

**Attending:** Giacomo Melis, Asgeir Matthiasson, Peter Sullivan, Xintong Wei, Moritz Baron, Paul Conlan, Giovanni Merlo

**Presenting:** Aesgir Matthiasson

**Discussing:** *Rules as Constitutive Practices* Asgeir Matthiasson

- **Carrie** wondered about the correctness of use of words in principle C in the paper – the correctness seems to apply generally to sentences not merely to words. **Asgeir** replied that some accounts in the literature suggest that S can never be wrong about what she said, and those are the sort of cases which Asgeir would rule out. **Carrie** suggested that an existential would be enough for Asgeir’s purposes, so that possibility is preserved but the material conditional is not implicated. **Peter** wondered if different notions of ‘incorrectly’ were being used. There are many notions of correctness in play which should be teased apart. **Asgeir** suggested that the correctness he is aiming at is “using the word correctly according to *your* meaning of it”. **Carrie** suggested aelithic correctness might do.
- **Crispin** suggested that in the context of a practice we have a notion of correct and incorrect use, so they are finessing rather than solving the problem. **Asgeir** suggested that this is still unsatisfactory, as the correctness is evaluated against the background of the practice. **Peter** suggested that if a practice is normatively identified then there is always a question of what fact identifies that practice.
- **Giovanni** wondered whether we can understand a co-ordination game in non-normative terms – i.e. in a way which does not run into the troubles the practice response to Kripke encounters. The intuitive notion of a game is normative. **Asgeir** suggested that the game-theoretic notion of a game is non-normative, likewise for the notion of strategy.
- **Peter** wondered how the notion of ‘payoff’ is being understood. **Carrie** suggested that the outcomes of the payoff table need to be ranked, and that could look normative. **Asgeir** suggested that successful communication is the payoff. **Carrie** also suggested a worry that the account could collapse into a version of success semantics. **Carrie** suggested that by the time we get to applying the model to language, we might have a circular account where the ‘1’ in the table is already constituted as successful communication, and successful is already normative.
- **Xintong** wondered what the relevant dispositions of the participants of the game are. **Asgeir** suggested that they are dispositions formed by training in a linguistic practice.

- **Peter** wondered what the basis of introducing an evaluative notion regarding second order equilibrium paths is? Why would we call deviation from one of the equilibrium paths a mistake? Where does the normativity reenter the story?
- **Crispin** wondered what the conditions for the emergence of a second order equilibrium path are, and are they contingent? **Asgeir** suggested that they are contingent. **Carrie** worried that the kind of situation Crispin describes is the usual case for the kind of Kripkenstein reasons, which leads to scepticism rather than realism. Secondly, a lot hinges on the empirical claim that we are similarly disposed to each other. Further, it leaves open the possibility that a community could be systematically in error in some way (e.g. bias), and we cannot say they are wrong.
- **Crispin** suggested that the problem suggested in the *Modus Ponens model* section of the handout does not necessarily arise for speakers of second languages. **Asgeir** suggested that this is true, it applies when the object language and the metalanguage are the same.
- **Crispin and Carrie** both suggested that there is a generality problem regarding the notion of community – what defines a community of speakers?

## *Rules as constitutive practices*

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### *Outline of the problem*

The sceptic is looking for some fact that determines what *S* means by his utterances. Any such putative fact seems to underdetermine what *S* means.

I understand Kripke's normativity of meaning argument to be about correctness. We want something that can explain why *S*'s utterance can be correct or incorrect. The dispositional account fails in this regard, since any change in dispositions indicates a change in meaning—and so anything *S* might do would be correct.

The problem can be seen from a different angle by considering how we learn concepts. We only ever see a finite set of 'exemplars' that are intended to exemplify the concept and then expected to apply what we learnt to new cases—but anything we might fit with some concept. The sceptic is looking for something that picks out one such relation between the past and the future as the correct one.

### *Meaning finitism and shared practices*

Some have presented the dilemma as a choice between meaning finitism—the view that meaning just doesn't settle infinitely many cases—and meaning platonism, the view that there is some object that mediates between our use and the meaning.

Others have argued that it is our *practice* that settles the meaning, thereby avoiding both extremes. It is unclear how such accounts actually do the work they are meant to.

### *Rules as constitutive practices*

My plan is to argue that rules and meaning are *basic constitutive practices* defined by a correlated equilibrium.

### *Constitutive practices*

- Searle makes a distinction between regulative rules and constitutive rules. The former are those that regulate an existing practice and the latter *constitute* a new practice.
- Two categorical examples are traffic and chess.
- I rely on a suggestion from Rawls: constitutive practices are those that have some kind of stagesetting against which action is evaluated.

Rules are an important part of such stagesetting for many constitutive practices. I will say that if a constitutive practice does not rely on *another* constitutive practice to constitute itself, it is *basic*. If rules turn out to be constitutive practices, most constitutive practices will turn out to be non-basic.

The way I proceed is by arguing that at least one kind of basic constitutive practice (i.e. constitutive rules) can be so by having a particular *structure* and it is against that structure that we evaluate action to be either an instance of the practice or not.

### *Formal details*

The underlying structure of basic constitutive practice is that of a *coordination problem*—a game. Agents:<sup>1</sup>

- can perform some action when prompted, based on their strategy.
- have beliefs about the actual world and the beliefs of others.
- get some pay-off depending on which action they took and those of others.<sup>2</sup>

The coordination game is in equilibrium if no agent would get a higher pay-off by unilaterally changing their strategy.

If  $f = f_1, f_2, \dots$  is an equilibrium (where  $f_i$  is a strategy), then the set of action profiles  $s_i$  that belong to  $f$  is a set of equilibrium paths of  $f$ .

### *The present account: '+' games*

I assume that agents are such that they respond to training in similar ways and form dispositions to respond when prompted. They also believe that whatever they are disposed to do is the correct thing to do.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I refer to the paper, p. 11–16 for the actual details.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that I'm not really relying on the agent's preferences to be interpreted as usually is done. They don't need to want to coordinate, for instance. It's just a formal measure to indicate success or failure in coordinating.

<sup>3</sup> The idea here is that the intention of an agent is to add, e.g. and then they have a reason to do what they are disposed to do.

The following is the structure of coordination problems I take to be the most basic, except I allow indefinitely many agents and infinitely many possible replies:

	'5'	'125'
'5'	1,1	0,0
'125'	0,0	1,1

I stipulate that for each possible pair of  $m$  and  $n$  in a question of the form 'what is  $m + n$ ?' there corresponds such a game.

Since there is a countable number of such games, we can enumerate them. I say that a selection of one equilibrium and one equilibrium path from that equilibrium from each game in the sequence is a *second-order equilibrium path*.<sup>4</sup>

Given that the agents perform similar dispositions to reply, there will only be second-order equilibrium path that has any chance of being actual.

I define this second-order equilibrium path to be what we should evaluate  $S$ 's action against: if  $S$ 's action lies on the equilibrium, he is doing what counts as taking part in the basic constitutive practice, otherwise not. The fact Kripke's sceptic is looking for is the second-order equilibrium path of the basic constitutive practice of using the symbol '+'!

Since every possible answer is settled when the dispositions of the agents and the structure of the game is settled, we can endorse most of what is important about (MD). There is a sense in which the 'rails to infinity' are real, but they are not found in the mind of any agent.

<sup>4</sup> This definition wasn't in the paper, I just think it's a clearer way of making the point.

## Objections

### *Objections to community views*

My account is a version of a community view, in that the community is essential to account for meaning. Isn't there a worry then that there is no room for the community to make a mistake? Surely, if we want to make room for the individual to make a mistake, we should also have a room for the community to make a mistake?

My answer is no.

- First of all, it only makes sense to speak of a mistake at a particular occasion of use. Only agents ever mean anything on this account.
- If the dispositions of the agents were to say that a non-square is a 'square', that would mean that a different proposition was expressed, where 'square' means 'non-square'. It is the basic constitutive practice of using the word 'square' that gives its meaning.
- The same would be the case if agents' dispositions suddenly changed: they are correct relative to the new practice, incorrect relative to the old. Both are well-defined, except only the new is actual.

### *Dispositions*

In order for the structure of the practice to determine infinitely many cases, the agents must have dispositions to reply in those cases. It might therefore be objected that this is impossible—we don't and can't have such dispositions.

- If we individuate dispositions such that we count one particular disposition for each case, Kripke says, we simply don't have a disposition to reply in every case.
- A proposed fix is to say that *S* would have responded with the sum if, *ceteris paribus* *S* had the abilities and time to come up with an answer. The trouble is, what makes it the case that *S* is adding in these cases, and not quadding?

My reply is that agents have a general disposition to use a term in *some* way in all cases, and that in the conjunction with the structure of the basic constitutive practice of using the term, is what gives its meaning. This is not circular, because I don't assume that the agents

are adding, but that their use of the term ‘adding’ is what gives its meaning for them.

### *The modus ponens model*

So far, it seems that rules do not play a big role in meaning—not even constitutive rules. What about actual cases of rule-following?

Consider the following case of what Crispin has called the ‘modus ponens’ model of rule-following:

(Rule) If ...  $x$  ..., then it is correct to predicate ‘red’ of  $x$ .

(Premise) ...  $x$  ...

(Conclusion) It is correct to apply ‘red’ to  $x$ .

If meaning really was rule-governed, in the sense that the rule guides  $S$ ’s use of ‘red’ and we really are considering a basic case, it seems that the rule cannot inform  $S$ ’s use of ‘red’ at all. In our case, we can bypass this problem by not requiring  $S$  to be guided at all, not by rules nor the practice itself. Just his own intentions, which are given content by the practice.

To contrast, consider the following case:

(Rule) If the light is red, stop!

(Premise) The light is red.

(Conclusion) Stop!

Here, there seems to be no analogous problem. If  $S$ ’s can grasp what the premise means and the rule means, by means of his grasp of the concepts involved, which don’t need further rules leading to a regress,  $S$  should be able to follow the rule. And this seems like a basic case, if anything is.