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Answering Meaning Scepticism: Judgement-Dependence and Interpretationism

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Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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Department of Philosophy
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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	III
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	IV
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I – KRIPKE’S PROBLEM	5
I – THE SCEPTIC’S ARGUMENT	5
II – FOUR RESPONSES	8
A) <i>Past instructions</i>	8
B) <i>Simplicity</i>	10
C) <i>Dispositionalism</i>	11
D) <i>Mental history</i>	19
CHAPTER II – WRIGHT AND MEANING SCEPTICISM.....	23
I – WRIGHT’S APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM	23
II – RESPONSE-DEPENDENCE AND TRUTH	26
III – JUDGEMENT-DEPENDENCE AND MEANING	32
CHAPTER III – DAVIDSON AND MEANING SCEPTICISM	38
I – WHAT CAN WE USE FROM WRIGHT?.....	38
II – RADICAL INTERPRETATION AND FIRST-PERSON AUTHORITY	40
III – A DAVIDSONIAN RESPONSE TO THE SCEPTIC	45
A) <i>First person-authority: Triangulation</i>	47
B) <i>Intentions and meaning</i>	50
C) <i>Davidson and the three problems</i>	52
D) <i>Self-deception</i>	54
IV – DAVIDSON AND THE STATUS OF MEANING	55
A) <i>Is Davidson an anti-factualist à la Kripke?</i>	55
B) <i>Is Davidson a realist or anti-realist about meaning?</i>	62
C) <i>Does Davidson endorse a form of anti-realism à la Wright?</i>	66
CONCLUSION.....	69
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	71

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to provide an answer to the problem of meaning scepticism as presented by Kripke by appealing to facets of a person's mental history. Following Wright's strategy, the sceptic's demand for a fact that determines meaning is placated by appealing to intentions. The focus of the problem becomes the need for a satisfactory account of first-person authority that also answers Kripke's argument from 'queerness'. Two approaches are presented, one from the traditional first-person perspective, and the other from Davidson's standpoint of the interdependence of self-knowledge, knowledge of other minds and knowledge of the external world. It will be shown that Davidson's approach is preferable because it answers Kripke's three problems. An interesting corollary of this research exposes similarities between Wright's judgement-dependence and Davidson's views on the theory of interpretation.

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Introduction

One of the most engaging problems in recent philosophy of language and philosophy of mind stems from Kripke's discussion of Wittgenstein's thoughts on language and rule-following¹. Kripke presents what he considers to be a new and insoluble form of scepticism based on certain passages of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. The interest goes beyond questions of exegesis. The genesis of the sceptical argument may be due to Wittgenstein or Kripke, or with the meeting of the two. The fact remains that Kripke presents us with an interesting argument. It is this argument that will be my concern in this work, not its origin.

Kripke's scepticism is aimed at meaning and has a metaphysical character that sets it apart from other forms of scepticism. While traditional scepticism tends to question our ability to know the truth of certain matters based on epistemological limitations, Kripke's sceptic argues that even heightened capacities would fail to establish the facts that determine meaning, for no such facts exist. The sceptic denies our common-sense intuitions about meaning-ascription by arguing that what a person means by such and such a word is not only indeterminate and questionable, but arbitrary.

The main thrust of the sceptic's argument is that we can give a non-standard interpretation of a speaker's words that conforms to that person's past behaviour and experience. The sceptic demands a reason to prefer the standard interpretation to the non-standard one he proposes. After all, if we are correct in preferring a certain interpretation, and our choice is not arbitrary, there must be a fact in virtue of which this choice is either

¹ Kripke, Saul. (1982) *Wittgenstein On Rules And Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*. Oxford: Blackwell. 150 p.

right or wrong. In the end, this is precisely what the sceptic comes to deny: there are no facts that determine meaning.

The first section of chapter one consists of a detailed presentation of the sceptical argument. As the abundant literature that followed the publication of Kripke's monograph indicates, there is a need and desire to solve the sceptical problem. It is felt necessary to limit the reach of the sceptic's conclusion to avoid the absurdity of its claim that there is no fact of the matter about what our words mean.

The second section of the first chapter presents four possible ways to respond to the sceptic. The first two, the appeals to *past instructions* and *simplicity*, fail for reasons that Kripke presents well in his book. The third solution is *dispositionalism*, the view that meaning is determined by a person's dispositions. This also fails according to Kripke. Moreover, Boghossian² presents a further argument that fatally undermines any dispositional account of meaning. The fourth approach seeks to determine meaning from facts about a person's *mental history*. This strategy is to appeal to an irreducible mental state that determines the meaning of a term. To the sceptic's question, the view holds that a certain interpretation is correct because it corresponds to what the words were intended to mean. This is the approach I find most promising.

The proposed solution starts by refocusing the sceptical problem. The idea is not to challenge the sceptic's claim that there are no facts from which we can infer the meaning of words. Instead, it is denied that knowledge of meaning must be inferential. The lesson to take from the sceptical challenge is that we must have non-inferential knowledge of whatever determines the meaning of our words, which, according to the solution I defend, is a person's intentions. The solution now hinges on our ability to explain how we can have

² Boghossian, Paul (1989a) "The Rule-Following Consideration." *Mind* Vol. 98. pp. 507-549.

non-inferential knowledge of our own intentions. To do this, we must deal with what Kripke termed the ‘mysteriousness’ of intentions³. The solution to the sceptical challenge I defend includes an account of first-person authority and responds to Kripke’s argument from ‘queerness’. Our task, therefore, must first be to supply an account of first-person authority from which we can develop an answer to Kripke’s sceptic.

There is no shortage of ways to explain first-person authority. Traditionally, philosophers have preferred approaches that emphasize the first person. For instance, Descartes establishes the reality of the subject in moving outwards from self-knowledge to knowledge of the external world and finally to knowledge of other minds. However, there is nothing that a priori prohibits an approach that makes knowledge of the world or of other minds prior to self-knowledge. There is also nothing that precludes an account that would make all three forms of knowledge interdependent. We may wonder if an account of first-person authority that favours one form of knowledge would be better suited to answer the sceptical challenge than one that favours another. It is with this question in mind that the present work will examine two different accounts of first-person authority.

In the second chapter I will discuss Crispin Wright’s first-person account of a person’s non-inferential knowledge of the intentions that play a role in determining meaning. His explanation of first-person authority is related to his concept of judgement-dependence, which he developed within his discussion of debates between realism and anti-realism for a given area of discourse. The second section of this chapter presents these ideas, while the third develops these considerations into an answer to Kripke’s sceptic. However, I will show that this approach fails, in part, because it only plays lip service to third-person judgements in establishing first-person authority.

³ See chapter 1.

The solution to the sceptical problem, I will argue, rests on the account of first-person authority proposed by Donald Davidson. On this view, there is an interdependence between self-knowledge, knowledge of the world and knowledge of other minds which shows itself through an investigation of the conditions of the possibility of both language and thought. The third chapter will present this view in detail. I will show that Davidson's approach is similar in spirit to Wright's work and that aspects of the latter can shed light on a Davidsonian answer to the sceptical challenge while other aspects will complement it.

Chapter I – Kripke's Problem

In this chapter, I present Kripke's sceptical argument. I also consider four ways to answer it: appeals to past intentions, simplicity considerations, the dispositional account of meaning and facts about mental history. A brief evaluation of these approaches will show that the latter is the most promising way of answering the sceptic.

I – The Sceptic's Argument

In *Wittgenstein On Rules And Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, Kripke presents a paradox about meaning. Although he develops the paradox in mathematics, the challenge applies to all of language. Kripke's formulation of the problem focuses on the addition function denoted by 'plus' or '+'. The sceptic's challenge is that I have computed finitely many sums in the past and that the rule for addition, it seems, determines how I should calculate infinitely many new sums that I have never even considered (Kripke [1982] 7).

The nature of numbers is such that there must be sums I have never computed: there are infinitely many numbers, finding two values to form a hitherto unadded pair is a simple task. Let us assume I have never added any numbers greater than or equal to 57. An example of such a calculation would be '68+57'. Adding '68 + 57' gives '125'. This answer is correct and seems to be determined by the fact that 'plus', as I use the word, denotes a function that gives '125' as a value when applied to the numbers '68' and '57' (Kripke [1982] 8).

The sceptic questions this last claim. It may be that as I intended to use ‘plus’ in the past, the answer to the above equation is ‘5’ rather than ‘125’. In this new instance (‘68 + 57’), I intend to apply the same function or rule I have applied to numbers many times before. The sceptic demands to know what my grounds are for believing this function is addition and not some other function. I have performed only a finite number of operations involving ‘+’ for numbers less than 57 and a number of different interpretations can account for my past usage. This is what I call the *finiteness problem*. The sceptic suggests that in the past, ‘plus’ or ‘+’ could well have denoted the function *quus*, which Kripke defines in the following way:

$$\begin{aligned} x \oplus y &= x + y, \text{ if } x, y < 57 \\ &= 5 \text{ otherwise (Kripke [1982] 8).} \end{aligned}$$

If the sceptic is mistaken when he claims that I meant *quus* by ‘plus’ in the past, there must be something in virtue of which his claim is false. This is what the sceptic denies: there are no facts that determine whether I meant addition or quaddition by ‘plus’.

When I compute ‘68 + 57’, I believe I am following directions I have previously given myself. These directions determine that the computation of this new instance should result in ‘125’. However, what can be said about these directions? They have nothing to say about this specific case. The sceptic claims that they are not germane because this is not simply a computation according to the rules exhibited by my previous examples since these examples are also compatible with the rule for quaddition. Past usage is compatible with both function, so what is it that makes me mean one or the other. My past computations are compatible with my meaning plus or quus by the symbol ‘+’ (Kripke [1982] 10). All this seems to show that past usage does not dictate it and it raises the question of what, if anything, does.

Kripke claims there are two interrelated aspects to the sceptic's challenge. The *metaphysical* aspect concerns the question of whether there are any facts that determine that I meant plus and not quus by 'plus'. This is metaphysical according to Kripke, because what the sceptic challenges is not our ability to know these facts, but their very existence. The *epistemological* aspect of the sceptic's challenge concerns the reasons that justify my responding '125' rather than '5' (Kripke [1982] 11). Kripke thinks the relation between these two aspects is evident; I am confident '125' is the answer because this answer corresponds to what I meant by 'plus'. Because of this, Kripke thinks that any answer to the sceptic's challenge must fulfill the following two requirements:

- "it must give an account of what fact it is that constitutes my meaning plus, not quus;
- any candidate fact must show how I can be justified in answering '125' to '67 + 58'"(Kripke [1982] 11).

The first one is the metaphysical requirement as it concerns the conditions that determine facts about meaning. The second is the epistemological requirement as to concerns how we can know what the meaning is.

In order for the sceptic to pose his challenge, he must accept my present usage ('plus' means addition), otherwise communication would impossible and he could not even raise the problem. He concedes that my present usage of 'plus' is such that '68 + 57' results in '125'. He questions whether my present usage matches up with my past usage (Kripke [1982] 12). Nonetheless, if the sceptic is right and we cannot find a solution to his challenge, the notion of meaning one function instead of another makes no sense and the conclusion will also affect my present usage. The sceptic holds that nothing that was in my mind or my external

behaviour establishes that I meant plus rather than quus. If he is right and we fail to find such a fact, there can be no fact about what function I meant in the past and so there can be no fact about which function I mean in the present (Kripke [1982] 13). Therefore, meaning is indeterminate.

II – Four Responses

A) Past instructions

Kripke considers the possibility of answering the sceptic by stating the instructions the speaker gives himself concerning addition. This response to the sceptic asserts that knowing the rule for addition is not a question of extrapolating every possible addition from a finite number of examples, but, rather, it depends on internalizing a rule for addition (Kripke [1982] 15). We answer the sceptic by claiming that the internalized rule covers infinitely many new cases without having prior knowledge of each specific case. Suppose we want to add $x + y$, the rule would be as follows:

- take a bunch of marbles;
- count out x marbles in one heap;
- count our y marbles in another;
- put the heaps together and count the marbles;
- the result is $x + y$ (Kripke [1982] 15).

This rule is prior to addition and gives it meaning. One could suggest that this set of instructions is incompatible with my meaning quus by 'plus' and that it is this set of directions, not the finitely many computations performed in the past, that justify '125' as the

answer to '68 + 57' (Kripke [1982] 15). This account seems consistent with our practice of adding as we rarely refer to past computations when presented with a new one; instead, we follow an algorithm similar to the one presented above (Kripke [1982] 16). Proponents of such a view claim that the sceptic is answered because the non-standard interpretation he proposes is incompatible with the internalized rule. In this way, past instructions state how a speaker is supposed to go on using a term in indefinitely many cases.

The sceptic's strategy to counter this answer is to give a non-standard account of 'counting' so as to yield a non-standard interpretation of 'plus'. The sceptic answers by doubting that 'count' in the instructions means counting as opposed to the act of *quounting*. The sceptic says that quounting is just like counting for heaps resulting from the union heaps containing less than 57 objects, but for heaps resulting of the union of heaps of greater number, the result of the operation is always 5. The sceptic can reintroduce the non-standard interpretation of 'plus' by providing a non-standard interpretation of one of the terms in the rule.

To answer the sceptic, we must show that we meant counting by 'count' and therefore 'plus' meant addition. Proponents of this view could once more appeal to a more basic rule, one that describes 'count'. However, the sceptic could still produce a non-standard interpretation of one of the terms in that rule to reinterpret 'count' as 'quount'.

This attempt to placate the sceptic by "appealing from one rule to another more 'basic' rule" is bound to fail, as the example with 'counting' shows us. The sceptic can pose his problem again at this more basic level just as he did with 'quount' (Kripke [1982] 17). Furthermore, Kripke thinks that by proceeding in this way, we might eventually come to a rule that we could not explain in terms of a more basic rule. The sceptic's ability to

reinterpret this rule would placate us. For Kripke's sceptic, these considerations are what make the application of a rule in a certain way, instead of another, entirely arbitrary (Kripke [1982] 17).

B) Simplicity

Kripke also considers the view that the hypothesis that I meant plus is justified on the ground that it is the simplest interpretation. Kripke believes that this solution comes from misunderstanding the role of simplicity in choosing between two hypotheses.

Given two conflicting scientific hypotheses about electrons for which we don't have direct access to the underlying facts, we must rely on indirect evidence such as the effects of electrons on everyday objects. If the two hypotheses are indistinguishable in their effects, we then rely on a simplicity principle. A being that has direct access to all facts about electrons would not need to do this. It could perceive the facts directly and determine which of the hypotheses is correct.

However, the sceptic's claim is that there are no facts about a person that could "constitute his state of meaning plus rather than quus" (Kripke [1982] 39). The appeal to simplicity is pointless, according to Kripke, because the sceptic does not argue from the basis of our epistemic limitations. The sceptic claims that even if these limitations were somehow lifted and we were granted access to all facts, we still would not find a fact that could justify choosing either the plus or quus hypothesis. If on the other hand, the sceptic's argument had been that the indirectness of our access to the facts about meaning prevents us from unarbitrarily ascribing meaning, the simplicity principle would have been of help. However, the metaphysical character of the sceptical challenge makes this solution hopeless.

C) Dispositionalism

A possible solution to the sceptical problem is the dispositional account of meaning. In this account, to mean addition by 'plus' is to be disposed when asked 'x + y?' to give the sum of x and y. To mean quus by 'plus', on the other hand, is to be disposed to answer with the sum for numbers lower than 57 and with 5 when one of the numbers is greater than or equal to 57. So even if my past thoughts do not differentiate between meaning plus and quus, the difference may be in the dispositions I have (Kripke [1982] 23).

There are three problems with this account; the first is the *finiteness problem*. The simple dispositional analysis purports to read off which function I mean by a symbol directly from my dispositions (Kripke [1982] 26). This account avoids the problem of the finiteness of past performance of the function by appealing to a disposition, but we can still pose the finiteness problem (Kripke [1982] 26). Some numbers are simply too large for me to answer with their sum when queried. We can redefine *quaddition* in such a way that it "agrees with additions for all pairs of numbers small enough for me to have any dispositions to add them, and let it diverge from addition thereafter" (Kripke [1982] 27).

Some may object that this difficulty with dispositionalism is related only to the crude form presented above. The dispositional account can be modified by adding the clause that if my brain were sufficiently powerful, and I were immortal, I would respond with the sum of the numbers m and n (no matter how large they are) when so queried and not their *quum* (Kripke [1982] 27).

The problem is that there is no telling what the proper idealization is. This clause is really meant to claim: "If I somehow were to be given the means to carry out my intentions

with respect to numbers that presently are too long for me to add (or to grasp), and if I were to carry out these intentions, then if queried about 'm+n' for some big m and n, I would respond with their sum (and not with their quum)" (Kripke [1982] 28). This does not answer the sceptic. The sceptic would argue that the counterfactual, while true, presupposes a notion of having an intention⁴ to mean one function instead of another by '+'. In short, "the idealized dispositions are determinate only because it is already settled which function I meant" (Kripke [1982] 28). Since this is precisely what the sceptic challenges, the answer is question-begging.

Boghossian argues that it is in the nature of dispositional accounts that the "holding of the relevant counterfactual truth" depends on the presence of ideal conditions to account for cases for which we have no actual dispositions. For instance we could plausibly idealize my biological properties in order to make true the following counterfactual: "If I were to go to Alpha Centauri, I would call horses, there, 'horses'" just as we might do with numbers too large to add or even grasp (Boghossian [1989a] 529).

Boghossian argues that it is not acceptable to reject a generalization from ideal conditions because of our lack of knowledge as to which counterfactuals would be true. "No one can claim to know all of what would be true if I were so modified as to survive a trip to Alpha Centauri" just as we can't know all of what would be true if "molecules and containers actually satisfied the conditions over which the ideal gas laws are defined" (Boghossian [1989a] 529). Nevertheless, we can still claim to know what the behaviour of ideal gases would be if such things existed. Likewise, it is legitimate to claim to know that I would call horses on Alpha Centauri 'horse' if I could get there (Boghossian [1989a] 529).

⁴ My proposed solution will appeal to intention, and I will ultimately disagree with the kind of response Kripke gives here. At this stage, I only wish to present Kripke's responses to challenges he discusses.

While Boghossian is willing to answer the *finiteness problem* in this way, he admits there are some problems with the view that we have infinite dispositions in ideal circumstances. While certain idealizations seem acceptable, others do not. There are no clear criteria that tell us which idealizations are acceptable and without such criteria, we cannot claim to possess determinate infinite dispositions.

The second problem with the dispositional account is that we have dispositions to make mistakes. Kripke points to the disposition of certain people to forget to carry when they add certain numbers. They are disposed to make a certain kind of mistake in certain situations; they are disposed to give an answer that diverges from the usual addition table (Kripke [1982] 29). If we are to determine what one means in virtue of relevant dispositions, we must explain how dispositions to make mistakes do not point us to another function than one we think is correct.

We would normally say that these people make mistakes. This means that for them ‘+’ means addition despite the fact that they are not disposed to give the correct answer all the time. However, since according to dispositionalism one reads the function that one means off the dispositions, this thesis fails to determine that addition is meant (Kripke [1982] 29). This is what I call the *error problem*.

By this account, there is a certain unique function that corresponds to the subject’s disposition, including his dispositions to make mistakes when certain numbers are involved. Common sense would claim that the subject means addition by ‘+’ but that he makes mistakes in certain situations. The dispositional account canvassed above holds that the intended function has to be determined from the subject’s behaviour, and this entails that no

mistakes are possible at least if we are to say the intended function is addition (Kripke [1982] 30).

A dispositionalist could reply to the *error problem* by arguing that a person generally disposed to give the sum when appropriately queried must also be disposed to withdraw an erroneous answer. For this to work, there must be common understanding of which function is being computed and there must be correctness conditions for this function. Without this, it is unclear in what circumstances a person would be disposed to recant on his answer.

However, since dispositions cover only a finite segment of the function, they may deviate from the function's correctness conditions. This means that two subjects may agree on their computation in certain cases even as they are computing different functions. In this context, errors would not be clearly evident to both parties and the disposition to withdraw a wrong answer would not manifest itself.

These concerns are partly epistemological since it is a matter of how to identify the function. We shouldn't confuse this with the larger issue of the sceptical challenge, which is metaphysical. Kripke's argument, above, presents a problem internal to the dispositional account that should be addressed if facts about dispositions are to be established as meaning-constituting. However, there is also a metaphysical side to this question. According to the dispositional account of meaning, facts about meaning are constituted by facts about dispositions. If two people with identical dispositions can mean different things, then the view is wrong.

The relevance of this discussion of the dispositional account for Kripke is that it also highlights the normative character of meaning. If we suppose that I mean addition by the symbol '+', it is then worthwhile to investigate the relation between this supposition "and the

question ‘how will I respond to the problem ‘68+57’ ’ (Kripke [1982] 37). Dispositionalism gives a descriptive account of this relation where the proper account of this relation should be normative. “The point is not that, if I meant addition by ‘+’ I will answer ‘125’, but that, if I intended to accord with my past meaning of ‘+’, I should answer ‘125’” (Kripke [1982] 37).

Nothing we gather from the dispositional account can justify the claim that ‘125’ is the correct answer and not simply a stab in the dark. This account says that ‘125’ is the response one is disposed to give and might well have given in the past. A candidate for a meaning fact must be such that whatever I may be disposed to do, it entails what I ought to do. Let us call this the *normativity problem*.

That I mean something by a term implies, for Kripke, truths about how that term ought to be used by me. That is, for example, I ought to apply it to the extension of the term and to nothing else (Boghossian [1989a] 530). Kripke thinks that defining the extension of a term is not merely a descriptive task, since it must account for the normativity of meaning. Although Boghossian agrees, he rejects Kripke’s claim that this implies the inadequacy of the dispositional account of meaning.

Boghossian argues that Kripke’s objection from normativity only shows that a crude version of the dispositional account of meaning fails. The crude dispositional account claims that the term ‘horse’ denotes things to which I am disposed to apply it. This does not work because it doesn’t allow for the possibility of error and because it doesn’t give us the correct extension of ‘horse’ (Boghossian [1989a] 531). This is the case because while I may have a disposition to call horses ‘horse’, there are certain situations in which I will apply the term to something other than a horse (such as a skinny cow at night or at a distance). The

crude dispositional account does not allow us to make the distinction between correct and incorrect dispositions. Indeed, if what I mean by a term is determined by my dispositions to use it, the extension of the term is all to which I am disposed to apply the term. Boghossian thinks this leads us to nonsense. The term ‘horse’ does not express the property of *being a horse* but ends up expressing the property of *being a horse or skinny cow* (Boghossian [1989a] 531).

Boghossian envisions a more sophisticated form of the dispositional account that is not subject to Kripke’s normativity objection. This sophisticated account does not claim that all dispositions to use the term ‘horse’ are involved in determining the extension of that term. Rather, it holds that there are certain “extension-tracking dispositions” which determine the meaning of the term, and a correct theory must pick them out, from all the other dispositions involving the term ‘horse’ (Boghossian [1989a] 532).

The strategy under consideration consists in giving a characterization of a certain property M that is a necessary and sufficient condition for a disposition to count as meaning-determining (Boghossian [1989a] 532). If we find M , we can claim that what determines the meaning of an expression is the “set of dispositions with respect to that expression that possess M ” (Boghossian [1989a] 532). However, Kripke thinks that even if such a property M existed, it would not solve the normativity problem, because dispositional facts are descriptive and meaning facts are normative. According to Boghossian, Kripke argues that even if we could get our description to match up to the normative facts about meaning, in the sense that we could satisfy the extensional requirement, we would still not have identified the dispositional predicate with the meaning predicate because they are of different types (Boghossian [1989a] 532).

Overall, Kripke claims that the dispositional account cannot give correctness conditions. Dispositional facts do not amount to meaning facts because the attribution of a disposition, however well specified, does not imply facts about correct use. Kripke's claim here is reminiscent of Hume's point that one cannot derive an 'ought' from an 'is'. Nevertheless, such facts might be implied by the attribution of an extension. "To be told that 'horse' means horse implies that a speaker ought to be motivated to apply the expression only to horses..." (Boghossian [1989a] 533). Given this, a sophisticated dispositional account must fulfill two criteria to succeed. It must specify property *M* without presupposing any intentional or semantic content, and it must show how the possession of an *M*-disposition amounts to a correctness condition (Boghossian [1989a] 533). According to Boghossian, there are two ways to give an account of property *M*: the communitarian account and the optimality condition account.

The communitarian approach claims that "*M* is the property of agreeing with the actual dispositions of the community" (Boghossian [1989a] 535). This is problematic, as we should not want to confuse communal assent and truth. We want to say that 'horse' means horses and that my dispositions to apply 'horse' to things other than horses are mistakes (Boghossian [1989a] 535). The communitarian account states that the correct dispositions are the ones that agree with the community's. Boghossian points out that the community will also have dispositions to make mistakes. It will apply the term 'horse' to things that are not horses in the same type of conditions in which I would make such a mistake. This is because some of the mistakes we make occur systematically, given certain circumstances, and this allows us to generalize the phenomena and justifies the claim that others, like me, would make the same mistakes in similar circumstances (Boghossian [1989a] 536).

Given this, systematically mistaken dispositions should also be present at the communitarian level. However, the communitarian account cannot call them mistakes, as they are the dispositions of the community. The communitarian must hold that ‘horse’ applies to horses and to other things (Boghossian [1989a] 536). Under the communitarian account, none of our concepts has the extension we take them to have. We are still lacking the characterization of property *M*, since we must be able to tell which of the community’s dispositions are meaning-determining (Boghossian [1989a] 536). Boghossian argues that nothing should entice us to define *M* over the community’s dispositions. If we could do it at that level, we could also do it for the individual’s dispositions (Boghossian [1989a] 536).

The alternative is to define property *M* by appealing to a naturally specifiable set of optimality conditions. These are given by the set of circumstances in which a person is incapable of mistaken judgements (Boghossian [1989a] 537). The strategy is to equate what the person means by an expression with “the properties they are disposed to apply the expression to, under optimal conditions” (Boghossian [1989a] 537).

A major difficulty for the dispositional account of meaning, an approach based on optimality conditions, is that beliefs are fixed holistically. A person may believe *There is a magpie* in the presence of a falcon, because of his other beliefs (Boghossian [1989a] 539).

For instance, he may hold any of the following beliefs:

- this (falcon) is what a magpie looks like
- the only birds in this area are magpies
- whatever my friend Jay says is right, and Jay says that this (falcon) is a magpie

(Boghossian [1989a] 539-540).

Boghossian argues that specifying the conditions under which a person would be disposed to apply the term ‘magpie’ only to magpies is problematic because beliefs are fixed holistically. Depending on the background beliefs, a person can be disposed to apply the term to indefinitely many things other than magpies (Boghossian [1989a] 540). In light of this, specifying optimality conditions for a term implies the specification of a situation where all beliefs that could dispose a person to misapply the term are absent (Boghossian [1989a] 540). As there may be infinitely many such background beliefs, a naturalistic specification of optimality conditions must be a naturalistic specification of a situation in which none of these numerous background beliefs are present. However, to specify this situation, we need “a set of naturalistically necessary and sufficient conditions for being a belief with a certain content” and this is what the dispositional account of meaning was trying to provide (Boghossian [1989a] 540). We would clearly not need the dispositional account of meaning if we had this. Therefore, and for all these reasons, the dispositional account of meaning does not seem a likely position from which to answer the sceptical challenge.

D) Mental history

Can we answer the sceptic by appealing to facets of our mental history? Some believe all that is required to determine the use of the word ‘green’ is a mental image or a sample of green I can bring to mind when I apply the word in the future. This justification of the use of ‘green’ for new objects falls prey to the sceptic following Goodman’s strategy. Perhaps by ‘green’ in the past I really meant *grue*, where something is grue if and only if it is green before time *t* and blue at or after time *t*. In this way, the sceptic can claim that my

colour image reference directed me to grue objects rather than green objects (Kripke [1982] 20).

The problem, here, can seem epistemological. However, the question is not merely how I or anyone else can know what I meant, because the sceptic claims that everything in my mental history is compatible with my meaning quus by 'plus'. This means that there was no fact about my mental history that determines what I meant.

The key consideration for Kripke is that having a particular image before one's mind is evidently neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to understand what is meant by a term. It is not a necessary condition, since we can plausibly conceive of someone understanding a term without considering a mental image (Miller [2002] 6). In fact, it is true of many of us that we regularly do so without considering such mental images. Further, it is not a sufficient condition, since having a mental image before the mind cannot determine by itself the correct use of a term as they need to be interpreted (Miller [2002] 6). Mental images, therefore, cannot be the sort of facts that determine meaning.

Another possible solution based on mental history is to claim that one's meaning addition by "plus" consists in having some irreducible mental state, "a primitive state [...] of a unique kind of its own" (Kripke [1982] 51). An advocate of this answer would claim that the apparent impossibility of finding the sort of facts the sceptic's challenge demands may be due to the particular character of this type of experience. It is as unique and irreducible as sensing yellow or feeling pain (Kripke [1982] 41).

The fact that I mean addition by 'plus' is identified, on this view, with the possession of a qualitative experience of the same kind as feeling pain or sensing yellow. We know we mean addition by 'plus' "by attending to the 'qualitative' character of our own experiences"

(Kripke [1982] 41). Kripke thinks this theory is unsatisfactory as an answer to the sceptic's challenge, since the sceptic wants to know why I would be justified in answering '125' when prompted with '67+58'. If this is the first time I ever think about this addition problem, a non-standard interpretation of '+' should then be compatible with all the irreducible states I have had to date (Kripke [1982] 41).

Kripke argues that even if we were to suppose that someone has a unique introspective experience each time he or she thinks of the sign '+', this experience can't tell the person to answer '125' or '5' when asked for the sum of '68+57'. If the person claims that the introspective experience tells her to answer '125', would there be anything in this experience to refute the sceptic's claim that she should have answered '5'? Kripke argues against this view by reflecting on what happens when a child learns to add. For suppose that there is a particular "Eureka!" moment in the child's education when he grasps the rudiments of the addition function. Whatever constitutes this experience, how different would it be from grasping the 'quaddition' function?

The major problem with Kripke's treatment of this view, as I will try to show in the next chapter, is that he misconstrues it. The account of ascribing meaning to expression of public language is more complex than Kripke makes it out to be. It does not amount to the claim that there is a mental state for each expression. While proponents of this view do not deny that there is much of interest in the relation between linguistic and mental content, they deny that it is worthwhile to investigate the reduction of "mental state properties to physical/functional properties" (Boghossian [1989a] 541). The crude picture Kripke presents us is not the only option available. For instance, we could adopt a token-identity theory that claims that there exists a physical state for each mental state, without seeking a

reduction of mental states to physical states, while maintaining the importance of the mental in causal relationships. In short, we do not have to adopt Humean empiricism to involve aspects of our mental life in determining meaning.

Kripke also rejects this type of solution because he believes intentions possess a mysterious character. In short, he questions the possibility that “a finite object contained in our finite minds”, such as intentions, could have the potential to determine the correct use of a term for indefinitely many circumstances. Boghossian argues that this only states the obvious: we find the idea of contentful states problematic. This does not tell us why we should not accept intentions as part of our solution. It does stress, however, that any potential solution to the sceptical challenge should address the issue of how a finite mental state can tell us how a term is to be used in indefinitely many circumstances. This issue will have to be addressed in the following chapters if we are to propose a satisfactory answer to Kripke’s sceptic.

Chapter II – Wright and Meaning Scepticism

This chapter will examine Crispin Wright's answer to Kripke's sceptical problem. I will begin by presenting Wright's characterization of the problem and the reasons that compel us to focus our attention on first-person authority in order to answer the sceptic. In order to give an account of Wright's solution, I will first explain his anti-realism for a given area of discourse. Applying these considerations to semantics gives us Wright's account of meaning. I will finally evaluate Wright's solution to the sceptical problem against the criteria of the three problems: the *finiteness problem*, the *normativity problem* and the *error problem*.

I – Wright's Approach to the Problem

Wright's strategy to solve the sceptical problem is to argue that the sceptic's demand for outside justification is not reasonable in the case of meaning. He considers a challenge directed at perceptual knowledge that follows Kripke's sceptical method. In this challenge, the sceptic questions a person's report of a former perception such as "Yesterday, I saw it was snowing." Wright lets the sceptic have the same ground rules as Kripke's sceptic allows. Therefore, the sceptic accepts appeals to any facts as long as knowledge of former perceptions is not presupposed by such appeals (Wright [1984] 774). This limits the available facts to "my present *seeming-memories*, presently available testimony of others, presently available putative traces [...] and meteorological office and newspaper records" (Wright [1984] 774). Wright argues that since the sceptic should be able to account for all these facts while denying the claim about the perception of yesterday's weather, there is then

no fact of the matter about what that person formerly perceived (Wright [1984] 774).

However, this argument, as Wright explains, could also work in the future when “now” becomes “then”; therefore there is no fact of the matter about what I presently perceive and so there is no perceptual knowledge⁵ (Wright [1984] 774).

Wright thinks that this absurd conclusion is possible only because the sceptic assumes that knowledge of a former perception must be inferential. We must derive what the perception is from certain facts. If we do not grant this, the sceptical challenge can be answered by non-inferential recall of the perception – in other words, by invoking perceptions themselves, or in the case of yesterday’s weather our memories of perceptions. The way to answer the sceptical challenge is not to find a fact from which we can derive perceptual knowledge: the sceptical problem shows no such facts are available. The sceptic’s claim can be acknowledged and perceptual knowledge can be vindicated by appeal to non-inferential perceptual knowledge. We know about perceptions directly, without inference. Wright thinks that the same is true of knowledge of meaning. The sceptic demands the recollection of a fact from which the meaning of a term may be derived. Wright argues that this is a reasonable demand “only if knowledge of a present meaning has to be inferential: otherwise the sceptic is satisfactorily answered simply by recalling what one formerly meant” (Wright [1984] 774).

Wright objects to the methodology of the sceptical argument since it assumes, but does not demonstrate, that knowledge of meaning must be derived inferentially from knowledge of certain facts. The sceptic is aware that the speaker would claim that by ‘plus’ she means addition, but demands an argument for that claim. So right from the start, the

⁵ Wright is using perceptual knowledge in the sense of knowledge about one’s perceptions, rather than knowledge about the external world gained through our perceptions, as the term might indicate.

idea that the speaker would have non-inferential knowledge of her meanings is ruled out. However, Wright is aware of the difficulties involved in claiming that knowledge of meanings is non-inferential. This is at the root of Wright's characterization of the Wittgensteinian paradox as being, as Edwards puts it, "a problem about the epistemology and ontology of our self-ascription of intentional states in general" (Edwards [1992] 21). If we can show that we can know our intentions without appeal to the sort of facts the sceptic demands, we can answer the challenge. At first approximation, Wright's solution is that I meant addition by 'plus' because that is what I intended.

Kripke was perplexed about the mysterious character of intentions, in that they are finite states that must account for indefinitely many actions to be realized. According to Wright, a solution to the sceptical challenge must account for two features of intentions. The first is the *epistemic authority* one has towards one's own intentions: a person has non-inferential knowledge of his intentions and we can attribute a certain authority to his sincere avowals of his own intentional states. The other characteristic of intentions is their *indefinite fecundity*. This refers to the possibly infinite number of different responses that must be made in indefinitely many circumstances in order for the intention to be fulfilled. There is an obvious tension between epistemic authority and indefinite fecundity since a subject who at one time avows that he has a certain intention cannot know at that time the potentially infinite number of responses he may be called to make in order to fulfill this intention. Wright's goal is to give an account of first person authority that solves this tension without depriving intentions of their indefinite fecundity.

From the rule-following consideration, Wright takes the lesson that it is unreasonable to claim that "judgements about the requirements of a rule on a particular occasion [...]"

answer to states of affairs constituted altogether independently of our inclination to make those judgements” (Wright [1989] 246). In other words, we should not play the sceptic’s game and seek a fact, constituted independently of our judgements concerning these facts, from which to derive meaning.

Wright’s solution is that there is a “constitutive and a priori link” between a person’s judgement that he has a certain intention and the intention the person has. Wright argues that our intentions are like the secondary properties of an object, such as colours (Wright [1989] 246). Before going into his judgement-dependent account of meaning, I propose a look at judgement-dependence in general.

II – Response-Dependence and Truth

Wright develops his notion of judgement-dependence in the context of his discussion of the debate between realism and anti-realism. One of Wright’s aims in *Truth and Objectivity* is to preserve the significance of the distinction between realism and anti-realism. He achieves this by proposing reformulations of both the terms and of the nature of the debate.

Wright proposes a pre-theoretical way of understanding realism about an area of discourse as a mix of *modesty* and *presumption*. Modesty, here, is the notion that our thoughts and the world are independent, that is our thoughts do not constitute reality (Wright [1992] 1-2). Presumption is the idea that we can know truths about the world when we are in the right conditions regardless of whether there is such an independence (Wright [1992] 1-2).

Wright explains that modesty and presumption in any area of discourse can each be subject to specific kinds of attacks. A sceptical challenge addresses presumption when it questions the adequacy of our capacity to know in a certain area of discourse (Wright [1992] 2). Such a challenge to moral knowledge would not challenge the existence of moral qualities, but would claim that our capacities to know them are limited or non-existent. An idealistic attack on an area of discourse questions the independence of the subject matter from our thoughts (Wright [1992] 3). If successful, the idealistic attack refutes the notion that the area of discourse expresses thoughts that reflect an independently constituted reality (Wright [1992] 3). The idealistic attack is Wright's basic characterization of anti-realism.

Wright proposes a new form of anti-realism based on these considerations. At its core, this approach will grant that opinions about a given area of discourse are assertoric; the discourse is truth-apt, that is, assertions within this discourse can be true or false. Two questions arise from this characterization. First, we must explain how we can give an anti-realist account of a truth-apt area of discourse (Wright [1992] 12). Second, we must show what is at stake in the debate between realism and anti-realism if both positions can agree that the discourse is truth-apt (Wright [1992] 12). The result Wright seeks is the development of a form of anti-realism that does not leave truth as the exclusive property of realism.

To this end, Wright defends a *minimalist* conception of truth, which is a conception of truth that even an anti-realist would accept. Minimalism states that for a predicate to count as a truth predicate in an area of discourse it must meet the *minimum platitudes* about truth, such as the platitude that asserting a statement is presenting it as true; that 'P' is true if and only if P (the disquotational schema); that truth-apt statements have negations that are

also truth-apt; that for something to be true it must correspond to the facts⁶; that truth differs from justification; etc. (Wright [2003] 4).

This allows Wright to claim that truth is not necessarily uniform across all areas of discourse, as different predicates could meet the minimum requirements. The truth predicates will differ in terms of the kinds of circumstances that constitute their application. Wright argues that it is these differences that can give content to a realist/anti-realist debate (Wright [2003] 6). He believes that an argument for a realist or anti-realist inclination for an area of discourse should be based on the characteristics of the ‘local’ truth predicate (Wright [2003] 6).

To help determine these characteristics, Wright proposes the concept of *superassertibility*. According to Wright, a superassertible statement is such that a presently accessible state of information “justifies its assertion, and will continue to do so no matter how enlarged upon or improved” (Wright [2003] 6). Superassertibility will satisfy the minimum platitudes about truth in any area of discourse in which we conceive that truth is knowable in principle (Wright [2003] 6). The debate between realism and anti-realism in a given area of discourse turns on whether or not truth, in it, can be identified with superassertibility. The anti-realist claims that it can. The realist must develop his view by showing that truth may diverge from superassertibility. There are two ways the realist can challenge the identity of truth with superassertibility.

The first way, according to Wright, is to show a potential difference in the extension of the two notions. That is that truth potentially outruns superassertibility: some truths are not superassertible (Wright [2003] 7). For instance, a realist might argue that statements

⁶ This is not the correspondence theory of truth, but merely a *platitude* that states that for something to be true, it must, at a minimum, accord with facts.

about black holes are not superassertible due to the lack of empirical evidence and yet are true or false. The other way is to accept that the extension of the truth predicate coincides with that of superassertibility and to argue that superassertibility does not explain the truth predicate. In other words, this approach denies that statements are true *because* they are superassertible, though all true statements are superassertible. Rather, the realist would argue that the truth of superassertible statements provides the explanatory ground, together with other facts, of their superassertibility: this is what Wright has called the Euthyphro contrast.

In their debate, Socrates and Euthyphro hold the following bi-conditional: “for any act x : x is pious if and only if it is loved by the gods” (Wright [1992] 108). Wright characterizes the disagreement between them by claiming that Socrates accorded explanatory priority to the left-hand side whereas Euthyphro privileged the right-hand side. In other words, Socrates held that the piety of an act is independent of its being loved by the gods, whereas Euthyphro held that what makes an act pious is that it is loved by the gods. Wright casts Socrates in the role of the realist about piety. Certain acts have the property of piety independently of anyone’s attitudes to them, and the fact that the gods love those acts has no bearing on their piety. Wright’s Euthyphro, on the other hand, denies the existence of a piety property that is independent of the gods’ judgements. The gods’ love of an act is what its piety consists in.

The intuitive distinction between primary and secondary qualities may help us understand this distinction. Wright explains the distinction between primary and secondary properties in terms of the relation between judgements made in “cognitively ideal conditions of both judge and circumstances” (i.e. best judgements) and the concept’s extension (Wright

[1989] 246). For secondary qualities, such as colours, Wright claims that best judgements *determine* the extension of the concept, but in the case of primary qualities, such as squareness, best judgements only *track* or *reflect* the extension of the concept (Wright [1989] 246). This means that Wright has a Socratic reading of the bi-conditional for primary qualities, while he follows Euthyphro's reading for secondary qualities.

Wright claims that judgements of secondary qualities fail the theoretical 'order-of-determination-test' (Wright [1989] 246). This test examines the relation between best judgements and truth. In a judgement that passes the test, truth is "a standard constituted independently" of our opinions, whereas in a judgement that fails the test, "truth is constitutively what we judge to be true when we operate under cognitively ideal conditions" (Wright [1989] 246). In other words, when a judgement fails the test, we have an anti-realist account of the domain to which the judgement belongs, and truth is thus characterized as superassertibility in this domain. The order-of-determination test allows us to draw the above distinction between extension-determining judgements and extension-reflecting judgements. This distinction is brought out in the following equations:

$$(1) Cxy \rightarrow (y \text{ looks red to } x \leftrightarrow y \text{ is red})$$

$$(2) Cxy \rightarrow (y \text{ looks square to } x \leftrightarrow y \text{ is square})$$

In these equations, C-conditions are optimal conditions including judger and environment.⁷

The first one reads: If optimal conditions C obtain, then objects *y* looks red to person *x* if and only if *y* is red. According to an anti-realist rendering of (1), the red property is determined by a knower's best judgements, just as the gods' judgements determine which acts have the piety property according to Euthyphro.

⁷ Schema (1), (2) and (3)-(6) to come are taken from Edwards' (1992) presentation. I find they work very well at showing Wright's distinction between extension-determining and extension-reflecting.

Wright argues that the C-conditions cannot be defined as whatever it takes for the observer *x* to judge that a certain object *y* has the property in question; otherwise (1) and (2) become trivially necessary or tautological (Wright [1989] 247). Where the judgement of colours is concerned, the C-conditions would include “normal visual equipment” and good lighting (Wright [1989] 247).

Wright argues that the C-conditions must also be logically independent of the extension of the colour concepts. If this were not the case, we could not establish whether best judgements do in fact determine the extension of the concept since the presence of the C-conditions would imply “some anterior constitution of colour facts” (Wright [1989] 248). According to Wright, (1) is *a priori*, and his suggestion is that the best explanation we can muster of the *a priori* of (1) is that in C-conditions, the judgements of the observer determine the extension of the concept red (Wright [1989] 248). The truth of (2), on the other hand, is *a posteriori*, given a non-trivial definition of the C-conditions. For a thing to be square certain conditions must be met (such as its having four sides) which are independent of our judgements. To understand this, compare what must be included in the C-conditions to make (1) *a priori* true with what must be included to make (2) *a priori* true. In (2), it seems impossible to specify the C-condition without referring to the concept of squareness, whereas there seems to be no similar obstacle, in principle, for secondary properties.

For Wright, this implies that colour judgements are a mix of subjective and objective. We should not take them as responding “to states of affairs which are constituted independently of our best opinions about colours” and yet there is a fact of the matter about

the object's real colour (Wright [1989] 249). It is precisely this sort of mix that he thinks will serve to explain the notion of intention.

III – Judgement-Dependence and Meaning

Wright wants to show that the self-ascription of intentions fails the order-of-determination test and hence that a subject's best judgements determine rather than reflect facts about the subject's intentional states (Wright [1989] 250). This is tantamount to saying that best judgements are not only linked to the intentional states they are about, they are *constitutive* of those states. Wright suggests we adopt the anti-realism discussed above when it comes to self-knowledge of intentional states. This means that the truth predicate of self-ascriptions of intentional states will be superassertibility. Since meaning is fixed by intentions, we also have a form of semantic anti-realism.

This form of semantic anti-realism is quite different from what Kripke's meaning sceptic leaves us with at the end of his argument. The sceptic's semantic anti-realism is a form of non-factualism that denies that meaning ascriptions are truth-apt. Wright obviously has a different conception of what counts as an 'anti-realist' point of view about meaning: in his solution, meaning ascription are truth-apt, but truth in this context is superassertibility.

One major virtue of this view, according to Wright, is that it accounts for first-person authority: a person's non-inferential knowledge of his intentions and the authority given his sincere avowals of his intentional states⁸. This is a major part of his answer to the sceptic. A person meant addition by '+' in the past, because that is how he intended to use the term. The sceptic's demand for justification is placated, since we can account for first person non-

⁸ I will challenge this claim in the following pages, but at this stage, my goal is merely expository.

inferential knowledge. However, Wright still has to account for the tension we described earlier between epistemic authority and indefinite fecundity. This is equivalent to solving a variation on the *finiteness* problem⁹ outlined in chapter one. To this end, Wright claims that any future best judgement about my intention is also extension-determining. Wright considers the following equations to be a priori and constitutive of the notion of intention if the C-conditions are specified correctly:

$$(3) \quad Cx \rightarrow (x \text{ believes } x \text{ intends } P \leftrightarrow x \text{ intends } P)$$

$$(4) \quad Cx \rightarrow (x \text{ believes } x \text{ intended } P \leftrightarrow x \text{ intended } P).$$

It is worth noting that this solution is free of the *normativity* problem. We have no reason to doubt that if one side of the bi-conditional is normative, so should be the other: there is no passage from the descriptive to the normative as was the case with dispositionalism. It is not the case that we infer an 'ought' from an 'is'.

Wright argues that sincere avowals of intentions are extension-determining because they are nothing but sincere expression of beliefs. Therefore, the following equations are correct:

$$(5) \quad C'x \rightarrow (x \text{ sincerely avows } x \text{ intends } P \leftrightarrow x \text{ intends } P)$$

$$(6) \quad C'x \rightarrow (x \text{ sincerely avows } x \text{ intended } P \leftrightarrow x \text{ intended } P).$$

The C'-conditions are stronger than the C-conditions because they must specify the ability and desire of the subject to express himself. We could easily think of cases where a subject may not be disposed to avow to anything. For instance, the captured officer would not avow his intention to escape. We must also account for those who cannot express themselves, because either they lack a language⁹ or they have suffered a certain physical trauma that

⁹ For dispositionalism, the finiteness problem posed itself because some numbers were deemed too large for us to have any dispositions towards them.

makes conversation impossible. These cases do not pose any serious difficulty for Wright as we can substantially stipulate C'-conditions that would account for them.

There are more problematic cases that Wright must address: cases of self-deception. It seems possible that subjects in optimal conditions can still lack the epistemic authority the equations (3)-(6) claim they have towards their intentions. He has to account for self-deceived subjects' inability to judge which intentions they have. That is, the subjects can fool themselves into thinking a certain intention had been formed when it was not, or by their sheer inability to focus on the intentions that actually motivated the actions (Wright [1989] 250-251).

Wright's difficulty here is that there seems to be no way of including provisions in the C- or C'-conditions to account for self-deception without trivializing the equations (3) to (6). This is because it seems that the only way to guarantee the absence of self-deception is to invoke the knowledge of one's intentions or define optimality so loosely that the C-conditions become trivial. Wright's solution is the introduction of *positive-presumptiveness*, by which he means that it is correct to assume that a subject is not self-deceived, unless there is "determinate evidence to the contrary" (Wright [1989] 252). This renders the equation a priori *credible* instead of a priori true. This means that the best judgements "formed under a restricted set of C-conditions, play a defeasible extension-determining role, with defeat conditional on the emergence of evidence that one or more of the background, positive-presumptive, conditions are not in fact met" (Wright [1989] 252).

Overall, Wright's view gives a plausible account of first-person epistemic authority, but it does not answer Kripke's sceptic. In short, this solution is vulnerable to a variation of the *error problem* presented in chapter one. For this approach to succeed we require an

account of what kind of facts could override the best judgements of a person. Wright has shown why he holds that best-judgements defeasibly determine the extension of the intentions they are about, but he has not explained what sort of evidence would suffice to show someone to be self-deceived. I think that these facts should come from a neutral observer, as it is unlikely that we could elaborate a non-question begging account from the subject's point of view.

Boghossian exposes another problem with Wright's view. He argues for the primacy of judgement-independent facts over judgement-dependent facts in the case of mental content. He claims that the left-hand side of bi-conditionals such as (3) and (4) presuppose, in the case of mental content, an independently constituted mental content. Specifically, it presupposes that "the content of the judgements [that fixes] the facts about the mental content" must be included (Boghossian [1989a] 547). Recall Wright's equation: $Cx \rightarrow (x \text{ believes } x \text{ intends } P \leftrightarrow x \text{ intends } P)$. If a subject x is in optimal conditions C , x believes that x intends that p if and only if x intends that p . The problem Boghossian sees is that this equation cannot determine mental content, since another judgement will be required to fix the meaning of the left-hand side of the bi-conditional, and so on infinitely. To stop the regress we must appeal to facts constituted independently of our best judgements. This undermines the judgement-dependent account of meaning since conception by best judgements will then presuppose a judgement-independent conception of meaning.

Mark Johnston has proposed an answer to this objection, but it requires a reformulation of Wright. Johnston argues that Wright's distinction between concepts whose extension is determined by best judgements and those whose extension are reflected in best judgements depends on Wright's concept of order of determination (Johnston [1993] 124).

He claims that the extension of a proposition P can be determined by a person's belief that P, under certain circumstances, only if the belief that P has an extension associated with it. If it does not, then the belief that P will be contentless and "will not constrain anything at all" (Johnston [1993] 124).

Johnston's solution is to say that the proposition P and the judgement about P have their extension determined together and to forego talk of an order of determination (Johnston [1993] 124). Johnston maintains the idea of extension-determining judgements, but only by saying that there is "an a priori connection between a concept F and the concept of our best judgements about which things are F, evidencing a certain kind of interdependence between the concepts in question" (Johnston [1993] 125). The determination of both concepts is simultaneous. As Johnston notes, this interdependence that goes against the idea of the order of determination nullifies Wright's requirement that a concept be absent from the C-conditions of the best judgements about the application of this concept (Johnston [1993] 125). This changes Wright's idea of judgement-dependence, but it does allow the view to survive Boghossian's criticism.

Boghossian's criticism does not go through in the case of a judgement-interdependent account of meaning. Boghossian argued that Wright's view of mental content as being constituted by best judgements about mental content presupposed facts about mental content that were constituted independently of these judgements. Johnston's reading of Wright changes the requirements on the C-conditions by refusing the idea of order of determination. Since the judgement and the proposition it is about have their content determined together, there is no room for the infinite regress at the root of Boghossian's objection.

Even granting Johnston's improvements the view faces serious objections. This is because Johnston's reformulation of Wright seems to make the view a form of meaning solipsism. There is interdependence between my intentions and my best judgements about my intentions. All of this remains within my own intentional sphere, and it is unclear how I can communicate my mental content to others or how others can share my intentional content. If this is the case, there is serious doubt Wright's approach can account for the publicity of meaning and content, i.e. the fact that we can share thoughts.

Wright leaves us with the view that my best judgements defeasibly determine my intentions to mean such and such by a particular term. However, we need to explain on what basis someone can challenge my best judgements and what makes it the case that I am wrong when my best judgement is wrong. One thing we can learn from Wright is that we need an account of first person authority that has a foundation in third person judgements. It is only by appealing to the third person that we can rid ourselves of the problem of self-deception. We also need to explain how we can communicate our mental content to others. In my view, we can answer these questions by looking at Davidson's account of radical interpretation.

Chapter III – Davidson and Meaning Scepticism

The aim of this chapter is to propose an answer to the sceptical challenge following Wright's approach. However, I will supplement his account of first-person authority with that of Donald Davidson. The advantage of adopting Davidson's system is that his account of first-person authority avoids the error problem. He relies on the interdependence between self-knowledge, knowledge of the external world and knowledge of other minds and claims that this interdependence is a necessary feature of linguistic communication. From his analysis of the conditions of the possibility of linguistic communication, Davidson explains first-person authority. I will argue Davidson is not subject to the error problem. I will first outline what exactly we can keep from Wright's approach. Afterwards, I will explain how Davidson establishes first-person authority on the basis of radical interpretation and propose a Davidsonian answer to the sceptical challenge. To conclude, I will examine the status of meaning under such an account.

I – What Can We Use From Wright?

In the previous chapter, we saw that Wright's proposed solution to the sceptical challenge succumbs to a variant of the error problem. The source of Wright's difficulty is that the third person is introduced too late in his account of first-person authority. We have seen that Wright takes first-person judgements of intentions under optimal conditions as constitutive of intentions. Facts about what I believe (or intend) are dependent on my judgements about what I believe (intend). Unfortunately, Wright found that he could not specify, in the C-conditions, provisions that guard against self-deception.

He claimed that self-ascriptions of intentions defeasibly determine the extension of the intentions about which they are. He called this positive-presumptiveness, which claims that it is correct to assume that a subject is not self-deceived unless there is determinate evidence to the contrary. There are two reasons I find this answer unsatisfactory, and these are why I believe this approach to the sceptical problem fails.

First, what sort of evidence can override best judgements? Second, who judges that there is determinate evidence that a person is self-deceived and that his judgements are not extension determining? I believe that these two questions emphasize the same difficulty. Wright's account of first person authority is entirely based on a subjective approach and the third person is introduced late in the account to provide a means of solving the problem of self-deception. However, we are not told precisely how this is to function, nor do we know how a third-person judgement can override a first-person ascription of an intention.

A concrete example may illustrate the difficulty: in optimal conditions, I sincerely avow that I believe that it's raining. From Wright's account, we are told that my belief that it is raining is determined by my avowal of that belief, unless I suffer from self-deception. If I could know when I am self-deceived, the problem would dissipate somewhat. However, if I can know when I am self-deceived, then we do not have a true case of self-deception. Clearly another person needs to indicate when I am self-deceived as I cannot be trusted to judge accurately. Equally clear is the need to explain how another person can pretend, in some cases, to a greater authority than mine over my own thoughts.

The aim of this chapter is to pursue a solution to the sceptical problem retaining some key aspects of Wright's characterization as presented in chapter two. On this view, a solution to the Wittgensteinian paradox requires first an account of a subject's non-inferential

knowledge of his own intentions. Second, it also requires an explanation of the indefinite fecundity of intentions: what Kripke called their “mysterious character.” I will present, below, an account of first person authority that is based on a third person intersubjective approach. This will solve some of the problems with Wright’s view, while following what I take to be valuable in it.

This account is taken from the works of Donald Davidson. In order to present it, I must first discuss his views on radical interpretation. I will then formulate an answer to the sceptical challenge on this basis.

II – Radical Interpretation and First-Person Authority

We generally assume that a speaker who sincerely avows that he has a certain belief, desire or intention is correct. However, we usually make no such assumption when he ascribes a belief, desire or intention to another. Davidson argues that this asymmetry is at the core of the traditional scepticism regarding knowledge of other minds. To solve the problem is to explain the asymmetry.

Davidson thinks that the first step towards a solution is to determine the objects over which the first person has authority. He believes that first person authority needs to be about sentences and utterances and not propositions or meaning. He thinks this is the only way to explain the asymmetry without simply restating it at another level (Davidson [1984] 107-108). Indeed, if we say that the source of the subject’s authority towards his own thoughts rests in his privileged access to some entities that determine the content of his thoughts, we have not explained the asymmetry between first-person ascription and other-ascription as it now surfaces at this level: what are these entities and how do we know them?

Davidson identifies two forms of the asymmetry. The first is the one that obtains between self-ascription and other-ascription of a propositional attitude to the same person, e.g. my claim that I believe Mozart composed *The Magic Flute* and your claim that I believe that Mozart composed *The Magic Flute* (Davidson [1984] 109). When I say that I believe that Mozart composed *The Magic Flute*, I am usually accorded a certain authority: it is assumed that I know what I believe. This kind of authority is absent when Joe ascribes a belief to me. If he were to say: "Sylvain believes that the earth is flat," one might ask him to verify the claim, perhaps by asking me to confirm or deny the allegation. The second form of the asymmetry obtains between my warrant for thinking I have said something true, when I uttered "Mozart composed *The Magic Flute*", and your warrant for thinking that I have said something true (Davidson [1984] 109). These will often be different. While Joe needs evidence, in the form of observable speech behaviour, from which to infer that I believe that the earth is round, I typically require no such evidence to self-ascribe the belief – one can be surprised by one's behaviour so that one then says "I had no idea I felt that way about X". Davidson is concerned with the second form of the asymmetry.

According to Davidson, to have communication, there must be a way for a speaker and an interpreter to "share in an understanding of what the speaker means by what he says" (Davidson [1991a] 210). Davidson thinks that looking at what any competent interpreter does to come to understand a speaker of an alien tongue shows us how this is possible.

To assign meaning to the utterances of the speaker, the interpreter assigns each of the speaker's sentences to one of his own in such a way that "the interpreter's sentences provide the truth conditions of the speaker's sentences, and hence supply the basis for the interpretation of the speaker's utterances" (Davidson [1991a] 210).

The interpreter does not have direct access to the speaker's beliefs, desires, and intentions (including the ones that may play a role in determining the meaning of his utterances); yet the interpreter can know what a person thinks through the outward manifestation of these attitudes because the interpreter can detect certain non-individuating attitudes (Davidson [1991a] 210). That is to say we can tell when someone is "holding a sentence true at a time, wanting a sentence to be true, or preferring that one sentence rather than another be true" without prior knowledge of the content of these propositional attitudes (Davidson [1991a] 211).

To simplify this presentation, I will concern myself only with the sentences that the speaker holds true in observable circumstances. When a speaker assents to a sentence, he does so because of both his beliefs and what the sentence means. From an interpretation of a speaker's sentences and knowledge of which sentences he holds true, we have knowledge of his beliefs (Davidson [1991a] 211). To this end, Davidson argues that two principles are required. The *principle of coherence*: "prompts the interpreter to discover a degree of logical consistency in the thought of the speaker" (Davidson [1991a] 211). The *principle of correspondence*: "prompts the interpreter to take the speaker to be responding to the same features of the world that he (the interpreter) would be responding to under similar circumstances" (Davidson [1991a] 211).

These are the two versions of Davidson's principle of charity: they endow the speaker with a minimum of logical coherence and a large number of what the interpreter takes to be true beliefs about the world. The principle of charity does not imply that we must interpret a speaker in such a way as to make all of his or her beliefs true. What Davidson proposes is that the principle be applied to the whole of the speaker's beliefs. We can easily

think of examples where it would be far better to attribute a false belief rather than to produce bizarre inconsistencies among the speaker's beliefs. According to Davidson, interpretation is the activity that, in accordance with the principle of charity, endows the speaker with coherence, rationality and true beliefs.

Davidson argues that charity is a condition of the possibility of interpretation because to interpret a speaker's language and mind, we must presume that she is generally right: her beliefs are mostly true and she knows what she believes. Any activity that renders the speaker largely incoherent or that makes the majority of her beliefs false cannot be considered interpretation. By its very nature, interpretation guarantees first person authority as it is constitutive of the very notion of an interpretation.

Suppose I uttered "Mozart composed *The Magic Flute*." Davidson argues that anyone who knows that I held this sentence true and who knows what I meant by this utterance at the time it was uttered, will also know what belief I expressed (Davidson [1984] 109). Given this, it must be the case that I know what I believed, while no such thing is true of my interpreter. This is due to the very nature of interpretation. An interpreter can easily misinterpret the utterances of a speaker, but a speaker cannot "wonder if he generally means what he says" (Davidson [1984] 110). If this were the case, the speaker would not be interpretable. The speaker does not need to interpret his own words in the way the interpreter must because he has direct (non-inferential) knowledge of his thoughts. That is not to say that we cannot question a speaker's interpretation of his own words in *particular* cases; however, we cannot do so *globally*. Davidson allows, in this way, for cases of "local" self-deception, that is, deception about what a particular sentence of one's language means, while ruling out the possibility of systematic error. It is an unavoidable feature of

interpretation that a speaker generally knows what he means by his utterances. If he does not, he will not be interpretable (Davidson [1984] 111). First-person authority is built into the constraints of interpretation and as far as a speaker is interpretable, he must have knowledge of his own thoughts.

I would like to discuss the similarities and differences that arise from a comparison of Wright and Davidson on first-person authority. This analysis may present a new way of looking at Davidson's philosophy and perhaps shed light on his thoughts.

Let us first recall Wright's schema from chapter two:

$$(5) \quad C'x \rightarrow (x \text{ sincerely avows } x \text{ intends } P \leftrightarrow x \text{ intends } P)$$

Focussing only on the consequent at this time, the first impression is that Davidson would find little to disagree with. Consider the following example: Joe is the subject of my ongoing attempt at radical interpretation and he believes, among other things, that the earth orbits the sun. After having spent quite a bit of time with Joe, I have interpreted many of his basic beliefs about his immediate environment. The only evidence I can count on to formulate my interpretation of Joe's language are the sentences I take him to hold true in observable circumstances. In doing this I follow the two versions of the principle of charity presented above. In short, I assume Joe is responding to the same features of the world as I am, and I assume, for those sentences I take as evidence of his meaning, that he gets things right. This basic work completed, I move to the more compelling task of working out his cosmology. On a given occasion, while in conversation he utters a sentence I had not previously interpreted. Based on the context and the background of previous interpretation and resulting belief ascription, I interpret his utterance of "I believe the earth is round" as meaning that he believes that earth is round.

From Wright's schema, we are told that if the avowal is sincere, Joe believes the earth is round. According to Davidson, it would also be correct to ascribe this belief to Joe, if the resulting interpretation is holistically optimized. At first glance, then, the schema seems a good way of capturing Davidson's approach. In fact, I think Davidson's radical interpretation may be used as a motivation for holding (5). It is reminiscent of Davidson's model for the normal case of belief ascription which he describes in the following way: "Paul believes what I would believe if I were sincerely to assert what I say next" (Davidson 1991c). This would be followed by an assertion like "It's raining." or "The earth is round."

One point to consider is that the holistic requirement of interpretation must be respected. We cannot ascribe a belief to a speaker simply on the basis of a particular, sincere avowal of a belief. To do so may result in incoherencies, perhaps due to self-deception. It is interesting to note that we have, with Davidson's radical interpretation, the resources needed to account for cases of localized self-deception while the whole of the interpretation endows the speaker with largely true beliefs and rationality. It is worth noting that the principle of charity will allow us to identify local self-deception. Therefore, schema (5) will hold in most of the cases (because the speaker is assumed to have first-person authority) and we will be able to ascribe a belief to a speaker from his sincere avowal of that belief.

III – A Davidsonian Response to the Sceptic

We are now in a position to answer the sceptical problem as presented by Kripke. The strategy to be employed follows the one I described under the heading 'mental history' in chapter one and in the first section of chapter two. Following Wright, it is proposed that we can answer the sceptic by appealing to an irreducible mental state of which the subject

has non-inferential knowledge. The focus of the answer is then twofold. On one hand, we need an account of first-person authority of mental states. On the other, we need to respond to Kripke's objection to these types of states because of their mysterious character.

We have already explored parts of Davidson's account of first-person authority by tracing its origin in his view of radical interpretation. Recall that the first part of Wright's answer to the sceptic consists of blocking the demand for further justification. Asking to prove that a speaker knows that 'plus' means addition is asking a question too many. This is due to a speaker's non-inferential knowledge of his own thoughts. As we have seen, Davidson approves this part of Wright's answer.

However, there are two further problems that must be answered to satisfactorily propose a solution to Kripke's sceptic inspired by Davidson within Wright's characterization. First, as we have noted, Davidson believes that the objects of first-person authority are sentences. Does this hinder the proposed solution? Second, we have seen that meaning for Davidson is the result of interpretation. Yet, the solution claims that certain irreducible states determine the meaning of the subject's words and says that the subject does not know these states by interpretation. Are these two positions reconcilable?

In what follows, I will propose answers to these two questions and I will then respond to Kripke's objection from mysteriousness. Further to this, I will assess this solution to the Wittgensteinian paradox against the criterion of the three problems presented in chapter one: *finiteness, error and normativity*.

A) First person-authority: Triangulation

The proposed solution to the sceptical problem requires that a speaker have non-inferential knowledge of the intentions that play a role in determining the meaning of his or her words. Davidson's account of radical interpretation guarantees that the speaker possesses such first-person authority. However, Davidson claims that the objects of this form of knowledge are sentences. But this is not a serious difficulty for our solution. There are a few reasons why I do not find this as worrisome a problem as it might first seem. Foremost among them is that language and thought in Davidson's work are interdependent and intertwined. After all, sentence meaning and thought content are determined from the same basic evidence and he often claims that we cannot have language without thought.

I believe Davidson's insistence on sentences may be motivated by his rejection of the "inner theatre" view, which claims that propositional attitudes are identified by objects before the mind that one must grasp to attain meaning. This is opposed to the view that an agent has direct, non-inferential knowledge of his own thoughts.¹⁰ The fact that he holds that thought and language are interdependent may also explain why Davidson sometimes talk of sentences, and sometimes of thoughts, as being the object of first-person authority. In "Three Varieties of Knowledge" Davidson argues for the interdependence of knowledge of one's mind, knowledge of other minds and knowledge of the external world. In this paper, the objects of self-knowledge are clearly propositional. It might be beneficial to examine his argument, as I believe it demonstrates Davidson's position on the relation between language and thought.

¹⁰ See "Knowing One's Own Mind" in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*. Toronto: Oxford University Press. 2001. p. 25. See also my discussion of the "museum myth" below (section IV-a).

Davidson argues that we cannot know what a being is responding to without having a second person interacting with this being. There are two problems facing an account that does not include the second person. The first problem lies in locating the stimuli causing the response because there is no fact of the matter about which of the links of the causal chain leading to his utterance counts as the reference of his word, since each can be said to cause his utterance. Davidson presents the problem in this way:

“If we consider a single creature by itself, its responses, no matter how complex, cannot show that it is reacting to, or thinking about, events a certain distance away rather than, say, on its skin. The solipsist’s world can be any size; which is to say, from the solipsist’s point of view it has no size, it is not a world” (Davidson [1992] 263).

The second problem is that a solitary person does not have any norms of correctness. For instance, a solitary person could classify the world by placing together things that are more alike by utilizing the criterion of 'similarity of response'. He or she could treat things believed to be similar in similar ways. However, Davidson argues that the criterion of similarity of response cannot be derived from the person's responses as it can only come from the responses of an observer to the responses of a particular person. A solitary creature cannot distinguish between things *being* the same and things *seeming* to be the same. It is the observer's conscious correlation of the observed person's responses with objects and events in the world that provides a basis for saying that the person is in fact responding to those objects and events instead of some others (Davidson [1991a] 212).

Triangulation, the connection between two creatures and between each creature and common features of the world allows us to solve these two problems. It locates the cause of the response; whether "a creature, in discriminating between stimuli, is discriminating between stimuli at the sensory surfaces or somewhere further out, or further in" (Davidson [1991a] 212). The sharing of reaction to a common stimulus makes it possible to attribute

content to thought and speech. "It takes two points of view to give a location to the cause of a thought, and thus to define its content" (Davidson [1991a] 212). The cause is the *common* cause of the two people's responses.

The two participants in the triangulation are reacting to sensory stimuli from a point of the world and if we were to project "the incoming lines outwards, the common cause [would be] at their intersection" (Davidson [1991a] 213). If the two of them note each other's verbal reactions, they can correlate the observed reactions to the world and a common cause is determined. This is the starting point of giving content to thought and speech according to Davidson.

Second, triangulation gives us the normative aspect of language by providing a basis for comparison and contrast. Contrast between your responses and mine allows for the possibility that I may be wrong. From this contrast, Davidson says we can get concept of norms. Because of this, Davidson claims that there is no sense in which my thoughts can have propositional content without communication¹¹. And this why Davidson claims that knowledge of another mind is required to have thoughts at all, and hence any knowledge whatsoever (Davidson [1991a] 213).

Since knowledge of the world is a necessary part of the triangulation that makes knowledge of another mind possible, the two are interdependent according to Davidson (Davidson [1991a] 213). It follows for Davidson that self-knowledge is impossible without the other two forms of knowledge, that is, knowledge of other minds and knowledge of the external world. But, Davidson argues that we can't attribute thoughts to others without

¹¹ Davidson is not overly clear as to how we can move from successful triangulation to linguistic communication and thoughts. Nor is it clear what sort of responses are contrasted, given that they are pre-linguistic and pre-cognitive. Davidson is not concerned with giving an account of how language and thought evolve, but, rather, he seeks to establish the necessary conditions for language and thought.

knowing what we ourselves think. After all, attributing thoughts to others is matching their sentences to our own meaningful sentences. There is then interdependence between knowledge of other minds, knowledge of the world and self-knowledge (Davidson [1991a] 213).

I think this shows the interdependence that holds between language and thought, as both require communication. Crucial to the proposed solution, it allows a person to have non-inferential knowledge of his intentions, including those concerning the use of his words.

B) Intentions and meaning

The starting point of Davidson's answer to the sceptical problem is essentially the same as Wright's. The sceptic demands that I provide the grounds from which I can claim that I meant addition by 'plus' in past. I answer that I meant addition, because that is what I intended to mean. The sceptic's demand for further justification, or for any facts from which we can derive meaning is not warranted, as I can know, non-inferentially, my own thoughts. This first-person authority is a built-in feature of successful interpretation. As such, it is a requirement for both linguistic communication and thought.

What should be clarified in this section is the role that intentions play in radical interpretation. Intentions are not available as basic or independent evidence to the interpreter, nor are they part of the basic evidence that informs interpretation. What justifies appealing to intentions to answer the sceptic from Davidson's point of view?

Restating Kripke's problem, Davidson wonders how an interpreter can know what language a speaker is using if all the evidence he has are the speaker's past utterances, without knowing "how [the] speaker is going to go on" (Davidson [1992] 110). The answer

is that the interpreter can be confident in his interpretation of a speaker if it passes the test of time. The longer the interpretation holds, the more likely it becomes.

There is a key aspect of a correct interpretation that assures its success, according to Davidson. “An interpreter (correctly) interprets an utterance of a speaker only if he knows that the speaker intends the interpreter to assign certain truth conditions to his (the speaker’s) utterances” (Davidson [1992] 111-112). Davidson claims that intentions are essential to communication and if, as he believes, communication is essential to meaning, then intentions play a role in determining meaning. According to Davidson, by speaking a language we intend to make ourselves interpretable by someone else.

There should be nothing wrong in invoking intentions as part of an answer to the sceptic from a Davidsonian perspective. In fact, Davidson himself suggests it in “The Second Person.” He claims that intentions, by their specific properties, can answer the sceptical challenge (Davidson [1992] 112). Essential to their character, is that a subject can know them non-inferentially. Intentions also have an “indefinitely large scope” that Davidson defines similarly to Wright’s indefinite fecundity: the possibly infinite number of different responses that must be made in indefinitely many circumstances in order for the intention to be fulfilled. These two aspects work as Wright described to form an answer to the sceptic. The affinity with Wright’s thought is not misleading since Davidson makes a direct reference to him in a footnote to these statements. He writes:

“Essentially these points about intention are made by Crispin Wright in attempting like me, to defuse Kripke’s view that he has extracted an essentially insoluble ‘sceptical paradox’ from Wittgenstein’s treatment of meaning” (Davidson [1992] 112).

There are two ways in which this prevents the sceptic from posing his challenge either directly at the speaker or at the level of the interpreter. The speaker can answer by stating his intention to mean addition by 'plus'. Given the authority he has towards his own

thoughts, this should suffice. The sceptic may be tempted to provide a nonstandard interpretation of the speaker's sincere avowal of this intention in order to make the problem resurface. However, the sceptic cannot claim that there is no fact of the matter what function is meant by 'plus' for within the framework of a translation manual there is a fact that dictates a correct interpretation. That the evidence does not fix a unique translation is not equivalent to saying any interpretation is adequate. As we have seen, the principle of charity allows us to reject certain interpretations and, over time, only a few should prove adequate.

C) Davidson and the three problems

Now that I have explained and detailed the proposed solution, I will assess it in light of the three problems: the problems of *finiteness*, *error*, and *normativity*.

The *finiteness* problem in this context can be posed, as Kripke does, regarding the finitude of my intentions. In order to carry out my intention to mean addition by 'plus', there are indefinitely many acts I must perform, most of which were not considered when the intention was first formed. This amounts to answering Kripke's objection from mysteriousness. In short, to know the meaning of a term, do we need to know how to use it in every situation that it can possibly occur in? To intend to mean addition by '+', do I need to have added all numbers? There is an apparent tension in holding that I intend to mean addition by '+' without knowing all that is entailed. Wright sought to solve this tension by arguing that meaning is like a secondary property, such as colour, and as such its determination has less to do with the nature of the world than with our judgements. In the following section, I will suggest that Davidson endorses this view of meaning.

The *error* problem surfaced in Wright's solution from the need to account for self-deception. There are two ways in which Davidson's approach resists this problem. The first is that the holistic application of the principle of charity will not result in an interpretation that renders its subject systematically mistaken: a speaker cannot be globally self-deceived. However, this introduces the possibility of localized self-deception. This is not problematic for Davidson, as we have the resources, within his framework of radical interpretation, to both simplify cases of self-deception and to identify them when they do occur. The nature of communication is such that, for it to succeed, a person must intend to be interpretable. Further, an interpreter must grant the subject of his interpretation with rationality and a number of true beliefs. This has two consequences. First, a speaker will turn out to be authoritative about the content of his own thoughts. Second, a speaker that is self-deceived to the extent that he does not know the meaning of his words will not be interpretable, and will thus not count as a speaker of a language.

The main thrust of the argument from the *normativity* problem against dispositionalism was that this approach could not account for the normative character of meaning. Kripke argued that attempting to obtain that normative aspect from a disposition was essentially equivalent to committing the naturalistic fallacy, since dispositions are merely descriptive.

It seems clear that if I intend to mean addition by 'plus', there are things I ought to do to make good on this intention. Davidson's approach is thus not vulnerable to Kripke's normativity objection. My point is that if meaning is normative, as Kripke claims it is, there is, from my intention to my use, no passage from the descriptive to the normative, but, if anything, everything remains within the intentional, normative sphere. Davidson's account

is normative through and through: the meaning of my words is explained in terms of my intentions, as well as the judgements of an interpreter, and both my intentions and the interpreter's judgements and contentful, and thus normative states. Here, there is no move from merely descriptive facts to meaning norms.

D) Self-deception

We saw that cases of self-deception were problematic for Wright because he could not provide C-conditions that ensured the subject was not self-deceived without making the C-conditions trivial. This is because it seems that the only way to guarantee the absence of self-deception is to invoke the knowledge of one's intentions or define optimality so loosely that the C-conditions become trivial. Wright opts for the view that it is correct to assume that a subject is not self-deceived, unless there is "determinate evidence to the contrary" (Wright [1989] 252). This renders the equation a priori credible instead of a priori true. I argued that this was a serious flaw in Wright's view because, according to his approach, my belief that P is determined by my sincere avowal of that belief, unless I suffer from self-deception. All this seems to indicate that another person needs to intervene to evaluate whether I am self-deceived, as I cannot be trusted to judge this accurately. However, because Wright's approach stems from the first-person, he needs to explain how another person can pretend, in some cases, to a greater authority than mine over my own thoughts. I don't believe his account allows us to explain this, and so I find it unsatisfactory.

The same cannot be said of Davidson's approach from the third-person. Because it is interpretation that gives content to thoughts, the process of belief ascription does not lie entirely with the subject, but rather emerges from the mapping of the interpreter's sentences with those of the speaker. Since interpretation must unfold according to the principle of

charity, it may be, at times, preferable for the interpreter to claim that a speaker is self-deceived -- that is, that the speaker thinks he believes that P, but in fact does not. This would be done to make the resulting interpretation is the most charitable.

The point is not that, following Davidson's view, subjects are never self-deceived, but that given his approach, we have the resources to account and explain self-deception. We explain how, at times, someone may have greater authority over your own thoughts than you may have.

IV – Davidson and the status of meaning

Our solution to the sceptical problem has survived the scrutiny of Kripke's three problems. One point that remains to be settled concerns the status of meaning according to this view. Some may think that Davidson sides with the sceptic because of his endorsement of Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation. Furthermore, given the similarities of their views, it is tempting to characterize Davidson's view as a form of anti-realism *à la* Wright. There seems to be a problem with this latter characterization, though, since Davidson claims that he is a realist about meaning. Which is it: anti-factualist, anti-realist or realist? I will address this question in sections B and C, below; but I must first discuss Davidson's endorsement of indeterminacy, and how it relates to Kripkean anti-factualism.

A) Is Davidson an anti-factualist *à la* Kripke?

Let first take a closer look at the sceptical solution to the Wittgensteinian paradox presented by Kripke. He first draws a distinction between two types of solution to a

sceptical problem. The straight solution answers the sceptic by demonstrating the thesis in doubt. The sceptical solution concedes the impossibility of answering the sceptic's challenge but preserves our ordinary practice by showing that the justification the sceptic shows to be impossible is not required in practice (Kripke [1982] 66). This has the effect of shifting the emphasis of the sceptical problem: it shows that our ordinary practice cannot be defended in a certain way, but is nonetheless legitimate.

Wittgenstein, Kripke argues, proposes a sceptical solution.¹² The solution does not consist in finding a meaning determining fact overlooked by the sceptic. The starting point is agreement with the sceptic: there are no facts, internal or external to the subject, which determine the meaning of his words. Because of this, an accurate account of language will not be one in which a sentence gets its meaning by virtue of its truth conditions as there are no facts that determine the truth-value of sentences such as "John means *addition* by 'plus'." The focus changes from the truth conditions to what Kripke calls the assertability conditions. An account of language must explain how we can be justified in making certain assertions in certain circumstances (Kripke [1982] 74).

The replacement of truth condition with assertability conditions allows Wittgenstein to tackle the problem of meaning in a different way and it also allows him to make sense of meaning assertions. "John means *addition* by 'plus'" has no truth-value, but an investigation of its assertability conditions may prove worthwhile. To legitimize a meaning assertion requires only that "circumstances under which they are legitimately assertable" be specified. A demonstration that this practice has a role in our lives would also be required (Kripke [1982] 77-78).

¹² My purpose here is merely to present Kripke's sceptical solution, in order to later on contrast it with Davidson's. I will thus simply present to main ideas of Kripke's solution, and make no attempt at assessing it.

The sceptical solution hinges on an investigation of the actual circumstances under which attributions of meaning are made and on a clarification of the actual role these attributions play in our lives (Kripke [1982] 86-87). Kripke's first step is to consider the case of a person taken in isolation. Such a person is not troubled by the sceptical problem; he answers unhesitatingly '125' when presented with '68 + 57' and this without wondering if the result should be any different (Kripke [1982] 87). When taken in isolation, a person acts without the possibility of justifying his action. Without justification, but not wrongly for it is part of "our language game of speaking of rules" that one may be inclined to follow his unjustified interpretation of the rule, rather than another (Kripke [1982] 87-88). When a person is taken in isolation, there are no assertability conditions as these are just the inclinations of that person.

This indicates that a person in isolation cannot be said to follow a rule. As the sceptical problem shows, there is no fact about him that determines whether his present usage of a rule accords with his past intentions regarding that rule, and so no one can claim that he has made a mistake, that he is not applying the rule appropriately, as he intended to apply it. Therefore, it does not make much sense to say of a person taken in isolation that he is following a rule (Kripke [1982] 88). This changes when the person is seen as part of a community.

When a community accepts the conditional "if an individual follows such-and-such a rule, he must do so-and-so on a given occasion" it accepts the converse of that conditional (Kripke [1982] 108). Because of this, if the individual does not act in such a way, the community of the speaker judges that he is not following the rule. This commits the community to judge a speaker as no longer following the correct rule for addition if this

speaker starts exhibiting quus-like behaviour (Kripke [1982] 95). Conversely, the speaker that passes enough tests is accepted by the community as a rule follower and the relevant concept is attributed to him. This acceptance allows the person to engage the community in certain types of interaction that require such an acceptance (Kripke [1982] 109).

The sceptical solution specifies circumstances under which meaning attributions are legitimate and it shows this practice has an important role in our lives; it allows us to participate in the community of speakers. This conclusion to the Wittgensteinian paradox is *non-factualism* about meaning. According to Boghossian, non-factualism about some area of discourse claims that declarative sentences about this area are not truth-conditional; thus a non-factualism about meaning claims that sentences that attribute meaning are not truth-conditional (Boghossian [1989a] 524). The sceptical solution makes this non-factualism global to all sentences of a language. This move from meaning non-factualism to global non-factualism is not as farfetched as one may think. If there are no facts that determine the meaning of a word, it follows that meaning-attributions are not truth-conditional. Since the truth-conditions for any sentence S are given by its meaning, there can be no fact of the matter about what truth-conditions S has if there is no fact of the matter about what gives S its truth-conditions. Therefore, a non-factualism about meaning implies a global non-factualism (Boghossian [1989a] 524). For Boghossian, this absurd conclusion is enough to reject a non-factualism about meaning¹³.

Some philosophers would argue that Davidson is committed to such a view because he embraces Quine's indeterminacy of translation, which is regarded by many as tantamount to a sceptical view about meaning. Kripke himself encourages this interpretation, when he

¹³ See Paul A. Boghossian (1990) "The Status of Content" *The Philosophical Review*. Vol. XCIX, No. 2. pp. 157-184.

equates meaning scepticism with the indeterminacy of translation (Kripke [1982] 14 and 55-57). In my view, this equation is an error, but it is perhaps an understandable one. After all, for Davidson there can be many possible ways to optimize truth and rationality (coherence) in a speaker's belief system, based on his linguistic behaviour. Since none of the facts that fix meaning fix it uniquely, there is no fact that makes one interpretation right and the others wrong. We could think up new ways of interpreting the speaker's utterances that respect equally well the constraints on interpretation. It would be a matter of matching the speaker's sentences to other sentences of our language while accounting for all the speech behaviour in accordance with the principles of interpretation (Davidson [1991a] 214). The endeavour may require a fair bit of creativity and a willingness to forego common style and sentence structure, but the nature of interpretation makes it likely to succeed. Many have misconstrued indeterminacy, as Kripke does, as a form of meaning scepticism: there's no fact of the matter about *the* correct interpretation.

One problem of interpretation that may explain this confusion is that we have access to finitely many of the speaker's utterances "while the definition of a language assigns meanings to an infinite number of sentences" (Davidson [1992] 110). There will be many different languages that are compatible with a speaker's spoken utterances, but incompatible with his unspoken ones. However, Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation is stronger. It claims that even if a speaker were to overcome the physical impossibility of uttering all the sentences of his language, there may still be other meanings with which these sentences could be compatible (Davidson [1992] 110). Indeterminacy is, then, not a matter of underdetermination by a finite amount of evidence or any amount of evidence.

For some, all these considerations force the question: Is Davidson an anti-factualist *à la* Kripke? I shall endeavour, in this section, to undermine this dubious claim. Let us first take a closer look at Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation explicitly endorsed by Davidson.

In "Ontological Relativity", Quine contrasts his naturalistic account of meaning with what he calls the *museum myth*: the traditional philosophical account of meaning. The myth in question is that of a museum in which the meanings are exhibits and the words are labels. The myth tells us that to switch from one language to the other is equivalent to switching the exhibit's labels. The words point to the same thing: an object, mental or otherwise. According to a simple version of this view, the speaker has ideas in his head that guide his speech. If a person listens well and assigns the correct meaning to the speaker's utterances, the result is communication. This process is often described as a "matching of ideas."

Quine's account of meaning denies that we need to grasp meanings as objects to make sense of the speaker's utterances. All we have to go on is the behaviour of the speaker. There are no facts about meaning except relative to a system of translation. Quine argues for this by giving an account of how we learn to speak a language. He claims that there are two parts to learning a word, the phonetic (reproducing the exact sound) and the semantic (knowing how to use the word). He argues that for both parts of language learning, "the learner has no data to work with but the overt behaviour of other speakers" (Quine [1969] 28). The language learner does not peer into his mother's head to confirm he has selected the proper label for a certain exhibit.

By replacing the museum myth, we forego the assurance of determinacy since according to the museum myth, a language's words and sentences have determinate

meanings. However, in Quine's account, the meaning we get from the speaker's behaviour is indeterminate as it is possible for an expression of a native language to have more than one English translation and still be reconcilable with the speaker's behaviour.

Davidson plays down the importance of the thesis of indeterminacy. He compares it to the measurement of weight by the assignment of numbers to an object. Such an assignment is not unique, since we can make the measurement in pounds or in kilograms, for example. "Because there are many different but equally acceptable ways of interpreting an agent we may say, if we please, that interpretation or translation is indeterminate, or that there is no fact of the matter as to what someone means by his or her words" (Davidson [1991a] 214).

This situation is quite different from the one Kripke's sceptic describes. The sceptic denies that there are any facts that determine a unique correct interpretation and concludes from this that no interpretation is more warranted or acceptable than any other. On the other hand, the indeterminacy of interpretation means that there are indefinitely many adequate ways of interpreting a speaker given facts, but not all interpretations are equal. Davidson's two versions of the principle of charity that guide our interpretation ensures that we can rule out as incorrect all 'interpretations'¹⁴ that make the majority of the speaker's beliefs false. In fact, such 'interpretations' are not even worthy of the name. Since the principles of charity are a condition of the possibility of interpretation, 'interpretations' that forsake them are the result of an activity other than interpretation. Hence, while we cannot have *the* correct interpretation, there is such a thing as *a* correct interpretation.

¹⁴ I write 'interpretation' here because Davidson says no such interpretations are possible. Speakers provide none of the basic evidence required for the interpreter's work unless they have true beliefs.

B) Is Davidson a realist or anti-realist about meaning?

Since meaning is, in part, determined by relevant thoughts, the above question resolves itself by determining Davidson is a realist about propositional attitudes. It may seem that his subscribing to the indeterminacy of translation entails that Davidson is an anti-realist about meaning. This is at least what some commentators think. Fodor, for instance, claims that the indeterminacy of translation entails anti-realism about propositional attitudes, and views this conclusion as a *reductio* of Davidson's view (Davidson [1997] 73). Dennett, on the other hand, agrees with indeterminacy and explicitly endorses the anti-realist conception of the mental (Davidson [1997] 73). However, Davidson endorses the indeterminacy of translation, disputes the inference to anti-realism, and does not endorse realism.

Davidson views anti-realism as a consequence of western philosophy's need to know what is real. The doctrine deems that whatever is beyond the realm of human knowledge is 'out of existence'. Another way of expressing anti-realism is by considering the epistemic limitations on the notion of truth. If we can't know whether a sentence is true or false, the anti-realist conclusion is that the sentence has no truth value (Davidson [1997] 69).

Davidson thinks that realism is the child of the idea that there is something about the world that determines the truth of our sentences or thoughts. However, he does not believe that realism as it is usually defended, that is, as a form of reductionism, is the *de facto* alternative to anti-realism. He thinks that we can reject arguments for an anti-realist position without having to endorse a reductionist form of realism as a consequence, according to which mental types would be identical to physical types (Davidson [1997] 70).

Davidson argues that the indeterminacy of translation does not imply an anti-realist conception of the mental. He claims that “many of our beliefs and statements about what people believe, intend, desire and hope for are true, and they are true because people have those beliefs” (Davidson [1997] 70). So, in Davidson’s view, interpretive sentences do have truth-values. This view should thus not be equated with that of the eliminativists, who argue that propositional attitudes are not properly scientific and that a scientific theory of the world would not involve the language of propositional attitudes. The reason behind this is that the language of psychology cannot be reduced to the language of physics or neurophysiology (Davidson [1997] 71). However, for Davidson, the impossibility of reducing propositional attitudes to the language of physics or neurophysiology does not entail an anti-realist view of the mental.

But this does not lead him to endorse realism in its reductionist form. His view is anomalous monism: a token-token identity theory. This theory claims that each object described in mental terms is identical with an object described in physical terms, but there is no law-like reduction from classes determined by the mental terms to classes determined by the physical terms. According to Davidson’s anomalous monism, intentions are “dispositions to behave in certain ways, which are in turn psychological, which finally are physical states” (Davidson [1997] 72). Intentional descriptions are not scientifically apt, though, due to the impossibility of reducing them to physical descriptions (Davidson [1997] 72). So, this is realism without reductionism. Mental states, being identical to physical states, are real, although one cannot hope for the kind of type reduction we may find in other areas (e.g. water = H₂O). Davidson argues that this is compatible with the indeterminacy of translation.

One reason why some philosophers reject indeterminacy has to do with the semantics of the sentences we use to attribute beliefs (Davidson [1997] 73). The grammar of belief attribution seems to indicate that ‘...believes that...’ is a relational verb that describes a relation between a person and a unique entity that the subject grasps and that is the object of the belief. Davidson rejects this view. He argues that the only object required to have a belief is a believer. Having a belief is being in a certain state “and being in a state does not require that there be an entity called a state that one is in” (Davidson [1997] 74).

Davidson says that this is the model to follow when considering belief attribution. “The entities to which we relate thinkers when we attribute beliefs or other propositional attitudes to them are not in the thinkers – not in their minds, or before their minds” (Davidson [1997] 74). Davidson argues that attributing a belief to someone means that a certain predicate is true of that person and that the relational appearance of the grammar is there only to simplify the attribution of an indefinite number of propositional attitudes (Davidson [1997] 74). Attributing a belief that p is not attributing a relation to the proposition that p ; it is merely attributing a property to the agent. That property is real for Davidson, since it can cause certain actions for example.

Here’s an analogy that will help understand Davidson’s position. We can measure weights in the metric or imperial systems, yielding different assignments of numbers. But that does not raise doubts as to the reality of the weight of objects (Davidson [1997] 74). Davidson thinks it should be likewise with the attribution of thoughts. Indeed, the weight of an object is not determined until we have selected a measurement system. Similarly, for Davidson, what beliefs an agent has is indeterminate until we have selected a translation manual (or theory of interpretation). So, Davidson’s claim that there’s no unique adequate

translation manual is analogous to the idea that there is no unique adequate measurement system. Hence, the indeterminacy of translation does not question the reality of propositional attitudes.

In order to express a thought, our own or another's, we must rely on our sentences as the only means of expressing it. It is the matching of my sentences to another's propositional attitudes that allows me to understand those thoughts (Davidson [1997] 74). However, the analogy to measurements is not perfect. Numbers are objective, as are the objects to which we apply them. Davidson says that numbers lie halfway between people as common ground. On the other hand, before using sentences to interpret the thoughts of others, we do not first settle on an interpretation of those sentences since this is also the result of such an interpretation (Davidson [1997] 83). "It makes no sense to ask for a common standard of interpretation, for mutual interpretation provides the only standard we have" (Davidson [1997] 83).

For Davidson, there is nothing beyond interpretation on the basis of which we could hope to judge this standard. It would be akin to asking to test whether the standard meter bar is in fact a meter long (Davidson [1997] 84). "If our judgements of the propositional attitudes of others are not objective, no judgements are, and the concept of objectivity has no application" (Davidson [1997] 84). This amounts to saying that the facts that determine the truth of judgements about the attribution of propositional attitudes are not constituted independently of those judgements. This may indicate that Davidson's view about propositional attitudes can be characterized as a form of anti-realism *à la* Wright. I will examine this question in the next section.

C) Does Davidson endorse a form of anti-realism *à la* Wright?

It is no great secret that words such as ‘realism’ and ‘anti-realism’ have held various definitions throughout the history of philosophy. Unfortunately, the distinction between realism and anti-realism is not drawn in the same way by all the authors discussed in this thesis. We have seen in chapter two that Wright proposes his view of judgement-dependence as an anti-realist alternative to realism. For Wright, whether a certain object is blue has to a great extent more to do with the person judging than with the object. So much so that in optimal conditions, an object is blue if and only if a normal observer judges that it is so. In contrast, whether an object is square depends not on the judge but on the actual features of the world. In this sense, Wright has an anti-realist view of colours, but a realist conception of squareness.¹⁵

I think it is worthwhile to note that the anti-realist label may be misleading. We could say that there are facts about the world that do determine which objects are blue. Those facts capture the physical relations between a judge in optimal conditions and the objects of the judgement that ‘*x* is blue.’ For many, including Davidson, this would entail that colours are real, and that one should be a realist about colours. However, this does not deny that facts about colours are entirely dependent on judges and would not otherwise be present in the world. It is in this sense, I take it, that best judgements about what is blue are extension-determining.

I think this exposes some interesting similarities to Davidson’s thought about the status of mental states. For Davidson, having a propositional attitude determines the truth of the attribution of this attitude. To ascertain that someone has a particular propositional

¹⁵ Please refer to the second section of chapter two for a detailed account of Wright’s characterization of the realism anti-realism debate.

attitude, we need to map that attitude (i.e. the speaker's sentences) to our own sentences. As we have seen in the previous section, we cannot presuppose a starting point of a common language containing previously interpreted sentences, since their interpretation relies on the same process.

We also noted that belief, for Davidson, is not relation. Having a belief is having a property and so attributing a belief to a speaker is saying that a particular predicate is true of that person: the speaker has, say, property *z*. To say that Davidson is anti-realist *à la* Wright is to suggest that this belief property is a secondary quality much like colours. Correctly attributing a belief has more to do with the attributer than it does with the world. It is the judgement of the interpreter that determines the content of speaker's beliefs. This is consistent with Davidson's anomalous monism since mental states are token-identical to physical states no type reduction of the mental to the physical is possible. It is here we find that whatever may determine the truth of an attribution of a propositional attitude will be dependent, on final analysis, on the judgement of speakers involved in interpretation. We can thus coherently hold that despite being a form of anti-realism *à la* Wright, Davidson's view about mental states is realist, in the sense that for him, mental states are real states that can causally interact with the world.

However, does this mean that our solution to the sceptical problem is now subject to Boghossian's criticism of the judgement-dependent account of meaning?¹⁶ It is if we claim that my thoughts are determined by another person's thoughts through the activity characterized as radical interpretation. If this is the story, we can create the infinite regress because we need another person to give content, through interpretation, to my interpreter's thoughts. However, this is very far from Davidson's philosophy. While the content of my

¹⁶ See chapter two.

thoughts are dependent on interpretation, the above scenario is impossible for it presupposes that my interpreter already possesses meaningful sentences to which he can match my utterances and that the content of his thoughts is not dependent on interpretation. As we have seen, this is the result of interpretation and cannot serve as its basis. The picture is closer, perhaps, to the solution envisioned by Johnston, while lacking its difficulties. Like Johnston, Davidson holds that there is an interdependence that obtains between what a speaker means and the judgements of an interpreter: the idea that one would be prior to the other is rejected. However, unlike Johnston, Davidson holds that the interpreter is a second person, distinct from the speaker. This allows Davidson to avoid the objection of solipsism, according to which the meaning of a speaker's words would be accessible only to that speaker.

Conclusion

This thesis began with the need to resolve the sceptic's challenge and to get us out of the absurd situation he described. The sceptic's methodology rested on the unargued assumption that the meaning of a term must be inferred from facts. There are then two possible courses of action: find such a fact or claim that a person can have non-inferential knowledge of his or her thoughts including those that play a role in determining the meaning of his or her words. It is the second option that is taken up here.

To the sceptic's demand for further justification, I can answer that, in the past, I meant addition by the term 'plus' because this is what I intended. The focus of the problem is then to find a satisfactory account of first-person authority concerning intentions. Two such accounts were presented, one founded on the first-person that failed to answer the sceptic, in part because of its focus on the individual. The other approach, Davidson's, was founded on the interdependence of self-knowledge, knowledge of the external world and knowledge of other minds.

It was also argued that we can take a new look at Davidson, following Wright's approach, that not only allows us to propose an answer to the sceptical challenge from the standpoint of radical interpretation but that also sheds light on certain aspects of Davidson's philosophy. I argued that we can propose a solution to the sceptical problem that showed Davidson to be an anti-realist *à la* Wright about meaning.

One question still to be answered concerns the status of solitary languages. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein claims the impossibility of a private language. Kripke argued that this claim stemmed from Wittgenstein's solution to his sceptical

considerations on rule following. Would the solution proposed in this work present different consequences for the possibility of a private language? To answer this question, we would first have to specify what we mean by 'private language'. To say that a private language is impossible can mean one of at least three things:

- 1) To speak a language is to be part of a community of speakers. A language is something spoken by a community, not a single person.
- 2) One speaks a language only if a community of speakers can interpret it in principle.
- 3) To speak a language is to have been interpreted and served as an interpreter of someone else's thoughts.

It would be worthwhile to further research this topic to ascertain which of these claims is implied by Kripke's sceptical solution and by the solution I presented, based on the philosophy of Davidson. However, such an undertaking, unfortunately, would go beyond the limits of this work.

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