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Abstract

Kalhat has forcefully criticised Wittgenstein's linguistic or conventionalist account of logical necessity, drawing partly on Waismann and Quine. I defend conventionalism against the charge that it cannot do justice to the truth of necessary propositions, renders them unacceptably arbitrary or reduces them to metalingustic statements. At the same time, I try to reconcile Wittgenstein's claim that necessary propositions are constitutive of meaning with the logical positivists' claim that they are true by virtue of meaning. Explaining necessary propositions by reference to linguistic conventions does not reduce modal to non-modal notions, but it avoids metaphysical accounts, which are incapable of explaining how we can have a priori knowledge of necessity.

Necessity and Language: in defence of conventionalism

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Kalhat's insightful paper is devoted to accounts of logical necessity proffered by Wittgenstein and defended by Baker and Hacker (1985), Schwyzer (2001) and myself (1996b; 2003). It challenges these accounts on two grounds. First, the attempt to explain logical necessity by appeal to linguistic rules or conventions fails; secondly, even if some such explanation were adequate, it would fail to be genuinely reductive of logical necessity, since normative notions presuppose modal notions.

I shall not take issue with Kalhat's interpretation of Wittgenstein, which I regard as by and large correct. I also concede that he has pointed out serious lacunae and difficulties in the Wittgensteinian position. Nevertheless, I shall argue, he has not succeeded in demonstrating that linguistic or conventionalist accounts are hopeless. Furthermore, if a viable linguistic account of logical necessity can be provided, modal notions may not have been reduced to normative ones, but they will have been explained in terms that render them less mysterious. That is to say, the explanation will not rely on unexplained metaphysical necessities.

1.   The Wittgensteinian position

Our topic is propositions which are logically rather than physically necessary. For Wittgenstein, these include the propositions of logic (e.g. those of the form '~ (p & ~p)') and mathematics (e.g. '7 + 5 = 12), as well as analytic propositions, broadly conceived. The latter include definitional truths like

(1)   All bachelors are unmarried.

Kalhat succinctly summarizes Wittgenstein's position. *Like* the logical positivists, Wittgenstein seeks to preserve a *connection* between (1) and the meaning of the word 'bachelor'. Verifying (1) requires attendance not to the marital status of men, but to the meaning of 'bachelor' and 'unmarried'. By the same token, rejection of (1) betokens linguistic misunderstanding rather than factual ignorance. *Unlike* the logical positivists, Wittgenstein does not maintain that (1) *follows from* the meaning of its constituents; instead he maintains that (1) is partly *constitutive* of that meaning. According to Wittgenstein, (1) is a 'grammatical proposition'. That is to say, it standardly expresses a *rule* for the correct use of at least one of those constituents, and thereby *determines* their meaning instead of following from it. By the same token, (1) has a *normative* status: it can be used to explain 'bachelor', and to criticize or justify one's use of that term. It also draws a line between meaningful uses of that term and nonsense like 'There is a married bachelor at the party'.

For Wittgenstein, this normative role of (1) explains its necessity. (1) cannot possibly be refuted by the facts, simply because no sentence contradicting it counts as a meaningful description of reality which is even in the running for stating a fact. To put it differently, in English no combination of words which contravenes (1) is truth-apt, i.e. counts as a statement or proposition that is even in the running for being true. At the same time, according to Wittgenstein language is 'autonomous' and grammatical rules like (1) are 'arbitrary'. They do not mirror putative essences in reality, but constitute what might be called the essence or nature of bachelors. By the same token, they have the status of conventions. Although it is not up to individuals to alter grammatical rules, and although there can be reasons for adopting one grammar rather than another, we can in principle adopt different rules, and thereby accord a necessary alias normative status on different propositions.

2.   Factual vs. Normative Truth

An objection dating back to Waismann (1968: 66-7, 136-7) runs as follows: unlike necessary propositions, grammatical rules cannot be true or false. Kalhat recognizes that this objection is not compelling as it stands (see Glock 2003: 163-4). We do predicate truth of paradigmatic expressions of rules such as

(2)   The chess-king moves one square at a time

But this means no more than that the rule to move the chess king one square at a time is in force. And according to Kalhat this 'normative truth' cannot account for crucial features of necessary propositions. For one thing, they can occur in conditional statements such as

   (3) If all bachelors are unmarried and Kant is a bachelor, then Kant is unmarried

If (1) were normatively rather than factually true, however, (3) would be, in the words of von Wright, '*a logical monster*'.   Kalhat considers the response that one can mix factual with normative truth without creating logical monsters, as

(4)   If the chess-king moves one square at a time, then the move you have just made will
         not be accepted by the community of chess players

He objects, however, that this is elliptical for

(5)   If [The rule according to which the chess-king moves one square at a time is in force]
         then [The move you have just made will not be allowed by the community of chess
         players]

We cannot treat (3) in an analogous fashion, Kalhat suggests. For that would deliver

(6)   If [the rule according to which the word 'bachelor' applies to men who are unmarried,
         is in force] and [Kant is a bachelor] then [Kant is unmarried]

And this would render the conditional contingent and would 'allow for a possibility that is otherwise (rightly) blocked', namely that 'while Kant is a bachelor, we cannot infer that Kant

is unmarried because the proposition 'The rule according to which the word "bachelor" applies to men who are unmarried, is in force' is false (pp. 9-11).

Unlike Kalhat, I do not regard this as an absurdity. If it is not a rule for the use of 'bachelor' that the term applies exclusively to unmarried men, then we can indeed no longer infer from the fact that 'bachelor' applies to Kant that 'unmarried' applies to Kant. (3) is a tautology *quite independently* of the conceptual connection between 'bachelor' and 'unmarried', and hence independently of the modal status of (1). That status reveals itself precisely in the fact that we do *not* need an additional piece of information to move from 'Kant is a bachelor' to 'Kant is unmarried'. By contrast, we *would* need an additional factual premises to move, e.g., from 'Kant is a bachelor' to 'Kant is unhygienic', in our case the premise 'All bachelors are unhygienic'.

Note further that in (5) – (6) Kalhat has substituted for (1) and (2) my analysis of what it is to *call* (1) and (2) *true*. That substitution is illicit. For I also suggested that the application of the truth-predicate assimilates the analytic proposition to an empirical proposition (Glock 2003: 163-4+n5). I am committed to an equivalence between the 'naked' analytic proposition and the 'naked' chess-rule. It holds between the role of (1) for the inference from 'Kant is a bachelor' to 'Kant is unmarried' on the one hand, and the role of (2) for the inference from 'You have moved the chess-king more than one square at a time' to 'You have made an incorrect move' on the other. In both cases, there is as yet no reason to accept that a relation of logical or conceptual implication obtains independently of whether (1) and (2), respectively, have a normative status.

As a result, Kalhat's first line of attack boils down to two objections. The first is that statements like (3) would be 'logical monsters' rather than tautologies if they mixed factual and normative propositions. But it remains to be shown that this fear is more than superstition. Why shouldn't one preserve the distinction between factual and normative propositions, while

recognizing that the common applicability of 'true' signals, among other things, that the two can be combined e.g. in conditionals like (3)?

A parallel defence is available for another notorious claim by Wittgenstein, namely that first-person psychological utterances are expressive rather than descriptive. It has been objected that such utterances can combine with and stand in logical relations to descriptive utterances. Thus

(7)   I am in pain

occurs in molecular statements like

(8)   I am in pain, and the doctor has not come.

Moreover, it can function as a *premise* in a valid *inference*, e.g.

(9)   I am in pain; therefore someone is in pain.

Both points indicate that (7) is capable of being true or false. It does not follow, however, that it is purely descriptive. Its status is the same as that of a description ('He is in pain', 'Someone is in pain') for the purposes of transformations that preserve truth-value. It need not for that reason be the same for all purposes. Thus the truth of a statement like (7) is guaranteed by the sincerity of the speaker. Accordingly, calling an avowal 'true' amounts to something different from calling a description 'true', even though both are truth-apt in a shared minimal sense which ensures that they can stand in logical relations (Glock 1996a: 50-4). By the same token, a grammatical proposition 'true' may amount to something different from calling an empirical proposition true, even though both are truth-apt in the minimal sense that they can combine in well-formed propositions and can stand in logical relations.

3.   Arbitrariness vs. Necessary Truth

The second objection which emerges from Kalhat's discussion of normative truth is that Wittgenstein's account cannot do justice to the necessity of propositions like (1). Normative truth attaches to rules (or rule-formulations) that are in force. Furthermore, since grammatical rules are arbitrary, they might not be in force. Accordingly, 'normatively construed, the truth predicate *could* fail to apply to necessary propositions (in those cases where *qua* rules they fail to be in force). Yet insofar as these propositions are *necessary*, the truth predicate simply could *not* have failed to apply to them. In calling them "necessary" we mean precisely that they could not possibly fail to be true. They could not possibly fail to be true *whatever* their truth amounts to' (p.12).

This passage eloquently expresses the realist sentiment concerning necessary propositions. As a criticism of Wittgenstein, however, it begs the question. For Wittgenstein challenges that sentiment by maintaining that the idiom of 'necessarily true' disguises the actual role of the propositions concerned. He grants that in calling propositions like (1) necessary or necessarily true, we accord them a special status. But he claims that this special status is not simply being true *plus* being true eternally or in all possible worlds. Rather, it means that we would not count anything as refuting a necessary proposition. Not their truth, but rather their *necessity* depends on this normative status. The way we use 'bachelor' has no immediate impact on the marital status of people. But it can have an impact on whether the term 'married bachelor' can meaningfully be applied to someone. Accordingly, certain propositions can lose their normative status, the status to which their necessity boils down to.

That may sound implausible. But there are pertinent examples that suggest otherwise (see Baker/Hacker 1985: ch. VIII). Statements that were regarded as paradigms of necessary truth, such as Euclid's 5th axiom or the claim that there cannot be negative numbers have not

just been stripped of their necessary status, they have been rejected altogether. Kalhat would presumably regard this as a merely epistemological complication. We can be mistaken as to what truths hold in all possible worlds. But even if the progress of mathematics involved increased knowledge of a modal realm, this would not explain all the cases in which necessary propositions have been abandoned. If it were a truth about that realm that there are negative as well as positive numbers, it would be one so basic that it should have been obvious to mathematical geniuses like Euclid or Eudoxos. The progress concerning negative numbers consists not in a new discovery about an abstract reality, but in the realization of the power of a novel system of calculation.

Kalhat takes up the incompatibility of necessity and arbitrariness once more in section 4. There he dwells on Wittgenstein's suggestion that the nature of colours is determined by grammatical rules such as

(10)   Nothing can be red and green all over

If (10) is of our own making, then the nature of colours must be as well. At the same time, the colours themselves are not of our own making.

> However, if we have not created the colours red and green, how could we have nevertheless created their nature? For what sense attaches to the idea that red and green could have existed without having the properties that make them the colours that they are? That would be to say that red and green could have existed without being *them*! Since the nature of red and green cannot thus be of our own making, then either the grammatical proposition 'Nothing can be red and green all over' is not constitutive of the nature of the colours red and green, or else it is not of our own making (p.18).

One might try to defuse this dilemma through a 'deflationary' construal of nature or essence: colours and their properties exist independently of us, yet '*we decide*, in accordance with our interests and needs, which of the colours' properties to treat as constitutive of them'. But this

would imply that a decision of ours might yield the result that the colour red is compatible with the colour green, which is absurd. As Kalhat acknowledges, Wittgenstein himself does not go down that road, since he treats colour incompatibility as constitutive of colour. His only option, according to Kalhat, is to go the full hog and insist that we create both the colours and their natures: while objects were coloured before human beings developed a colour vocabulary, they were not red. Kalhat rightly demurs that this is incompatible with the fact that an object cannot be coloured without having a particular colour. Furthermore, Wittgenstein cannot claim that the very concept of colour depends on us. Even if thoughts about colour presuppose concepts of our own making, we can fashion colour concepts only because we can discriminate different colours. And this implies a realistic position about colours and their natures, that is, the position that Wittgenstein seeks to avoid (pp.19-22).

But what does it mean to say that colours exist independently of us? It means that the concepts we use do not alter any of the pertinent facts about objects, notably their visual appearance. For instance, they do not render hitherto colourless objects coloured (red, green, etc.). Yet those facts can be *stated* only in terms of concepts which, at least according to Wittgenstein, are of our own making. There is an indefinite number of facts involving objects which could in principle be stated; for there is an indefinite number of properties that objects possess. Only *some* of these properties are such that creatures of our cognitive and perceptual capacities can notice or ascertain them. And of these, only some are captured by our concepts, and hence feature in our statements.

Whatever Wittgenstein himself thought about the matter, our colour concepts are not arbitrary in the sense that we have a free choice. For they depend on our perceptual capacities, which in turn reflect universal biological features of the human visual apparatus. But this does not mean that statements of colour geometry like (10) are forced on us by the nature of colour, or even by certain anthropological constants. Nothing about coloured objects or our sense-organs

prevents us from devising and employing a vocabulary in which objects of certain intermediate shades, or objects that oscillate rapidly between different colours, are said to have two colours all over at the same time. What is determined by grammar is *not* nature in the sense of the causal properties which are responsible for the way coloured objects affect our perceptual apparatus. Instead, at least according to Wittgenstein, what is determined by grammar is nature in the sense of those features which give rise to *a priori, conceptual inferences*. There is no incompatibility between granting that objects are coloured independently of us and insisting that the rules constitutive of the *concept* of colour are determined by our linguistic practices. What concepts we adopt depends (to degrees that vary according to the area of discourse) on our objective exigencies in an objective world; yet this does not mean that it is dictated by metaphysical essences. By the same token, one can acknowledge that any number of facts obtain independently of us, while insisting that no such facts obtain necessarily.

4.   The goal of language

At the same time there is a problem with the idea that grammatical rules are arbitrary which Kalhat does not pick up on. As he explains, in Wittgenstein this idea is to bring out that grammatical rules are 'determined neither by the nature of reality, nor by some goal that is conceptually independent of them' (p.5). The last point alludes to a contrast with the rules of cooking. The concept of cooking is defined by its goal, the production of edible or tasty food (depending on whether one approaches the issue from a British or continental perspective). This goal is specifiable independently of the rules of cooking, and hence those rules can be justified by reference to the extent to which they expedite the attainment of that goal.

By contrast, Wittgenstein insists, the concept of language is not defined by an independent goal. Instead, the grammatical rules are constitutive of the concept of language, and the goal of language is not independent of the concept of language. It is natural to take

language to serve the goal of communication. But according to Wittgenstein, the concept of language is already contained in that of communication. This claim runs counter to established use, in which we *distinguish* between linguistic communication and *non-linguistic* communication, e.g. through gestures and facial expressions.

Schwyzer defends Wittgenstein by arguing that coordination through signals counts as communication only if it involves language. If John tries to lure Mary to his side by crying, this counts either as a mere case of '*vocal netting or lassoing*' (2001: 293), or as a case in which John *speaks* to Mary. But this dichotomy is incomplete. John communicates with Mary if he intentionally conveys his thoughts (beliefs, desires, intentions, etc.) to her. Mary does not come to his side through a mechanical reaction to a stimulus, but because she has understood the point of John's cry. Nevertheless such communication is not linguistic. Mary has not understood the meaning of a conventional sign; rather, she has understood a desire conveyed through a natural expression.

Wittgenstein and Schwyzer are wrong, therefore, to suggest that communication is *per se* linguistic. This by itself does not show, however, that the goal of communication is a necessary precondition of a language. It only shows that languages are not the only means of communication. Furthermore, even if being suitable for communication were a necessary precondition of language, this would not necessarily undermine the autonomy claim. For it is as yet unclear how the goal of communication could favour one set of communally sharable grammatical rules over another.

5. Being about

Kalhat objects to the idea that what is about a number in the sense in which 'The sofa is blue' is about the sofa is *never* a mathematical proposition like '2 + 2 = 4', but rather a proposition like 'There are 2 people on the sofa' (Baker/Hacker 1985: 282). He objects that 'the latter is a

proposition about the number *of people* (on the sofa), not about the *number* 2 itself!'. Yet this is an unwarranted dichotomy. For that sentence can be analysed à la Frege as '2 = the number of people on the sofa'. And in that case it is about the number 2, precisely because it is about the number of people on the sofa.

In any event, the main gist of Kalhat's objection is that a necessary statement cannot *both* be about, e.g., numbers and colours *and* be a rule for the use of words. A look at the rules of chess suggests otherwise, however. (2) is both about the chess-king and a rule for the use of the chess king. Kalhat might question the analogy. For in the chess case, the rule guides the use of *what it is about*. In the linguistic case, by contrast, the rule guides words, yet it is supposed to be about what those words denote. Wittgenstein would respond, however, that the sense in which numerals like '2' denote numbers is a special one. Numbers are what numerals denote or signify, but the meaning of numerals is given not by a mental pointing at entities beyond space and time, but by specifying the rules for their use (see Glock 1996a: 264-8).

Kalhat next contends that if a grammatical proposition like

(11)   All mares are female horses

is constitutive of the meaning of the word 'mare', then it should in some sense be about that word (p.14). But I don't see why this should be the case. The so-called central paragraphs are constitutive of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany *not just* in the mereological sense, but also in the sense that they *define* that particular body of laws irrespective of its overall composition at any given time. They are explicitly specified to be unalterable, and hence no legal codex that lacks them can be that constitution. And yet these paragraphs are not about the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany. Furthermore, there is a sense in which (11) is about the word 'mare': it is standardly used as rule for the use of that word. If you say 'I own a mare that is male', I can correct and inform you by uttering (11).

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Kalhat also maintains that as a grammatical rule (11) would have to be equivalent to

(12)   The English word 'mare' applies to all and only female horses

This, he protests, is wrong, since unlike (11), (12) is a meta-linguistic statement and hence contingent (p.15).

Admittedly, (12) can be used as an empirical proposition, as what von Wright calls a 'norm proposition' (1963: viii). In that case it is a statement to the effect that a community (in our case the community of Anglophones) follows certain linguistic rules (in our case the rule of applying 'mare' only to female horses and accepting its application to all and only female horses). But (12) can also be used normatively, as the expression of a constitutive rule of English. In that case, it is not an empirical proposition which is falsified e.g. by someone who applies 'mare' to male horses, or female foxes, or nightmares. Its dependence on the contingent behaviour of Anglophones is indirect: if everybody violated the rule and nobody accepted corrections of such violations, then the rule would no longer be in force. Certain contingent regularities are part of the framework for our linguistic activities, as Wittgenstein stressed (see Glock 1996a: 135-9).

Note that the phrasing of both (11) and (12) suggests an extensional equivalence rather than an intensional one. This connotation is avoided by a definitional proposition like

(13)   Mares are female horses.

At the meta-linguistic level we can achieve this effect e.g. by inserting 'by definition' into (9).

(14)   The English word 'mare' applies by definition to all and only female horses.

This reveals a further point in favour of a linguistic conception. One would expect that (11) and (12) come apart simply on the grounds that someone can know what (11) expresses without knowing what (12) expresses. But it is at any rate a moot question whether, for instance, a monoglot Germanophone who knows that *Mähre* applies to all and only female horses can therefore be said to know that mares are female horses. (13), not to mention (14),

is tied too closely to linguistic understanding for us to feel comfortable in saying so. By contrast, we have no hesitation to say that a monoglot Germanophone can know that all mares eat grass.

6.   Truth by virtue of meaning

Kalhat considers a different way out of the quandary. Though still meta-linguistic, (11) will not come out as a contingent truth if it is about a 'symbol' rather than a mere 'sign', in the terminology of the *Tractatus* (3.12). In that case (11) does not pronounce on the contingent application of 'mare', construed as a *mere inscription or sound pattern*, but 'on the application of "mare" construed as the inscription/ sound pattern *together with its meaning*'. (11) would then say that the symbol 'mare', 'which means *female horse*, applies to all and only female horses. And it is unclear that a word *with that meaning* could correctly apply to anything other than female horses' (p.16).

Kalhat rejects this way out on two interconnected grounds. The first is that in talking about a sign 'together with its meaning', it comes close to treating meanings as *objects* associated with words, a view which Wittgenstein himself castigated as the idea of 'meaning-bodies' that stand behind our expressions and their use. Kalhat does not regard this objection as serious, since the proposal can be 'reformulated in terms of *use* rather than meaning (Wittgenstein, after all, took use to *determine* meaning …)'. Presumably, the reformulation runs somewhat as follows: (11) is not contingent, because the sign *used in the way we actually do* could not apply to anything other than female horses.

Unfortunately, this gives rise to a problem that Kalhat considers fatal.

If we construe [12] as pronouncing on the application of the word 'mare', when

the latter is taken together with its meaning, then it seems that far from

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constituting the meaning of that word, [12] in fact presupposes that meaning, and simply proceeds to record it. But in that case, [11] cannot be equivalent to [12], for [11] is supposed to be constitutive of the meaning of the word 'mare' –that, after all, is why [11] is supposed to be about the word 'mare' in the first place! (pp.16-7).

The equivalence between [11] and [12] is not the real sticking-point. For one can insist that they are equivalent, irrespectively of whether one treats both as constituting the meaning of 'mare' or both as recording it. They will be equivalent for Wittgenstein's purposes if they fulfil a similar function, namely of explaining the meaning of 'mare'.

The real difficulty lies in how to construe such explanations. If we treat them as *recording* the meaning of expressions, we seem to abandon a crucial difference between Wittgenstein's account and that of the logical positivists. Following several commentators (Baker/Hacker 1985: 267-9, 341; Glock 1996b: 207; Boghossian 1997: 348), Kalhat credits Wittgenstein with an alternative version of conventionalism: necessary propositions do not follow from the meaning of their constituents, they partly *constitute* that meaning (pp.2, 16). But if they record meanings, it seems that they cannot at the same time constitute it.

But why should a conventionalist opt for Wittgenstein's alternative rather than that of the logical positivists? Because the idea that necessary propositions follow from the meaning of their constituents is supposed to fall prey to powerful arguments developed independently by Wittgenstein and Quine. Waismann combined these two strands. As he pointed out, the phrase 'true by virtue of meaning' is *prima facie* puzzling, since it is unclear how a proposition could follow from a meaning rather than from another proposition (1968: 124-5). Quine associated the phrase with the 'myth of a museum' (1969, 27, see 19), Wittgenstein with the picture of 'meaning-bodies' (1974: 52-8). What they condemn under these titles is the idea

that there are meanings – abstract entities or mental processes – which coerce us (either psychologically or rationally) to hold on to analytic propositions, come what may.

In fact, the logical positivists recognized perfectly well that signs do not have meaning intrinsically, but only as a result of conventions, i.e. of our using them in a certain way. Without Platonist and mentalist myths ,the idea of truth by virtue of meaning seems to boil down to the claim that necessary propositions are true by virtue of *definition*: they follow from the definitions, or, more loosely, the *explanations*, of their constituents.

Wittgenstein rejected even this seemingly innocuous idea. But his animadversions are uncompelling (Glock 1996a: 239-41; cp. Baker/Hacker 1985: 312-8). Wittgenstein challenged the idea that the tautologies and the associated rules of inference follow from the truth-tabular definitions of the logical constants. Rules of inference, he informs us, determine the meaning of the logical constants, rather than proceed from them. Whether a specific transformation of symbols is licensed or not is one aspect of the correct use and hence of the meaning of the terms involved. That we use '$p = \sim\sim p$' as a rule of inference contributes to the meaning of '$\sim$'. Without that rule the sign would not have the meaning it has. And if the rule were changed, if we accepted instead '$\sim\sim p = \sim p$' the meaning of '$\sim$' would change correspondingly. Accordingly, the rules of inference cannot correspond or fail to correspond to the meaning of e.g. negation. Someone who passes let us say from '$\sim\sim p$' to '$\sim p$' does not follow a false rule of negation, but has given a different meaning to '$\sim$' (1953: 147n; 1978: 398).

However, to say that '$\sim\sim p = p$' follows from the truth-tabular definition of '$\sim$' can be understood innocuously as the contrapositive of Wittgenstein's own claim. From Wittgenstein's claim that if we alter the rule we alter the meaning it follows that if we do *not* alter the meaning, we get the rule. Furthermore, although we could use '$\sim$' according to either '$\sim\sim p = p$' or '$\sim\sim p = \sim p$', it would be inconsistent to combine *our* truth-tabular explanation of it with the second rule. For in that case we would say that the truth-table has been misunderstood--as every logic-tutor

will confirm. By Wittgenstein's own lights, the truth-tabular explanation is a rule, and to accept '~~p = ~p' is a criterion for having misunderstood that rule, because one is not applying the same operation--that of reversing the truth-value--to ~p that has been applied to p.

Wittgenstein replies 'Who says what "the same thing" is' (1976: 180). What he has in mind is that the rule follows from the explanation only if it is understood that in the truth-table the place of *p* can be taken by '~p', i.e. that in applying negation to '~p' we reverse the truth-value of a *proposition* rather than operating on an *operation*. Wittgenstein illustrates the difference through brackets: the first—and standard--option corresponds to '~(~p)', the second to '(~~)p'. Accordingly, '~~p = p' is not to be determined by the truth-table definition alone, but only in conjunction with this second rule. Since there is no comparable rule in natural languages, nothing determines how to understand 'I ain't done nothing' (1976: 184). But this is not a general objection to the idea that explanations—if necessary in combination--can render a proposition true. 'The rules/grammatical propositions determine the meaning' is as wrong as 'The meaning determines the rules/grammatical propositions'. Understanding the truth-tabular explanation and acknowledging '~~p = p' are simply *internally related* aspects of one and the same practice of using '~'. The truth-table would mean something different in a practice in which the rule is rejected. Both are simply *two different rules* which make up our practice.

Another qualm about the very idea of truth by virtue of meaning or convention goes back to C.I. Lewis and C. Lewy. It seems that for *any* sentence *s*, *s* is true iff for some *p*, *s* says that *p* and *p*. All that conventions do is to determine what a sentence *says*; whether what it says is true is another question, to which linguistic conventions are irrelevant. Therefore, a sentence cannot owe its truth-value exclusively to meaning or conventions (Boghossian 1997: 335-7). A related worry has exercised some Wittgensteinians. What could it mean for a convention to *create* a truth? Of course, we can choose to *assume* that a certain proposition is true, in the course of constructing hypotheses, or for the sake of argument. But this does not

render that proposition true. In the sense in which, for example, the fact that the cat is on the mat might be said to render true the statement that the cat is on the mat, conventions cannot be said to render anything true. The only truths conventions could 'create' are truths such as 'In 1795 France adopted the metric system', which are precisely not true by convention (Baker/Hacker 1985, 234; Glock 2003: 158-9). To that extent Kalhat seems right in excluding the positivist option.

At least one Wittgensteinian, however, begs to differ. Schroeder (2006: 242-3) makes out a clear and prima facie attractive case for insisting that there is nothing mysterious about the idea of truth in virtue of meanings or conventions, once we attend to suitable examples. Thus:

(15)   'A tandem' means: a bicycle with two seats

is true because the word 'tandem' *does* mean a bicycle with two seats. The same goes for the definitional truth

(16)   A tandem is a bicycle with two seats

which has the same function and can also be verified simply by looking up the meaning of 'tandem' in a dictionary (assuming standard meaning for the other components).

Schroeder also addresses the worry that a conventionalist account turns necessary propositions into mere stipulations without a truth-value. This holds true of original stipulations, which '*give* a meaning' to expressions, but not of propositions like (16) which '*report* correctly what meaning ["tandem"] has in English'. In this context Schroeder takes me to task for maintaining (in line with Wittgenstein, incidentally) that analytic-cum-grammatical propositions partly determine or constitute the meaning of the words involved. 'The meaning of the English word "tandem" is completely independent of what I may say: What "partly constitutes" the meaning of the word "tandem" is not the statement (16), but the linguistic convention that such a statement reflects'.

In one respect, this is a misunderstanding of the Wittgensteinian position. It makes meaning dependent not on what individual speakers 'may say', but on whether we use certain sentences as standards of correctness, rather than as factual statements. To that extent, there is no real conflict, even though Schroeder's reminder of the dependency of analytic propositions on a convention is salutary. In another respect, the term 'reflect' conceals precisely the difficulty highlighted by Kalhat. Schroeder himself spells it out by saying that analytic propositions 'describe' games or 'report correctly' what meaning expressions have in a particular language. In that case, however, it would seem that these propositions must be empirical and *contingent* rather than necessary.

A way out of the quandary has already been intimated. Unlike norm propositions, analytic propositions do not just *talk about* a practice, they are part of it. They constitute meaning rather than simply record or follow from it. They are normative statements in line with a practice which, in its entirety, determines the meaning of the word. Both the applications and the explanations of words by individual speakers are responsible to this established practice (unless they deliberately diverge from it). Analytic propositions are 'normatively true' in that they *express* (rather than describe or state the existence of) conventions that are actually in place in a particular linguistic community. At the same time, those conventions would not exist if the community adopted different conventions, that is, if it adopted different explanations or consistently tolerated behaviour at odds with the old one.

7.   What we cannot say

The final two sections of Kalhat's paper pursue a different target: even if Wittgenstein's conventionalist account were adequate, the assimilation of necessary propositions to grammatical rules would nevertheless fail to reduce the notion of necessity to a non-modal notion.

Kalhat rightly notes that Wittgenstein is associated with anti-reductionism. Nonetheless he regards his 'assimilation of necessary propositions to grammatical propositions' as a reductive explanation, in so far as a modal concept is explained in 'non-modal … normative terms' (p.3). What is correct is that Wittgenstein tries to demystify necessary propositions and modal notions. Moreover, he regards the traditional idea that necessary mirror de re essences or modal features of reality as mystifying. Consequently, Kalhat is right in holding that he would not be happy to explain necessary propositions as grammatical rules if this meant granting that the latter mirror essences or modal features of reality (pp. 23-4). What is crucial to Wittgenstein's enterprise, however, is not the reductionist aspiration of analysing away modal notions, but an account which avoids any reliance on metaphysical necessities. These observations do not take the sting out of Kalhat's last two sections. For if he is right, Wittgenstein's account relies on modal connections which he has not accounted for, and which perhaps cannot be accounted for in linguistic terms. We face the threat of unexplained metaphysical necessities.

According to Wittgenstein, the use of a word determines its meaning. We could not, therefore, use the words 'red' and 'green' to characterise the same object without thereby changing their meaning. But in that case, Kalhat reasons

> the necessity of the proposition 'Nothing can be red and green all over' reduces to the fact, not that we never use the words 'red' and 'green' to characterise the same portion of an object, but to the fact that we *could not* use these words in that way. For the very attempt to do so would violate the grammatical rule that is itself constitutive of their meaning (viz., 'Nothing can be red and green all over'), and the words would *thereby* cease to have the meaning that they do (p.25).

He acknowledges that Wittgenstein deliberately tried to avoid modal notions in his account. 'Do not say "one cannot", but say instead: "it doesn't exist in this game". Not: "one can't castle in draughts" but – "there is no castling in draughts"' (1967: §134). But, Kalhat intercedes, Wittgenstein's explanation of why 'there is no castling in draughts' and why 'there is no such thing as enumerating all the members' is willy-nilly modal, since it implies that it is '*impossible* to say things like "It is generally a good idea to castle as early as possible in a game of draughts", and mean what we ordinarily mean by the expression "to castle"' (p.26). Hence Wittgenstein's linguistic analysis requires modal claims rather than dispensing with them.

Let me rephrase this objection. Of course we might start uttering sentences like

(17)   The Tower is red and green all over

Nevertheless it would remain impossible to say that this rose is red and green all over, since in (17) at least one of the constituent terms no longer means what it now does, and hence the *oratio obliqua* construction would be inaccurate. By the same token, we might begin to play a board game which is like chess, except that the queen must be moved when it is threatened. Nevertheless, it would remain impossible to check the queen in chess, since this board-game would no longer be chess and the piece at issue no longer the (chess-)queen.

The objection is connected to two other lines of criticism. The first is part of the aforementioned Lewis-Lewy point. One must distinguish the question of whether a sentence *s*, as presently used, expresses an analytic truth from the question of whether the proposition that is at present expressed by *s* is an analytic truth. Granted, if it pleased us to apply the terms 'red all over' and 'green all over' to one and the same object at the same time, it would no longer be true to utter the *sentence* (10). But the *proposition* that we now express through (10) would still be a necessary truth. Elsewhere I have tried to defuse this objection (2003: 164-8). The conventionalist can draw an analogous distinction between a sentence *s* expressing a

particular rule and that rule being in force. If the rule is not in force, then the anti-conventionalist cannot without *petitio principii* insist that it is nevertheless *necessary* that nothing can be red and green all over.

In the present context, I want to draw a connection to another objection to the arbitrariness of grammar. Wittgenstein maintains that there could be alternative grammatical systems or 'forms of representation'. It is perfectly intelligible, for instance, that we should adopt different rules of counting, calculating or measuring, such as measuring by the ell. What is unintelligible is only the idea of changing our form of representation, while *retaining our present concepts* (Baker/Hacker 1985: 327). But, Wright objects, if different techniques make for different concepts, what entitles Wittgenstein to speak of alternative forms e.g. of measuring (1980: 67-72). Strictly speaking, it seems, while one can behave differently, one cannot adopt a different way of *measuring*.

In my view, we can call measuring by the ell a form of *measuring,* in spite of the fact that some of the 'constitutive' rules differ. For there is sufficient overlap in these rules, and the alternative practice plays an analogous role in the form of life of those who pursue it. The idea of rules constituting a practice or meaning or concepts must not be understood too rigidly. Otherwise we can no longer make sense of conceptual change. To be sure, there are *conceptual* limits to revising grammar. While our concepts of counting, measuring etc. are flexible enough to accommodate certain variations, there is a much tighter link between the 'laws of logic' and notions like 'reasoning', 'thinking', and even 'proposition' or 'language' (1978: 80, 89-95, 336; 1976: 201-2, 214). A practice which does not conform to the rule for the modus ponens simply does not qualify as inferring. And a system which allows the derivation of a contradiction does not count as an alternative logic. However, these limits are set not by Platonic entities, as Frege had it, or by a 'metalogical' obligation to avoid contradictions, as the logical positivists thought, but by our concepts, by what *we call* 'inferring', 'reasoning', or '(system of)

rules' (1974: 111, 304). The rules for the use of these terms pay no more heed to reality than those of other words; rather a practice which does not conform to them would be unintelligible to us, and would not count as a language.

By this token, some modifications to the rules for 'red' and 'green' are perfectly compatible with treating them as *colour* terms expressing *colour* concepts. Whether abandoning (10) is one of those is a moot point. If so, then one *can* say that the Tower is red and green all over (e.g. when it is subjected to a supremely weird light display on the occasion of the inevitable 75th Jubilee of Elizabeth II). In any event, Wittgenstein's ultimate response to Kalhat derives from his denial of *metalogical necessities*. Whether 'red' and 'green' would still count as *colour* terms, and hence whether it is possible to say that something can be red and green all over is once more determined not by a surplus metaphysical necessity, but by what we do and do not allow in our linguistic practice. Even if Kalhat is right to regard (10) as crucial to colour concepts, the result can be formulated without appeal to unexplained modalities.

> Do not say 'One cannot say that the Tower is red and green all over', but say instead 'Saying that the Tower is red and green all over doesn't exist in this game'.

8.   What rules demand

Kalhat could deny that this response defuses the threat of surplus necessity, at least as long as what does and does not exist in the game is explained in terms of grammatical rules. For the notion of a rule is *itself modal* in nature. Indeed, Kalhat reasons in his final section, this follows from Wittgenstein's own insistence that it is essential to the notion of a rule that something counts as following the rule and something as going against it.

The consistency of a rule R and an action A comes down to the fact that it is possible to follow R and perform A. And the inconsistency of a rule R* and an action A* comes down to the fact that it is impossible to follow R* and perform A*. If all possible linguistic behaviour were consistent with a rule, then it would just not be a rule. So, in order for something to be a rule, some of its applications must be consistent with it, and some must be inconsistent with it. But the notion of consistency is evidently a modal notion. Therefore, to the extent that this notion plays a vital role in characterising the very concept of a grammatical rule, the latter is itself modal in nature (p.27).

Kalhat considers the response that the connection between a rule and its application is 'internal', i.e. constitutive of the rule. He denies that this solves the problem. For if anyone who steps out of line were simply following a different rule, then there would be no such thing as following a rule incorrectly. The difficulty is not allayed by holding that the internal connection holds between 'the rule and the *on-reflection-acceptable* application of it'. For that latter notion presupposes that the rule-follower can recognize a mistake, which is to say an action inconsistent with a rule she intends to follow. Nor can the idea of an action which is inconsistent with the rule be reduced to an action which we in fact count as inconsistent. For there is an indefinite number of actions which we would count as violations of the rule. At most, an inconsistent application is one which runs counter to 'the way we are in fact *disposed* to apply the rule'. But the notion of a disposition is itself modal in nature, since it is the notion of how we would apply the rule in *non-actual* (yet possible) cases (p. 29).

At one level, this objection can countered in the same manner as the previous one. There is no need for an extra layer of necessity. There is an internal connection between a rule and its application, i.e. between the rule-formulation and our *practice* of calling such-and-such 'obeying' or 'going against it'. The internal relation is not to be explained in terms of

dispositions. As Wittgenstein pointed out, this would undermine its normative status. Instead it is to be explained in terms of an open-ended practice. The fact that a rule covers an indefinite or infinite number of cases should not mystify us and lead us down the garden path to the Platonic picture of rails to infinity. In fact, what would really be mysterious is a rule which covers only a limited number of cases, without such a limitation being specified in its formulation.

At a different level, Kalhat's objection takes us to the heart of unresolved issues about rule-following. For it is no mean feat to explain how our practice sustains an internal relation between rule and application. We have yet to steer entirely clear of the Scylla of Platonism and the Charybdis of rule-scepticism. Wittgenstein, for all the genius he displayed in dealing with rule-following, often veered dangerously close to the latter, for instance in his attack on meaning-bodies.

Fortunately, even without a completely satisfactory account of rule-following one can question the ultimate morale that Kalhat derives from his last argument. He relies on the assumption that normative concepts would have to be 'non-modal' in order for a conventionalist account to work. This assumption is mistaken. The primary use of modal terms like 'must', 'must not' and 'can' is obviously a normative one (see White 1975). The moot points are two. First, is the modality involved *logical* or *conceptual*, i.e. of the kind involved in logical or analytic truths; secondly, is the latter modality metaphysical, i.e. grounded in abstract entities or essences located in a reality independent of human practices. Rule-following may be inherently modal in that it involves modal notions; yet these modal notions need not be of the metaphysical kind, and they may in turn be inherently connected to normative practice. Thus Anscombe (1978) suggested that there is a special and primitive variety of necessity, found in all rule-governed activities, such as games. In the context of such activities 'You have to' ('You're meant to', etc.) involves a 'forcing modal', which expresses a kind of necessity, and 'You can't' involves a 'stopping-modal, which expresses a kind of impossibility. If a child says

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'*Why* can't I do that?', we answer by referring to a rule, for instance 'Because your king is in check', and ultimately by saying things like 'Because it's against the rules'. Neither modals nor rules are more basic, they are ultimately both facets of normative practices in which we encourage and discourage certain activities. 'In the beginning was the deed!', as Wittgenstein was fond of quoting Goethe, not recherché metaphysical necessities.

9.   The Negative Case

Of course this last statement stands in need of defence. But the best defence may lie in attacking the metaphysical alternative. In recent years, Wittgensteinians have shielded his provocative claims about necessity with great ingenuity against some of prima facie compelling objections. But they have failed to stress sufficiently the attractions of a broadly speaking conventionalist account in comparison to realist alternatives. Wittgenstein's so-called rule-following considerations provide powerful arguments against certain Platonistic conceptions of rule-following. They do not refute Platonist conceptions of necessary propositions as statements about abstract objects beyond space and time. Even less do they refute the Aristotelian idea that necessary propositions are statements about de re necessities sustained by the essential features of our non-abstract world.

Yet general and weighty objections to the very idea of de re metaphysical necessity are to be found in Kant, as well as in thinkers that are surprisingly close to him on that score, namely the logical positivists. Kant's basic insight is this: de re necessities of which we can become aware independently of experience are mystifying, to say the least, provided that experience is our way of getting in touch with reality. Recent commentators notwithstanding, this challenge in no way relies on Kant's own transcendental idealism. Nor has it been superseded by Kripke's and Putnam's rehabilitation of real essences (Glock 2002). Modal claims of the relevant kind are tied not to investigations of the world, but to the way we

individuate and conceptualize the world. There is nothing necessary about Plato, Aquinas, Kant, Wittgenstein, …, (who happen to be bachelors), being unmarried. One might retort, however, that there are underlying *de re* necessities. For instance, one might insist that it necessary that those who are in fact bachelors should be unmarried. But this alleged de re formulation once more owes its necessity to the occurrence of the term 'bachelor' and to the conceptual/semantic implications of the latter.

Another plea for the de re nature of necessity hails from White (1975 ch. 11). He argues that modal statements of the form 'It is necessary that X is Y' and 'X is necessarily Y' are always de re, in the sense that they are not about *the proposition* that X is Y (what is known as *de dicto*) but about X's being Y. Furthermore, that X is necessarily Y does *not* depend on the manner X is referred to (*pace* linguistic accounts). Kant is necessarily unmarried because he *is* a bachelor, not because we (occasionally) refer to him as a bachelor. This is a realist stance Kalhat would underwrite. At the same time White concurs with conventionalism in denying that statements of the form 'X is necessarily Y' imply the existence of peculiar modal properties like *X being necessarily Y*. Rather, they signify a *relation* between X and other items involved in the situation. It is *because of* or *qua* being a bachelor that Kant is necessarily unmarried.

But now we have to scrutinize the nature of this specific 'because of' or 'qua'. It is conceptual rather than factual or intentional, as in modal statements of a different kind ('It is qua Prussian that Kant must have been a pedant', 'It is qua analgesic that cancer patients need morphine'). White himself explicitly distinguishes what he regards as standard modal statements of the form 'It is necessary that X is Y' or 'X is necessarily Y' from necessary truths like '~ (p & ~p)', '9 > 7' or analytic truths like (1). Whereas the former have their truth necessitated by something else, White informs us, necessary truths 'have their truth necessitated by themselves'; they are 'true in themselves' (1975: 94, 170). This is in fact

hospitable to the linguistic account. Kant is necessarily unmarried because he is a bachelor and because the meaning of bachelor guarantees that all bachelors are unmarried. Whether it is conceptually necessary that an individual is unmarried depends on the articulation of our concepts. That much seems to me to be reflective common sense. By contrast, I remain puzzled by the idea of de re metaphysical necessities independent of our conceptual apparatus which nonetheless we somehow manage to get into the haircrosses of our intellectual periscopes.

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