The Meaning That Matters

Trinity Lopez
Lawrence University

ABSTRACT
This paper looks at Kripke’s interpretation of Philosophical Investigations. First, we begin with a picture of the world. An individual uses their awareness of physical and non-physical things to discover meaning in the world. Once an individual is aware of meaning, they understand an accordance. Individuals talk about their meaning of accordances and, through their use of language, come to agree. Then, this paper investigates an example, introduced by Wittgenstein, that captures his paradox. The section after that uses Kripke’s interpretation of the paradox to make it more concise. The paradox, as written by both Wittgenstein and Kripke, claims that there is no fact about an individual determining whether their current meaning accords with their past meaning. Kripke offers the solution of agreement; an individual remembers what they have previously learned as their community’s agreement to check whether their current meaning accords with their past meaning. We end our observation of Kripke’s interpretation with his private language argument. Kripke’s private language argument claims that an individual cannot mean anything other than what their community agrees with and, thus, that the concept resulting from the phrase “private language” is a semantic contradiction. I argue that the private language argument does nothing more than claim that the phrase “private language” cannot exist; the resulting concept can exist but requires different phrasing to capture its meaning. A “private behavior” or “private frame of reference” does not require agreement to exist and, additionally, does not create a semantic contradiction.

KEYWORDS
Wittgenstein, Kripke, Thing, Accordance, Meaning, Agreement, Private Language
compos mentis

I will be introducing my interpretation of Kripke’s *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. In that book, Saul Kripke offers his view of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. So, I will be offering my interpretation of Kripke’s interpretation. First, we will develop a picture of the world. Then, we will use this picture to observe Wittgenstein’s *paradox*, which we make concise using Kripke’s interpretation. The *paradox* questions whether an individual’s current meaning is the same as their past meaning. Kripke answers by saying that individuals use *agreement* to determine whether their current meaning is the same as their past meaning.

Regarding Kripke’s solution of agreement, we will find worries suggesting that Kripke’s view diverges from Wittgenstein’s work. These worries show us that Kripke’s take on the private language argument goes further than it should; while Wittgenstein claims that the phrase “private language” results in semantic contradiction, Kripke takes it further by saying that the concept of the phrase “private language” is impossible. But while the meaning of “private language” may be an impossible concept, the meaning of “private behavior” and “private frame of reference” are not. This leads us to assert that his interpretation should be revised. My thesis is that it is possible for each of us, as individuals, to have a concept of a private thought process. “Private language” just might not be the correct phrase for the concept.

I. A PICTURE OF THE WORLD

Let’s begin with a picture of the world. (It could also be called a picture of everything.)

A. Things

As it is ordinarily used, the word “physical” refers to things that can be pointed to. For example, suppose you are on a stroll, wandering along a river. You see a tree. You can point to the wavering waters along the river; they are “physical”. Or you can point to the tree, a bush, those flowers, a duck, some geese, fish, and so on; they are all “physical” things too. In the next paragraph, I suggest that physical things will be clarified when we add another condition to the phrase “can be pointed to”.

1. Quotation marks signify that the words within them are either spoken or written language.
A physical thing can be pointed to but cannot be contained within a mind’s experiences of non-perceptual mental states. Returning to the stroll example, the river, tree, animals, and many other things can be pointed to. But these things are not, themselves, contained within your mind’s (non-perceptual) mental states! For example, the river is not within your mind; it does not flow into your thoughts, causing you to see it. Rather, the river is something external to you that causes your sight of a river. The same is true of the tree, a bush, those flowers, a duck, some geese, and fish; you must interact with these things in some way (for example, by changing your eye’s or ear’s view) in order to sense them. These things exist outside of the mind and, thus, are physical. This notion of physical things – being those things that are not contained within mental states – suggests that there may be other things that are, in fact, contained in mental states. Thus, we are led to add non-physical things to our picture.

A non-physical thing is the opposite of a physical thing; it cannot be pointed to but can be contained within the experiences of mental states. If you imagine the stroll again, there are many non-physical things involved in your experience of wandering down a river. For example, you become aware of a tree because you become aware of non-physical parts of the concept of a ‘tree’. A ‘tree’ has some necessary parts: ‘a trunk’, ‘branches’, ‘leaves’, ‘bark’, ‘canopy’, ‘veins’, and so on. Your ‘tree’ concept has been organized with respect to a specific structure: ‘the trunk has little trunks emerging from it, there are leaves on the little trunks, the leaves have a pattern to their veins, the canopy looks a certain way, …’. From this specific order, you have your non-physical concept of ‘tree’. All of the conceptual information I have just written are composed of non-physical things; they cannot be pointed to, but they are the things contained within experiences of mental states. You cannot point to ‘tree’ but you can think of a ‘tree’ or contemplate what a ‘tree’ is.

B. Relations

In our stroll example, we have implied that there are relationships between physical and non-physical things. To see this, consider how you become aware of

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2. In contrast with quotation marks, apostrophes denote a concept. Concepts are one of the many groups of non-physical things. For example, the written phrase “the concept of a tree” is communicated by the following form: ‘tree’. If I write the word tree without use of apostrophes, I intend for you to imagine a picture of a tree. If I write the word ‘tree’ with apostrophes, I intend for you to imagine your concept of a tree.
a tree. An assortment of physical parts – such as a trunk, branches, leaves, bark, a canopy, and so on – fits with a specific non-physical concept – such as ‘tree’. Physical parts cause your awareness of their corresponding non-physical concepts because they relate in a specific way.

Why does ‘tree’ relate to a trunk, branches, leaves, barks, a canopy, and the tree’s other parts? I suggest that things relate to one another because they have a meaningful, structured relationship. Relations are non-physical; you can sometimes point to their corresponding things, but doing so does not capture the structure of relation between those things. Instead, the structure of relation between those things is a non-physical thing within a mind.

We will call this non-physical relation – the one between things and their effects upon a mind – meaning. Meaning will be very useful to us; it is the focus of Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations and, thus, the focus of Kripke’s interpretation as well. Often, Kripke and Wittgenstein synonymize “meaning” with “use”. Wittgenstein writes: “[…] the meaning of a word is its use in the language.” (Wittgenstein 2001, §43). This does not need much explanation; it explicitly identifies meaning as “use”. Kripke does not do so explicitly but, rather, embeds the claim – that of synonymizing “meaning” and “use” – within an example of addition. Kripke writes: “…Jones now means addition by ‘+’ if he presently intends to use the ‘+’ sign in one way…” (Kripke 2002, 77). In other words, an individual means something by using it in a certain way.

In my words, meaning is a structure of relation between things, where the related things are either physical, non-physical, or a combination of these types. Meaning is a structural relation. For reasons that will soon become clear, I will notate a relation as “R”. When two things – ‘a’ and ‘b’ – relate, I notate this as “aRb”.

I will emphasize that relations are non-physical by writing them in apostrophes. When an individual speaks or writes, they show that they are aware of a specific structure – and, thus, meaning – of R. Individuals put meaning into an empty R.

A good linguistic test to see whether “meaning” and “structure of relation” are the same things is to consider the following questions. On one hand, “how does that relate?” is a question about the structural relation between things that have been said in the past. While “how” begins a question about structure (‘R’), “does”, “that”, and “relate” add the concept ‘relation’ to the structure of the

3. Where ‘a’ and ‘b’ may be replaced by anything.
question and identify the content (the things) under consideration. Thus, with our relation notation, this is a question that reflects the structure: ‘“that”Rb’. On the other hand, ‘what does that mean?’ is also a question of structural relation. “What” asks for content (‘a’ and ‘b’). “Mean” expands the question (from “a” and ‘b’) to ask about relation and structure (‘aRb’). So, both questions – one about relation and the other about meaning – investigate the structure of a relation (‘aRb’).

Now that we have tested whether “meaning” and “structure of relation” are the same thing, we can make our discussion a bit more specific by investigating two subgroups of meaning. Paul Grice distinguishes between two of the most prominent forms of meaning. To show that our notion of meaning – being a structural relation – is sufficient, we will now apply our picture of the world to Grice’s two forms of meaning. First, take, for example, the sentence “those spots mean measles”. In this sentence, the word “mean” establishes that its speaker is aware of two distinct things: physical spots and the non-physical concept of ‘measles’. In our relation notation, we have: ‘those spots R ‘measles’’. This sentence can be restated by choosing a word other than “mean” for the relation between its things, for example, by using the sentence “those spots correspond with ‘measles’”. This restatement – by substituting the word “mean” with “correspond with” – signifies that the relation between the relevant things is structured in a specific way; when we say things correspond, it is because they have a similar, related, structure. Thus, the sentence “those spots mean measles” reflects a specific, corresponding, relationship between these things: spots and ‘measles’.

Second, consider the sentence “The recent budget means that we shall have a hard year”. Similar to the spots and measles sentence, this sentence identifies two distinct things: ‘the recent budget’ and the relevant group’s ‘hard next year’. (In our relation notation, we have: “recent budget’ R ‘hard next year’). The word “means” identifies a specific relationship between ‘the recent budget’ and a ‘hard next year’ and, thus, the sentence may be paraphrased as: “because of the recent budget, the next year will be hard”.

4. For this paper, it is not essential to know what Grice’s two forms of meaning are. Rather, I leave implied that we investigate both forms.

5. Both of these things have a combination of physical and non-physical things but let us leave this debate behind because, for our present purpose, it is not necessary.
Grice’s first sentence can replace “mean” with the phrase “‘a’ corresponds with ‘b’”. But, in contrast, Grice’ second sentence can replace “means” with the structure “because ‘a’, ‘b’ will be”. Both sentences set up a relation between things – in the form ‘aRb’ – but the structure of these relations are different.6

The main point is that meaning is a very broad and abstract notion of relation. Meaning acts as if it is an empty relationship, into which the thinker of that meaning incorporates the structure that reflects the way they believe two or more things relate.

Let us introduce yet another word – very closely related to meaning – often written by Kripke and Wittgenstein: accordance. Once an individual has discovered a meaning (once the empty structural relation has been filled), they have become aware of an accordance. When things relate to one another, they have a certain intended structure. These intended structures – meanings – are what humans hope to discover (in the broadest sense of ‘discover’) so that they can feel like they know an accordance. In other words, an accordance is a meaning that an individual has become aware of.

The individual’s becoming aware of an accordance does not entail that the meaning has vanished; rather, once meaning is discovered, it exists alongside the newfound accordance. For example, suppose you see a vibrant bush while on your stroll. It has berries of a magnificent blue, something you have not been aware of before (it has a structure of bush that you do not recognize). ‘Blue’ is a part of this bush and it is structured on the bush in a specific way: blue is only on the berries and not on the stems or leaves, it is a shimmering blue, it effects the experience that individuals have of the entire bush, and so on. You ask yourself “what could these blue berries mean?”. The blue may mean that they are poisonous or perhaps luscious and delicious. Maybe it means something else – or nothing. Regardless, there is a structured relationship between this blue and this berry bush; it seems like the blue part of the bush means something. As of now, the to-be-discovered meaning is not an accordance because you are not aware of what the relation between the bush and the blue is.

If you eat the berries, you will become aware of the structural relation between the bush and the blue; you will become aware of a meaningful accordance. You could get sick, have a delightful meal, or have any other possible experience. Let us suppose you get sick. In this situation, you become aware of the accordance

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6. Much like the various interpretations of the accessibility relation in modal logic.
"I eat these blue berries’ means (R) ‘I get sick’. After you have become aware of a meaningful relation (R) between two or more things (a, b, c, d, e, …), you have become aware of an accordance.

There are many different types of meaning that reflect different structural relations. Meaning can be a one-sided relationship. For example, the sentence “the recent budget means that we shall have a hard year” means that a recent budget will cause a bad year for a company. But it does not follow from the same sentence that a bad year will cause a non-desirable budget; the ‘bad year’ could refer to bad social (non-professional) interaction in the workplace, which does not entail – but may contribute to – a bad budget.

Meaning can also be a double-sided, symmetrical relation. A symmetrical relation (which I may abbreviate as Rs) occurs when one thing relates to a second thing in the very same way that the second thing relates to the first thing (‘aRs b’ iff ‘aRb’ & ‘bRa’). For example, if you see a tree, you have become aware that the ‘tree’ relates to the physical trunk, branches, leaves, barks, canopy, and so on. Further, you may become aware that the physical trunk, branches, leaves, barks, canopy, and other parts relate to the concept ‘tree’. In other words, you may become aware of a symmetrical relation ("tree’ Rs trunk, branches, leaves, barks, canopy, …‘) between the non-physical ‘tree’ and the physical parts of the tree (”tree’ R trunk, branches, leaves, barks, canopy, …’ & ‘trunk, branches, leaves, barks, canopy, … R ‘tree’).

I’m sure that there are many other types of meaning. I encourage you to discover them.

So far, we have distinguished between physical and non-physical things, introduced meaning and accordance, and established two types of relations between things (R and Rs). This is not a complete picture; it is confined to a single individual’s awareness of the world. In order to be able to understand each other’s awareness, individuals must agree. Thus, to complete our picture, we must investigate agreement.

C. The Relation of Agreement

Let’s call an agreement a symmetrical relation between two or more individuals’ awareness of accordances. If an individual’s thought is seen as one thought bubble, an agreement can be seen as the merging of two thought bubbles. So, an agreement is an embedded relation because it connects two different meanings,
which are relations themselves (but not necessarily a symmetrical relation). The following two paragraphs explain this by outlining our method of agreement.

First, for an agreement to happen, an individual must become aware of the symmetrical relations that a second individual is aware of. If I say “the tree is next to the river” and you listen to me, then you will become aware that I am aware of the relation ‘the tree is next to the river’ (“tree’ Rs ‘river’”); you become aware of what I mean by my words; you become aware that I have put ‘next to’ into my empty meaning of ‘Rs’. You have gained knowledge about my mental states; you know, given the language we speak, some things I am aware of, such as that river, that tree, ‘river’, ‘tree’, ‘next to’, and so on.

The second criteria of agreement is for a second individual to become aware of the symmetrical relations that the first individual is aware of. After you are aware that I think ‘the tree is next to the river’, suppose you want to confirm that you think so too. In that case, you would say something like “I think so too”. Once you say it, I become aware that you are aware of the same symmetrical relation that I am aware of – namely, ‘the tree is next to the river’. Thus, I have gained some knowledge about your mental states; it seems like we have the same meaning; it seems like we have both put the same meaning – ‘next to’ – into the structural relation ‘Rs’. Since we are each aware that each other are aware of the same meaning of a symmetrical relation, we agree. In as few words as possible, agreement occurs when two or more individuals understand the same meaning.

A quick note: we do not have to be aware of the same exact meaning in order for us to agree. For example, my meaning of ‘next to’ may be confined to ‘close enough’ while your meaning of ‘next to’ may be ‘within a 1-foot distance’. Even though we may have different meaningful concepts of ‘next to’, we can still agree about whether or not the ‘tree’ is ‘next to’ the ‘river’ – given that our meanings resemble each other enough.

We began investigating what ‘things’ are; there are two main kinds of things: physical and non-physical. Then, we saw that our experiences of physical things cause non-physical things to exist. Then, we saw how they relate, giving rise to meaningful accordances. Meaning is an empty structural relation, into which a mind put things and, once an individual has become aware of a meaning, they develop an accordance. There are many types of meaningful relations; we investigated one-sided relations and symmetrical relations for two examples. Finally, we attempted to understand another form of meaningful relation: agreement. Once
two or more individuals have become aware that each other are aware of the same meaning, they agree.

Now that we seem to have a complete picture of the world, we will turn to Kripke’s interpretation of Philosophical Investigations. In doing so, we will identify a paradox and offer a solution to it.

II. KRIPKE’S INTERPRETATION

In this section, we first look to Wittgenstein for an example of the paradox. Then, we clarify the notion of the paradox using Kripke’s interpretation. With the paradox out of the way, we will look at Kripke’s solution and his take on the private language argument.

A. Wittgenstein’s Paradox

Philosophical Investigations gives a great example of the paradox:

[...] Now we get [a] pupil to continue a series (say +2) beyond 1000 – and he writes 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012.

We say to him: “Look what you’ve done!” – He doesn’t understand.
We say: “You were meant to add two: look how you began the series!” – He answers: “Yes, isn’t it right? I thought that was how I was meant to do it. [...]” (Wittgenstein 2001, §185).

What should we tell the pupil to assist understanding the rule ‘+2’? Not much would help this situation. The pupil is stubborn: he persists that he is following the rule because, for example, he simply skips saying every other number in the series. If we tell him “You are not following ‘+2’ right”, he may respond “Yes I am, you just don’t know that I am. I leave every other number in the series implied; I know what each number should be.”. He insists that he is aware of the accordance between the rule ‘+2’ and the series ‘1000, 1002, 1004, 1006, …’; he communicates his awareness of this accordance by saying “1000, 1004, 1008, 1012, …” and he says “I know what I mean, even if you don’t.”.
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This seems problematic and, thus, we have our paradox. The following two paragraphs capture the paradox but it will be made more concise when we develop Kripke’s interpretation.

If a student could always be misinterpreting the rule we are teaching, then how would we ever know that the student is learning the correct rule? We can’t say we do. We use the words that the student tells us – “1000, 1004, 1008, 1012, …” – and the student could have uttered these words according to any meaningful interpretation of them. The student is the only person aware of their own interpretation and so, it is possible that the student’s meaning of ‘+2’ does not agree with our use of that rule.

To be sure that the student uses ‘+2’ in a way that agrees with their community’s use of it, they should have said “1000, 1002, 1004, 1006, …”. However, we are simply clueless as to what the student means by their ‘mistaken’ interpretation. It seems like no matter what a student says, they could be misinterpreting their past learning. When an individual learns a new meaning, it is always possible for them to become aware of an accordance that their teacher is not aware of. This could lead to misunderstanding, which is the focus of Kripke’s interpretation of the paradox. However, to presuppose my problem with Kripke, I claim that a mistaken interpretation of meaning could also lead an individual to improve their own understanding of relations.

Wittgenstein explicitly words the paradox as: “[…] no course of action could be determined by a rule, because any course of action can be made out to accord with the rule.” (Wittgenstein 2001, §201). I soon offer the paradox in my words but suggest that you think about this quote for yourself before I give Kripke’s interpretation and my (somewhat) concise interpretation of it. Now, we turn to Kripke’s interpretation of the paradox.

B. Kripke’s Paradox

Kripke’s paradox, in my words, is: there is no fact that determines whether an individual’s current meaning accords with their past meanings. Given our picture of meaning and accordance, my interpretation of the paradox claims that an individual’s current awareness of a meaningful structure does not necessarily accord with the exact structure of the individual’s past meaning.

7. This presupposes my counter to Kripke. But this is not problematic because it is consistent with his interpretation of the paradox.
Throughout Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language, Kripke uses a rule called ‘quaddition’ – in contrast with ‘addition’ – to brew an example of the paradox. ‘Quaddition’ is a rule supplementary to ‘addition’; once one of the ‘added’ numbers is greater than ‘57’, ‘quaddition’ is followed instead of ‘addition’; once ‘quaddition’ is followed, the sum of the two numbers is ‘5’. Just as a pupil in Wittgenstein’s example could claim that their utterance of “1000, 1004, 1008, 1016, …” accords with the rule ‘+2’, a pupil in Kripke’s example could claim that their utterance of “68+57=5″ accords with the rule ‘addition’.

For example, suppose I am in a room – isolated from everyone else – and I add 68 Tonka trucks to 57 tonka trucks. I become aware of a new accordance and, thus, decide to follow ‘quaddition’. ‘Quaddition’ tells me that the answer to ‘68+57’ is ‘5’. How could ‘68+57’ equal ‘5’? Which accordance could I have possibly become aware of? Based on the processes of ‘addition’ that others have taught me, it seems like the answer is always ‘125’. But, the paradox questions whether an individual, regardless of what processes they have been taught, can find a fact that determines whether their current meaning of ‘addition’ accords with their past meaning of it.

When searching for such a fact, no individual will find it. There is no fact – neither within their mind nor their surroundings – that determines whether an individual’s current meaning of ‘addition’ accords with their past meaning of ‘addition’. What determines the meaning of ‘addition’ is an interpretation instead of a fact; putting meaning into an empty structural relation is a method of interpretation rather than experimentation. An interpretation is not a fact itself but, rather, the way that facts are seen. For example, suppose you see a black figure in the corner of your vision and think “Did I see someone?” . When you attempt to look at it, it disappears. The figure is not a fact; it is a part of the way that you were interpreting the facts around you, and, upon closer observation, you discover that there are no facts – no things around you – that accord with the figure. If the black figure had stayed within your vision, you may have had a new interpretation – influenced by a new awareness of accordances – that led you towards the claim “spirits are real”. Applying this to ‘quaddition’, it is possible that, when encountering any new problem, an individual means to follow ‘quaddition’ because they claim to have discovered a new accordance between the problem ‘68+57’ and the answer ‘5’.

Put more generally, an individual can always claim that they have discovered a new structural relation of meaning because individuals discover meaning through
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interpretation instead of through facts. When a student believes, for example, that ‘quaddition’ should be followed instead of ‘addition’, they think they have become aware of a meaningful relation (thus, an accordance) between ‘adding numbers greater than 57’ and ‘5’. The student has found a new interpretation of ‘addition’ which they believe should replace our currently agreed upon interpretation of ‘addition’. However, Kripke’s solution – as discussed in the next section – prohibits any individual from discovering their own meaning from a newfound accordance.

Kripke writes “The relation of meaning and intention to future action is normative, not descriptive.” (Kripke 2002, 37). In other words, the rules that we teach students – like ‘addition’ – are not learned through the student’s direct experience of the world. Instead, rules are taught by learning the tips and tricks that other people have already figured out; rules embed past peoples’ awareness of accordances into language. Once a community has agreed that they are aware of the same accordance, they create a rule – using language – that will be passed down to future generations; the community believes that the rule – such as ‘addition’ – will benefit the collective knowledge of their kind and, so, they pass it on. Kripke’s point in the quote above is that individuals do not learn rules from their individual experience of accordances. Instead, an individual must interpret physical language in order to relate their (intellectual) ancestors’ past awareness of accordances into their current awareness of accordances.

Learning language is learning past meaning and interpreting it into the learner’s current, individual, meaning. There is a worrisome gap in this process made prevalent by the paradox; since we communicate language physically and we must indirectly interpret non-physical meaning from physical language, it is always possible that an utterance does not accord with the audience’s interpretation of that utterance’s meaning. As Wittgenstein puts it, “Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order. We are trained to do so; we react to an order in a particular way. But what if one person reacts in one way and another in another to the order and the training? Which one is right?” (Wittgenstein 2001, §206). I’d say: neither is right; all language can be misinterpreted but this does not entail that the individual lacks meaning. Kripke would disagree; he does not take it this far – or takes it too far – in saying: “[Wittgenstein] has shown all language, all concept formation, to be impossible, indeed unintelligible.” (Kripke 2002, 62). While Kripke submits to the paradox, Wittgenstein only offers it as a question and
a mistaken one at that. After his explicit statement of the paradox, Wittgenstein claims this:

> It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each one contended us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call “obeying the rule” and “going against it” in actual cases. (Wittgenstein 2001, §201).

This begins to show us that Kripke’s interpretation diverges from Wittgenstein’s work; perhaps there is a non-physical behavior that is not effected by the paradox. Maybe we follow rules without relying on facts by training our minds using our ancestors’ language. While interpretations seem to vanish and alter, I feel – quite literally – something that does not.

**C. Kripke’s Solution**

Kripke’s solution to the paradox is agreement. For example, before I was taught the rule ‘addition’ by my teacher, I was uncertain whether the way I currently add things accords with the way I have added things in the past. Kripke would say that prior to learning a rule, an individual can never know whether their current meaning accords with their past meaning. Instead, the importance of agreement surfaces when I am able to show that I ‘add’ correctly – by solving novel problems and giving my answers to them – and when my teacher is able to tell that I follow ‘addition’ similar to the way that they do. My teacher saw that our answers were the same for a large number of problems and, thus, they inferred that we were both aware of the same accordances – between, for example, the problem ‘38+23’ and the answer ‘61’. In other words, the teacher became aware of a symmetrical relation between our awareness and, so, uttered something like “right” to affirm that we were aware of the same meaning for the same symmetrical relation. Because two people – I and the teacher – were aware that each other were aware of the same symmetrical relation, we understood that we agreed about the meaning of ‘addition’.  

8. This sentence is past tense, an important tense for understanding the paradox. This becomes
This appears to solve the paradox because it gives the individual a frame of reference for checking whether their current meaning accords with their past meaning. For example, if I, a good time after learning ‘addition’, come across a novel problem such as ‘3,482+9,382’, then I will be able to remember some of the times that my teachers and I had agreed about ‘addition’. If I feel like I might be wrong, I will recall the experiences under which I learned ‘addition’ so that I can know whether my current meaning accords with my past meaning. The main idea is that, by recalling past experiences of agreement, an individual is able to have a reliable frame of reference to check whether their current meaning agrees with both their individual past meaning and their community’s past meaning. (But why do we need a reliable frame?)

This frame of agreement has a twofold purpose. First, the frame of agreement allows an individual to know whether their meaning makes sense. Second, it allows an individual to know whether their meaning is useful. Kipke says:

All that is needed to legitimize assertions that someone means something is that there be roughly specifiable circumstances under which they are legitimately assertable, and that the game of asserting them under such conditions has a role in our lives. (Kripke 2002, 77-78).

However, I feel that these two purposes alone do not give assertions their meaning. Circumstances of meaning do not get to the core of meaning. Rather, meaning is a mindful, non-physical, frame of reference which is caused by the circumstances relating to a meaning. In other words, meaning is caused by circumstances, but a meaning is not only determined by its relevant circumstances; while we may physically agree, we may fail to non-physically understand each other because of the gap in our learning process (discussed in II.B. of this paper). With respect to the second purpose (utility), why must meaning have “a role in our lives”? Often, individuals find meaning that is useful, but only to them. For example, I have created the saying “Go with the flow. Take it slow. Let it go.”. This saying’s meaning is only for me; I’m sure that, to many others, it means something vastly different than what I mean by it. I use it to reach a state of mind which I have recently discovered. Without more explanation of this state of mind, you (most likely) do not know what I mean by the phrase.

clearer in the next paragraph.
Thus, I believe individuals have a private frame of reference – independent from a community’s agreement – that the individual uses to understand things. I find that Wittgenstein would agree (not italicized).

**D. Kripke’s Private Language Argument**

Kripke uses ‘agreement’ as an essential premise within his interpretation of the private language argument. To make this interpretation clear, we must first investigate privacy.

Something is private when only one individual is aware of it; when an individual is aware of an accordance, and no other is aware that the individual is aware of that accordance, then the accordance is private. In other words, something is private when it has not yet been agreed upon.

Kripke uses ‘agreement’ for his private language argument. The argument goes as follows. A language must have agreement in order to be a “language”. Something “private” cannot have ‘agreement’ because it has not yet been agreed upon. Thus, if we put “private” and “language” into one phrase that accords with a concept, the resulting concept is a contradiction; the phrase “private language” is a semantic contradiction; the meaning of “private language” cannot exist without incurring problems.

Kripke takes the private language argument a step further by claiming that the concept of a “private language” – regardless of its according phrase – does not exist. However, this is a step that Wittgenstein does not take. I believe Wittgenstein would say that the phrases “private behavior” and “private frame of reference” do not entail a semantic contradiction and, thus, its according concept could exist. If I am right, we must revise Kripke’s interpretation to sufficiently reflect Wittgenstein’s work. Briefly forget that we are interpreting others and ask yourself: don’t we often have private thoughts that we choose not to say?

**III. A PROBLEM WITH KRIPKE’S SOLUTION**

Kripke’s private language argument claims that an individual’s meaning cannot exist unless other people agree with that meaning. But the private language argument does not entail that an individual's meaning does not exist; rather, the point of it is as simple as saying: the phrase “private language” is a semantic contradiction. The private language argument makes a claim about “language”,

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not about whether there exists a *private meaning*, *private thoughts*, a “*private behavior*”, a “*private frame of reference*”, or any other phrase sufficient for the concept we are looking for.

Although “*private language*” is a phrase of semantic contradiction, there could be processes – not “*language*” or ‘*language*’ – that are *private*. The *paradox* seems as if it is deeply problematic; if it is plausible, then individuals are always uncertain about what they mean. If I, for example, do not know whether my *meaning* of ‘addition’ has changed throughout my use of it, then it seems like I do not know whether ‘addition’ – and even my mind – is reliable. But the most important phrases in the past two sentences are “*seems as if*” and “*seems like*”; what seems to be is not always what is. Without these phrases, the *paradox* prevents an individual from having a *private*, *meaningful* behavior. With them, the *paradox* does no such thing.

Kripke’s interpretation claims that *meaning* is never *private*; it seems like he believes that he does not *mean* anything *privately*. But without *private meaning*, the individual has no system of reference that may be used to check whether their community’s language *accords* with that individual’s *private* processes, whether or not those processes are “*language*” or ‘*language*’. Even though the *paradox* is problematic when interpreting *meaning* as determined by *agreement*, it does not raise a problem when interpreting *meaning* as a system of reference; the individual’s system of reference is not necessarily determined at all. My mind – my system of reference – often does things I do not approve of, but I trust it anyway.

I think Wittgenstein would reject Kripke’s interpretation. Continuing a passage I introduced earlier, Wittgenstein writes:

[…] Suppose you came as an explorer into an unknown country with a language quite strange to you. In what circumstances would you say that the people there gave orders, understood them, obeyed them, rebelled against them, and so on?

The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language. (Wittgenstein 2001; §206).

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9. The word “*seem*” is important for the literature concerned with Kripke and Wittgenstein, but only if you are interested. If so, I suggest looking at the words “*seems*”, “*seems like*”, “*as if*”, and similar words after you have finished reading this paper.
Wittgenstein seems to say that individuals interpret language through private behavior or a private system of reference. It seems “common” to all of mankind, but the process itself is private. Think of private behavior as an individual mind’s processes, such as carrying, counting, and putting together numbers to solve an ‘addition’ problem. These processes do not always follow language; they are learned through interpretation of language but, with enough practice, become automatic processes.\textsuperscript{10} When an individual has become comfortable with ‘adding’, they do not, within their minds, tell themselves “Okay, ‘8+7=15’, so I have to carry the one and put the five here. Now, ‘1+6+5=12’, so I have to put twelve next to the five. …”. Rather, they do the problem quickly, the speed of which (roughly) depends on the extent of their practice. For example, do the problem “92+34” and think about the “private behavior” that you follow.

Let us translate the problem with Kripke’s solution of agreement into our picture of the world. I, an individual, do not need agreement to mean something. For example, if I point to someone and say the sentence “that guy’s such an Austin”, you do not know what I mean by ‘Austin’. There are countless interpretations of ‘Austin’ that could make the sentence true or false because only the people involved with the inside joke would know what the sentence means and, thus, extract the correct interpretation. There may be people that have agreed on what the joke means, but it is also possible for me to have a private joke and chuckle to myself (as I just did, but don’t try to figure out what it was). Thus, although Kripke’s solution may be a solution to the question of whether an individual’s meaning accords with their community’s meaning, it is not a solution to the question of whether an individual’s meaning accords with itself. Agreement connects two thought bubbles, but it does not connect one thought bubble to itself. Going beyond the private joke example, individuals often put language about accordances into the world and, frequently, their meaning fails to be correctly interpreted.

To make it even clearer, let us look at the problem from another angle. The problem with Kripke’s solution is that there is not a second individual capable of completing a symmetrical relation of awareness regarding my current awareness of an accordance. I can be aware of an accordance when there is no one aware that I am aware of that accordance. I could disagree with everyone (as may be

\textsuperscript{10} Kripke calls these automatic processes “brute inclinations”; see page 15.
the situation when an individual seems to have Schizophrenia, be high on LSD, or believe in the spirit world).

I mean this: the thoughts I have are not fully determined by what I have interpreted as my community’s meaning. Although agreement helps me in countless ways, I do not want to be committed to the claim that my private processes have no meaning. Agreement points to the meaning that I should follow, but I decide which meaning I actually follow. Agreement suggests to me what I should put in my empty structural relation, but I decide what actually goes in there. Wittgenstein says: “The line intimates to me which way I am to go” is only a paraphrase of: it is my last arbiter for the way I am to go.” (Wittgenstein 2001, §230). Focus on that one word: “last”. To emphasize my problem with Kripke’s solution, I leave it to you to interpret your own meaning for this quote. (Although, I have already, implicitly, given you my interpretation of it.)

Why does all this matter? I suggest this: do not worry about the “genius” of other people. Instead, when you learn something new, trust your private thoughts. Then, see whether your private thoughts accord with what you are learning. In doing so, you will save yourself from much work, time, and, most importantly, from dangerous thoughts that may lead you to a mindset of insecure stupidity. You’re not ‘dumb’, I know with certainty. Or, rather, should I put it like: “We are all ‘dumb’, endlessly figuring things out.”?

REFERENCES
