

Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*
Professor Warren Goldfarb (Harvard University)
Lecture XII: §§185-203

Wittgenstein takes up rule-following in the swath of text from §185 to §242. These sections are now considered to be very central to Wittgenstein's view. One good reason for taking them as central is that at the topic of rule-governed behavior, or the nature of rules, lies the junction of various different topics that are Wittgenstein's concern throughout *Philosophical Investigations*. One particularly important topic, which hasn't been broached in these lectures before, is the nature of logic, and mathematics. Wittgenstein wrote a great deal on the philosophy of mathematics. Many of those manuscripts concerned with the philosophy of mathematics are centrally concerned with the following of rules. The notion of rule-following is inextricably bound with the question of inference: What follows from what? What follows from the statement of a rule? The whole notion of inference can be thought of as a matter of following rules of a particular sort.

The early secondary literature on rule-following was addressed almost solely to the philosophy of logic. The most famous paper from this period is Michael Dummett, "Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mathematics", from 1959 (reprinted in *Truth and Other Enigmas*). There is a rejoinder to Dummett by Barry Stroud, entitled "Wittgenstein on Logical Necessity" (1965). Those papers are concerned entirely with the rule-following considerations and with their connections to Wittgenstein's views on logic and mathematics.

The sections were given an even more important role in Wittgenstein's thought by Saul Kripke in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (1982). Kripke provides a novel reading of the rule-following considerations, and takes them as foundational for Wittgenstein's thought. Kripke takes it that what we get from the rule-following considerations is a conclusion from which Wittgenstein's other famous conclusions (e.g., the Private Language Argument) follow as deductive consequences. It was a very startling way of reading Wittgenstein (quite unlike that which I have been presenting in these lectures); as a result it gathered a great deal of attention. The attention is twofold: both on the text of which Kripke offered a reading, and on Kripke's reading itself.

The question is: How does a rule, or the meaning of a word, anticipate reality? How does the rule “reach out” to its applications? In these sections, Wittgenstein (as always) clearly wants to undermine some metaphysical conception of rules; he wants to point to some appropriate, non-distorted way of thinking about rules, from which, such metaphysical conceptions depart. Wittgenstein is opposed to some conception of rules “in Platonic Heaven”; but what exactly is that picture, and what does it mean to oppose it? As usual, that is the real question in trying to understand what Wittgenstein is doing. Wittgenstein himself (helpfully or not) uses metaphorical language in describing the positions he opposes. So in §188 he says, “Your idea was that that act of meaning the order had in its own way already traversed all those steps: that when you meant it your mind as it were flew ahead and took all the steps before you physically arrived at this or that one.” This is clearly metaphorical. No philosopher says that she has a theory about meaning or about rules in which the mind “flies ahead.” One might want to say that some philosophical theories all but say that, or that really amount to nothing more than the mind “flying ahead”. But whether that is so is precisely what must be settled.

We can divide the rule-following sections into four parts:

1.§185: Wittgenstein raises the problem of rule-following with the Parable of the Wayward Child. This is the child who understands the series of natural numbers and is busy acting on our order “Add 2.” She gives every indication of understanding the order but then suddenly careers off and does something different.

2.§§186-97: Wittgenstein depicts a response to that problem and examines it. (§§193-194 are apparently about what the models here are; but these sections are even more difficult to decipher than usual)

3.§§198-202: The “Paradox of Rule-Following”. “This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule.” (§201) This is the linchpin of Kripke's reading: the rule cannot tell us how to go on, because there is always some interpretation that can make the rule accord with any subsequent behavior. So there is nothing that can be called “being in accord with the rule” itself; no agreement or disagreement is possible. (That is the paradox.)

4. §§203-42: Rules and life. Wittgenstein says that rule-following is a "custom", a "practice", an "institution". The considerations here are meant to exhibit what that talk comes to. It's a sort of grammatical investigation. He considers intuition, regularity, agreement, understanding, forms of life, justifications. §242 is a kind of punch line. He is giving a summation of the "positive" reading, i.e., of what the appropriate ways are of talking about these matters.

[the remainder of the material in this lecture can be found in my typescript article "Rule-Following Revisited", pp. 2-19.]