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Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Jun., 1986), 555-575.

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The Normal and the Normative: Wittgenstein's Legacy, Kripke, and Cavell

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It has become widely accepted in recent years that critical reflection about our practices and their rationales is something various people through acculturation learn to engage in (or to avoid) in various ways, not a simple matter of assuming a culture-neutral standpoint open to all human beings; philosophy is not a presuppositionless superscience. As a result, it seems that all we can do in attempting to justify a practice is appeal to what is normal in some culture (real or ideal) that we admire, and it seems that such appeals are too weak to show that some particular way of doing things must be accepted or rejected by everyone. Either blind enthusiasm or empty rationalism tends to supplant serious critical reflection about what we do. And so philosophical debate about our practices comes to consist in disputes between those who enter appeals to what is normal or traditional (somewhere, if not in one's home culture, then in another, or in the culture of one's imagination) and those who criticize appeals to tradition and undertake searches for culture-neutral ways of formulating and defending principles for the assessment of practices.

Thus, for example, Michael Walzer, in *Spheres of Justice*, argues that a way of distributing goods in a given society can (and can only) be shown to be just by seeing what would be said about distribution by someone "learned in his own tradition, patient and skillful in studying its history, its underlying philosophy, and its institutional details . . . [who] teases out [our] deepest understanding" of fairness and how we value things.¹ "The hard task is to find principles latent in the lives of the people [we] live with, principles they can recognize and adopt."² Ronald Dworkin then

¹ Michael Walzer, "Letter to the Editors," *The New York Review of Books* XXX, 12 (July 21, 1983), p. 43, column c.

² *Ibid.*, p. 44d.

takes Walzer to task for urging nothing more than blind conventionalism. People have different ways of valuing and distributing goods. There are no principles that are latent in the lives of all the people and that merely await recognition. “[O]ur society is divided rather than united over which principles of distributional justice to apply to different types of resources.”³ The only way, according to Dworkin, to escape uncritical conventionalism is to add to our understanding of how we currently value and distribute goods an understanding of “what abstract justice would require.”⁴ Walzer is quick to note in reply that “there are no preordained forms”⁵ of just distribution: preferences for any forms of distribution are culturally shaped and variable. Walzer is thus unable to “see how [distributional] priorities can be *philosophically* determined.”⁶ And so the debate goes on, and our chill does not pass.

One must then ask: is there no other ultimate source of justifications of practices than the appeal to what is normal (either in one’s culture, or in one’s culture transfigured in imagination)? If not, why not? What kinds of questions about justification, if any, can be settled by appeals to what is normal? How, why, and when ought we to do what most people do or could do or wish to do?

In work on the normal and the normative, Wittgenstein’s later writings loom large. Periodically, proclamations of the founding of a Wittgensteinian sociology, or philosophy of science, or political philosophy, or philosophy of art are issued, each proclaimer putatively having found in *Philosophical Investigations* and associated work some help with the problem of how what is normal (and only what is normal) within forms of life can justify engagement in research or social practices and set standards of sanity within them. Both Saul Kripke and Stanley Cavell have suggested, in recent close analyses of selected passages from *Philosophical Investigations*, that Wittgenstein has shown both why justifications of both practices and claims about them must depend on what people normally would do or say in various circumstances and why and how justifications by appeal to the normal can be satisfactory. Yet the accounts of these matters that Kripke and Cavell put forward are at strikingly different levels of depth and intelligibility. This fact itself raises questions about what Wittgenstein’s legacy is and how it can matter to us. Can we find out from Kripke in fewer than 150 pages that, say, skepticism about

³ Ronald Dworkin, “Reply to Walzer’s Letter to the Editors,” *The New York Review of Books* XXX, 12 (July 21, 1983), p. 44d.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45e.

⁵ Walzer, p. 44c.

⁶ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

other minds is refutable through appeal to the fact that we normally, in certain circumstances, claim to know what others think and feel (that “x is in pain” has assertibility conditions for x’s other than oneself)?⁷ Can such a straightforward refutation of skepticism about other minds be taken as a model of how practices and claims are in general to be justified? Or do we need Cavell’s 500 page elaboration of the ‘truth’ of skepticism about our knowledge of others — that skepticism registers, in its simultaneous irrefutability (we do not know others; our fate is to acknowledge them or avoid them) and unlivability, our apartness from others and our fantasies about self-sufficiency to which it helps give rise? Just how is the appeal to what is normal to be entered, in order to justify a way of seeing or doing things? How can it be upheld?

I

In canvassing Wittgenstein’s skeptical arguments for the claim that how we see and do things *cannot* be justified *other* than through appeal to the normal, Kripke’s book is a good place to begin. *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Languages* is very much a work on Wittgenstein’s epistemology, not on his philosophy of mind (to the extent that these are separable — and this will be an issue). Kripke focuses on Wittgenstein’s account, principally set out in Sections 1-202 of *Philosophical Investigations*, of our grasp of concepts and our ability to apply them: that is, of how we come to see and describe things as we do and what license, if any, we have for doing so. He discusses Wittgenstein’s views about such topics as imagination, sensations, and consciousness only in passing as they bear on the former topic.

In one way this emphasis is salutary, for it allows Kripke to analyze in detail Wittgenstein’s argument for the conclusion that nothing about individuals considered in isolation enables them to apply concepts correctly. In order to justify a present application of a concept, appeals to past experiences or pseudo-experiences (of grasping a concept or intending to follow a certain rule in a certain way), present dispositions, and the outputs of machines are all useless. (i) Any past experiences can always be interpreted in various different ways that point to various inconsistent present applications of concepts. My present inclination to say “five” when asked “what is the sum of two and three?” cannot be justified through appeal to a prior experience of intending to do so, for how do I know that I understand now my past experiences of intending to add; per-

⁷ Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982). See p. 135. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the text by page numbers in parentheses, e.g., (135).

haps I had always really intended to say “twenty-seven” when asked *now* for the sum of two and three, now that things are somehow different. (Kripke fruitfully compares Wittgenstein with Goodman on induction at this point.) (ii) Our dispositions are finite while occasions for applying concepts are potentially infinite; moreover, our dispositions have no normative force and hence cannot justify any present behavior. (iii) The outputs of machines cannot be regarded as normative for our applications of concepts, for machines sometimes break down and we correct their outputs by reference to our applications of concepts, not vice versa. Consequently, “the answer to the sceptic’s problem ‘What tells me how I am to apply a given rule in a new case?’” (43) is “not any facts only about me.”

At this point, “it seems that the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air.” (22) Having confronted the skeptic’s points, “the main problem is *not* ‘How can we show private language . . . to be *impossible?*; rather it is, ‘How can we show *any language* at all (public, private, or what-have-you) to be possible?’” (62) Our practice of applying concepts, of describing things thus and so, suddenly seems unjustifiable.

Kripke suggests that Wittgenstein offers a skeptical solution, in the style of Berkeley and Hume, to the skeptic’s problem. Such a solution consists in “conceding that the sceptic’s negative assertions are unanswerable,” while insisting that our practices of applying concepts and following rules are nonetheless justified insofar as they do “not require the justification the sceptic has shown to be untenable.” (66)

First of all, falling under certain state-concepts (e.g., knowing the sum of two and three) is to be analyzed as having an ability (e.g., being able to say what others would normally say in response to the question “what is the sum of two and three?”), not vice versa. Secondly “follows a rule correctly” just *means* “does what we normally do in relevantly similar circumstances.” Sentences have assertibility conditions which “involve reference to a community.” (79) These conditions, and not any facts only about individuals, determine what it is for an individual in a community to follow a rule correctly. Wittgenstein does not deny that there is any such thing as correct rule following; all that is “denied is what might be called the ‘private model’ of rule following, [i.e.] that the notion of a person following a given rule is to be analyzed in terms of facts about the rule follower alone, without reference to his membership in a wider community.” (109)

It is not for us to say, on the basis of any *a priori* conceptions, what it is for me to apply the rules ‘in the same way’ in new cases. If our practice is indeed to say “he is in pain” [of another] in certain circumstances, then that is what determines what *counts* as “applying the predicate ‘is in pain’ to him in the same way as to myself.” . . . There is no legitimate ques-

tion as to whether we do the ‘right’ thing when we apply “in pain” to others as we do. . . . (135)

II

The considerations which Kripke adduces against the private model of rule following are familiar. So are the references to assertibility conditions and membership in a linguistic community in the account put forward by Kripke of what “follows a rule correctly” means. But do appeals to assertibility conditions and linguistic communities really provide us with justifications for seeing and describing things as we do? Mustn’t there be more to the story? Notoriously, languages and linguistic communities continually change somewhat and eventually a good deal, as different types of expressions are associated with different assertibility conditions. New phenomena — Christian morality, game winning RBIs, *in vitro* fertilization, obsessional neuroses, the capitalist exploitation of labor — appear in our culture and are newly conceptualized, so that new groupings, things newly called the same, sometimes emerge among the older phenomena as well. Are we supposed simply to know, in the absence of even Kantian or Davidsonian transcendental argument, how things are necessarily grouped by most people, what must always normally be called what?

Furthermore, is Wittgenstein’s talk of forms of life and “how we do it” even meant to solve the problem of justifying some ways of seeing and doing things? One will want, I think, to answer this last question “yes and no,” an ambivalence that might be explained by saying that Wittgenstein was continuously concerned with who we are — that is, which persons share membership in a form of life — with how this can change, and with how we can thus perplex or become enigmas to ourselves, find our practices somehow out of order with us, and wonder what to do then. To overlook these concerns of Wittgenstein’s is to trivialize his teaching into an uncritical conventionalism. (I have the impression that Wittgenstein is nowadays much ignored precisely because what he has to say is thought to be trivial in this way.)

But Wittgenstein’s later work is not so trivially conventionalist. His continuing concerns with the shiftings of forms of human life and community and with what justifications are nonetheless available for certain ways of seeing and doing things are registered in a number of closely interrelated ways in *Philosophical Investigations*.

1) Wittgenstein sketches imagined alternative languages, such as the

language used by a builder and his assistant,⁸ and he notes that a new language can grow out of an older one, can be an expansion (“eine Erweiterung”) (PI, 68), of it. No doubt it is difficult, perhaps impossible (but why?), for us to imagine ourselves using only the language of the builders; the interests of the builders in their world and in communication with one another are too meager for us to be able to recognize ourselves in them. (One might perhaps *try* to imagine our culture coming to be dominated by a post-industrial rejection of all complexity in favor of absorption in repetitive manual labor.) Nonetheless, Wittgenstein does repeatedly call what the builder does the speaking of a language, and, however different the speakers and hearers of that language would be from us, it is not yet obvious — not without further argument — that the way the builder and the assistant have of responding to new phenomena, their division of the world into blocks, pillars, slabs, beams, and nameless undifferentiated other things, is any more or less a correct way of rule following than our own. There is a community there; communication is said to take place. Yet if their way of seeing and doing things is correct, because normal, then it seems that ours cannot be correct just like that; our ways of thinking and speaking of things would be normal, and hence justifiable, only for us. Wittgenstein would have to be understood not as suggesting a theory of the justification in general of practices through reference to the normal, but rather as a kind of relativist.

Notoriously, the possibility of our coming to use alternative languages, our coming to associate new linguistic types with new assertibility conditions, has driven many, Goodman, for example (“there are many ways the world is, and every true description captures one of them,”⁹ so that neither the world nor what is normal now provides any unchallengeable justification for ruling abnormal talk out of court; one has to try it out), to outright relativism. Wittgenstein insists on the very facts which so move Goodman: that our linguistic habits are historically emergent and alterable and that no grasp of abstract culture-independent concepts or structures of reality underlies and justifies our linguistic habits. In light of these facts, appeals to what is normal now cannot *by themselves* justify us in seeing and doing things as we do. *If* justifications of our practices which

⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3d. ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958). Subsequent references to this work will be given by section number, preceded by PI, in parentheses, e.g., (PI, 2), for Part I, and by section number and page number, preceded by PI, in parentheses, e.g., (PI, xi, 222), for Part II.

⁹ Nelson Goodman, “The Way the World Is,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 14, 1 (September 1980). Reprinted in *Problems and Projects* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1972), p. 31.

rely on appeals to what is normal are to be convincing, they must rely on more than these appeals alone. To the question “does my membership in a linguistic community and possession of certain habits of talking justify me in talking as I do, when there are other communities, actual or possible, in which different habits prevail?” Goodman replies “no” or “not necessarily; the other community’s habits might be useful ones — one must try them and see.” Wittgenstein seems to want to say “at least sometimes, yes, necessarily.” But how can this reply be made convincing? — Not by appeal to what is normal alone.

2) Wittgenstein denies that there are any *givens*, any unconceptualized simple bits of experience such that acquaintance with them would determine what would count as legitimate constructions and projections of concepts, as legitimate habits of describing things. What is simple and what is complex in our experience depends on the circumstances and the problem of classification that confronts us. (See PI, 48.) What is simple relative to one way of looking at things — for example, the 128 measures of an E-flat chord with which *Das Rheingold* begins — may be complex relative to another (the orchestration of these measures and the role of their motif in the plot are elaborate). Here too the parallel with Goodman (“[no way of seeing] can lay any good claim to be the way of seeing or picturing the world as it is”)¹⁰ is striking, and the relativistic moral seems inescapable. If our current ways of seeing the world are not and cannot be exclusively based on what is simply given in our experience, then what justifies us in seeing the world as we do? — Not by itself the fact that some way of seeing is now normal.

3) Wittgenstein construes our employment of in principle private languages — our withdrawal from one another into silent soliloquizing — as a *logically* possible alternative to our normal ways of talking. Admittedly, it is not, Wittgenstein would have it, an alternative we can take up without altering many of our practices and finding our present practices and selves unintelligible from our new standpoint. But this nonetheless means that the real question for Wittgenstein in his consideration of private language is the nature, and strength, of our attachment to our currently normal ways of talking about public objects. And one of his conclusions is that nothing about what is normal itself alone necessitates this attachment. Rather than being, as Kripke would have it (3), a special case in which established conclusions about the roles of linguistic communities and normal usages in justifying various linguistic practices are deployed to show private languages impossible, Wittgenstein’s consideration of the possibility of private languages is designed to test the extent to which our mem-

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

bership in an actual present community of language users who talk about public objects justifies us in talking in this way against the claims — as yet not shown to be incoherent — that no justification for what we do can be found in what is normal and that such justifications could only be found by attending to what goes on in individuals. One moral of this consideration is that what is now normal or prevailing in our linguistic behavior always requires acceptance and continuation.

This reading of the so-called private language argument, sections 243 to 315, is eccentric and controversial. If I am right, seeing what Wittgenstein has to say about how our attachment to the normal, first of all, is contested by our attraction to silent soliloquizing and self-understanding and, secondly, defeats it (insofar as Wittgenstein himself finds the attachment stronger than the attraction and claims to speak for us) is crucial to understanding Wittgenstein's general views about the normal and normative. It is worth setting out this reading at some length.

The argument typically attributed to Wittgenstein runs as follows.

- (1) There must be rules for the uses of expressions in order for there to be behavior sensibly described as using language.
- (2) All rules are such that it is possible to make a mistake in applying them.
- (3) But it is not possible to make a mistake in applying a rule for the use of an expression which applies only to one's private experiences, for in that case whatever one takes to be a correct application of the expression will be correct.
- (4) Therefore (by 2 and 3) there could be no rules for using expressions which referred only to a single person's private experiences.
- (5) Therefore (by 1 and 4), there can be no behavior sensibly describable as following a rule for applying a term in a private language. The notion of a private language is fundamentally incoherent.

This argument will surely, and rightly, fail to convince a defender of the possibility of private languages of the incoherence of the notion of such a language. Premises (1), (2), and (3) are debatable. They will all simply be denied by a defender of the possibility of a private language, by someone who thinks that is possible to explain our thinking and our language use through recognizing in oneself law-governed events which determine one's linguistic behavior.

The whole point in believing in the possibility of private languages is in believing that our mental life and linguistic behavior are law-governed and that we can explain our thinking and our linguistic behavior by discovering the laws of our inner life. In that inner life, perhaps public rules for the uses of expressions have nothing to do with the mental events which determine the course of our thinking and public language use. If we could discover the character of that inner life, then perhaps we could understand how our linguistic behavior comes about and how we communicate without drawing on the notion of rules for the uses of expressions, so (1) might be false. That is, it might turn out that what makes a piece of behavior linguistic is not its being rule-governed, but rather its being caused in a certain special way. Moreover, it surely ought to be noted that Wittgenstein's own account in sections 143-202 of "knowing how to go on" is thoroughly at odds with the notion that all uses of language are necessarily rule-governed. It is at least possible, according to Wittgenstein, so far as the concept of language is concerned, that a person should know how to go on (apply a concept correctly) *without* adverting to any rule whatsoever. (See PI, 152.) Human beings may not typically do this, but nothing in the concept of correct language use shows they could not. Language use is not necessarily governed by rules, *according to Wittgenstein*; thus (1) may well be false. Cavell made this point over twenty years ago, but it is worth insisting on here. "That everyday language does not, in fact or in essence, depend on such a structure and conception of rules, and yet that the absence of such a structure in no way impairs its functioning, is what the picture of language drawn in the later philosophy is about."¹¹ Finally, it also ought to be noted that, according to Wittgenstein, "language" is a family-resemblance concept, so that there presumably are no necessary truths about either language or linguistic behavior. (1), however, is just such a claim about a feature which all linguistic behavior putatively has necessarily, so that (1) seems at odds with Wittgenstein's rejection of the idea that there are necessary truths about language.

Secondly, perhaps in the course of our inner lives we apply rules that are, unlike public rules, just the sorts of rules that are always applied correctly, so (2) might be false. Or, thirdly, perhaps we can make mistakes in characterizing events in our inner life. Perhaps we can confuse the representational import or past provenance of distinct mental pictures and

¹¹ Stanley Cavell, "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy," *The Philosophical Review* LXXI (1962): 67-93. Reprinted in *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G. Pitcher (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1966), p. 156.

later find out that we have done so, so (3) might be false. (An interesting case: Kant, in the third *Critique*, claims that we can never be certain about whether an inner feeling of pleasure has been caused by the satisfaction of desire, on the one hand, or the harmony of the cognitive faculties in free play, on the other.) It is perhaps true that it is not possible for us to *recognize* having made a mistake in applying a term of a private language. But (3) does not follow from this claim. To suppose that it does is to confound truth with verifiability. It could be true that someone has made a mistake in applying a term of a private language, without that fact being verifiable. Similar considerations undermine other reconstructions of the private language argument, according to which one must, in order to use a term, remember its meaning correctly, while we are (so this reconstruction runs) unable to remember the meaning of a term of a private language (“whatever seems right is right”). It is true that we could not independently *verify* our having remembered correctly the meaning of a term of a private language but that does not show that we could not in fact correctly remember such a thing.¹²

Thus the argument typically attributed to Wittgenstein fails to show that all linguistic behavior must come about through conformity, induced through training, to public rules of usage. Someone who believes that our thinking and our language use can be explained as the outcomes of law-governed inner processes (whether the laws in questions are the laws of God, the laws of nature, or the laws of metaphysics) is right not to be moved by this argument by itself.

We do, generally, share public languages with others. But how have we come to do it? Can our sharing of language and our thinking be explained? Once our thinking and our overt linguistic behavior seem fit matters for explanation, then public agreement in overt linguistic behavior appears to be *not* a fixed source of all justifications, but rather an alterable epiphenomenon of what goes on in us. Something inner, a private process sealed off from public view, the soul’s silent self-colloquy (whether mental or material), seems to determine what we do in using language, and even whether we think and use language as others do. Once this is suspected, it seems that we must look inside ourselves to find this as yet undiscovered inner sign-use-determining process.

The defender of the possibility of private languages suggests that some process takes place unconsciously in individuals, that this process issues in unconsciously asserted descriptions of individuals’ inner experiences, and

¹² See Alan Donagan, “Wittgenstein on Sensation,” in *Wittgenstein*, ed. Pitcher, pp. 339-40; and Stewart Candlish, “The Real Private Language Argument,” *Philosophy* 55, 211 (January 1980): 90-91.

that somehow process and result unconsciously come to consciousness as the calling out of a term for what is often taken, in virtue of unconscious thought processes, to be a public object. Someday such unconscious processes and unconscious intermediate results of them might be discovered. Their discovery might matter to how we think of ourselves and to how we then use language. What is now normal linguistic behavior could change.

Thus (contrary to Kripke's reading) the claim that justifications for applying terms to things in certain ways *must* always depend ultimately on its being normal in some community to do so, and not on any facts about individuals, *cannot* be established before the possibility that our language use is grounded in our (currently unconscious) sensations and (currently unconscious) (quasi-)recognition of them is considered. Like Kripke, Anthony Kenny notes that Wittgenstein claims early on in *Philosophical Investigations*, before considering explicitly the possibility of private languages, that the process of learning to apply terms to *public* objects cannot be private. That is, no private acts of "bare ostension" could account for how we apply terms to public objects. But, unlike Kripke, Kenny then observes that the possibility that the referents of terms are exclusively private inner experiences complicates matters anew.

A defender of private languages might suggest the possibility of a language which was private in that its words *referred to* private sensations without necessarily being private in that its words were *learnt from* private sensations by bare ostension. A private language, he might maintain, might be learnt from private sensations not by bare ostension but by some private analogue of training in the use of words. This suggestion shows that the critique of the primacy of ostensive definition does not render superfluous the later explicit discussion of private languages.¹³

In other words, the "stagesetting" necessary for language use (PI, 257) could, it seems, take place not in cultures, but in individuals — and why not differently in different ones? — so far as any considerations about the necessity for correct rule following that certain ways of rule following be normal show by themselves. As a result what had looked fixed and unalterable, normal public language use, now appears — pending consideration of how we might discover or construct private languages and of what we might do with them and make of ourselves if we did — to be potentially shifty and unstable.

How could such suggestions that unconscious processes and their results unconsciously either determine our habits of conceptualization or set standards for their correctness be refuted *a priori*, in advance of investigations of what goes on in us? They cannot be. As Wittgenstein later

¹³ Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 180-81.

remarks, "The best that I can propose is that we should yield to the temptation to use this picture, but then investigate what the application of this picture looks like." (PI, 374; translation modified) The discussion of sensations put forward by Wittgenstein in sections 243 to 315 depicts his imagination yielding, so far as it is possible, to the temptation to suppose that our currently normal linguistic behavior is to be explained (and either justified or replaced) by reference to currently unconscious, but potentially introspectible, inner processes, and not vice versa. Wittgenstein is *not* arguing that it is possible for us to construct and employ private languages; quite the contrary. But, to the extent that he finds the possibility of our doing so to be empty or not real for us, he finds it to be so *not* through any straightforward argument about linguistic rules, but through setting his attachment to normal modes of human communication against his desire for an explanation of his mental and linguistic life and through finding the attachment stronger, *more essential to his ability to recognize himself*, than the desire. This role played by self-recognition in rejecting the enterprise of constructing and employing a private language can point us to a way of understanding how, when, and why what is normal can sometimes be normative, given that what is normal is not always normative. Wittgenstein secures our commitment to the practice of employing languages with terms which refer to public objects, but not by showing that private languages are logically impossible. What then secures this commitment?

4) Wittgenstein emphasizes that criteria for calling things thus and so or seeing things as thus and so are in some sense conventional, are set up, established, or fixed through human agreement. "[W]hat should interest us is the question: how do we *compare* these experiences; what criterion of identity *do we fix* for their occurrence?" (PI, 322) New criteria can be introduced in a linguistic community (see PI xi, 212; 288; 354), as the interests of its members in comparing phenomena shift and new similarities among phenomena emerge in their experience. To be sure, new criteria do not often emerge (although they sometimes do) through explicit discussion of them or reflection on them; the myth of rational prelinguistic subjects wordlessly confronting the world and deciding how to class things is one Wittgenstein is concerned to combat. Rather, new criteria emerge almost imperceptibly in the life of a linguistic community, as the interests of its members shift. But this does not detract from the fact that they do change. Normal ways of seeing and describing things are subject to some evolution. And if that is so, then appeals to what is normal at a given moment cannot by themselves convincingly justify us in seeing and doing things in a particular way.

In light of these four points, Wittgenstein cannot be properly understood as advocating uncritical conventionalism about ways of talking and of doing things that are normal in a community. If anything, his position about the justification of practices now looks more like some version of relativism. Individuals and cultures change their ways of seeing and doing things as interest and inclination lead them, without any particular ways of seeing and doing being such that we — human beings in general — are rationally compelled to engage in them. The phenomenon of linguistic change, the nonexistence of any given basic units of experience, the logical possibility of our coming to employ private languages, and the conventionality of criteria all suggest that we lack, and perhaps must lack, rational justifications for how we see things and what we do — unless, however, some account of the rational justification of a practice can be teased out of Wittgenstein's way of rejecting the genuine logical possibility of private languages as empty for us.

III

One account of the rational justification of a practice which has been found in *Philosophical Investigations* by some is (what can be called) the No Real Alternatives View, advocated by John W. Cook, Barry Stroud, and Jonathan Lear, among others. Cook, in a recent defense of the methods of ordinary language philosophy, has uncovered what he has dubbed “the illusion of the aberrant speaker.”¹⁴ This is an illusion to which certain relativists, in particular, critics of ordinary language philosophy, are prone. They imagine that there are coherent alternative ways of seeing and doing things when in fact there are not. For example, a relativist about languages and practices might suppose that some persons could use the words “inadvertently” and “automatically” as synonyms. As Cook would have it, however, this supposition is incoherent; “we cannot get so far as imagining”¹⁵ such persons, in as much as they would mysteriously lack our sense of salient differences among the manners in which actions can be done.¹⁶

Similarly, Barry Stroud suggests that while radically alternative practices are logically possible or in some sense conceivable, we are unable to imagine or make sense either of the persons who, the relativist alleges, could engage in them or of such practices themselves. First of all, “alternatives are not inconceivable or unimaginable because they involve

¹⁴ John W. Cook, “The Illusion of Aberrant Speakers,” *Philosophical Investigations* 5, 3 (July 1982). See p. 217.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

or lead to a logical contradiction.”¹⁷ Yet the limits of the imaginable or intelligible are narrower than those of the logically possible, and we cannot really make sense of such alternatives.

We think we can understand and accept them [radically alternative practices, such as continuing arithmetical series differently than we do] only because the wider-reaching consequences of counting, calculating, and so forth in these deviant ways are not brought out explicitly. When we try to trace out the implications of behaving like that consistently and quite generally, our understanding of the alleged possibilities diminishes.¹⁸

Our interests, inclinations, and senses of significant similarities and differences among things somehow block our projection of ourselves into engagement in such practices.

According to Lear, we have the practices we have because we are “minded in a certain way, [that is, we have] perceptions of salience, routes of interest, feelings of naturalness in following a rule, etc. that constitute being part of a certain form of life.”¹⁹ We might have been minded other than we are; it is logically possible. Nonetheless, we cannot really understand what it would be like to be minded otherwise.

[T]he notion of people being ‘other-minded’ is not something on which we can get any grasp. . . . [B]eing minded as we are is not one possibility we can explore among others. . . . There is no getting a glimpse of what it might be like to be other-minded, for as we move toward the outer bounds of our mindedness we verge on incoherence and nonsense.²⁰

And so, in as much as we have the practices we have because we are minded as we are, there are no real alternatives to our seeing and doing things as we do.

The license for attributing the No Real Alternatives View to Wittgenstein is clear. There are such passages as the following.

What has to be accepted, the given is — so one could say — *forms* of life. (PI, xi, 226)
[Philosophy] leaves everything as it is. (PI, 124)

And thinking and inferring (like counting) is of course bounded for us, not by an arbitrary definition, but by limits corresponding to the body of what can be called the role of thinking and inferring in our life.²¹

¹⁷ Barry Stroud, “Wittgenstein and Logical Necessity,” *Philosophical Review* 84, 4 (October 1965). Reprinted in Pitcher (ed.), p. 485.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 488.

¹⁹ Jonathan Lear, “Leaving the World Alone,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 79, 7 (July 1982): 385.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

²¹ Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, ed. G. H. Von Wright, R. Rhees and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), Part I, Section 116, p. 34e.

Yet these passages suggest only that what is normal must *sometimes* be accepted, that we must engage in *some* normal modes of conceptualization, not reject them in favor, say, of ways of thinking proposed by philosophers (though how is one to distinguish what is normal from what a philosopher says we really do? and how is one to distinguish philosophical revisionism from plain appreciations of the normal?). These passages do *not* say that what is normal must always be accepted. Only when what is normal is, so to speak, in part constitutive of our form of life must it be.

Moreover, as a general view about the justifiability of normal practices, the No Real Alternatives View cannot be right, nor, for the reasons given in Section II above, did Wittgenstein suppose it was. Sometimes there are genuine alternatives. Whether, for example, *every* time in a major league baseball game a batter, having hit a ball into fair territory that is not caught while in flight and is not misplayed by any fielder, is able to circle the bases, touching them all in order and not passing another runner, before the ball is retrieved and he is tagged with it, is to be said to have hit a *home run* is up to us. In fact, the practice varies from stadium to stadium. In Chicago's Wrigley Field, but not in other parks, a batter can be returned to second base and ruled to have hit a ground rule double if the ball he hit became lodged, in such a way that the outfielder could not find it, in the ivy growing on the outfield wall. The rule could be otherwise; the batter could be determined to have hit a home run. Presumably if the ivy is cut down the rule would be changed. The practice could be other than what it is. More controversially, does "morally right" mean "commanded by pure practical reason"? If so, why? If not, why not? Couldn't we make it mean whatever we all pleased? — Perhaps not. But then if not, why not?

The No Real Alternatives View is attractive, especially in light of the difficulties we run into in trying to justify the practices we have and our ways of following rules. But it cannot be sustained by itself in the absence of some further account of what distinguishes cases in which there are no alternatives for us to a normal way of doing things from cases in which there are. (Lear sees this, and he allots to philosophy the role of seeing which among actual and logically possible practices are mandated for us, which are open to us if we like, and which are incoherent for us, given that we are minded as we are.²² (Unfortunately he says rather little about how this is to be done, about what features of ourselves and our practices we are to be on the lookout for in doing this.) Is there then a *kind* of case in which there is for us no genuine alternative to what we normally do? What is meant by the phrase "constitutive of our form of life" when we say that a practice is constitutive of our form of life and hence cannot be

²² Lear, pp. 390-91.

abandoned or altered? How can we tell when a practice has this feature? What is wrong with someone (for example, a throughgoing relativist) who thinks there are alternatives when there are none? What does he fail to see about practices or to understand about himself?

IV

These questions are ones whose relevance Cavell has been concerned to insist on. This insistence stems from his recognition, in the face of much early commentary on *Philosophical Investigations*, that the satisfaction of what are now our criteria for calling a thing thus and so is *not evidence* of any kind for a thing's being thus and so.²³ For example, the fact that this person here before me satisfies the criteria for being in pain is not evidence in favor of his being in pain. The role of providing evidence for the existence of particular states of affairs is instead allotted to what Wittgenstein calls symptoms, phenomena which experience has shown to be accompaniments of the states of affairs of which they are symptoms.²⁴ Nor are criteria *logically* sufficient conditions for the existence of the states of affairs of which they are criteria, in as much as the criteria of x 's being F can be satisfied and x nonetheless not be F . (See CR, 69-70.) Yet Wittgenstein apparently nonetheless supposes that our having and knowing certain criteria for x 's being F sometimes confers on us the right to say " x is F " or "here is an F ." (See PI, 289.) How is this possible, given that the satisfaction of criteria does not justify us, either inductively or deductively, in saying " x is F "? What is the point of saying, in the face of the skeptic's insistence that our criteria could be satisfied and the thing nonetheless not present ("we do not really know") and that our criteria are conventional ("we could talk otherwise, play different language-games;" "we cannot establish that the distinctions drawn in our language mirror the structure of the world") that *these are our criteria*, that in certain circumstances *we call that x 's being F* ?

Here Cavell has a sharp and novel answer. Claims of the form "in such and such circumstances we call that x 's being F " are neither simply reports

²³ Cavell discusses at length two well-known early accounts of Wittgenstein's views on criteria and justification: those of Rogers Albritton, "On Wittgenstein's Use of the Term 'Criterion,'" *The Journal of Philosophy* 56 (1959); reprinted in Pitcher (ed.); and Norman Malcolm, "Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations*," *Philosophical Review* 63 (1954); reprinted with slight revisions in Pitcher (ed.). See *The Claim of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), Part I, Section II, pp. 37-48. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the text by page number, preceded by CR, in parentheses, e.g. (CR, 112).

²⁴ See Wittgenstein, *The Blue Book* in *The Blue and Brown Books* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), pp. 24-25.

upon prevailing usage nor pieces of attempted linguistic or conceptual imperialism. They are rather *attempts* to speak as a member of a community would speak, attempts which are called forth by the facts that not everyone does speak that way, that community habits of speech have been lost or forgotten or that the community of which one is or hopes to be a member has not yet learned how to project its habits of speech onto new situations and so is under threat of dissolution, in so far as different people may come to conceptualize important new situations differently, thus distancing themselves from one another. (Compare *Philosophical Investigations* Section 288, where Wittgenstein remarks that when a normal language-game is abrogated [“abgeschafft”] then we need criteria.) They are what Cavell calls *claims to community*, entered when the existence of community is in doubt.

The philosophical appeal to what we say, and the search for our criteria on the basis of which we say what we say, are claims to community. And the claim to community is always a search for the basis upon which it can [be] or has been established. (CR, 20)

Claims to community are at the same time claims to *self-knowledge*. One who puts such a claim forward represents himself as sharing with others certain habits of speech and conceptualization, and this self-representation is either upheld or established, on the one hand, or rejected, on the other, as others accept or reject this claim on what they would say. Just as claims to community, which are also claims to self-knowledge, are entered when community is in doubt, so are they also entered when self-knowledge is in doubt.

Wittgensteinian criteria are appealed to when we “don’t know our way about,” when we are lost with respect to our words and the world they anticipate. Then we start finding ourselves by finding out and declaring the criteria upon which we are in agreement. (CR, 34)

Finally, such claims to community and self-knowledge are at the same time claims to or of *reason*. “The wish and search for community are the wish and search for reason.” (CR, 20) Reason thus must and can be claimed. More prosaically, there are no *a priori* knowable rules for forming all and only rational beliefs, yet some beliefs nonetheless turn out to be rationally justifiable — when they are expressed by sentences we “would all say” in certain circumstances.

Why should this be so, and is it right? What is reason such that it can be lost or threatened and must be claimed (it is not our fixed possession) and that it must be claimed by claiming community and self-knowledge, by entering appeals to what we say? — Without criteria, conditions under which things may be called thus and so, there is no possibility of making sense of the world. They enable our conceptualization of our experience, our comparing of things to one another.

Criteria are the terms in which I *relate what is happening*, make sense of it by giving its history, say 'what goes before and after'. What I call something, what I *count* as something, is a function of how I *recount* it, tell it. (CR, 93-4)

I can to some extent make my own criteria, constitute myself a community of one. But insanity is a threat here. My abnormality relative to others (even should I prove somehow able to generate and sustain normal ways of conceiving of things by myself) is likely to prove destructive of my self. Even if I could (say through concentrating my inner attention) develop and maintain thoroughly idiosyncratic sets of criteria, ways of thinking and speaking (to myself, about what is going on in me — private languages are logically possible), something in me wants my habits of conceptualization and speech confirmed in the habits of another. Left alone with my criteria, it is as though I cannot bring myself to believe in them and to continue deploying them in new cases. This natural human propensity to want one's ways of thinking and speaking shared shows itself in our reaction to the sorts of cases Wittgenstein puts before us of people who do things very differently from us: they continue the series of even numbers, adding two, by saying ". . . 1996, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2008. . . ;" or they reckon the amount of lumber on hand by determining the area covered by a pile of it, so that a shorter more spread out pile of (what we call) the same amount of wood contains 'more wood' for them; or they classify animals not at all in virtue of their ability to reproduce offspring 'like' them, but as "too large (or not) to carry in a pocket," "able (or not) to solve trigonometry problems," and "is older than six (or not)." Cavell has noticed an important feature of these cases: they're upsetting; the supposed persons described in them make us anxious. Why is this? "Is it that we read our unintelligibility to [such beings] as our unintelligibility as such?" (CR, 115) It seems that our sense of having selves at all and of encountering and living in a world depends upon our finding others to conceptualize and talk about it as we do. Without community, there is, for us, no self-identity and no reason (in or for our conceptualizing).

So far all that has been suggested by Wittgenstein's examples is that sharing some habits of conceptualization with some others is necessary for self-identity and for continuing commitment to a way of conceptualizing things (itself necessary for continuing self-identity as opposed to insane self-doubt and self-struggle). But will the sharing of any habits of conceptualization whatsoever by any group of people enable us to think of ourselves as having identities as conceptualizers and agents and to believe in what we do, so that no particular habits of conceptualization are necessary for human beings in general and one community is as good as another for enabling stable self-recognition? No; Wittgenstein's exam-

ples of radically alternative practices are meant to make us realize something stronger than that. Not only do we want, and does our capacity for self-recognition require, others to do things as we do, to deploy our criteria (sometimes), we want and require them to do so because it is natural and inevitable for them to do so. For us to believe in certain of our practices and to be able to recognize ourselves as beings who have them, it is necessary not only that some others have them, but further that others *in general* take to them and continue them as we do. Certain (not all) of our practices — say, among others our ways of counting, assessing volumes, and classifying biological species — present themselves to us as necessary for self-recognition. We cannot imagine ourselves doing these things other than we do. When we try, we fail, our sense of being persons encountering and conceiving of a world with certain regularities having vanished.²⁵ What is normal for us appears in the unintelligibility to us of the ‘others’ of Wittgenstein’s examples as natural to human beings in general. These examples of radically alternative practices are ones, for us, “in which the ideal of *normality*, upon which the strength of criteria depends, is seen to be an idea of *naturalness*.” (CR, 122) The ‘imagining’ of ‘others’ who have other ‘practices,’ but in whom we are unable to recognize ourselves, makes it clear that our idea of what is human includes that of finding *certain* of our ways of doing things — of counting, conceptualizing, and following rules — natural. What prevents us from recognizing ourselves in logically possible cases in which practices radically different from certain of our own are normal is the fact that our selves are partially determined by the practices we find natural. What enables us to know that this is so is only that our attempts at imaginative self-recognition are sometimes blocked. That certain practices be shared, normal, is necessary for continuing self-recognition for anyone. But furthermore that certain of *our* current practices be normal and *natural* for human beings in general is necessary for our being what we are, our being able sometimes to recognize ourselves as beings who naturally engage in certain practices.²⁶

²⁵ For a detailed and specific account, along these lines, of why we must make use of the principle of non-contradiction, see Manley Thompson, “On A Priori Truth,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 78, 8 (August 1981).

²⁶ Wittgenstein’s way, as I read him, of establishing that engagement in certain specific practices is a necessary condition of our capacity for self-recognition has evident affinities with Kant’s procedure in the transcendental deduction of arguing that our conceptualization of phenomena as belonging to certain categories is a necessary condition of our ability to become conscious of our having of any representation we have. Two differences, which ought to be remarked, between Wittgenstein and Kant are (i) that we have the capacity for self-recognition is *not* for Wittgenstein (unlike, according to Kant, our being such that the principle of the unity of apperception is true of us) a logical principle; for Wittgenstein, each of us must try for himself to see when and how far this capacity

Not all practices are such that they can be shown to be either necessary for us or impossible for us through the success or failure of attempts at self-recognition of projections of oneself in imagined situations. Sometimes there are real alternatives for us to our ways of doing things, and it is not easy to say when there are and when there are not. (Philosophizing does not offer a solution to every problem about what to do.) Problems about which practices are desirable or pleasant or profitable cannot be solved through the use of Wittgenstein's strategy of testing the extent to which self-recognition would be possible were certain practices other than our own normal. Nonetheless — as Wittgenstein's way of rejecting as empty for us the possibility of private languages and of speaking for us in general in so doing show — some practices can be shown to be constitutive of our form of life and hence necessary for us.

Which practices are such that we would be unable to recognize ourselves were the world to be such that they were not normal is not something which can be specified without considerable efforts at the imagination of alternative practices and at self-projection. (Compare Charles Taylor's suggestion that radically alternative practices found in cultures other than our own can be explained and evaluated by, and only by, developing a "language of perspicuous contrast" within which both others' ways of life and ours can be described as "alternative possibilities in relation to some human constants at work in both.")²⁷ Imaginative self-projection is the sort of thing which novelists and poets, along with philosophers, often do. Thus one result of understanding Wittgenstein's remarks on private languages to generate practice-governing principles as I have claimed they do would be refusing to distinguish between philosophy and literature. Works in both genres work, when they work, by enabling our imaginative self-recognition of our attachment or lack of it to various practices. (Compare Aristotle's observation in the *Poetics* that works of literature yield categorical universals, that is, yield knowledge of what *anyone* in certain circumstances would do.) Consider Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*: a man who, like us, worries about the point and worth of various common human practices such as the moral assess-

extends (sometimes, it turns out, we all get the same result); and (ii) unlike Kant, who provided a Table of Categories, Wittgenstein provides no list of practices engagement in which is necessary for human life as such. One might sum up these differences by saying that for Wittgenstein philosophical activity, the testing of our capacity for self-recognition and the capacities necessary to support it, is always to be carried out within a culture which evolves to some extent, while for Kant philosophizing can be conducted from a neutral standpoint outside culture.

²⁷ Charles Taylor, "Understanding and Explanation in the Geisteswissenschaften," in *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule*, ed. S. Holtzman and C. Leich (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 205.

ment of actions. His repentance, described in the epilogue, reveals — insofar as it is natural, inevitable, to him — that our attachment to “mere existence,” like that of others, and to love, when one finds oneself in it, that is like the love others have and believe in for one another, outweighs our hopes for grand success and any beliefs one might have that one “alone has the truth” about how to achieve it. There is, so we learn, “fundamental falsity” in thinking otherwise.²⁸

This particular claim to community might fail, not win acceptance. If it does, Dostoyevsky will not have spoken for us as I suppose and there may be less human community than I suppose. But claims of this kind — claims to community, self-knowledge, and reason — *can* succeed and yield practice-governing principles. Convincing practice-governing principles will *not* be summaries, suitable only for certain social groups, of what simply is normal in certain times and places, and they will not be the products of abstract reasoning about the right, the good, and the fair which does not consider when and how we naturally go on with certain practices. They will instead reflect discoveries, achieved through the effort to imagine and recognize ourselves doing things otherwise, that some of what is normal is natural.

Normal ways, in various societies, of thinking and doing things *express* conceptions of rational rule following, rational pursuits, and rational social relations. People understand and define themselves in relation to these practices as people who count or investigate nature or distribute goods or find the experience of art valuable in certain ways. Sometimes some of what is normal can seem to express inconsistent or otherwise unsatisfactory conceptions of what is natural in the investigation of nature, in social life, or in the experience of art. If this is sensed or noticed, alienation results. If this does not happen, and what is normal is found to be unproblematically natural, then human life is authentic.²⁹ Wittgenstein thus emerges ultimately as not only a philosopher of mind, language, or knowledge, but as a theorist of alienation and authenticity. His legacy lies in his suggestion of a strategy — the testing of the possibilities of self-recognition when various normal practices are imagined altered — for recognizing and accounting for these phenomena.³⁰

²⁸ Joanne Wood prompted my attention to this example. For a more detailed account of how self-reflection as it has been practiced by poets and novelists can lead to the generation of practice-governing principles, see my “On Knowing How to Live: Coleridge’s ‘Frost at Midnight,’” *Philosophy and Literature* 7 (October 1983): 213-28.

²⁹ In introducing the ideas of alienation and authenticity here, I have been guided by Charles Taylor in *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 383-84.

³⁰ Hugh Lacey and Hans Oberdiek provided helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.