Make-up and alteration

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ABSTRACT

Wittgenstein denies that language games can be determined by fixed rules. In section 83 of his *Philosophical Investigations*, he asks us to imagine the case where we play and make up/alter the rules as we go along. The relationship between make-up and alteration thus introduced has been interpreted in quite different ways. Kripke raises the sceptical 'paradox' that one cannot know how to follow a rule – a private problem he solves sceptically by appealing to community agreement. But also the community does not offer a fixed ground of regularity. Baker and Hacker therefore consider Kripke's problem unsolvable. Wittgenstein would escape its consequences by not posing such meaningless questions in the first place. In practice, a sceptical problem does not rise, for we use to know what to do – even without last grounds. This refusal to go into unsolvable problems, however, presupposes an undisputed 'we'. Through an orientation towards Derrida, Staten abandons such presupposed grounds more thoroughly. Feeling under the spell of a rule does not exclude deviant ways of going along. New 'appearances' can always be indentified to earlier instances or be distinguished from them as we go along. Making such difference is part of the game of rule following.

Departing from an attempt to come to terms with rulescepticism, this essay develops a reading of Wittgenstein that does not presuppose any certainty beyond appearance. A rule is just what actual practice shows it to be. A judgement of identity can't fix it, since it is itself an intervention in practice. It alters and is altered by other, different,

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even antagonistic, claims to identity. Wittgenstein, in his treatment of rules, recognizes this impact of difference. His juxtaposition of make-up and alteration (PI 83) indicates that practice constitutes both identity and difference (communication and misunderstanding, rule following and deviation, etc.). But if practice is that ambiguous, doubt about how to follow a rule can't be easily excluded. All ground of communicative or social identity is taken away. From a practical point of view, being regular is a dead-end worry.

1. WITTGENSTEIN'S APPEARANCE

Wittgenstein's notion of rules as being made up and altered as we go along poses at least two problems that are still worthwile to be philosophically investigated: the 'sceptical paradox' and the relationship between make-up and alteration. The sceptical paradox describes the (non-) effectiveness of rules: "no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made to accord with the rule" (PI 201). No underlying regularity can guarantee that, uttering language, we actually communicate or understand each other, because there are no fixed criteria for regularity. Any interpretation can be seen as following from any sign (Kripke 1982). But the rules of language need not necessarily be seen as a priori justifications - that are to be interpreted in language use. If language is seen as mere practice, one can't even hope to find determinations before or beyond its actual use. Language itself shows its rules. In this case, the sceptical paradox simply doesn't arise; rules don't need lasta foundations (Baker and Hacker 1984a). In this article, I will summarize and evaluate this controversy.

I will show that attempts to make sense of Wittgenstein's concept of rule have failed in both ways, until now, because of the second problem, which involves the practical distinction between the make-up ('identification') of a course of action and its alteration ('differentiation'). From Wittgenstein's writing practice, one can conclude that he is looking for foundations only in order to refute them time and again. His work is an endless game (or play) of identification and differentiation. Since one has always stressed the first pole (that of identification - among others: of instances of a rule), it has become urgent to revalue Wittgenstein's attention to difference and alteration (Staten 1985). This step, however, directly leads to a new case of sceptical paradoxy, because rules can't differentiate between identity and difference - at least, not in a way that isn't itself made up / altered as we go along. A distinction between identity and difference can't be made without presupposing a notion of rule that takes the edge off Wittgenstein's argument. Wittgenstein answers his paradox by saying: "if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here. [...]. What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule [...] which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases" (PI 201). From this, one can conclude that

Wittgenstein's juxtaposition of make-up and alteration in PI 83 doesn't make a distinction at all. It shows that, in practice, following a rule is exactly as ambiguous as it appears to be - an appearance without underlying reality: both make-up and alteration.

2. SCEPTICISM OF RULES (KRIPKE)

The sceptical paradox has been brought to the fore by Kripke (1982, cf. Stegmüller 1986). His problem can be traced back, at least, to Pyrrhonian scepticism as summarized by Sextus Empiricus (circa 160-210 A.D.). Especially, Sextus' use of the concept of criterion is illustrative. He attributes two different senses to it (Sextus 1955: 17): 1. "the standard regulating belief in reality and unreality", and 2. "the standard of action by conforming to which in the conduct of life we perform some actions and abstain from others". The first sense he considers most problematical. To decide the dispute as to whether such a criterion exists, one needs an accepted criterion by which the dispute can be judged. This leads to circularity (the dispute must be first decided), to infinite regress (looking for another criterion to judge the criterion), or to dogmatism (Sextus 1955: 161 f.). Since sceptics don't want to dispose of contrasting opinions by mere assumption, they propose to suspend judgment, and to continue the investigation. In the second - practical - sense, Pyrrhonian scepticism considers appearance its criterion. Appearance, contrary to reality, is not open to question, because it lies in feeling and involuntary affection. "Adhering, then, to appearances we live in accordance with the normal rules of life, undogmatically, seeing that we cannot remain wholly inactive". (Sextus 1955: 17; for a more wide-ranging actualization of scepticism, see Hiley 1988).

Kripke's formulation of the problem is quite close to Sextus' problem with criterion 1 (the standard of belief - interpreted rather conceptually than realistically, nowadays). And his solution assumes the unproblematicality of criterion 2 (the practical standard).

1. Kripke translates Wittgenstein's paradox of the (non-) effectiveness of rules into a problem with addition. Grasping the rule for addition implies that one is able to use the same operation in new cases. But what criterion do I have to judge whether I am doing the same in circumstances that never occurred before? Here Kripke introduces a 'bizarre sceptic', who argues that the rule earlier applied while adding, was not that of addition, but that of 'quaddition': a function X quus Y that, in all earlier cases, has the same result as X plus Y; but, when applied to higher numbers than dealt with before (let's say over 57), the result is 5. This means that I would alter my earlier practice when I came to the decision that 68 + 57 equals 125 instead of 5. The sceptic could even improve his point by baptizing his own operation 'addition', while saying that my stubborn insistence that 125 is the correct answer can only be seen as an inimitable result of madness or hallucination. In terms of Sextus, there is no criterion to justify either result. Although Kripke calls this suggestion bizarre, he admits that it can't be refuted by reference to earlier (qu)addition experiences. Before I have been informed about new cases, the instructions followed may imply each of both operations. I didn't

117

know what rule I was following by using '+'. I obey a rule blindly: it does not guide in new circumstances, so that each new application is a leap in the dark.

2. Conceding that the sceptic's criticism can't be answered, Kripke tries to solve the paradox sceptically - that is by stating that, in ordinary practice, we don't need the kind of justification just shown to be untenable. Wittgenstein would hold, with the sceptic, that there is no fact as to whether I mean plus or quus. But this is no problem, since he is not interested in truth conditions, but in practical conditions of assertability or justification. The idea of necessity in following a rule has to do with custom. A single person, taken in isolation, can apply a rule as it strikes her/him; but, considered as interacting with a wider community, her/his practice has to agree sufficiently with the customs of the community - if she/he is to be seen as a participant of that community (and of communication). Asserting that we mean addition by '+', therefore, is part of a customary language game. In this form, Kripke says, this assertion sustains itself only because of the 'brute empirical fact' that we generally agree. "What has to be accepted, the given, is - so one could say - *forms of life*" (PI p. 226). In order to check persons that claim to be following a rule, members of a community don't need an a priori paradigm. The fostering of agreement is just a primitive part of their language game.

3. THE BOUNDARY OF SENSE (BAKER AND HACKER)

This interpretation of Wittgenstein has been met with vehement criticism by Baker and Hacker (1984a). They deny that from Wittgenstein a sceptical problem can arise. Moreover, if a problem is posed with regard to criterion 1 (belief in - conceptual - reality), it is not sceptical, but rather nihilist, or (in terms of Stegmüller 1986: 67-76) hypersceptical. It directly rejects the possibility of penetrating language. For, once posed, the problem can't be solved by appealing to another criterion (not even by criterion 2, the appearance of community agreement). As Baker and Hacker point out, Wittgenstein's solution is that of not asking a question that is obviously nonsensical.

1. Wittgenstein's problem is how a rule determines its application - a problem he answers immediately by indicating that the relation between a rule and its application is internal (the application shows the rule, like training does, cf. PI 198). Kripke, say Baker and Hacker, shifts this problem to a problem of interpretation of instuctions given (to oneself) in the past. This leads to a problem of interpreting these instructions, which does not confront Wittgenstein. To him, a rule determines what will be implied in following it; this is part of the way in which we use the concept of rule. Wittgenstein's paradox does not imply that rules can't guide. It shows that understanding a rule is not a matter of interpretation, but something manifest in acting. Since final interpretations or grounds are impossible, criticism from their absence is unreasonable. "Giving grounds [...] comes to an end" (Wittgenstein, OC 204). In short, Baker and Hacker rather suspend doubt than judgment: I know what I mean by '+', since there is no justification for doubting such things. Doubt about norms (about the grammatical or logical

118

conventions of our language) is senseless. In their view, there is no serious sceptical problem. There is no gap between appearance and reality, since only action is involved (which does not need external conditions in order to show our rules and our reality).

2. Following a rule is a practice (PI 202): appearance and reality at the same time. Within this practice, acting in conformity with a rule *is* a criterion for understanding the rule. That we judge behaviour by applying our criteria, has nothing to do with checking its agreement with other (social or individual) practices. For Wittgenstein, agreement is a precondition of our language game (which is not affirmed in it), it is a framework within which the community game is possible. Following a rule is no more than exercising a technique, a customary action. Adding underlying dispositions - like in the assumption of innate cognitive rules (cogently criticized by Baker and Hacker 1984b), or in that of a statistical community rule like presupposed by Kripke - introduces the idea of obective guarantee. Baker and Hacker especially object to the idea that - instead of rules - such a 'nobody's interpretation' could guide action. Grounding meaning in assertion-conditions is as bizarre as grounding it in truth-conditions. There is no truth behind the rules that makes them 'correct'. "It is not rules that breathe life into signs, but our using the signs in accord with rules, in what we call 'accord'" (Baker and Hacker 1984a: 52). "We make our rules" (1984a: 74). "We fix what is to *count* as following a given rule, and hence what it is to conform to it" (1984b: 226).

4. DIFFERENCE (STATEN)

Staten (1985) tries to read Wittgenstein from the perspective of Derrida (e.g. 1967, 1977), who leaves from the (Saussurean) difference between signs. Since every element of language is constituted by its relations to all other elements, it is not possible to fix signs. The continuous grafting of signs upon signs does not give rise to a direct accessibility of language (to a meaningful purity of speech). It is just a practice that is always impure and parasitic - like writing has often been considered parasitic on speech. Reading Wittgenstein from this perspective is showing how forms of language momentarily touch on other forms of language, without determining them. Language is writing: a game with (nothing but) its own play at stake.

1. Staten (1985: 64-108) argues that Wittgenstein's doubt is not sceptical. His doubt is part of a practice in which he continuously moves on from attempts to "shew the fly out of the fly-bottle" (PI 309) to actively forgetting solutions he has already given, in order to write anew. He tries to resolve particular confusions in a way that also functions as an instruction in a skill, a strategy that examplifies a method without rules, and without fixed boundaries, taught only by being practiced. In this practice, solutions exactly become the problems that are to be attacked in a next step. This way of making fun of solvability turns Wittgenstein's work into a satire (cf. also Rorty 1982). It throws a comical or absurd - even grim and obsessive - light upon the compulsory scenes of philosophy (cf. the philosopher of PI 38, staring at an object, and repeating the word

'this' innumerable times, in order to bring out the relationship between name and thing). Language is an appearance that shows and hides its play. Sometimes, we can find our way, but coming from another side, language bewitches and seduces us - a bewitchment we can't cure outside of it (PI 203, 109). The only remedy against the illusions that arise from the excessive wealth of language is letting oneself be carried away by the profusion of language appearances. Wittgenstein shows the inseparability of the two aspects of showing and hiding by making up and altering the coherent forms of normal writing. He looks for new contexts that help us think the unthought of ordinary language, and that evoke the abnormal by suggesting differences.

2. From Wittgenstein's remark that someone is 'under the compulsion' of a rule when she/he can't understand why someone else sees the application of a rule differently (PI 231), Kripke (1982: 98, n. 78) concludes that we can't understand the deviant. Staten (1985: 101) replies that Wittgenstein quite often refers to his 'inclination', 'urge', or 'want' to say this or that (cf. PI 299). He is tempted by language in a way that can't be escaped as long as one's mind is closed. But only the initiated is so much under the spell of usual practice that she/he sees the rule as unescapable. The deviant may open new paths by seeing things differently. Initially, deviancies usually don't make sense, but we can't know if they will do so later on. Therefore, I can't require someone to follow the line in the same way I do (PI 231). This leads to the conclusion that, in contrast to Kripke as well as Baker and Hacker, Wittgenstein does not exclude deviant applications from what he considers to be language (use). What matters is not correctness or even seriousness. What matters is that uses be woven into the threads of other uses. "And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres" (PI 67). Wittgenstein is concerned with a technique that makes language open to new contexts, which are connected with old uses but vary away from them. Instead of enforcing formal criteria or community standards constituting identity in language use, he tries to draw attention to small differences. Use is extended by twisting new uses onto old ones, and by discovering the possibilities of movement of language.

5.   NON-PRACTICED AGREEMENT

It is clear - even from such a brief sketch - that this controversy gives rise to huge differences. 1. While Kripke thinks the problem of our lack of foundations should be posed, Baker and Hacker consider this problem a way of exceeding the framework within which we can make sense. And - 2. - while Kripke sees the consequences of a rule as unfixed, but taking shape through community control, Baker and Hacker see them as determined in practice, and incorrigeable from outside. But their agreement is even more striking. 1. Kripke as well as Baker and Hacker deny that the apparant necessity provoked by rules can be justified in terms of a transcendental truth or reality. 2. They also agree in holding on to their confidence in rule following practices by an

appeal to the community, respectively to an undefined concept of we - could it be an implicit form of Rorty's 'we' (1985: 12): "the liberal intellectuals of the secular modern West"? 'We' are not in need of justification. In practice, there is no reason to worry, since rules are given in the practices of our community (or linguistic convention).

Kripke as well as Baker and Hacker hold that nothing is justified in the end (neither confidence in rules, nor doubt), but that in customary practice, this doesn't lead to problems. Compared to this agreement - which is shared by lots of interpretors of Wittgenstein -, the mutual differences pale into insignificance. The differences even can be explained only in a confused way as long as one tries to hold on to both points of agreement. How can a rule be either unfixed or determined, if the difference between knowing and not knowing the consequences of a rule can't be definitely justified? How can scepticism be either solvable or nonsensical, if the unacceptability of solutions can be very well understood in lots of practices? If one rejects dogmatical criteria for justification and at the same time accepts the priority of a reassuring practice, the controversy is muddled from the start.

The work of Baker and Hacker does contain a strong and clear refutation of psychological and sociological realism. It is a step forward in not distinguishing any longer between the conceptual reality of a rule (criterion 1) and the linguistic practice of applicating it (criterion 2). But Baker and Hacker are utterly one-sided when they merely extend the apparent self-evidence of practice, pretending that it eliminates sceptical problems. This does not surmount Kripke's paradox, because it doesn't reckon with its practical import. It is true that practical doubt often transgresses the boundaries of sense - but also language does, in practice! (cf. Gadet and Pêcheux 1981).

6. DIFFERENTIATION FOR LIFE

Compared with the common agreement, Statens reading makes a world of difference. 1. He more consistently rejects 'metaphysical comfort' - which leads to a drastic rejection of practical reassurance. 2. Staten doesn't take community for granted. Thus, he better accounts for the fact that the non-existence of ultimate foundations does not self-evidently turn the sceptical paradox into something solvable (or solved).

Wittgenstein doesn't solve the paradox. He makes it productive for his practices, without a prospect of any clearcut solution (cf. Staten 1985: 164-6, n. 20-1). Suggesting more or less ethnocentric solutions to the sceptical problem is beside his point. Agreement is not a 'brute empirical fact' (PI 185, 227; cf. Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 93-148). There may be practices in which identification/differentiation is not explicitly problematized but, usually, following a rule is complicated in a vital sense - interrupting the community feeling, or the unity that 'we' are, even while constituting and enforcing it. If there can't be criteria guiding language use, then, also agreement, or forms of life, won't establish grounds of security - and for the same reasons. At this

point, one can decide that Wittgenstein doesn't succeed in overcoming a certain 'essentialism of practice' (e.g. Feyerabend 1981: 127). But it is more promising to find out that this 'picture' doesn't really fit. Wittgenstein doesn't consider captivity to the criteria embedded in communal practices unescapable. He illustrates a method of destabilization of normality (Staten 1985: 176, n. 35, cf. Feyerabend 1981: 126).

Scepticism doesn't give reason to accept 'normality', but neither does it give reason to dream of 'escape'. It just doesn't give any reasons at all. The tension can't be solved (cf. Hiley 1988). One doesn't shut one's eyes in front of doubt only by acting confidently. The eyes are shut anyhow (PI p. 224). Accepting difference doesn't make things visible as they are; it just provides appearances, a kind of writing. The confusion about scepticism and rules can be unraveled by not restricting oneself to the serious (communicative, or sensical) side of Wittgenstein. Saliently enough, Wittgenstein also accepts (at least, shows) the power of unseriousness, fiction, and nonsense (cf. PI 42, 307, 464), and he involves in practices in which 'we' are not self-evidently part of 'the community'. Is it plainly serious to ask questions like "But isn't *the same* at least the same?", "Are two things the same when they are what *one* thing is?", and "How am I to apply what the *one* thing shews me to the case of two things?" (PI 215); or is it exactly his sense of dry playfulness that makes Wittgenstein's work fascinating? This question can't be answered without ambiguity. It is Wittgenstein's seriousness that makes one laugh, and the fun he makes of his own practices is no joke.

Therefore, it can't be enough to say that Wittgenstein "remained trapped by the urge toward final liberation" (Staten 1985: 3). Of course, hope for a happy end may seduce, but that can't be all. Sometimes, Staten tends to pursue a new reassurance, e.g. in aesthetics (1985: 85, 90). This weakens the fear of inclination, desire, and madness - but only by giving to difference an all too unambiguous place: that of art, and beauty. Wittgenstein's obsession with differences would look rather harmless, if one could give his 'communitarian moment' and his 'deconstructive moment' their own separate places (1985: 156). However, this distinction slides back into the dichotomy between external (criterium 1) and internal (criterium 2) that Staten generally rejects (e.g. p. 86). If the internal relationship Baker and Hacker assume between a rule and the practice of following it, fuses with externalities, one can't get around the recognition that one doesn't really know what happens; regular communication looses its ground (cf. Derrida). Wittgenstein's 'satire' is moving only because it is no mere satire. His game of certainty and doubt is no less than a form of life.

7. AS WE GO ALONG

Baudrillard (1976: 157-8) argues that a made up mouth doesn't speak. It seduces, by showing an ideal that isn't there. It is a bar that cuts off from reference, and thus confronts with castration. It is play and rule at the same time. Make-up can't be detached from alteration any longer. But doesn't this exactly say how a made up mouth

does 'speak'? Wittgenstein, at least, writes while he makes up his rules. And his writings fascinate lots of people, who imagine a straight ('phallic') speech behind his lines - that continuously bar sight. Wittgenstein's work is tempting because it practices the temptations of language. He seduces by his written appearance, his make-up/alteration. There is no reason to idolize the living lips that speak, while having a horror of the castration of the written (make-up that 'speaks' whereas the speaker is not there). If this discrimination is not accepted, than what to think of Wittgenstein's form of life?

The controversy about the make-up of rules didn't discomfort this much, as long as it was detached from practical relationships. In practice, certainties are threatened, signs affect signs, and made up rules actively alter. Wittgenstein's practice does discomfort, since he doesn't accept the boundary of his 'game' (PI 68). This is a rejection of custom. Wittgenstein's doubt of practical certainties is hard to cope with as long as one continues to circle around over the (im-) possibility of identity in order to find ground for a safe landing. One has got to fly, even within a fly-bottle, in order to suspend one certainty: death (Staten 1985: 148-155, cf. Grene 1976). Or is captivity within the ambiguity of language a form of being dead already: without a referent, and without a self-identical self? Saying that communication looses its ground is not just a way of saying that signs get flying. The floating of differences can't make sure that 'we' are not yet dead. After having entered the bottle, what real difference remains? Just waiting for further disintegration is at best 'survival'. It is no way out. Could one say that death already occurred? Or is it possible to live in appearance - superficially and ambiguously? (Baudrillard 1976: 191-282).

The fun of Wittgenstein's investigations is that they are not tied to answers. Phantasies of straight identity (solving or denying Wittgenstein's scepticism) and of absolute difference (accepting or rejecting his play as something merely aesthetic) are needed only if one feels an urge to give grounds for one's being seduced. This is a way of tearing up the appearance that is alive/dead in the ambiguity of Wittgenstein's writing. The sceptical problem is not how to erect (Wittgenstein's or our) identity once again - declaring it alive or dead. The problem is how to cope with the ambiguity of appearance (identity/difference); and how to deal with practical bars and barriers that obstruct the view of something that isn't there. One is not seduced because of grounds, but "we cannot remain wholly inactive" because grounds are lacking.

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