain circumstances, then that is what determines what counts as [the correct use]. . . There is no legitimate question as to whether we. . . are right in proceeding as we do with 'plus'. . . This is what we do; other creatures might have acted differently (Kripke 1982, 135–36).

If the skeptic's challenge were justified on its own terms, and meaning were to depend on some facts that guide our use of words, then KW's appeal to our common form of life would

indeed do little to prevent the skeptical paradox. Nevertheless, because we do not choose to be the creatures we are, it makes no sense to ask is our way of doing things with language justified—and if the question is still asked, we might just as well say that nothing explains why we speak as we do.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>The interpretation of the skeptical solution given in this paper has much in common with the one expounded in Kusch's magisterial study and defense of KW, which too highlights the non-explanatory role of semantic facts, the absence of metaphysical justification and the non-prescriptive character of assertability conditions. However, what I have been trying to point out is the critical, or therapeutic, nature of minimal factualism that sometimes gets obscured in Kusch's account. Thus, for example, he writes that KW 'identifies the new kind of meaning-conferring conditions as "assertability conditions"' (Kusch 2006, 27) or, similarly, that 'assertability conditions, rather than truth-conditions, give expression their meaning' (Kusch 2006, 90). This might make it sound as if we could abstract the meaning of a word from its use, provided that we capture it in an appropriate non-CR way of the skeptical solution. But, if I am right, KW's concept of assertability conditions functions in the Tractarian way, as a ladder we must climb in order to see the point of the skeptical solution, which also implies the dissolution of the concept. For, by emphasising the importance of taking practical purposes with which an expression is used into the account of its meaning, KW is trying to say that, as Wittgenstein himself put it, '[w]ords only have meaning in the stream of life' (Wittgenstein 1996, § 913). That is, contrary to what the concept of assertability conditions seems to suggest, the meaning of a word is not separable from the way it is intertwined into the fabric of our everyday lives, from the rest of our needs, interests and aspirations as human beings, and thus cannot be given in a statement of the kind of behavior that legitimizes its use any more than in a statement of its truth-conditions. Now, I do not want to imply that Kusch misses this point altogether—in fact, he does say that 'the bulk of the work of a meaning-sceptical philosopher is negative. . . [which is] to remove confused philosophical ideas that obscure our view of our practices (2006, 48–49), and that KW's 'criteria for rule-following are holistic' (2006: 284). Rather, it might just be that the interpretative difficulty here has to do with the danger KW warns against, the one that 'comes when we try to give a precise formulation of exactly what it is that we are denying. . . [which] may be hard to do. . . without producing yet another statement that, we must admit, is still "perfectly all right, properly understood"' (Kripke 1982, 70). Or, conversely, without producing yet another view that, if not properly understood, falls victim to the skeptical argument.

## 8. A Reply to the 'No Solution' Objection

An objection along the following line may be raised: 'Your account might very well be on the right track. It appears plausible enough that KW targets a particular philosophical construal of semantic facts rather than their reality. And he is clearly at pains to emphasise the legitimacy of our ordinary talk about them. Nevertheless, you still have not said what those semantic facts that KW supposedly accepts are, and how do they pertain to the difference between correct and incorrect applications of an expression? Until you do, they are bound to appear 'mysterious and desperate' since it would seem that their existence depends on our postulating them—which is no solution to the skeptical paradox'.

The answer is that KW's minimal semantic facts are irreducible because they are empty, in a sense of not having a capacity to explain our linguistic behavior, which CR ascribes to them. The character of their existence is shown in the theoretical role they play for KW. It is to complement the turn to justification conditions by presenting the meaning of CR's basic notions in accordance with the criteria of the skeptical solution—in the form of description of the ways we use words like 'fact' and 'truth' when speaking about the meaning of a particular linguistic act. To use James Dreier's words regarding the theoretical implications of deflationism, KW in effect 'sucks the substance out of heavy-duty metaphysical concepts' (Dreier 2004, 37). From the perspective of the skeptical solution, there is nothing mysterious about semantic facts, and no deep metaphysical mistake resides in our everyday talk about them. Other than that, KW is not committed to saying anything more about minimal semantic facts (and truths) because their existence appears problematic only if we expect them to do the same explanatory work as the CR's semantic facts.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that, however minimal, any factualist, or, for that matter, any credible interpretation of the

skeptical solution owes some account of the distinction between right and wrong uses of a word, regardless of whether or not it portrays the justification conditions as non-prescriptive. Moreover, such an account seems to be presupposed in the thesis stated above, that unjustified linguistic actions are not necessarily wrong, which suggest that we can make sense of semantic normativity without appealing to the notion of justification. Let me address both of these worries at the same time.

As I understand KW, his key methodological point is that, because there are no rules in the sense of facts explaining our agreement *in language*, we can make our intuitive notion of a language rule intelligible only by approaching it *from the inside* of our actual rule-following practices. Accordingly, the nature of normativity can only be *shown* in the descriptions of the ways we relate to each other in language, where it appears as a natural feature of our linguistic behavior. Its main aspects are a speaker's right to follow his own linguistic inclinations and to be considered provisionally justified in doing so, and his obligation to explain his linguistic actions when challenged by others.<sup>11</sup> So, for KW, the normative connection between meaning and use is conditional in the following sense: to answer '125' when asked '68+57', and to justify that answer if needed in a suggested manner, is not to correctly interpret a language rule for meaning addition by '+', but simply *is* to mean addition by '+', as an individual acting in such a way will be judged in our community to have mastered the concept of addition. However, at the bottom level of inclinations, I have a right to consider my spontaneous actions correct although no justification can be given for them—except that I act as the rest of my language community. The point is that because our collective linguistic practices render the phenomena of semantic normativity intelligible in the first place, no meaningful use can be made of the word 'wrong' to judge them.

<sup>11</sup>Here, to explain an expression is to reference communally accepted criteria of understanding that expression, which consist of the instructions and examples we draw on in teaching its use to new speakers.

As far as the hypothesis about a quus-like form of life is concerned, which the skeptic could develop here, it is true that we would not have any justification for saying that they wrongly use '+', but that is only because we could not find ourselves in their behavior: 'We could describe such behavior extensionally and behavioristically, but we would be unable to find it intelligible how the creature finds it natural to behave in this way' (Kripke 1982, 98). At this point, the theoretical discomfort with the factualist interpretation and characterization of KW's insight, that our ungrounded way of doing things with language is what makes our notions of objectivity and factuality possible at all, can only be alleviated by asking—if we give up the notion of an inner fact which determines correct uses of a word independently of what anybody thinks, and accept the framework of the skeptical solution, what reason is there to doubt everyday realism of our semantic discourse?

## 9. A Reply to Wilson's Objection

Wilson's argument against the minimal semantic factualism is that KW irons out the differences between language games by adopting the deflationary conception of truth (and truth-aptness), which endows every meaningful declarative sentence with the ability to describe facts. This is particularly unfortunate for what should be a piece of the Wittgenstein scholarship because, as Wilson notes (2003, 180), the *Philosophical Investigations* cite assimilation of sentences with different uses and a similar grammatical surface as a major source of philosophical problems.

Exegetical questions about the later Wittgenstein aside, Wilson wrongly supposes that: a) KW disregards the differences in language; and b) that his understanding of truth is the reason for a). *Pace* Wilson, KW is opposed to the 'seamless' conception of language: "The legitimacy, in its own way, of the expression "stand for numbers" should not lead us to think of numerals as similar

to expressions such as 'slab', 'pillar', and the like, except that the entities 'denoted' are not spatio-temporal' (Kripke 1982, 76). In fact, he is denying that our primitive agreement in the form of life manifests itself in the same way throughout language:

It is tempting to suppose that this model [of 'object and designation'] ought to be a general one, and that if it does not apply to the case of 'pain' we must conclude that in some sense the adult can never really confirm the correctness of the child's use of 'I am in pain.' Wittgenstein's suggestion is that there cannot and need not be such a demand based on generalizing the use of 'table'. No a priori paradigm of the way concepts ought to be applied governs. . . our own form of life. (Kripke 1982, 105).

KW here obviously differentiates talk about material and immaterial entities, which might be taken as a proof that he holds the traditional language bifurcation thesis, and regards meaning ascriptions as non-factual (as in Boyd 2017). However, I think his point here is that the way our agreement about how things stand in the physical world operates is not the model for our agreement about how a speaker understands a word. If so, then there is no reason to consider our agreement about meaning any less factual or objective than our agreement about tables just because it comes about differently.

On the other hand, Wilson sees in deflationism a source of a general theory about what makes a sentence descriptive, which would contradict the pluralist view of language that KW presents in the above quote. But deflationism implies no such general theory—rather, if 'to affirm that a statement is true. . . is simply to affirm the statement itself' (Kripke 1982, 86), then the true statements are true for different reasons of their own, relative to what counts as a 'fact' or as a 'description' in a particular language game. Therefore, there is no tension between deflationism and KW's pluralist view of language.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Živan Lazović, Mašan Bogdanovski, Andrej Jančarić and anonymous referees for challenging me to make my arguments as clear and convincing as possible.

**Miloš Šumonja**  
University of Novi Sad  
milossumonja@gmail.com

## References

- Ahmed, Arif, 2007. London: Continuum.
- Blackburn, Simon, 1984. *Spreading the Word*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- , 1993. "Wittgenstein and Minimalism." In *Themes from Wittgenstein*, edited by Brian Garrett and Kevin Mulligan, pp. 1–14. Canberra: ANU Working Papers in Philosophy 4.
- , 2013. "Pragmatism, All or Some?" In *Expressivism, Pragmatism and Representationalism*, edited by Huw Price, pp. 67–84. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Boghossian, Paul, 1989. "The Rule-Following Considerations." *Mind* 98: 507–49.
- Boyd, Daniel, 2017. "Semantic Non-Factualism in Kripke's Wittgenstein." *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy* 5(9): 1–13.
- Byrne, Alex, 1996. "On Misinterpreting Kripke's Wittgenstein." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 56: 339–43.
- Davies, David, 1998. "How Sceptical is Kripke's 'Sceptical Solution'?" *Philosophia* 26: 119–40.

- Dreier, James, 2004. "Meta-Ethics and The Problem of Creeping Minimalism." *Philosophical Perspectives* 18: 23–44.
- Kripke, Saul, 1982. *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kraut, Robert, 1990. "Varieties of Pragmatism." *Mind* 99: 157–83.
- Kusch, Martin, 2006. *A Sceptical Guide to Meaning and Rules: Defending Kripke's Wittgenstein*. Chesham: Acumen.
- McGinn, Colin, 1984. *Wittgenstein on Meaning*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Miller, Alexander, 2007. *Philosophy of Language*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- , 2010. "Kripke's Wittgenstein, Factualism and Meaning." In *The Later Wittgenstein on Language*, Daniel Whiting, pp. 167–90. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- , 2011. "Rule-Following Skepticism." In *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*, edited by Sven Bernecker and Duncan Pritchard, pp. 454–63. London: Routledge.
- , 2020. "What is the Sceptical Solution?" *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy* 8(2): 1–22.
- Price, Huw, 2011. *Naturalism Without Mirrors*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- , 2013. *Expressivism, Pragmatism, and Representationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- , 2015. "From Quasi-Realism to Global Expressivism—and Back Again?" In *Passions and Projections: Themes from the Philosophy of Simon Blackburn*, edited by Robert N. Johnson and Michael Smith, pp. 134–52. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, George, 1994. "Kripke on Wittgenstein and Normativity." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 19: 366–90.
- , 1998. "Semantic Realism and Kripke's Wittgenstein." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58: 99–122.
- , 2003. "The Sceptical Solution." In *The Legitimacy of Truth*, edited by Riccardo Dottori, pp. 171–87. Muster: Litt.
- , 2011. "On the Skepticism about Rule-Following in Kripke's Version of Wittgenstein." In *Saul Kripke*, edited by Alan Berger, pp. 253–90. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 1986. *The Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- , 1996. *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wright, Crispin, 1984. "Kripke's Account of the Argument Against Private Language." *Journal of Philosophy* 81: 759–78.
- , 1992. *Truth and Objectivity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.