



Università  
Ca'Foscari  
Venezia

Corso di Dottorato di ricerca  
in Filosofia e Scienze della  
formazione

ciclo 32°

Tesi di Ricerca

**De-naturalizing  
dispositions**

A Wittgensteinian perspective  
SSD: M-FIL/05

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# Chapter 0

## Introduction

### 0.1 What and why

The present work is the product of a research on Wittgenstein and dispositions. Almost every time I talked about my research project, people felt a bit confused when they heard the word “disposition”. The common reaction was: “Can you give me examples?”, “What is a disposition?”. The latter one, is a very tricky question indeed, and yet we constantly and ordinarily employ dispositional terms and expressions. Ordinary language is permeated by dispositional terms. How many times do we say that a friend of us is *brave*, *jealous*, *irascible*, or *shy*? How many times do we proudly say that we *can* play a particular game, or sport, or that we *are able to* do some rule-governed activity that we have learned, maybe through exhausting practice and exercise? Again, we often normally and spontaneously act by referring to dispositions, even implicitly: for example, we put a lump of sugar in a cup of hot coffee and we stir with a little spoon while waiting sugar to dissolve in the hot liquid. We know that sugar is *soluble*, that is, it is disposed to dissolve when plunged into water and other liquids, such as hot coffee and tea. We play with a rubber band and we expect it not to break, for we know – and ordinarily say – that a rubber band is *elastic*, that is, it is disposed to straighten without breaking when stretched. If someone asks us why we carefully protect the new set of crystal glasses, we would probably answer that we do this because those glasses are *fragile*, that is, they are disposed to easily break when struck.

Sugar and salt are soluble. A rubber band is elastic. A crystal glass is fragile. My colleagues are intelligent. My best friend’s partner is jealous. I can speak English and French and I know how to play the trumpet. Now, the previous examples already contain a variety of dispositions that are captured by different kinds of linguistic expressions: firstly, we find what we will call physical dispositions of the matter, such as solubility and fragility. These dispositions are pick out by a class of predicates that do not reduce to those with suffixes; arguably, the words “soft”, “opaque”, “fragile”, “poisonous” are indicative of the dispositional just like the words “edible”, “irascible”, “flexible”, and “excitable”. Secondly, we find character traits and features of human beings and animals. Indeed, independently from any specific zoological knowledge, some dispositional words about character are applicable – and are, as a matter of fact – applied, to animals too. We say that dogs and cats are excitable under certain conditions, or we say that some dogs are more excitable than others. Again, it is common to ascribe aggressiveness, or rather quietness to animals. Finally, there is a group of terms

which are applied to human beings' behaviour and that refer to intelligent activities or, we might say for now, activities that are exercises of mental capacity. Such dispositions are captured both by expressions of power, like "can", "be able to", "knows how to", "is capable of", and by some mental terms such as "believes", "knows", "intends", "understands", etc.

What do those terms have in common in order to be labelled dispositional? Instead of looking at what they have in common, I will suggest for now to look at some common features of their use in language; similarities in the role they play in a system of language. A univocal and precise definition of the term "disposition" is not just something that we do not actually have in our hands, but it is something we should better stop aspire to. Preliminarily, we could say that the concept of disposition tells us something that is still latent and still not actualized; it refers to a potentiality and it takes the form of a modal concept in ordinary language. A disposition is associated with a set of stimulus conditions and a characteristic manifestation. Solubility is an easy case to illustrate: the dispositional term "solubility" refers to the fact that sugar is disposed to dissolve when put into water. The immersion in water is the stimulus condition, while dissolution in water is the corresponding manifestation. But this applies to character traits too: saying that someone is brave means saying that such a person is disposed to behave in a certain way under certain circumstances. For example, such a person would probably run into the water if he saw a drowning man. Finally, abilities and capacities are dispositional concepts for they refer to what is intuitively thought to be something which is possessed even when it is not concretely externalized: I can speak English even when I do not actually speak it. I can sensibly affirm to know how to play chess even if I am not efficiently playing chess at the moment of speaking. In a certain sense, the sentence "I can speak English" amounts to saying that I am disposed to speak English correctly in certain communicative situations. Similarly, stating that I know how to play chess amounts to saying that I would play chess well and correctly if there was the opportunity to play with someone. It is for this reason that, historically, the mark of the dispositional has been captured by some kind of conditional sentence. Reference to potentiality is indeed commonly construed using the counterfactual conditional: if someone asks us what the term "soluble" means, it seems we are entitled to answer by saying that the word "soluble" means that the object to which it is ascribed would dissolve if it were put into water.

The decision to write about dispositions came from a personal – still embedded in the philosophical context – experience. I felt a tension between what I thought to be the ordinary job of dispositional words and sentences, and the way in which dispositions are treated in the most recent debates on the topic. My interest came from a question I pose to myself while studying Wittgenstein's later philosophy: isn't Wittgenstein's characterization of understanding as mastery of a technique

*dispositional*? Could we not employ the notion of disposition in order to give an account of Wittgenstein's positive view on meaning and understanding as it comes from his remarks on Rule-following and psychological concepts? Wittgenstein criticized a kind of mentalistic conception of understanding according to which understanding is an inner occult process to be inspected thorough introspection. Wittgenstein's critique of mentalism is followed by a *pars construens*, that is, a positive account of understanding. My intuition was that the positive account consists in thinking about understanding as human beings' ability to correctly follow rules that have been acquired through training and education. Similarly, I thought that the characterization of meaning as use, could be further expounded as stating that knowing the meaning of a term consists in being disposed to employ that term correctly, that is, in accordance with its grammatical rules.

However, when I started reading specific literature on dispositions, I realized that the approach was completely different: a naturalistic approach was dominant and authors referred to dispositions mainly by looking at physical dispositions such as solubility, fragility, conductivity, and so on. No reference to specific human behaviour was made. I will refer to such body of recent and technical works on dispositions as "The current paradigm on dispositions". In other words, the notion of disposition belonging to the current paradigm seemed to me to be inapplicable to Wittgenstein's philosophy. Moreover, independently from Wittgenstein's philosophy, I felt a tension between the contemporary treatment of the notion of disposition and the use of the concept both in ordinary language and in the history of philosophy, from ancient to modern times. Globally, the notion of disposition seemed to me to be extensively employed without a preliminarily clarification of the concept itself and the criteria of use; hence the need to enquiry again a concept which occupies an important place within philosophical reflection starting from the origin of philosophy itself and that seems to be an indispensable element of our language.

Here it is the "Why". Now I have to spend some words about the "What".

With this research I intend to employ some aspects of Wittgenstein's later philosophy in order to suggest an alternative approach on the notion of disposition. My idea is that such alternative approach could respond to some limits of the current paradigm. In particular, I will enquiry the possibility to talk about dispositions in grammatical-normative terms. Such a talk is an alternative to two kinds of talks that characterize the current paradigm: a metaphysical talk and a naturalistic-reductionist talk. Moreover, the approach I intend to defend rejects the common assumption according to which all dispositions are essentially non-normative.

Wittgenstein criticizes a kind of dispositional account of knowing and understanding in the *Philosophical Investigations* by working with a notion of disposition as a state of a physical apparatus. However, as stated also by some critics, if a different and less reductionist use of the notion is accepted, then it is plausible to speak about dispositions in order to give an account of the conception of language and understanding that comes from Wittgenstein's numerous remarks on Rule-following. Indeed, the concept of disposition might be used to give an account of the tendency to react in a certain way after some training or educative process, without giving a deterministic and behaviouristic sense to the relation between stimulus and response. Dispositions, as such, could be applied and learned; they could constitute, so to speak, a cultural product.

The dispositional reading of Wittgenstein's later philosophy that I endorse gains plausibility and strength provided that a concept of disposition as acquired and incorporated practice is employed; dispositions would be propensities to actions which constitute human beings' nature, or second-nature. However, the current paradigm on dispositions is extensively influenced by a naturalizing perspective: authors, independently from their specific theory, share some basic aspects on the study of dispositions. They can be said to belong to a specific paradigm which stands on the following three main assumptions: 1. Hypostatisation of dispositions; 2. Identification of dispositions with mere natural capacities; 3. Nexus between dispositions and causality.

Generally speaking, my aim is to give an account of a kind of disposition, essentially linked to human life and rule-governed behaviour, that is not characterizable in terms of inner state or property of its bearer; rather, it is an ability, or mastery of a technique. In particular, my thesis is twofold: firstly, I will argue that it is misleading to ask about the meaning of the term "disposition" assuming a denotative, or referential theory of meaning. Secondly, I will argue that the divorce between dispositions and normativity is neither a platitude, nor a desirable assumption: I will claim that the naturalized concept of disposition belonging to the current paradigm gains legitimacy and importance thanks to the ordinary concept of disposition, which is not a naturalized one. On the contrary, it is a concept of disposition whose use stands on a picture of dispositions as something *natural*, for they are part of an acquired and incorporated system, but still *normative*, hence not reducible to innate and biological capacities. The normative dimension of specifically human dispositions could be characterised in terms of contingency, or possibility: stating that society and education lead human beings to acquire certain dispositions leaves the door open for a "why" question, that is, the idea that there is no necessity and that what happens, what is the case, could have been different. Dispositions do not force, or determine their correspondent reactions, or manifestations. The kind of normativism I will suggest is a *third way* between on the one hand, naturalization of dispositions, that is, a

conception of dispositions as mere natural biological facts, which leads to a deterministic conception of human behaviour and, on the other hand, a kind of metaphysical normativism that presupposes the existence of normative facts that should force action, just like moral imperatives. According to the third way I will endorse, dispositions (1) can be treated as natural facts. However, firstly, those facts are not mere biological facts. Secondly, those facts are not grounding facts; rather, dispositional concepts are used in order to provide *reasons* of courses of action; (2) contrary to the old empiricist suspect against dispositions in virtue of their empirical inaccessibility, dispositions can be *seen*, provided that a notion of empirical accessibility different from direct observation of objects is employed.

In order to reach this goal, I will first expound the current paradigm on dispositions and I will show that its limits derive from a set of problematic presuppositions. In this respect, the reader will not find a direct answer to the open questions belonging to the current research on dispositions. My point is that some of those open questions come from problematic presuppositions, therefore what is needed is a conceptual enquiry both on the concept of disposition and on the shared assumptions. Secondly, I will present the kind of dispositionalism that can be traced in Wittgenstein's later remarks. This is the core of the present work for two reasons: 1. This kind of dispositionalism represents an alternative to the current paradigm: it does not share the same presuppositions; hence it avoids the same kind of misunderstandings. 2. The Wittgensteinian perspective, together with Ryle's suggestions expressed in *The Concept of mind*, constitutes a powerful conceptual tool in order to critically engage with the current paradigm: I will show that a naturalized perspective on dispositions stands on a category mistake and that, for this reason, naturalization reveals to be pseudo-science. The question "What is a disposition?" has been generally treated as a factual question on a mysterious and unobservable entity, while it should be treated as a conceptual question that needs a conceptual analysis to be properly answered.

## 0.2 Summary

The present work is divided into three parts: 1. The current paradigm on dispositions, 2. Wittgenstein and dispositions, 3. De-naturalizing dispositions. Each part can be treated as a partly autonomous nucleus which is linked to the other two by the red line I traced in the above paragraph.

In the first part I present a sketch of the historical debate on dispositions and disposition ascriptions, starting from modern times, with a specific focus on recent contributions to the topic. The general aim is to show that authors share at least three aspects on the study of dispositions: 1. The assumption according to which dispositions are essentially non-normative; 2. A factual treatment of

the question “What is a disposition?”; 3. A notion of disposition as a latent depositary of pre-arranged, still not externalized, courses of action.

Chapter 1 focuses on the historical debate. Two different criteria have been employed for the exposition: 1. The reaction to the simple conditional analysis of disposition ascriptions; 2. The passage from a semantic interest to an ontological interest. The aim of the chapter is to show that such a debate has its roots in the traditional empirical problem of the *inaccessibility of the disposition*, which is grounded on the idea that dispositional terms denote hidden states or properties of objects and individuals. Firstly, I will expound two kinds of conditional analysis – material and simple – endorsed, respectively, by Carnap (1936-7), Ryle (1990) and Goodman (1983) and I will present traditional counterexamples formulated by Martin (1994), Johnston (1992), Bird (1998) and Smith (1977). Secondly, I will present two kinds of reaction to the objections against the simple conditional analysis: reformation of the simple conditional analysis (Choi 2006, Gundersen 2002, Lewis 1997, Manley & Wasserman 2007), and total rejection of conditional based analysis of dispositions (“dispositions first reaction”).

Chapter 2 focuses on the most recent debates on dispositions: the current paradigm. I will organize the exposition using the distinction between a metaphysical-foundational talk on dispositions, and a naturalistic-reductionist talk. As a whole, the aim of the chapter is to show that the notion of disposition stands between naturalism and naturalization, that is, it can be put on both extreme lines, but that the current paradigm works with a naturalized notion of disposition. First, I will expound the views of Quine (1975), Armstrong (1997) and Mumford (1998, 2001, 2009): the latter two are an example of, respectively, the naturalistic-reductive talk, and the metaphysical talk on dispositions. As a second step, I will show that the current and naturalized paradigm rests on the following assumptions: 1. Realist perspective and hypostatization of dispositions, what I will call the “ontological must”, i.e., the idea that dispositions must be real entities in order to be legitimately ascribed to objects; 2. The “simplification fallacy”, that is, the identification of dispositions with mere natural capacities; 3. Causal efficacy of dispositions, 4. A picture of potentiality that I will call “the potentiality that lies in a box”: the idea that the manifestation of the disposition is already contained, as it is, in the realm of potentiality, as if potentiality was something contained in a box and that, in order to get actual, it has merely to come out the way it is. Finally, I will present what I take to be some limits of the current paradigm which directly derive from the shared assumptions: 1. There is no third way between mentalism and behaviourism, or between heuristic function and ontological foundation of dispositions; 2. Narrowness of the philosophical discourse on dispositions with respect

to dispositional talk of ordinary language; 3. Materialist character of the realist perspective; 4. Divorce between dispositions and normativity.

In chapter 3 I will present some exceptions to the rule, namely, some reformative contributions belonging to the non-Wittgensteinian paradigm. The underlying observation is that intuitively something changes if we move from the case of the solubility of sugar to the case of linguistic dispositions and, in general, human's dispositions to action. I will first expound the strategy, informed by the Aristotelian tradition, of improving dispositional pluralism (McKittrick 2009b); then, I will present two critiques of the Quinian view of dispositions (Moline 1972, Over 1976).

In the second part I will present a dispositional reading of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. This is the theoretical core of the work. The aim of this section is twofold: on the one hand, a particular interpretation of Wittgenstein is suggested, on the other hand I will argue that Wittgenstein's perspective helps criticizing the current paradigm for it does not stand on the same misleading presuppositions. Although Wittgenstein writes against a kind of dispositionalism in *The Philosophical Investigation*, I will show that Wittgenstein addresses his critical stance towards who endorses *all* the following three theses: 1. Knowledge of ABC *is* a disposition of the subject. 2. The disposition of knowing *is a mental state*. 3. The expression "mental state" might be further explained using the model of the physical state of an apparatus. This disposition is, therefore, the state of a physical apparatus. Given this, I will argue that it is possible to trace within Wittgenstein's philosophy a dispositional account which does not rest upon the three theses cited above.

In chapter 4 I will present two main lines of justification of the topic of the present work: 1. The debate generated by Kripke's *Wittgenstein on rules and private language*; 2. Dispositional readings of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. I will engage with Kripke's work, for it generated a new interest in dispositions and in the normativity of meaning. In particular, I will focus on two aspects: Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein ("Kripkenstein"), and Kripke's own views on dispositions, meaning and understanding. My aim is to argue that (1) the dispositional account discussed by Kripke (1982) fails because, on the one hand a narrow and naturalized characterization of disposition is assumed and, on the other hand, dispositions so conceived cannot fulfil the role that they should cover within the boundaries of the sceptical challenge; (2) critics generally responded to Kripke's sceptical paradox by assuming both the legitimacy of Kripke's notion of fact and the paradox itself, and a narrow characterisation of dispositions as physical and non-normative states.

In chapter 5 I will present my own dispositional reading of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. I will argue that Wittgenstein's alleged dispositionalism can be traced by looking at his positive account of

Rule-following, provided that both Kripke's interpretation and the assumptions shared by the critics who engaged with Kripke's work are rejected: 1. Contrary to Kripke's dispositionalism, Wittgenstein's dispositionalism is not a kind of direct response to the sceptical challenge, that is, it does not provide dispositional facts as candidates for the role of grounding fact, mainly because no such fact is needed in order to justify the linguistic practice; 2. Contrary to Kripke's perspective, Wittgenstein talks about some general facts of nature, but such facts do not play a foundational role; 3. Dispositions play a different role than the one demanded by the kripkean sceptic: they do not have to determine meaning, that is, they do not guarantee constitutive normativity, and they do not metaphysically ground the practice.

Chapter 6 contains the second line of justification of the research: dispositional readings of Wittgenstein's philosophy suggested by the critics. Some of them are Wittgensteinian scholars (Tait 2005, Peacocke 1982, Voltolini 2009, Kenny 1989, 2002, 2010, Ter Hark 2010), while others are critics who tried to reflect on the import of Wittgenstein's philosophy for current issues on philosophy of language and mind (Kemp 2014, Horwich 2012, Maddy 2014). I will divide the readings into two main groups: 1. Dispositional readings that lead to a naturalization of Wittgenstein's philosophy; 2. Dispositional readings that preserve Wittgenstein's anti-scientific naturalism and where a de-naturalized notion of disposition is actually at work. I will argue that readings belonging to the second group better capture Wittgenstein's main point and they better respect Wittgenstein's own conceptions of philosophy and philosophical enquiry. My aim is to show that (almost) all critics – at least, the critics that I engage with in the chapter – state that the notion of disposition employed in order to give an account of Wittgenstein's view on understanding is not endorsed by Wittgenstein, because they think that he had in mind, by contrast, a narrow and materialistic conception of disposition. In other words, they only take into account paragraph 149 of the *Philosophical Investigations* and they think that Wittgenstein endorses the naturalized and materialistic conception of disposition which is there assumed, without looking at Wittgenstein's own use of the concept which is found in other works.

Chapter 7 tries to fill the exegetical gap about Wittgenstein's own use of the concept of disposition. I will argue that critics' shared assumption is false: if we look at other places of the Wittgensteinian *corpus*, it is possible to trace a Wittgensteinian use of the notion of disposition which is line with my dispositional reading of Rule-following; Wittgenstein employs a de-naturalized notion of disposition and he even warns the reader against some misleading uses of the same notion which share many aspects of the contemporary use of the concept in metaphysics and philosophy of mind. I will show that Wittgenstein does not criticize the employment of the notion of disposition; rather,

he writes against a particular use of the concept which comes from a misleading conception of possibility – the “shadowy model”. According to such a misleading model, linguistic dispositions would be mysterious entities or states that contain all the future applications of the word in a latent but already actualized form. The misleading use coincides with the use of the notion belonging to the current paradigm. Moreover, I will present other dispositional elements of Wittgenstein’s philosophy: the dispositional character of aspect-seeing, and the theme of novelty and creativity of behaviour within the boundaries of the conception of understanding as a kind of knowledge-how. This will help to further define the normative character of the concept of disposition.

The third part of the work plays a double role: it constitutes both a conclusive part and the connection between the first two parts; the current paradigm is criticized using a combination between Wittgenstein’s and Ryle’s insights.

In chapter 8 I will face a methodological concern: the difficulty to apply Wittgenstein’s remarks to the current paradigm, given the profound difference between the two paradigms. I will argue that my strategy gains further philosophical evidence and legitimacy if we critically work with Ryle’s notion of “para-mechanical fallacy”, as it is presented in *The Concept of Mind*. Firstly, I will better circumscribe the theoretical point of my thesis: the problematic notion of disposition as a latent but already actualized deposit of actions and reactions. Secondly, I will state that current metaphysical debates stand on what Wittgenstein thinks to be the traditional mistake of metaphysics: the confusion between the grammatical and the factual, or empirical. This point gets clearer if we look also at Ryle’s distinction between concrete factual questions about something and questions about the concept of that something (Ryle 2009).

In chapter 9 I will argue two things: 1. The above mistake is a category mistake in the sense expressed by Ryle in *The Concept of Mind*. Consequently, naturalization of dispositions in response to a conceptual question is another instance of the para-mechanical fallacy, that is, it reduces to a kind of pseudo-science; 2. Ryle’s notion of category mistake applies to the conceptual misunderstanding which stands at the bottom of Wittgenstein’s picture of the “shadowy model”. A category mistake is committed when a concept is allocated to the wrong logical type, or category. Conceptual clarification, therefore, consists in putting concepts in the proper drawer, or category. Firstly, I will show that, as traditional body-mind dualism is construed from a pre-constituted distinction between the two, the concept of disposition as a non-normative causal property of objects is construed from a pre-constituted notion of disposition which is not naturalized. In other words, naturalization of dispositions borrows legitimacy from an ordinary notion of disposition which is embedded in ordinary language and in human life. Secondly, I will show that the category mistake that lies at the bottom of

the current paradigm consists in characterizing dispositions using the model of empirically accessible objects, whereas dispositions are something of a different logical type than things that can be seen or unseen through direct observation. Finally, I will suggest to focus on the role dispositional terms play in the characterization of human beings' intelligent behaviour: dispositional concepts should be understood within the broader discussion of the difference between propositional knowledge and knowledge-how, for there also lies their normative character.

In chapter 10 I will first present some examples of normative dispositionalism endorsed by some authors working in the fields of philosophy of mind and philosophy of action. I will show that the notion of normative disposition is not completely alien to philosophy, and that dispositional concepts can be used to give an account of the normativity of the intentional. Finally, I will go back to the issue of the kind of normativity traced in a Wittgensteinian informed kind of dispositionalism. I will claim that the category mistake applied to dispositional terms is of the kind Wittgenstein imputes to the traditional *inner-outer divide*, and that dispositions can be seen in the way Wittgenstein states that we see the glance of the human eye.

## Part one

The current paradigm on dispositions

# Chapter 1

## History of the debate

### 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present a sketch of the historical debate on dispositions and disposition ascriptions. Broadly, the debate is constituted by three main areas of research, which correspond to three different kinds of questions:

1. Theories *on* dispositions: what is a disposition? What is the difference between dispositions and categorical properties? What is the metaphysical status of dispositions? This area contains issues mainly in Metaphysics and Ontology; authors who engage with these questions generally presuppose a conception of dispositions as particular type of entities, therefore they then try to spell out their metaphysical nature. As we will see, this kind of question is one of the main ingredients of the current paradigm on dispositions, which is indeed characterised by the intention to guarantee the ontological autonomy of dispositions.
2. Dispositional analysis *of* philosophical notions, or *applied dispositionalism*.<sup>1</sup> In this case, the disposition is not itself the main object of research; rather, dispositions, or dispositional language is used in order to provide accounts of some phenomena, or some new kinds of analysis of traditional philosophical concepts. For example, let us recall Foot's and Gauthier's dispositional accounts of the rationality of human actions and moral responsibility (Foot 1977, Gauthier 1986)<sup>2</sup>; or dispositional analysis of belief and desire, as presented by some exponents of classical pragmatism and, in a different form, by Ramsey;<sup>3</sup> or, again, dispositional accounts of meaning and understanding, which will be broadly discussed in the second part of this work.<sup>4</sup> Finally, more recently, McKittrick (2015) has elaborated a dispositional theory of gender.
3. Semantics of the ascriptions of dispositional predicates. Here, the question involved is strictly connected to the epistemic problem of the inaccessibility of the disposition in virtue of its potential

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, this area might be strictly connected to the first, for the particular dispositional analysis presupposes a certain theory on dispositions or, at least, a particular use of the concept, even if this is not always expounded.

<sup>2</sup> Their account stands on a shift of focus from the particular individual *just act*, to something that each individual *manifests*, or *expresses*; a putative *virtue*. For example, fidelity is conceived as a *practical disposition* in Aristotelian terms: it is a familiar trait captured by the terms *hexis*, or *habitus*.

<sup>3</sup> According to this perspective, belief is a disposition to act or a habit of action. See especially Bain (1859). As stated by Fish (1954), Peirce got his definition of belief from Bain. F. P. Ramsey (2013) recalls Peirce and pragmatist dispositional accounts of belief to argue *against* Russell's behaviouristic conception of belief contained in *The Analysis of the Mind* (Russell 2008).

<sup>4</sup> For a recent dispositional account of meaning see Mumford (2011).

nature: how can we ascribe dispositions given that they are not empirically accessible? How to linguistically capture dispositional statements and ascriptions of dispositional predicates?

The focus and the main red line I have chosen to present the debate is the empirical problem of the *inaccessibility of the disposition*, which is grounded on the idea that dispositional terms denote hidden states or properties of objects and individuals. For this reason, I will take into consideration the literature from Hume onwards and I will not go into the detail of ancient and medieval treatments of dispositions, if not for the sake of some specific argument we will engage with throughout the discussion.

Historically, the main problem of the philosophical studies on dispositions was the empirical inaccessibility of dispositions: dispositions are not observable; we can only observe their manifestations. We do see that a lump of sugar actually dissolves in a glass of water but we do not see its *solubility*; we do see that a particular piece of wood catches fire if put next to a source of fire, but we do not see its *flammability*. Similarly, we do see that subject S reacts in a quite exaggerate way to a simple ironical joke – for example, he leaves the room while swearing and gesticulating – but we do not see his *susceptibility*; or, we see that subject S perfectly plays Chopin’s *studio Op. 10 n. 3*, but we do not actually see his *skill*, or *ability*.<sup>5</sup> I have deliberately introduced different types of dispositional terms in the above examples: *physical dispositions* of inert matter, like solubility and flammability, and *specifically human dispositions*, which are further distinguished between character traits and acquired skills, or abilities.<sup>6</sup>

This preliminary classification has two merits: 1. It is a way of introducing a conceptual pluralism of the dispositional talk which is embedded in the very ordinary use of the concept of disposition but that, as we will see, it is not always recognized by the authors who engage with issues regarding dispositions; 2. It throws light on the main assumption of the traditional empiricist problem. The

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<sup>5</sup> In the literature there is a distinction between two types of dispositional predicates: *canonical dispositions* and *conventional dispositions*. The former are predicates that are explicit about the stimulus condition and the manifestation of the disposition, for example, the disposition to cause death in response to being digested, the disposition to run away in response to seeing a spider, the disposition to cause poisoning after being drunk, etc. The latter are simple predicates which include no explicit reference to stimulus conditions and manifestations, for example, “fragile”, “soluble”, “conductive”, “flammable”, and so on. The two forms of expression are related to one another, for the canonical disposition might be a way to spell out, or explain, a conventional disposition: instead of saying that *x* is soluble, we could say that *x* has the disposition to dissolve if put into water – in this case we already specify stimulus conditions and manifestation of the disposition. This is a two-step approach that has been employed by followers of the conditional analysis of disposition ascriptions (Lewis 1997), as we will see in the next paragraph.

<sup>6</sup> We find a similar classification already in the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle. Physical dispositions would roughly correspond to Aristotle’s notion of *physis* (nature), while specifically human dispositions fall under the notions of *hexis* (habit), and *dynamis* (power, capacity). Within the category of *dynamis*, regarding human dispositions, Aristotle talks about *rational dispositions*, i.e. dispositions that are present in the rational part of the soul; they are accompanied by a *logos* and they are realised through ratiocination. For example, the art of medicine (Jansen 2009).

problem is that, even if the disposition is not observable, we usually ascribe it to subjects and objects without hesitation. Given this, how can we justify the ascription of the disposition to the subject/object? Now, if we take the last example quoted above, someone might object that it is not true that we do not see the subject's ability, for we do see him playing correctly the piano, and that is all we need in order to ascribe to him the ability.<sup>7</sup> If we consider that ability as something that is not observable, we are then assuming that such an ability is some kind of entity separated from the subject's performance and located somewhere in the subject's mind or body. The same goes for physical dispositions: if we think that sugar's solubility is not observable, then we are assuming that such a disposition is something, or some kind of thing separated from the actual manifestation and located somewhere "inside" the object to which it is ascribed. Indeed, three main answers have been given to the question formulated above: 1. Humean answer, according to which dispositions do not ontologically exist, for they are just products of habit;<sup>8</sup> 2. Classical Empiricist answer, that reduces dispositions to categorical properties of the objects in order to preserve their empirical accessibility; 3. The (historically most recent) dispositionalist answer, according to which dispositions do exist and they are different from categorical properties. All these three answers assume that (1) for a disposition in order to be sensibly ascribed to something it must be open to empirical access, and that (2) such empirical accessibility is read in terms of being a particular autonomous and observable entity. The Humean answer shares as well such an assumption and it is in virtue of this that dispositions are not included in what exist; the criterion of existence still consists in the ontological autonomy of the entity which is then object of empirical enquiry.

I will organize the exposition by distinguishing two different lines, for the general assumption is that the historical debate on dispositions could be presented using two different criteria: 1. The reaction to the simple conditional analysis of disposition ascriptions (Cross 2011); 2. The passage from a semantic interest to an ontological interest. This line can be summarised as the passage from the Rylean thesis that dispositional terms do not denote inner states, to the thesis according to which

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<sup>7</sup> As we will see, this is indeed one way of reacting to the current paradigm and such a train of thought is actually suggested by Wittgenstein.

<sup>8</sup> Hume explicitly expresses his hostility towards the use of the concept of power in the following passage: «[in nature] all events seem entirely loose and separate. One event follows another; but we never can observe any tie between them. They seem conjoined, but never connected. And as we can have no idea of any thing which never appeared to our outward sense or inward sentiment, the necessary conclusion seems to be that we have no idea of connexion or power at all, and that these words are absolutely without meaning, when employed either in philosophical reasonings or common life» (Hume 1975, 74). According to Hume, there are just two reasons to establish necessary relations in nature – in this case, the nexus would be between the stimulus condition, the disposed object and the manifestation of the disposition: "relations of ideas" and "matter of fact". However, Hume argues that both fail: in the first case, experience is needed, in the second case, we can at least observe a series of conjoined events, one event following another, but we do not observe neither the necessary relation between those events, nor the disposition.

having a disposition consists in being in a certain state, or having a certain property.<sup>9</sup> I will start with the semantic line for, as stated by Cross (2011, 1) «the semantics of disposition ascriptions is the *de facto* point of entry», given that there is an historical connection between the study of disposition ascriptions and the elaboration of metaphysical theories on dispositions.

## 1.2 1<sup>st</sup> line: from the counterfactual analysis to the “dispositions first reaction”

Intuitively, the concept of disposition seems to be related in some way to the truth of conditional sentences, especially counterfactuals for, in virtue of the fact that it refers to a potentiality, it takes the place within modal terms in language. The nexus between dispositional terms and conditionals is what helps us to express a certain dispositional property even if we do not have a specific name for it; in other words, using the expressions presented earlier, it permits to express in *canonical form* the disposition when the *conventional form* is not available. For example, in our language there is the possibility to speak of someone’s disposition to feel uneasy *if* being observed for a certain amount of time, or the disposition to utter bad words *if* bothered in the early morning; maybe we do not have specific terms to identify those dispositions<sup>10</sup>, such as “solubility”, or “fragility”, but we do not have difficulties in expressing that potentiality using a conditional sentence which makes stimulus conditions and manifestation explicit. However, even if the conditional sentence seems intuitively the best way to express disposition ascriptions – and, indeed, it is what we ordinarily do when we talk about dispositions – the consequent adoption of a *more formal* conditional *analysis* of dispositional expressions in terms of conditionals is not something obvious and undisputed.

Historically, the analysis of disposition ascriptions in terms of conditional sentences is strictly linked to the classic empiricist and Neopositivist problem discussed above, i.e. the empirical inaccessibility of dispositions. The conditional analysis looked appealing to empiricist philosophers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, for it appeared capable to accommodate power ascriptions in empirically acceptable ways. This was part of the broader philosophical project of construing an empirical language in which all meaningful sentences – hence, dispositional sentences too – are to be analysed in observational and extensional terms. For this reason, followers of the conditional analysis share a reductive attitude towards dispositions: they do not intend to eliminate dispositional terms, but rather they aspire to reduce them as much as possible to something more empirically acceptable.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See the voice “Dispositions” written by Mumford on the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. URL: <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/dispositions/v-1>.

<sup>10</sup> Although, maybe, in the first case we might talk about *shyness*.

<sup>11</sup> This kind of reduction does not necessarily lead to eliminativists attitudes towards dispositions.

The idea was that the presence of powers could not be verified if they were supposed to have modal properties. But we could, instead of that, test for the presence of power by testing whether it manifests in the appropriate stimulus conditions. (Mumford 2009, 169)

The conditional analysis is a result of this, where the antecedent of the conditional specifies the appropriate stimulus conditions and the consequent specifies the appropriate manifestation. I start by exposing one of the early proposals of conditional analysis contained in Carnap's *Testability and Meaning* (Carnap 1928).<sup>12</sup>

Carnap considers the reduction-sentences as a way of introducing dispositional expressions into our language and he understands the conditional as a *material conditional* (MCA). A particular object  $x$  has disposition  $D$  if and only if  $x$  gives the appropriate manifestation  $M$  upon occurrences of stimulus  $S$ .

$$\forall x (Dx \leftrightarrow (Sx \rightarrow Mx))$$

Let us take the example of solubility: for every object  $x$ ,  $x$  is soluble iff

**MCA:** *if*  $x$  is put into water, *then*  $x$  dissolves.<sup>13</sup>

Carnap's idea is that we can meaningfully tell whether  $x$  is soluble only if it is put into water and MCA works as a rule for introducing the dispositional predicate in application to objects that have actually been put into water. However, the analysis of dispositional predicates in terms of material conditionals raises some problems: first of all, MCA does not help if we wonder whether  $x$  is soluble and  $x$  is not put into water, therefore "soluble" cannot be completely eliminated from language; secondly, the material conditional leads to a paradox: on a material reading of the conditional,  $Sx \rightarrow Mx$  is true even if the antecedent is false, but that would make everything soluble that has not been tested for solubility.

Carnap does not really deal with those problems, for he embraces the idea that we cannot use MCA to completely eliminate the predicate "soluble".<sup>14</sup> Given the inadequacy of the material conditional, philosophers started accepting the idea that dispositional expressions cannot be analysed in an extensional language, *pace* the empiricist's demands (Sellars 1958). Consequently, they turned

<sup>12</sup> To be precise, Carnap makes use of intuitions expressed already by Peirce. As clearly stated by Misak (2004, 10), «Peirce's considered view about the untouched diamond is that 'it is a real fact that it *would* resist pressure' (CP 8. 208, 1905). For the behaviour of diamonds is governed by laws and [...] Peirce argues that laws sustain subjunctive and counterfactual conditionals».

<sup>13</sup> The material conditional substitutes the problematic term "soluble".

<sup>14</sup> This conclusion was not appealing for philosophers of empiricist leanings, therefore some of them tried to look for other definition schemas of dispositional predicates in an extensional language. See, for example, Kaila (1939) and Storer (1951).

their attention to the relation between disposition ascriptions and *counterfactual*, or *subjunctive conditionals*, especially from the early 1970's when philosophy of modality gained new interest and attention.

### 1.2.1 The simple conditional analysis

The first attempt in this direction is the *simple conditional analysis* (SCA) of disposition ascriptions, which is traditionally traced in Ryle (1990) and Goodman (1954). According to this approach, ascriptions of dispositional predicates are analysed in terms of corresponding counterfactual conditionals. Following Cross (2011, 1), I expound the analysis by separating two distinct steps:

1. The dispositional predicate  $D$  is associated to a set of stimulus conditions  $C$  and a set of manifestation conditions  $M$ . Object  $x$  has  $D$ , if and only if,  $x$  is disposed to  $M$  in  $C$ ;
2. The locution “is disposed to” is analysed in terms of a counterfactual conditional: If  $x$  was in  $C$ , then  $x$  would  $M$ .

With the first step, we define the particular disposition to which the dispositional predicate refers to by specifying the characteristic stimulus conditions and the characteristic manifestation. With the second step, the disposition ascription is analysed through a counterfactual conditional. If we take the two steps together, we reach a conditional analysis of the following form:

**SCA:** Object  $x$  is disposed to  $M$  when  $C$  iff  $x$  would  $M$  if it were the case that  $C$ .

For example, let us take the already familiar case of the dispositional predicate “soluble”: with the first step, I associate the expression “ $x$  is soluble” with the disposition to dissolve in water; with the second step, I then analyse  $x$ ’s disposition in the following terms: if  $x$  were put into water, then  $x$  would dissolve. In other terms, saying that object  $x$  is soluble means saying that  $x$  is such that it would dissolve if it were put into water. A further example. Let us consider the dispositional predicate “fragile”, which is another instance of conventional disposition. The expression “ $x$  is fragile” is first associated to the disposition to break when struck, then  $x$ ’s disposition to break is analysed as its being such that it would break if struck: if  $x$  was struck, then  $x$  would break.

It is important to note that, according to this perspective, the ascription of the dispositional predicate is intrinsically linked to the *truth* of the counterfactual conditional therefore, if the conditional turns out to be false, then the ascription is considered semantically invalid. Object  $x$  has to manifest  $M$  in the presence of conditions  $C$ , otherwise we are not allowed to meaningfully state that  $x$  has the relative disposition. Indeed, the main problem of SCA is that it cannot account for many cases where we would ascribe the disposition to an object, or subject without hesitation if the object,

or subject does not actually manifest the disposition even if it is put in the relevant stimulus conditions. The main line of attack has been the formulation of some counterexamples to this kind of analysis, i.e. cases where the nexus between dispositional predicate and counterfactual conditional does not work (Martin 1994, Bird 1998, Johnston 1992, Smith 1977).

### 1.2.2 Finking, masking and mimicking

There are three main types of counterexamples: 1. Cases of finkish dispositions (Martin 1994); 2. Cases of masking (Johnston 1992), or antidotes (Bird 1998); 3. Cases of mimicking (Smith 1997).

1. The case of finking occurs when the conditions for an object's acquiring or losing a disposition  $D$  might be the same as  $D$ 's stimulus conditions. Martin (1994) presents the example of the dead electrical wire. Let us suppose that an electrical wire is live when it is "conductive", that is, it has the conventional disposition to conduct electricity ( $M$ ) when it is touched by a conductor ( $C$ ). According to SCA the dispositional predicate "conductive" ( $D$ ) is analysed as follows: a wire has  $D$  if and only if, it would conduct electricity if touched by a conductor. Martin (1994) imagined a dead wire which is connected to what he calls an "electro-fink" device: this device senses when the wire is about to be touched by the conductor and when it is about to be touched, it makes it conductive (it makes it live). Therefore, when it is untouched, the wire is, intuitively, not conductive, because it is a dead wire – without the disposition of being conductive – even though if it was touched, it would conduct electricity thanks to the "electro-fink" device. The wire, being dead, is not disposed to conduct electricity when touched by a conductor however, it would conduct electricity – hence, it would manifest  $M$ , because it is connected to the device. In Martin's example, the "electro-fink" device could also operate on a reverse cycle: when connected to a naturally live wire (a conductive wire, hence a wire possessing the disposition) it keeps the wire live until it senses that the wire is about to be touched; when it senses that the wire is about to be touched it removes its property of being alive, hence the naturally live wire that would conduct electricity does not actually manifest its disposition because the device removes its disposition. In both cases, the counterfactual conditional is false, for the wire gains or loses the disposition when the stimulus conditions for that disposition do obtain.

2. The second type of counterexample is due to Johnston (1992) and Bird (1998). According to Bird (1998, 228) «many dispositions have [...] antidotes. An object  $x$  is disposed to display response  $r$  under stimulus  $s$ . At time  $t$  it receives stimulus  $s$  and so in the normal course of things, at some later time  $t'$ ,  $x$  gives response  $r$ ». Martin's examples have shown that the time gap between  $t$  and  $t'$  allows, in finkish cases, the loss of a disposition, like in the case of the "electro-fink" operating the reverse cycle. However, there can be a different kind of case; there can be an *antidote* to the above disposition

and that «would be something which, when applied before  $t'$ , has the effect of breaking the causal chain leading to  $r$ , so that  $r$  does not in fact occur». Let us consider the case of a fragile glass which is carefully protected by a sophisticated packing material; if we follow SCA, then we would claim that the expression “The glass is fragile” amounts to saying that the glass would break if struck. However, the packed glass would not break if dropped, even though the glass is fragile and would remain fragile if dropped: the packing material is an “antidote” to striking or, in Johnston’s terms, a “masker” (Johnston 1992, 233).

It is important to better highlight the main difference between these two kinds of counterexamples: finkish cases are based on the idea that something can gain and loose the disposition; those cases are cases where the object undergoes an *intrinsic change*: it gains a disposition or it loses a possessed disposition. This change is read in terms of a change of intrinsic property: gaining or losing a disposition amounts to gaining or loses a certain intrinsic property. Cases of masking or antidotes, by contrast, are cases where the object does not undergo any intrinsic change, for the lack of manifestation is due to some *external interfering factor* which does not remove the object’s disposition; it simply “blocks” the manifestation, hence the causal chain that links stimulus conditions and manifestation of the disposition. The following two passages make this point clearer:

In the antidote cases the antecedent is satisfied but not the consequent. For the causal basis of fragility remains and the glass is struck. But the causal basis and the striking are not jointly a glass-complete cause of breaking, since the glass does not break. (Bird 1998, 228)

Even though the cup would not break if struck *the cup is still fragile* [my emphasis]. The cup’s fragility is masked by the packing which is a) something extrinsic to the glass cup and b) causes the glass cup when struck to withstand deformation without breaking. Were it not for such an extrinsic masker the cup would break when struck. (Johnston 1992, 233)

Both Bird (1998) and Johnston (1992) work with the following three assumptions, which are shared by Martin (1994) too: 1. Dispositions are *intrinsic properties* of objects;<sup>15</sup> 2. The relation between a disposition’s set of stimulus conditions and the disposition’s manifestation is *causal*; 3. The disposition has a relative *causal basis*, which is independent from the external manifestation.<sup>16</sup> Given these three assumptions, cases of masking and finking provide counterexamples for SCA, for the

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<sup>15</sup> In other words, they are hypostatised; that is why they can be gained or lost as they were some kind of object.

<sup>16</sup> That is why we can still say that a glass which does not break if struck due to some extrinsic factor is still fragile; its fragility remains, for it depends on some intrinsic feature of the object itself – its molecular structure – for example.

consequent is not satisfied and we would not be allowed to ascribe the disposition to the object, even if the object does possess the disposition.<sup>17</sup>

3. Cases of finking and masking are generally cases in which it is intuitively clear that object  $x$  has, at time  $t$ , the disposition  $D$  to  $M$  when  $C$  even if it is not true that  $x$  would  $M$  when  $C$ . Cases of mimicking, on the contrary, are cases in which it is intuitively clear that object  $x$  does not have at time  $t$  the disposition  $D$  to  $M$  in  $C$ , but  $x$  manifests  $M$  in  $C$ , therefore it behaves like it possessed  $D$ . In this case, object  $x$  *mimics* the manifestation of disposition  $D$  even if it does not possess  $D$ . Again, let us consider the dispositional predicate “fragile”. We know that, according to SCA, being fragile means being disposed to break if struck. Now, let us consider the following case presented by Lewis (1997):

When a styrofoam dish is struck, it makes a distinctive sound. When the Hater of Styrofoam hears this sound, he comes and tears the dish apart by brute force. So, when the Hater is within earshot, styrofoam dishes are disposed to end up broken if struck. However, there is a certain direct and standard process whereby fragile things most often (actually, nowadays, and hereabouts) break when struck, and the styrofoam dishes in the story are not at all disposed to undergo that process. Are they fragile? To say so would be at best a misleading truth, and at worst an outright falsehood.

(Lewis 1997, 153)

We would say without hesitation that styrofoam dishes are not fragile, therefore the styrofoam dish in the case presented above is not disposed to break when struck. However, that particular dish would break if struck due to the interference of the Hater of Styrofoam, which is then called a “mimicker” of the disposition to break when struck, i.e. it makes it the case that the styrofoam dish, which do not have the disposition, *mimics* the disposition’s relevant manifestation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Actually, I think that the success of such counterexamples lies in part on the fact that a certain nexus between disposition ascriptions and conditionals is still assumed, and that nexus is causal. If we completely did not accept SCA and its assumptions – hence if we do not strictly link the validity of the disposition ascription to the truth of a conditional sentence – some cases would not even been seen as problematic. Indeed, in the case of the protected fragile glass, we could observe that the ascription of fragility already operates in the counterexample case: we are surprised when the glass does not break when struck because we have already ascribed a certain disposition to the glass, and such ascription does not necessarily retains validity in virtue of some empirical evidence. Is part of the concept of “fragile glass” the glass’s disposition to easily break when struck, and the lack of the relevant manifestation is not necessarily seen as an obstacle to such an ascription embedded in the ordinary use of the linguistic expression. The term “fragility” does not change its meaning. It is true that the ascription of fragility can be grounded on empirical evidence about the glass material: we say that a glass made of crystal is fragile because we know by empirical evidence and scientific research that crystal is a kind of material which easily breaks when struck. However, this is just one case among many, if we consider the linguistic use of the dispositional expression: we assume that glasses made of crystal are fragile because we are used to employ that concept in a certain way; we are used to apply the concept of fragility to glasses made of crystal and not to glasses made of plastic. No empirical evidence is needed to operate with those concepts in such a way.

<sup>18</sup> See also another example formulated by Smith (1977, 444): «How, for example, are we to distinguish putting an object on Neptune (or subjecting it to a Neptunian environment in a laboratory) and sharply tapping it with the result that it shatters, where the object was resilient on earth but has become fragile on Neptune, from the case where, in

As claimed by Cross (2011, 2), «recent literature on dispositions can be characterized helpfully, if imperfectly, as a continuing reaction to this family of counter-examples». I distinguish three kinds of responses: 1. Some authors (Choi 2006, 2008) tried to defend SCA by arguing that, if properly understood, it is not undermined by the counterexamples presented above; 2. Others (Lewis 1997, Gundersen 2002, Fara 2005, Mellor 2000, Malzkorn 2000, Prior 1985) maintained that counterexamples do refute SCA but they tried to elaborate sophisticated versions of it in order to save the traditional conditional-based approach; 3. Others, like Martin himself (Martin 1977, Ellis 2001, Mumford 1998, Molnar 2007), took extremely seriously the above counterexamples and they completely abandoned the project of a conditional-based semantics of disposition ascriptions by moving to a more ontological-metaphysical enquiry into the nature of dispositional entities.

### **1.2.3 Defending SCA: understanding anew or reformation**

SCA has been defended using two different strategies: 1. A proposal of a better understanding of the same SCA, mainly based on a different assumption about what dispositions an object possesses (Choi 2006, Gundersen 2002); 2. A proposal of reformation of the traditional SCA, hence the elaboration of more sophisticated conditional-based analysis of dispositional predicates.

1. Choi (2006, 2008) works with the already discussed example of the fragile glass which is protected by a sophisticated packaging: according to him, when the glass is protected by the packing material it is no longer disposed to break when struck; it is no longer fragile. Rather, the glass is disposed to break when struck *in the absence of the packing material*. In this way, SCA is preserved: the protected glass *would* indeed break when struck *in the absence of packaging*, although it would not break when struck under its current conditions. Similarly, regarding Lewis's example (Lewis 1977), Choi claims that when the styrofoam dish is near the Hater of Styrofoam it is indeed disposed to break when struck, but it is not disposed to break when struck in the absence of the Hater of Styrofoam. Therefore, the styrofoam dish would not break if struck in the absence of the Hater of Styrofoam, but it would break if struck under its current conditions.

Such a strategy seems to imply that there can be *complex dispositions*, i.e. dispositions whose stimulus conditions and manifestation are particular events – say, the event of being struck and being broken – plus some additional conditions, such as the absence of the packing material or the Hater of Styrofoam. Moreover, there is general agreement that there are *multi-track dispositions*, that is, dispositions that correspond to more than one pair of stimulus conditions and manifestation: the same

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ordinary conditions, we tap a solid block of wood while simultaneously beaming a Z-ray on to it, with the result that it shatters?».

disposition can be picked up by different characterisations in terms of stimulus conditions and manifestation. Language skills are of this kind: the ability to know a particular language, say Italian, is manifested or exercised both in the correct utterance of Italian sentences, but also in the correct act of writing Italian texts, reading Italian texts, etc. Similarly, fragility can be said to be a multitrack disposition for it has many different stimulus conditions: object  $x$  being struck,  $x$ 's being twisted,  $x$ 's being shaken,  $x$ 's being dropped, etc.<sup>19</sup> Solubility, on the contrary, is a *single-track disposition*, for it admits just one event as a manifestation: the object's dissolution in water.

Complex and multi-track dispositions call for a problem of disambiguation of the notion of stimulus conditions: generally, specification of the stimulus conditions is grasped by looking at the context of utterance in ordinary discourse. For example, let us consider the expression “Arsenic is poisonous”. Prior (1985) claims that it would be improper to identify the stimulus condition of the disposition expressed with the event of being ingested, for in most normal contexts of utterance the expression is used to say that Arsenic is poisonous for humans, therefore the stimulus condition can be said to be the event of being ingested by a human being. However, in the context of formal semantic analysis of disposition ascriptions, the stimulus condition has been thought to be better spelled out by specifying the conditions under which deviant cases of masking, finking and mimicking are absent. Choi (2008) seems to assume that, effectively, SCA involves some *ceteris paribus clauses* which should rule out cases of finks, reverse-cycle finks, maskers or antidotes, and mimickers. This was indeed at the core of one of the many attempts (Malzkorn 2000, Steinberg 2010, Mumford 1998) to improve SCA by adding further qualifications, and this strategy is traditionally called “Qualified conditional analysis” (QCA).

2. In general, QCA invokes a qualifier of some kind to rule out the offending cases: Malzkorn (2000) restricts the conditions under which, for example, a fragile object would break when struck to *normal conditions*, Mumford (1998) speaks about *ideal conditions*, Steinberg (2010) invokes a *ceteris paribus* clause, whereas Choi (2008) himself speaks about *ordinary conditions*. Correspondingly, cases of masking, mimicking and finking are taken to be abnormal, normal, or non-ideal, or generally “special cases” which, although possible, do not undermine the conditional-base of the dispositional ascription within the boundaries of SCA. The idea is that, for example, the dispositional expression “Object  $x$  is fragile” entails that  $x$  would break if struck *under certain standard conditions*, and the

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<sup>19</sup> Cartwright (1999, 59, 64) presents electric charge as a paradigm example of multitrack disposition, which she calls “capacity”: an electrically charged electron is disposed to experience the electrostatic force  $F$  in response to being placed at a distance  $d$  away from an electric charge  $q$ , but it is *also* disposed to experience an electrostatic force  $F^*$  in response to being placed at a distance  $d^*$  away from an electric charge  $q^*$ .

expression “under certain standard conditions” is construed by specifying cases where masks, antidotes, finks, mimickers, or reverse-finks operate:

**QCA:** “if  $x$  were struck under certain standard conditions it would break”, or “If  $x$  were struck, then, *ceteris paribus*, it would break”.

The point is that, to the extent to which cases of finks, masks and mimickers are non-standard, the *ceteris paribus* clause ensure that the expression “ $x$  is fragile” has the same truth value as the correspondent counterfactual conditional in every case.<sup>20</sup>

Adding a *ceteris paribus* clause might indeed “protect” the conditional against the logical possibility of counterexamples such as those elaborated by Martin (1998) and others. However, there are two main problematic aspects: first of all, serious difficulties arise when we try to spell out the *ceteris paribus* clause in a way that fits the bill. It seems that the only way to spell it out is to leave the qualifications bare, rendering the qualified analysis vacuous, or trivial: to say that if  $x$  were struck, then  $x$  *ceteris paribus* would break, seems to simply state that if  $x$  were struck then it would break, unless it did not break, which is vacuously true (Martin 1998); the abnormal, or non-ideal or non-normal cases seem to be nothing more than cases where if  $x$  were in the relevant stimulus conditions,  $x$  would not manifest the relevant manifestation anyway. Alternatively, as suggested by Cross (2011,4), triviality can be avoided by fleshing out the qualification into a substantive proposal, but then the analysis is liable to be undermined by further «counter-examples that come in endless varieties». In other words, adding *ceteris paribus* clauses can be on the one hand extremely vacuous and useless – or useful just in response to already formulated counter-examples – or it can be more substantive, but insufficient to cover all the possible deviant cases which would undermine the truth of the counterfactual conditional, thereby undermining the validity of the disposition ascription.

Secondly, QCA seems to imply that problematic cases are cases where disposition  $D$  does not manifest the relevant manifestation  $M$  even if it were in the relevant stimulus conditions  $C$  due to *extrinsic* factors which interfere with the standard process. This might be in line with cases of masking and mimickers but, as we have seen, cases of finking and reverse-finking are cases where there are *intrinsic* changes in the possessor of  $D$ : dispositions can be gained and lost. In other words, contrary to what claimed by Choi (2008), the alleged ordinary conditions, or standard condition of  $D$  might be intrinsic to the putative bearer of  $D$ . Indeed, the notion of intrinsicness plays a central role in the

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<sup>20</sup> In Choi (2008)’s terms: “ $x$  is fragile” means that  $x$  would break if struck under the ordinary conditions for fragility. Ordinary conditions for a disposition  $D$  are extrinsic conditions to the bearer of  $D$  that are considered ordinary by those who possess the corresponding dispositional concept. We do all know, as competent speakers, how to use the concept of fragility, therefore we all know what are the ordinary conditions for an object to be legitimately defined fragile.

sophisticated conditional analysis suggested by Lewis (1997), which is called “Reformed conditional analysis” (RCA).<sup>21</sup>

Lewis (1997) starts from the fact that Choi’s defence of SCA against Martin’s counterexamples is precluded by the fact that  $x$ ’s dispositions are not thought to be related to its intrinsic properties, whereas dispositions involved in the counterexamples are intrinsic to their bearers. Lewis assumes that all dispositions are intrinsic to their bearers; he subscribes to the Intrinsic Disposition Thesis (UDT). With some simplifications, Lewis proposal is:

**RCA:** An object  $x$  is disposed to  $M$  in  $C$  just in case  $x$  has an intrinsic property  $P$  which, if it were retained by  $x$  for a sufficiently long period and  $x$  were in  $C$ ,  $x$  would  $M$  in virtue of  $P$ .

However, Lewis’ proposal falls under a critique which constitutes the other side of the coin of what we have said against QCA: it enables to circumvent the problem of finks and reverse-finks, for in that case the deviant factor is intrinsic to the bearer of the disposition, but it does not help with the problems of maskers and mimickers which, no surprise, are cases where the interfering factors are extrinsic to the bearer of the disposition. Let us recall the case of the fragile glass carefully protected by the packing material. Let us assume, like Lewis, that the glass is fragile – it possesses the disposition – in virtue of some intrinsic property, say its molecular structure. Now, the protected glass of the case discussed is struck but it does not break; actually, it retains all its molecular structure for a sufficient time but it would not break thanks to the masking operation of the packing material. Similarly, the Styrofoam dish would break if struck due to the mimicking interference of the Hater of Styrofoam but the dish, even if struck, it does retain its microstructure responsible for its distinctive sound.<sup>22</sup>

I end by briefly expounding the last proposal of reformed conditional analysis that I intend to discuss here; this version is proposed by Manley & Wasserman (2007, 2008). Their proposal stands on two main observations: 1. Dispositions come in degree, i.e. we can perfectly say using our

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<sup>21</sup> Talk of intrinsic properties is shared by Fara (2005) too, who offers a *habitual analysis of dispositions* (HAD): an object  $x$  is disposed to  $M$  when  $C$  iff  $x$  has an intrinsic property in virtue of which  $x$   $M$ s when  $C$ . Fara claims that an analysis in terms of habituals can be a valid alternative to the use of conditionals. Habituals are a common place devise for characterizing the way an object or subject habitually behaves through universal generalisations that tolerate exceptions. For example, the statement “Mark usually drives to work” is true even if, occasionally, Mark walks to work, or if Mark takes the bus. Fara’s analysis has the merit to give a better characterisation of specifically human dispositional behaviour which is extremely open to exceptions and deviation from the general rule for it can accommodate deviant cases without taking them as counterexamples to a conditional-based disposition ascription. However, it has been argued (Yli-Vakkuri 2010) that Fara’s analysis reduces to a particular version of SCA: an object  $x$  is disposed to  $M$  when  $C$  iff  $x$  has an intrinsic property in virtue of which, *ceteris paribus*,  $x$  would  $M$  if it were the case that  $C$ . If this is so, then Fara’s account is liable to the same critics that affect QCA, such as vacuity and circularity.

<sup>22</sup> Cross (2011,3) provides a further example: «A poison taken with its antidote may fail to kill when ingested, and without any change in its intrinsic character».

language that object  $x$  is “*very fragile*”, or “*slightly fragile*”, or that object  $x$  is more fragile than object  $y$ , and so on. In other words, dispositional terms often work as comparatives; 2. Some dispositions seem to lack characteristic stimulus conditions altogether, such as loquaciousness or irascibility. We perfectly know how to sensibly employ the dispositional predicates “*loquacious*” and “*irascible*”, for we are able to immediately recognize events that correspond to their standard manifestations; however, it seems difficult to isolate a definite set of stimulus conditions under which those dispositions would manifest. Both observations constitute further elements against SCA: in the latter case, the lack of stimulus conditions prevents the formulation of the counterfactual conditionals; in the former case, the conditional analysis fails because counterfactual and subjunctive conditionals are neither gradable nor comparative. Counterfactual conditionals invoked by conditional analyses do not admit of degree. Indeed, Manley & Wasserman argue that the element of degree raises a new family of counterexamples, which are different from the ones already discussed: a non-fragile object, say a plastic bottle, may be immune from breaking under most conditions – hence the lack of the disposition of fragility – but when it is struck at just the right angle and pressure it can break anyway. Likewise, a fragile object, say the screen of a mobile phone, may fail to break if struck from a certain angle and with a certain force without any protection that could function as a masker, although in almost all other circumstances it would break or being damaged if not carefully protected. In these cases, it is hard to see how any specification of normal or ideal or *ceteris paribus* conditions could rule the counterexamples out. However, if they are not ruled out, they will foil both SCA and modified versions such as QCA.

For these reasons, Manley & Wasserman (2008, 76) offer the following conditional analysis of disposition ascriptions:

**PROP:** Object  $x$  is disposed to  $M$  when  $C$  iff  $x$  would  $M$  in some suitable proportion of  $C$ -cases.<sup>23</sup>

PROP has two merits: it faces finkish and masking cases, because «the many possible non-finkish, non-masking  $C$ -cases overwhelm the masking and finkish  $C$ -cases in the final tally of possibilities» (Cross 2011, 5); moreover, it can accommodate comparative or degree-theoretic disposition ascriptions and can easily characterize dispositions with no stimulus conditions, by letting ‘ $C$ ’ cover all cases. On PROP, the expression “ $x$  is more disposed to  $M$  in  $C$  than  $y$ ” means that  $x$  would  $M$  in a greater proportion of  $C$ -cases than  $y$ .

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<sup>23</sup> The expression “ $C$ -cases” stands for a specific scenario that settles everything that is causally relevant for a disposition to manifest and that is fixed both by the stimulus conditions  $C$  and by the context of the ascription.

However, still this analysis is not without difficulties. It is very difficult to talk about proportions of *C*-cases, given the plural and different factors that might affect the weights of given *C*-cases. As Manley & Wasserman (2008, 78–82) note, whether an infinite set of possibilities constitutes a “suitable proportion” or not depends in complex and subtle ways on how number of factors are weight, and this varies from context to context. Moreover, Manley & Wasserman’s account of comparative disposition ascriptions requires a non-arbitrary standard in order to compare the size of infinite sets of *C*-cases, but it is a hard task to set up such a standard and to do so in a way that is epistemically accessible to those who possess the concept of the disposition at issue.

We have seen that none of the proposals is without difficulties and the debate on the merits and limits of conditional-based analysis of dispositional predicates is still open. Another popular response to the famous counterexamples to SCA, shared by Martin’s (1997) himself, is to shift the philosophical focus from semantic issues to metaphysical issues, trying to improve our understanding of dispositions by including dispositions directly within the fundamental ontology and then attempting to analyse other key metaphysical notions in terms of them. Cross (2011, 2) calls this reaction “dispositions first reaction”.

#### **1.2.4 Rejecting SCA: “dispositions first reaction”**

Failure to defend the conditional-based analysis of disposition ascriptions has led many philosophers to think that «the disposition ascription is, to a degree, evidence transcendent [...]. There is, of course, some empirical basis for such ascriptions [...] but ultimately [...] it will be for theoretical and metaphysical reasons that we should accept an ontology of causal powers» (Mumford 2009, 171). Authors then, are interested in building dispositions in the ontological foundation by arguing in favour of their ontological autonomy. As noticed also by Tiercelin (2002) dispositions, after having been considered mere ways of talking and linked to the obscurantism of occult qualities such as forces and powers, have gained new importance and attention in the recent debate thanks to the entitlement of an autonomous ontological status.

Historically, Tiercelin (2002) traces four main sources of such kind of rehabilitation of dispositional discourse: 1. Philosophy of science: philosophers of science started to acknowledge the fact that it is impossible, even within science, to exclude some kinds of entities just in virtue of their being non observable, thus empirically inaccessible. 2. Philosophy of psychology from the 50’s: philosophers argued against two mistaken conceptions of the mental; on the one hand Ryle, Peirce and Wittgenstein wrote against an internalist or cartesian interpretation of mental phenomena, the so-called theory of the “ghost in the machine” but also, as we will see in the second part of the present

work, Wittgenstein's attention on the misleading "shadowy picture". On the other hand, the same philosophers recognized the limits of a behaviourist and mechanistic interpretation of mental phenomena that are not able to give an account, for example, of the dispositional character of certain mental concepts, like belief and desire. 3. Philosophy of probability: Peirce, Ramsey and, later, Popper, faced the limits of frequentist and subjectivist theories of probability by proposing a theory grounded in the notion of propensity. 4. Quantum mechanics: quantum science implies a new image of the world where dispositions are real and universe itself is completely made up by propensities. As stated by Thompson (1988, 76-77), in the context of quantum physics, «position and velocity should now be related not to spatial properties or actual shapes, but to *propensities* [my emphasis]. Quantum mechanics uses the 'propensity' type of disposition, as this type displays its effects probabilistically [...]. If we then ask what must the world be like in order that quantum mechanics describes it correctly, we arrive at the existence of real propensities». Although «it is sometimes thought that talk of propensities can be reduced to talk of conditional probabilities [...] the notion of a "real disposition" is an essential part of both our theoretical and practical understanding of the physical world [...] and is likely to be fundamental to a realistic and non-paradoxical account of quantum physics». In Popper's words:

Propensities, like Newtonian attractive forces, are invisible and, like them, they can act: they are *actual*, they are *real*. We are therefore compelled to attribute a kind of reality to mere possibilities, especially to weighted possibilities, and especially to those that are as yet unrealized and whose fate will only be decided in the course of time, and perhaps only in the distant future. (Popper 1990, 17)

Philosophers who are part of the "dispositions first reaction" share the common interest in reconsidering dispositions as real entities part of the world we inhabit. I will present some specific proposals in the next chapter; for now, I limit my attention to two typical views of the disposition first ontology: *dispositional essentialism* and *dispositional monism*. According to the first, endorsed by Ellis (2010), *at least some* fundamental properties have dispositional, or causal essences. According to the second, endorsed by Bird (2007) and McKittrick (2003), *all* fundamental properties have dispositional essence. Dispositional monism is also called "dispositionalism": simply put, it states that the essence of a property  $P$  is wholly constituted by the causal role  $P$  plays and such a role determines how  $P$ 's instances are disposed to act and react under various circumstances.

### **1.2.5 Some preliminary critical remarks**

Beyond the specific proposals, I would like to focus on a presupposition which is very important for the sake of the present work. Even the "dispositions first reaction", like conditional-based analysis of

disposition ascriptions, stands on the classical empiricist problem of the empirical inaccessibility of dispositions; the assumption is the same. Both counterfactual analysis of dispositional predicates and ontological thesis about the reality of dispositional properties are ways to face the empirical problem without giving up the validity of dispositional notions which are part of ordinary language and ordinary ways of speaking about the world. Ontological autonomy seems to be the only way to rehabilitate the notion of disposition given its empirical inaccessibility. However, we might wonder whether there are other legitimate sources of the general idea of power and the employment of dispositional terms. Is empirical inaccessibility really a serious problem for a legitimate use of dispositional terms? Are we really obliged to give dispositions ontological autonomy, hence hypostatize them, in order to make sense of dispositional talk?

First of all, it seems to me that empirical inaccessibility would actually constitute a serious problem if we assume a quite rigid denotative theory of meaning of dispositional terms, i.e. if we assume that dispositional terms are meaningful in virtue of the fact that they refer to particular kinds of entities located somewhere in the world or inside the bearers of dispositions. However,

1. The denotative, or referential theory of meaning has been widely criticized by philosophers of language. In particular, Wittgenstein, at the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations*, deals with such a theory – which he calls “Augustinian” model of meaning and language – in order to show how it is incomplete and limited for it cannot account for the varieties of uses of words and sentences. He defines the denotative theory as a picture of language according to which «the words in language name objects – sentences are combinations of such names. – In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands» (PI §1).

Wittgenstein’s critique stands on two main observations: firstly, followers of the denotative model are «thinking primarily of nouns like “table”, “chair”, “bread”, and of people’s names, and only secondarily of the names of certain actions and properties» (PI §1). Indeed, it is easy and plausible to state that the term “apple” refers to the object apple, the fruit, or that the term “chair” refers to the material chair; however, what about the terms “in virtue of”, “and”, “emotion”, “sensibility” and so on? What about the term “disposition”? What are the referents of those terms? We cannot really point a finger towards some kind of entity, but still those terms have a meaning and a role in language. The first limit of the denotative model is the narrowness with respect to the plurality of usages of the

words constituting a language.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, the denotative model entails an ostensive teaching of words, i.e. the idea that «an important part of the training will consist in the teacher's pointing to the objects, directing the child's attention to them, and at the same time uttering a word; for instance, the word "slab" as he displays that shape» (PI §6). However, Wittgenstein intends to show that such ostensive training could not constitute the subject's understanding of the words, for the grasping of the ostensive training presupposes the mastery of the use of the words; it presupposes knowledge of the system: «the pointing occurs in the *use* of the words too and not merely in learning the use» (PI §9).<sup>25</sup>

One can abbreviate the description of the use of the word "slab" by saying that this word signifies this object. This will be done if, for example, it is merely a matter of removing the misunderstanding that the word "slab" refers to the building stone that we in fact call "block" – but the kind of '*referring*' this is, that is to say, the rest of the use of these words, *is already known* [my emphasis]. (PI §10)

2. We do not actually employ the term "disposition" in ordinary language in virtue of the fact that it would refer to a particular kind of entity; rather, we use it in order to give a particular kind of explanation of behaviour or a certain type of conduct. Hypostatisation of the disposition is a product of philosophical reflection and, in particular, it is a philosophical move given in response to the empiricist problem of inaccessibility of the disposition. In ordinary language, the fact that dispositions are not observable do not raise any problem, for the meaning of the term is not fixed by the alleged entity the term should refer to. The term "disposition", hence, is not so different from other terms that we easily use even if we cannot point to anything ontologically autonomous and stable as corresponding reference, such as "mood", "sight", "idea", "tall", etc. Those words have a meaning in

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<sup>24</sup> Words are like tools in a toolbox: «the functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. Of course, what confuses us is the uniform appearance of words when we hear them in speech, or see them written or in print. For their *use* is not that obvious» (PI §11).

<sup>25</sup> The idea is that if someone points to something, I need to know where to look at. I think this gets clearer if we think about the way we learn a foreign language, say Italian. Let us suppose an English speaker is studying Italian at school. While walking with an Italian friend of his, he asks his friend the following question: "What does 'giallo' mean?". Now, let us further suppose that the Italian friend endorses a denotative model of meaning; he then answers by uttering "This is 'giallo'" while pointing to a yellow flower. What is he pointing at? The word "giallo" might stand for the colour of the flower, but also for the shape, or for the object itself. The English speaker in order to grasp the ostensive explanation and to understand that "giallo" means "yellow" has to already know at least that the term refers to a colour, and not to a kind of shape or object. In other words, in order to grasp the ostensive definition, the English speaker has to already master some grammatical categories.

Popper (2002) too recognized that observations and words do not automatically match. In *Logic of Scientific Discovery* of 1934, he claimed that it is impossible to build logic on what one has observed or is able to look at, for if an empiricist, or a believer in inductive logic told me "Record what you are now experiencing", «I shall hardly know how to obey this ambiguous order. Am I to report that I am writing; that I hear a bell ringing; a newsboy shouting; a loudspeaker droning; or am I to report, perhaps, that these noises irritate me? And even if the order could be obeyed: however rich a collection of statements might be assembled in this way, it could never add up to a *science*. A science needs points of view, and theoretical problems» (Popper 2002, 88). Popper puts Wittgenstein's point the other way around: observations are too diffuse to allow a simple verbal assignation; we need a word so that we can know where to look and what to look for.

virtue of the role they play in a system of sign, or language; Wittgenstein, indeed, suggests to think about the meaning of words as the use they have in language, that is, as their employment governed by shared and public rules. From a semantic point of view, the epistemic problem of accessibility and observability appears when we are doing philosophy but it does not affect the actual use of words, for such use is even assumed in the philosophical reflection: we wonder what kind of entity a disposition is, but we are actually already operating with the concept, so the concept itself cannot be grounded on the alleged entity that is the object of metaphysical enquiry.

Secondly, for the sake of the argument let us assume that a certain degree of empirical accessibility has to be guaranteed in order to meaningfully engage with a dispositional talk. Indeed, it has to be recognised that disposition ascriptions derive from certain regularities in the external conduct of objects and individuals, therefore the notion of disposition cannot completely be divorced from the concept of experience. However, even if we grant so, there might be different legitimate sources of the general idea of power and disposition others than direct observation or ontological hypostatisation. In the context of the recent debate on dispositions, Mumford (2009) traces other three empirical legitimate cues upon which we make disposition ascriptions:

1. Analogy. «While this particular vase may never have been tested for fragility, others have been so tested and have broken. If our untested vase is enough like the broken past vases, then we can very easily form the idea of *untested powers* [my emphasis] that are ready to be manifested if all the conditions are right» (Mumford 2009, 171). However, conditional analysis cannot specify non-trivially all the conditions that would have to be present for the manifestation to occur, for we cannot rule out all potential preventers of the manifestation. As we have seen, this is also one of the limits of QCA.

2. Patterns of behaviour. Here, interestingly, Mumford employs the example of the machine, which will be extensively discussed by Wittgenstein too, as we will see in the second part of the present work: «I may see the insides of a machine and, if my understanding is developed enough, I can see what powers this machine has. I need not have put it directly to the test or know whether it has actually performed such a function, but I can nevertheless understand that it has the power to do, just from my mechanical knowledge» (Mumford 2009, 172). In this case, knowledge of unmanifested powers is based on our knowledge of the structure and functioning of the machine; its constitutive and underlying laws. From a semantic point of view, such a perspective entails the idea that concepts of power and disposition refer to inner states, or structures of the bearer of the disposition and for this

reason, it is difficult to avoid hypostatisation here.<sup>26</sup> However, as I will try to argue throughout the whole work, is possible to speak about patterns of behaviour in a non-mechanical way, and to take into account the experiential element of dispositions without thereby conceiving of the meaning of the term as an external referent linked to the inner structure of the bearer.

3. Dispositions and powers can be felt. «While we cannot see powers, we might be able to *feel* [my emphasis] them» (Mumford 2009, 172). Mumford presents the example of a tug-of-war contest. Let us imagine the case where the contest is evenly balanced and neither team moves forward: visually, nothing at all appears, but the members of the two teams can *feel* the force of the pull exerted. They do *feel* the power also in their legs and arms. According to Mumford, this example shows that Hume and traditional empiricist's mistake was to concentrate only to visual experience. I think that the problem is not visual experience itself, rather it is a particular conception of visual experience, i.e. direct observation of entities and events. As I will try to argue in the second and third part of the present work, there might be a sense in which dispositions and powers are *seen*, using a different concept of vision from the mere primary visual experience: dispositions are seen in the same way as we see joy by looking at a joyful sight, or we see sufferance in the traits of a human face. In order to do this, we will engage with Wittgenstein's notion of aspect seeing.

One last remark before moving on: these cues, or alternative empirical sources of the concept of disposition and, in general, power, are part of our way to speak about dispositions and powers. Maybe, as we have seen, they cannot be accounted for by standard conditional-based analysis of disposition ascriptions, but they do play a role in our ordinary use of dispositional concepts. It might be true that, in a certain sense, we do ascribe fragility without hesitation to this particular glass even if its fragility is untested in virtue of the fact that similar glasses have been tested in the past, but this does not necessary oblige us to endorse a denotative theory of meaning according to which fragility refers to a particular inner property of the object. Indeed, we are already operating with the concept of fragility, so we do not need to test that particular glass in order to say that it is fragile.

In the following and last paragraph, I will briefly expound the second line of reconstruction of the historical debate, which will function as a direct link to the recent debate, for such a debate is mainly constituted by metaphysical and ontological issues and it stands within the category of the “dispositions first reaction” to SCA.

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<sup>26</sup> The model of the machine is the underlying picture at the basis of misleading conceptions of Rule-following, generally classified under the label “guidance conception”. See chapter 5 for a detailed discussion.

### **1.3 2<sup>nd</sup> line: from dispositions vs occurrences to dispositional properties vs categorical properties**

The previous section was devoted to the issue of how to devise a conceptual analysis of dispositional predicates and disposition ascriptions given that dispositions are not observable. In this section I will expound another philosophical way of enquiring dispositions: rather than reflecting about the best way to semantically analyse dispositional terms, dispositions are approached from an ontological-metaphysical point of view as particular kinds of entities, or properties. Given this assumption, the main question is: what is the criterion of a dispositional property? What is a non-dispositional property and how does it differ from a dispositional one?

These questions are still open and they are at the basis of some views we have already presented, like dispositional monism and dispositional essentialism. Whether some properties are intrinsically dispositional, or all of them, or none of them, is a controversial issue. Historically, we can trace a significative passage from the opposition between dispositions and occurrences, due to Ryle (1990), to the opposition between dispositional properties and categorical properties which is at the core of the “dispositions first reaction” and the current debates.

In *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle devised a conceptual analysis of dispositional terms and he opposed dispositions to occurrences or events. Dispositions are different from occurrences, for dispositional terms do not refer to inner states or events happening in the subject; rather, they are something that issued in occurrences. This difference is a difference in the logical type. It is not a matter of empirical accessibility – what can be seen and what cannot be seen: «a disposition is a factor of the wrong logical type to be seen or unseen, recorded or unrecorded» (Ryle 1990, 33). However, Ryle rightly states that «the truth that sentences containing words like “might”, “could”, and “would...if” do not report limbo facts does not entail that such sentences have not got proper jobs of their own to perform» (Ryle 1990, 115). Indeed, «a number of the words which we commonly use to describe and explain people’s behaviour signify dispositions and not episodes» (Ryle 1990, 112). To have a disposition is to be liable to be in a state, or to undergo a change, when some conditions obtain, but it is not to be actually in a certain state or to have something happening now.<sup>27</sup>

Dispositional statements are neither reports of observed or observable states of affairs, nor yet reports of unobserved or unobservable states of affairs. They narrate no incidents. But their jobs are intimately connected with narratives of incidents, for, if they are true, they are satisfied by

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<sup>27</sup> For example, someone might be a smoker, but this does not entail that he should be smoking at the time of the dispositional ascription; he is a smoker even when he is not actually smoking.

narrated incidents. “John Doe has just been telephoning in French” satisfies what is asserted by “John Doe knows French”. (Ryle 1990, 120)

For this reason, Ryle claims that statements that ascribe dispositions are hypothetical and usually testable and they are articulated using a conditional.<sup>28</sup> We might summarize Ryle’s main points as follows<sup>29</sup>: dispositional statements’ job is connected to the one of law sentences; they are not laws because they mention particular things or persons, but they resemble laws because (1) they are partly variable, or open, (2) they are often deductions from laws, that is, we often have to learn some laws before we can use them, although in general the learning process goes the other way (i.e., we often learn how to use dispositional statements about individuals before we learn laws stating general correlations between such statements) and, most important (3) they are inference-tickets: dispositional statements are satisfied by the actions, or reactions or states of the object and they license us «to predict, retrodict, explain, and modify these actions, reactions, and states» (Ryle 1990, 119). Ryle’s perspective is particularly interesting because it shows that endorsement of conditional-based analysis of dispositions ascription from a semantic point of view does not necessarily entail hypostatisation of dispositions and endorsement of a realist perspective from an ontological-metaphysical point of view.

Since Ryle, however, it has become more common to speak of dispositional properties as opposed to non-dispositional, or categorial properties, because authors progressively rejected Ryle’s claim that to have a disposition is to be in no state. Indeed, nowadays it is quite common to think about the term “disposition” as a term that indicates a type of property, state or condition which provides for the possibility of some further state or behaviour under certain specific circumstances. To have a disposition means to be in a certain particular state and such a state has some causal power in virtue of which a further state or behaviour is made possible. Given this, what are categorical properties? Here we find already a problem, for the concept of categorical property is not easier to define, therefore, if the opposite concept is not defined as well, we are in no better position regarding the clarification of the concept of disposition when we simply intend to oppose it to the concept of categorical property. We might say that there are some clear cases of categorical properties, like

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<sup>28</sup> Overall, I think that Ryle’s talk on disposition is interesting because it suggests the idea that adhering to the conditional analysis of dispositional statements does not imply endorsing a realist and naturalized conception of disposition. In the third part of the present work I will argue that Ryle does not employ a naturalized notion of disposition, even though he is commonly cited among the authors that endorse the conditional analysis.

<sup>29</sup> A detailed exposition of Ryle’s perspective is found in the third part of the present work. For now, it is important to grasp the passage from Ryle’s conceptual interest on dispositional terms and a substantive ontological interest on dispositional entities and properties.

roundness, or being made of plastic, however it is difficult to settle what characteristics they have in common.

Failure of the conditional-based analysis of disposition ascriptions – both SCA and reformed versions, like QCA or PROP – undermined the attempt to define the difference between the two types of properties by appealing to the entailment of counterfactual conditionals. As clearly stated by Mumford, «from one direction, it has been argued that although disposition ascriptions entail conditionals, so do non-disposition, or categorical, ascriptions. From the other, it has been argued that while non-disposition ascriptions fail to entail conditionals, disposition ascriptions equally fail. The general problem is, therefore, that whatever relation holds between dispositions and conditionals arguably holds equally between non-dispositions and conditionals».<sup>30</sup> First of all, regarding the conditional-base, dispositional properties are not unique. Mellor (1974) takes the example of an alleged paradigmatic categorical property, triangularity, and he claimed that even such categorical property entails the following conditional: “if the corners were counted correctly, then the result would be three”. Secondly, critiques of Mellor’s proposal echo the critiques elaborated against SCA and QCA: the conditionals that are entitled by the property ascriptions, even in the case of alleged categorical properties, often need to be qualified. Mellor’s conditional is susceptible of reverse-fink and maskers: for example, an object  $x$  is triangular, but if  $x$ ’s corners were about to be counted, we can imagine a finking device that changes  $x$ ’s shape so that the result of counting would not be three. We might suggest that such a problem might be addressed by adding a *ceteris paribus* clause so that the stimulus condition of triangularity is not simply  $x$ ’s corners being counted, but  $x$ ’s corners being *correctly* counted under certain *standard conditions*. However, QCA applied to triangularity has the same limits of QCA we have previously seen, that is, triviality and the impossibility to set all the possible interfering factors.

The rejection of conditional entitlement as a criterion of the dispositional has led authors to reconsider dispositions by focusing on their ontological autonomy, i.e. considering them as real properties of the world. If dispositions are real properties, they exist independently of their manifestation and they can be there even if they are not manifested or tested. Martin’s notion of finkish disposition, actually, goes in this direction: dispositions can be gained and lost over time; therefore, they are in a certain sense independent from their manifestations and their bearers. Finkish cases show that something could have a disposition though it is never manifested when tested.

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<sup>30</sup> See the voice “Dispositions” written by Mumford on the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. URL: <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/dispositions/v-1>.

Similarly, Molnar (2003) claims that dispositions are real properties in their own right, therefore it makes sense to talk about a disposition which is randomly manifested or another disposition which is continuously manifested; however, these cases cannot be accounted through a conditional, for every conditional would be trivial. Rather than conditional entitlement, Molnar traces the mark of the dispositional in the notion of intentionality: differently from categorical properties, dispositions are directed towards their manifestations and yet they exist independently of their manifestations. A disposition is always a disposition for some specific behaviour, reaction or manifestation.<sup>31</sup>

It is important to note that metaphysical reality is always a presupposition, something which is taken for granted but that is not always directly addressed. Indeed, even Mumford (2009, 174), who explicitly adheres to a realist conception of dispositions, states that «whether or not the world is a world containing dispositions is not a matter we will settle empirically but only in the court of metaphysics. If a metaphysics of causal powers is superior to its rivals, then that will be good grounds for saying that there are causal powers». Metaphysics, indeed, is the primary area of research in the context of the most recent debate on dispositions, which will be the object of the next chapter. In this chapter I tried to present a brief history of the main philosophical issues on dispositions and dispositional concepts; this exposition should work as a general map in order to better allocate more recent contributions on the topic and in order to highlight some philosophical assumptions that stand underneath the surface of particular views and theories on dispositions. In the following chapter, I will focus on more recent contributions which are part of the second type of enquiry discussed above, that is, the study of dispositional properties in opposition to categorical properties; all the contributions share the basic idea that recognition of dispositions should be done in ontological terms, that is, by giving dispositions ontological autonomy. Such an assumption is endorsed even by those authors, like Quine, who deny the existence of dispositions in favour of the existence of mere categorical properties: that assumption plays the role of guiding principle and it is at work even when dispositions are not thought to be real, in virtue of the fact that they do not fulfil such underlying requirement.

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<sup>31</sup> According to Molnar, hence, Brentano was wrong to think of intentionality as the mark of the mental, for it is rather the mark of the dispositional.

## Chapter 2

### The current paradigm on dispositions

#### 2.1 Introduction: dispositions between naturalism and naturalization

With the expression “current paradigm” I refer to a body of recent works on the theme of dispositions, which includes articles, books and collections of essays. Globally, the production is generally placed within the “dispositions first reaction” spirit, for most of the production is an exercise in dispositions first ontology.<sup>32</sup> In this chapter I will present some significant contributions of the recent debate on dispositions with the aim to show that the current paradigm is particularly influenced by a naturalizing perspective. In particular, in the light of what we have already seen in the previous chapter, I will try to unpack some shared assumptions of the current naturalized perspective on dispositions and I will suggest some sources of dissatisfaction towards such an account.

With the expression “naturalizing perspective” I refer to a kind of naturalistic perspective which involves a naturalizing move towards philosophical notions and ordinary concepts. Historically, the process of naturalization characterises most of philosophy from the second half of the XX Century and it is strictly linked to the influence of Quine’s naturalistic philosophy, in particular, Quine’s project of a naturalized epistemology (Quine 1969): Quine intends to make the traditional conceptual analysis on the foundations of knowledge a kind of analysis exclusively related to the empirical method, thus rejecting its conceptual and *a priori* character. It is an anti-intellectualist move based on the idea that traditional epistemic issues should be addressed through scientific method; in this way, epistemology collapses into science.<sup>33</sup>

Epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science. It studies a natural phenomenon, viz., a physical human subject. This human subject is accorded a certain experimentally controlled input – certain patterns of irradiation in assorted frequencies, for instance – and in the fullness of time the subject delivers as output a description of the three-dimensional external world and its history. The relation between the meager input and the torrential output is a relation that we are prompted to study for somewhat the same reasons that always prompted epistemology; namely, in order to see how evidence relates to theory, and in what ways one’s theory of nature transcends any available evidence. (Quine 1969, 82-83)

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<sup>32</sup> In particular, Damschen et. al. (2009), Handfield (2009), Mumford (1998, 2004), Ellis (2001), Bird (2007), Molnar (2007), Martin (2008).

<sup>33</sup> From a metaphysical point of view, Quine endorses a rigid *continuity thesis* between philosophy and science; philosophy should be continuous with science regarding method, object and goal of the enquiry.

Contrary to the traditional *received view* of epistemology of the first half of the XX Century<sup>34</sup>, Quine's project consists in talking about knowledge by looking at *how* individuals function when they understand, *what* happens when they understand and know things, *how* we can describe the process of knowing and understanding by using the same instruments scientists use to study natural phenomena.

Such an approach is concretely applied in contemporary exercises of naturalization of traditional philosophical concepts, such as knowledge, mind, interpretation, justification, etc. According to the naturalizing perspective, which constitutes a kind of scientific or, using Maddy's terminology, "severe" naturalism (Maddy 2014), a concept is valid only if it can be addressed through the methods of natural science. The process of naturalization consists in a *reduction* of the philosophical concept to a kind of concept naturalistically acceptable, i.e. adaptable to the canons of the current scientific theories. Nowadays, classical examples are found in the context of psychological concepts: concepts belonging to the so-called "folk psychology", such as belief, knowledge, desire, etc., are approached within the domain of neuroscience. It is important to preliminarily state that different kinds of reduction are acknowledgeable (McKittrick 2009b, 32):

1. Conceptual, or analytical reduction: the reduction of A's to B's occurs when we *define* A's in terms of B's. In this way, we tend to systematically replace A's talk with B's talk;
2. Epistemic, or explanatory reduction: the reduction of A's to B's occurs when B's *explain* everything that A's explain;
3. Metaphysical reduction: the reduction of A's to B's occurs when we state that A's are nothing more than B's.

All three kinds of reduction can lead to an eliminativist attitude towards the concept at issue: if A's are totally definable in terms of B's, or if they do not explain more than what B's explain, or if they are metaphysically nothing more than B's, then the entity A might be removed from the set of entities ontologically accepted, or the concept of A, hence the term, might be eliminated from the array of philosophical concepts. Already within the Neopositivist perspective which, as we have seen, informed the first kinds of reduction of dispositional predicates to conditional sentences, impossibility of reduction of a concept was a strong reason in favour of the elimination of that concept from the

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<sup>34</sup> I refer to Fregean antipsychologism and Carnap's project of logical empiricism. According to this perspective, truth conditions of knowledge, and certainty are rigidly separated from processes of construction of knowledge (Laudisa 2014, 30). Traditional epistemology, then, enquires the conditions that propositions should fulfil in order to be knowledge-laden independently both from the content of propositions and the concrete empirical modalities through which the subject acquires knowledge. The method is completely *a priori*.

philosophical vocabulary.<sup>35</sup> Reductionism and eliminativism, hence, come from the same philosophical root.<sup>36</sup>

The naturalized account of dispositions, then, tries to reduce dispositions to something else, such as causes, or categorical properties of objects and individuals. What interests in the context of the present work is the philosophical source of the need of such a reduction, that is, the need to speak about dispositions in scientifically acceptable terms. This was already part of the empiricist concern regarding the empirical inaccessibility of dispositions and the counterfactual conditional analysis of dispositional predicates is a first attempt to reduce dispositional properties to something empirically acceptable, without totally renouncing to the modal character of the concept. Reductionism, here, does not lead to eliminativism. However, things work differently within the “disposition first” spirit, which informs the current debate, for the kind of reduction involved is mainly metaphysical. Not all the authors endorse such a reduction, for many of them hope for an ontological re-evaluation of dispositions as autonomous ontological entities: the debate, hence, is mainly between followers of reductionism, and/or eliminativism that is, the idea that at least some dispositions, or every disposition, is reducible to something else, such as natural laws (Armstrong 1996), or physical properties (Quine 1975)<sup>37</sup>, and followers of dispositionalism, that is, the idea that at least some properties are genuinely dispositional and that dispositions can be considered an autonomous ontological category even though they are not observable.<sup>38</sup>

Since the naturalizing approach includes both reductionism and anti-reductionism, appeal to naturalization as a reduction cannot be the constitutive mark. For this reason, I will speak about the naturalized account of dispositions mainly as an account which gives deterministic and immediate sense to the relation between stimulus and response; in other words, it construes the dispositional character in a behaviouristic, or mechanistic sense thereby eradicating dispositional talk from specific ordinary human experience. Throughout the work I will maintain a distinction between the adjectives “naturalistic” and “naturalized” in order to maintain a conceptual distinction between types of philosophical naturalism. Not every kind of naturalistic perspective is tantamount to a naturalized perspective, therefore it is sensibly possible to trace kinds of naturalism without naturalization. As we will see, the suggested dispositional reading of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy is located within

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<sup>35</sup> However, Carnap did not totally endorse such a perspective, for he admitted that the concept of solubility cannot be completely eliminated from language.

<sup>36</sup> Given this, one way of debating scientific naturalism is to reevaluate the importance of concepts that, even if they are not actually reducible to the canons of science, they have a proper value and role within human experience.

<sup>37</sup> The view that all properties are categorical properties is called “categoricalism” (Armstrong 1997). According to this perspective, dispositional properties are thus reduced to categorial properties.

<sup>38</sup> As we have seen, the view that all properties are essentially dispositional is called “dispositional monism” or, simply, “dispositionalism”. It is also used the expression “pan-dispositionalism” (Shoemaker

the broader issue of Wittgenstein's alleged liberal naturalism, i.e., a naturalistic perspective which cannot be identified with scientific and scientist versions of naturalism.<sup>39</sup>

## 2.2 “Metaphysical talk” and “Naturalistic-reductive talk”

The current paradigm is constituted by two kinds of talk, or discourse, on dispositions: a *metaphysical talk* and a *naturalistic-reductive talk*.<sup>40</sup> The two kinds are not mutually exclusive, but I suggest to maintain the conceptual distinction I established between the two for the endorsement of one of them does not necessarily entail the endorsement of the other one.

In the former case, dispositions are conceived as autonomous ontological entities and they often play a foundational role with respects to some philosophical concepts. In other words, once dispositions are built in the ontological foundation, philosophers put them to work: for example, as clearly summarized by Cross (2011, 3) philosophers «typically take the laws of nature to be metaphysically necessary, mere reflections of the dispositional essences of fundamental properties (Bird 2005; McKittrick 2010)», or «causation is [...] analysed in terms of the manifestation of dispositions (Mumford 2011)» or, again, «more ambitious still, possibility and necessity [...] are analysed in terms of actual dispositions and capacities (Borghini and Williams 2008; Pruss 2002; Jacobs 2009)». Within the same domain we find dispositional analysis of philosophical concepts, that is, a kind of applied dispositionalism: reference to dispositions, for example, might be done in order to give foundation to the concept of meaning and, in general, meaningful talk. It is of this kind the dispositionalism discussed by Kripke (1989) and indeed, as we will see in chapter 4, Kripke works with a narrow and naturalized notion of disposition which is intrinsically non-normative.

In the latter case, dispositions are characterized in behaviouristic terms and they are thought to play a causal role. However, this does not entail the attribution of ontological autonomy to dispositions, for the causal role might be assigned to a categorical basis of the disposition. According to Prior (1985), for example, having a disposition is a matter of having some *other property* that can play a certain causal role. Similarly, other authors (Armstrong, Martin, Place 1996; Jackson 1998; Lewis 1977) endorse the idea that dispositions are *based*, i.e. they have a categorical basis that would be causally responsible for the manifestation of the disposition. By contrast, followers of

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<sup>39</sup> See chapter 6 for a more detailed exposition of the variety of naturalism.

<sup>40</sup> We could identify a third kind of discourse, that I call “de-substantive account” and that is exemplified by Ryle's (1990) view that there is nothing more than the truth of a conditional sentence. This discourse, however, is distinct from the other two, for it assumes that dispositions are neither states, nor events, while both the metaphysical and the naturalistic-reductive talks do assume a substantiation of the notion of disposition; in other words, with reference to the line discussed above “from dispositions vs occurrences to dispositional properties vs categorical properties”, they both belong to the second horn of the expression.

dispositionalism, or dispositional essentialism, argue in favor of the existence of “*bare dispositions*”, that is, dispositions with no distinct causal basis (McKittrick 2009b, Mumford 2006, Ellis 2001, 2002). Indeed, while the categoricalist is inclined to deny the possibility of bare dispositions, for it is maintained that it is categorical properties that we truly attribute to object  $x$  when we talk about  $x$ 's disposition, a dispositionalist maintains that all, or at least some properties are essentially dispositional, therefore there is no need to say that dispositions must have a causal basis in order to be causally active. As a matter of fact, the issue is still unresolved: there is no agreement on the proper characterization of the notion of “causal basis”<sup>41</sup> and it is still an open question whether the causal basis for a disposition could be another disposition, or the disposition itself, rather than a categorical property.

I will first expound Quine's (1975) view on dispositions, for it clearly exemplifies the conceptual distinction I have made. As a second step, I will deal with Armstrong's (1997) and Mumford's (1998, 2001, 2009) views as significative examples of, respectively, a naturalistic-reductive talk and a metaphysical talk on dispositions.

### **2.2.1 Dispositions, to be more exact, do not exist**

Quine's perspective provides a clear example of a philosophical view that belongs to the naturalistic-reductive talk without belonging to the metaphysical talk. Broadly speaking, Quine does construe the dispositional character in behaviouristic terms, that is, following Skinner's stimulus-response model, but he explicitly refrains from attributing ontological autonomy to dispositions. His conception of dispositions, in the end, is merely heuristic. I will expound Quine's proposal by looking mainly at the following works: the book *Word and Object* (Quine 2013), the articles, or book-chapters, *Mind and Verbal Dispositions* (Quine 1975)<sup>42</sup>, *Natural Kinds* and *Propositional Knowledge* (Quine 1969).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Prior, Pargetter, Jackson (1982, 251) suggest the following definition: «A causal basis for disposition  $D$  is the property or property-complex that, together with the characteristic stimulus of  $D$ , is a causally operative sufficient condition for the characteristic manifestation of  $D$  in the case of “surefire” dispositions, and in the case of probabilistic dispositions is causally sufficient for the relevant change of the manifestation». “Surefire” dispositions are deterministic dispositions, that is, mere *natural capacities*: when the stimulus conditions obtain, then the manifestation occurs necessarily. In the case of probabilistic dispositions, on the contrary, the manifestation does necessarily obtain given the relevant stimulus conditions, for it obtains with a certain degree of probability.

Lewis (1997) employs a different notion of causal basis in his RCA: the causal basis for a disposition  $D$  is an intrinsic property  $P$  that would cause object  $x$  to manifest  $D$  if  $x$  were to be exposed to the stimulus condition and, at the same time,  $x$  would retain  $P$  for a sufficient time.

<sup>42</sup> This article is contained in S. Guttenplan (ed.) (1975), *Mind and Language*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>43</sup> Both articles are part of the essays-collection W.V. O Quine (1969), *Ontological Relativity & other essays*, Columbia University Press, which collects Quine's first John Dewey lectures, delivered at Columbia University in 1968.

Quine has a complicated and troubled relation with dispositions: on the one hand, he finds extremely hard to accept the modal character of dispositional terms as being an intensional context,<sup>44</sup> on the other hand he cannot refrain from acknowledging the fact that «we are always involved in talk of dispositions, even in the most empirical studies of speech behavior and of natural phenomena generally» (Quine 1975, 144). Indeed, the notion of disposition plays a central role in Quine's account of language and meaning. Early in *Word and Object*, Quine explicitly states that his enquiry is about «language as the complex of present dispositions to verbal behavior, in which speakers of the same language have perforce come to resemble one another» (Quine 2013, 24). Globally, Quine's notion of disposition should be read in the light of his scientific naturalism, as a conceptual tool which is used in order to put in practice what such a theoretical perspective involves: studying knowledge by looking at *how* subjects do function when they know, *how* sensory inputs that reach human's nerves could finally produce theoretical descriptions of the world as an output. Quine's approach is descriptive and it is no surprising to see that Quine's reflection on the notion of disposition is an integral part of a broader reflection on the different levels of description of human external behaviour. For this reason, I think that it might be useful to expound Quine's perspective by focusing on the following two points:

1. Quine's critique of philosophical mentalism; 2. Quine's view on the ontology of dispositions.

1. First of all, the notion of disposition is a key ingredient of a scientifically-acceptable and «physicalist account of language» which should replace the «extravagantly perverse» mentalistic account of language and which stands on a conception of language as «a social enterprise which is keyed to intersubjectively observable objects in the external world» (Quine 1975, 80-81).

The mentalistic account of language conceives of language as a tool to convey pre-existing thoughts and ideas, therefore the physical phenomenon of speech is analysed and explained by appealing to the mental realm of the subject, say mind itself, some mental activity, or inner mental entities such as thoughts, ideas and meanings. According to this perspective, language learning is read in terms of an association of words with ideas: when we learn language, we associate words to the same ideas which our elders have learned to associate to the same words. From a mentalistic perspective, mental notions are what provide explanation of intelligent phenomena, such as meaningful speaking; the notion of meaning is thought to *explain* the understanding of expressions

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<sup>44</sup> Quine explicitly rejects Carnap's conditional analysis in terms of material conditionals and he raises doubts on the alternative counterfactual conditional analysis in terms of subjunctive conditionals: «[...] Carnap's example of solubility in water. To say of some individual object that it is soluble in water is not to say merely that it always dissolves when in water, because this would be true by default of any object, however insoluble, if it merely happened to be destined never to get into water. It is to say rather that it would dissolve if it were in water; but this account brings small comfort, since the device of a subjunctive conditional involves all the perplexities of disposition terms and more» (Quine 1975, 130).

and the correct use of them: we understand the expression and we know how to use it *because* we know, or grasp its meaning.<sup>45</sup>

Quine discusses the mentalistic perspective by opposing an alternative account of language learning through the examples of reinforcement of random babbling and imitation:

Consider the case where we teach the infant a word by reinforcing his random babbling on some appropriate occasion. His chance utterance bears a chance resemblance to a word appropriate to the occasion, and we reward him. The occasion must be some object or some stimulus source that we as well as the child are in a position to notice. Furthermore, we must be in a position to observe that the child is in a position to notice it. [...] In so doing we encourage the child to repeat the word in future similar occasion. (Quine 1975, 80-81)

In the case of imitation it is the child, conversely, that witnesses what is confronting the adult when the adult volunteers the word. The child then volunteers the word when similarly confronted, and thereupon the adult proceeds to reinforce the child's behaviour just as in the case of babbling. (Quine 1975, 81)

What Quine wants to show with those examples is that the fixed points are just the stimulus and the word that both agents share, whereas ideas in between can have whatever appearance and they can vary as long as those two fixed points stay paired up. Language learning, at least at a primitive level, is directed to the learning of *observational terms* and *sentences*; for example, the child learns to assent to the query "blue?" in the presence of a blue thing and he learns to dissent to the same query in the presence of, say, a red thing. Contrary to mentalistic tendencies, Quine intends to show that «language is a social art. In acquiring it we have to depend entirely on intersubjectively available cues as to what to say and when. Hence there is no justification for collating linguistic meanings, unless in terms of men's dispositions to respond overtly to socially observable stimulations» (Quine 2013, xxix).

In particular, appealing to meaning conceived in terms of a mental entity for explaining language and speech constitutes, according to Quine, a spurious and illusory explanation.<sup>46</sup> Quine distinguishes three levels, or degrees of depth, of explanation: 1. *Mental* explanation; 2. *Behavioural* explanation; 3. *Physiological* explanation. «The mental is the most superficial of these, scarcely deserving the name of explanation. The physiological is the deepest and most ambitious, and it is the place for

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<sup>45</sup> As we will see, critique of mentalism is Wittgenstein's starting point too, although he does not endorse a behaviouristic and physicalist account of human language as Quine does; in the second part of the present work I will argue that the notion of disposition could be employed to devise a characterisation of language which stands between the two extremes, i.e. mentalism and behaviourism, or physicalism.

<sup>46</sup> This is one of the main ingredients of the guidance conception of human rule-governed behaviour which we will discuss in chapters 4 and 5.

causal explanation. The behavioural level, in between, is what we must settle for in our descriptions of language, in our formulations of language rules, and in our explications of semantical terms» (Quine 1075, 83). The behavioural level coincides with the dispositional level, that is, the explanation of understanding and language use in terms of dispositions to overt behaviour. Quine suggests a kind of dispositional account of understanding, as the idea that «part of the understanding of a word consists in the ability to use it properly in all manner of admissible context. Part consists in reacting properly to all such uses» (Quine 1975, 84). Understanding is reduced to human's *verbal dispositions* through the notions of query and assent: for example, a man's knowledge of the truth conditions of the sentence "This is blue" consists in the man's *behavioural disposition* to assent or dissent when asked in the presence or absence of blue things.<sup>47</sup>

Such a semantical perspective coincides with a particular dispositional account of the mental: according to Quine, in order to abandon the Sargasso sea of mentalism, we must «study language as a system of dispositions to verbal behaviour» (Quine 1975, 87) and «construe [the] mind as a system of dispositions to behaviour», rather than a system of associated ideas (Quine 1975, 88), for «the semantical study of language is worth pursuing with all the scruples of the natural scientist» (Quine 1975, 87). However, if language should be studied in a scientific way, why cannot we employ directly the third and deepest level of explanation, i.e. the physiological one? What is the relation with such a level and the behavioural, or dispositional one? In order to answer to these questions, we should first consider what Quine means by "disposition".

2. Already in *Word and Object*, Quine suggests a naturalized conception of dispositions: the disposition is defined as a «built-in, enduring structural trait[s]. [...] some subtle neural condition, induced by language-learning, that disposes the subject to assent to or dissent from a certain sentence in response to certain supporting stimulations» (Quine 2013, 204).<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the disposition, so conceived, is thought to function like a mechanism in the organism.

A disposition to do a certain thing when stimulated in a certain way is a mechanism, already mechanically understood or not, in the organism; and the name of the disposition tells us how to gather evidence of varying conclusiveness for its presence. We cannot gather much evidence at a given moment for a speaker's

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<sup>47</sup> I think that Quine's notion of verbal disposition is a sub-class of the broader class of behavioural dispositions. A behavioural disposition is a disposition that is manifested in the overt behaviour of its bearer; such a behaviour, however, need not be verbal. For example, one might be disposed to give a slap if offended, or to systematically move a leg when music turns on. Verbal dispositions are a particular kind of behavioural dispositions that are manifested in the verbal act of asserting and dissenting to linguistically formulated queries on particular occasions.

<sup>48</sup> The element of the structural condition appears earlier in the same book, where Quine defines the disposition as a «structural condition, like an allergy and like solubility; like an allergy, more particularly, in not being understood» (Quine 2013, 30).

range of speech dispositions at that moment, true. But we can gather, for his dispositions at a moment, much evidence at other moments: indirect evidence from which we reason according to plausible psychological theories and generalizations regarding the persistence of habits and other matters. (Quine 1969, 144)

What is important to note is that, according to Quine, the disposition does not properly exist, for it is completely reducible to a physical structural trait of the organism. The disposition is nothing more than the physical neural condition of the subject, or the physical structure of the object such as its molecular structure; the dispositional character lies exclusively in the level of explanation, or discourse to which we rely on. In Quine's terms, a disposition is «simply a physical trait, a configuration or mechanism» and «what makes it a disposition is no significant character of its own, but only the style in which we happen to specify it» (Quine 1975, 89). For example, let us consider the case of solubility. According to Quine, solubility is a physical trait of the soluble object. However, such a physical trait can be specified in various ways. We could talk about the position of an object's molecular particles or, more ordinarily, we could talk about solubility by citing a simple common test: put an object in water and see what happens; if it dissolves or not. The term “disposition”, hence, does not refer to a kind of trait different from the physical one, but it has the role of specifying the physical trait by identifying behavioural symptoms and tests. In other words, a disposition is a physical trait spelled out in dispositional terms, i.e., singled out by behavioural symptoms and tests.

If dispositions, actually, do not exist, what is the role of dispositional vocabulary? Dispositional terms play a heuristic role: they do not refer to any dispositional entity, but they allow us to give a behavioural explanation when the physiological explanation of a phenomenon is epistemically inaccessible. Here we reach the heart of Quine's naturalism and pragmatism: when we deal with the study of language, the physiological and causal explanation is what we should aspire to, for it constitutes the deepest level of explanation of a phenomenon. However, we are not all scientists and in some cases such a kind of explanation is not available to us. When this is the case, the behavioural, or dispositional explanation is the best we can do without falling back into the muddy sea of mentalism.

Until we can aspire to actual physiological explanation of linguistic activity in physiological terms, the level at which to work is the middle one; that of dispositions to overt behaviour. Its virtue is not that it affords causal explanations but that it is less likely than the mentalistic level to engender an illusion of being more explanatory than it is. (Quine 1975, 91)

Let us go back to the example of solubility. In this case, it might be easy for us to replace the dispositional talk with a talk regarding the object's particular molecular structure. However, other

cases are more complicated, such as hardness, or redness. Hardness is ordinarily defined as the disposition to resist if pressed, while redness is defined as the disposition to blush in white light. Both dispositional expressions, though, come finally to be scientifically explained in terms of minute structure, thus with the third level of explanation, but people's first access to them is dispositional. In some cases, people are in no position to detail physical traits in physiological terms. Dispositional talk is useful and acceptable when the physiological talk is not accessible to us.<sup>49</sup> For this reason, Quine's account belongs to the naturalistic-reductive talk on dispositions but not to the metaphysical one, for dispositions are not considered autonomous ontological entities and they are totally reduced to categorical properties.

### 2.2.2 Armstrong's soft deflationism

Quine's reductive attitude is shared by Armstrong, who is considered the major defender of categorialism. Contrary to Ryle (1990), Armstrong maintains that dispositions are properties and that dispositional predicates actually refer to specific properties, or states of the object possessing the disposition. However, he does not recognize the existence of genuine dispositional properties, for he claims that dispositional properties are identical and totally reducible to categorical properties of the corresponding bearers.

Already in *A Materialist Theory of the Mind* (Armstrong 1968), the Australian philosopher claims that the ascription of a dispositional predicate to an object depends on the object's categorical basis, such as its microstructure, which is not itself dispositional; it is in virtue of such a basis that the disposition is in some sense real. In this context, Armstrong intends to oppose two different views: Ryle's "de-substantive account" of dispositions, which he calls "Phenomenalist, or Operationist account", and Price's idea, presented in *Thinking and Experience*, that there might be mental dispositions that are ultimate, so there is no *a priori* necessity for supposing that all dispositions must have a categorical basis. To these views, he intends to oppose a "Realist view" of dispositions, according to which «to speak of an object's having a dispositional property entails that the object is in some non-dispositional state or that it has some property (there exist a 'categorical basis') which is responsible for the object manifesting certain behaviour in certain circumstances» (Armstrong 1968, 86). The Realist view is thought to gain support from two different sources: ordinary language

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<sup>49</sup> See also the following passage: «an example is the disposition called intelligence [...] the ability, vaguely speaking, to learn quickly and to solve problems. Sometime, whether in terms of proteins or colloids or nerve nets or overt behavior, the relevant branch of science may reach the stage where a similarity notion can be constructed capable of making even the notion of intelligence respectable. And superfluous. In general we can take it as a very special mark of the maturity of a branch of science that it no longer needs an irreducible notion of similarity and kind. It is that final stage where the animal vestige is wholly absorbed into the theory» (Quine 1969, 138).

and an *a priori* argument which stands on the fact that we can attribute dispositions to objects even when the relevant stimulus conditions do not actually obtain.

1. Armstrong thinks that we often identify a disposition with its categorical basis when we employ ordinary language; for example, we do often utter expressions such as “It has been found that brittleness is a certain sort of molecular pattern in the material”. However, first of all, Armstrong seems to identify what is real exclusively with what is physical, material and approachable through the methods of science. This assumption though is by no means so pacific, for we might indeed maintain that there is a kind of realism that is not realism of the actual existence of things.<sup>50</sup> Secondly, even if we keep Armstrong’s own notion of reality, I do not think that such a linguistic observation is a sufficient reason for endorsing a realist account; on the contrary, ordinary use of dispositional terms is not scientifically informed. The ordinary notion of disposition comes from the domain of human life and experience and it is rather employed to describe human tendencies or character traits. In this respect, the philosophical source might rather be the ancient treatment of dispositions as we find in Aristotle’s writings. Rather, I think that the sentence Armstrong refers to can be a good example in favor of Quine’s perspective: such a sentence shows that we do actually replace sometimes dispositional expressions with more scientifically precise explanations of the very same phenomenon; it shows that dispositional talk actually stands on a level of description different from the physiological one.<sup>51</sup> However, this observation might not apply to the semantics of dispositional terms, that is, it is not a way of limiting the importance and the role of dispositional vocabulary as a mere surrogate of physiological talk: indeed, we are talking about different levels of description which are conceptually distinguished so that they do not affect each other. If I choose to employ the physiological explanation, I choose to work with a kind of paradigm but the validity of a dispositional talk on the very same phenomenon is not undermined; saying that sugar’s solubility reduces to sugar’s particular molecular structure does not undermine the legitimate place of the concept of solubility within other concepts of language; rather, we might wonder what we actually gain from adopting such a reduction more than having spelled out the phenomenon in a more scientifically acceptable

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<sup>50</sup> See for example a kind of ontological pluralism endorsed by Lynch (2009). In his work *Truth as One and Many*, he argues that we can make sense of the diverse and still unified content of thought only if we reject the assumption according to which «if a belief or its content is true, it must be true in the same way — for example, by corresponding to reality» (Lynch 2009, 2-3). Indeed, with regard to some propositions we believe, and we easily understand, there seems to be no objects, facts, or properties to which they correspond. In other words, some propositions are employed without corresponding to any reality. For example, the proposition that says that torturing another human being is morally wrong seems true to us, but it seems puzzling to devise an account according to which the proposition is true in virtue of the fact that it corresponds to some mind-independent reality. In the context of contemporary naturalism, it is difficult to locate moral wrongness amongst the furniture of physical world.

<sup>51</sup> Of course, contrary to Quine, it is possible to accept such a view without giving priority to the physiological kind of explanation over the behavioural one. Distinction between levels of explanation and description *per se* does not actually entail endorsement of reductivism or scientific naturalism.

manner. If this is a great advance for scientific research, the same might not apply to the context of semantic reflection on the concept of solubility and, in general, dispositional concepts.

2. Armstrong provides also a stronger *a priori* argument «which purports to prove the truth of the Realist account of dispositions» (Armstrong 1968, 86). Let us consider the following case: «suppose that, on a number of occasions, a certain rubber band has the same force,  $F$ , applied to it, and that on each occasion it stretches one inch. We can then attribute a disposition to the band. It is disposed to stretch one inch under force  $F$ » (Armstrong 1968, 86). Armstrong makes two important moves by presenting such example: 1. He shares the first step of the simple conditional analysis, that is, the identification of the dispositional predicate  $D$  by the specification of its relevant stimulus conditions  $C$  and its relevant manifestation  $M$ : Object  $x$  has  $D$ , if and only if,  $x$  is disposed to  $M$  in  $C$ . In the present example, the rubber band has  $D$  (the disposition to stretch one inch under a certain force) if and only if, the rubber band is disposed to stretch one inch ( $M$ ) when it is applied to it a force  $F$  ( $C$ ). 2. He construes the ascription of the dispositional predicate in terms of induction: we have empirically observed a constant and repetitive behaviour of the object and we then inductively predict that the same object will behave in the same way whenever it is placed under the same conditions. In virtue of this, Armstrong's concern is the following one: since dispositions can be attributed to objects even when objects are not placed under the relevant stimulus conditions, what kind of warrant do I have when I state, for example, that the rubber band would have stretched one inch if it had been subjected to force  $F$  at a time ( $T'$ ) when it was never been subjected before?

Armstrong claims that the phenomenalist or, in general, a non-realist about dispositions would actually fall under the classical problem of induction: «the only reason he can give for saying that the bend would have stretched one inch under force  $F$  at  $T'$  is that numerically the same band behaved in this way on other occasions» (Armstrong 1968, 87). However, a thing can change its properties over time and dispositional properties are not necessarily an exception to this. Contrary, for a realist about dispositions is easy to warrant the above sentence on a solider ground:

[the realist] will say that there is every reason to believe that the categorical state of the band which is responsible for its stretching one inch under force  $F$  obtains at  $T'$ . Given that it does obtain at  $T'$ , then, as a matter of physical necessity, the band must stretch one inch under force  $F$ . (Armstrong 1968, 87)

The Realist view starts from the rejection of Ryle's main point, that is, the idea that dispositions are not states of the object. Armstrong explicitly claims that dispositions ontologically are «states that actually stand behind their manifestations», but those states are linguistically «identified in terms of their manifestations in suitable conditions rather than in terms of their intrinsic nature» (Armstrong

1968, 88). The dispositional term, therefore, has a meaning in virtue of the fact it refers to a particular state of the object or subject to which is ascribed. Moreover, only in this way, Armstrong states, we can think of dispositions as causes of their manifestations: it is the categorical state that functions as a causal factor.

Armstrong's main move is to employ the notion of physical necessity in order to warrant the above dispositional ascription. In his *A World of States of Affairs*, indeed, he proposes a soft deflationist doctrine of dispositional properties: dispositional properties are reduced to laws of nature. In this context, Armstrong develops other two critics against dispositionalism and thereby other two arguments for categoricalism:

1. First of all, dispositionalism entails the intentionality of the mental, which is a problem for the physicalist view Armstrong firmly endorses. «A disposition as conceived of by a Dispositionalist is like a congealed hypothetical fact or state of affairs» (Armstrong 1997, 79). Let us consider the case of a fragile glass which does not break, hence, whose disposition does not manifest. Now, in this case, from a dispositionalist point of view, the glass is still fragile inasmuch as it would break in response to being struck under certain conditions. If this is so, then, we are assuming that the glass has essentially, within itself, a reference to the manifestation that did not occur, namely, the event of breaking. The glass still points to something that does not exist, i.e. an entirely counterfactual state of affairs. Armstrong claims that such a view reminds of Brentano's notion of intentionality of mental states and processes, that is, the idea that those states and processes are directed upon objects and states of affairs that need not exist. Intentionality is thought to be the mark of the mental. Armstrong does not deny the existence of the intentionality of the mental, but he states that it constitutes a problem for his physicalist view for, if the mental has intentionality and it is ontologically irreducible, then «physicalists about the mind are therefore found trying to give some ontologically reductive account of the intentionality of the mental» and, since «irreducible dispositions and powers are admitted for *physical* things, then intentionality [...] has turned up in everything there is» (Armstrong 1997, 79). In other words, there is no mark of the mental anymore, for the physical is assimilated to the mental.

2. Secondly, dispositionalism entails the counter-intuitive idea that «everything is potency, and act is the mere shifting around of potencies» (Armstrong 1997, 80). Let us consider the case of a thing that acts and as a result some other thing gains a new property. According to the dispositionalist the new property will itself be purely dispositional, so if such a property has its effects, then even these effects would be a matter of gaining, losing or sustaining purely dispositional properties. Armstrong recognizes the example, due to Mellor, of a magnetizable object that may become magnetized, and

to be magnetized is a dispositional property, but he finds puzzling to generalize such a case for we would retain a very counter-intuitive view: «particulars would seem to be always re-packing their bags as they change their properties, yet never taking the journey from potency to act. For ‘act’, on this view, is no more than a different potency» (Armstrong 1997, 80).

Given those sources of criticism against dispositionalism, Armstrong suggests to account for the truth-makers of disposition ascriptions in terms of categorical properties and laws of nature, embracing a deflationary doctrine of unmanifested powers and dispositions.<sup>52</sup> According to such an account, to say that object  $x$  is fragile is not to ascribe a real property to  $x$ ; rather, it is an abbreviated way of saying that, given laws of nature, from  $x$ ’s being struck, we can infer that  $x$  would break. Dispositional talk is thus a convenient way to talk about categorical properties of objects.

Summing up, what we need is that the particular should have the property F, together with the totality of the relevant laws of nature, because it is laws that give us empirical possibility. [...] Given these truth-makers, the particular’s having a certain property, plus the relevant laws, it is entailed that the particular has the power or disposition. (Armstrong 1997, 82)

To conclude, Armstrong actually gives substance to dispositions by considering dispositions some kinds of properties or states, but he endorses reductionism and categoricism, for he reduces dispositional properties to laws of nature which are not dispositional. Contrary to Quine, however, he does not endorse an eliminativist attitude<sup>53</sup>: «deflation is a matter of degree, and too much deflation becomes elimination. But the doctrine of unmanifested powers now to be advocated seems not too deflationary» (Armstrong 1997, 81).

### 2.2.3 Bringing dispositions “down to earth”

In his book *Fact, Fiction and Forecast*, Goodman (1983, 40) states that, although «the dispositions or capacities of a thing [...] are no less important to us than its overt behaviour [...] they strike us by comparison as something ethereal. And so we are moved to inquire whether we can bring them down to earth», that is, «whether we can explain dispositions terms without any reference to occult powers». This is precisely what Mumford (1998) intends to do in his book *Dispositions*:

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<sup>52</sup> Armstrong means by the expression “laws of nature” whatever it is in the world that makes law-statements true, hence the correspondent in the world of true-law statements (Armstrong 1997, 81). Laws of nature cannot be mere uniformities in nature, rather they are “strong”, still contingent, laws.

<sup>53</sup> Actually, it is still disputed whether Quine could be rightly defined an eliminativist philosopher regarding dispositions. I think, though, that his kind of reduction is stronger than Armstrong’s one and that he is more inclined towards eliminativism rather than mere reductionism or deflationism, for dispositional predicates play a mere heuristic role; they are totally eliminable when the physiological explanation of the phenomena is accessible to us.

I aim to bring dispositions down to earth in the way Goodman wants and, in so doing, make appeal to them legitimate and *scientific* [my emphasis].<sup>54</sup> (Mumford 1998, 1)

A similar concern informs Mellor's view presented in *In Defense of Dispositions* (1974). At the beginning of his work, Mellor (1974, 55) claims that «dispositions, like unmarried mothers, can manage in their own» and that his aim is to restore their good name by raising their ontological status, namely, claiming that dispositions are real properties. Mellor is traditionally considered the most prominent defender of strong dispositionalism, i.e., the view that all properties are essentially dispositional. By contrast, Mumford belongs to a milder version of dispositionalism, for he maintains a certain distinction between categorical properties and dispositional properties. His strategy consists in offering a *functionalist theory* of dispositions which takes into account, simultaneously, the following three points:

1. The distinction between the dispositional and the categorical;
2. The genuine causal role of dispositions;
3. The realist character of disposition ascriptions, i.e., the fact that they are relative to the world.

1. First of all, Mumford specifies that the realism he endorses coincides with the thesis that there is a subject-independent reality, but he does not endorse the claim that we are capable of describing that reality accurately (Mumford 1998, 192).<sup>55</sup> He accepts a distinction between the world and our conceptualization of it, but he also maintains that whatever the world is actually like is not affected by the way we describe, conceptualize, and experience it. Given this, the dispositional-categorical distinction is seen as a way to talk about properties and states of the world, rather than an accurate division in reality; it is *a way of taking* about reality. As a consequence, from an ontological point of view, Mumford subscribes to a kind of *neutral monism*: «monist because dispositional and categorical tokens can be identical, neutral because it refrains from the classification of reality as either ‘really’ categorical or ‘really’ dispositional» (Mumford 1998, 192).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> A first source of concern lies in the assumption that appeal to dispositions must be scientific in order to be legitimate. Do we really need naturalization in order to legitimately employ a concept? Why should every word have a mind-independent correspondent? I will spend more words on this point in the final paragraph of the present chapter, where I will present some limits of the current paradigm on dispositions.

<sup>55</sup> Mumford endorses what Wright (1993) calls the modest claim of realism, while he rejects the presumptuous claim. The first is a metaphysical claim, a kind of ontological presupposition, while the second is an epistemic claim. One thing is to state that there exist mind-independent states of affairs, another thing is claiming that we can perfectly describe and know them.

<sup>56</sup> In this respect, categorical and dispositional monists make the mistake of thinking that their idiom accurately captures reality, rather than being just one distinctive way of characterizing a non-linguistic world.

Mumford's functionalist theory is «a homuncular functionalism coupled with a thesis of continuity in levels of nature» (Mumford 1998, 196). Two elements must be spelled out: the continuity thesis, and the way in which homuncular functionalism is applied to a functionalist theory of dispositions, together with a specification of Mumford's kind of homunctionalism. I will start from the first point.

The continuity thesis states that nature is composed by a hierarchy of dispositional and sub-dispositional levels and at each level there are structural, or non-dispositional property instances or states to be identified with dispositions. Even though, whether a particular property or state is dispositional depends on the description of that property or state, dispositions are considered as real as any other property of the world. For example, let us consider the traditional example of solubility. From a functionalist perspective, various things can be soluble but the point is that the thing in virtue of which something is soluble is that the object possesses a property that has the functional role of causing the dissolution when the object is put into water. So, dispositions are real properties of objects. However, Mumford's functionalism does not coincide with strong dispositionalism because it is left unstated what the property's non-functional characterization is: the functional role of solubility, and other cases such as fragility, elasticity, and the like, is a causal role specified in terms of typical causal antecedent(s) and typical causal consequence(s).

Classical homunctionalism is an explanatory strategy employed in philosophy of psychology which entails a cartesian dualist conception of the mind-body relation: «a certain mental ability may be provided with a putative explanation in terms of some component of the mind being endowed with the very same ability that it is supposed to explain» (Mumford 1998, 211). Dennett (1991) links the homuncular strategy to what he calls “Descartes' tiny theater”: a subject's mental activities are explained by imagining a little theater in the brain where a small person performs at a lower level the subject's mental activity. Ryle (1990,17) speaks in terms of “the dogma of the ghost in the machine”. According to classical homunctionalism, mind is conceived as a second autonomous subject which lies inside the physical subject's head and which plays a role comparable to the one played by a driver with respect to the relative vehicle: a little person, or homunculus, who drives the machine.<sup>57</sup> The problem of homunctionalism, so conceived, is that it does not really explain what it intends to explain, for the same explanation is needed with respect to the homunculus to which the ability is ascribed, therefore a regress is faced. The possession of the ability at the lower level is left unexplained and so the question can always be raised as how the homunculus in the head can do what it does. However,

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<sup>57</sup> As we will see in chapter 6, Kenny (2010) traces in this perspective the mark of materialism, conceived in terms of identification between mind (mental activities) and the brain.

Mumford thinks that the modern version of homunctionalism proposed by Dennett and Attneave avoids the charge because, according to this alternative version, the homunculus is not empowered with the same ability that has to be explained at the higher level.

The lower level homunculi are more stupid. They have less sophisticated abilities which are possessed in virtue of even lower-level homunculi with even less sophisticated abilities. These descending levels come to an end with homunculi with the most basic abilities consisting in simple mechanisms requiring no intelligence at all. The homuncular strategy is, therefore, genuinely explanatory rather than regressive. (Mumford 1998, 211)

Such a strategy is applied to the case of dispositions in the following way: Mumford assumes that a disposition of an object can be explained in terms of what its component parts do; «the explanation of the dispositions of the whole is in terms of the dispositions of its parts where each component part is understood functionally according to the abilities it can bestow» (Mumford 1998, 211). The various components, like in the case of the sophisticated homunctionalism, have simpler abilities and they make a partial contribution to the whole. Dispositions are possessed in virtue of a set of sub-dispositions which are numerous and which work together performing simpler tasks; the combination of such numerous simpler tasks constitutes complex behaviour. Mumford provides the example of the disposition of a car engine to afford propulsion. A mechanic might give us an explanation of how the engine works by making reference to the various components of the engine, such as the carburetor, the radiator, the distributor, etc. In this kind of explanation, these components are things with dispositions, namely, they do perform mechanical functions. The disposition of the whole, then, is explained in terms of the dispositions of its parts and these parts can also be considered as wholes whose behaviour can in turn be explained with reference to their constituting parts.

I would like to suggest some critical remarks. First of all, it seems to me that no solution of the regression fallacy is provided here, for we might still wonder what is the stopping place of the possibility to read every part as a whole which can in turn be explained with reference to the constituting parts. What lies at the bottom of such a functionalist kind of explanation? If we answer by pointing to some further irreducible structural trait, or part of the object, then we are compelled to a version of categoricalism, for dispositionality seems grounded in the end in some structural, non-dispositional trait of the object. Mumford, then, would not respect the continuity thesis presented above. Indeed, and this is the second source of concern, how are abilities graded? How can we say that one ability is more sophisticated or less sophisticated than another? What is needed is a specification of the model, or criterion of evaluation, for talking about more sophisticated and less sophisticated parts, or homunculi entails a qualitative evaluation of the abilities involved. However,

if those abilities are the fundamental elements of Mumford's functionalist kind of explanation, a different criterion for the dispositional must be in force in order to avoid a sense of circularity. Finally, I don't think that Mumford's functionalist account can be read as a modern version of homuncularism. The traditional homunculus placed in the human subject's head does not contribute to the functioning of the whole as a constituent part does. What differs is the underlying model, or comparison: while Mumford thinks about a machine constituted by various parts which together work and contribute to the global functioning, classical and modern homuncularism works with the model of a machine and its driver, which is placed inside it. The homunculus is a kind of mental intermediary between external stimuli and the subject's output, but the problem lies in the fact that the homunculus is empowered with the same abilities and mental qualities that are ascribed to the subject and that should be explained through the homunculus argument, therefore the explanation is trivial. The homunculus is construed using a model of mental activity which is the very same model that should be explained; it is like a little subject inside the subject, but both are described using the same model, or paradigm. If Mumford's homuncular functionalism avoids this fallacy by ascribing to the constitutive parts a different kind of ability than the one of the whole, then reference to the classical homuncular model restricts merely to the idea that explanation of external behaviour involves reference to inner states, or properties, using the model of a mechanism.

2. Secondly, Dispositions have a genuine causal role but such a causal role is not read in terms of possessing a second-order property of having a property with a particular causal role. This is the view endorsed by Prior (1985).<sup>58</sup> Traditionally, functionalism about the mind dictates that mental properties are second-order properties, that is, properties that allow to possess other properties, but there is a problem regarding the causal role of such second-order properties. Take the case of provocativeness; it is a second order property that consists in having some first-order property, say redness, that causes bulls to be angry.<sup>59</sup> Now, what really causes the bull to be angry? The first-order redness or the second-order provocativeness? In other words, the bull gets angry because of the cape's redness or the cape's provocativeness? This concern applies to more familiar dispositional predicates too: is it the first-order molecular structure that causes the lamp of sugar to dissolve, or is it sugar's solubility? Is it the first-order molecular structure that causes the glass to break, or is it the glass' fragility? The problem of causal efficacy, read in these terms, is a problem regarding the way to interpret the relation between the disposition and its causal basis;<sup>60</sup> in particular, if we understand

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<sup>58</sup> Prior (1985) talks about dispositions as functional properties and she then characterises a functional property as a property of having some other property.

<sup>59</sup> This example is found in Block (1994, 331).

<sup>60</sup> This observation works the other way around too: we could say that views about the relation between dispositions and their causal basis mirror views about the relation between mental properties and physical properties.

dispositions' functional character as Prior does, then it seems that dispositions do not add extra causal powers to their possessors above the causal powers of the first-order properties that realize them. Dispositions are second-order properties of having some causal basis or other. As we have seen, such an issue applies to theories which allow the existence of based-dispositions, whereas philosophers who allow the existence of bare-dispositions argue that at least some dispositions do not need anything structural, or non-dispositional, in order to have causal efficacy.

Mumford's proposal rests on two assumptions: 1. A "token-identity theory" of the relation between dispositions and causal basis, according to which any *instance* of a disposition is *identical* with an *instance* of its causal basis; 2. The assumption that causal basis «are causally efficacious of dispositions manifestations». Given this, «dispositions are also causally efficacious of their manifestations» (Mumford 1998, 205).

In a later work, Mumford specifies that he aims to introduce a kind of necessary connection between dispositions, or causal powers and the world which is different from the traditional notion of synchronic metaphysical necessity (Mumford 2004).<sup>61</sup> Dispositional properties are *dynamic*, «they are responsible for, or productive of, changes in those and other particulars» (Mumford 2004, 168). For this reason, Mumford distinguishes two subspecies of his new dynamic kind of necessity which should grasp the dispositional push: *dispositional possibility* and *dispositional necessity*. According to the first, the having of one property may dispositionally make possible the having of another property; according to the second, the having of one property may dispositionally make necessary the having of another property. For example, being fragile makes possible being broken, but it does not necessitate the breaking event for something can be fragile without breaking. Having gravitational mass, on the contrary, necessitates attraction of other properties (Mumford 2004, 177). I think that such a distinction is useful if we want to characterize the connection between the dispositional property and the correspondent manifestation without reading it as mere unconnected compatibility and still without reading it as metaphysical necessity: being fragile does not necessitate being broken, still between the two there is a kind of relation which is not mere compatibility because «fragility has a causal connection with being broken» (Mumford 2004, 177).<sup>62</sup> This helps also accounting for some deviant cases, like masking and antidotes. However, it seems to me that the notion of dispositional

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<sup>61</sup> For "metaphysical necessity" here I refer to a kripkean metaphysical necessity, which is associated with truth in all possible worlds. Ellis (2002) provides an example of a theory which captures the link between stimulus conditions of a disposition and its manifestation using the notion of metaphysical necessity, which is defined as «being true in all possible worlds» (Ellis 2002, 110).

<sup>62</sup> Actually, there is something intuitive behind this observation. When we ascribe fragility to an object, for example, we want to highlight the fact that when the object breaks it breaks in virtue of its fragility, hence it is not a mere association of events. A certain dispositional pull must be recognized; still, it is not obvious that such a pull should be understood in causal terms.

necessity is very akin to the traditional notion of metaphysical necessity and that the above distinction is rather a distinction between types of disposition, for example, between deterministic dispositions and probabilistic dispositions: in the first case the relation between the dispositional property and the manifestation entails dispositional necessity, while in the second case only dispositional possibility is involved.<sup>63</sup>

3. So forth we have seen that, according to Mumford (1998, 2004), a disposition ascription is a functional characterization of a state or property instance and that such an ascription captures a causal link between the dispositional property and the correspondent manifestation. Dispositions do affect the world we inhabit. In a more recent work, Mumford (2009) offers a transcendental argument in order to argue that «dispositions are mind-independent features of reality that are possessed by or instantiated in particulars» (Mumford 2009, 169) and that ascriptions of dispositions are warranted if we accept such a dispositional ontology, rather than empirical observations.<sup>64</sup> A dispositional ontology is an ontology of real dispositions.

The ultimate judgement [...] is a metaphysical one. Whether or not the world is a world containing dispositions is not a matter we will settle empirically but only in the court of metaphysics. If a metaphysics of causal powers is superior to its rivals, then that will be good grounds for saying that there are causal powers. (Mumford 2009, 174)

According to Mumford, a metaphysics of causal power is superior for it allows to generate a plausible and unified account of various metaphysical problems, such as what causes are, what laws are, events, properties, and *de re* features of the world. It is not my aim here to expound and evaluate Mumford's argument; my aim is to highlight the fact that, according to Mumford, even if the presence of dispositions cannot be completely empirically warranted, we have good reasons to believe that the world is a world of power and dispositions, so disposition ascriptions stand on a dispositional ontology. When we ascribe a disposition, we are talking about something real; a property of the world we inhabit. Such a semantic position is another instance of Mumford Realist view for it assumes the distinction between the way the world is and the way we can actually describe and empirically approach the world: the fact that a certain truth is empirically inaccessible does not mean that such a truth should be put off.

### 2.3 Common assumptions of a naturalized perspective

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<sup>63</sup> See Schrenk (2009, 162) for a similar position.

<sup>64</sup> As we have seen in the previous chapter, Mumford engages too with the classical empiricist problem of the empirical inaccessibility of dispositions. Dispositions can be ascribed even if they are empirically inaccessible and unverifiable.

So forth I have tried to provide a general sketch of the main issues and the main approaches constituting the current paradigm on dispositions; in order to reach this goal I have expounded three relevant perspectives – Quine’s, Armstrong’s and Mumford’s – that are representative of the naturalistic-reductive talk and the metaphysical talk on dispositions and disposition ascriptions. In what follows I will present what I think to be the main common assumptions of such a naturalized perspective, that is, those assumptions that authors share and that stand behind the particular theories, and I will suggest that each assumption is tantamount a source of critical remarks against the current paradigm. My underlying claim is that, given the unresolved nature of many of the current issues, the current paradigm should be approached by looking at its underlying presuppositions and pictures through a conceptual enquiry which should apply to the concept of disposition too.

### 1. *The ontological “must”*

First of all, the current paradigm is characterized by a realist perspective on dispositions: from an ontological point of view, dispositions are thought to be autonomous entities, or *real* things that constitute what Quine calls «the furniture of the universe» (Quine 2013, 234). Indeed, if we look at recent essays-collections on dispositions, we see that every author assumes the idea that dispositions are particular properties or states of the objects to which they are ascribed: Hanfield (2009), in the introduction of the volume *Dispositions and Causes*, talks about dispositional properties, McKittrick (2009, 31) and Eagle (2009), in the same volume, define dispositions respectively as «properties of objects which have characteristic manifestations that occur in certain circumstance», and as properties which determine an object’s behaviour. In a similar vein, Mumford begins his contribution for the entry “Dispositions” in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* by stating that the term is used to indicate «a type of property, state or condition [...] that provides for the possibility of some further specific state or behaviour, usually in circumstances of some specific kind».<sup>65</sup> From a semantic point of view, the meaning of the term “disposition” is thought to be the property, state or condition to which it refers; authors assume a referentialist or denotative account of meaning.

Given so, the nature of the alleged dispositional entities or properties becomes object of metaphysical enquiry: if dispositions are real things, and dispositional terms refer to such things, what kind of things are they? As we have seen, dispositionalism and categorialism are two ways of answering such a question. No matter whether dispositions are thought to be reducible to categorical properties, or causes, or laws of nature; the common assumption lies in the idea that they are real properties and conditions of their bearings.

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<sup>65</sup> <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/dispositions/v-1>.

I want to highlight two main aspects of such a perspective: 1. It entails the *hypostatisation*, or *reification* of dispositions. Dispositions are separated from the correspondent manifestations and they are then treated as autonomous and distinctive things. Hypostatisation lies behind the idea that, although dispositions have characteristic manifestations that occur under specific stimulus conditions, «an object can have a disposition outside of the circumstances of manifestation and hence without the manifestation occurring» (McKittrick 2009, 31). The disposition is something that is possessed by the object, so the object can have the disposition, considered as a thing, even when such a disposition is not concretely manifested or realised. 2. The perspective stands on what I here call “the ontological must”, namely, the idea that dispositions must be considered real properties in order to be accepted within the legitimate philosophical concepts and in order to be re-evaluated after their rejection by the Humean and empiricist tradition. Whereas Quine reduces the role of dispositional concepts to a mere heuristic function, the current paradigm stands on the idea that we must argue for a dispositional ontology if we want to allocate dispositions to their legitimate place; the only way to face the classical empiricist suspect about dispositions is to argue for an ontological autonomy of dispositions by putting dispositions within the fundamental ontology: metaphysical claims take the place of the search for empirical sources of the idea of power.

## 2. Enough with solubility and fragility!

Authors belonging to the current paradigm generally identify dispositions with mere natural capacities. With the expression “natural capacity” I mean a disposition whose necessary conditions for the manifestation are also sufficient conditions: when the stimulus conditions occur, then the manifestation inevitably occurs.<sup>66</sup> Such a presupposition is manifested in the poverty of the examples that are usually employed: authors generally use classical examples or fragility, solubility, elasticity, conductivity; in other words, reflection on dispositions is generally done by looking at physical dispositions of the matter and no reference is done to specifically human dispositions, such as skills and abilities.<sup>67</sup> I call this the “simplification fallacy”.

It is interesting to note that Mumford (1998, 205) actually establishes a distinction between “non judgement-dependent” disposition concepts, such as solubility, and “response-dependent” disposition concepts, such as the already mentioned example of provocativeness: in the latter case, «the colour which provoked anger may have been different because which colour does this depends on the judgements, rational or non-rational, of the observing subject» (Mumford 1998, 205). However, such a case is almost put on the side by Mumford; it is not really included in his functionalist theory of

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<sup>66</sup> We could also talk of a deterministic disposition.

<sup>67</sup> In general, what Aristotle calls “rational capacities”.

dispositions for, in his opinion, «it is an example that will mislead us if we try to generalize from it» (Mumford 1998, 205). I think Mumford is saying that generally dispositions are “non judgement-dependent”, and that “response-dependent” dispositions are a sort of exception to the rule.

However, I think there is, on the contrary, an intuitive difference between dispositions such as solubility, conductivity, gravitational force, or elasticity, and mental dispositions or behavioural dispositions of human beings which constitute rule-governed behaviour, and that such a difference does not merely amount to a difference in the type of bearer of the disposition. Regarding specifically human dispositions, it is not surprising to see that within the current naturalized paradigm, human dispositions are recognized usually in the form of character traits, such as provocation, irritability, jealousy, and so on, for they are easily naturalizable and reducible to biological, or physiological functions of human organism.<sup>68</sup> However, human dispositions do not merely regard character traits and mentalities but they cover the realm of acquired abilities and intelligent capacities. Already within the Aristotelian corpus, among dispositional concepts, we find the difference between *Ethos* and *Hēxis*: while the first refers to character traits and it has an ethical value, the second is an active and relational category and it rather refers to habits, or acquired patterns of behaviour.

### 3. Causal efficacy

Thirdly, authors generally establish a strict nexus between dispositions and causality. The underlying idea is that the manifestation does not merely follow the disposition, but it occurs in virtue of the disposition. Dispositions must have a kind of causal efficacy; what we have previously called “the dispositional pull”. As specified by McKittrick (2009), the nexus might be a simple correlation, or it might lead to the metaphysical reduction of dispositions to causes. According to causal structuralism, for example, dispositions have a causal role, namely they produce, or cause, their manifestations; the causal profile is intrinsic to the dispositions. Causal structuralism is, as we have seen, accepted by the followers of dispositionalism, or dispositional monism, while it is rejected by followers of categoricalism, for in this case the causal profile is attributed to the non-dispositional basis of dispositions. Both dispositionalists and categoricalists employ the very same concept of cause, that is, something that has an active and productive role; it is the explained element. Moreover,

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<sup>68</sup> Schnepf (2009) shows how character traits are the kind of dispositions which constitute the dispositional vocabulary employed by historians for historical explanations. Some events, or individual actions, are explained through a reference to the agent's character, or mentality. For example, Caesar's mercy, or the cruel temperament of Philipp II of Spain. However, even in this field the naturalizing move is still at work, for dispositional concepts play a descriptive and non-normative role. Moreover, Schnepf argues that, for the historian, the realist view on disposition is not mandatory, for dispositions so conceived are reduced to non-dispositional and observable properties of agents and the ascription is grounded on nomological knowledge: observable regularities are generalized and they then become more or less confirmed hypothesis.

starting from the modern debate, causes are thought to necessarily determine the effect (Laudisa 2010). In the current debate on dispositions, indeed, we find a perspective called “dispositional actualism” according to which natural necessity should be read in dispositional terms, therefore the nexus between stimulus conditions and manifestation is necessary and natural, rather than logical (Eagle 2009).

#### *4. Potentiality lies in a box*

Finally, the current paradigm employs a notion of disposition which seems to be based, even implicitly, on a particular picture, or metaphor, which I here call “the potentiality that lies in a box”. Such a picture, as we will see, plays an important role in Wittgenstein’s reflection on the grammar of the concept of power and, for this reason, it constitutes one of the reasons that legitimate a connection between Wittgenstein’s philosophy and the philosophical issue of dispositions.

Dispositional concepts do refer to something latent; something that is still potential and that it might be manifested externally. As we have seen, suspect against dispositional concepts arises from the idea that is difficult and puzzling to give an account of something which is not observable and empirically accessible: we do not see dispositions; we only see their manifestations. In order to face such a difficulty, dispositions, on the one hand, have been variously reduced to something more empirically acceptable and, on the other hand, they have been assigned to the fundamental ontology. The first strategy informs the various conditional analysis of dispositional concepts, and the reduction of dispositions to something non-dispositional, such as physical structures or laws of nature. In the latter case, dispositions are construed mainly in behaviouristic terms. The second strategy informs what we have called the “dispositions first reaction”.

What I want to highlight is the fact that every position starts from a common picture of the dispositional and, in general, of potentiality: a notion of disposition as a latent depositary of pre-arranged courses of action. The underlying idea is that the manifestation of the disposition is already contained, as it is, in the realm of potentiality, as if potentiality was something contained in a box and that, in order to get actual, it has merely to come out the way it is; it is an already actualized potentiality which is simply hidden and not externally manifested. A lump of sugar possesses solubility even when it is not actually dissolving in water; the manifestation, or the particular course of action associated to the disposition, is in some sense already contained in the object’s disposition and it has merely to manifest when it gets triggered by the stimulus conditions. I think this is precisely what Armstrong (1997) critically refers to as the dispositionalist conception of disposition as a «congealed hypothetical fact or state of affairs» (Armstrong 1997, 79). As we have seen, Armstrong

does not accept such a position because it entails the intentionality of the mental. Differently from Armstrong, however, I do not think that the underlying picture is the one of the object which essentially has a reference, or points to the unmanifested manifestation; rather, the picture is that of an object which possesses something or is in a particular state or condition, which is like a latent depositary of unmanifested but pre-determined courses of action, as if the future courses of action, were contained in an already actualized form; they are latent, for they still inhabit the gaseous realm of potentiality, but they are actualized, for they are already pre-determined, or pre-constituted. Still, Armstrong is right in envisaging a mentalistic element in such a picture, and it is not surprising to see that the intentional element of disposition is not accepted: the notion of disposition employed in the current paradigm is essentially *non-normative*. There is no space for normativity within the dispositional. In the second and third part of the present work, I will specifically deal with this point and I will try to argue in favor of a normative notion of disposition which does not entail the puzzling picture of “the latent already actualized”.

One last remark about the presuppositions of the current paradigm: although some authors distinguish between dispositional entities and dispositional concepts, and although there is an accepted distinction between metaphysical research on dispositions and semantic research on dispositional terms, the question “What is a disposition?” is approached by the authors, no matter the specific theoretical strand to which they belong, as it was a *factual*, or *empirical question*. For this reason, the question is addressed by looking for something, for an entity which should be real and empirically accessible in some way. However, as we will see in the third part of the work, the same question might be different in nature; it might be a *conceptual question* about the notion of disposition and, in such a case, no empirical and factual answer is adequate, for another kind of approach is needed.

## 2.4 Problems of the current paradigm

### 1. No third way

First of all, it seems that no third way is admitted between two kinds of extremes: 1. Mentalism and behaviourism 2. Heuristic function and ontological foundation.

On the one hand, dispositions are thought to be either “mysterious” latent depositaries of pre-arranged and potential actions and reactions, or they are construed merely in behavioural terms as mechanical responses, or outputs triggered by some stimulus conditions. The first picture, mentalist in nature, is what tries to preserve dispositions’ latent character and the modal nature of dispositional concepts, while the second picture, which is behaviouristic, or mechanistic, comes from the

philosophical attempt to find more acceptable empirical sources of the concept of power, therefore dispositions are reduced to outward and observable mechanisms.

On the other hand, dispositions have been considered either mere heuristic terms, totally replaceable by a more sophisticated causal explanation of phenomena (Quine 1975), or autonomous ontological entities placed within the fundamental ontology: in other words, dispositions are either mere *façons de parler*, or real entities of the world.

Is there an admissible third way? Is it possible to find a legitimate place for dispositions without necessarily ground them in the fundamental ontology? Is it possible to construe the dynamics of the dispositional without embracing the “gaseous” mentalistic paradigm, still without construing it exclusively in mechanical and non-normative terms? If we should refrain from conceiving dispositions as mysterious hidden forces that produce manifestations, are we then oblige to embrace a behaviouristic account?

## 2. Narrowness

The “simplification fallacy” leads to a narrowness of the philosophical discourse on dispositions with respect to dispositional talk of ordinary language. I do not intend to argue that the current paradigm is false; rather, I argue that the current paradigm is globally narrower than the variety of the dispositional talk as it is found both in the history of philosophy and in ordinary language. If we better look at ordinary language, we see that dispositional talk does not necessarily entail neither hypostatisation or reification of dispositions, nor a causal account of dispositions. Dispositional terms that are usually employed do not gain meaning in virtue of the fact that they would denote an alleged inner or outer entity, such as a particular mental state or inner mechanism. Indeed, sophisticated and metaphysical reflection on dispositions plays a role within the philosophical enquiry but it stands on a broader notion of disposition: when we philosophically enquire about the metaphysical status of solubility, we already master the relative concept, and such a concept is acquired and learned without reference to scientific tests or scientific knowledge about sugar’s molecular structure. Moreover, the very same concept of disposition and dispositionality is broader than the naturalized one, for we use dispositional concepts specially to give accounts of human actions and activities, hence practices embedded in ordinary life. The notion of disposition was not born behaviouristic. When we say that individual *P* is jealous, we are not stating that he will *necessarily* manifest a certain behaviour – say, get angry – when certain stimulus conditions occur – say, when someone says something ambiguous

to his partner; rather, the dispositional ascription occurs almost *a posteriori*, and it is a way to talk and give an account of certain courses of action.<sup>69</sup>

### 3. “*Materialist realism*”

As we have seen, almost all the authors belonging to the current paradigm profess to be realist about dispositions. However, the kind of realism involved is materialist in nature, for it is based on a notion of reality – hence, a certain employment of the word “real” – as something scientifically acceptable and discoverable. “Real” is used as a synonym of concrete, physical and material. For this reason, authors generally work with the assumption that appeal to dispositions must be scientific in order to be legitimate. Given this, some legitimate questions arise: do we really need naturalization in order to legitimately employ a concept? Why should every word have a mind-independent correspondent in the mind-independent world? As already suggested, there is space for a kind of realism different from the realism of the actual existence of things, and Lynch (2009) provides an interesting example of this.

### 4. *How about normativity?*

Globally, the current paradigm vehicles a realist and mechanistic picture of dispositions. Dispositions are intrinsically non normative. This is a widespread assumption. Indeed, the philosophical issue of normativity does not occur, for any mistake or deviation from the norm is read as *malfuctioning*. As we have seen, the underlying picture which informs the naturalized conception of disposition is that of a machine with inner mechanisms.

However, first of all I would like to highlight the – even intuitive – peculiarity of human dispositions, especially those regarding rule-governed behaviour. Let us think, for example, about linguistic skills, practical abilities such as playing chess, swimming, playing football, playing a musical instrument, or even resolving mathematical queries. In such cases, the lack of manifestation is accepted even if the disposition is correctly ascribed; it can be either a genuine mistake of the agent, or an eventuality included in the use of the dispositional concept. For example, when we say that subject S can play chess, we are not excluding the possibility of mistake; on the contrary, the possibility of mistake is part of the subject’s competence. In a certain sense, only who is able to play chess can make mistakes, for even mistakes are part of the rule-governed activity. Similarly, when we say that subject S can speak a particular language, say English, we are ascribing to S a set of dispositions, such as the disposition to utter “You are welcome” in response to the expression “Thank

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<sup>69</sup> We could also try to say that it is almost a way to rationalise certain human reactions and tendencies.

you”, or the disposition to inform about the time in response to the question “What time is it?”; now, if subject S does not react in this way, many things might have occurred, for no direct and necessary nexus has been established between the stimulus conditions and the manifestation of the disposition: S might be a practitioner of English language, hence he might have committed a mistake for he does not master all English concepts yet, although he does master many of them, or S might be a competent English speaker but he does not react in the expected way because he is joking, or simply because he deliberately refrains to for potentially infinite reasons (he is naughty, he does not want to inform about the time, he wants to hurt the person, etc..).

Secondly, disposition ascriptions are not just descriptive, although they do play an explanatory role too. The normative element of the disposition lies in the fact that, through the ascription, we intend to highlight the fact that the manifestation of the disposition *should* occur. In this case, the dispositional concept does not play the role of explaining *a posteriori* a particular course of action, but it serves to predict a certain behaviour, or to circumscribe accepted and legitimate behaviours. The distinction between correct and wrong is admitted even within the dispositional talk. If a chess player moves the pawn backwards, he commits a mistake, he is not a machine that does not work well, and in order to make that mistake he must master at least the rudiments of chess; he must master part of the system.

In the second and third parts of the present work I will present an alternative account of dispositions and dispositional concepts which is informed by Wittgenstein’s later philosophy and which does not stand on the above presuppositions. In the light of what we have just observed, such an alternative perspective might be thus summarised and anticipated:

1. Globally, it represents a third way between mentalism and behaviourism;
2. Dispositions are not hypostatised; Ryle’s idea that dispositional terms do not denote states and processes gains importance and interest again, contrary to the “dispositions first reaction”. In particular, it is wondered whether we can sensibly reconcile dispositions and their manifestations and talk about dispositions as a kind of fact, rather than a type of property, though it is different from the kind of fact assumed by Kripke (1982).
2. If causality has a place, it is a kind of causality based on a notion of cause as *explaining* element, rather than what produces and creates something. The cause, in this sense, is what gives the account of something; it is not the explained element. Wittgenstein’s philosophy, indeed, is an example of a kind of liberalisation of the notion of cause, for a type of explanation in terms of *reasons* is

acknowledged. It will be argued that, from a Wittgensteinian-informed perspective, dispositions explain in terms of *reasons* rather than causes.<sup>70</sup>

3. Dispositional pluralism is maintained and preserved: there are different types of dispositional concepts and dispositional talk plays a variety of roles.

4. No denotative theory of meaning is presupposed. Concerning dispositional concepts, meaning is characterized in terms of the use of the concept in the system of language in which it is employed, i.e., the use governed by rules, rather than in terms of the entity the concept should denote.

5. A notion of normative disposition is defended.

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<sup>70</sup> The liberalisation of the notion of cause is done, using a different strategy, by Davidson too (2001). In the essay “Actions, Reasons and Causes” [1963], Davidson rejects the idea that explanations of actions in terms of reasons, which he calls “rationalisations”, are not causal and that reasons are not causes. By contrast, he wants «to defend the ancient – and common-sense – position that rationalization is a species of causal explanation» (Davidson 2001, 13). Davidson’s thesis is that reasons are causes and that explanations in terms of reasons are causal explanations. This is why he explicitly states that his thesis runs counter to the Wittgensteinian perspective which is endorsed also by other Wittgensteinians, such as Ryle, Anscombe and Kenny.

## Chapter 3

### Exceptions to the rule

Before talking about the way in which Wittgenstein's later philosophy might inform an alternative and de-naturalized conception of dispositions, I would like to briefly present some reformative contributions belonging to the non-Wittgensteinian paradigm. Even within the XX Century and the current paradigm, some authors have felt the need to reflect upon a concept of disposition which should be broader than the dominant philosophical one; the underlying observation is that intuitively something changes if we move from the case of the solubility of sugar to the case of linguistic dispositions and, in general, human's dispositions to action.<sup>71</sup>

I will first expound the strategy, informed by the Aristotelian tradition, of improving dispositional pluralism; then I will present two critiques of the Quinian view of dispositions.

#### 3.1 Going back to Aristotle

##### 3.1.1 Aristotle on dispositions I: realism

If we look at the history of philosophy, it could well be argued that no one reserved so much space and attention to the study of dispositions and dispositional terms more than Aristotle. What I want to highlight is that Aristotle influenced and shaped our thinking about dispositions and the current views on dispositions on two different lines: 1. On the one hand, Aristotle is quoted among the authors that intend to defend a realist view of dispositions; 2. On the other hand, the Greek philosopher is singled out also by philosophers who endorse a dispositional pluralism and that reject absolutist theories on dispositions, i.e., theories that pretend to grasp and set out a precise definition of what a disposition is, and that such a definition should apply to all kinds of dispositions.

These two lines catch two important elements of Aristotle's global view of dispositions, which is actually complex and sophisticated and it is not reducible to a single definition. I will first spend some words about Aristotle's kind of dispositional realism, and I will then move to his detailed classification of dispositional expressions.

Globally, Aristotle means by "disposition" some *causal property*. For this reason, Aristotle's talk on dispositions is not to be found among his remarks on *diathesis*, which is the Greek equivalent of

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<sup>71</sup> Damschen, Schnepf, Stüber (2009, xi), indeed, already express a similar concern in the introduction of the essays-collection *Debating Dispositions*: globally, the work is meant to improve a multidisciplinary, hence multifaceted study of dispositions, in contrast both to the traditional negative attitude towards dispositions, and to one-directional studies on dispositions. If we might regard salt's solubility as being reducible to categorical lower properties, yet «such reducibility might not be in the offing for mental dispositions such as belief, desires and so on».

the Latin word *dispositio*, for this word rather means “arrangement”, be it of things, soldiers, and speeches. According to Jansen (2009), Aristotle employs three different words to refer to three different types of dispositional causal properties: *dynamis* (“power”, or “capacity”)<sup>72</sup>, *physis* (“nature”), and *hexis- ethos* (“habit”).<sup>73</sup>

The notion of *dynamis* is extensively discussed in the *Metaphysics*, where Aristotle immediately states that the word *dynamis* has different meanings related to one another so to make a sophisticated net; it is something, like the notion of being, that is spoken of in many different ways or, using a Wittgensteinian language, it constitutes a net of different meanings related to one another by family resemblances. At the core of the web, though, lies the meaning of *dynamis* as *active power*:

*Dynamis* means a source of movement or change which is in something else or in itself as something else. (*Metaphysics* V 12, 1019a 15-16)<sup>74</sup>

An active power is a property possessed by a bearer which causes changes in something that might either be different from its bearer, or it can coincide with the bearer himself. For example, the builder has the active disposition to bring about a change in something else, i.e., the building material: mere logs and stones become a new house. Now let us think about a doctor. A doctor possesses the art of healing, hence the active disposition to heal. If the doctor becomes ill himself, then in many cases he will be able to heal himself, thus the active disposition brings about a change in its bearer.

Having spelled out the core concept of *dynamis* as active power, Aristotle then individuates two families of *dynameis*, or dispositions: 1. Principles for change; 2. Principles for being something (Jansen 2009, 29).

1. Principles for change are what is involved in a dynamic causal explanation. In this context, the word *dynamis* has other three meanings: 1. Passive disposition, 2. Qualified disposition, 3. Resistance disposition. The first refers to a principle of change in the bearer of the disposition which is caused by something other than the bearer of the disposition. In this sense, a passive disposition needs a corresponding active power in order to be manifested or realised, and *vice versa*. The second refers to a principle to do something well, or to act after a decision, as opposed to something done by accident. Aristotle employs the example of the drunkard: both the drunkard and the sober can walk somehow, but only the sober can walk well, i.e., without staggering and pausing. The third refers to a principle that allows the bearer to resist changes caused by something that possesses an active

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<sup>72</sup> Maintained by Liske (1996) too.

<sup>73</sup> Jansen (2009) does not include the term *ethos*. On the contrary, I think it is an important part of Aristotle’s reflection on dispositions for it is one of the meanings of the word “habit”. See Barandiaran, Di Paolo (2014).

<sup>74</sup> Aristotle (2009).

power; it is a principle for not being changed by something else. For example, a flexible rod can resist breaking when being bent; the rod possesses the disposition of flexibility, which is here read in terms of a resistance disposition, i.e., the disposition to resist the breaking caused by something different from the rod itself. Principles for change are relevant for dynamic causal explanation because they are involved in the account of a certain change: if I want to explain how it comes about that this piece of marble is a sculpture, I refer to the *dynamis* – in terms of active power – of the sculptor to shape the marble and to the matching *dynamis* – in terms of passive disposition – of the marble to be shaped in this manner.

2. Principles for being something are involved in a kind of static ontological explanation. Instead of being principles for becoming healthy, becoming hot, etc., principles for being are principles for being healthy, being hot, being red, etc. These principles are involved whenever we want to explain how, for example, the already cited sculpture's marble is at this very moment of time related to the sculpture: the marble is realising its *dynamis* to be shaped.

Dispositions, then, are causal properties. Given this, how about their metaphysical status? Are dispositions intrinsically causal or causal efficacy is rather possessed by some categorical basis? Are dispositions real? What I want to highlight is the fact that Aristotle's view of dispositions is realist and the realist character comes from two main points which are well explained by Jansen (2009): 1. The talk about disposition does not coincide with the talk about possibility; 2. Dispositions are “two-sided”.

1. Jansen (2009, 30-31) argues that, according to Aristotle, the word “disposition” is a synonym of the words “capacity” and “potentiality”, rather than the word “possibility” for two main reasons: firstly, possibility talk and dispositional talk have different syntactical structures. Syntactically, the expression “It is possible that...” is a sentence operator, that is, it forms a sentence when combined with another sentence. Differently, dispositional expressions such as “X has the disposition to...”, “X is capable to...”, “X is able to...”<sup>75</sup> are predicate modifiers, that is, they combine with predicates and they form new predicates. Secondly, «the above syntactical difference mirrors a crucial ontological difference» (Jansen 2009, 31). Possibility sentences such as “It is possible that *p*” have truthmakers located in some possible world, that is, the sentence *p* is true in the actual world if and only if there

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<sup>75</sup> Jansen (2009, 30) specifies that Aristotle uses the following expressions to ascribe dispositions, or *dynameis*: 1. He says that something has a *dynamis* for something (“X has the disposition to...”); 2. He uses both the finite form and participate form of the verb *dynasthai*, which means “to be capable” (“It is capable...”, “Being capable of.”); 3. He employs the adjective *dynaton*, which means “capable” (“X is capable to do something”); 4. He employs the phrase *dynameis badizontos estin* which expresses the idea that, for example, with respect to his *dynamis*, someone is a walker (“someone is potentially a walker”).

is a possible world  $w$  such that  $w$  is accessible from the actual world and the sentence  $p$  is true in this possible world.<sup>76</sup> On the contrary, a *dynamis*, or a disposition, is something that can be encountered in the actual world; according to Aristotle, dispositions are part of the furniture of the actual world. A disposition, thus, is a quality token. Therefore, disposition ascriptions are about the actual world.

2. A disposition is “two-sided” for it is possible to have a disposition and not to realize it at the same time. The idea is that «as a relevant causal factor for its realization, a disposition precedes its effect» (Jansen 2009, 36), therefore the realization of a hitherto unrealized disposition could happen at some time in the future, given that the disposition does not get lost in between. Dispositions get hypostatized, for they are separated from their manifestations and they are treated as something ontologically autonomous.

Aristotle, thus, rejects the Megarian thesis according to which the actual realization of a disposition is both necessary and sufficient condition for possessing it and he indeed makes a distinction between the terms for the possession of the disposition and the terms for the realization of the disposition in order to establish the possibility of *unrealized dispositions*: for  $X$  to have a disposition to do or to be  $F$ , it must be *logically possible* to assume that  $X$  actually does or is  $F$ .

### 3.1.2 Aristotle on dispositions II: pluralism

So forth we have seen that Aristotle shares two important aspects with the current paradigm on dispositions: the causal role of dispositions and the ontological foundation of dispositions. However, Aristotle does not seem to fall into the “simplification fallacy”, for he preserves the variety of dispositional predicates and he indeed individuates different types of dispositions.

First of all, within the category of *dynamis*, Aristotle distinguishes between *non-rational dispositions* and *rational dispositions*. The first difference lies in the type of bearer: the former are dispositions that can also be possessed by non-living things, plants, or beasts; the latter are dispositions that cannot be possessed by inanimate things, plants or beasts, for they belong to the rational part of the soul of human beings. The second relevant difference is that, contrary to non-rational dispositions, rational dispositions are accompanied by a *logos* and they are realized through ratiocination. Let us consider the case of the art of medicine, which is Aristotle’s paradigmatic example of this kind of dispositions. The art of medicine is accompanied by a *logos* in the sense of

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<sup>76</sup> Jansen thus presupposes the idea that possibility sentences are modal operators that can be grasped through the usual possible worlds semantics. For a different view see Vetter (2014). Vetter argues that dispositions are modal properties and their modality is closest to that of possibility than the one captured by some kind of conditional. It is interesting to note that Vetter (2014, 3) traces in Aristotle such an alternative account of dispositions: she maintains, like Aristotle, that the term “disposition” is akin to the term “capacity” and “ability”, but she does not draw a difference between dispositional talk and possibility talk.

rational formula, i.e., the definition of health. The possessor of the disposition starts from a definition like “Health is XYZ”, then he deliberates about how and when to heal patients in the following way (Jansen 2009, 39):

Health is XYZ.

XYZ will come about if I do *F*.

I can do *F*.

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Thus, I will do *F*.

In virtue of this, rational dispositions can have contrary realizations: an evil doctor can use the very same knowledge to kill people. Moreover, they cannot be realized in a simple manner like non-rational dispositions, for spatial vicinity between the doctor and the patient does not automatically lead to the realization of the disposition; the doctor has to decide to exercise his medical knowledge and he has to decide his goal, that is, whether he wants the patient to heal or to feel worse.

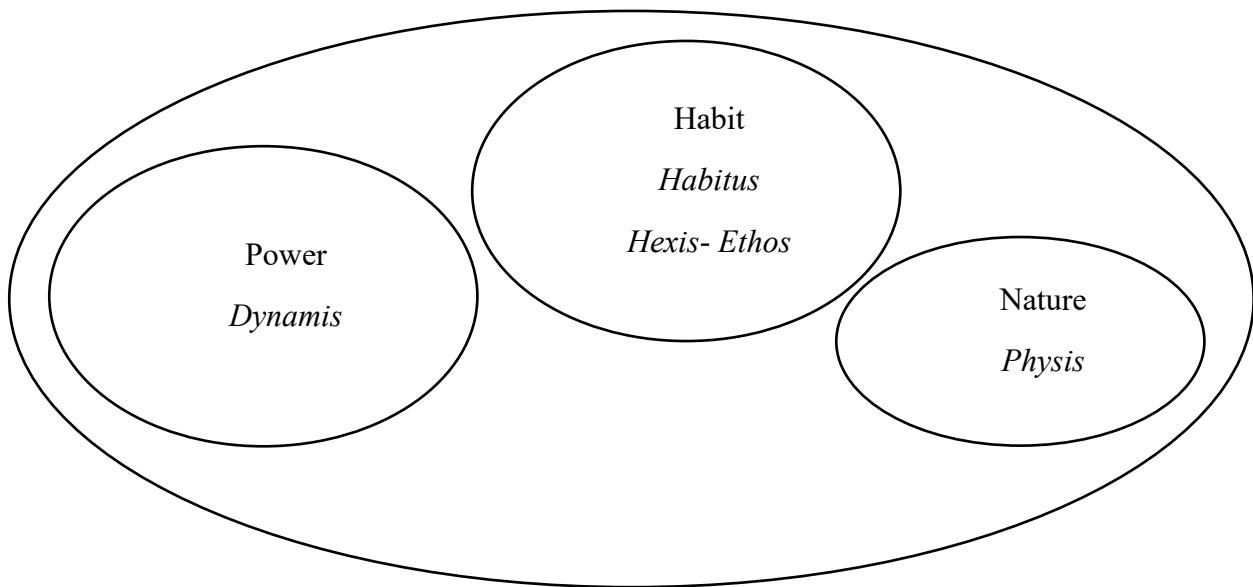
Secondly, among the dispositional causal properties, Aristotle individuates also natures (*physeis*) and habits (*hexeis- ethos*). Nature «also is the same genus as *dynamis*; for it is a principle of movement – not, however, in something else but *in the thing itself qua itself*» (*Metaphysics* IX 8, 1049b 5-10). Whereas, as we have seen, an active power requires a matching passive disposition in order to be realized, there is no such need for a *physis*, for if something has a *physis* to do or to be *F*, «its realization depends only on the appropriate marginal conditions, but it does not require the special vicinity of the bearers of other causal properties» (Jansen 2009, 40).

Aristotle has a polysemic conception of habit. The word “habit”, like the Latin word *habitus*, can be traced back to two Greek terms: *hexis* and *ethos*. The noun *hexis* has two main meanings: on the one hand, it is a relational and active category; the having or being in possession of something. On the other hand, it is also a normative dispositional category for it means a disposition to which that which is disposed is either *well* or *ill* disposed (*Metaphysics* V, 1022b). In the latter sense, the notion of habit has ethical implications and it becomes part of a self-modifying practice which is exercised to attain a virtuous character. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, indeed, Aristotle employs the notion of *hexis* to describe ethical virtue: dispositions (*hexeis*) are «conditions in virtue of which we are well

or ill disposed in respect of the feelings concerned» (*Nicomachean Ethics* II, 1105b 25-6).<sup>77</sup> Defective states of character are *hexeis* too, but they are tendencies to have inappropriate feelings.

Finally, the word *ethos* refers to what we nowadays call character traits. This word too contains a plurality of meanings: it means both “an accustomed place” in which animals and human beings live (their *habitat*), and a disposition or character that denotes the subject’s personality as it develops along his lifetime. It is important to note that, according to Aristotle, habits in general arise from custom or repetition and, once acquired, they become a sort of second nature for the subject.

To conclude, from the Aristotelian *corpus* we obtain the following conception of dispositional language:



Aristotle endorses a realist view of dispositions, but he does not employ a narrow notion of disposition, for a clear distinction is made between types of dispositions and peculiarity of specifically human dispositions is preserved.

### 3.1.3 McKittrick's dispositional pluralism

The Aristotelian distinction between rational and non-rational dispositions is recalled by McKittrick (2009b) in order to argue against «the tendency to make sweeping generalisation about the nature of dispositions [...] extremist or absolutist positions about dispositions» such us the views according to which all dispositions are necessarily grounded, or ungrounded, intrinsic, or extrinsic, etc (McKittrick 2009b, 186). The antidote to absolutism is dispositional pluralism. Such a perspective, though, might

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<sup>77</sup> Aristotle (2004).

take different forms: we might endorse a semantic, or conceptual pluralism, i.e., the idea that there are different dispositional concepts, or a variety of meanings of the term “disposition”, or we might go on and state that there are also different kinds of dispositions, considered as real entities of the world. This would be a kind of metaphysical pluralism. The endorsement of the former does not necessarily lead to the endorsement of the latter, and *vice versa*: on the one hand, it is possible to maintain a conceptual pluralism of dispositional predicates and still reject the realist view of dispositions; in this case, conceptual pluralism might be seen as an obstacle to any attempt to formulate a precise definition of dispositions and a precise definition of their metaphysical status. On the other hand, metaphysical pluralism does not necessarily entail conceptual pluralism, for it is possible to maintain that there exist different types of dispositions in the world and still admit that there is only one meaning of the term “disposition” which applies to all kinds. While the present work globally belongs to the first perspective, McKittrick (2009b) wants to argue for both types of dispositional pluralism: in particular, she intends to argue for metaphysical pluralism starting from conceptual pluralism.<sup>78</sup>

In what follows I will first present two relevant merits of McKittrick’s account, namely, (1) the attention to ordinary language and (2) the employment of semantics in order to reject absolutist theses. Then, I will suggest some criticism about McKittrick’s methodological move, that is, the passage from a semantical thesis to a metaphysical thesis through the appeal to epistemology.

1. McKittrick (2009b, 187) starts by stating that various English words are synonymous with the term “disposition”: “tendency”, “power”, “ability”, “force”, “predisposition”, “liability”, “susceptibility”, “propensity”, “potentiality”, “proclivity”, “capability”, “inclination”, “faculty”, and “aptitude”. Moreover, she interestingly recognizes the fact that there are different shades of meaning, since, for example, some terms suggest rational agency, such as “proclivity” and – I would say – “ability”, while others suggest fundamental properties of the matter, such as “force”.

In addition to the variety of synonyms of the term “disposition”, there is a variety of dispositional terms, which cover a broad range of qualities, from solubility, to courage: not just common qualities of physical objects, such as elasticity, flammability, and terms taken from science, such as conductivity, reactivity, charge, etc., but also character traits and complex social concepts, such as marketable, collectible, provocative, etc. In this case, though, further specification is needed. If these terms are not synonymous with the term “disposition”, on what grounds can we classify them as

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<sup>78</sup> The distinction between metaphysical and conceptual pluralism is mine, for it is not found in McKittrick (2009b) in the very same terms: she rather talks about different types of dispositions and different dispositional concepts. Indeed, she employs the expression “dispositional pluralism” to refer to the view that «there are many different kinds of dispositions», which here coincides with what I have called “metaphysical pluralism” (McKittrick 2009b, 187).

dispositional? McKittrick (2009b, 187) offers the following sketch of the mark of dispositionality, which should be read as a rule of thumb, rather than as an analysis.

A term is dispositional if it has the following marks of dispositionality:

1. The term is associated with an event type – the manifestation of the disposition;
2. The term is associated with an event type in which the manifestation occurs – the circumstances of manifestation;
3. The term is ascribable to an object when the manifestation is absent;
4. If a dispositional term is ascribable to an object, then a certain subjunctive conditional to the effect that “if the circumstances of manifestation were to occur, then the manifestation would occur” is true;
5. The term is semantically equivalent to an overtly dispositional locution – “the disposition to so and so”.

While I think that conditions 1,2, 4 and 5 actually grasp important features of the ordinary use of dispositional concepts, I hesitate to include condition 4, for it is theory-laden, that is, it involves the endorsement of a kind of conditional analysis of dispositions, be it simple or qualified. It is true that dispositional predicates are linguistically expressible through a conditional sentence, and this might be indeed a characteristic feature of them, but this does not entail the idea that the ascription of the term to the object is linked to the truth of the conditional sentence. Indeed, traditional counterexamples to the conditional analysis teach us that we would be inclined to ascribe dispositions to the object even when the correspondent subjunctive conditional is false for the very reason expressed by condition 3. Therefore, globally, we might trace the following features of dispositional terms, which do not constitute a precise definition of them: 1. We employ them to express the idea of a potential behaviour, which is linked to certain circumstances of the manifestation and to a typical manifestation; 2. We employ those terms even when the relevant manifestation is not concretely realized, for it is a way of describing the object independently from its actual behaviour; 3. We intuitively linguistically grasp those terms with counterfactual conditional sentences, for they give the idea of potentiality; 4. We express those terms also with overtly dispositional locutions such as “The disposition to so and so”, “X is disposed to...”.

In any case, McKittrick’s reconstruction works if we consider the marks – as she actually does – sufficient but not necessary conditions for a term to be dispositional: it is difficult to argue that a term which bears all her five marks is not dispositional but, as suggested, counterexamples to the conditional analysis suggest that mark number four is not always true.

2. Pluralism of the dispositional is acknowledgeable not just if we look at ordinary language, but if we look at the history of philosophy too. McKittrick (2009b, 188-191), indeed, presents some of the various distinctions between kinds of dispositions made by philosophers, from antient times to the XX Century. She cites the already discussed Aristotelian distinction between *rational* and *non-rational* dispositions, which is important because it draws a distinction between the realization of the manifestation which is due to physical necessity (non-rational dispositions) and dispositions typical of rational human agents, where decision plays an important role for the realization of the manifestation. Another important distinction is made by Ryle (1990), who distinguishes between *single-track* dispositions and *multi-track* dispositions: the first are triggered in just one kind of circumstance and they manifest themselves in just one way. For example, solubility is triggered only in the circumstance of being immersed in water, and its only manifestation is dissolution in water. The second have different kinds of manifestations and they are triggered in different kinds of circumstances. Character traits are of this kind. Bravery, for example, can be triggered by various circumstances, such as a battle, medical procedures, intimidating social interactions, a roller-coaster ride, etc., and its manifestation is as diverse as acting in order to stop an armed robbery or taking a political stand. C. D. Broad, in *The Mind and its Place in Nature*, distinguishes between *first-order* dispositions and *second, or higher-order* dispositions: a higher-order disposition is a disposition to acquire or lose a first-order disposition. For example, magnetizable objects possess the second-order disposition to acquire the disposition of being magnetic. Finally, McKittrick recalls Rom Harre's distinction, presented in the article *Powers*, between *active powers* and *passive powers*:<sup>79</sup> if something has the active power to *A*, he will do *A* in a certain circumstance, whereas if something has a liability, it has the disposition to suffer a change.

According to McKittrick, the diversity of the dispositional terms, together with the diversity of the philosophical distinctions between types of dispositional concepts, are good reasons to argue that «dispositional semantics does not support absolutist claims» (McKittrick 2009b, 191). The first absolutist claims about dispositions, that are also at the core of the current paradigm, are that either all properties are dispositional (dispositional monism, or dispositionalism), or that all properties are non-dispositional (categoricalism). Against such a dichotomy we should bear in mind that not all terms are dispositional and authors who endorse one of the above claims implicitly, or explicitly do not respect such a conceptual distinction.<sup>80</sup> If this is the most prominent couple of absolutist claims,

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<sup>79</sup> Harre follows the Aristotelian distinction.

<sup>80</sup> Indeed, Mellor (1974) and Goodman (1983) suggest that there is no clear way to distinguish between the dispositional and the non-dispositional even at the conceptual level.

McKittrick (2009b, 191-195) individuates other five dichotomies between two extremes. For each of them, she argues that there is no semantic support.

1. The dichotomy intrinsicness/extrinsicness: dispositions are either all intrinsic properties, or they are all extrinsic properties. However, dispositional concepts would be concepts of intrinsic properties if they were necessarily applicable to perfect duplicates of the corresponding bearer, but not all dispositional predicates function in this way: “fragility” applies equally to one glass and its perfect duplicate. If this statement sounds too related to a particular theory of dispositions, namely, a theory that reduces dispositions to the physical structure of objects, we might rephrase it in this way: if we look at the ordinary use of the term “fragile”, we see that we would be surprised if we hear a person ascribing fragility to one particular glass and yet not to a perfect duplicate of that glass; maybe we would wonder whether that person master the concept of fragility. But how about “vulnerability”? This dispositional term applies differently to perfect duplicates: a newborn infant left alone in the woods is more vulnerable than his perfect twin who is sleeping at home (McKittrick 2009b, 192). We might get more general and say that such observation applies to all gradable dispositional concepts which, as we saw, are at the centre of Manley & Wasserman (2007; 2008) analysis. In this sense, “solubility” is not a gradable dispositional concept, for it does not make sense to state that object *x* is more soluble than object *y*; rather, it makes sense to state that object *x* is either soluble or non-soluble but no difference of degree is actually admitted by the ordinary use of the concept.

2. The dichotomy natural/non-natural: either all dispositions are natural properties, or all dispositions are non-natural properties. Again, if we look at our linguistic practices, we see that some dispositional predicates pick up natural properties, while others do not pick up natural properties. For example, things that we say are soluble, elastic, or conductive, might have certain compositional and structural similarities; however, things that we say are provocative can have no relevant structural and compositional similarities. Similarly, I would add, when we say that human beings are trainable, or intelligent, we might indeed presuppose that they have certain similarities in biological structure, but this is not at the basis of every dispositional ascription, for when we say that subject *S* is jealous, or brave, or that he is able to play tennis, we are not referring to the subject’s structural traits so the ascription does not seem to pick up any natural property.

3. The dichotomy essential/non-essential: either all dispositions are essential properties of the objects which instantiate them – hence an object cannot lose its disposition and still be the same object – or all dispositions are non-essential properties of objects. According to McKittrick, some disposition ascriptions seem contingent, for example the ascription of bravery. A brave person could have been otherwise, given a different past history, or given his intentions and desires. Something similar might

be said regarding physical dispositions too: a fragile handmade box could have been construed with solider material, or with stronger fixing material. On the other hand, though, some disposition ascriptions seem necessarily true, such as the predicate “having negative charge”: such a predicate applies to certain objects in every circumstance in which the object exists.

4. The dichotomies grounded/ungrounded, reducible/irreducible: either all dispositions are grounded, or reducible properties, or they are ungrounded, or irreducible properties. McKittrick (2009b, 194) rightly argues that linguistic ascriptions do not take such dichotomies into account, for such metaphysical claims do not play an essential role in the disposition ascription. The passage is worth to be read in its entirety:

If I attribute a disposition to an object, learning that the disposition ascription was true in virtue of the fact that the object had some distinct property would not give me a reason to withdraw my disposition attribution. For suppose I claim that Joe is irritable. Then I'm told that Joe is irritable in virtue of some of his neurological features – his irritability derives from or is based on these neurological features. I withdraw neither my claim that Joe is irritable nor my belief that his irritability is a disposition. Even if my claim that Joe is irritable were reducible to a claim about some distinct property, reduction is not elimination, and I have no reason to withdraw my disposition ascription.

On the other hand, if I attribute a disposition to an object, learning that that object had no distinct property in virtue of which that claim was true would give me no reason to withdraw my claim. For example, suppose I claim that a massive object is disposed to attract other massive objects. If I learned that the object has no distinct property in virtue of which this is true, that this was a fundamental, irreducible feature of the object, I would not withdraw my disposition claim. (McKittrick 2009b, 193-194)

In other words, the semantics of dispositional properties is independent of whether the ascribed properties are grounded or ungrounded.

5. The dichotomy causal efficacy/causal inactivity: either all dispositions are causally inert properties, or all dispositions are causally efficacious properties. However, the causal power – its presence or the lack of it – is not always part of the dispositional concept. We do not use all dispositional concepts in a way that links disposition and manifestation through a causal relation and, I would state, in any case, the attribution of causal efficacy is often puzzling, for it might be attributed to different dispositions depending on the kind of description we adopt: let us recall the example of provocativeness discussed by Mumford (1998). We might ascribe the dispositional predicate “provocative” to the red cape that is used by the bullfighter. We ascribe provocativeness to the red

cape without hesitation, given the fact that the bull gets angry when it sees the cape. Now, regarding the above dichotomy, two different descriptions are possible: I might consider provocativeness a first-order property, or a second-order property that consists in having some first-order property, that is, redness.<sup>81</sup> In the first case, provocativeness is considered causally efficacious, while in the second case the causal efficacy is attributed to the first-order property. The bull gets angry; does it get angry because of the provocativeness of the cape, or because of the redness of the cape? I think that no more substantial difference lies here regarding the linguistic use of the dispositional concept, than a difference in the adopted description. Moreover, even if we discover that it is in virtue of the redness of the cape that the bull gets angry, we would not be inclined to withdraw the attribution of provocativeness to the cape itself.

To summarize what has been said so far,

philosophers have distinguished several different disposition concepts. Natural language, English anyway, presents a wide variety of disposition terms and concepts. We can and do attribute a variety of dispositional predicates: intrinsic and extrinsic, natural and unnatural, essential and non-essential, higher-order and fundamental. Our disposition ascriptions are neutral with respect to whether the dispositions are reducible or irreducible, bare or grounded, essential or non-essential, inert or efficacious. (McKittrick 2009b, 194-195)

I conclude this section with one last remark. McKittrick clearly shows how more attention to ordinary language and history of philosophy helps rejecting absolutist attitudes in the study of dispositions. Conceptual dispositional pluralism, indeed, is a powerful tool against the endorsement of absolutist metaphysical claims. However, I hesitate to maintain that conceptual pluralism could have a positive role in arguing for the reality of dispositions. McKittrick, indeed, does not restrict her thesis to conceptual pluralism, for she further tries to «support a metaphysical claim that there are different kinds of dispositions» (McKittrick 2009b, 186). I do not intend to argue that there are no different kinds of dispositions; rather, I suggest that conceptual pluralism is not an adequate ground for sustaining such a metaphysical claim, for the gap has to be bridged between semantics and metaphysics. McKittrick tries to bridge the gap by appealing to epistemology, that is, by considering the question “When do we have good reason to believe that a disposition ascription is true?”. Two (puzzling) assumptions are at work: 1. The idea that concept use tells something about the world too, namely, that «a long entrenched tradition of employing certain concepts with apparent success gives some reason for thinking that those concepts are related to the world in a meaningful way» (McKittrick 2009b, 195); 2. The idea that «if our disposition ascriptions are true, then the dispositions we ascribe

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<sup>81</sup> This example is found in Block (1994, 331).

to things exist, in whatever sense properties exist (as universals, tropes, natural kinds, genuine similarities, etc.)» (McKittrick 2009b, 195).<sup>82</sup>

There might be a sense in which concept use tells us something about the world, but I do not think that such a role consists in telling that things actually and factually exist in the actual world. More than a shift from semantics to metaphysics, it is a shift from the conceptual to the factual. Concept use tells us indeed something about the world in the sense that the way we use a term constitutes also the view on what kind of object a thing is. This is part of the Wittgensteinian anti-essentialism, that is, the critique of the view according to which things have an hidden essence that should be enquired through a kind of analysis which goes deep “into” the object; contrary to such a claim, Wittgenstein recognizes the ontological role of grammar, conceived as the set of rules that govern the use of the concept (PI §§ 371, 373). In this sense, the question “What is  $x$ ?” can be answered by looking at the way the concept of  $x$  is actually used in language. However, this is not a way to state that object  $x$  actually does exist in the world; grammar does not ground existence, for we do not employ terms in virtue of the fact that they refer to existing and concrete things in the world. Concept use is not an evidence for the claim about the existence of objects.

### 3.2 Against Quine’s account

I conclude the chapter with an exposition of two relevant critiques of the Quinian perspective on dispositions (Moline 1972, Over 1976). If McKittrick (2009b) expresses the need for dispositional pluralism against absolutist metaphysical claims, Moline (1972) and Over (1976) argue against what I have called the “simplification fallacy”, for they criticize a narrow notion of disposition which does not properly take into account the specificity of human dispositions.

#### 3.2.1 There is no unique standard

Quine’s account of dispositionality in terms of reference to objects’ inner structure has its own plausibility, for it is a way to deal with the fact that dispositions are not observable. Even intuitively, it is plausible to think that when we say that a particular lamp of sugar  $L$  is soluble, we are saying that  $L$  resembles in some respects – even structurally – other lamps of sugar that actually dissolved in water. Analogy is indeed one of the available sources of the idea of power and it actually plays a role in the ordinary use of dispositional concepts. It is plausible to think that the use of the term “soluble” incorporates reference to the past behaviour of lamps of sugar that actually dissolved, so that we are

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<sup>82</sup> Given those assumptions, McKittrick (2009b, 195-197) then suggests legitimate sources of evidence for the truth of dispositions claims, for the truth of such claims would give us evidence for the existence of dispositions. However, I will not further expound this point because my interest lies in the underlying assumptions.

used to employ that term for a particular lamp of sugar given the past behaviour of other lamps of sugar which are thought to be similar in structure and general features. Of course, this does not necessarily need scientific knowledge about sugar's molecular structure; it might be a general assumption about similarity in structure, without further define structural elements and compositionality. Quine's proposal, as we have seen, does not restrict to such intuitive thoughts for, according to him, canonically admissible references to structure are all that we need to grasp both the force of dispositional terms and the ontological status of dispositions. Quine's interest is ontological and he deals with the question "What is a disposition?" by offering a naturalistic answer. However, Moline (1972, 132) argues that, despite its initial plausibility, «as it applies to human dispositions at least, Quine's proposal is mistaken. [...] From an ontological point of view one cannot correctly regard a human disposition as a subtle neural condition». Moline's argument stands on the observation of the variety of standards that we use to ascribe dispositions.

First of all, let us consider the case of irascibility. Moline compares the term "irascible" with the term "tall": there is neither a universal standard for tallness, nor a universal standard for irascibility. Indeed, saying that someone is tall is to suggest that his height is remarkable relatively to some particular standard which is contextually determined. In a similar way,

to say that a man has an irascible disposition is not to suggest that there exists some-thing which he has. It is to suggest that by *contextually determined standards* [my emphasis], his anger is remarkable as to frequency, threshold of provocation and intensity. (Moline 1972, 132)

In other words, to be irascible is to exceed a certain standard, but such a standard is not universally determined.

Moline discusses a second example: the disposition to dislike anything old. «What counts as such a disposition in Peoria would count as antiquarianism or worse in Peking» (Moline 1972, 132). Again, even in this case the standard governing the disposition ascription varies and, moreover, variety of standards can generate incompatible disposition attributions. It is not implausible to imagine that the same individual *S* can be considered irascible in one context, and still be considered quite or, at least, non-irascible in another society or tribe.

Let us stop for a moment. One could object that this is just because we are supposing a difference of standard which is due to a difference of language; we are talking about different concepts, for we are not comparing different uses belonging to the same language. So, one might state that in our language dispositional concepts do not function in this way for their use is already linked to a stable set of conditions, therefore there is no much context variability or, at least, it is rare to find cases of

incompatible disposition ascriptions. However, first of all, those examples teach us an important feature of *some* of our ordinary dispositional terms: some dispositional terms are *relative* terms. Even if we do not recall cases of cultural clash, some dispositional terms used within one particular language are used with respect to a context-dependent standard. This is a way of rejecting semantic Platonism: we do not actually say that subject *S* is tall because we suppose that *S* fits with the Form of Tallness in virtue of which all tall people are. Someone is not tall *absolutely*; someone is tall *relatively* to a certain established standard. In the same way, someone is not irascible *absolutely*; he is irascible with respect to a certain standard which defines, from within, through an internal logical relation, the concept itself. Secondly, Moline argues that ordinary use of dispositional concepts is incompatible with Quine's *absolutist* suggestion for it shows that, at least with respect to some dispositional terms, Quine's view is mistaken.<sup>83</sup> Let us suppose, as Quine does, that if a subject displays behaviour  $b_1$  he is in neural state  $n_1$  and that when we talk about dispositions we are talking about behaviour. «Given these suppositions, it is impossible for all those who are correctly said to have a disposition of a certain kind to be in the same neural state», for diverse people may be said to have a particular disposition even if the relevant behaviour they display is not similar (Moline 1972, 133).

Suppose a Neapolitan, Giuseppe, is in neural state  $n_1$  and displays behaviour  $b_1$ . Suppose further that by English standards anyone who displays characteristic behaviour  $b_1$  is voluble and effusive. Suppose further that by Neapolitan Standards, anyone who displays behaviour  $b_1$  is taciturn. To be taciturn by English standards, one would have to display behaviour  $b_2$ . It would follow that someone who was taciturn by English standards was necessarily in a neural state different from the neural state of someone who was taciturn by Neapolitan Standard. (Moline 1972, 133)

The point is that there does not seem to be a unique and particular neural state characteristic of all those who are correctly said to have a disposition of a certain kind and, even conceptually, the meaning of some dispositional terms is not characterized by reference to an alleged neural state of the subject. «In calling people irascible we are not functioning as unwitting neurologists or unwitting endocrinologists» (Moline 1972, 137).

Given this, of course it is not denied that every person is in a particular and objective neural state when he is disposed to something, and that there can be an objective neural correlate for whatever disposition can be ascribed to a subject by a certain standard. We could well attribute to subject *S* irascibility and then maintains that when *S* actually displays irascibility, his brain is in a certain state

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<sup>83</sup> This might be a sufficient reason to reject the perspective, if such a perspective is thought to be absolutist, i.e., applicable to all kinds of dispositional terms.

and it is structured in a certain way. However, what is misleading is to maintain that if we can correctly ascribe irascibility to  $S$ , then his brain *must* be in a particular state and it *must* be structured in a certain way. What is denied is that «there is a neural state in virtue of which all who possess an irascible disposition are irascible» (Moline 1972, 133). In other words, given that there can be a neural correlate for every disposition correctly ascribed to a subject, it is denied that there is a single such correlate which is the same in all subjects to whom the disposition can be correctly ascribed.

Two objections might arise at this point: 1. Moline's remarks cover only a small range of dispositional terms; 2. Quine did not actually make the above mistake. Concerning the first, Moline (1972, 132) actually admits that maybe not every dispositional human trait is like irritability, so not every dispositional concept works in this way. However, he thinks that his observation works well at least with human dispositions marked by attributive forms bearing “ble” suffixes, like suggestibility, irascibility, etc and those human dispositions are those which fall most readily under Quine's characterisation. Moreover, even if it is applicable only to a small set of dispositional concepts, it is enough to show a variety of use which undermines any attempt to provide absolutist and uniform semantical theories of dispositions.

Concerning the second objection, Moline concedes that maybe Quine, in stating that a disposition is a subtle neural condition, did not commit the above mistake. However, if he did not, his perspective avoids the mistake only with a very high price; it would be trivial in one of the following two different ways: 1. The view might be taken to mean that when a subject  $S$  has a disposition  $D$ , then  $S$  is in a particular neural state, but such a state is not necessarily the same as the neural state everyone else who is correctly said to have  $D$  is in; 2. The view can be taken to hinge on a different meaning of the word “disposition”, so that anything that is subjected to context variability is not properly a disposition. Now, the first possibility is trivial for, actually, nothing particular is said; it is like «claiming that tallness is a subtle physiological condition, when all one can defend when pressed is that anyone who is tall is of some height or other» (Moline 1972, 134). Still, the second possibility is trivial too, for the view, ruling out the variability in standards, could not explicate part of our everyday disposition talk. Quine would not be able to talk about what we are when we attribute dispositions to people in everyday contexts, but this seems to be the aim of his reflection on dispositional expressions.

Moline's contribution has the merit of showing some features of ordinary use of dispositional terms that have to be taken into account in order to properly characterize the meaning of dispositional concepts; moreover, his perspective preserves the conceptual character of the semantical enquiry which should not be identified and confused with a factual or empirical enquiry. Rather than willing

to state that dispositions are mere convenient fictions, Moline intends to make it clear that, «if they are the convenient fictions they appear to be, human dispositions (though not their causes) are the proper concern not of the neurologist but of the philosopher» (Moline 1972, 137).

### 3.2.2 Capacities and abilities

Human dispositions such as abilities and practical capacities are at the centre of Over's paper on Quine's dispositions. Over (1975) argues that Quine's analysis of dispositional expressions is inappropriate when applied to the expressions "having the capacity" and "being able to", or "having the ability to". Before moving on, some words must be spent on Quine's semantical proposal concerning the analysis of disposition ascriptions.

As we have seen, on the one hand Quine accepts that dispositional expressions are equivalent to certain subjunctive conditionals; the solubility of sugar can be expressed by saying that sugar would dissolve if it were immersed in water (Quine 2013, 204). On the other hand, though, Quine dislikes subjunctive conditionals for they are intensional contexts, and intensional contexts are not admitted in the kind of scientific language that should constitute philosophy according to his naturalistic perspective. As a consequence, Quine dislikes dispositional operators too, especially the operator "-ble" which permits to formulate an illimited number of dispositional terms. Instead of treating subjunctive conditionals as essential elements of any kind of analysis of dispositional expressions, Quine suggests to analyse each dispositional term that we need and to paraphrase it in a way that makes it acceptable in the extensional language.

The special problem of disposition terms is therefore this: must we treat the etymologically dispositional words 'soluble', 'fragile', etc. as simple and irreducible general terms on a par with 'red', or can the sentences that contain them be systematically paraphrased so as to drop those disposition terms in favor of their root verbs? Of course they can if we allow subjunctive conditionals; but the problem is to manage also without that aid – or, what is equivalent, to paraphrase subjunctive conditionals themselves insofar as they can be fairly viewed as expressing dispositions. (Quine 2013, 205)

Quine presents the analysis of dispositional operator "-ble" in section 46 of *Word and Object*. Here, dispositional expressions are translated into Quine's canonical notation, that is, they are transformed into expressions that lack the dispositional operator.

Let us start with the expression "soluble". The operator "-ble" is not admitted within the canonical notation, but the expression can be paraphrased using a relative term – *M* – which should be read as "is similar in molecular structure to".

The expression “ $x$  is soluble” is translated into the expression “ $\exists y (xMy \text{ and } y \text{ dissolves})$ ”: there is at least one  $y$ , such that  $y$  is similar in molecular structure to  $x$  and  $y$  dissolves.

Similarly, the expression “ $x$  is fragile” is translated in the following way: “ $\exists y (xMy \text{ and } y \text{ breaks})$ ”. There is at least one  $y$ , such that  $y$  is similar in molecular structure to  $x$  and  $y$  breaks.

From this translation scheme it follows that, according to Quine, we correctly ascribe disposition  $D$  to an object  $x$  just in case  $x$  is similar in molecular structure to an object that displays and has already displayed  $D$ . Possessing a disposition consists in possessing some particular structural trait and dispositional terms are treated as nouns which refer to a particular physical trait or mechanism.

Each disposition, in my view, is a physical state or mechanism. A name for a specific disposition, e.g. solubility in water, deserves its place in the vocabulary of scientific theory as a name of a particular state or mechanism. In some cases, as in the case nowadays of solubility in water, we understand the physical details and are able to set them forth explicitly in terms of the arrangement and interaction of small bodies. (Quine 1974, 10)

Enough about Quine’s translation scheme. At this point we should wonder whether such analysis could be applied to other types of dispositional operators, for “-ble” is not the only one we actually employ in our language. Over (1975, 334) considers the following operators that we use in our ordinary dispositional talk:<sup>84</sup>

- (1) can
- (2) have the capacity to
- (3) have the ability to
- (4) have the disposition to

Let us consider the following two examples: (5) “Having the capacity to accelerate at  $10 \text{ m sec}^{-2}$ ” and (6) “Having the ability to speak Manx”. First of all, the relative term  $M$  must be accommodated. Since it refers to similarity in some structural and physical state of the object, instead of referring to the molecular structure, in the above cases it should rather refer, respectively, to mechanical structure ( $M$ ) and anatomical structure ( $T$ ). Given this, we get the following translations:

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<sup>84</sup> The distinction made in chapter 1 between canonical dispositions and conventional dispositions applies here too. We could state that Quine’s concern is restrict to conventional dispositions, i.e., simple predicates which include no explicit reference to stimulus conditions and manifestations but that can be paraphrased in a canonical form.

(5) is transformed into “ $\exists y (xMy \text{ and } y \text{ accelerates at } 10 \text{ m sec}^{-2})$ ”. When we say that object  $y$  has the capacity to accelerate at  $10 \text{ m sec}^{-2}$  we are saying that  $y$  is similar in mechanical structure to another object that actually accelerates at  $10 \text{ m sec}^{-2}$ .

(6) is transformed into “ $\exists y (xTy \text{ and } y \text{ speaks Manx})$ ”. When we say that subject  $y$  has the ability to speak Manx, we are saying that  $y$  is similar in anatomical structure to another subject who actually speaks Manx.

However, according to Over this kind of analysis is unsatisfactory for two main reasons:

1. First of all, «we need a very good reason for assuming that something or other [structural traits] *always* [my emphasis] displays all of the dispositions of every object» (Over 1975, 335). For example, we cannot properly state that a brand-new car – a prototype – satisfies (5), for it cannot be compared to other tested cars that are similar in mechanical structure, given its being a prototype. Moreover, surely such a prototype possesses some capacities and these capacities may even be explained in terms of its component parts, but such an explanation is not obvious, for some of its component parts might also be new and untested.

2. Secondly, in several cases, such as fragility, the ascription of the disposition needs the manifestation to be *caused* by the associated stimulus conditions; it is not sufficient to state that a certain manifestation occurs, for it must occur *because* the relevant stimulus conditions did obtain. In other words, «a vase, or any other object, does not demonstrate that it is fragile by simply breaking, or even breaking after it has been struck lightly with, say, a hammer. To display this disposition, a vase must break because it has been struck lightly. [...] Analogously, a sports car does not demonstrate that it has the capacity to accelerate at  $10 \text{ m sec}^{-2}$  if it does not cause itself to move at  $10 \text{ m sec}^{-2}$ » (Over 1975, 335). Over’s objection stands on the assumption that dispositional expressions are intrinsically related to the concept of causation; indeed, he thinks that such a problem does not raise in the case of expressions that have the concept of causation built into them. Properties of dissolving and performing an action, according to him, are of this kind.

A piece of salt does not dissolve in water by merely disappearing in it; one substance dissolves in another only if a specific chemical reaction takes place. Similarly, a man fails to indicate that he has the ability to run at  $10 \text{ m sec}^{-2}$  when he is pulled along by a sports car. (Over 1075, 335)

Consequently, Over thinks that Quine’s analysis can be improved by adding “because” to the translation: “ $\exists y (xMy \text{ and } y \text{ breaks})$ ” must be replaced with “ $\exists y (xMy \text{ and } y \text{ breaks because } y \text{ has been struck likely})$ ”. «It is clearly true that, if an object truly displays a disposition, i.e. its structure is causally involved in the production of the display, then it possesses that disposition at least at the time

of the display»; on the assumption that everything is similar in structure to itself, Quine could claim that this fact followed logically from the above modified translation (Over 1975, 335). However, this is an unfeasible strategy for Quine, since the expression “because” is not part of the canonical notation; it is an intensional sentential operator.

I share Over’s general criticism on the narrowness of Quine’s analysis. However, I do not agree with the assumption of the need of intrinsic causal efficacy of dispositions. First of all, I do not think that this strategy could be an improvement of Quine’s analysis, for it is not an available move, given Quine’s canonical notation. Secondly, I do not think that this strategy could be a good strategy from a theoretical point of view either, for the nexus between dispositions and causes, as we have seen, is not obvious. Stimulus conditions and manifestation are thought to be linked as causes and effects are, but such conditions are not always fixed and specified. Moreover, Over assumes that causation is an element build into the concept of dispositions itself, but this assumption is not obvious either; the notion of cause does play a role in the use of dispositional concepts, but the notion of cause involved is more often that of an explicating element, rather than the element which actively produces and generates something. Let us consider again the case of fragility. It is true that ascription of fragility is made under certain conditions. For example, when we say that a particular glass is fragile, we implicitly assume that it is fragile for it would break if struck with little pressure; we would not be inclined to ascribe fragility to an object which breaks because of a gigantic shock wave. If I ascribe fragility to an object which gets broken or damaged after having received the effect of a gigantic shock way, someone might ask me whether I really know what the word “fragile” means. However, this is a feature of our ordinary use of the concept and no empirical enquiry on the alleged real cause – object of scientific research – of the manifestation event is needed, or even done.

## Part two

# Wittgenstein and dispositions

## Chapter 4

### Justifying the Issue: Wittgenstein, “Kripkenstein” and dispositions

#### 4.1 Justifying the Issue I: what does Wittgenstein have to do with this?

Talking about Wittgenstein and dispositions might surprise the readers, perhaps including Wittgenstein's scholars too. This is because of two main reasons: first of all, Wittgenstein does not explicitly address the problem of dispositions as it has been broadly presented in the previous section. That is, we are not dealing with a Wittgensteinian theme. Secondly, Wittgenstein employs the notion of disposition only once in the *Philosophical Investigations* in order to criticize a kind of dispositional account of knowing and understanding.

If one says that knowing the ABC is a state of the mind, one is thinking of a state of an apparatus of the mind (perhaps a state of the brain) by means of which we explain the manifestations of that knowledge. Such a state is called a disposition. But it is not unobjectionable to speak of a state of the mind here, inasmuch as there would then have to be two different criteria for this: finding out the structure of the apparatus, as distinct from its effects. (Nothing would be more confusing here than to use the words “conscious” and “unconscious” for the contrast between a state of consciousness and a disposition. For this pair of terms covers up a grammatical difference). (PI §149)

In this remark, Wittgenstein treats dispositionalism as a deceptive perspective on understanding. It is important for our purposes to bear in mind that here the term “disposition” is used to refer to a state of a physical apparatus. This apparatus might be the brain, or the mind conceived in terms of inner mechanism. This kind of dispositionalism, hence, consists in giving an account of understanding through the *explanation* of the manifestations of knowing (the ABC, in this case) by appealing to such a physical state. Wittgenstein seems to suggest that this perspective is deceptive because if we try to identify the fact of knowing with a particular state of the mind, then we are implicitly operating with two different criteria: the criteria according to which we identify and describe the structure of such a state, and the criteria according to which we identify and give an account of the effect of such a state.

We will deal with Wittgenstein's own position later on in this section with the help of other critics who engaged with this remark. For now, I would like to point out that Wittgenstein here is addressing his critical stance towards who endorses *all* the following three theses: 1. Knowledge of ABC *is* a disposition of the subject. 2. The disposition of knowing *is a mental state*. 3. The expression “mental

state” might be further explained using the model of the physical state of an apparatus. This disposition is, therefore, the state of a physical apparatus. According to Wittgenstein, this way of seeing things is another instance of philosophical confusion which comes from the mistake of any mentalistic philosophical position according to which the meaning of an expression is identified with hidden mechanisms, that is, mental states or processes which are not directly accessible by the language user.<sup>85</sup> Regarding in particular the phenomenon of knowing, the dispositional account is deceptive because it assumes a characterisation of the meaning of “knowing” in terms of being a certain physical apparatus – the brain, or the mind itself – in a certain state, therefore the word should denote an inner object.

Wittgenstein’s explicit negative attitude toward dispositionalism in PI 149 might stop scholars from further enquiry the philosophical significance of a research about Wittgenstein’s philosophy and dispositions. The present work globally tries to face this intuitive attitude and this section is dedicated to the explications of the relevance of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy for what we have called a “de-naturalized account” of dispositions. Although Wittgenstein criticizes dispositionalism in PI 149, it will be argued that, if we employ the notion of disposition in a de-naturalized way it is possible and desirable to employ such a notion to give an account of Wittgenstein’s characterization of language and understanding as it comes from his remarks on Rule-Following. Moreover, it will be argued that such a notion is traceable in some writings constituting the Wittgensteinian *corpus*, therefore it is a notion which comes from Wittgenstein’s philosophy itself.<sup>86</sup>

However, what has to be clarified forthwith is the use of the expression “de-naturalized” in the present work. It is useful to draw a distinction between a broader use of the expression, and a narrower one: In general, with the expression “de-naturalized” I mean to distinguish the approach I would like to defend from the current naturalized perspective on dispositions which is the object of section one of the present work. “De-naturalized”, therefore, is used in opposition to “naturalized”. Moving now to the narrower meaning, the expression refers to the possibility to use the notion of disposition to give an account of the human tendency to act and react in such and such a way after a long period of training, or education, without giving a deterministic and immediate sense to the relation between stimulus and response or, in other words, without using such a relation in a behaviouristic sense.

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<sup>85</sup> Thesis number one, indeed, is given in response to a semantic question, that is, to the question about the meaning of the expression “knowing the ABC”. In this respect, Wittgenstein’s critique is addressed not only to the thesis itself but mostly to the assumption according to which such a thesis would be a sound response to the meaning question.

<sup>86</sup> This means that it is not a notion which is arbitrarily construed outside Wittgenstein’s philosophy and then applied to his remarks but, on the contrary, it is gradually construed within Wittgenstein’s remarks and insights. This particular characterisation of dispositions comes from Wittgenstein’s later philosophy and it could then be sensibly applied to it.

Dispositions, in this sense, might be learned and acquired. The term “disposition”, therefore, would not merely denote a particular – still metaphysically mysterious – property or state of a given object, but it would admit an important use according to which dispositions are best characterized in terms of abilities, or mastery of techniques. Such a notion fits best with any philosophical attempt to give an account of specifically human practices and rule-governed behaviour. This is because a de-naturalized perspective on dispositions aims overall to defend a notion of human disposition which is natural, as it is part of an embedded and absorbed system, but still normative, as it is not reducible to mere innate and biologically defined capacities.

In what follows I will try to justify the relevance of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy for a de-naturalized account of dispositions by presenting a dispositional account which is not affected by Wittgenstein’s critical remarks in PI §149. It will be shown that it is possible to trace a dispositional account which does not rest upon the three theses cited above: the notion of disposition might be used to give an account of our understanding of meanings and our use of linguistic expressions in accordance with their rules of usage (1) without using dispositions to *determine* the meaning of the term “understanding” and “meaning”, (2) without assuming the ontological autonomy of the dispositional entity, hence, (3) without identifying dispositions with mysterious properties of objects or individuals which should describe a particular state of the object or individual in question.

#### 4.1.1 Setting the path: two lines of justification

Gary Kemp (2014) ascribes to Wittgenstein a kind of linguistic naturalism according to which an array of basic *linguistic dispositions* would stand at the basis of our linguistic competence. The author employs Quine’s notion of linguistic disposition because he overall aims to reconcile Quine’s and Wittgenstein’s ideas, against the view endorsed by Hacker (1996) and Canfield (1996).<sup>87</sup> Quine defines the linguistic disposition as the disposition to assent to or dissent from a given sentence and the disposition is further explained as a state of the nervous system which takes part in a causal structure. He then distinguishes between linguistic dispositions with respect to observational sentences and the ones with respect to theoretical sentences. The notion of linguistic disposition replaces the problematic notion of reference as the root of the capacity for language. This alleged linguistic naturalism would be one of the serious similarities between the two philosophers, together with the replacement of the orthodox view of language as resting on reference.

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<sup>87</sup> These authors argue for a fundamental divide between Wittgenstein and Quine. According to Canfield, Quine’s account of use in terms of dispositions to assent or dissent to observation sentences cuts them off from other language games and this is something that Wittgenstein would not accept. Hacker states that Wittgenstein keeps insisting on something that Quine rejects, that is, the divide between factual sentences and grammatical sentences.

Quine's talk of linguistic dispositions is indeed very close to Wittgenstein's talk of how in the end one must "act blindly"- of how one "goes on", of what one is disposed to *do*. I shall even go so far as to characterise them both as linguistic naturalists: Both figures reject the picture of language as resting on reference, or as explained by grasp pf rules pf meaning, and both reject the first-person position as basic. (Kemp 2014, 2)

I would like to emphasise three aspects of Kemp's reading which play a relevant role for our present purpose: 1. The dispositional reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy. 2. The notion of fact which comes from such a reading. 3. The notion of disposition which is assumed. First of all, Kemp's dispositional reading is based on a particular interpretation of Wittgenstein's remarks on Rule-following which «does share crucial features of those of such figures as McDowell, Diamond, McGinn, Long, Child and especially Fogelin» (Kemp 2014, 2-3). All these authors share an important interpretative point: they all reject Kripke's interpretation of the Rule-following considerations. According to the author, the Rule-following problem comes to play when we attempt to devise a genuine explanatory theory by assuming the following three things: 1. Truth-deflationism (PI 136) of declarative sentences, that is, the idea that saying that a declarative sentence has truth conditions does not add anything to merely saying that it is a declarative sentence. 2. Restriction of the role of the notion of meaning in understanding language and language games in favour of a detailed observation of the variety of language uses which are interwoven with practices (PI 5). 3. Criticism of the denotative account of language, based on the notion of reference. Given these three assumptions, the Rule-following problem is conceived by Kemp as a problem about the interpretation of a given rule in a fresh case. «Any statement of a rule can be variously interpreted consistently with a given human being's experience» (Kemp 2014, 4). Therefore, what is needed is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation (PI 201).<sup>88</sup> Kemp interprets Wittgenstein's alternative to the interpretative account as the idea that

as human beings, we just do, as a matter of contingent fact, almost always go on in ways that we jointly recognise as correct. Thus at the fundamental level we "act blindly" (PI 219), that is, without being guided by further rules. (Kemp 2014, 4)

The key expression, here, is "fundamental level". The alternative account is then construed in naturalistic terms as the set of dispositions that human beings share in virtue of the fact that they are human beings, that is, they share a specific natural history. The Rule-following problem, hence, can be resolved by realizing that what we need are not "super-facts", but rather facts which belong to

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<sup>88</sup> This is a point extensively discussed by Fogelin (2009).

human's natural history and which are matter for natural scientists, historians and anthropologists to enquire.<sup>89</sup> Linguistic dispositions, therefore, would be contingent or empirical facts essentially different from the metaphysical facts required by Kripke (1982). Finally, Kemp employs a notion of disposition which is taken from Quine's works and which is essentially non-normative. This characterisation is presupposed in the possible objection, according to which «a mere disposition cannot distinguish between a person who operates with the right rule but makes certain mistakes, and a person whose behaviour is identical to the first but operates correctly with a different rule» (Kemp 2014, 4). This is a reformulation of Kripke's argument against dispositionalism and it is partly endorsed by Kemp; he does admit that meaning is normative, whereas dispositions are not. He then states that the required normative character of language and meaning might be provided by the linguistic community: the activity of the community is not metaphysically necessary for existence of language, however, «the background of our community-wide language games or “grammar” must be in place for the particular moves to have the full significance they in fact have» (Kemp 2014, 5).

The label “linguistic naturalism” is also used by Pears (1971) in order to give an account of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, but such a philosophical move is different from Kemp's. For our present purposes I shall focus on two points: 1. Pears' notion of linguistic naturalism. 2. The notion of fact involved in his reading. Pears interprets the difference between Wittgenstein's early philosophy and the later one in the light of the broader philosophical issue concerning the difficulty of devising the study of language without construing a scientific theory of language or, even better, without construing any theory at all. The difficulty is that «any study of language, whether it be philosophical or scientific, will certainly involve the noting of facts, and will probably involve the construction of theories» (Pears 1971, 36). According to Pears, at the time of writing the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein still believed that it was possible to construe a good philosophical theory of language, but he later abandoned such a belief and the question about the difference between philosophy and science was reopened in a different fashion. Pears claims, overall, that the point of discontinuity between Wittgenstein's early philosophy and the later one should be traced in the move to anthropocentrism: whereas the *Tractatus* still embodies a kind of objectivism, that is, the belief that

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<sup>89</sup> With this expression I am alluding to what Wittgenstein calls “Philosophical Superlatives”: Super-order and super-concept (PI 92), super-likeness (PI 389), super-expression (PI 192). Within the context of Rule-following, a “super-fact” is what an act of meaning should be according to the account that Wittgenstein criticizes. An act of meaning is a “super-fact” because, according to this perspective, when I grasp the meaning of a word, or when I grasp a rule, «“the steps are really already taken, even before I take them in writing or orally or in thought”. And it seemed as if they were in some unique way predetermined, anticipated - as only the act of meaning can anticipate reality» (PI 188). This account entails the idea that there must be such a “super-fact” at the basis of Rule-following, and this is this very same idea that Pears, together with Wittgenstein, refutes.

there are independent, objective points of support outside human thought and speech, the later doctrine is characterized, on the contrary, by the belief that «there is nothing but the facts about the relevant linguistic practice» (Pears 1971, 171). There are no independent points of support outside human practices; they alone embody meaning and necessity, and their stability comes from rules. Such a perspective is called by Pears “linguistic naturalism” and it is presented using an analogy with Hume’s psychological naturalism. Hume claimed that causal inference has no objective external justification and that its justification is that it is a natural habit of thought; Wittgenstein, in a similar manner, denies that there is any possibility to justify any kind of discourse by appealing to anything outside the relevant facts about language. These facts provide all the justification that is needed (Pears 1971, 172-173).

Linguistic naturalism: there are these forms of human life and thought, and, since they have no independent basis outside themselves, a request for their justification can be met only by a careful description of the language in which they find expression, and of its place in our lives. (Pears 1971, 35)

Pears’ linguistic naturalism, hence, is the perspective according to which there are only *facts* regarding linguistic practices which do not require further objective justification outside themselves. These facts, in turn, are simply the ways people think and speak. Pears’ notion of fact is different from Kemp’s: the main difference lies in a different characterization of the naturalistic fashion of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. Whereas Kemp characterises linguistic naturalism as an ingredient of a kind of scientific naturalism, Pears’ talk about linguistic naturalism still admits Wittgenstein’s «resistance to the thrust of science, which, he felt, must not be allowed to encroach on other modes of thought» (Pears 1971, 173-174).<sup>90</sup> Kemp’s facts are facts regarding human’s biology. Pears’ facts are modes of speaking and acting, that is, the way people actually behave and speak. They are facts of ordinary linguistic practices. However, both notions of fact share two important features: 1. They are different from the one employed by Kripke (1982). 2. Facts do not play a metaphysical justificatory role of language and language use. If they ever justify, the kind of justification is different: it is external and biological in Kemp’s work, and it is internal and anthropological in Pears’ work.

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<sup>90</sup> Pears expresses this point in terms of the difference between “destructive positivism” and “subtle positivism”. It is a difference which stands on the different way of reading the expression “there is nothing but the facts”. The former denies the significance of all discourse that is not factual. The latter claims that all kinds of discourse are significant but denies that we can justify them by appealing to something outside the relevant facts about language. (Pears 1971, 172-173).

I have briefly sketched the comparison between Kemp's and Pears' interpretations of Wittgenstein's later philosophy because this scenario contains the two main lines of justification of the topic of the present work:

1. The debate generated by Kripke's *Wittgenstein on rules and private language*;
2. Dispositional readings of Wittgenstein's later philosophy.

The two lines are interrelated given that (1) dispositional readings are mainly based on particular interpretations of Wittgenstein's remarks on Rule-following and the concept of understanding, therefore critics can't refrain from taking into account Kripke's own interpretation of the Rule-following remarks. Moreover (2) Kripke's work generated a new interest in dispositions and the normativity of meaning. In conclusion, in order to acknowledge the plausibility of a philosophical research about Wittgenstein and dispositions we should take into account the various dispositional readings offered by the critics, together with the renewed interest on dispositions in the form presented by Kripke (1982), that is, in the context of the philosophical issue of the normativity of meaning. Before dealing with the dispositional elements of Wittgenstein's philosophy, then, we should spend more than few words about "Kripkenstein".

#### **4.2 Justifying the Issue II: starting from "Kripkenstein"**

"Kripkenstein" is Wittgenstein seen from Kripke's exegetical glasses. In the book *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private language*, Kripke engages with Wittgenstein's paragraphs on the Rule-following problem and private language argument in the *Philosophical Investigations*. On the one hand, in the preface he explicitly states that «the primary purpose of this book is the presentation of a problem and an argument, not its critical evaluation» therefore «if the work has a main thesis on its own, it is that Wittgenstein's sceptical problem and argument are important, deserving of serious consideration» (Kripke 1982, ix). On the other hand, in the first chapter, Kripke admits that «the present paper should be thought of as expounding neither 'Wittgenstein's argument' nor 'Kripke's': rather Wittgenstein's argument as it struck Kripke, as it presented a problem for him» (Kripke 1982, 5). There are two inaccuracies in this declaration of intent: (1) the presentation of the argument is not neutral. Saying that the work expounds Wittgenstein's argument as it struck the author assumes the idea that such an argument is indeed present. However, the first passage quoted above already contains a strong critical thesis. Talking about Wittgenstein's problem as a sceptical one is committing oneself to a critical evaluation, given that Wittgenstein never defined his own views as sceptical. (2) Kripke's presentation of the argument is not entirely independent from his own views on meaning

and understanding. Indeed, the book might be read on two different levels: the first level is exegetical, i.e., Kripke's own interpretation of Wittgenstein's remarks on rules, understanding and private language. The second level is, we might say, more theoretical, that is, it is about Kripke's own views on meaning and understanding. As we shall see, Kripke's treatment of the various responses to the sceptical challenge presupposes a certain conception of meaning and language use.

The view presented above finds further evidence if we look at the philosophical debate that Kripke's work has generated after its publication. The debate is twofold: 1. There is the exegetical issue about the correct interpretation of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Wittgensteinian scholars have written many articles trying to defend or criticize Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein's treatment of the Rule-following problem.<sup>91</sup> 2. There is the theoretical issue about the normativity of meaning, that is, Kripke's own views. Kripke's interpretation presupposes the thesis according to which meaning is essentially normative. Indeed, this is one of the elements that, according to him, would undermine any attempt to give dispositional analysis of meaning and understanding, given that dispositions are thought to be essentially non normative. Such an issue is clearly independent of whether such views could be sensibly ascribed to Wittgenstein and it constitutes an important object of research in its own.<sup>92</sup> If we embrace and assume the distinction suggested above between the philological import and the theoretical import of Kripke's book we could then trace two main reasons of the great importance of such a work both for the Wittgensteinian studies and for the purposes of the present work.<sup>93</sup> (1) First, from a theoretical point of view, Kripke's interpretation introduced a particular type of reading of the Rule-following problem, that is, "the communitarian view". Such a view has been adopted – with some modifications – by other authors and it is generally opposed to "the individualist view" endorsed by Baker and Hacker (Baker; Hacker 1990). (2) Second, from a more historiographical point of view, Kripke's work not only generated a philosophical debate that is still thriving nowadays, but it *renewed* the debate itself. The work generated a *renewed* interest in Wittgenstein's philosophy and the more general issue of the normativity of meaning and dispositions. I emphasise the word "renewed" because Kripke's work really changed the terms of the research on those topics: normativity is not thought in terms of conventions – conventional use of language – but

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<sup>91</sup> Kripke's interpretation is defended by Kusch (2006). A similar interpretation of the Rule-following problem was actually presented by Fogelin in his first book *Wittgenstein* (Fogelin 1976), although he later changed his mind on this topic. Critiques of the kripkean reading are offered by Baker; Hacker (1984), Goldfarb (1985), McDowell (1984), Wright (1984) and, more recently, Fogelin (2009) and McGinn (2010).

<sup>92</sup> Similarly, Kusch (2006, xiii) defines Kripke's work both as «an outline of a particular take on meaning and content» and as «an interpretation of Wittgenstein». The aim of his book is to defend Kripke's work on both sides.

<sup>93</sup> Stern (2006, 2) considers Kripke's book «the most influential and widely discussed» work on Wittgenstein since the 1980s.

it is approached through the notions of correctness conditions and rule-guidance.<sup>94</sup> Dispositions are here approached in the context of conceptual clarification of the notions of meaning and understanding. The notion of disposition is therefore applied to human behaviour and, in particular, to linguistic behaviour. In what follows, I will first expound Kripke's reading of the Rule-following problem. Secondly, I will focus on Kripke's treatment of dispositionalism and semantic normativity and I will try to sketch a map of the various responses to such a treatment given by the critics.<sup>95</sup>

#### 4.2.1 Adding, “quadding” and other sceptical urges

Kripke's main exegetical move is to ascribe to Wittgenstein a kind of philosophical scepticism. According to Kripke, Wittgenstein presents a “sceptical paradox” concerning the notion of rule in the paragraph 201 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, he endorses the paradox and he then tries to give a “sceptical solution” to this problem. «The ‘paradox’ is perhaps the central problem of the *Philosophical Investigations*. [...] It may be regarded as a new form of philosophical scepticism» (Kripke 1982, 7). I construe Kripke's interpretation using a five- part structure: (1) the scenario, which must be compared to Wittgenstein's scenario (PI §§143, 185); (2) the sceptical challenge; (3) the sceptical paradox, which must be compared to PI §201; (4) the sceptical conclusion and (5) the sceptical solution.<sup>96</sup>

(1) Suppose that you have to calculate a specific calculation, i.e., 40+25. You answer “65” to the previous arithmetical question, which is indeed the correct result. Suppose now that someone asks you the following question: “Have you been taught to calculate *that specific* calculus, namely,

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<sup>94</sup> I'm referring to the thesis according to which language is essentially conventional, which goes back to Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* and which has been recently called a platitude (Lewis 1969). Kripke's treatment of the normativity problem rests on the idea that meaning is normative in a wider sense, without wondering whether such normativity should be understood in terms of conventions or not.

<sup>95</sup> For the present purposes, I need to focus on Kripke's interpretation of the paradox presented in PI §201 and the debate that his reading has generated. For this reason, I will engage with those aspects of the book that play an important role in the debate. I will then mainly refer to chapters 1 and 2 of Kripke's work, leaving aside his own interpretation of the private language argument, and I will engage with the dispositional response to the sceptic, leaving aside other responses that are examined in the text.

<sup>96</sup> This five-part structure differs slightly from Kush's reconstruction (Kush 2006): he rather talks about sceptical challenge, sceptical argument, sceptical conclusion, sceptical paradox and sceptical solution. I prefer using the five-part structure suggested above for the following reasons: 1. Starting from the scenario is important because it helps understanding the peculiarity of the kripkean sceptical challenge. Kripke's scenario is already different from Wittgenstein's scenario introduced in PI §185. While Wittgenstein often uses the expression “following a rule” to designate the main object of his enquiry, Kripke employs- rather interchangeably- the expressions “following a rule”, “intending a rule”, “grasping a rule”, which do not seem to be equivalent in Wittgenstein's remarks. 2. I put the sceptical conclusion after the sceptical paradox because the conclusion is read as a generalization of the consequences of the sceptical paradox. While the sceptical paradox is formulated relatively the application of addition function to a fresh new case, the sceptical conclusion involves the general notion of meaning and the possibility of human speaking and communication. 3. The section about the sceptical argument Is here included in the section on the sceptical challenge and it is about the various attempts to give a direct response to the sceptic's demand.

‘40+25’?”. You might think for a second about maths lessons at school and then you will probably answer in this way: “No, I have not. The teacher has not taught me how to calculate *that specific* calculation. He has taught me how to calculate sums. He has taught me the addition function”. Someone might object that maybe the student has actually calculated “40+25” while learning the addition function with the teacher, that is, while doing exercises. We can well concede this, but still maintain that there can always be a specific calculus that a student is able to solve even if he has never done it before, given that numbers are infinite and we cannot actually engage with all the possible sums in our life.<sup>97</sup> The core of the Rule-following problem is the philosophical question about the normative force of a general rule which is applied to potentially infinite particular cases even if the particular case is not explicitly mentioned in the expression of the rule. How can the rule tell me what to do in a *fresh new case* of application? How can the rule «teach me what I have to do at *this point*?» (PI §198). That is the question that Wittgenstein implicitly raises already in PI 185, where the case of the Wayward Child is presented. Wittgenstein is dealing with a language game in which «A gives an order, B has to write down a series of signs according to a certain formation rule» (PI §143). Let us suppose that a pupil has been taught to operate with the series of natural numbers in the decimal system and, according to the usual criteria, we can say that the pupil has mastered the series of natural numbers. Next, we teach him to write down series of natural numbers in response to an order of the form “+n”, let’s say, “+2”, so at the order “+2” he writes down 0, 2, 4, 6, etc. Let us suppose, moreover, that the pupil has done several exercises but his understanding has been tested up to 1000. When we ask the pupil to continue the series beyond 1000, that is, we ask him to continue to follow the rule in a new case never encountered before during the training, he writes 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012 without acknowledging to be mistaken.

We say to him, “Look what you’re doing!” He doesn’t understand. We say, “You should have added two: look how you began the series!” He answers, “Yes, isn’t it right? I thought that was how I had to do it.” – Or suppose he pointed to the series and said, “But I did go on in the same way”. It would now be no use to say, “But can’t you see...?” and go over the old explanations and examples for him again. In such a case, we might perhaps say: this person finds it natural, once given our explanations, to understand our order as we would understand the order “Add 2 up to 1000, 4 up to 2000, 6 up to 3000, and so on”. This case would have similarities to that in which it

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<sup>97</sup> «So you mean that you know the application of the rule of the series quite apart from remembering actual applications to particular numbers. And you’ll perhaps say: “Of course! For the series is infinite, and the bit of it that I could develop finite.”» (PI §147).

comes naturally to a person to react to the gesture of pointing with the hand by looking in the direction from fingertip to wrist, rather than from wrist to fingertip. (PI §185)

How can we convince the pupil that we are right and he is wrong? How can we demonstrate to him that his understanding of the rule is mistaken? Wittgenstein is raising here a metaphysical question, not an epistemological one: is there *anything* that grounds the rule and that determines which actions are in accordance with the rule *before* the rule is actually followed? Is there anything metaphysically stable – a *fact* – to which we can rely on in order to undermine the pupil's irremovable claims? The case of the Wayward Child helps unpacking what is «the phenomenology of understanding for us» (Ebbs, 2017), that is, the natural temptation to think that the correct application of the rule is in some sense predetermined and anticipated in the expression of the rule. Consequently, according to such a view, when we grasp the rule, when we *understand* the rule, we grasp a series of instructions in a compacted format. Kripke's scenario, however, is slightly different. Like Wittgenstein, Kripke develops the problem with respect to a mathematical example and he highlights the fact that the philosophical issue about the grasping of a rule is that, although we have computed only «finitely many sums in the past», the rule determines my answer «for indefinitely many new sums that I have never previously considered» (Kripke 1982, 7). However, he then goes on by characterizing the notion of "grasping a rule" – in this case, the addition function – in terms of *meaning* something with a particular sign, having *intentions* regarding the function.<sup>98</sup> «My past intentions regarding addition determine a unique answer for indefinitely many new cases in the future» (Kripke 1982, 8). Now,

Let me suppose, for example, that '68+57' is a computation that I have never performed before. [...] I perform the computation, obtaining, of course, the answer '125'. I am confident, perhaps after checking my work, that '125' is the correct answer. It is correct both in the *arithmetical sense* [emphasis added] that 125 is the sum of 68 and 57, and in the *metalinguistic sense* [emphasis added] that 'plus', as I intended to use that word in the past, denoted a function which, when applied to the numbers I called '68' and '57', yields the value 125. Now suppose I encounter a bizarre sceptic. This sceptic questions my certainty about my answer, in what I just called the

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<sup>98</sup> Kripke's notion of intentionality must not be confused with Brentano's notion. Brentano defines intentionality as the object towards which every mental phenomenon is directed. «Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity». (Brentano 1973, 68). Kripke employs the notion of intentionality to refer to the linguistic intentions of the language user, that is, the subject's intentions to use the term in accordance with its meaning. In this respect, the notion of intentionality involved is captured by the expression "meaning something by a sign". Given a subject *S* and a sign *X*, *S* means *y* by *X* when *S* has linguistic intentions regarding *y* and these intentions determine *S*'s usage of *X*.

'metalinguistic' sense. Perhaps, he suggests, as I used the term 'plus' in the past, the answer I intended for '68+57' should have been '5'! (Kripke 1982, 8)

Since all the sums that I have done in the past involved numbers smaller than 57, maybe in the past I used the signs "+" and "plus" to denote a function which Kripke calls "quus", symbolised by the sign " $\oplus$ " and defined as such:

$$\begin{aligned} x \oplus y &= x + y, \text{ if } x, y < 57 \\ &= 5 \text{ otherwise} \end{aligned}$$

The "quus" function is identical to the addition function up to numbers smaller than 57. Given this, how can we say that this is not the function I *meant* by "+" in the past? After all, the computation "68+57" is the first computation I do with numbers bigger than 57, therefore it is the first case encountered in which the two functions actually differ.<sup>99</sup> In order to acknowledge the difference with Wittgenstein's scenario, it is important to bear in mind Kripke's distinction between the *arithmetical sense* and the *metalinguistic sense*: the sceptic does not challenge the arithmetical competence, nor he wants to undermine the validity of arithmetic; he rather raises doubts about our certainty in the metalinguistic sense, that is, the fact that I *now* mean with "+" what I meant in the past, in all the other cases of calculations with numbers smaller than 57. Such a doubt is legitimate, given that a certain characterization of understanding a rule is here assumed, that is, the idea that in a fresh new case I know what to do because I *intend* the rule as I *intended* it in the past; I justify my present intention regarding the function at issue by appealing to my past intentions regarding the same function. Therefore, given such a view, if in the past with the sign "+" I actually meant "quus" and not "plus" then, coherently with the past practice, I should now answer "5" instead of "125", otherwise I would have changed the use of the term, hence its meaning. Here we reach the core of the sceptical challenge.

(2) The sceptic is admitting the possibility of a metalinguistic mistake according to which I am mistaken in thinking that in the present case I am acting in accordance with my previous linguistic intentions. He asks the interlocutor to give evidence that he really meant "plus" and not "quus" in making calculations, assuming that he never happened to make calculations with numbers smaller

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<sup>99</sup> Kripke's scenario is nearer to the formulation of the problem of "grue" given by Goodman (1983) in order to illustrate a problem with inductive predictions. It is also called "The grue paradox". The predicate "grue" applies to all things examined before some designated future time  $t$  just in case they are green but to other things observed at or after  $t$  just in case they are blue. The problem is that our present observations of, let say, green grass seem to provide equal support for hypotheses that grass is green and that grass is grue.

than 57, but the challenge consists in denying that such an evidence could be given. Is there a *fact* that determines my past and present meaning something with a sign rather than something else?<sup>100</sup> This alleged fact has two functions: (1) it should determine what is meant by a particular sign; (2) it should justify a particular course of action at the present time, that is, it should tell the subject to act in a certain way rather than another. I call the first function the “foundational requirement” and I call the second function the “normative, or justificatory” requirement.

The challenge posed by the sceptic takes two forms. First, he questions whether there is any fact that I meant plus, not quus, that will answer his sceptical challenge. Second, he questions whether I have any reason to be so confident that now I should answer ‘125’ rather than ‘5’. (Kripke 1982, 11)

The sceptic doubts whether any instructions I gave myself in the past compel (or justify) the answer ‘125’ rather than ‘5’. He puts the challenge in terms of a sceptical hypotheses about a change in my usage. (Kripke 1982, 13)

The sceptical challenge is then slightly different from Wittgenstein’s formulation of the problem in PI 185, although they share the metaphysical character of the question. The problem is not, at least at this point, the normative force of a general rule in a fresh new case never encountered before, but rather the continuity of the usage of a sign, further defined as the present intention to use the sign in a certain way, i.e., in accordance with the previous linguistic intentions regarding the same sign. In order to win the sceptical challenge, I should find the fact that constituted my meaning “plus” with “+” rather than “quus” in the past and that consequently would justify my response “125” to the present query. However, the sceptic casts doubt exactly on the possibility to find such a fact.

(3) As we have seen, in order to answer to the sceptical challenge, we should find a fact of the matter in virtue of which a subject means something by a sign – in this case – a fact of the matter in virtue of which a subject means addition by “+”. Kripke firstly examines six attempts to give a *direct* response to the sceptic, that is, attempts to find a candidate for such a fact which could observe both the “foundational requirement” and the “normative, or justificatory requirement”: The “algorithm response” (AR), the “simple dispositional response” (SDR), the “*Ceteris paribus* dispositional response” (CDR), the “functionalist response” (FR), or “argument of the machine”, the “simplicity

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<sup>100</sup> The sceptical challenge could be also expressed as a problem of *what* gives attributions of meanings their significance, that is, in virtue of *what* an ascription of meaning such as “John means addition by ‘+’” is true or false. Kusch (2006, 2) rightly observes that in Kripke’s work the ascription might be of a meaning, as in the previous example, a concept (“James has grasped the concept of addition”), and a rule (“James follows the rule for addition”). He then calls all three types “meaning sentences”.

response" (SR), and the "experiential response" (ER). All these responses share the acceptance of the sceptical challenge, that is, they assume the legitimacy of the sceptical doubt and the need of such a metaphysical fact in order to ground meaningful language use. Globally, the responses can be divided into two groups: the mentalistic responses (AR, SR, ER) and the behaviouristic ones (SDR, CDR, FR). The former tries to find the grounding fact in the mental life of the subject, while the latter tries to find the fact by looking at the overt behaviour of the subject. I will engage with the dispositional response in the next paragraph, where we will also briefly comment the mentalistic responses. In this section it is sufficient to point out that, according to Kripke, all these responses fail: no fact of the matter can be given to answer the sceptical challenge. Therefore, the sceptic is right in asserting that there is no fact of the matter – either physical or mental – that can constitute the state of meaning plus rather than "quus" by the sign "+".

This, then, is the sceptical paradox. When I respond in one way rather than another to such a problem as '68+57', I can have no justification for one response rather than another. Since the sceptic who supposes that I meant quus cannot be answered, there is no fact about me that distinguishes between my meaning plus and my meaning quus. Indeed, there is no fact about me that distinguishes between my meaning a definite function by 'plus' (which determines my responses in new cases) and my meaning nothing at all. (Kripke 1982, 21)

The sceptic asserts both that there is no fact that determines my meaning something with a sign rather than something else ("foundational requirement") and that, in virtue of this, there is no fact that forces me to answer in one way rather than another ("normative, justificatory requirement"), so «when I answered '125' to the problem '68+57', my answer was an unjustified leap in the dark; my past mental history is equally compatible with the hypothesis that I meant quus, and therefore should have said '5'» (Kripke 1982, 15). This is how Kripke reconstructs what he thinks Wittgenstein is saying in PI 201, where he writes that «no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule», and «if every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule, then it can also be brought into conflict with it», therefore «there would be neither accord nor conflict here».

There can be no such thing as meaning anything by any word. Each new application we make is a leap in the dark; any present intention could be interpreted so as to accord with anything we may choose to do. So there can be neither accord, nor conflict. This is what Wittgenstein said in §201. (Kripke 1981, 55)

(4) If there is no fact of the matter that determines what function I meant in the past and what function I mean in the present, then the same concepts of meaning and intending lose their sense. This is what I call "The sceptical conclusion" which is a kind of "tragic" extension and generalisation of the sceptical paradox. Since Kripke construes the sceptical paradox as a problem concerning the use of a particular sign in order to mean something, he then leads Wittgenstein to conclude a radical thesis about the impossibility of meaningful discourse. There are no "facts of meaning", neither in the mind, nor in the overt behaviour. For every word of language, we can find an alternative interpretation of what I meant with that word which is compatible both to my past usage and to any explicit instructions I gave to myself.

If there was no such thing as my meaning plus rather than quus in the past, neither can there be any such thing in the present. When I initially presented the paradox, we perforce used language, taking present meanings for granted. Now we see, as we expected, that this provisional concession was indeed fictive. There can be no facts as to what I mean by 'plus', or any other word at any time. (Kripke 1982, 21)

(5) The sceptical conclusion is «insane and intolerable» (Kripke 1982, 60). According to Kripke, Wittgenstein does not leave us with the sceptical problem but he tries to solve it. Wittgenstein's solution would be not a direct response to the sceptic, but a sceptical solution. The sceptical solution consists in conceding the sceptic that he is right. His challenge cannot be answered. However, the point is that the practice at issue, that is, Rule-following, does not need the kind of justification required by the sceptic. While a direct response to the sceptic tries to find the alleged foundational and justificatory fact, the sceptical response consists in showing that such a metaphysical fact is not needed. For this reason, Kripke states that Wittgenstein's scepticism has many similarities with Hume's scepticism on causality and induction.<sup>101</sup>

Wittgenstein also states a sceptical paradox. Like Hume, he accepts his own sceptical argument and offers a 'sceptical solution' to overcome the appearance of paradox. (Kripke 1982, 68)

It is important to bear in mind that Kripke's interpretation presupposes that Wittgenstein actually accepts and endorses the sceptical paradox. This is why he then tries to give a solution. Wittgenstein admits that there is no fact of the matter, as characterized by the sceptic, that constitutes my meaning

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<sup>101</sup> This is another element that confirms the fact that Kripke construes the Rule-Following problem in terms of past and present intentions. Wittgenstein and Hume can be compared because they both express a sceptical paradox which is grounded on the doubt about a certain nexus between past and present. «Wittgenstein questions the nexus between past 'intentions' or 'meanings' and present practice. [...] Hume questions [...] the causal nexus whereby a past event necessitates a future one, and the inductive inferential nexus from the past to the future» (Kripke 1982, 62).

addition by “plus”, but he then tries to show that such a fact is not needed in order to justify the Rule-following practice.<sup>102</sup> Such a practice, is a *social* practice: what is needed is actual *communitarian agreement* whereby some behaviours are stigmatized as mistakes and others are accepted as the correct ones. The key concept is that of the individual’s *conformity* to the behaviour of the members of the community in which he is embedded. A meaning statement like “*X* means plus by ‘+’” is justified if and only if *X*’s responses to the pertinent questions mostly correspond to the responses that are generally given by the other members of the community in which *X* has been raised. Similarly, we are justified in stating that *X* has correctly applied the addition function to a couple of numbers if and only if the result given by *X* corresponds to the result which is accepted and recognized by the community. This is Kripke’s much discussed “Community view” of Rule-Following. The main consequence of this perspective is that Kripke reads Wittgenstein’s private language argument as a consequence of the Rule-following considerations: if using language entails following rules, and if following rules entails being a member of the community, then the concept of a private language is inconsistent because it would rule out any reference to the individual’s membership to a wider community.<sup>103</sup> In other words, since the notion of correctness is construed by Kripke in terms of conformity to the behaviours of the other members of the community, then it would be nonsensical to state that an isolated individual would have applied correctly a rule in giving a certain result.<sup>104</sup>

#### **4.2.2 Kripke vs dispositionalism**

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<sup>102</sup> Since the sceptical challenge can be expressed also as a semantic problem concerning “meaning expressions” (see note n. 15), the sceptical solution involves a different account of meaning. If we look for the meaning of a sentence like «John means addition by “+”», we should not look for the truth condition of the sentence, that is for a state of affair to hold for it to be true, because no state of affairs constitutes the meaning of the sentence. In other words, if there is no fact of the matter, no state of affairs which ground your meaning so and so, then we cannot rely on a concept of meaning as truth conditions. One possibility is to use Dummett’s notion of assertibility-conditions which involve actual community agreement. According to Kripke, this agreement legitimizes the assertion that I meant addition by ‘plus’ despite there having been no fact of the matter.

<sup>103</sup> I agree with Goldfarb when he states that Kripke’s notion of private language is a «language the constitution of which depends on properties of each speaker taken in isolation», therefore we should rather employ the expression “solitary language” (Goldfarb 1985, 480). I think that Kripke’s notion of privateness differs from the characterization given by Wittgenstein in PI §242.

<sup>104</sup> The “community view”, then, holds that on Wittgenstein’s account of things a lifelong Crusoe could not have language and could not follow rules. According to Kripke, if we think of Robinson Crusoe as following rules, we are applying our Rule-following criteria to him, that is, we are taking him into our community. Kripke reads Wittgenstein’s private language argument as stating that we cannot think of an individual *considered in isolation* to follow rules, whether or not he is actually *physically isolated*, like Crusoe on the island. Against this perspective, Baker and Hacker have suggested an “individualist view” of Rule-Following (Backer, Hacker 1990; Baker, Hacker 1984). According to them, «there is no reason why Crusoe should not follow a pattern or paradigm, making occasional mistakes perhaps, and occasionally (but maybe not always) noticing and correcting his mistakes. That he is following a rule will show itself in the manner in which he uses the formulation of the rule as a canon or norm of correctness» (Baker, Hacker 1984, 433).

In the previous paragraph I have tried to sketch my own reading of Kripke's account of Wittgenstein's remarks on Rule-following. I now turn to discuss in detail Kripke's account of the dispositional responses to the sceptical challenge. My aim is twofold: on the one hand, I will try to unpack Kripke's own notions of disposition and normativity which come from his own attempt to criticize such responses; on the other hand, I will try to sketch a map of the debate that Kripke's account has generated about the issue of the normativity of meaning and the role of dispositions. This debate is characterized by the type of responses that critics gave to Kripke's sceptical paradox.

Kripke faces dispositionalism as a possible direct response to the sceptical challenge, that is, as a thesis on intending and meaning according to which dispositions can be good candidates for the role of foundational fact required by the sceptic. Three dispositional analysis have been offered: The *simple dispositional analysis*, the sophisticated, or *ceteris paribus dispositional analysis*, and the functionalist version of dispositionalism, also called "the machine argument".<sup>105</sup> The moral of Kripke's discussion is that all these analyses are doomed, therefore dispositions cannot be the facts required by the sceptic because they do not satisfy the "foundational requirement" and the "normative, justificatory requirement". Following Guardo (2018) I distinguish two main types of critiques of dispositionalism: A. The problem of the unreliability of dispositions, which includes what I will call "the finitude problem" and the "mistake problem".<sup>106</sup> This line of critique argues that dispositions fail to fulfil the "foundational requirement"; B. The problem of normativity, that is, the idea that dispositions are intrinsically non-normative. These arguments are put forward to show that dispositions cannot fulfil the "normative, justificatory requirement".<sup>107</sup> With this macro picture in mind, I now turn to Kripke's critical discussion of the three dispositional responses to the sceptical challenge. I will proceed as follows: First, I will expound the *simple dispositional analysis*; secondly, I will present the "finitude problem" and the "mistake problem"; then, I will turn to other two versions of dispositionalism which are put forward to face those problems: the *ceteris paribus dispositional*

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<sup>105</sup> This type of dispositional response corresponds to Dummett's "objection of the machine", expounded in *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mathematics* (Dummett 1959).

<sup>106</sup> These labels are used by Kusch (2006, 95).

<sup>107</sup> Kusch (2006) expresses a similar point but he speaks of "extensional requirement" and "intentional requirement". According to the first one, having the disposition to use a sign "y" under conditions C would resemble meaning X by "y". According to the second one, the dispositional state should be a meaning constituting mental state that contains and determines all future, potentially infinite, applications of a sign "y". Dispositionalism does not fulfil the former requirement because dispositional predicates do not logically co-vary with meaning predicates, and it does not fulfil the latter one because it does not capture semantic normativity. Kusch's "extensional requirement" coincides with what I here refer to as "foundational requirement", whereas the "intentional requirement" coincides with what I have called "justificatory, or normative requirement". I argue that the alternative I have suggested helps to highlight the two features that have to be fulfilled by the sceptical, or kripkean, notion of fact: the fact has to determine what I mean by a particular sign – hence it has to ground meaning – and it has to guide and justify my rule-governed behaviour – hence it has to guarantee meaning normativity.

*analysis* and the “machine argument”; finally, I will present the problem of normativity, that is, the arguments against the idea that dispositions can fulfil the “normative, justificatory requirement”.<sup>108</sup>

#### A. Dispositions and unreliability.

According to the *simple dispositional analysis* meaning addition by “+” means being disposed to answer “125” to the question “68+57?”, whereas meaning “quaddition” by “+” means being disposed to answer “5” to the same question. Be  $\phi$  a number theoretic function and “f” a binary function symbol

The referent  $\phi$  of “f” is that unique binary function  $\phi$  such that I am disposed, if questioned about “ $f(m, n)$ ”, where “m” and “n” are numerals denoting particular numbers  $m$  and  $n$ , to reply “p”, where “p” is a numeral denoting  $\phi(m, n)$ . (Kripke 1982, 26)

What I mean by a particular sign is “read off” from the disposition I have. The dispositionalist would then reply to the sceptic in this way: my present linguistic intentions are in accordance with the past ones because if you had asked me “68+57” I would have answered “125” and this fact shows that addition is the function I now mean by the sign “+”. Even if I had never encountered this specific arithmetical query, my disposition was present. The dispositionalist, therefore, presupposes the existence of some *dispositional facts* of the subject that are present even when the disposition is not concretely manifested, or actualised. Remember that, in order to successfully reply to the sceptic, these dispositional facts should be the facts to which I can rely on in order both to determine what I mean by a particular sign and to justify my response, that is, my rule-governed behaviour. Kripke raises two objections to this version: the “finitude problem” and the “mistake problem”. The first objection tries to fight the idea according to which dispositional facts about the subject can actually fill the gap between the subject’s past and finite usage of signs and the subject’s present use of a sign in a fresh new case of application. The problem is that while the addition function is infinite, like any other arithmetical function, the subject’s dispositions to give sums in reply to plus-queries such as “ $m+n=?$ ” are finite. The totality of the subject’s dispositions is finite for two main reasons: first, the subject’s life comes to an end; second, if faced with a plus-query which involves very big numbers, the subject’s might not have any disposition at all, or his disposition might be that of opening his eyes

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<sup>108</sup> Whereas the arguments presented are meant to be an accurate exposition of Kripke’s own position, the order I follow in the presentation of the discussion of dispositionalism is slightly different from Kripke’s. I have decided to discuss the arguments about normativity at the end for two reasons: 1. This makes clearer the thematic distinction I made between the problem of the unreliability of dispositions and the problem of normativity (which, in turn, are respectively linked to the “foundational requirement” and the “normative, justificatory requirement”). 2. Whereas the “finitude problem” and “the mistake problem” are presented as limits of the *simple dispositional analysis*, Kripke’s discussion of the normativity requirement of the sceptical challenge applies to all possible kinds of dispositionalism because it concerns the very same notion of disposition (which is assumed invariably in all the versions discussed by Kripke).

wide, or feel uneasy. In other words, it is simply not true that, for every plus-query, a subject has a disposition to give a particular sum in reply because the subject's dispositions cover only the realm of non-enormous numbers. However, the addition function is defined for both non-enormous numbers and enormous numbers, therefore it cannot be determined by the subject's dispositions to give particular responses to plus-queries.

It is not true, for example, that if queried about the sums of any two numbers, no matter how large, I will reply with their actual sum, for some pairs of numbers are simply too large for my mind – or my brain – to grasp. When given such sums, I may shrug my shoulders for lack of comprehension; I may even, if the numbers involved are large enough, die of old age before the questioner completes his question. (Kripke 1982, 26-27)

The second objection casts doubt on the dispositionalist's possibility to distinguish between following one rule correctly and following another rule incorrectly in the case of systematic mistakes. Some of us might have dispositions to systematically make *arithmetical* mistakes.<sup>109</sup> For example, I might have the disposition to answer systematically "15" to the query "5+9", or I might have the disposition to forget to "carry" when I add, that is, I systematically forget to carry when I add.<sup>110</sup> It is very important to point out that Kripke's cases concern competent agents from a metalinguistic point of view, that is, people that employ the sign "+" as we do – meaning addition – but they make mistakes when they operate with specific numbers. We are not dealing with a case of metalinguistic mistake, like the one suggested by the sceptic, that is, these are not cases in which the subject means "quaddition" by "+" instead of addition. For the "systematic mistaken" «as for us '+' means addition, but for certain numbers they are not disposed to give the answer they *should* give, if they are to accord with the table of the function they *actually* meant» (Kripke 1982, 29). Now, we have seen that according to the *simple dispositional analysis*, the function I mean by a particular sign is "read off" from my disposition to answer in a particular way rather than another. If this is so, the dispositionalist cannot say that the "systematic mistaken" actually means addition by "+" but he makes a mistake in operating with the numbers "5" and "9". The dispositionalist, on the contrary, has to state that "15" is the response I should give to the query "5+9", and that the correct response to certain plus-queries is that of forgetting to "carry". Let us take the case of a subject who systematically answers "15" to the query "5+9". Let us further suppose that there is a unique function, called "skaddition", which

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<sup>109</sup> We should bear in mind Kripke's distinction between "arithmetical sense" and "metalinguistic sense". The systematic mistakes discussed here are arithmetical, not metalinguistic. In this sense, their nature is different from that of the cases raised by the sceptic in the sceptical challenge.

<sup>110</sup> The ascription of the disposition demands repetition of the pattern of behaviour.

corresponds in its table exactly to the subject's dispositions, including the dispositions to make mistakes. The dispositionalist cannot discriminate between two possible cases: the subject is a mistaken additioner, that is, he means "addition" by "+" but he makes systematic mistakes when he operates with 9 and 5; the subject is a competent "skadder", that is, he means by "+" another function and he acts in accordance with it. As Kripke states, while common sense holds that the subject means the addition function but he makes systematically arithmetical mistakes, the dispositionalist seems obliged to hold that the subject is following another rule, that is, the rule of "skaddition", because his paradigm entails that the function which is meant by a particular sign is detected via the subject's disposition to respond in a certain way.

The *sophisticated dispositional analysis* is put forward mainly in response to the "finitude problem".<sup>111</sup> This analysis faces the problem by adding a *ceteris paribus* clause to the conditional that linguistically captures the subject's disposition. Granted the legitimacy of the finitude problem, I can still say that I mean addition by "plus" because *ceteris paribus* I would give sums even to plus-queries in the realm of enormous numbers. The point is how this clause is spelled out, that is, what are the conditions added.

How should we flesh out the *ceteris paribus* clause? Perhaps as something like: if my brain had been stuffed with sufficient extra matter sufficient to grasp large enough numbers, and if it were given enough capacity to perform such a large addition, and if my life (in a healthy state) were prolonged enough , the given an addition problem involving two large numbers,  $m$  and  $n$ , I would respond with their sum, and not with the result according to some quus-like rule. (Kripke 1982, 27).

Kripke raises two objections against this second version of dispositional analysis; an epistemological one and a logical one: 1. From an epistemological point of view, how can we be sure about the truth of the counterfactual previously expressed? How can I say what would happen if my brain was filled with extra matter or if my life were prolonged almost to infinity? 2. I can grant that the *ceteris paribus* clause might be better spelled out as signifying that I would respond to a plus-query involving enormous numbers with their sum rather than their "quum", «if I somehow were to be given the means to carry out my intentions with respect to numbers that presently are too long for me to add (or to grasp), and if I were to carry out these intentions» (Kripke 1982, 28). Even if this counterfactual is

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<sup>111</sup> The analysis can be seen as a response to the "mistake problem" too if we concede, as Guardo (2018, 22) does, that both problems share a common point: it is simply false that the subject's past dispositions conformed to the addition function. This is the core of the first type of objection raised to dispositionalism, i.e., the problem of the unreliability of dispositions.

actually true, it is of no use against the sceptic due to a logical problem of circularity. The counterfactual presupposes the fact that I mean addition by “+” rather than something else, but this is the very fact that I need to demonstrate to the sceptic. It is what I actually mean that tells how to specify the required idealisations of the *ceteris paribus* clause, that is, how to idealize dispositions, whereas dispositions should tell what it is meant by a particular sign. In other words, the idealized dispositions should determine what it is meant by a particular sign, but they fail because they are themselves determined in virtue of the fact that what is meant with a particular sign has already been established. Dispositions, then, fail to fulfil the “foundational requirement”.

The dispositional theory, as stated, assumes that which function I meant is determined by my dispositions to compute its values in particular cases. In fact, this is not so. Since dispositions cover only a finite segment of the total function and since they can deviate from its true values, two individuals may agree on their computations in particular cases even though they are actually computing different functions. Hence the dispositional view is not correct. (Kripke 1982, 32)

According to Kripke, the dispositional view entails a particular anthropological perspective: humans are characterized using machines as a term of comparison, that is, humans resemble computing machines. The case of the subject who is faced with plus-queries can be read as a case in which the subject is like a machine that, given a particular input – the rule, or the arithmetical function –, it then gives automatically the correct response as an output. That is why Kripke faces one last version of dispositionalism which coincides with Dummett's objection of the machine: «a machine can follow this rule; whence does a human being gain the freedom of choice in this matter which a machine does not possess?» (Kripke 1982, 32). The functionalist version of dispositionalism which is presented as a response to the sceptic, then, goes as follows:

The rule can be *embodied* in a machine that computes the relevant function. If a build such a machine, it will simply grind out the right answer, in any particular case, to any particular addition problem. The answer that the machine would give is, then, the answer that I intended. (Kripke 1982, 33).

This passage clearly shows the dispositional vein of the response: the function which is intended is “read off” from the output of the machine. Similarly, according to the *simple dispositional analysis*, the function which is meant by the subject is “read off” from his response to the particular plus-query because such a response is read as the output, or manifestation, of a dispositional state which lies *inside* the subject and which *embodies* the function. Kripke's objections to this response follow Wittgenstein's remarks on machines (PI §§193-195; RFM I §§118-130, II §87, III §§48-49). First of

all, how do we identify “the machine”? What does the word “machine” refer to? Kripke allows two possibilities.<sup>112</sup> 1. The term refers to the written version of the machine program «that I draw up, embodying my intentions as to the operations of the machine» (Kripke 1982, 33). However, the program is open to multiple interpretations, just like the sign “+”: the sceptic can say that the program too has to be interpreted in a “quus-like” manner. Even if we say that the program is not a written text but an abstract mathematical object, we should then be able to state which abstract object do correspond to the “program” that has been written on paper in accordance to the way we meant it. 2. A concrete physical machine that embodies the function I intend by “+”. The values it gives are the values of the function that I intend. However, first of all, in order to state that the machine embodies this particular function, I need some instructions about how to interpret the machine’s output – the “language” of the machine –, or its coding. But then the sceptic is still free to interpret all these instruction in a different way, like a “quus-like” way. Secondly, the “finitude problem” and the “mistake problem” raise here too. The concrete machine is a *finite object* which can produce a finite number of outputs and that can receive a finite number of inputs. Moreover, the concrete machine can *malfunction*: how can we determine when a malfunction occurs? By reference to the designer’s intention, any particular phenomenon may or not count as the machine “malfunction”.

### B. Dispositions and normativity.

It is time to discuss the second main objection against dispositionalism: dispositions cannot guarantee the normative element of Rule-following.<sup>113</sup> Kripke’s main thesis is that the dispositional account cannot fulfil the “normative-justificatory requirement” because dispositions are essentially non-normative. What exactly this thesis amounts to depends on Kripke’s notions of normativity and dispositions. Let us start from the first.

Semantic normativity is one of the main ingredients of a common sense picture of meaning which is assumed throughout the whole dialectics between the sceptic and his interlocutor.<sup>114</sup> According to such a picture, meaning is normative, that is, the meaning fact required by the sceptic is a fact that should justify the subject’s response to the arithmetical query. However, what does Kripke mean by “normative”? How should a fact look like in order to be normative? First of all, the

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<sup>112</sup> PI §193.

<sup>113</sup> Kripke states that almost all the various objections to the dispositional account «boil down to this one» (Kripke 1982, 24).

<sup>114</sup> This picture comes from the interlocutor’s responses. In other words, the way in which the interlocutor replies to the sceptic shows indirectly the picture of meaning which is assumed. Given this, it is legitimate to state that the sceptic, by challenging the interlocutor’s responses, is challenging the common sense picture of meaning he is a representative of.

expression “normative” is used in the text in opposition to the expression “descriptive”. Simply put, given a particular course of action, a descriptive account merely states that such and such an action has occurred, whereas the normative account justifies the course of action, that is, it gives the answer to the question “why?”; Subject *A* does *X*. Why is *A* justified in doing *X*? Why should *A* do *X*? Secondly, I follow Kusch (2006) in stating that the normativity requirement is better understood if we bear in mind other two ingredients of the common sense picture of meaning: immediate first-person knowledge and privacy.<sup>115</sup> Meaning sentences like “Paul means *y* by the sign *z*” are true if and only if Paul has a certain mental state which constitutes his meaning *y* by *z*. Recall that this is precisely the fact that the sceptic wants the interlocutor to demonstrate. Now, Paul knows such mental state directly and with fair certainty (first-person knowledge) because such state is intrinsic to the subject, that is, it is private and directly accessible (privacy). This aspect should then be valid within the dispositional account too: the interlocutor who gives the dispositional response to the sceptic assumes that the subject has direct access to his own dispositions. Indeed, it is only in virtue of such epistemological assumption that the subject is able to provide a dispositional fact as a candidate for the kind of fact required by the sceptic. Thirdly, the normative element is further construed by Kripke in terms *both of guidance and justification*: the meaning constituting fact has to guide the subject in using signs and has to justify the actual use of signs. The idea is that when the subject answers “125” to the question “68+57” he does not act blindly, that is, his response is not a brute inclination or a leap in the dark. His meaning something by the sign “+” contains a standard for correct use, that is, it tells the subject how he should answer in a new case (guidance) and we can refer to it to justify that particular answer (justification). The compresence of these two elements – guidance and justification – is clearly testified if we look at two passages in which Kripke expounds the problem of normativity: the first is the introduction of the problem, while the second is a reformulation of the main point after the whole discussion of the dispositional account.

To a good extent this reply [saying that I meant plus in the past because, if I had been asked “68+57” I would have answered “125”] immediately ought to appear to be misdirected, off target. For the sceptic created an air of puzzlement as to my *justification* [my emphasis] of responding ‘125’ rather than ‘5’ to the addition problem as queried. He thinks my response is no better than a stab in the dark. Does the suggested reply advance matters? How does it *justify* my choice of ‘125’? [...] Well and good, I know that ‘125’ is the response I am disposed to give (I am actually giving it!), and maybe it is helpful to be told – as a matter of brute fact – that I would have given the same

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<sup>115</sup> Kusch (2006) calls this picture of meaning “Low-brow meaning determinism” because, as we have seen, it substantially states that what someone means by a sign – that is, the mental state that constitutes the subject’s meaning something by the sign “+” – determines both how he will use it and how he should use it.

response in the past. How does any of this indicate that – now or in the past – ‘125’ was an answer *justified* in terms of instructions I gave myself, rather than a mere jack-in-the-box unjustified and arbitrary response? (Kripke 1982, 22)

Suppose I do mean addition by ‘+’. What is the relation of this supposition to the question how I will respond to the problem ‘68+57’? The dispositionalist gives a descriptive account of this relation: if ‘+’ meant addition, then I will answer ‘125’. But this is not the proper account of the relation, which is normative, not descriptive. The point is not that, if I meant addition by ‘+’, I *will* answer ‘125’, but that, if I intend to accord with my past meaning of ‘+’, I *should* answer ‘125’. (Kripke 1982, 37)

The first passage contains Kripke’s emphasis on justification. The sceptical challenge consists in finding a metaphysical fact that justifies the subject’s response. However, the dispositional account is merely descriptive: it simply tells how the subject is disposed to react, but it does not provide tools to justify the actual reaction to the sum-query. Saying “I am/was disposed to answer *X*” is different from saying “I should/ought to answer *X*”. The second passage contains Kripke’s emphasis on guidance. Here, Kripke refutes the idea that dispositional facts could guide the subject’s actions by stating that the dispositional account entails an equation between execution and correctness: the dispositional fact describes the action but it does not tell the subject what he should do in a new case of Rule-following, therefore, «it fails to satisfy the basic condition on such a candidate [...] that it should *tell* me what I ought to do in each new instance» (Kripke 1982, 24). If my reading is correct, then, when Kripke says that the dispositional account fails to guarantee meaning normativity, he is assuming a non-normative notion of disposition and he is asserting all these three thesis: 1. The dispositional account is merely descriptive; 2. Dispositional facts do not justify a particular course of action; 3. Dispositional facts do not guide the subject’s use, that is, they do not tell the subject how he should use the signs (they fail to provide a standard for correct use). Kripke’s alternate emphasis on the elements of guidance and justification has led the critics to offer two different interpretations of Kripke’s main point. According to some of them (Boghossian 2003, 2005; Hattiangadi 2006; Miller 2010; Wikforss 2001) Kripke’s objection to the dispositional account is captured by “the obligation argument”. They focus especially on the second passage quoted above. According to this interpretive line,

Kripke argued that meaning is normative in the sense that it essentially involves certain ‘oughts’ [my emphasis]. A candidate for what constitutes the state of my meaning something by a sign, Kripke argued, has to be such that “whatever in fact I (am disposed to) do, there is a unique thing that I should do.” This claim struck many people not only as true but also as teaching us something

profoundly important about the nature of linguistic meaning. It was suggested that theories of meaning that do not allow for any genuine 'oughts', such as dispositionalism, could be rejected out of hand, and many concluded that a terminal stumbling block for any type of naturalist theory of meaning had been found. (Glüer, Wikforss 2009, 31)

"The obligation argument", then, goes as follows:

1. It is constitutive of the concept of intending that its instances entail an ought. That is, if you mean addition by the sign "+", then you ought to answer "125" to the plus-query "68+57".
2. It is not constitutive of the concept of disposition that its instances entail an ought.
3. Therefore, whichever dispositional analysis of intending is doomed.

Other critics (Zalabardo 1997; Guardo 2014) argued that Kripke's point against dispositionalism is captured by "the justification argument". They focus on the first of the two passages quoted above and they take into consideration one of the two ingredients of the common sense picture of meaning and intending stated above: first-person knowledge. Their main point is that the "normative, justificatory requirement" of the sceptical challenge consists in stating that it is part of the concept of intending that we have a privileged and direct access to what we intend. In other words, it is constitutive of the concept of intending that the speaker has a non-inferential knowledge of what he means by a sign.<sup>116</sup> Guardo (2018, 64) reconstructs the argument as follows:

1. It is constitutive of the concept of intending that its instances can justify the generally unhesitating speaker's usage of words.
2. My meaning something by a word can justify my generally unhesitating usage of that word only if my knowledge of what I mean is non-inferential.
3. It is not possible to analyse my meaning something by a word exclusively in terms of manifested dispositions.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Kripke seems to explicitly expound this point in the following passage: «the idea that we lack 'direct access to the facts whether we mean plus or quus is bizarre in any case. Do I not know, directly, and with a fair degree of certainty, that I mean plus? Recall that a fact as to what I mean now is supposed to justify my future actions, to make them inevitable if I wish to use words with the same meaning with which I used them before. This was our fundamental requirement on a fact as to what I meant. No' hypothetical' state could satisfy such a requirement: if I can only form hypothesis as to whether I now mean plus or quus [...] then in the future I can only proceed hesitantly and hypothetically, conjecturing that I probably ought to answer '68+57' with '125' rather than '5'. Obviously, this is not an accurate account of the matter» (Kripke 1982, 40).

<sup>117</sup> Since a manifested disposition is a disposition which has been resulted in explicit behaviour, if we try to face the sceptical challenge by appealing to manifested dispositions we actually appeal to the concrete and actual usage of the sign, therefore we are basically reacting like the sceptic's interlocutor and the sceptic's objection raises anew. Like the

4. We don't have direct and non-inferential knowledge of dispositions that have not been manifested yet.<sup>118</sup>

5. Therefore, meaning something by a word cannot be analysed in dispositional terms.

I don't think that Kripke's main point is captured only by one of the two arguments. First of all, Kripke does not provide a real argument in favour of the normativity of meaning; that meaning is normative is something which is assumed. Secondly, Kripke construes the dialectics between the sceptic and the interlocutor by focusing on both elements of guidance and justification. These elements have to be seen as ingredients of a common picture of meaning which is under scrutiny throughout the book rather than core elements of two separated arguments against dispositionalism. The limit of the second interpretative line, that is, the "justification argument", is that it does not take into account Kripke's numerous remarks about the guidance capacity of the alleged meaning fact. The problem of normativity cannot be expressed by focusing on justification alone, but we should take into account the other important criteria of the meaning fact, that is, the idea that such a fact should guide the agent in new cases of Rule-following never encountered before. Guidance and justification are strictly linked in Kripke's presentation: the meaning fact justifies because it tells the subject what to do in a new case of application of the sign. In this sense, the answer "125" to the query "68+57" is justified because it is the answer that the subject *should* give in order to act in accordance with his meaning addition by "+". On the other hand, the limit of the "obligation argument" is that it assumes a characterization of normativity which does not precisely coincides with Kripke's one. I think that Boghossian (1989) provides a good example of such a view. Boghossian agrees with Kripke in opposing dispositional facts and facts of meaning – the former is descriptive, while the latter is normative. However, he argues that Kripke's normativity considerations are not successful as an argument against dispositionalism. Boghossian defines semantic normativity in terms of conditions of correct use: the fact that an expression means something implies a whole set of normative truths about the behaviour of the speaker, that is, that the use of the expression is correct in application to

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effective usage, a manifested disposition cannot discriminate between meaning addition and meaning quaddition by the sign "+". Indeed, Kripke explicitly states that if we try to respond to the sceptic within the picture of the dispositional account, we are obliged to make hypothesis about my past dispositions, and dispositions that have never been manifested. This is, indeed, one of the sources of doubt about this perspective (Kripke 1982, 23).

<sup>118</sup> According to Guardo (2018, 63) linguistic dispositions can be known by the subjects in three ways: 1. Observation of outer behaviour, that is, the fact that at time  $t$  I answered "125" to the query "68+57"; 2. Prediction of a disposition which has already been manifested, given the assumption that dispositions are stable throughout time. The fact that I had the disposition to answer "125" at time  $t$  seems to be a good reason to think that I had, or I will have the same disposition at time  $t_2$ ; 3. Direct analysis of brain processes. All three modalities are inferential, therefore they cannot provide the kind of knowledge required by the sceptic's demand.

certain objects and not in application to others.<sup>119</sup> For example, the fact that “dog” means ‘dog’ implies that I ought to be motivated to apply that expression only to dogs. If normativity is characterized in terms of correct use, then correct use is in turn linked to motivation and prescription.<sup>120</sup> I think that surely Kripke assumes that meaning is normative and that it is intrinsically linked to norms. However, I find at least doubtful whether this might be sufficient for Kripke to endorse Boghossian’s characterization of normativity. I am trying to argue that, for Kripke, there is no meaning without norms that are in force; meaning is normative because it has normative consequences and this indeed implies prescriptivity (What the subject ought to do given that he has grasped the meaning).<sup>121</sup> This is the guidance element already discussed above. However,

1. Kripke does not seem to construe correctness conditions in terms of true application of terms. The point is not that if I grasp the meaning of “dog”, then “dog” ought to be applied only to ‘dogs’ and not to ‘cats’. The point is that if I grasp the meaning of “dog” I grasp a standard of correct use which tells me how to use the word if I want to use it in accordance with the meaning that I have grasped, that is – using Kripke’s language – according to my past linguistic intentions regarding the same sign. Kusch (2006) rightly suggests to distinguish between misapplication of a term and misuse. If a misapply a term – for example, if I see a cat and I say “That is a dog” – I utter something false, whereas if a misuse a term I utter something meaningless.

2. Consequently, the “ought” of the prescription is not a moral “ought” which establishes a sort of duty in the speaker. The subject who grasps the meaning of the sign “+” ought then to reply “125” to the query “57+68” if he wants to act in accordance to his linguistic intention. If he does not use the sign in such a way, he commits a mistake, rather than behaving in an immoral way. The prescription is not an obligation, it is rather a guidance of action, a sort of instruction.

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<sup>119</sup> Similar views are held by other “classical” meaning normativists. McDowell (1984) and Brandom (1997) defines meaning normativity as the idea that meaning determines how words *ought* to be used. This amounts to saying that when I learn the meaning of a word I am then *obliged* to judge and speak in a certain way if I want to obey the dictates of the meaning I have grasped. Hence, they focus on the element of prescription. Wright (1986) focuses rather on the element of correctness conditions and he argues that from the fact that words have meaning derives the fact that there is a correct and incorrect use of them.

<sup>120</sup> Norms can be norms of being (they tell that a certain state of affairs ought to obtain) and norms of action (they tell what to do). Norms of action, in turn, can be instrumental, that is, contingent means-ends relations, or non-instrumental. Within this latter group we find prescriptions. (Von Wright 1963). Normativity of meaning commonly involves norms for action and, in particular, prescriptions. The idea is that norms of meaning are not merely hypothetical imperatives like Kant’s one because, indeed, they are not simply instrumental but rather prescription of action.

<sup>121</sup> For this reason, I leave open the question whether, according to Kripke, norms determine meaning (constitutive normativism). I take Kripke to state, at least, that meaning is normative in the sense that it has normative consequences, regardless of how it is determined.

3. Kripke's main point is to show that some facts correspond to norms without thereby postulating the existence of normative facts.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, normative statements are not analysed as factual truth-conditional claims about independent normative facts, but rather in terms of the psychological states of the subjects.<sup>123</sup> In other words, meaning is intrinsically linked to norms, but norms are not in force for the subject in virtue of the fact that they refer to some metaphysical primitive and independent normative facts. Moreover, Kripke's sceptical solution suggests that the normative force of the norm derives rather from the community, the totality of the members of the system in which the speaker is born and reared.

4. As already suggested above, Boghossian's characterization of normativity is narrower than Kripke's, that is, it takes into consideration the guidance element without focusing on the element of justification. Kripke's normativity is linked to justificatory force and immediate first-person knowledge.

For these reasons, I think that Kripke's main point cannot be captured by the "obligation argument" alone, or by the "justification argument" alone. Kripke works with a notion of normativity which, on the one hand it does not presuppose the existence of normative facts, but that on the other hand puts strict constraints on the candidate that should be found in order to answer to the sceptic. It is nevertheless a strong version of normativism. However, I think that the two arguments provide a good basis for enquiring Kripke's own notion of disposition. I argue that premise number 2 of the first argument and premise number 4 of the second argument exhibits two features that Kripke actually attributes to dispositions: dispositions do not entail an ought; dispositions cannot be known non-inferentially.<sup>124</sup> This brings us to final part of this paragraph, i.e. a reflection about the kind of dispositionalism that Kripke assumes in his presentation.

Why cannot dispositional facts guide and justify rule-governed behaviour? That is, which non-normative notion of disposition has Kripke in mind? I argue that, from a semantical point of

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<sup>122</sup> I owe to Prof. Perissinotto the grasping of this important point.

<sup>123</sup> A normative fact is what corresponds to a true normative statement and it does not have to be an extra-linguistic entity (Skorupski 2000). Normative statements can be value-statements ("It is good to do *X*"), reason-statements ("I have good reasons to be mean with you) and ought- statements ("You ought to keep your promises") (Schaber 2005, 1). In other words, a normative fact is the thing that is the case – a value-fact, or a reason-fact, or an ought-fact – if the statement in question is true. According to normative realism, there are normative facts which are independent of whether we think they obtain or not, therefore normative statements do correspond to something "out there".

Philosophers who deny the existence of normative facts, like Ayer (1936) and Stevenson (1937) think that normative statements have no truth value because they do not correspond to anything in the world.

<sup>124</sup> This might suggest that there might be a difference between the notion of normativity assumed by the sceptic's interlocutor and Kripke's own notion as it comes from his discussion of the dispositional account. I cannot further develop the point here.

view, Kripke endorses the counterfactual analysis of dispositional predicates as it is stated by Ryle (1946).<sup>125</sup> Dispositional predicates are linguistically analysable in terms of counterfactual conditionals. The locution “being disposed to  $X$ ” is then expressed as “doing  $X$  under certain conditions”. “Being disposed when asked to any sum ‘ $m+n$ ’ to give the sum of  $m$  and  $n$  as the answer” can be expressed in this way: given a subject  $S$ , a disposition  $D$ , a set of stimulus conditions  $C$  and a manifestation  $M$ ,  $S$  has the disposition  $D$  if and only if he is disposed to  $M$  in  $C$ . If asked to any sum “ $m+n$ ” I would answer with their sum and, in the past, if I had been asked to any sum “ $m+n$ ” I would have answered with their sum. From a metaphysical point of view, Kripke endorses a mentalistic notion of disposition which has causal power, that is, an inner mental object that produces its manifestation. The element of causality is found in Russell’s *The Analysis of Mind*. In particular, Kripke focuses on the notion of behavioural cycle, which is put forward by Russell in order to give a dispositional account of desire: the object of desire is defined as the thing that, when obtained, will cause the end of the activity of the subject due to the desire (Russell 1922, 58-66). According to Kripke, there is a parallel between Russell’s dispositional and causal explanation of desire and dispositional theories of meaning:

Just as the dispositional theory holds that the value I meant ‘+’ to have for two particular arguments  $m$  and  $n$  is, by definition, the answer I would give if queried about ‘ $m+n$ ’, so Russell characterizes the thing I desired as the thing which, were I to get it, would quiet my ‘searching’ activity. (Kripke 1982, 25, n.19)

Dispositional accounts are, then, causal accounts because the relation between meaning and intention and between meaning and future action is thought to be *external*, rather than internal. But, for Kripke, this means that the dispositional account is then merely descriptive. On the other hand, Kripke’s notion of disposition seems to be mentalistic because he treats dispositions as psychological facts of the subject. However, it does not seem to me that Kripke would endorse contemporary dispositional realism, because dispositional facts seem to be reducible to categorical properties. The mental state that constitutes someone’s meaning something by a sign is reduced to someone’s dispositions to use that sign under certain conditions, but such dispositions are then thought of as spooky entities that are then construed in physicalist terms, that is, as something similar to entities that the physicalist finds acceptable. Finally, from an epistemological point of view, Kripke’s attack to dispositionalism shows that he assumes that we can’t have direct access to our dispositions; dispositional knowledge is rather

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<sup>125</sup> Kripke explicitly mentions Gilbert Ryle at the beginning of the discussion of the dispositional account (Kripke 1982, 22).

inferential. This is a point which is seriously taken in consideration by the followers of the “justification argument” discussed above and this is one if the reasons why dispositional facts cannot justify any course of action, given that my meaning something by a word can justify my generally unhesitating usage of that word only if my knowledge of what I mean is non-inferential. To conclude, I think that Kripke works with a strong notion of normativity which puts strict constraints on the candidate that the interlocutor tries to present to the sceptic and, at the same time, a naturalized notion of disposition which could not strive for being the grounding and justificatory fact required by the sceptic because it is construed in totally non-normative terms.<sup>126</sup> It is not surprising, then, that Kripke explicitly states that any dispositional analysis – as it is characterized in the text – is incompatible with Wittgenstein’s ideas, although his remarks often contain dispositional elements. Kripke reads Wittgenstein’s rejection of dispositionalism together with Wittgenstein’s rejection of behaviourism given that, as I tried to argue, he construes dispositionalism in behaviouristic terms. Kripke does not mention paragraph 149 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, where Wittgenstein actually writes against a dispositional account of knowing and understanding; he draws his conclusions by considering especially Wittgenstein’s rejection of Russell’s dispositional and behaviouristic theory of desire, as expressed in some remarks of *Philosophical remarks*, which belongs to an earlier period than the *Philosophical Investigations*. This should not surprise us, because Kripke explicitly characterizes dispositions and dispositionalism taking Russell’s *The Analysis of Mind* as a reference point.

I am inclined to conjecture that Wittgenstein’s philosophical development was influenced considerably by this work [Russell’s *The Analysis of Mind*], both in the respects in which he sympathizes with behaviouristic and dispositional views, and to the extent that he opposes them. I take Philosophical Remarks [...] to express a rejection of Russell’s theory of desire. (Kripke 1982, 25, n.19)

In particular, the problem of the relation between the desire and its object – which is thought to be external and causal by Russell – is seen by Kripke as one of the forms that Wittgenstein’s problem about meaning and rules takes in the *Philosophical Investigations*, i.e., the rejection of causal and dispositional account of meaning and Rule-Following.

Wittgenstein’s rejects Russell’s dispositional theory because it makes the relation between a desire and its object an ‘external’ relation (*PR*, §21) [...]. Wittgenstein’s view that the relation between a

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<sup>126</sup> Kusch (2006, 13), indeed, talks of “reductive semantic dispositionalism”.

desire and its object must be ‘internal’, not ‘external’, parallels corresponding morals drawn about meaning in my text below. (Kripke 1982, 25-26, n.19)

The moral Kripke refers to is the idea that the relation of between meaning and intention to future action is normative rather than descriptive, that is, meaning and intention play a justificatory role in explaining the concrete actual action given in response to the expression of a rule.

#### 4.2.3 After Kripke

Kripke’s remarks on the normativity of meaning and dispositional accounts are at the centre of a still flourishing debate. Kripke’s discussion of dispositionalism produced a renewed interest in the topic. I will now present a sketch of the debate and my aim is to show that all the critics presuppose a non-normative notion of disposition. Some of them do not endorse Kripke’s rejection of dispositionalism and they try to defend the dispositional account (Fodor 1990, Millikan 1990, Coates 1986, Martin and Heil 1998, Blackburn 1984, Horwich 1990, Ginet 1992), while others agree with Kripke’s rejection of dispositionalism as characterized in his text, but they consider his arguments unsatisfactory (Boghossian 1989, Guardo 2018). All of them, though, do not raise any doubt about the assumed gap between dispositions, or dispositional talk, and normativity.

Critics generally gave two main types of responses to Kripke’s global argument, i.e., the sceptical paradox (Lalumera 2004,31): 1. Semantic naturalism, according to which there are the relevant facts required by the sceptic.<sup>127</sup> The dispositional account discussed by Kripke already belongs to this line. 2. Anti-naturalism, which includes (2a) Kripke’s own response to the sceptical problem – the sceptical solution – and (2b) a kind of metaphysical normativism that rejects the demand for a non-semantic fact and it rather suggests to look for primitive normative properties (McGinn 1984, Wright 1984). The antinaturalist response rejects the assumption that meaning ascriptions are correct if and only if there is a *fact* that makes them true, but they try to guarantee truth conditional semantics by invoking some normative properties. The idea is that reality is made both of natural properties and normative properties and that the latter are irreducible to the former.<sup>128</sup> Critics who tried to defend the dispositional response belong to the first group; they basically try to show that dispositions, if correctly understood, can be the facts required by the sceptic. Fodor (1990)

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<sup>127</sup> Chomsky (1986), for example, thinks that the domain of relevant facts is indebtedly restricted in the sceptical dialect, that is, it is construed differently from the ordinary scientific practice. Goldfarb (1985) argues that the sceptic overlooks an important class of natural properties because he limits his discussion to dispositions.

<sup>128</sup> For example, the word “green” should be applied only to green things in virtue of some intrinsic normative property of the word itself: the property of *meaning green*. This normative property is what makes the statement “‘green’ means green” true (Boghossian 1989, 547).

agrees with Kripke that the *simple dispositional analysis* is hopeless. However, he tries to defend the *ceteris paribus* version of dispositionalism and the idealisation implied by invoking the use of idealisation in the natural sciences.<sup>129</sup> According to Fodor, if we fault dispositionalism for its use of idealisation, then we should reject much of natural science, given that natural science relies on idealisation as does dispositionalism. Fodor actually does not reject Kripke's own notion of disposition, but he uses the authority of science against Kripke in order to show that dispositional talk, so characterized, is nevertheless accepted within scientific practice.<sup>130</sup>

Apparently Kripke assumes that we can't have reason to accept that a generalization defined for idealized conditions is lawful unless we can specify the counterfactuals which would be true if the idealized conditions were to obtain [...]. But it's not required, in order that the ideal gas laws should be in scientific good repute, that we know anything like all of what would happen if there really were ideal gases. All that's required is that we know (e.g.) that if there were ideal gases, then, *ceteris paribus*, their volume would vary inversely with the pressure upon them. And that counterfactual the theory itself tells us is true. Similarly, if there are psychological laws that idealize to unbounded working memory, it is not required in order for them to be in scientific good repute that we know all of what would happen if working memory really were unbounded. All we need to know is that, if we did have unbounded memory, then, *ceteris paribus*, we would be able to compute the value of  $m + n$  for arbitrary  $m$  and  $n$ . (Fodor 1990, 94-95)

In a similar vein, Millikan (1990) defends dispositionalism with a reform of the notion of normativity which is intuitively linked to meaning. She replaces the conception of normativity assumed in Kripke's work with the biological notion of *purpose*. Dispositions are non-normative; however, the notion of biological purpose is not a constraint to reductive semantic dispositionalism, therefore dispositionalism does not fail to respond to the sceptical challenge. Biological purposes can be innate or learned in response to the environment and they are epistemologically learned through hypothesis within the domain of biological science. In particular, in the case of human beings, Millikan argues that confirming to a rule can be an *unexpressed* biological purpose of a species: a capacity to

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<sup>129</sup> Fodor's defence of dispositionalism tries to show that dispositions can meet the extensional requirement if *idealized* with *ceteris paribus* clauses. He does not deal with the problem of the intensional requirement – the problem of normativity – because he thinks that to meet the extensional requirement is *eo ipso* to meet the intensional requirement. Fodor, indeed, suggests to replace semantic normativity with the notion of semantic correctness and he then argues that we capture semantic correctness as soon as we meet the extensional requirement: to apply a term to a thing in its extension is to apply the term correctly. According to this perspective, we only need to make clear the extension of a term and there is no further job for grounding normativity. «Once you've said what it is that makes the tables the extension of "table", there is surely no further question about why it's correct to apply "table" to a table. It thus seems that if you have a reductive theory of the semantic relations, there is no job of grounding normativity left to do». (Fodor 1990, 135-136)

<sup>130</sup> We might wonder whether idealisation in science is actually similar to the kind of idealisation involved in the *ceteris paribus* version of dispositionalism. Kusch (2006, 102-105) argues against this assumption.

purposefully follow expressed rules which is grounded in the purposeful following of unexpressed rules. In other words, intentions are derived biological purposes. With these tools, Millikan uses biological purposes as a constraint against the idea – which she accepts – that human behaviour could be described in quaddition-like terms.

Whatever you mean to do when you encounter “plus”, that content has been determined by your experiences coupled with evolutionary design. But, reasonably, whatever you mean by “plus” is the same as what other people mean who are endowed with the same general sort of cognitive equipment and have been exposed to the same sort of training in arithmetic. This meaning has been determined by the application of *Homo sapiens* rules of some kind to experience. [...] These considerations constitute, albeit in very rough and broad outline, the solution to the Kripke–Wittgenstein paradox. (Millikan 1990, 344)

Millikan accepts a naturized notion of disposition in terms of biological capacity, and she then tries to defend dispositionalism by arguing that the normative element can be captured by biological functions alone. The critique of Kripke’s idea that the dispositional account cannot capture semantic normativity is the main target of Horwich’s proposal of “communal dispositionalism” (Horwich 1990). According to Horwich, communal dispositionalism can capture the normative implications of meaning and it faces successfully the finitude problem and the mistake problem.

[O]ur normal ways of identifying mistakes (and conditions likely to produce mistakes) involve reference to community opinion: our criterion for “going wrong” is divergence from what is generally said. [...] Ordinarily, and subject to certain conditions, individuals are said to mean by a word whatever that word means in the linguistic community they belong to – even when their own usage is to some extent improper. (Horwich 1990, 111)

However, in order to avoid the risk of a commitment to the infallibility of the community, Horwich expounds a kind of sophisticated communal dispositionalism which includes more dispositions than merely dispositions to give answers to plus-queries.<sup>131</sup> These additional dispositions constitute a practice of epistemological revision and adjustment of attitudes in the light of new evidence, given that dispositions to correct and revise concern also judgements that are shared by the community as a whole. Coates (1986) too suggests a strategy which is based on an increased number of dispositions

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<sup>131</sup> This objection is presented by Boghossian (1989, 173). « The community [...] is bound to exhibit precisely the same duality of dispositions that I do: it too will be disposed to call both horses and deceptively horsey looking cows on a dark night “horse”. After all, if *I* can be taken in by a deceptively horsey looking cow on dark nights, what is to prevent 17,000 people just like me from being taken in by the same, admittedly effective, impostor? The point is that many of the mistakes we make are *systematic*. [...] The communitarian [...] cannot call them *mistakes*, for they are the community’s dispositions. He must insist, then, firm conviction to the contrary notwithstanding, that “horse” means not *horse* but, rather, *horse or cow*».

involved. He reads the sceptical challenge as a problem of commitment to consistency of use, that is, what distinguishes Rule-following from mere rule conforming is the presence of an intention to use the word in accordance with its extension. Coates thinks that phenomena of commitment can be captured by second order dispositions, that is, dispositions that manifest themselves in the maintenance or change of first order dispositions. Therefore, dispositionalism can be defended by increasing the number of dispositions so to include second-order dispositions<sup>132</sup>:

What is it that entitles us to move to a normative claim about how I ought to use a word? The answer consists in the fact that I committed myself to using the word consistently, and that this commitment was grounded in a robust second-order disposition to be consistent in my first-order dispositions to use the term; making this commitment is the best means open to me of satisfying my various goals. In order to achieve the various general goals I may be assumed to have, I ought now to be consistent in my use of language. (Coates 1986, 183)

However, Coates construes second-order dispositions on the model of first-order dispositions, therefore it is not clear why second-order dispositions could have normative consequences, given that first-order dispositions do not have them. So, the general problem of normativity is not faced. Moreover, Coates' proposal does not answer to the question why one's first order disposition to respond to plus-queries in a certain way must count as a first-order disposition to add, which is precisely the sceptic's question. Contrary to Coates and Blackburn, others critics, like Ginet (1992) and Hattiangadi (2001) think that Kripke assumes the need of too many dispositions and they then argues that dispositionalism can face the finitude problem by reducing the number of dispositions involved in the addition function which are possibly excluded by Kripke. The objection states that we do not need a disposition for every instance of " $m+n$ ", but rather a finite number of dispositions that can be manifested repeatedly as part of a recursive procedure.

That is to say, we have one hundred dispositions to respond to  $x + y = ?$  problems where  $x$  and  $y$  are different single digit numerals. For handling plus-queries involving numerals above nine we additionally have dispositions to manipulate them spatially. For instance, we have dispositions to write down the numerals below each other and align them in such ways that the addition task

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<sup>132</sup> A similar strategy is held by Blackburn (1984). He suggests to increase the number and kinds of dispositions in order to overcome the mistake problem. He then distinguishes between "unchecked responses" and "multiply checked responses": the former are reactions to plus-queries that I am disposed to give quickly and without checking my response, the latter are reactions to plus-queries that I am disposed to give on the basis of several calculations. Blackburn argues that these latter responses allow for a dismissal of the mistake problem: I mean addition rather than quaddition by "+" because, although my disposition for unchecked responses to plus-queries match the "quus" function, my disposition for multiply checked responses to plus-queries match the addition function. Blackburn strategy rests on the – still doubtful – assumption that performing a calculation again and again will increase the reliability of the result given in response to the arithmetical query.

reduces to single-digit addition plus “carrying”. In other words, our dispositions for single-digit addition operate without taking the context of the addition into account. (Kusch 2006, 111)

It is important to note that such perspective assumes a machine-like characterisation of arithmetical dispositions: it is assumed that arithmetical dispositions behave like physical dispositions, like solubility; salt dissolving in water “ignores” much of the context, such as the shape and the colour of the water container. Finally, while Fodor, Coates and Millikan defend dispositionalism by reforming the notion of normativity somehow implied by rule-governed behaviour, Martin and Heil (1998) face the problem of the “unreliability of dispositions” by stressing some limits of the simple conditional analysis of dispositional predicates. They try to argue that dispositions can fulfil the “foundational requirement”, but they do not face the problem of normativity. In particular, they try to argue against the argument of the “unreliability of dispositions”. As we have seen, this kind of objection consists in arguing that it is simply not true that I have a disposition to answer with a sum for every plus-queries, because in the case of enormous numbers I would rather shrug my shoulders. Martin and Heil highlight the fact that the problem of the unreliability of dispositions, then, is grounded on an inference which goes from the falsity of a simple conditional to the denial of the possession of the disposition by the subject. However, in virtue of some counterexamples traced by Martin (1994) and Johnston (1992), this kind of inference is not valid because the lack of possession of the disposition is not the only alternative: the disposition might be *finkish*, or *masked*.<sup>133</sup> A finkish disposition is a disposition that, even though it is present, it does not manifest because the presence of the relevant stimulus is at the same time the cause of the disappearance of the disposition itself.<sup>134</sup> This

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<sup>133</sup> Bird and Handfield (2008) presented two arguments against Martin and Heil’s thesis. The first argument tries to state that we have no reason to believe that our dispositions conform to the addition function (Guardo 2018, 30-31). In the case of *finkish* and *masked* dispositions, the entity which impedes the disposition to manifest is something temporal and extrinsic to the possessor of the disposition. If the impediment is intrinsic to the possessor, then it is more plausible to say that the possessor does not possess the disposition anymore. However, according to them, the impediments involved in the case of plus-queries involving enormous numbers are primarily intrinsic to the subject. Therefore, the reason why I do not give the correct arithmetical answer is that I do not possess the relative disposition. The second argument tries to show that, even if Martin and Heil were right, the simple dispositional analysis is doomed. Let us concede that my dispositions do conform to the addition function and that I would not give the correct arithmetical answer to plus-queries involving enormous numbers only because my disposition to give the answer is *finkish* or *masked*. Let us take two enormous numbers,  $m$  and  $n$ , and let us suppose that the correct arithmetical answer to “ $m+n$ ” is  $p$ . According to this perspective, then, I do have the disposition to answer  $p$  to the query “ $m+n$ ”, but I do not actually give this answer because such disposition is masked and I react, let us say, by shrugging my shoulders. Now, the shrug of my shoulder is actually the manifestation of a disposition, that is, the reason why I shrug my shoulders if queried about “ $m+n$ ” is that I have the disposition to shrug my shoulders if queried about “ $m+n$ ”. This means that I have at least two dispositions regarding the query “ $m+n$ ”: the disposition to answer  $p$ , which is masked, and the disposition to shrug my shoulders. The latter disposition does not conform to the addition function, therefore we do have some dispositions that do not conform to the addition function which are totally put aside by Martin and Heil’s thesis. This argument has been criticized by Cheng (2010) and Schlosser (2011). However, Guardo (2018, 35) thinks that it is a decisive argument against Martin and Heil’s strategy to defend the *simple dispositional analysis*.

<sup>134</sup> The stimulus produces an *intrinsic* change in the object that possesses the disposition. Lewis (1997, 147) provides a good example. «A sorcerer takes a liking to a fragile glass, one that is a perfect intrinsic duplicate of all the other fragile

counterexample shows that the truth of the conditional is not necessary condition for the presence of the disposition. A masked disposition is a disposition that do not produce its manifestation in presence of the relevant stimulus because some extrinsic factor interferes in the causal process which normally would lead from the relevant stimulus to the manifestation associated.<sup>135</sup> This counterexample shows that the truth of the conditional that captures the dispositional predicate is not sufficient condition for the presence of the disposition.<sup>136</sup>

Finally, I will briefly sketch Boghossian's response to Kripke's rejection of the dispositional account. Boghossian (1989) agrees with Kripke's conclusion that dispositionalism fail to fulfil both the "foundational requirement" and the "normative, justificatory requirement" but he tries to improve Kripke's criticism of the sophisticated version of dispositionalism in light of Fodor's defence of idealisation.

Kripke [...] briefly considers the suggestion that we attempt to define idealized dispositions and says that 'a little experimentation will reveal the futility of such an effort.' But, surely, this underestimates the complexity of the problems involved [...]. What Kripke needs, if his rejection of dispositional accounts is to succeed, but does not really provide, is a set of principled considerations against the existence of *non-semantically, non-intentionally* specifiable *optimality conditions* [my emphasis]. (Boghossian 1989, 537)

Boghossian's argument rests on three main points: First, he thinks that the sceptical challenge does not concern merely the case of intending in the sense of meaning something by a sign, but it can be extended to all semantic-intentional concepts, like belief, desire, etc. Second, given the first assumption, Boghossian works with a more demanding circularity-requirement. According to Kripke, it would be sufficient to give an account of the notion of idealized conditions without referring to the notion of meaning in order to save the *ceteris paribus* dispositional analysis. Boghossian, instead, assumes that it is necessary to give an account of the notion of idealized conditions (or optimality conditions) without referring to *any* semantic-intentional notion (Guardo 2018, 39-40). Third, Boghossian endorses belief holism regarding the process which fixes the belief: the fixation of

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glasses off the same production line. He does nothing at all to change the dispositional character of his glass. He only watches and waits, resolved that if ever his glass is struck, then, quick as a flash, he will cast a spell that changes the glass, renders it no longer fragile, and thereby aborts the process of breaking. So his finkishly fragile glass would not break».

<sup>135</sup> For example, a fragile glass that is carefully protected by a sophisticated packaging. The glass is fragile, that is, it possesses the disposition to break if struck, but it does not break if struck thanks to the packaging. Its disposition, then, is masked by the extrinsic factor of packaging. Unlike the case of sorcerer (see previous note) the masking impedes the disposition to manifest without causing an intrinsic change in the object that possesses the disposition.

<sup>136</sup> For an extended exposition of the critique of the simple dispositional analysis, see chapter 1.

perceptual beliefs, for examples, depends on both perceptual stimuli and background beliefs. With these three assumptions on hand, Boghossian presents an argument against *ceteris paribus* dispositionalism which aims to show that even this sophisticated version fails because it cannot avoid circularity in the fixation of the idealized conditions.

Under normal circumstances, belief fixation is typically mediated by background theory-what contents a thinker is prepared to judge will depend upon what other contents he is prepared to judge [...]. Thus, Neil may come to believe *Lo, a magpie*, as a result of seeing a currawong, because of his further belief that that is just what magpies look like; or because of his belief that the only birds in the immediate vicinity are magpies; or because of his belief that whatever the Pope says goes and his belief that the Pope says that this presented currawong is a magpie. And so on. [...] A dispositional theorist has to specify, without use of semantic or intentional materials, a situation in which a thinker will be disposed to think, *Lo, a magpie* only in respect of magpies. But the observation that beliefs are fixed holistically implies that a thinker will be disposed to think *Lo, a magpie* in respect of an indefinite number of *non-magpies*, provided only that the appropriate background beliefs are present. Specifying an optimality condition for 'magpie', therefore, will involve, at a minimum, specifying a situation characterized by the absence of all the beliefs which could potentially mediate the transition from non-magpies to *magpie* beliefs. Since, however, there looks to be a potential infinity of such mediating background clusters of belief, a non-semantically, non-intentionally specified optimality situation is a non-semantically, non-intentionally specified situation in which it is guaranteed that none of this potential infinity of background clusters of belief is present. But how is such a situation to be specified? What is needed is precisely what a dispositional theory was supposed to provide: namely, a set of naturalistic necessary and sufficient conditions for being a belief with a certain content. (Boghossian 1989, 539-540)

The point is that, given the three assumptions presented above, the dispositionalist cannot avoid to refer to some beliefs if he wants to specify the idealized conditions: for example, he has to specify that the subject does not believe that all the birds proximal to him are magpies. If this is so, then, the *ceteris paribus* dispositional analysis does not conform to Boghossian's circularity-requirement.

### 4.3 Conclusions

In this chapter I have tried to show the relevance of Kripke's influential work for a research that is meant to expound Wittgenstein's contributions to the philosophical issue of human dispositions. Already in *Wittgenstein on Rules and private language*, the possibility of a dispositional reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy is envisaged, together with a reflection on the potentialities and limits of a dispositional account of rule-governed linguistic behaviour. My aim is to highlight the following points:

1. The dispositional account discussed by Kripke (1982) fails because of a narrow and naturalized characterization of disposition and the role that dispositional facts should cover within the boundaries of the sceptical challenge. Kripke works with a naturalized notion of disposition and a strong kind of meaning normativism: the failure of any dispositional account of meaning and understanding is then unavoidable, given that dispositions, so conceived, cannot fulfil such normative requirement. Moreover, if we combine a strong normativity requirement with a naturalized notion of disposition, we fall into a perspective which, in a certain sense, lose sight of life and all its constitutive practices.

2. As we have seen, critics gave two kind of responses to the sceptical paradox: semantic naturalism and anti-naturalism. The first tries to answer to the sceptic by offering some natural fact, while the second presupposes the existence of some normative facts which are irreducible to the natural ones. These two main responses share two main points: 1. Kripke's notion of fact and, in general, the legitimacy of the sceptical demand. Both defenders and critics of the dispositional account answer to the sceptical challenge by proposing a direct response to the sceptic; they assume the legitimacy of the sceptical demand and they try to offer candidates for a metaphysical fact that conforms to the "foundational requirement" and the "normative, justificatory requirement". 2. A narrow characterization of dispositions. Dispositions are thought to be physical states that are essentially non-normative.

I argue that it is possible to give a third kind of response to the sceptical challenge presented by Kripke. This response is at the same time, and from a broader perspective, another kind of response to Kripke's ideas on meaning and understanding. Far from being a direct response to the sceptic, this perspective does not assume the legitimacy of the sceptical paradox and, for this reason, it is in line with what I think to be Wittgenstein's own positions regarding Rule-following. The alternative response I would like to endorse stands, therefore, between the exegetical issue and the broader issue that constitute the debate generated by Kripke's text. In the next chapter, I will present my own reading of Wittgenstein's remarks on Rule-following which should be read in the light of the discussion presented in this chapter: contrary to Kripke's interpretation, I will argue that Wittgenstein does not provide a sceptical solution because he does not endorse any sceptical paradox; the sceptical paradox is already the product of a conceptual misunderstanding, that is, the *interpretational account* of Rule-following (Fogelin 2009). My entire work locates within this kind of response which moves from the rejection of Kripke's own interpretation of Wittgenstein's remarks on Rule-following. In what follows, I will argue that Wittgenstein's alleged dispositionalism can be traced by looking at his positive account of Rule-following, without endorsing either Kripke's interpretation and the assumptions shared by the critics who engaged with Kripke's work:

1. Wittgenstein's dispositionalism is different from the dispositional account discussed by Kripke. The former is not a kind of direct response to the sceptical challenge, that is, it does not provide dispositional facts as candidate to the role of grounding fact, mainly because no such fact is needed in order to justify the linguistic practice according to the Wittgensteinian perspective;

2. Wittgenstein works with a notion of fact which is different from Kripke's. Wittgenstein wants us to recognize some general facts of nature, but these facts do not metaphysically ground.

3. Dispositions play a different role than the one demanded by the kripkean sceptic: they don't have to determine meaning, that is, they do not guarantee constitutive normativity, and they do not metaphysically ground the practice. Dispositions, so conceived, would be part of the general facts of nature which are at the centre of many remarks within Wittgenstein's late production. Dispositions are, in a certain sense, facts, however: 1. They are facts which do not ground, but they rather justify, that is, they provide reasons – rather than causes – of some rule-governed practices; 2. They are not merely biological facts, because they are also part of what human beings acquire through training and education. Dispositions, therefore, are neither natural facts, in the sense of merely physical, biological facts, nor normative facts as it is suggested by the followers of a strong kind of semantic normativism.

## Chapter 5

### Dispositions and Rule-following

In this chapter I will argue that, although Wittgenstein criticizes a kind of dispositional account of knowing in PI §149, it is nonetheless possible to employ the notion of disposition to give an account of Wittgenstein's characterization of language and understanding as it comes from his remarks on Rule-following. This interpretative move is possible provided that we employ the notion of disposition in relation to the notions of capacity, ability and mastery of a technique. In this sense, the notion of disposition which informs the present dispositional reading of Wittgenstein does not merely refer neither to physical dispositions of the matter, like fragility, solubility, electricity, nor to character traits of human beings, like courage, irascibility, or temperance. Dispositional concepts are here applied to rule-governed behaviour, that is, to human beings' ordinary practices of following rules in a specified context.

The dispositional reading has two main sources: 1. The Rule-following considerations and the characterisation of meaning as use; 2. The characterisation of understanding as mastery of a technique (PI §150). In what follows I will argue that the second is a product of the first in two senses: on the one hand, Wittgenstein's characterisation of understanding comes from the main point of the Rule-following considerations, that is, the idea that following a rule is a *practice*; on the other hand, the deceptive account of understanding which is Wittgenstein's main target comes from a philosophical misunderstanding which is at the source of misleading conceptions of Rule-following too; deceptive conceptions of meaning and understanding, then, constitute parallel philosophical problems which have a common source.

For this reason, I will start with an exposition of Wittgenstein's remarks on the Rule-following problem, mainly looking at paragraphs 138-242 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Then, I will move to Wittgenstein's remarks on the concept of understanding. Before starting, though, it is useful to specify that, according to the present reading, it is possible to distinguish between a *pars destruens* and a *pars construens* within Wittgenstein's train of thought. The dispositional reading stands within the *positive* account of understanding which Wittgenstein suggests after having disentangled some philosophical confusions around the concepts of meaning and rule.<sup>137</sup> McGinn (1984, 3), indeed,

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<sup>137</sup> I am not stating, though, that Wittgenstein presents any philosophical thesis, properly called. The a-theoretical character of his philosophy is preserved. The distinction between *pars construens* and *pars destruens* is an external operation, done by the critic, in order to better expose the point that has to be made in this chapter. The positive account of understanding does not equate to a theory of understanding, as the positive account of meaning as use does not equate to a semantic theory of meaning. "Positive account" stands merely as "active" grammatical elucidation of the concept of Rule-following, after having rejected misleading conceptions of it (*pars destruens*).

summarizes early in his work four principal themes in Wittgenstein's treatment of meaning and understanding, three are negative and one is positive:

1. To mean something by a sign is not to be the subject of an inner state or process.
2. To understand a sign is not to interpret it in a particular way.
3. Using a sign in accordance with a rule is not grounded upon reasons.
4. To understand a sign is to have mastery of a technique or custom of using it.

As stated by Wright (2002, 115), the ascription of these lines of thought to Wittgenstein is not controversial, however, each line might be differently spelled out. According to McGinn (1984), for example, Wittgenstein constantly overstates theme number one and, contrary to this overstatement, we could well think of understanding and meaning something by a sign as an inner state or process, provided that we specify that such a state or process is neither episodic, nor occurrent. Concerning theme number four, McGinn has no quarrel with the conception of understanding as a practical capacity, however he does not accept what Wright (2002, 117) calls the "multiple application thesis", that is, the idea that «it is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which someone obeyed a rule [...] To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* (uses, institutions)» (PI §199). McGinn, indeed, reads this remark as if Wittgenstein would be interested in what actually would be enough for a rule to be such; a kind of definite numerical threshold.

[...] consider a possible situation in which [...] actually followed rules are not obeyed. Imagine we carry out this thought-experiment one rule at a time gradually whittling the applications away. Wittgenstein in effect allows that we can carry out this procedure very extensively: in fact, the thought-experiment is deemed coherent until we get to the final rule grasped by the subject [...] at which point, he thinks, we must call a halt to our supposings. We can also, he allows, remove large segments of the actual application made of *the final rule*, but we must leave intact at least two applications of this rule [...] The problem is to see why what seems such a small change in the actual situation – *viz.* deleting the penultimate surviving application of the final rule could have such momentous consequences. (McGinn 1984, 131)

These four lines of thought are indeed at the core of the Rule-following considerations, but I will take them into account differently from McGinn:

1. Theme number one represents, in general, Wittgenstein's anti-mentalism. His objection is to "state" and "inner" altogether.<sup>138</sup>

2. Thesis number two expresses Wittgenstein's rejection of the interpretational account of Rule-following, which will be discussed in section 5.1.1. This line of thought is strictly connected to the first, given that the interpretational account is an instance of mentalism in philosophy of language and mind.

3. Theme number three encompasses the anti-foundationalist stance of Wittgenstein's later philosophy which is emblematically exemplified in the image of the bedrock: «Once I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do." » (PI §217).

4. Theme number four represents Wittgenstein's *positive* account of meaning and understanding as practical capacities, against the mentalistic perspective. I will argue against McGinn's interpretation and I will spell out the dispositional character of understanding by taking distance from Kenny's reading too.

All these four suggestions come from Wittgenstein's later production as a whole, therefore it is not easy to organize the material in an organic and systematic way. In order to do so, I will try to organize my discourse by reading those suggestions as ingredients of the two main aspects which, according to my perspective, characterise Wittgenstein's later production in general and, in particular, his own *new* perspective on language and meaning:<sup>139</sup>

1. The "anthropological turn" in philosophy of language;

2. The critique of mentalism.

(1) With the expression "anthropological turn" I refer to a perspective according to which language is not merely a rule-governed activity, but rather a typically *human* activity, that is, an

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<sup>138</sup> Whereas, as Wright (2002) suggests, McGinn seems to assume that Wittgenstein's objection regards only the aspect of the inner.

<sup>139</sup> I do not endorse the resolute reading of the *Tractatus* promoted by Cora Diamond and James Conant. I rather locate myself within the "traditional reading". According to the latter reading, the *Tractatus* contains a theory of language and meaning, traditionally called the "picture theory", or the theory of the proposition as a picture of a state of affair. In this work, then, I assume the presence of a theory of language and proposition in the *Tractatus* which is Wittgenstein's critical target at the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations* where he highlights the «grave mistakes in what [he] set out in that first book» (PI 4e). In this sense, it makes sense for me to speak of a change of perspective on language and meaning between Wittgenstein's early philosophy and Wittgenstein's later philosophy or, in other words, between "the first Wittgenstein" and "the second Wittgenstein". This of course does not prevent us from acknowledging continuity between the two phases, but it helps seeing the development of Wittgenstein's philosophy which comes from his rejection of some ideas, assumptions and goals operating in his first work. For a clear exposition of the difference between the two interpretative readings see Bronzo (2010, 269-287).

activity whose appearance is in some sense influenced by the features of the subjects that share it. Wittgenstein expresses this point in PI §23, where he writes that «the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life». Wittgenstein, indeed, often asks the reader to pay attention to some “extremely general facts of nature”, «facts as are hardly ever mentioned because of their great generality» (PI §142) and he suggests a kind of nexus between human nature and language or, better, the particular adopted conceptual system. The emphasis on language as a rule-governed activity, on the one hand, and the emphasis on the human character of language, on the other hand, represent the two main points of what I here call, respectively, Wittgenstein’s “grammatical turn” in philosophy of language and Wittgenstein’s “anthropological turn”, where the second is a kind of improvement and completion of the first and it is the main achievement of the Rule-following considerations presented in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

With the expression “grammatical turn” I mean the idea according to which the clarity of the logic of language, which was already one of the main goals of the *Tractatus*, should not be searched in “another” language, different from the ordinary one – being it the ideal language of logic, or the primary language of phenomenology – but it should rather be searched in the ordinary language that we daily speak.<sup>140</sup> The emphasis on the notion of grammar is chronologically prior to the Rule-following remarks and it dates back to the 30s – a period of time traditionally named “transition” (1929-1933) – where Wittgenstein developed the idea that analysing language should consist in looking at the rules that govern the ways we employ words in ordinary speech, in explicit contrast with his previous thoughts expressed in the *Tractatus* (Marconi, 2002).<sup>141</sup> Contrary to Frege, Wittgenstein thought that we could rightly state that mathematical symbols do not represent anything, hence they do not have meaning in Frege’s terms, but still maintain that they are not merely ink

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<sup>140</sup> Around 1929, Wittgenstein thought that philosophy should construe and study a phenomenological, or primary language. With this expression Wittgenstein meant «a language that should describe, or represent, what is immediately given or experienced, without any hypothetical supplement, that is, pure and uncontaminated experience» (Perissinotto 2010, 79, my translation). However, already in autumn 1929, Wittgenstein abandoned the idea because it was still an instance of the opposition between ordinary language and another type of language which he was going to reject. The phenomenological perspective, so conceived, still entailed the distinction between ordinary language and primary language, but Wittgenstein started realizing that we do not need to construe a language, because ordinary language is the only one language, and it only needs to be clarified. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, indeed, Wittgenstein wrote that «it is easy to get into that dead end in philosophizing where one believes that the difficulty of the problem consists in our having to describe phenomena that evade our grasp, the present experience that slips quickly by, or something akin a where we find ordinary language too crude, and it looks as if we were dealing not with the phenomena of everyday conversation, but with ones that “are evanescent, and, in their coming to be and passing away, tend to produce those others”.» (PI §436). For a detailed exposition of the phenomenological phase, see Marconi 2002, 68-74.

<sup>141</sup> It is part of the “grammatical turn” the emphasis on the strict relation between the concept of rule and the concept of meaning. Wittgenstein famously states in the *Philosophical Investigations* that «for a large class of cases of the employment of the word “meaning” – though not for all – this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language»(PI §43), but the new conception of meaning as use was one of the intuitions of the transition period, in contrast with both the denotational phase of *Tractatus* and the phenomenological phase.

marks.<sup>142</sup> There is a way for an ink mark to be meaningful without representing anything and this is best captured by the metaphor of the game of chess: the pawns are not merely wooden objects, still they do not represent anything; they are pawns in virtue of the fact that they are used like pawns in the game, that is, they have a role governed by rules. It is the totality of the rules which determines if that piece of wood is a bishop, rather than a rook. Rules are essential and they constitute the grammar of the pawn or, in general, of a sign.<sup>143</sup>

At this stage, however, there is still the idea of a complete grammar describable in its total configuration, and language appeared to be usefully compared with a calculus, a system of transformations governed by rules; Wittgenstein seemed to accept the possibility of inventorying, at least in principle, all the rules of language through a computational procedure. In this sense, the paragraphs of the *Philosophical Investigations* represent a new point of view. What is mainly criticized is the idea that we are allowed to conceive of a language as a whole exactly and completely defined by precise rules: it is not sufficient to characterize meaning as use and language as a rule-governed activity if we conceive of rules of language as a definite *corpus*.

In practise we very rarely use language as such a calculus. For not only do we not think of the rules of usage – or definition, etc. – while using language, but when we are asked to give such rules in most cases we aren't able to do so. We are unable clearly to circumscribe the concepts we use not because we don't know their real definition, but because there is no “real definition” to them. (BB 44)

Moreover, I will argue that the “anthropological turn” encompasses some naturalistic aspects of Wittgenstein's philosophy and it prevents us from ascribing to Wittgenstein a kind of hyper-intellectualism, as wrongly suggested by Burge (2010, 13, 27).<sup>144</sup>

(2) Following Voltolini (2009), I distinguish between psychological mentalism (PM) and semantic mentalism (SM), where the second is a particular instance of the first. Psychological mentalism is a perspective according to which the terms of folk psychology – “understanding”, “intending”, “believing”, “desiring” etc. – are names of inner processes or states that take place inside

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<sup>142</sup> Frege rejected mathematical formalism by stating that mathematics does not merely work with ink marks, however, he thought that in order to avoid this perspective, mathematical symbols should be signs of something, that is, they should represent their meaning (Perissinotto 2010, 98).

<sup>143</sup> Wittgenstein uses the word “grammar” in a variety of ways. He speaks of the grammar of a linguistic expression (1) to refer to the set of rules that govern the use of the expression, that is, rules according to which the expression is used by the speaker, (2) to refer to the set of rules that constitute language itself, that is, the grammar of an entire language and, finally (3), to refer to the study of the rules of a particular language, that is, as an integral part of the philosophical activity (Marconi 2002, 74).

<sup>144</sup> Burge (2010) faults the later Wittgenstein as bad influence on the tradition, because Wittgenstein's excessively “linguistic” orientation is manifestation of the twentieth-century “hyper-intellectualism” that, in Burge's view, made an appreciation of the true nature of objective thought impossible, contrary to contemporary cognitive science.

the subject's mind. Psychology gets, in other words, mentalized. Andronico (2019) rightly emphasizes the fact that at the core of psychological mentalism rests a notion of mind as mental medium or intermediary between language and reality: in the case of understanding, this leads to a conception of understanding as something, being it a state or a process, which is mental and it takes place *inside* the subject. Semantic mentalism is a semantic thesis according to which the meaning of a word is a mental entity – being it an inner image, or a representation – associated to the word.<sup>145</sup> Wittgenstein's philosophy is anti-mentalist on both sides. In particular, in his writings PM takes the form of the guidance conception of understanding (Bridge 2017), or, using a different metaphor, the “rails to infinity imagery” (Wright 2002). The first image puts emphasis on the conception of understanding as a source of something, that is, as a mental depositary which guides the subject's behaviour in response to rules. The act of understanding is thought in terms of inner guidance. This view is emblematically endorsed by Wittgenstein's interlocutor in the dialect constituting the Rule-following remarks. The second image puts emphasis on a certain conception of rules as predetermined rails which should guide the agent after having been understood: rules are like rails to infinity, in the sense that they already contain their future applications. This is the idea that, as Wittgenstein characterizes it at RFM VI, §31, «once you have got hold of the rule, you have the route traced for you».

We could now move on to a more detailed exposition of Wittgenstein's Rule-following considerations, and the first step to take is to highlight the point that, *pace* Kripke, Wittgenstein is not “Kripkenstein”.

### **5.1 Wittgenstein is not “Kripkenstein”**

Kripke's reading has the virtue of making the duplicity of the Rule-following problem explicit; there are two parallel issues: normativity, on the one hand, and the philosophical implications of the guidance conception, on the other hand. This distinction applies to the grammatical investigation both of the concept of meaning and of the concept of understanding. The Wittgensteinian characterization of meaning as use, on the one hand, and of understanding as mastery of technique, on the other hand,

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<sup>145</sup> Voltolini (2002, 54-59) further distinguishes between the experiential version of PM and SM, and the neurophysiological version. According to the first, the meaning of a term is the subject's conscious meaning experience (SM), and understanding is a conscious mental event (PM); according to the second, the meaning of a term is some sort of cerebral process (SM) whereas, accordingly, understanding is an unconscious cerebral process (PM). This distinction is further employed in Marconi (1995, 415). I will not entirely adopt this multifaced classification; my point is to distinguish between a broader perspective which is based on the appeal to the mental as a necessary intermediary between language and reality, regarding meaning, understanding and all the other psychological terms (PM) from the semantic instance of such a general perspective, where the appeal to the mental intermediary is thought to be necessary condition for a term to be meaningful (SM). In this sense, with the expression “semantic mentalism” I refer to what Andronico (2019) calls “psychologism”, and which is there distinguished from mentalism (which coincides with my use of the expression “psychological mentalism”).

is put forward against the mentalistic guidance conception of both meaning and understanding, which itself implies the idea of the mind as a special mechanism (Bridge 2017). The guidance conception is presented in Wittgenstein's remarks through the interlocutor's voice; the interlocutor works with a common sense picture of meaning which, in Kripke's text, is assumed by the sceptic too, that is, it is the common ground shared by the sceptic and his interlocutor. In this sense, it is the common ground in virtue of which the interlocutor could rightly be said to endorse and deal with the sceptical challenge. Kush (2006, 4) calls this common picture of meaning "Low-brow meaning determinism": «"Low-brow" [...] is meant to remind us permanently of its picture-like status.<sup>146</sup> The expression "meaning determinism" picks out one of the most central elements of the picture: the idea that what someone means by a sign *determines* both how he *will* use it (if he wishes to stick to his meaning), and how he *should* use it (if he wishes to speak correctly)». In other words, the meaning of an expression, or the mental act of understanding/grasping the meaning, are thought to be the elements which ground the phenomenon of following a rule, that is, the element we should rely on in order to answer the following questions: «What does it mean to follow the rule *correctly*?» (BB, 142), «How is it decided what is the right step to take at any particular point?» (PI §186).<sup>147</sup>

However, Kripke's interpretation differs from Wittgenstein's own line of thought mainly with respect to three aspects:

1. The interpretation of the sceptical paradox and the role that such a paradox plays within the dialectics;
2. The notion of fact employed;
3. The notion of rule.

Let us start from the first. I will discuss the other two points in section 5.3.

Contrary to Kripke's interpretation and following in particular Fogelin (2009), I argue that Wittgenstein's philosophy is not an example of philosophical scepticism because (1) Wittgenstein does not endorse any sceptical paradox. As a consequence, (2) he does not formulate a sceptical conclusion about the impossibility of meaning and (3) he does not even provide a sceptical solution to the paradox. As stated above, Kripke's dialectics presupposes a basic agreement between the sceptic and Wittgenstein: the legitimacy of the sceptical paradox. Wittgenstein, indeed, according to

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<sup>146</sup> The picture-like status of the conception of meaning is here opposed to a formal theory of meaning: the former is intuitive, «rough and only partially explicitly formulated» (Kusch 2006, 4).

<sup>147</sup> These questions frame the Rule-following problem and they are at the centre of the scenario which introduces the issue in the *Philosophical Investigations*: the parable of the Wayward Child (PI §185).

Kripke, endorses the paradox and he then tries to face it by rejecting traditional philosophical responses to it. The *pars construens* of the Rule-following considerations is read, therefore, as a sceptical solution to the sceptical paradox. But a sceptical solution, even if different from a direct response, is still a response to the sceptical challenge and it implies the acceptance of the challenge itself. Kripke, indeed, rightly traces the alleged sceptical paradox in PI §201, but he takes into consideration only the first part of it:

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule. The answer was: if every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule, then it can also be brought into conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here. (PI §201)

However, the key passage is only one line below:

That there is a misunderstanding here is shown by the mere fact that in this chain of reasoning we place one interpretation behind another, as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another lying behind it. For what we thereby show is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an interpretation, but which, from case to case of application, is exhibited in what we call “following the rule” and “going against it”. (PI §201)

Wittgenstein does not properly respond to the sceptical paradox because the paradox itself is already the product of a philosophical confusion; the paradox is not the starting point, but rather the product of a philosophical misunderstanding about the concepts of meaning and rule. Once we endorse the paradox, we are already trapped into a philosophical confusion. We reach the paradox because, in dealing with the phenomenon of Rule-following, we «place one interpretation behind another»; the mistake lies in what Fogelin (2009) calls the “interpretational account of Rule-following”. Therefore, what we should do in order to dissolve the Rule-following problem, is to find a «way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation».

Contrary to Kripke’s claim, in PI 201 Wittgenstein does not say that his paradox shows that there can be no such thing as meaning anything by a word [...]. What the paradox shows, he says “is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation”. Surprisingly – actually, incredibly – Kripke never cites this passage in *Wittgenstein on Rule and Private Language* and thus misses what I take to be the central moral of Wittgenstein’s paradox: Rule-following cannot

be made determinate – or, by extension, meanings cannot be fixed – through interpretation alone.  
(Fogelin 2009, 16-17)<sup>148</sup>

The first line of the above quotation expresses the key point that shows that Wittgenstein does not formulate a sceptical conclusion: Wittgenstein does not reject the possibility of Rule-following. He does not want to raise doubts on meaning and Rule-following, but rather he wants to elucidate and reject a particular and deceptive account of Rule-following, namely, the interpretational account.

To put the matter more strongly, for Wittgenstein there is no “paradox” of rule-following. The thought that it is paradoxical is the product of a philosophical misconception, namely, the misconception that rule-following is always grounded in (or implicitly contains) acts of interpretation. (Fogelin 2009, 22)

### 5.1.1 The “paradox of interpretation”

The interpretational account of Rule-following consists in stating that following a rule *always* entails acting in accordance with an interpretation. As stated above, the Rule-following problem might be spelled out as follows: what does it mean to follow a rule? How can a rule tell me what to do at this point? It is worth noting that these questions intuitively arise when we all stop and reflect about the common practice of following rules – may them being linguistic rules, orders, instructions, etc. – without being actively involved in the practice. These questions entail a degree of abstraction which constitutes a kind of external e “disembodied” point of view: we all follow rules in our daily life, but we do not usually query the phenomenon in the “flux” of daily life and practices; we just act. The philosophical space comes to play when we stop and reflect about our actions; when we look at the phenomenon from the outside. Indeed, Wittgenstein introduces the issue with a scenario which represents an exception or, at least, a very rare case because, in some respects, it is from the acknowledgement of a strange and uncommon case that Rule-following looks puzzling and problematic. Wittgenstein’s scenario is also called “The case of the Wayward Child”.

Suppose there is a pupil who, judged by the usual criteria, masters the series of natural numbers, that is, he has been thought to write down series of natural numbers in the decimal system and he acts correctly in response to orders of the form, for example, “Write the number that comes after 5”, and so on (PI §145). Next, the teacher teaches him to write down series of cardinal numbers of the form “+2”. In order to do so, the teacher provides the pupil examples and does exercises with him up to 1000. This means that the pupil does exercises with the teacher which involve numbers

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<sup>148</sup> See also Finkelstein (2000, 64). «The second paragraph of §201 indicates that, according to Wittgenstein, the paradox mentioned in the first paragraph reflects a misunderstanding. The paradox depends upon our thinking that the grasping of *any* rule requires that it first be interpreted».

lesser than 1000 and the teacher testes the pupil's understanding up to 1000. Then, the teacher asks the pupil to continue the series “+2” beyond 1000 and the pupil writes 1000, 1004, 1008, etc. We would be all inclined to think that the pupil is not acting in accordance with the rule “+2”, that is, we would tell him that he is not following that rule anymore, like in the previous cases with numbers smaller than 1000. However, the pupil does not think he is acting incorrectly: «We say to him, “Look what you’re doing!” He doesn’t understand. We say, “You should have added *two*: look how you began the series!” He answers, “Yes, isn’t it right? I thought that was how I *had* to do it.” – Or suppose he pointed to the series and said, “But I did go on in the same way”» (PI §185). Now, how can we convince the pupil that he is not following the rule, given that it is no use to repeat or reformulate the expression of the rule to him? Any attempt to convince him by appealing to the same rule fails.<sup>149</sup>

The case of the Wayward Child is important because it helps expressing two important points regarding the Rule-following problem:

1. The philosophical issue of Wittgenstein’s formulation of the Rule-following problem is the *normative capacity of a general rule* in a fresh new case of application. In other words, how to give an account of the fact that a general rule is applied to potentially infinite particular cases even if the particular case is not explicitly mentioned in the linguistic expression of the general rule?<sup>150</sup>
2. The philosophical problem is *metaphysical*, rather than merely epistemological. The question “How can we convince the pupil that his understanding of the order ‘add 2’ is not correct?” must be read as a question about the metaphysical foundation of the rule and it can be so expressed: Is there *something* that grounds the rule and that determines which courses of action conform to the rule even before the rule is concretely followed? Is there something metaphysically stable to which we can rely

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<sup>149</sup> Wittgenstein provides another formulation of the case of the Wayward Child in *The Brown Book*, which is chronologically prior to the *Philosophical Investigations*: «We now give the pupil the order "Add 1". After some time we observe that after passing 100 he did what we should call adding 2; after passing 300 he does what we should call adding 3. We have him up for this: "Didn't I tell you always to add 1? Look what you have done before you got to 100!"—Suppose the pupil said, pointing to the numbers 102, 104, etc., "Well, didn't I do the same here? I thought this was what you wanted me to do."—You see that it would get us no further here again to say "But don't you see . . .?", pointing out to him again the rules and examples we had given to him. We might, in such a case, say that this person naturally understands (interprets) the rule (and examples) we have given as we should understand the rule (and examples) telling us: "Add 1 up to 100, then 2 up to 200, etc."» (BB, 141).

<sup>150</sup> Mathematical functions indeed are particularly suitable examples of this. Let us consider the addition function, then let us suppose that we have to answer to a specific addition-query: “25+40”. Let us suppose that we immediately answer “65” with fair certainty about the arithmetical correctness of such a response. Then, someone asks us: have you been thought to calculate *that specific* calculus, that is, “25+40”? We would be inclined to answer in a negative way: at school we learned the addition function, rather than that specific calculus. We would intuitively say that we have been thought the addition function and then we are able to apply it to any particular case, even if we have never encountered it during the learning process. «When I say I understand the rule of a series, I’m surely not saying so on the basis of the *experience* of having applied the algebraic formula in such-and-such a way! [...] So you mean that you know the application of the rule of the series quite apart from remembering actual applications to particular numbers. And you’ll perhaps say: “Of course! For the series is infinite, and the bit of it that I could develop finite.”» (PI §147).

on in order to prove that we are right and the pupil is wrong? This metaphysical element should help us dealing with point 1: it would be the grounding element which guarantees the normative capacity of the rule, that is, the element which guides the agent in the application of the rule to the particular case.

These points are implicitly acknowledged in Wright's clever summary of the philosophical import of the Rule-following problem:

The principal philosophical issues to do with rule-following impinge on every *normatively constrained* [my emphasis] area of human thought and activity: on every institution where there is right and wrong opinion, correct and incorrect practice. It is the merest platitude that where there is such a thing as following a rule or complex of rules correctly, or as going wrong, there have to be *facts* about what the requirements, in context, of the relevant rule(s) are. (Wright 2001, 1)

Wittgenstein thinks that philosophers have generally given two responses to such an issue and both responses share the basic assumption that we should actually find such a grounding element, that is, we should try to provide a fair candidate for such a metaphysical role.

1. *The platonist candidate.* According to this perspective, it is enough to appeal to the rule itself – thought in terms of a general formula, or algorithm – because the rule contains all the possible applications even before these applications are concretely realised. «But are the steps then *not* determined by the algebraic formula?» (PI §189). Therefore, all the passages are already done before being actually realised in practice; in other words, the particular applications of the rule are *predetermined* and *anticipated* «in a unique way» (PI §188). When I grasp a rule, I grasp a sort of compacted set of instructions. A platonist teacher would deal with the case of the Wayward Child by stating that he already knew, at the time when he gave the order “add 2”, that the pupil should have written “1002” after “1000”. Now, Wittgenstein first observes that such declaration «amounts to something like: “If I had then been asked what number he should write after 1000, I would have replied ‘1002’”» (PI §187), and Wittgenstein himself does not doubt it.<sup>151</sup> «This is an assumption of much the same sort as “If he had fallen into the water then, I would have jumped in after him”» (PI §187). However, Wittgenstein highlights the fact that the platonist, when he expresses that utterance, he is rather saying that he *meant* the rule in that way: «your idea was that this *meaning the order* [my emphasis] had in its own way already taken all those steps: that in meaning it, your mind, as it were, flew ahead and took all the steps before you physically arrived at this or that one. So you were inclined to use such expressions as “The steps are *really* already taken, even before I take them in writing or

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<sup>151</sup> Note that this would be a dispositionalist response, in Kripke's sense.

in speech or in thought". And it seemed as if they were in some *unique* way predetermined, anticipated a in the way that only meaning something could anticipate reality» (PI §188).

The central point of the platonist response is that the consequences of the rule are thought to be already existing in the expression of the rule in an *ideal sense* of "existing" which Wittgenstein expresses with the help of two images: 1. The image of the string of pearls in a box. The consequences are already contained in the rule «as though they were a string of pearls in a box, and by pulling out one pearl I pulled out the one following it» (BB, 39-40).<sup>152</sup> 2. The image of the rails to infinity, which is deeply discussed by Wright (2001). It is as if the rule «once stamped with a particular meaning, traces the lines along which it is to be followed through the whole of space» (PI §219) therefore, following the rule would be like moving on «rails invisibly laid to infinity» (PI §218); infinitely long rails which «correspond to the unlimited application of a rule» (PI §218). Wright (2001) talks of the "rules-as-rails" imaginary and he rightly highlights the fact that this perspective is platonist because it presupposes *hypostatisation of rules*; rules are hypostatised in the sense that they are thought as autonomous entities which ground normativity. «The upshot is, then, that the picture of rules-as-rails forces us to think of our ability to follow them, to know in a potential infinity of cases what moves are in accord with them, as owing to a kind of hypercognitive felicity» (Wright 2001, 160): when we grasp the rule, our mind «flew ahead and took all the steps before [we] physically arrived at this or that one» (PI §188), as the mind could «crossed all the bridges before you were there» (BB, 142).

Wittgenstein's objection to this response is simple but incisive: who, or what, guarantees that the point to which we are *physically* arrived is the point to which the rule has already always *ideally* arrived? (Perissinotto 2010, 106 my translation). Indeed, the platonist response presupposes a gap between the predetermined application of the rule which is ideally contained in the rule itself and the actual application, and this gap should be filled in virtue of the fact that the rule, «as it were meant, foreshadowed all the transitions which were to be made according to it»; however «the assumption of a shadow of a transition does not get us any further, because it does not bridge the gulf between it and the real transition. If the mere words of the rule could not anticipate a future transition, no more could any mental act accompanying these words» (BB, 142-143).

2. *The mentalistic candidate.* If the rule alone – through the mental act of grasping it – cannot anticipate and determine its future applications in a «unique way» (PI §188), then we might think

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<sup>152</sup> We find another formulation in the *Philosophical Grammar*, where Wittgenstein writes that «it can easily seem that the sign [the formulation of the rule, in our case] contained the whole of the grammar [...] like a string of pearls in a box and he had only to put it out» (PG §55).

that, for each case of application, there should be something between the rule and its application; that is, that at each step we need a new understanding of the rule, or a new intuition. In general, what we need is a kind of interpretative act.

Supposing there to be a certain general rule [...] I must recognize each time afresh that this rule may be applied *here* [my emphasis]. No act of foresight can absolve me from this act of insight.

Since the form to which the rule is applied is in fact different at every step. (PR §149)

In the case of the Wayward Child, the mentalistic interlocutor is inclined to say that «a new insight – intuition – is needed at every step to carry out the order “+n” correctly» (PI §186). But, «what at any stage we are to call “being in accordance” with it?» «It would almost be more correct to say, not that an intuition was needed at every point, but that a new decision was needed at every point» (PI §186). However, even appealing to an act of decision might be misleading, because «nothing like an act of decision must take place, but possibly just an act of writing or speaking» (BB, 143). In particular, Wittgenstein intends to show that if we assume that there should be something mental between the rule and its application – an intuition, a decision, a new act of understanding – then we are doomed to fall into a paradoxical situation: «whatever I do can, on some interpretation, be made compatible with the rule» (PI §198). Even the behaviour of the Wayward Child could be made compatible with the rule if we say that his interpretation of the rule “add 2” was “add 2 till 1000, then add 4 from 1000 to 2000, then add 6 from 2000 to 3000” and so on. Therefore, «no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule», but «if every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule, then it can also be brought into conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here» (PI §201). The mentalistic response leads to the paradox which undermines the very normative force of rules: rules got dissolved because if there is neither accord, nor conflict, there are no rules altogether.

The outcome of Wittgenstein’s treatment of the two responses is that if we identify the normative force of the rule with its expression – that is, in the rule itself (platonist response) – or in the mental entity associated to the rule (mentalistic response), we interpose a mental intermediary between the rule and its application which inevitably leads to a dissolution of the Rule-following practice. The two responses, then, come from two common philosophical misunderstandings:

1. The interpretational account of Rule-following;
2. The guidance conception of meaning and understanding.

(1) The platonist and the mentalist are both “interpretationist”, that is, they share the idea that following a rule always involves an interpretative act; in other words, there should be an interpretative

act which fills the gap between the expression of the rule and its application: the former situates the interpretative act in the act of grasping the meaning of the rule with all its future applications *ideally* contained, while the latter assumes that there must be an interpretative act for every new case of application of the rule. In this sense, we could say that even the platonist response is mentalist in the sense that it belongs to psychological mentalism, because it assumes the idea of the mind as a mental intermediary between the grasping of the rule and the application of it.

Wittgenstein deals with the problem of interpretation already at the time of his return to Cambridge in 1929, after having abandoned the philosophical work right after the publication of the *Tractatus*. The interpretational account of Rule-following has its root in a widespread philosophical assumption which, according to Wittgenstein, has informed many theories of meaning and language throughout the history of philosophy: the idea that a sign, simply taken in itself, is a *mere* ink mark, that is, an inorganic, «utterly dead and trivial thing» (BB, 4) and it therefore needs something added to get “life”: a platonist “third realm” of meanings, or a mental entity associated to it. Platonism and mentalism both come from this assumption: if the sign is so conceived, then «what must be added [...] is something immaterial, with properties different from all mere signs» (BB, 4) because every new sign, since it is something dead and inorganic, could not give life to another sign.<sup>153</sup> Platonism takes the form of the *reification of meaning*, that is, the idea that meaning is *something* autonomous separated from the sign and, in particular, it is something that must be added to the dead sign to give it life (Perissinotto 2002). Regarding mentalism, Wittgenstein summarises the link between mentalism – in particular, what I have previously called “psychological mentalism” – and the assumption of the sign as *mere* dead sign, in the following passage, taken from *The Blue Book*:

We are tempted to think that the action of language consists of two parts; an inorganic part, the handling of signs, and an organic part, which we may call understanding these signs, meaning them, interpreting them, thinking. These latter activities seem to take place in a queer kind of *medium* [my emphasis], the mind; and the mechanism of the mind, the nature of which, it seems, we don't quite understand, can bring about effects which no material mechanism could. (BB, 3)

However, Wittgenstein warns us against this apparently innocuous philosophical assumption because «whatever accompanied it [the sign] would for us just be another sign» (BB, 5) either if we place it in the platonist realm of meanings, or if we place it in the subject's mind. In this way we reach what can be called “The regress of interpretations”: if every sign must be interpreted, then we should be able to find something which is not further interpretable, otherwise the infinite regress is inevitable. It is important to clarify, though, that Wittgenstein is not against interpretation *tout court*; he has no

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<sup>153</sup> According to Wittgenstein and Frege, this was the mistake of 19<sup>th</sup> Century mathematical formalism.

quarrel in admitting that interpretation is one of the many activities within the realm of language. It is not problematic, indeed, to acknowledge the fact that sometimes a rule can be restated in a clearer and easier way if the interlocutor does not immediately understand; the main target is the idea that every meaningful application of a word entails an interpretative act. Wittgenstein, therefore, admits the possibility of a “circumscribed interpretation”:

Of course sometimes I do interpret signs, give signs an interpretation; but that does not happen anytime I understand a sign. (If someone asks me “What time is it?” there is no inner process of laborious interpretation; I simply react to what I see and hear. If someone whips out a knife at me, I do not say “I interpret that as a threat”). (PG I §9)

It should be clear now that the root assumption of the regress of interpretations is the idea of a sign as a dead ink mark. It is no surprise then, that Wittgenstein suggests a change of perspective which consists in considering a sign in the context of other signs rather than in isolation: «The sign (the sentence) gets its significance from the system of signs, from the language to which it belongs» (BB, 5).<sup>154</sup> If we consider the sign as part of a system, then we are no tempted to see it “dead”, because it already gets life from the role, or use, it has in that system: «if we had to name anything which is the life of the sign, we should have to say that it was its use» (BB, 4).

(2) In talking about the guidance conception both of meaning and understanding I follow Bridge’s suggestion that, although «understanding, no less than meaning, possesses normative significance», that is, «just as we may speak of the student’s response as being in accord (or conflict) with the order’s meaning, so we may speak of that response as being in accord (or conflict) with her understanding of the order’s meaning» (Bridge 2017, 376), there is the parallel issue of the explanatory role of meaning and understanding: «To say that the student is applying a certain understanding of the order in responding to it is to offer an explanation of her response; it is to imply that she responds to the order as she does *because* she understands the order in that particular way» (Bridge 2017, 376).<sup>155</sup> We appeal to meaning and understanding in order to give an account, or to explain, the subject’s behaviour. The central point of the guidance conception is the idea of meaning

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<sup>154</sup> Wittgenstein applies Frege’s “Context principle”. If we consider the sign as an element in a system of signs, then it gets its meaning from its use, rather than from something that coexists with it. Frege expresses the “Context principle” in *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, 1884. In the introduction of the work, Frege introduces the principle as one of the fundamental methodological principles kept in the enquiry: «never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition». Frege already acknowledges the strict nexus between psychologism [mentalism, in our terms] and the study of words in isolation: if we consider the sign in isolation then of course we see it as a dead thing and we are then led to add something to it which belongs to the realm of the mental.

<sup>155</sup> Although Bridge talks mainly about the explanatory role of understanding, I think that the same suggestion applies to the platonist conception of meaning: meaning is something that, if grasped, (1) guides the subject’s action and (2) it justifies the action. Therefore, we can still say, borrowing Bridge’s expression, that the subject responds to the order as he does because he meant the order in that particular way, that is, because he grasped such a meaning.

and understanding as *sources* of the use of words and it is the idea endorsed by Wittgenstein's interlocutor in the dialogue constituting the Rule-following dialectics. The interlocutor's master thought is that applying one's understanding consists in being guided by an image in one's mind. (Bridges 2017). To understand an expression's or utterance's meaning, therefore, is a matter of having an image in the mind that can be consulted and that shows the subject how to proceed; how to apply the rule (Stroud 1996). The *platonist response* and the *mentalistic response* to the Rule-following problem are two versions of the guidance conception: in the first case, the pupil is thought to have an image of the algebraic formula, or algorithm, and he is then able to determine what to write through a derivation from that formula; in the second case, the student is thought to be the subject of a mental gasping of the meaning of the rule and such a meaning is what "tells" him how to apply the rule; the student acts in virtue of the way the rule is meant.

First, Wittgenstein's critical remarks on the guidance conception echo the problem of the regress of interpretations: something cannot guide the subject in a particular way, unless the subject understands it to show him that. So even the added element requires an act of understanding in order to be considered a guiding item: «if the guidance conception were correct about the connection between use and understanding that obtains when a subject applies her understanding, then that connection would depend upon the subject's having a *second-order* understanding, an understanding of the inner item whose presence constitutes her original understanding» (Bridge 2017, 378).<sup>156</sup> However, even the item constituting the subject's second-order understanding can guide if it is understood as doing so, hence a third-order understanding comes into play and then we are faced with a regress.

Secondly, the interlocutor who endorses the guidance conception – hence the interpretational account of Rule-following – has the inclination to posit the existence of the mind as a mental mechanism, which is thought to be a necessary medium between language and reality (psychological mentalism). To construe the mind as a mechanism is to think of it as a "sphere", as a self-standing realm.

If one says that thought is a mental activity, or an activity of the mind, one thinks of the mind as a cloudy gaseous medium in which many things can happen which cannot occur in a different sphere, and from which many things can be expected that are otherwise not possible. (PG §100)

Moreover, this autonomous sphere is thought to be the source of use, therefore the mental is conceived in terms of a kind of mental *depository* of *potential* courses of action which could then be manifested

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<sup>156</sup> As Wittgenstein says of the "inner voice," «if it can guide me right, it can also guide me wrong» (PI §213).

and externalised in the outer behaviour: in the case of the platonist perspective, this leads to the already quoted imagery of rules-as-rails to infinity, which *ideally* contains the future application in the particular cases. According to this picture, the phenomenon of Rule-following is entirely understood within the realm of the mental, without looking at the wider context of social interactions and social practices. We will see that Wittgenstein's positive account of Rule-following rests on a rejection of the guidance conception and, in particular, on a rejection of such a characterization of the mental as an autonomous, still metaphysically mysterious, realm which already contains in a latent form courses of action and which can be approached entirely without any reference to the context in which rule-governed activities are embedded.

To conclude, as I tried to show, the common source of misleading conceptions of meaning and understanding is the interpretational account, but this account itself is grounded on the platonist imagery of rules-as-rails and the mentalist conception of understanding as a mental state thought in terms of a latent depositary of pre-arranged courses of action. For this reason, I argue that it would be more precise to talk about the “paradox of interpretation” (Fogelin 2009), rather than the “sceptical paradox”, or “the paradox of Rule-following”, because no real paradox of Rule-following is actually acknowledged by Wittgenstein: the paradoxical situation exists only within the borders of the deceptive account of Rule-following.

### 5.1.2 Following a rule is a practice

Wittgenstein's critical remarks about the interpretational account are followed by a *paris construens* in which Wittgenstein positively deals with the grammatical analysis of the very notion of Rule-following: his method consists in clarifying the expression in order to advance a solution which is, really, a *dissolution* of the very problem. Wittgenstein's solution is very different from Kripke's sceptical solution, although the community still plays an important role. Indeed, as suggested by Fogelin (2009), the communitarian solution of the sceptical paradox is simply a particular version of the interpretational account: the community, rather than the individual, is thought to provide the subject the ultimate interpretation of the rule. Therefore, the individual's interpretation of the rule is judged as correct if it squares with the community's interpretation of it. However, «whatever the members of the community do, or say they are doing, under some interpretations of their rules their actions will conform to them, and under others they will not», hence «the paradox of interpretation breaks out anew, now at the community level» (Fogelin 2009, 26).<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Wright (1980) criticises Kripke's interpretation in a different way. He admits that the very meaning of Rule-following presupposes as a background a collective practice, that is, he still endorses a communitarian view of Rule-following. However, contrary to Kripke's claim, he agrees with Fogelin (2009) in stating that the paradox should not be

Given this, is there «a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation»? (PI §201), that is, is there a possible alternative account of Rule-following? Wittgenstein's answer is positive: there is indeed a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation and this alternative account consists in looking «from case to case of application [...] what we call “following the rule” and “going against it”» (PI §201). Following a rule is a *practice* (PI §202). In order to face platonist and mentalistic tendencies, Wittgenstein invites us to approach the problem of Rule-following in anthropological and pragmatic terms, in line with the pluralistic and praxiological conception of language which is the main ingredient of what I have previously called the “anthropological turn”. What does Wittgenstein mean by “practice” in this context? And what does he mean by “use”? Is it the practical use, more similar to the function that an object fulfils, or is it more similar to the role that something has within a determined practice? I argue that the second option is what better fits with Wittgenstein's overall philosophical interest. Talking about following a rule as a practice is *a way of seeing* the practice itself, that is, a way of looking at it from a particular perspective.<sup>158</sup> In particular, it is to look at the role, the function and the consequences that such a practice has in the life of the subjects that share it; it is a way of establishing a nexus between the practice at issue and *life*.<sup>159</sup> This nexus, as we will

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seen as a real and constitutive paradox, but rather as a product of the interpretational account. Moreover, he clearly rejects the ascription to Wittgenstein to what we have called “the sceptical conclusion”: Wittgenstein does not undermine the existence of semantic facts and he does not raise doubts on the reality of communication; he rather criticizes the traditional assumption of the “ratification-independence” of the semantic facts, i.e., the idea that semantic facts exist independently from the community's acknowledgement.

<sup>158</sup> Wittgenstein's remarks on Rule-following are a good example of his main idea of philosophy and philosophical enquiry, which is one of the elements of continuity between his early philosophy and the later period. Wittgenstein always maintained a sharp distinction between philosophy and science concerning methods, objects of research and main goals. One of the main ingredients of this distinction is the *a-theoretical* character of philosophy itself. Philosophy is not a doctrine; hence it is intrinsically different from science. Something is a doctrine if it can be seen as a body of positive knowledge of the world and its features. However, already in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein writes that «philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity» (TLP 4.112) and later, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, he states that what is essential in the philosophical enquiry is that «we do not seek to learn anything new by it. We want to *understand* something that is already in plain view. For *this* is what we seem in some sense not to understand» (PI §89). Philosophy is better characterised as an activity which aims at clarifying ordinary language – it aims at reaching the *übersichtliche Darstellung* (PI §122) –, given that many traditional philosophical problems arise from a deceptive understanding of language. What I want to highlight is the fact that the philosophical enquiry, so conceived, produces a change of perspective; it helps *seeing things differently* from the way we are used to see them.

<sup>159</sup> I think this is one of the main differences between Wittgenstein's and Peirce's conceptions of meaning. Peirce's conception of meaning is expressed through the following pragmatic maxim: «Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object» (Peirce 1936, vol. 5, section 402). During an interesting seminar held at Ca' Foscari University by Professors Kenneth Stickers and Roberta Dreon, professor Stickers summarised Peirce's view on meaning as the idea that the meaning of a term is identified with the practical consequences of the object the term refers to. “Use” in this context stands for practical use, whereas Wittgenstein's notion is richer: a word's use is its role in a system, or language game and this role is constituted not only by grammatical rules, but also by features of the subjects and the contexts where the word is actually employed. For a detailed comparison between the two, see Boncompagni (2016).

see, involves the consideration of human beings not as solipsistic rational agents, but as beings who belong both to a specific biological species and to a particular cultural system. In Fogelin's words:

Wittgenstein is not saying that an individual's interpretation of the rule is correct to the extent that it squares with the community's interpretation of it. In rule-following we join a consensus in *action* – a consensus grounded in the kind of training we, as humans, *can* successfully undergo and the kind of training that we actually *do* undergo in the community in which we are reared. The consensus is grounded, as Wittgenstein puts it, in facts concerning our *natural history*. (Fogelin 2009, 28)

In what follows I will expound three aspects that stand at the core of Wittgenstein's dissolution of the Rule-following problem and which together suggest the naturalistic character of Wittgenstein's later philosophy.

1. First of all, the new way of looking entails no hiatus between the formulation of the rule and its application. I do not look at the rule as something that precedes and grounds its own applications but rather as something that «lives within its applications, within the regularity of human action and human's agreement in action» (Perissinotto 2015, 104, my translation). The misleading picture of the “dead sign” which, as we saw, is at the source of the interpretational account, applies here as well: as we cannot properly talk about a “dead sign” because a sign is already something codified, in a similar manner, there is no “dead rule”, because if something is talked as a rule, then it is already a codified rule, otherwise it would not be a rule at all. Wittgenstein uses the notion of paradigmatic application in order to express this point: an application of the rule to a new circumstance is not an action based on some previously determined definition of the rule, but it is the paradigm of correctness for further future applications in the same condition. How to follow the rule is, in a certain sense, determined at the moment. The paradigmatic formulation is not itself predictable in terms of correctness and incorrectness, for it is the very criterion that determines this boundary. The new application, indeed, establishes a standard that does not exist independently of such a grammatical decision; the rule is defined from time to time by an internal relation with its paradigmatic applications, whose existence becomes necessary for the existence of the rule itself.

The functional distinction between a paradigmatic application and additional applications of the rule in a given circumstance sets the basis for the dissolution of the Rule-following problem because, if the paradigmatic application provides the criterion of correctness of a particular application through a grammatical decision, before this decision is made it doesn't literally make sense to address the

problem of the correctness or incorrectness of future applications.<sup>160</sup> There is nothing that determines in advance whether the future application of a rule is correct or incorrect. The paradigmatic application, while determining the reasonableness or otherwise of further applications, does not precede the application; it is simply that application considered as a paradigm. As such, it cannot justify anything (PI §217).

Whether a behaviour counts as an application of the rule is not written in the formulation of the rule itself but it is, in a certain sense, the result of a decision (PI §186). However, the emphasis on decision, while it is useful to replace the role of intuition (PI §186), it threatens to introduce a form of conventionalism that is foreign to the reflections on Rule-following. The decision mentioned by Wittgenstein is not the arbitrary and deliberate adoption of some convention, but an almost spontaneous operation that comes from a long training (PI §219). In this sense, we could say that treating an application of the rule in a new circumstance as a paradigm is not the result of a conscious decision but a familiar pattern of behaviour which expresses human's agreement in action.

Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order. One is trained to do so, and one reacts to an order in a particular way. (PI §206)

When I follow the rule, I do not choose. I follow the rule *blindly*. (PI §219)

When I follow the rules I do not always reason upon them, that is, there is no necessary intermediate mental process between the understanding of the formulation of the rule and its application: «all we do is read the lips of the rule and *act*, without appealing to anything else for guidance» (PI §228). In this sense, from a grammatical point of view, there is a difference between understanding the rule and interpreting the rule.

If I see the though symbol “from outside”, I become conscious that it *could* it could be interpreted thus or thus; if it is a step in the course of my thoughts, then it is a stopping place that is natural to me, and its further interpretability does not occupy (or trouble) me. As I have a time-table and use it without being concerned with the fact that a table is susceptible of various interpretations. (Z §235)

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<sup>160</sup> The distinction is *functional* and not ontological. An application is paradigmatic if *it is used as* a paradigmatic application. Wittgenstein applies the same kind of functional distinction between grammatical and factual propositions: a proposition is grammatical if it used as a norm, i.e., if it plays a normative role, whereas a proposition is factual, or empirical, if it plays a descriptive role. This distinction does not depend upon the formal structure of the proposition. The very same proposition might be used as a grammatical proposition and then as an empirical one.

However, I stop from further interpreting the sign not because the sign is itself self-evident and it could not be interpreted anymore; I do not further interpret the sign because I actually do not interpret it anymore. Why? Because I do not need to do so given that the sign is part of a picture which I find familiar.

What happened is not that this symbol cannot be further interpreted, but: I do no interpreting. I do not interpret, because I feel at home in the present picture. (Z §324)

Following a rule, in this sense, is like an extension of a primitive behaviour: there is no intellectualistic mediation; I simply act in a spontaneous way given the kind of training I have been subjected to. This brings us to the second aspect.

2. The moral of the previous section is that how to follow rules is not independent from how *we actually* follow rules. This is part of what Fogelin (2009) calls Wittgenstein's "defactoism" and which he generally defines as «the rejection of appeals to rational processes where philosophers typically have attempted to find or supply them» (Fogelin 2009, 41).<sup>161</sup> Stating that following a rule is a practice, then, amounts to characterizing it as a habit, an institution...a technique.

To follow a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* (usages, institutions). (PI §199)

The expressions "rule" and "following a rule" refer to a learned and incorporated technique; a habit or institution which is intersubjectively accepted and situated in a context which is an entire "form of life" (PI §199). That is why, then, «to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life» (PI §19).

Some questions may well arise at this point: what kind of custom is Rule-following? What does the word "we" refer to? Given that Rule-following is a practice, how to give an account of the normativity of rules? In order to answer to these questions, I make a subtle distinction between the aspect of *regularity* and Wittgenstein's focus on the *sense of familiarity* (PI §§129, 596). I will discuss the latter at point 3.

First of all, the grammatical clarification of the expressions in terms of customs and institutions entails the idea that «it is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on

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<sup>161</sup> According to Fogelin (2009), "defactoism" captures a central feature of Wittgenstein's mode of philosophizing which stands for an anti-intellectualist approach which demotes the role of the intellect by stressing the importance of training and human shared primitive reactions. There is no substantial problem of Rule-following because, if we look at Rule-following as a practice, there are just activities and practices that we, as a matter of fact, do as humans and as members of a specific society.

which only one person followed a rule. It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which a report was made, an order given or understood, and so on» (PI §199).<sup>162</sup> That is, the very grammar of the expressions “custom”, “institution”, “habit”, involve the element of *regularity*, or *repetition*. We would not call something – say, a particular course of action – a custom if this course of action «would be possible for only *one* person, only *once* in a lifetime, to do» (PI §199). It should be clear that Wittgenstein here is not enquiring whether it might be possible for a particular course of action to be actually done by only one person and one time in a lifetime; rather, he is trying to spell out the grammar of the terms involved in ordinary discourse around Rule-following.<sup>163</sup> He is spelling out how we actually employ these expressions, for this makes clear what is actually following a rule for us.<sup>164</sup>

Let’s imagine that the people in that country carried on usual human activities and in the course of them employed, apparently, an articulate language. If we watch their activities, we find them intelligible, they seem ‘logical’. But when we try to learn their language, we find it impossible to do so. For there is no regular connection between what they say, the sounds they make, and their activities [...] Are we to say that these people have a language: orders, reports, and so on? There is not enough regularity for us to call it “language”. (PI §207)

Secondly, the characterisation of Rule-following as a custom, or institution, is meant to show that following a rule consists in learning a determined *capacity* to do something in a spontaneous and immediate way, that is, without further reasoning or interpretation. When the traffic light gets red, I immediately stop, without reflecting about the sign; I have *learned* how to drive and I have acquired a *pattern of behaviour* which helps me acting “blindly”, that is, in a certain sense, with closed eyes.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Wittgenstein himself specifies that this is not a factual sentence, but rather «a gloss on the *grammar* of the expression “to follow a rule”» (PI §199).

<sup>163</sup> I do not endorse McGinn (1984)’s criticism of the “multiple application thesis”. As we have previously seen, McGinn interprets Wittgenstein’s paragraph as if he wanted to provide a definite numerical threshold of the sufficient number of applications in order to consider something a rule. However, Wittgenstein’s interest is, as always, grammatical, that is, he wants to elucidate the grammar – hence the use – of the expression at issue. Wittgenstein’s point is that for something to be rightly called a rule is necessary to actually being applied and only one application would not be enough. However, Wittgenstein does not want to specify the number of applications that could be sufficient, for this is a task that would be probably considered impossible and senseless. The multiple application aspect is a necessary condition for something to be a rule, but not a sufficient one.

<sup>164</sup> As stated by Marconi (2002), according to the Wittgensteinian perspective «the content of what is traditionally called “concept” coincides with the grammar of the corresponding linguistic expression» (Marconi 2002, 74, my translation). The study of concepts, then, coincides with the study of the grammar of the linguistic expressions, therefore Wittgenstein’s grammar is a conceptual grammar. It is important to note that the grammar replaces the ontology, in the sense that it plays the same role: some propositions that might seem ontological assertions on the world and its essential traits are in fact grammatical propositions which characterise language functioning. «Grammar tells what kind of object anything is» (PI §373).

<sup>165</sup> I owe to Professor Perissinotto this insight about the way to better spell out the expression “blindly”. The expression “with closed eyes” reminds rather to the expression “without seeing” which has a different connotation than “blindly”.

I use the expression “pattern of behaviour” in order to further highlight the element of regularity: people are trained to follow rules in such and such a way and, thanks’ to constant exercise and repetition, they incorporate patterns of action which rest at a very basic level of human action. The word “pattern” is meant to show that such course of action is already defined, in a certain sense, for a definite number of cases encountered and it allows the subject to be confident and familiar. Following a rule is then best characterized as a *practical capacity*, a kind of *knowledge-how*, rather than *knowledge-that*. But if Wittgenstein’s reflection on rules comes from his characterization of meaning as the use of signs, then language use itself is best characterized as a practical capacity. As we immediately stop at the traffic light when the light turns red, similarly we employ the expressions of the language we have acquired in a spontaneous and un-reflexed way, without stopping and reasoning before speaking or before reacting to people’s utterances. We follow rules in this way because, simply, we are used to act in this way, i.e., this is what we have learned through training and education within the boundaries of our form of life.

The expression “form of life” occurs only five times in the *Philosophical Investigations*; three times in the first part (PI §§19, 23, 241), and two times in the second part, also called “Philosophy of Psychology – a fragment” (PPF §§1, 345<sup>166</sup>).<sup>167</sup> The expression is not a technical term and it is not used in a systematic and precise way. However, the very semantic fluctuation of the term is very interesting because it introduces Wittgenstein’s complex reference to nature, both human nature and nature in general.

In paragraph 23 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein employs the expression “form of life” together with “activity”, in order to refer to the fact that «language use is not the use of a disembodied subject, but rather it is the use which takes place in a context of activities and customs whose character is eminently social» (Voltolini 2009, 40).

The word “language-game” is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life. Consider the variety of language-games in the following examples, and in others:

Giving orders, and acting on them –

Describing an object by its appearance, or by its measurements –

Constructing an object from a description (a drawing) –

Reporting an event –

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Indeed, “blindly” generally gives the idea of unintentionality, irrationality, or lack of understanding. The rational, conscious and intentional character of Rule-following is not rejected by Wittgenstein.

<sup>166</sup> See also RPP I §630.

<sup>167</sup> I refer to the second part using the abbreviation “PPF”.

Speculating about the event –  
Forming and testing a hypothesis –  
Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams –  
Making up a story; and reading one –  
Acting in a play –  
Singing rounds –  
Guessing riddles –  
Cracking a joke; telling one –  
Solving a problem in applied arithmetic –  
Translating from one language into another –  
Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying. (PI §23)

Wittgenstein, as we can read, presents a list of language-games and activities which belong to the cultural system. These activities mark out a specific culture, that is, they define its appearance and they distinguish it from other different cultures. We find a similar list in the *Remarks on the philosophy of psychology*. Here, Wittgenstein talks about the “facts of life” and he provides examples of activities such as punishing certain actions, describing colours, taking interest in sentiments of other people, and giving orders (RPP I §630). The focus on the cultural aspect of the form of life is at the centre of other remarks where Wittgenstein states, for example, that «what belongs to a language game is a whole culture» and that to describe the use of expressions of aesthetic judgement «you have to describe a culture» (LC §25).<sup>168</sup>

In other passages, though, Wittgenstein employs the notion to refer to a set of behaviours and aspects of human life considered as a biologically specific life; these behaviours are cross cultural and they involve basic activities like eating, and reproducing (PI §25, RFM V §2).

Giving orders, asking questions, telling stories, having a chat, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing. (PI §25)

The notion of “form of life”, then, is a complex notion which refers both to human characteristics and traits which belong to biological nature, and to human culturally acquired characteristics and traits. Acting in a certain way, then, is part of our form of life and that is why we could rightly say that rules,

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<sup>168</sup> See also BB, 134: «We could also easily imagine a language (and that means again a culture)».

although conventional and not grounded on nature, can still be said to be *natural*. I will now try to show how this is conceptually possible.<sup>169</sup>

3. The nexus between language and form of life is meant to show that we understand words and concepts if we look at their use not only as a matter of conformity to a set of grammatical norms, but if we take into account the consequences of their usage in the life of people that use them. In this way, language is conceived as one of the constitutive aspects of action which characterises a human specific way of life (OC §475).

In this section, then, I would like to focus on the fact that, according to the Wittgensteinian perspective, rules are not enough for constituting a practice, but examples and exercises are needed as well (PI §208).

Not only rules, but also examples are needed for establishing a practice. Our rules leave loop-holes open, and the practice has to speak for itself. (OC §139)

What is needed, in addition to rules, is a sense of familiarity; feeling at ease with the practice. If the application of the rule wouldn't be so spontaneous and natural, nothing could force us to make it, witness the case of the Wayward Child: it is of no use to repeat the formulation of the rule and the examples again. In this case, indeed, rather than stating that the pupil has a lack of cognitive capacities, «we might perhaps say: this person finds it *natural* [my emphasis], once given our explanations, to understand our order as *we* would understand the order “Add 2 up to 1000, 4 up to 2000, 6 up to 3000, and so on”», and «this case would have similarities to that in which it *comes naturally* [my emphasis] to a person to react to the gesture of pointing with the hand by looking in the direction from fingertip to wrist, rather than from wrist to fingertip» (PI §185). We could maybe say, by exaggerating Wittgenstein's point, that the pupil seems to belong to a different form of life, that is, to a system where people are used to point to something by looking in the direction from fingertip to wrist; this custom appears strange to us, and maybe even unnatural, but it gains meaning from the system in which it is embedded; it is possible to imagine a culture, or a tribe, in which this practice is part of their way of life.

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<sup>169</sup> The “apparent” ambiguity of the expression “form of life” has led the critics to provide two different interpretations: some of them identify the form of life with the set of basic biological traits of human beings (Hunter 1968, Garver 1994); others identify the form of life with the specific culture, without taking into consideration facts concerning human's natural history. I argue that Wittgenstein employs the notion by taking into account both aspects. For a detailed exposition of the various interpretations see Andronico (1998).

Indeed, Wittgenstein's later production contains many passages about some general *facts of nature* and their relation with the particular adopted language. Wittgenstein often asks the reader to imagine logically possible situations, like the case discussed above, where some important aspects of our nature and nature in general are very different from how they actually are.

It is interesting, for example, to observe that particular shapes are not tied to particular colours in our environment; that, for example, we do not always see green in connection with round, red in connection with square. If we imagined a world in which shapes and colours *were* always tied to one another in such ways, we'd find intelligible a system of concepts, in which the fundamental division – shape and colour – did not hold. [...]

It is important, for example, that we are accustomed to draw with pencil, pen or the like, and that therefore the elements of our representation are strokes and points (in the sense of dots). Had human beings never drawn, but always painted (so that the concept of the contour of shapes did not play a big part), if there were a word in common use, let's call it "line", at which no one thought of a stroke, i.e. of something very thin, but always thought only of the boundary of two colours, and if at the word "point" one never thought of something tiny, but only of the intersection of two colour boundaries, then perhaps much of the development of geometry would not have occurred [...]. (RPP I §47)

These examples contain cases in which the conceptual net through which we look at the world would have been different from the one we actually have and it would have been different in virtue of some characteristic of humans considered as a species and humans considered as members of a particular culture. Here, again, Wittgenstein's reference to nature includes not just biological traits but also cultural traits. That is why Wittgenstein uses the adjective "natural" even for practices that are culturally acquired and this is a conceptual broadening of the concept of nature which plays an important role in the present work. Wittgenstein calls "natural" even something that is acquired and, in this sense, it becomes natural for us after a long period of training and exercise, in virtue of the fact that the behaviour gets implemented at a very basic level of action.

If we teach a human being such and such a technique by means of examples, – that he then proceeds like *this* and not like *that* in a particular new case, or that in this case he gets stuck, and thus that this and not that is the "*natural*" [my emphasis] continuation for him: this of itself is an extremely important fact of *nature* [my emphasis]. (Z §355)

In this paragraph the two senses of nature are clearly employed: in the first occurrence "natural" stands for something acquired that got natural after constant practice; in the second occurrence "natural" stands for something which is part of the natural history of the creature involved. Humans,

in virtue of their nature (first sense), find natural (second sense) even what they learn through exercise.<sup>170</sup> Indeed, one of the general facts of nature that Wittgenstein wants to take into account is the very human capacity to be trained and educated. We might consider this a sort of second order capacity – grounded in our biological constitution – that is, a capacity which allows humans to acquire further capacities, like language competence. These capacities, though, are not grounded in our biological nature, but they are part of what we may call our “second nature” which is itself irreducible to the first.

We're used to a particular classification of things. With language, or languages, it has become second nature to us. (RPP II §678)<sup>171</sup>

The behaviour of humans includes of course not only what they do without ever having learned the behaviour, but also what they do (and so, e.g. *say*) after having received a training. And this behaviour has its importance in relation to the special training. (RPP I §131)

Given Wittgenstein's rejection of platonist and mentalist accounts of Rule-following, forms of life and facts of life become “the given”, that is, what the philosopher has to accept and take into account if the paradox of interpretation has to be avoided. Forms of life, together with the general facts of nature which constitute them, play the important role of stopping place of the justification chain of our linguistic practices.

Instead of the unanalysable, specific, indefinable: the fact that we act in such-and-such ways, e.g. *punish* certain actions, *establish* the state of affair thus and so, *give orders*, render accounts, describe colours, take interest in other's feelings. What has to be accepted, the given – it might be said- are facts of living. (RPP I §631)<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> In a similar vein, Wittgenstein broadens the concept of instinct too. In the *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, Wittgenstein classifies rituals within the group of instinctive actions and he distinguishes between “instinctive” and “animal” human's actions. Generally, we would be inclined to consider “instinctive” and “animal” synonymous, and probably we would not classify human's rituals within this category of actions. However, it seems clear that Wittgenstein considers rituals a kind of instinctive action, but not a kind of animal action. There seems to be a sense in which something is instinctive without being animal. Andronico (1998) suggests that we could face this dilemma by remembering that Wittgenstein applies to rituals what he generally thinks about language games: «they are not reasonable or unreasonable, but they stand there, like our life» (Andronico 1998, 238-239, my translation). What belongs to the ritual has not to be seen as derived from propositional beliefs associated to it, but like something that lies beyond what is justified or unjustified (OC §359).

<sup>171</sup> I am using the expressions “first nature” and “second nature” exclusively for purposes related to the clarity of the presentation. My aim is to show that Wittgenstein's use of the concept of nature includes not just biological and innate traits and behaviours but also learned behaviours and practices; that is, cultural products that become natural for us. I am not presupposing an ontological divide between the two and a perspective of continuity is endorsed throughout the whole work. Wittgenstein himself, indeed, is not interested in separating two kinds or levels of reality and he actually does not use the expression “second nature”: in the original german version of RPP II §678 Wittgenstein simply writes “nature” and not “second nature”. The latter expression is the product of the English translation.

<sup>172</sup> See also PPF §345.

In this context, reference to the forms of life helps clarifying the fact that Wittgenstein's dissolution of the Rule-following problem does not entail conventionalism. Wittgenstein's interlocutor might say, indeed, that the normativity of language and rule-governed activities then is grounded in human's decision, or better, it is grounded in the opinion of the majority of people of the community. Against this possible objection, Wittgenstein replies by distinguishing between agreement in form of life, and agreement in opinions:

So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?" – What is true or false is what human beings *say*; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree. This is agreement not in opinions, but rather in form of life. (PI §241)

Wittgenstein wants us to pay attention to something different from the sphere of human decision and, in this sense, something belonging to a more fundamental level which precedes both the decisional sphere and the justificatory sphere. One of the sources of the philosophical confusion about Rule-following is the idea that something should force us to do what we actually do, while we should simply recognize that «we need have no reason to follow the rule as we do. The chain of reasons has an end» (BB, 143). This, however, does not mean that there is no Rule-following at all, like in the sceptical conclusion but, on the contrary, it means that even when the reasons for a practice come to an end, this does not entail that no further reasons could be given. I do not give further reasons because, at a certain point, it would be senseless to give further reasons and we should just say that that is how we act, that is how we calculate, that is how we follow this rule, etc. At the end of the justification chain, hence, there is our way of acting and living. The recognition, again, of some general facts about our form of life.

People are trained in the procedures for making measurements. Mistakes are, of course, possible – hence the carpenter's precept, "measure twice, cut once". Disagreement can occur but, in fact, rarely do. Why is this? What is the ground of this common agreement? Wittgenstein's response, to repeat it, is to resist what he calls the overwhelming temptation "to say something more, when everything has already been described".». (Fogelin 2009, 33-34)

Human's agreement in following rules, or using language, is an agreement in action: it is not the product of a factual stipulation but rather something that is manifested in the fact that the subjects' actions converge in applying the rule in one way rather than another. We follow rules, then, for no

“ultimate and super metaphysical reason” but because it is how we act, given the context in which we have been reared.

“How am I able to follow a rule?” – If this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my acting in *this* way in complying with the rule. Once I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: “This is simply what I do.”. (PI §217)<sup>173</sup>

To conclude, I think that we have sufficient material in order to say that the dissolution of the Rule-following problem shows that, according to Wittgenstein, the process of understanding and following a rule is a dispositional state, that is, an ability or capacity that can be actually exercised. The mentalist’s mistake is to think that I can know what is the correct application of the rule in a fresh new case before having established a paradigmatic application of the rule in that circumstance. Within this new perspective on following rules as a practice, the dispositional account applied to meaning and meaningful use of language helps characterizing understanding of the meaning of a term as being able to employ correctly that term, that is, in conformity to its grammatical rules. This is the dispositional stance of the characterization of meaning as use. Linguistic understanding, then, is described as a kind of knowledge-how: knowing or understanding the meaning of a term can be characterized as having the disposition, or ability to employ the term in conformity to its grammatical rules, that is, knowing how to correctly use that term. Language acquisition leads to the acquisition of some linguistic dispositions, that is, it leads to the assimilation of courses of action that are in accordance with the use of words. Once we have learned language, we are disposed to use the terms in a certain way, that is, in accordance with their shared and recognized use. Given the type of beings we are and the kind of training we have undergone in our specific cultural system, we are disposed to use the expressions in a certain way rather than another, that is, in accordance with the public and shared use. I know how to follow the rule – hence, how to apply, or use a term – not because I interpret

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<sup>173</sup> Wittgenstein introduces an interesting grammatical distinction between the concept of reason and the concept of cause; this distinction is one of the instances of the general divide between science and philosophy. A cause is a scientific hypothesis that has to be tested and verified. It is unknown to the subject and, for this reason, it is the object of scientific research. «The proposition that your action has such and such a cause, is a hypothesis. The hypothesis is well-founded if one has had a number of experiences which, roughly speaking, agree in showing that your action is the regular sequel of certain conditions which we then call causes of the action» (BB, 15-16). A reason is a motive which is used by the subject in order to justify a particular action or particular meanings. Reasons are not object of hypothesis, and «in order to know the reason which you had for making a certain statement, for acting in a particular way, etc., no number of agreeing experiences is necessary» (BB, 16). «The difference between the grammars of "reason" and "cause" is quite similar to that between the grammars of "motive" and "cause". Of the cause one can say that one can't *know* it but can only *conjecture* it. On the other hand, one often says: "Surely I must know why I did it" talking of the *motive*. When I say: "we can only *conjecture* the cause but we *know* the motive" this statement will be seen later on to be a grammatical one. The "can" refers to a *logical* possibility» (BB, 16).

it correctly, but rather because I have been trained to use the term in that way and I am now disposed to use it in that same way. Dispositions, therefore, would be part of those general facts of nature, or of our form of life, which the philosopher has to take into account in order to give an account of the linguistic practice without falling in the regress of justifications. Those facts constitute that “rough ground” which provides the sufficient “friction” in order to face misleading images at the core of our ordinary use of language (PI §107).

## 5.2 Understanding as a “mastery of technique”

As already suggested, the *pars construens* of Wittgenstein’s remarks on Rule-following consists in clarifying the grammar of the expressions “rule”, “following a rule”, but also “understanding a rule”, or “knowing how to proceed”. The dispositional character involves the notion of understanding too as a consequence of the characterisation of meaning as use. There is a knowing how and when to use a term and this also provides a criterion for someone’s understanding it. The concept of understanding, correspondingly, is best characterized in terms of a capacity to use the word, a “mastery of a technique” which is learned by training in a particular cultural system or, better, in a “form of life”. Wittgenstein explicitly expresses this point in the *Philosophical Investigations* where he writes that

The grammar of the word “know” is evidently closely related to the grammar of the words “can”, “is able to”. But also closely related to that of the word “understand”. (To have ‘mastered’ a technique.). (PI §150)

To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to have mastered a technique. (PI §199)

Wittgenstein is not providing a definition of understanding; he rather suggests to characterize understanding as mastery of a technique in order to avoid the problems which arise from misleading conceptions of understanding informed by platonist and mentalist perspectives. Baker and Hacker (2005) clearly summarise three traditional categorical misconceptions of understanding:

1. Understanding as an experience [*Erlebnis*] of the subject;
2. Understanding as a mental process, or activity which accompanies the acts of listening, reading and writing;
3. Understanding as a state of the mind.

Wittgenstein's critical remarks about all these three conceptions are meant to show that they all violate the grammar of the word "understanding". If we employ the conceptual classifications and clarifications stated at the beginning of the chapter, we could say that all these three conceptions are essentially mentalistic and they represent different versions of the guidance conception: conception 1, in particular, is the experiential version of PM, which is captured by conception 2; while conception 3 includes, as we will see in a moment, both a platonist conception of rules-as-rails, and the neurophysiological version of PM. For this reason, I will discuss two main types of misleading conceptions of understanding which coincide with conceptions 1-2 together, and conception 3.

1. Wittgenstein often reminds us that understanding is not to be thought as a mental process, or activity, which accompanies our activities. «Don't think of understanding as a 'mental process' at all! – For *that* is the way of talking which confuses you» (PI §154). If words have meaning in virtue of the fact that they have a use – that is – they have a rule-governed function in the language-games to which they belong, the understanding of the meaning of a word coincides with the fact that the word is employed in accordance with the rules like the other members of the linguistic community (Andronico 2018, 30). We have already seen how the guidance conception of understanding as a mental process leads to an infinite regress of different levels of understanding. I would like here to spend some words about the experiential version.

The experiential conception of understanding is very tempting because it is suggested by the very phenomenology of understanding as it is experienced in ordinary life. When we read a text, or when we deeply think about something, or just when we listen to someone speaking, we often find ourselves uttering expressions like "Now I understand!", "Now I got it!", as if understanding was actually a *particular* experience which happens to us while reading, writing and listening. Now, Wittgenstein does not quarrel about the fact that we have experiences of understanding, but he rejects the idea that such experiences would constitute understanding. Indeed, this would be another instance of the philosophical tendency to use an alleged «solider concept» to give an account of language (RPP I §648), instead of simply engaging with the «quite weighing of linguistic facts» (Z §447).

First of all, Wittgenstein highlights the fact that a subject can have an experience associated to understanding without actually having understood. That is, various things might happen when someone utters "Now I know!".

Let us imagine the following example: A writes down series of numbers; B watches him and tries to find a rule for the number series. If he succeeds, he exclaims: "Now I can go on!" — So this ability, this understanding, is something that occurs in a moment. So let us have a look [...] What happened here? Various things may have happened; for example, while A was slowly writing

down one number after another, B was busy trying out various algebraic formulae on the numbers which had been written down. After A had written the number 19, B tried the formula  $a = n^2 + n - 1$ ; and the next number confirmed his supposition. Or again, B does not think of formulae. He watches, with a certain feeling of tension, how A writes his numbers down, while all sorts of vague thoughts float through his head. Finally, he asks himself, "What is the series of differences?" He finds: 4, 6, 8, 10, and says: "Now I can go on." Or he watches and says, "Yes, I know *that* series" and continues it, just as he would have done if A had written down the series 1, 3, 5, 7, 9. – Or he says nothing at all and simply continues the series. Perhaps he had what may be called the feeling "That's easy!" (Such a feeling is, for example, that of a light quick intake of breath, as when one is slightly startled.). (PI §151)

This example shows us a multitude of different characteristic experiences, but it will not show us one experience which we should call "*the* experience of understanding".

Secondly, Wittgenstein intends to show that the experiential model rests on a grammatical confusion between "describing an experience" and "expressing an experience" (Schulte 1993, 60-62) and this confusion is connected to the use of the word "particular". In *The Brown Book*, Wittgenstein distinguishes between three uses of that term: (1) the transitive use, (2) the intransitive use and (3) the reflexive use. We use the word according to the first use when we use it preliminarily to a further comparison, specification or description. That is, I use it in a way that the question "In what way is it particular?" is intelligible and can be answered with a further specification. For example, when I utter "This flower has a *particular* smell" I can then move on and say that "It reminds me of my childhood, because it was my grandmother's favourite flower". When I use the word "particular" according to the second use, I use it in order to give *emphasis* and no further description or specification is required. Within this use, the word is similar to "peculiar", or "out of the ordinary". For example, when I utter "What a particular face!", or "What a peculiar smell!", I am not describing that face and that smell but I am rather giving emphasis. Indeed, I would probably not be able to further describe that face and that smell. Finally, the reflexive use is a special case of the transitive use, for it is a way of using the term in order to give emphasis but this form of speech could be always "straightened up" (BB, 161), i.e., it can be rephrased in transitive terms. For example, we utter in a reflexive form "That's that" but this expression could be reformulated in a transitive form like "The matter is closed", or "That is settled".

According to Wittgenstein when we philosophize about understanding we employ the word "particular" according to the intransitive use, but we regard the use as a reflexive one, hence a variant of the transitive use. This means that we think we are using the word to denote an experience which

is difficult to describe and characterize, but as a matter of fact we are not using the word in order to describe an object; we are simply *expressing* the experiences we are actually having.

We feel as though we could give an experience a name without at the same time committing ourselves about its use. [...] We are emphasizing, not comparing, but we express ourselves as though this emphasis was really a comparison of the object with itself; there seems to be a reflexive comparison. (BB, 159-160)

The expression “Now I understand!” is not the description of an experience that should constitute the act of knowing, but it is a *signal* of the fact that we actually understood. Therefore, even this experiential vocabulary presupposes our grammatical competence, that is, meaning as use: those expressions are expressions that we correctly employ as expressions of particular experiences – it is a use which is included in their grammar – but it is not grounded on the experience itself.

2. According to this conception, understanding a word means being in a certain mental state. However, this can be differently spelled out: (1) we could say that being in such a mental state means having an idea or mental image associated to the word; having that image leads the subject to behave in a way that should exhibit knowledge of the word. For example, «a picture does come before your mind when you hear the word “cube”, say the drawing of a cube» (PI §139) and the picture, as we have seen, plays the role of inner guidance of action. We are clearly within the guidance conception of understanding. (2) If we are more platonist, but still with a mentalistic soul, we could say that being in such a mental state consists in having in mind the rules of use of the word, like the algebraic formula in the case of the Wayward Child. (3) If we are more sympathetic with the methods of science, we could say that being in such a mental state consists in being in a hypothetical state of a physical apparatus of the mind which should explain mental activities. Wittgenstein discusses this conception in PI §149, where a kind of dispositional conception of knowing and understanding is rejected. I will focus on this latter version of the general idea that understanding is a state of the mind of the subject who understands.

If one says that knowing the ABC is a state of the mind, one is thinking of a state of an apparatus of the mind (perhaps a state of the brain) by means of which we explain the *manifestations* of that knowledge. Such a state is called a disposition. But it is not unobjectionable to speak of a state of the mind here, inasmuch as there would then have to be two different criteria for this: finding out the structure of the apparatus, as distinct from its effects. (PI §149)

In this paragraph Wittgenstein rejects a dispositional account of knowing and understanding *given a very narrow conception of disposition*: here, the term “disposition” refers to a state of a physical apparatus which can be the brain, or the mind conceived in terms of inner mechanism. This conception is misleading because, if understanding was a dispositional state of the brain, then there would be two different criteria for understanding: the subject’s performance expressed in the outer behaviour, and the structure of the apparatus.<sup>174</sup> This dispositional account is a version of the guidance conception for the physical state is thought to be the source of use – so it is subjected to the critique previously exposed in the chapter – but it is also a terminological variant of the philosophical inclination to posit the existence of mental mechanisms; in this sense, it fully belongs to PM.

Wittgenstein’s interlocutor who employs the expression “state of a mental apparatus” might seem «open to viewing the mind as a physical mechanism, with construction-level characterizations of its states to be couched in physical (e.g., neurophysiological) terms» (Bridge 2017, 380). The guidance conception presupposes a conception of the mental activity based on a comparison with the functioning of a machine where the system seems to already contain all the future possibilities of the machine itself.

A machine as a symbol of its mode of operation. The machine, I might say for a start, seems already to contain its own mode of operation. What does that mean? – If we know the machine, everything else – that is the movements it will make – seem to be already completely determined. [...] “The machine seems already to contain its own mode of operation” means: we are inclined to compare the future movements of the machine in their definiteness to objects which have been lying in a drawer and which we now take out. — But we don’t say this kind of thing when it is a matter of predicting the actual behaviour of a machine. Then we do not in general forget the possibility of a distortion of the parts and so on. — We *do* talk like that, however, when we are wondering at the way we can use a machine as a symbol of some way of moving – since it can, after all, also move quite differently. (PI §193)

First of all, the image of the objects contained in the drawer has the same explanatory power of the image of the string of pearls in the box: these images exemplify the idea of giving an account of the possibility of a course of action by postulating the existence of such course of action in a potential depositary located somewhere in the mental sphere of the subjects; this depositary is thought to be like a source of future usage and it plays the role of inner guidance for the subject that follows the rule. The future application is already contained in the formulation of the rule, or in the mental act

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<sup>174</sup> Bake and Hacker (2005, 374-375) here talk about Wittgenstein’s critique of “Central State Materialism”.

grasping it, like the movements of a machine that are already contained and determined in it. Secondly, Wittgenstein specifies that this way of talking is not used when we have to predict the actual behaviour of the machine, but rather when we use a machine like a symbol – in this case – as a symbol of a way of behaving. We use this picture when we try to philosophically give an account of understanding.

When does one have the thought that a machine already contains its possible movements in some mysterious way? – Well, when one is doing philosophy. And what lures us into thinking that? The kind of way in which we talk about the machine. We say, for example, that the machine *has* (possesses) such-and-such possibilities of movement; we speak of an ideally rigid machine which *can* move only thus-and-so. (PI §194)

It is important to note that the picture of the mental as a depository of pre-arranged courses of action entails a particular conception of possibility which I call the “shadowy picture” and which is clearly expressed in the following passage:

The *possibility* of movement a what is it? It is not the *movement*, but it does not seem to be a mere physical condition for moving either a such as there being play between socket and pin, the pin’s not fitting too tight in the socket. For while this is empirically a condition for movement, one could also imagine things to be otherwise. The possibility of a movement is supposed, rather, to be like a shadow of the movement itself. (PI §194)

The picture of the mental depository depicts possibility as a sort of “shadowy reality”; a sphere where everything that is possible is already actualized in a mysterious and indescribable sphere and that has just to come out, to be externalised in the very same form. That is why it is already “contained” in the mental depository. This picture is very important because, as we will see in chapter 7, it is at the basis of Wittgenstein’s own criticism about a naturalized conception of disposition. In this section I want to focus on two limits of such a conception of understanding: 1. It relies on a picture which is useless. 2. It presupposes the postulation of an autonomous mental sphere whose functioning would not depend upon other extrinsic context-dependent factors.

1. According to Wittgenstein, the imagine of the machine, so used, is *useless*. Why? The problem is that when the interlocutor thinks about the effects that a mental mechanism can produce, he thinks at the same time that no physical mechanism could behave in that way: mind is thought to be a mechanism but different in kind from a physical one. How can we then give substance to the idea of a mental “non-physical” mechanism? The immediate result is a conception «of the mind as a cloudy

gaseous medium in which many things can happen which cannot occur in a different sphere, and from which many things can be expected that are otherwise not possible» (PG §100).

Though we do pay attention to the way we talk about these matters, we don't understand it, but misinterpret it. When we do philosophy, we are like savages, primitive people, who hear the way in which civilized people talk, put a false interpretation on it, and then draw the oddest conclusions from this. (PI §194)

The picture is useless because it relies on the idea of material constitution, like the physical mechanism, but then it denies its application because there is the underground assumption that mind cannot behave like a physical machine.<sup>175</sup>

2. To construe the mind as a mechanism, although non-physical and with mysterious nature, is to construe it as a self-standing sphere with a specific mode of operation, like the machine itself. However, this characterization is not an empirical assertion, but it is rather a conceptual – not material – requirement of self-standingness. I use the expression “conceptual” in order to show that this requirement regards not mind itself as the object of scientific research, but our way of talking about mind and of understanding its mechanisms: our understanding of mental mechanism has to be self-standing, that is, a way of conceiving mental states and processes which is independent from considerations about context and activities, like human's linguistic acts and interactions. The guidance conception of Rule-following, expressed through the interpretational account, tries to give an account of Rule-following and understanding leaving apart context and social interaction – either in the platonist variant and in the mentalist variant. Indeed, «if we think of the student's state of understanding as constituted by the occurrence in her mind of an image – say, of the formula “ $x + 2$ ” – we have access to a way of thinking about that state that does not depend upon our grasp of the context of the teacher's and student's interaction» (Bridge 2017, 382).

Wittgenstein's positive characterization of understanding is exactly the opposite, that is, it brings back the role of context and background, given the moral of the dissolution of the Rule-following problem and the characterisation of following a rule – hence, employment of language expressions – as a practice embedded in a social context.

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<sup>175</sup> As we will see in the third section of this work, Wittgenstein is here alluding to a conceptual problem that could be sensibly compared to Ryle's notion of category mistake and which informs the current naturalized conception of human dispositions (Ryle 1990).

The problem that concerns us could be summed up roughly thus: ‘Must one see an image of the colour blue in one’s mind whenever one reads the word “blue” with understanding?’ People have often asked this question and have commonly answered no; they have concluded from this answer that the characteristic process of understanding is just a different process which we’ve not yet grasped. [...] Well, ‘Understanding’ is not the name of a single process accompanying reading or hearing, but of more or less interrelated processes *against a background*, or *in a context, of facts of a particular kind*, viz. the actual use of a learnt language or languages [my emphasis]. (PG §74)

The characterisation of understanding as mastery of a technique is first of all an antidote against the tendency to provide a mechanistic, context-independent account of understanding. Understanding should be characterized as a mastery of a technique in the sense of an ability learned through constant practice which manifests itself in the correct application of shared rules. The dispositional character of understanding can be thus summarised: in the light of the Rule-following considerations, it is misleading to characterize understanding as a mental process which always needs an act of interpretation. Understanding is rather something immediate which manifest itself when we show to have acquired the capacity to follow rules like the other members of the community, in a spontaneous way. If an interpretative mediation were always needed, then we could not give a proper account of the immediacy of our gathering of signs: we *immediately* get the frightening force of a gun as we *immediately* stop at the traffic light when the light gets red, without previously making inductive reasonings or computational procedures. There are things that we immediately gather neither because we directly experience them, nor because they constitute primary experience; rather they are gathered immediately because they are part of the system in which we live and act: they are, indeed, customs and rooted habits.<sup>176</sup>

### 5.2.1 Bonus track I: is Wittgenstein an ethnologist?

Wittgenstein’s complex employment of the notions of “form of life” and “fact of nature” – which is at the core of both the characterisation of Rule-following as a practice and understanding as learned capacity – is meant to establish a kind of nexus between our being humans in a specific time and space, and the particular adopted language. This is the principle reason why Wittgenstein’s philosophy seems to incorporate a kind of naturalism (McGinn 2010, 322). At this point, someone might think that this particular nexus is that of determination as if «the description of the structure of our concepts [was] really disguised natural science» (RPP I §46). Several critics (Conway 1989,

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<sup>176</sup> In this context the concept of “immediacy” is used as “without mediation”. “Immediate” is then the opposite of “mediated”.

McGinn 1984, Moyal-Sharrock 2004), indeed, have read Wittgenstein's remarks on nature in a foundationalist way. According to their perspective, Wittgenstein would be interested in looking for the *causes* of our concepts, therefore he would be engaged with a factual, or empirical research in human language: the interest would be in the natural data itself in order to provide a naturalistic grounding of language and the natural facts would be facts which determine the meaning of words. Is the “anthropological turn” a way of saying that doing philosophy reduces to anthropology, or ethnology? The answer is negative.

First of all, Wittgenstein himself explicitly denies the possible identification of his philosophy with ethnology, or any kind of science.

If we use the ethnological approach does that mean we are saying philosophy is ethnology? No it only means we are taking up our position far outside, in order to see the things *more objectively*.  
(CV, 45)

Secondly, the anthropological perspective has a *methodological* function, that is, it is at the service of the philosophical activity which is still conceived by Wittgenstein in terms of conceptual clarification, or grammatical enquiry. If Wittgenstein is careful to conceive philosophy as a non-theoretical activity, on the other hand he still accepts the possibility of a peculiar philosophical method; his methodological remarks are not a mere set of “prohibitions”. As clearly explained by Andronico (1998), Wittgenstein employs a kind of comparative, or morphological method that he takes from Goethe's naturalistic writings and Spengler's *The decline of the west*. This method is a comparative strategy: the analysis of language is construed through the analysis of limited portions of language – language-games – which are compared with each other in order to bring out the rules that govern the usage of terms and expressions. At the end of the comparison we should be able to better recognize forms of expressions which we already use but whose usage is not clear to us because we regularly employ them. I distinguish here, for the sake of the exposition, two important elements of the method: 1. The comparative strategy; 2. The employment of imaginary cases where language and concepts are very different from the ones we are actually adopting in conjunction with differences in human's nature and nature in general.<sup>177</sup>

The comparative strategy helps respecting Wittgenstein's anti-causal principle of the logical-grammatical analysis: the point of the philosophical enquiring is not «to explain a language-game by

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<sup>177</sup> In his later production, Wittgenstein continuously asks the reader to imagine those cases: for example, a tribe that has two systems of counting (BB, 94), or a population in whose language there no such form of sentences like “the book is in the drawer” or “water is in the glass” (BB, 100) or, again, «a language consisting only of questions and expressions for answering Yes and No» (PI §19). See also RPP I §47 for a list of imaginary cases and general facts of nature.

means of our experiences, but to take account of a language-game» (PI §655), that is, treating it in the analysis as a «proto-phenomena» and simply saying «*this is the language-game that is being played*» (PI §654). The employment of imaginary cases, on the other hand, allows to have what I here call a “non-metaphysical kind of estrangement”: it helps to look at our language-games in an objective way even if we are inside the system *without* entailing a disembodiment of the observer, that is, without separating the observer from the system he is part of. That is why the figure of the philosopher might be compared to the figure of the anthropologist: considering different imaginary cases which depict situations very far from our actual form of life helps clarifying, by contrast, what we actually do in our system, how we operate and how we do use our concepts.

If concept formation can be explained by facts of nature, shouldn't we be interested, not in grammar, but rather in what is its basis in nature? — We are, indeed, also interested in the correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature. (Such facts as mostly do not strike us because of their generality.) But our interest is not thereby thrown back on to these possible causes of concept formation; we are not doing natural science; nor yet natural history a since we can also invent fictitious natural history for our purposes. (PPF §365)

Wittgenstein's interest is not about the natural data itself, but it is directed to concepts functioning. Reference to natural facts, so conceived, «is not a way to ground concepts on facts, but to understand how our concepts work» (Perissinotto 2010, 117, my translation).<sup>178</sup>

I am not saying: if such-and-such facts of nature were different, people would have different concepts (in the sense of a *hypothesis*) [my emphasis]. Rather: if anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize a then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him. (PPF §366)

The non-hypothetical character of the remark is very important: Wittgenstein does not say that *if* natural facts were different from the actual ones, *then* our concepts would be different in such and such a way. He does not construe a conditional. Rather, he invites us to imagine facts of nature which are different from the ones we are used to in order to reach two important insights: 1. To grasp the contingency of our conceptual system, that is, the idea that it is like this but it could have been completely different; this is a way to deny that such a system is grounded in nature. 2. To better

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<sup>178</sup> See also Bouveresse (1975, 83).

understand concepts very different and far from ours which could be aprioristically labelled strange, unintelligible and even unnatural.

### **5.2.2 Bonus track II: is Wittgenstein a Behaviourist?**

The dissolution of the Rule-following problem, as we have seen, consists in characterizing following a rule as a codified and social practice. Wittgenstein's critique of mentalistic and platonist conceptions of meaning and understanding is followed by a *pars construens* which has the notion of behaviour at its core: meaning something with a sign is best characterised as having the ability to use that sign correctly, that is, in accordance with its grammatical norms; correspondingly, understanding the meaning is not a mental state or process but it is rather a capacity which is manifested in the actual use of linguistic expressions. Wittgenstein's critique of mentalism is also a critique of a particular way of philosophically reflect about the distinction between the inner dimension of human beings and the outer behaviour: his remarks are against the temptation to find in the inner dimension – inner states, processes and activities – that medium which is traditionally called “mind” and which would give life to signs and external behaviour that would be otherwise “dead”. This perspective leads to a characterisation of the inner as a sort of chemical structure from which behaviour comes out (RPP II §643) – the mind as a mental depository of pre-arranged courses of action. Wittgenstein's perspective, on the contrary, rejects this idea of the mental as the source of behaviour and it is rather an invitation to look at the behaviour itself without postulating any mental intermediary: looking at the actual practices of human beings; looking at how we actually employ the expressions, the circumstances in which we employ them and the consequences that such an employment has on life.

Given this, we might wonder whether Wittgenstein intends to limit the role of the inner in favour of the outer so to subscribe to a kind of behaviourism. Indeed, Wittgenstein himself presents this possible objection through the voice of an interlocutor: «“Aren't you nevertheless a behaviourist in disguise? Aren't you nevertheless basically saying that everything except human behaviour is a fiction?”» (PI §307).

First of all, for the sake of clarity I will draw some basic distinctions:

1. I broadly distinguish between a methodological aspect of behaviourism and more substantial philosophical-theoretical thesis on human's nature and the problem of free will. The former consists in applying the methodology of science to psychology in order to substitute the problematic employment of the introspective method, which belongs to the psychologist paradigm. The traditional mentalistic concepts of consciousness, motives, sentiments and emotions which were meant to be the main objects of psychology must be replaced with the observable behaviour, because only this can

be the object of a proper experimental method. The latter aspect is a possible but not necessary consequence of the first and it might be summarised as a mechanistic conception of human beings which denies their free will and moral responsibility.<sup>179</sup>

2. Following Casati (2002, 215-216), I distinguish between three types of behaviourism:

2a. Psychological behaviourism (PB): The objects of psychology as a science are the types of behavioural responses to given stimulus, rather than inner mental states;

2b. Semantic behaviourism (SB): the ascriptions of psychological states to the subjects are, in reality, about behavioural responses, that is, they are elaborated through an inductive reasoning starting from the observation of behavioural responses. It is the natural data which determines the meaning of the psychological concepts.

2c. Metaphysical behaviourism (MB): mental states do not ontologically exist. There are just stimulus-response schemas.

As a second step, I argue that Wittgenstein is not a behaviourist philosopher and he rejects all the three types of behaviourism. In the remaining of this section I will try to expound this point in three steps: 1. Wittgenstein's explicit remarks about PB, SB and MB; 2. The Wittgensteinian distinction between symptoms and criteria; 3. The Wittgensteinian reinterpretation of the inner-outer divide.

1. Wittgenstein rejects PB and MB in the following remark of the *Philosophical Investigations*:

How does the philosophical problem about mental processes and states and about behaviourism arise? — The first step is the one that altogether escapes notice. We talk of processes and states, and leave their nature undecided. Sometime perhaps we'll know more about them – we think. But that's just what commits us to a particular way of looking at the matter. For we have a certain conception of what it means to learn to know a process better. (The decisive movement in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one that seemed to us quite innocent.) – And now the analogy which was to make us understand our thoughts falls to pieces. So we have to deny the yet uncomprehended process in the yet unexplored medium. And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes. And naturally we don't want to deny them. (PI §308)

In this passage, Wittgenstein seems to see behaviourism as a consequence of a mentalistic perspective on language and mind. The critique which underlies the point is the same as the one

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<sup>179</sup> This anthropological thesis is the object of Skinner's *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*.

applied to psychological mentalism, i.e., the uselessness of the image of mind as a special kind of mechanism. Once we talk about processes and states of mind, then the problem of their nature arises. However, this problem puts our mind of a whirl because, even if we construe the image of the mind using the comparison with the machine, then we are not able to be coherent with this analogy, since we are not disposed to totally identify mental functioning with the functioning of a machine: mind should be a mechanism, but with a special nature. At this point there are two possible reactions: we could stay within the boundaries of mentalism, trying to specify the mysterious nature of the mental sphere, or we could then deny altogether the existence of the mental sphere itself, because it cannot be grasped using a scientific enquiry like in the case of a physical machine. Mentalism leads then to metaphysical behaviourism, but that is not what Wittgenstein wants to state: «Why ever should I deny that there is a mental process», for example, when we remember something? (PI §306) «What we deny is that the picture of an inner process gives us the correct idea of the use of the word “remember”» (PI §305). Wittgenstein's antimentalism and antipsychologism then, is purely semantic and it does not entail the ontological denial of mental processes and states, which is the main thesis of MB. But Wittgenstein does not even endorse a kind of semantic behaviourism, as it is clear from these passages taken from the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*:

But if now someone were to say: “so after all, all that happens is that he *reacts*, behaves, in such-and-such a way,” – then here is a gross misunderstanding. (RPP I §652)

“‘Seeing *this*’ doesn't mean: reacting in this way, – for I can see without reacting.” Of course. For neither does “I see” mean: I react, nor “he sees”: he reacts, nor “I saw”: I reacted, etc. And even if I said “I see” whenever I saw, these words wouldn't say “I say ‘I see’”. (RPP I §83)

In the second remark, Wittgenstein rejects the idea according to which grammar and, in general, meanings, can be grounded in the factual behaviour; grammar, and grammatical rules cannot be metaphysically grounded. Here, the key expression is “it means”: Wittgenstein is here criticizing who thinks that the actual behaviour, or the actual reaction determines the meaning of the term, and this is the very thesis of SB. Behaviour is the expression of the understanding of the rule but it is not the ground of the meaningfulness of the linguistic expression.

2. Talking about behaviour as the expression of understanding means considering it as a *criterion* of understanding and, correspondingly, of the ability to correctly use the expression. Wittgenstein's rejection of behaviourism can be thus approached through the grammatical distinction between criteria and symptom, which is a particular instance of the general distinction between

factual/empirical discourse, or level of description and grammatical/logical discourse, or level of description. Criteria and symptoms are two different kinds of evidence of the presence of a certain phenomenon – in this case, the occurrence of a certain mental state. Wittgenstein calls “symptom” «a phenomenon of which experience [*Erfahrung*] has taught us that it coincided, in some way or other, with the phenomenon which is our defining criterion» (BB, 25). In the same context, Wittgenstein provides an example taken from medical science: medical science calls angina an inflammation caused by a particular bacillus. This is a definition of angina. Indeed, the proposition «"A man has angina if this bacillus is found in him" is a tautology or it is a loose way of stating the *definition* [my emphasis] of "angina"», whereas uttering «"A man has angina whenever he has an inflamed throat" is to make a *hypothesis* [my emphasis]» (BB, 25). The nexus between the symptom and the phenomenon related to it is external and factual, that is, it can be object of research and discovery, while the nexus between a criterion and what it defines is internal, or logical. If we ask the doctor «"why do you say this man has got angina?" then the answer "I have found the bacillus so-and-so in his blood" gives us the criterion, or what we may call the defining criterion of angina», while if the answer was «"His throat is inflamed", this might give us a symptom of angina» (BB, 25).

Going back to the relation between behaviour and understanding, Wittgenstein's point is that overt behaviour is a criterion for the ascription of a mental state, that is, it is part of the concept and it defines the concept from within. It is part of the concept of mental process that it has a characteristic behavioural manifestation and no causal nexus is postulated here. Of course, nature still plays a role, but this role is limited to the observation of the linguistic acquisition of the psychological vocabulary: according to Wittgenstein, psychological concepts do not denote mysterious inner entities, but they are learned as a sort of *substitution* of the natural responses which constitute primitive behaviour: simply put, the child learns to utter “I feel pain here!” or “My leg hurts!” instead of shouting, or crying.<sup>180</sup> Wittgenstein of course does not deny that when the child utters such statements something happens inside him, but those utterances are not meaningful in virtue of the fact that they denote something inner; they are part of the habitual way of speaking and acting, they are learned through practice and exercise. Those utterances, indeed, provide also the criterion for the ascription of the mental state for they constitute overt behaviour: «[Pain-behaviour] is a *criterion* of pain. It is possible for pain to occur without being manifest, and it is possible for pain-behaviour to be displayed without there being any pain» Hacker (1990, 243). “Pain-behaviour” includes both natural expressions and

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<sup>180</sup> «How does a human being learn the meaning of names of sensations? For example, of the word “pain”. Here is one possibility: words are connected with the primitive, natural, expressions of sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behaviour» (PI §244).

linguistic expressions of pain. For example, I see that subject *S* cries, or utters “I feel pain”, I then ascribe to *S* a mental state and I utter “*S* is feeling pain”. It is important to understand that the word “pain” does not really mean crying, or any other natural expression; «on the contrary: the verbal expression of pain replaces crying, it does not describe it» (PI §244). In this sense, we could rightly say that, for Wittgenstein, mental states are *seen*.

“We see emotions.” – As opposed to what? – We do not see facial contortions and make inferences from them (like a doctor framing a diagnosis) to joy, grief, boredom. We describe a face immediately as sad, radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give any other description of the features. – grief, one would like to say, is personified in the face. This belongs to the concept of emotion. (Z §225)

3. As clearly expressed by Perissinotto (2015, 157), «Wittgenstein is not behaviourist because he is not mentalist». Both mentalism and behaviourism start from the presupposition of the original inorganic nature of the sign, which was at the source of the interpretational account of Rule-following too, and they react to this presupposition by giving a metaphysical privilege to the inner sphere, in one case, and to the external behaviour, in the other case. By rejecting this misleading assumption, Wittgenstein is against both tendencies: the tendency to look for an element that should give life to sign, be it searched in the inner sphere of the subject or in his overt behaviour. Inner sphere and mere exteriority are both myths, or misleading philosophical constructions, therefore they do not have foundational priority.

Wittgenstein is neither mentalist, nor sceptic, nor behaviourist. Therefore, the dispositional character of his remarks on meaning and understanding takes the following form: we are disposed to behave in a certain way, we are disposed to use words in a certain way, given that we are human beings and given that we are members of a specific cultural system; behaviour is spontaneous in the sense that it “becomes nature for us” (RPP II §678). In this sense, a notion of disposition which avoids mentalism and behaviourism seems to be acknowledgeable and this will be the object of the final section of the chapter, where I will better spell out Wittgenstein’s notions of rule, normativity and facts.

### 5.3 Norms, facts and dispositions

In this last section I will take stock of what I have previously exposed in order to better clarify some features of the alleged dispositional character of Wittgenstein's remarks on meaning and understanding. I will do so by focusing on three main points:

1. What kind of fact dispositions are. This is also a specification of the difference between Wittgenstein's and Kripke's notion of fact.
2. What kind of normativity is at work in Wittgenstein's characterization of meaning and understanding and in what sense dispositions can be said to be normative. This point specifies the difference between both Kripke's notion of normativity and traditional metaphysical and semantic normativism;
3. Wittgenstein's rich notion of rule, and his critique of *de re* necessity, which is instead at the core of current metaphysics.

1. As we have seen, Wittgenstein's *dissolution* of the Rule-following problem demands a different way of looking at the phenomenon itself, that is, a change of perspective which involves the recognition of some *facts* about human beings and their practices: «Regard the language-game as the *primary thing*» (PI §656), that is, as «objects of comparison which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language» (PI §130). This comparative activity involves a particular sight on how people *actually* employ linguistic expressions, how we actually use words, for this can show us what we call concept *X* in everyday life (PI §235). For example, looking at the way we actually calculate and comparing it to a different schema according to which we have at every step «a feeling of being guided by the rules as by a spell», helps seeing «how much there is to the physiognomy of what we call “following a rule” in everyday life» (PI §235). Instead of looking at our linguistic practices from the outside with the demand of a context-independent grounding element, we should remain inside the system and look at our actual usage of words and its internal, or grammatical, connection with life.

Fogelin (2009), indeed, states that Wittgenstein's facts are metaphysically neutral, because they do not determine meaning and they do not ground grammar. For this reason, I have argued that they rather seem to be *dispositions* to act in such and such a way, without thereby presupposing a direct conditioning between nature and concepts. We know the meaning of a term as we are able, or we are disposed to employ that term in a certain way; we understand the meaning of a term as we have acquired the capacity, or disposition to employ that term in accordance with its grammatical, public and shared rules. Such a disposition, however, is not an inner and innate entity which guides from the inside the subject's behaviour. It is rather a propensity to action which comes from constant training

and which do not any way necessitate the subject's response. Dispositions, so conceived, are part of what Wittgenstein calls "general facts of nature" but they are not merely biological, because such dispositions are acquired pattern of behaviour which become incorporated thanks to constant practice and repetition. In this sense, these dispositions do not reduce neither to physical dispositions of the matter, nor to biological dispositions of human beings such as biological and innate traits and qualities. However, they can still be said to be *natural*, given Wittgenstein's extension of the concept: they are natural because they become natural for us; part of our second nature. It is in this way that the community plays an important role; in other words, «the particular rules that [human creatures] are trained to follow are in large measure a function of the society they inhabit» (Fogelin 2009, 35). Contrary to Kripke's reconstruction, Wittgenstein's facts do not have to fulfil the "foundational requirement" but, as I am trying to argue, they do fulfil the "normative-justificatory requirement", that is, they do not ground meaning but they provide *reasons* in order to justify and give an account of particular courses of action.

2. The normative character of dispositions, so conceived, has its core in the statement of the fact that dispositions do not necessitate the subject's action. The normative force of the disposition could be characterised as a dimension of *contingency* and *possibility*. What I am trying to capture through the Wittgensteinian perspective is a kind of third and thin line which stands between the traditional community view and the pragmatist tradition: even if I say that society and education lead the subject to acquire certain dispositions connected to rule-governed behaviour, the door is still open for a demand of justification; that is, I can still ask "Why?". The question presupposes the acknowledgment that there is not necessity, i.e., that it is actually like this but it could have been different. Such a contingent feature involves two aspect: 2a. The broader nexus between adopted language and form of life; 2b. The "normative power" of acquired dispositions.

2a. Even traditionally, stating that rules of language are contingent and arbitrary means stating that they are not grounded in nature.<sup>181</sup> As we have seen, Wittgenstein invites us to imagine imaginary cases where general facts of nature and concepts are different from ours in order to highlight the contingent character of our conceptual system and our form of life. Contingency, here, is thought in terms of a "sense of possibility": our language-games and our form of life do not have philosophical or metaphysical foundation; everything that is the case could have been different if developed under

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<sup>181</sup> In the traditional classification of signs provided by Peirce, language signs are symbols and not index, or icons. Given that, in general, a sign is «anything which is so determined by something else, called its Object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its interpretant, that the later is thereby mediately determined by the former» (Peirce 1998, 478), symbols are characterized by the fact that they are arbitrary and conventional, that is, the relation between the sign and the object, i.e., the thing it stands for is not natural.

different conditions. That is why Bouveresse (1975) places Wittgenstein in Musil's category of the "men of possibility", that is, men «who are particularly sensitive to the contingency and precariousness of what there is and they are particularly disposed to see everything that could well alternatively stand» (Bouveresse 1975, 63, my translation)<sup>182</sup>. Whoever is pervaded by this sense of possibility does not say "this is so and so, this must be so", but rather "imagine: here this could happen, here this should happen", and so on.

What is insidious about the causal approach is that it leads one to say: "Of course, that's how it has to happen". Whereas one ought to say: It may have happened *like that*, & in many other ways. (CV, 45)

This sense of contingency and possibility is very important because it helps characterizing the facts we should take into account in non-metaphysical terms: as we have seen, language-games and forms of life constitute the "bedrock", or "the given", that is, the ultimate element of the justification chain of a practice at which we should stop and simply ascertain that a certain concept is employed in such and such a way. But such a "given" is methodological and conceptual: the form of life is on the one hand the condition we should ascertain and accept if we want to clarify our language, but on the other hand it is a condition that can change and, above all, that could have been completely different. It is not a passive acceptance of reality, but rather a recognition of human's condition in order to better understand the relative conceptual system.

2b. According to the Wittgensteinian perspective, dispositions are facts that do not oblige, that is, there is no causal or necessary relation between human's dispositions and the behavioural reaction. Previously in this chapter I tried to show how Wittgenstein's remarks on nature do not entail a thesis of determination between nature and language. Language use has no natural foundation in this sense, because no natural facts constitute facts of meaning. I now try to argue that, according to Wittgenstein, there are no normative facts as well at the basis of our linguistic competence. Therefore, dispositions do not reduce to mere natural-biological facts that should determine meaning, but they do not refer to any primitive normative facts either, because no fact of the matter is even postulated. There can be normativity without postulating normative facts.

Wittgenstein is often cited among the authors that endorse "meaning determining normativity" (MD), that is, the idea that 1. There is no meaning without norms that are in force and 2. Norms are

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<sup>182</sup> In *The man without qualities*, Musil talks about the sense of possibility and the sense of reality and he distinguishes between men who are more sensitive to the first, and men who are more sensitive to the second.

metaphysically prior to meanings; hence they determine, or constitute meanings.<sup>183</sup> However, I think that this ascription is incorrect for the following reasons:

1. Wittgenstein does not accept the foundational stance of MD, that is, he is not looking for a metaphysical determination of meanings, since meanings and, in general, grammar are not grounded and cannot be grounded.<sup>184</sup>
2. Wittgenstein's norms are not reducible neither to constitutive norms of action, nor to prescriptions, whereas traditional normativity of meaning, both MD and ME, involves norms of action.<sup>185</sup> Grammatical rules are not moral prescriptions; in this sense, they do not entail a moral *ought*: if a subject does not employ the word in accordance with its meaning, hence its rules, he is not acting immorally, he is rather acting incorrectly.
3. The validity of a norm does not come from the fact that the norms refer to alleged independent and primitive normative facts; the validity comes from the social background, that is, the agreement in form of life.

However, I do state that it is not incorrect to ascribe to Wittgenstein the idea that meaning is essentially normative. Indeed, meaning is characterized not just as the use of an expression, but rather as its *correct* use, that is, the use in accordance with its governing norms. Wittgenstein always wants us to pay attention to the fact that the concept of rule seems inseparable from the logical possibility of distinguishing between correct and incorrect and this possibility cannot be given without reference to the public dimension of the rule.<sup>186</sup> Meaning normativity comes from the paradigmatic application of the rule, and this kind of normativity is irreducible to the cognitive and computational one. Indeed, as we have seen, it makes no sense to wonder about the normative capacity of a rule in a fresh new case of application *before* the paradigmatic application have been settled, because it is in virtue of a paradigmatic application of the rule in a certain circumstance that I can then distinguish between

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<sup>183</sup> MD differs from "Meaning engendered normativity" (ME); the latter states that meaning is metaphysically prior to norms and it has normative consequences, regardless of how it is determined (Glüer & Wikforss 2009). This is the kind of normativism endorsed by Kripke (1982). Both versions, though, accept the following condition for an expression to have meaning: *e* means *M* for *S* at *t* only if a norm for *e* is in force for *S* at *t*.

<sup>184</sup> Already in the transition period, Wittgenstein presents a simple but clear argument against the philosophical demand for a foundation of rules and grammar: in order to ground grammar and rules we should already possess the concepts of the properties that should play the foundational role, but then we should already assume those rules that we would like to ground. In other terms, in order to ground something, we should possess concepts, that is, grammar should already be at work.

<sup>185</sup> I am here referring to a classification of the types of norms provided by Von Wright (1963). Von Wright distinguishes between norms of being (a certain state of affairs ought to obtain) and norms for action (they tell what to do). Among the latter we find other two broader distinctions: instrumental/ non-instrumental norms of action, constitutive/non-constitutive norms of action. Meaning normativity generally assumes the presence of non-instrumental and, in the case of MD, constitutive, norms of action, like prescriptions.

<sup>186</sup> This element is at the core of his remarks against the possibility of a private language.

correct application and incorrect application of the rule in that circumstance. Being correct application of the rule  $R$  in circumstance  $C$ , then, means, being an application which internally (not necessarily) conforms to what counts as paradigmatic application of  $R$  in  $C$ . It is important to highlight the fact that the paradigmatic character of application is functional: a rule in order to be paradigmatic has to be assumed as such and it should fulfil some conditions, like being criterion of correctness and, above all, being recognizable by the others as such; the must be a public dimension. In this sense, Wright (1982, 119) is right in stating that the “multiple application thesis” belongs to Wittgenstein’s attempt to provide an alternative account of normativity to the platonist “rules-as-rails”, that is, there can be middle ground between hypostatisation of rules and their denial. This applies to dispositions too.

Dispositions, in this context, are not facts that ground meaning and concepts but they are rather facts that help mapping our concepts; they are part of the concept and they constitute the concept from within (Perissinotto 2015). Being disposed to  $X$  – being disposed to employ the term in a certain way in a certain circumstance – is different from *ought* to do  $X$  and having the disposition still admits the possibility of a different reaction: I can still refrain from correctly employ the term, or I can make mistakes. In this sense dispositions do not guarantee constitutive normativity but their normative power consists in allowing the possibility of a different course of action which preserves the non-mechanistic character of human action.

Moreover, dispositions play a justificatory role, in the sense that they provide *reasons* for a particular course of action. However, reasons could be often given *after* action, in order to justify it and for giving an account of it. In a certain sense, dispositions could be *assumed*, and the subject can refrain from incorporate them. Indeed, this applies to rules too.

### 3. Wittgenstein employs a rich notion of rule.

First of all, rules are always rules *of* something, *of* a particular language-game (Fogelin 2009). Rules have a goal and they play a function in a system of rules; indeed, in order to have a specific goal, rules “live” in a particular practice constituted by customs and institutions. For this reason, the following scenario does not belong to Wittgenstein’s concept of rule-governed practice because it lacks those requirements:

Someone who was trained to emit a particular sound at the sight of something red, another sound at the sight of something yellow, and so on for other colours, would not yet be describing objects by their colours. (PPF §70)

Not any kind of training produces a genuine practice and Wittgenstein is interested in training as it is embedded in a communitarian dimension where rules govern shared human activities. Following a rule does not reduce to the stimulus-response schema after a long period of training.

Secondly, rules are like *a posteriori*, that is, it is as if they were acknowledged step by step, at every application. The application of the rule is at the same time its determination: application is prior to the existence of the rule itself and all its future formulations. In other words, the rule is determined while it is applied, not before but, since the use is always open and never completed, the rule has an open existence: it comes after or, better, it comes through its employment. That why a rule can determine its employment but it cannot pre-determine future usage.

Thirdly, rules play the role traditionally assigned to necessary facts. As stated by Marconi (2009) current metaphysics accepts the following two theses: 1. Things have essential, hence, necessary properties independently of how we experience or conceptualize, or describe them; 2. Certain facts, that is, certain ways things stand, are necessary. Contrary to this perspective, Wittgenstein's late philosophy lies within the Kantian tradition, according to which there is no *de re* necessity: necessity does not inhere things themselves but it is projected onto them by us through experience, language, and our system of representation. Therefore, features are necessary with respect to the adopted conceptual scheme. In the case of late Wittgenstein, necessity lies in grammar, i.e., necessary truths are rules of grammar in disguise and rules of grammar are not grounded in the nature of things. At best, they are grounded in our contingent form of life, as we have previously seen, but saying that rules are grounded in our form of life is not saying that they are grounded in nature, given that Wittgenstein uses the notion both to refer to biological nature and cultural traits. Forms of life are plural, contingent and changeable.

To conclude, the dispositional reading of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is plausible and incisive if and only if we employ a concept of disposition as a learned and incorporated practice; a propensity to action which is part of human's second nature. According to Tait (2005), for example, Wittgenstein's remarks suggest a concept of disposition as "doing what we actually do"; in this sense, the subject's disposition is conceptually distinguished from the alleged categorical bases – being it a physical or mental state of the subject – and from the causal mechanism to which it is often associated. Such disposition does not determine the meaning of the linguistic expressions but, rather, "it is a fact that I am disposed to employ linguistic expression in a certain way" (Tait 2005). It is important to clarify that such a fact is metaphysically neutral, that is, it does not ground the linguistic practice but it provides the ending element of the justification chain. As we have seen, one of Wittgenstein's main concerns is the temptation of foundationalism: Wittgenstein invites us to see the fact that the reasons

we can adduce to justify a practice must come to an end; beyond that limit it is deceptive to find a further justificatory element and, at that point, I must stop and «I am inclined to say: “This is simply what I do.”» (PI §217).<sup>187</sup> The dispositional perspective, so conceived, becomes part of a naturalistic philosophical attitude which does not entail any kind of naturalizing process since it does not lead to the identification between philosophy and science, and it preserves the normative character of the concept of disposition applied to human beings’ rule-governed behaviour.

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<sup>187</sup> This end, or “bedrock” (PI §217) is not intellectualistic but, rather naturalistic, since it involves the recognition of some facts about human’s form of life, both biological and cultural. This is one of the elements which suggest how Wittgenstein’s later philosophy might express a kind of liberal, non-scientific naturalism.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Dispositional readings of Wittgenstein's later philosophy**

In the previous chapter I presented my own reading of Wittgenstein's remarks on Rule-following in order to argue that some dispositional elements are indeed present in Wittgenstein's later conception of meaning and understanding, although Wittgenstein rejects a kind of dispositional analysis of knowing and understanding in PI §149. In other words, I tried to argue that it is possible to employ the notion of disposition in order to explicate and give an account of Wittgenstein's perspective. In this chapter, I will deal with some relevant and significant dispositional readings offered by the critics: some of them are Wittgensteinian scholars (Tait 2005; Peacocke 1982; Voltolini 2009; Kenny 1989, 2002, 2010; Ter Hark 2010), while others are critics who tried to reflect on the import of Wittgenstein's philosophy for current issues of philosophy of language and mind (Kemp 2014, Horwich 2012, Maddy 2014). Moreover, some of them explicitly employ the notion of disposition in order to give an account of Wittgenstein's perspective, while others employ the related notions of capacity, ability and mastery of technique. In what follows I will deal with what I have called in chapter 4 the second line of justification of the topic of the present work.

I gather the readings into two different main groups: 1. Authors whose dispositional readings lead to a naturalization of Wittgenstein's philosophy; 2. Authors whose dispositional readings preserve Wittgenstein's anti-scientific naturalism and allocate his philosophy within a more liberal naturalist perspective, where a de-naturalized notion of disposition is actually accepted and used. I will critically expound each reading but I will also argue that readings belonging to the second group better capture Wittgenstein's main point and they better respect Wittgenstein's own conceptions of philosophy and philosophical enquiry. For the sake of clarity, I will first draw some basic conceptual clarifications:

1. With the expression "naturalization" I mean what I think to be the characterizing trait of a certain type of naturalism, broadly called "scientific", or "reductive". The term "naturalism" is used with a variety of senses in contemporary philosophy; therefore, there is no actual univocal and universally shared definition of it. For this reason, as rightly suggested by Laudisa (2014, 3, my translation), the term encompasses a «family tree of related concepts which contribute to give the idea of a philosophical spirit rather than a univocal and structured theory». In the present work, I employ Strawson's (1985, 1) distinction between "reductive naturalism" and "liberal naturalism": Quine's naturalized epistemology is an example of the former, while Hume's limitation of the pretensions of reason in Book II of the *Treatise on human nature* is an example of the latter (Strawson 1985, 10). I use two different criteria to expound such distinction: 1. Metaphilosophical considerations; 2. The

role of normativity. “Reductive naturalism” is well expressed by Sellars’s motto «science is the measure of all things» (Sellars 2004, 59). In general, it is grounded on the idea that philosophy should be continuous with science, broadly conceived. Moreover, this kind of naturalism hopes for a naturalization of traditional philosophical concepts, that is, a sort of translation of them into the language of science, and it does not leave much space for normativity within the realm of human action. “Liberal naturalism”, by contrast, does not entail any identification between philosophy and science. It can be characterized as an anti-intellectualist attitude that limits the role of the intellect in favour of philosophical enquiries where human’s nature and cultural belonging are taken into account. Within this perspective, the normative character of human action is generally preserved.

However, given the variety of contemporary naturalism, it is nonetheless possible to set down some features of a minimum sense of naturalism; none of these features necessarily leads to the scientific, or reductive version. First of all, an ontological aspect: as stated by Glock, naturalism «denies that there is any realm other than the natural world of matter, energy, and spatio-temporal objects or events» (Glock 2008, 138). Secondly, an anti-foundationalist aspect: philosophy loses the role of foundation of all knowledge. Thirdly, a metaphilosophical aspect: a particular conception of philosophy is built in relation to the nature of scientific practice.

2. In the context of dispositional and naturalistic readings of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, I employ the expression “deterministic” to refer to a kind of reading which interprets Wittgenstein’s remarks on nature as a thesis on mutual determination between nature and concepts; as a thesis on the concepts’ genesis in terms of *causes*.

3. In the same context, I employ the expression “reductive” to refer to a kind of reading which reduces Wittgenstein’s remarks on nature to the mere biological traits of human beings, without taking into account Wittgenstein’s complex usage of the concept of nature. In this sense, the term “reductive” *does not* refer to the still flourishing debate between reductionism and eliminativism at the core of many current scientific naturalist perspectives.

## 6.1 Wittgenstein naturalized

In this section I will expound in particular Horwich’s (2012) and Maddy’s (2014) readings and I will argue that the first ascribes to Wittgenstein a kind of reductive and deterministic dispositionalism, while the second tries to accommodate Wittgenstein’s later philosophy to the realist and scientific view of Maddy’s “Second philosophy”. However, I will preliminary go back to Kemp’s (2014) dispositional interpretation in order to suggest some critical remarks against it.

As we have seen at the beginning of chapter 4, Kemp ascribes to Wittgenstein a kind of *linguistic dispositionalism*, very similar to the one endorsed by Quine. Such dispositionalism states that at the origin of human's linguistic competence stand some basic dispositions which are not necessarily describable in neurophysiological terms. Such human dispositions would provide the necessary foundation of language, because they constitute the element that each language should presuppose. According to this perspective, Wittgenstein would be interested in enquiring how such basic dispositions could be trained, guided and developed. Kemp ascribes to Wittgenstein a kind of reductive and deterministic naturalism for the following reasons:

1. Kemp rightly states that, contrary to Kripke's claim, the moral of Rule-following is not the individuation of any metaphysical fact of meaning which should guide and justify the subject's action. However, he substitutes the notion of kripkean fact with a naturalized notion of disposition which he takes from Quine. Kemp, indeed, talks of "pre-existing dispositions" which are part of human being's natural history. He reads Wittgenstein's remarks on nature as remarks on human's shared natural history but the focus is on biological, innate traits, rather than cultural acquisitions. The reductive element of Kemp's interpretation of Wittgenstein's concept of nature is at odds with Wittgenstein's complex usage of the notion and his considering natural what is acquired through training and education.
2. Kemp's dispositional reading is deterministic because he reads the nexus between nature and concepts as a nexus of determination and "nature", here, refers to the set of basic pre-existing linguistic dispositions which are part of human's biological equipment: we have the concepts we have *because* we possess such dispositions; this "because" refers to a causal-empirical connection so Wittgenstein's position is read in terms of a factual hypothesis on language genesis and functioning. However, such foundationalist stance is absent in Wittgenstein's remarks: indeed, as we have seen, Wittgenstein is not interested in finding the empirical causes of our actual conceptual system, but it intends to clarify the conceptual system; linguistic dispositions, as we have defined them in the previous chapter, can play this role because they provide *reasons* for a particular course of action; reasons, however, are not causes, and they are part of a level of description and justification which is different form the one that is object of scientific enquiry.
3. Coherently with the previous points, Kemp's notion of disposition is intrinsically non-normative. However, Kemp endorses the thesis of the normativity of meaning, so the problem of how to conciliate linguistic dispositions and normative meaning arises. Kemp resolves this problem by adhering to the problematic communitarian view of Rule-following: if dispositions alone cannot guarantee meaning normativity, then normativity is guaranteed by the presence of the linguistic

community which sets the standard of speaking of something. However, the communitarian view fails on two levels: first of all, from an exegetical point of view it does not constitute Wittgenstein's own solution of the Rule-following problem; secondly, from a theoretical point of view, it fails to provide a good alternative to the interpretational account for it is substantially the same misleading account construed on a communitarian level: it is not the individual's interpretation of the rule that should determine the correct application, but the interpretation provided by the community, considered as a strange kind of autonomous organism. Kemp does not explicitly talk about the community interpretation of the rule, however, the lack of context-depending criterial elements of language use moves the communitarian response within the boundaries of the interpretational account.

If this is so, it seems doubtful whether such a non-normative and biological notion of disposition could be of use for the characterization of language use and understanding, given that we cannot avoid referring to the normativity of meaning and then we are led to the postulation of a problematic communitarian normative power in terms of communal interpretation of the rules. In this context, Kemp's pre-existing dispositions would at best provide the additional scientific explanation of an ordinary practice, but they are of no use if we search for a justification of the practice itself; for this purpose, a different notion of disposition should be employed, which is part of a characterization of Rule-following as a practice and which does not lead to the deceptive communitarian response. Some of the central points of Kemp's reading – the postulation of linguistic dispositions, the focus of the role of the community and the naturalist character of the interpretation – are at the centre of Horwich's dispositional reading, which I will present in the following section.

### **6.1.1 Horwich's causal account of meaning**

Horwich's book rests on three main basic assumptions: 1. It is possible to clearly formulate Wittgenstein's ideas and provide decent arguments in support of them; 2. Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical interest has priority over other specific claims on meaning, Rule-following, private language, etc. More specifically, Wittgenstein's starting point is a «common-sense critique [...] of the scientistic aspirations and methodological assumptions that govern most of what has been done, and still is done, in the name of philosophy» (Horwich 2012, x); 3. The *Philosophical Investigations* overrides other later writings, therefore from an historiographical point of view it is improper to talk about two or three different Wittgenstein for Wittgenstein's thought constitutes one single line that culminates in the *Philosophical Investigations*. In this section I will not deal with these three

assumptions, but I will focus on Horwich's engagement with Wittgenstein's treatment of meaning and understanding for there lies the dispositional character of his interpretation.<sup>188</sup>

First of all, Horwich rightly states that Wittgenstein's remarks on meaning and understanding are meant to illustrate the defects of the tractarian conception of meaning and to defuse a cluster of philosophical problems that come from some misleading reflections on meaning; both components presuppose Wittgenstein's characterisation of meaning as use, which is then considered the basic assumption which lies at the core of subsequent reflections on language use and understanding. Meaning is best characterized as the use of the term, hence knowing the meaning of the term consists in being able to master its use, that is, to *know how* and when to use it.

His central point, rather, is that this “signification” is determined by usage – even when there is no conventional association between utterances of the word and observations of its referent. Thus, our inscription “5” stands for the number 5 in virtue of how we operate with it in counting and calculation. [...] Similarly, “pain” designates pain partly in virtue of our tendency to apply it to ourselves as an expressive alternative to grimacing, crying, jerking away, and so on, and not because we have *observed* a pain. Every word's purporting to refer to what it does consists in its being used in a distinctive way. (Horwich 2012, 107-108)

Moreover, in accordance with what we said in the previous chapter, Horwich is careful to specify that the notion of use which is operative in Wittgenstein's remarks does not refer to the word's function or our method of using it. Rather, the use of a word is better qualified as a tendency to *do* certain things with it, following a certain rule, «where this is characterized in *behavioural terms* [my emphasis] [...] (e.g. our *disposition* [my emphasis], in certain circumstances, to utter certain sentences containing it)» (Horwich 2012, 110). The dispositional character of Wittgenstein's conception of meaning and understanding is explicitly expressed in the following passages:

Someone's meaning a certain thing by a word might consist in his following a certain rule for its use, which might in turn be constituted (in large part) by his *being disposed to* [my emphasis] operate with it in a certain law like way. (Horwich 2012, 119)

According to Wittgenstein, our knowledge of what a word-type literally means – that is, our knowledge of how to use it [...] consists in our disposition to do a certain variety of things with it in a certain variety of circumstances: for example, to respond to the order “Add 2” by writing 1004 after 1002, and so on. Therefore, there should be no puzzle about how the state of understanding a word – our grasping its meaning – can determine all these hypothetical

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<sup>188</sup> I will specifically engage with chapter 4 of the Horwich's book.

actions. For that state is nothing more or less than the propensity to perform those actions.  
(Horwich 2012, 140)

Thus Wittgenstein's view, quite clearly, is that the meaning consists in the disposition.  
(Horwich 2012, 141)

These considerations do not necessarily lead to a naturalization of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Indeed, what we need is to better clarify three aspects: 1. What Horwich means by the notions of rule, disposition and behavioural terms; 2. What kind of nexus Horwich establishes between human's dispositions, meaning and the actual use of words; 3. Horwich's treatment of normativity.

1. Horwich distinguishes between norms, or rules, and dispositions, or mere regularities (Horwich 2012, 108). It seems to me that he defines the former as imperatival rules for use of the form – be “*w*” a word – “Accept such-and-such sentences containing *w*!”, or “We ought to use *w* in such-and-such a way” (Horwich 2012, 117); while the latter is defined as «wholly non-normative, non-regulative facts of linguistic activity» (Horwich 2012, 118). Dispositions are conceived as mere regularities, or knee-jerk reactions that can neither involve, nor engender any instruction or rational guidance.

The expression “behavioural terms” does not necessarily refer to a behaviouristic perspective, for it is rather used by Horwich in opposition to the expression “semantic, or intentional terms”. The latter expression is here used to refer to Grice's notion of intention; the idea that the word “dog”, for example, is used with the *intention* of helping to communicate our beliefs about dogs. According to Horwich, Wittgenstein aims at demystifying the concept of meaning and all the derivative puzzling concepts of reference, intention and belief. Therefore, he rejects the idea that we need semantic and intentional concepts in order to articulate the use of the word; rather «the meaning-giving uses of words must be restricted to *non*-semantic forms of use, including physical, behavioural, and certain psychological forms – for example, the internal acceptance of sentences» (Horwich 2012, 111).<sup>189</sup>

2. Given this, what is it to follow such rules – eminently considered in terms of dispositions – for the use of words? Horwich reads the Rule-following considerations as mainly stating the fact that acting in accordance with rules of usage should not be compared to acting in accordance with explicit instructions or directions, like a food recipe, or a complete list of imperatives. Indeed, the paradox of interpretation is meant to show the philosophical danger of any account of Rule-following which

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<sup>189</sup> Horwich supports this thesis by looking at Wittgenstein's “fairly” behaviouristic illustrations. Indeed, Wittgenstein often asks the reader to consider the use of some expressions by looking at what is done with the word, how it is acted on and how people actually behave with it. This is one of the main ingredients of his later anthropological perspective on language and meaning which is expressed mainly by the idea that imagining a language consists in imagining a form of life.

interposes a mental intermediary between the formulation of the rule and its application, as if the rule should be first formulated and understood and then correctly followed. «There must be such a thing as following rules *implicitly*» (Horwich 2012, 118). But what is that? A combination of rough conformity with law-like regularities [dispositional element] and occasional self-correction.

3. If this is so, how about normativity? How to distinguish between Rule-following and law-like regularities, like the motion of the planets (Horwich 2012, 112, footnote 12) or the dissolution of sugar in a glass of water?

First of all, Horwich generally endorses a non-normative notion of meaning or, better, he can be included among the followers of what I previously called “Engendered normativity”: the normative element stands within the implications of meaningfulness but it is not constitutive of meaning. Indeed, Horwich’s main goal is to argue «against the view [...] that “a purely causal account [of Rule-following] cannot make space for the distinction between correct and incorrect action”» (Horwich, 2012, 192, footnote c\*). The normative import is read in terms of the implications of “what ought to be done with the word”. Such an import is limited to the following points:

3a. The subject’s propensities to correct himself based on his immediate reaction of satisfaction or dissatisfaction to his initial inclination. This should be what distinguishes Rule-following from mere law-like regularity.

3b. If a word’s communal meaning is constituted by the majority following a certain rule, then all the members of the community ought to follow the same rules of use for the sake of communication. This point encompasses two other aspects: the endorsement of the community view of Rule-following and a fairly moral interpretation of the “ought” vehiculated by the rules of use which is common within the perspective of engendered normativity (this applies to point 3c too).

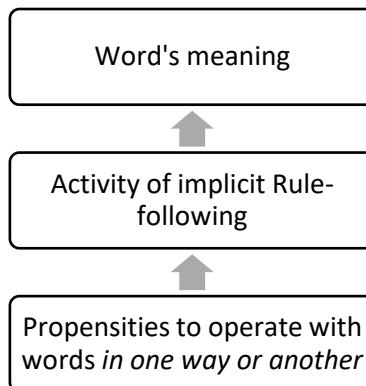
3c. Given that it is a virtue to pursue truth and avoid false belief, then «the following of certain rules of use for a word will, in light of the meaning thereby constituted, imply the desirability of applying it to certain things and not others» (Horwich 2012, 120).

At this point, it might seem as if Horwich employs alternatively different notions of normativity; sometimes he focuses on the dispositional nature of rules in terms of mere regularities, other times he recognizes the imperative character of rules of use which is the basis of the “ought” as defined in points 3b and 3c. Personally, I think that this is the case, but that at the same time it has the merit to acknowledge the fact that in the dispositional account of meaning and understanding, Wittgenstein has a number of different normative aspects in mind: normative commitments, cases of imperatival Rule-following and some mere regularities. However, I do not endorse Horwich’s characterisation of

propensities and dispositions as mere regularities and, above all, I have doubt regarding the following and conclusive reconstruction of Wittgenstein's picture of meaning and understanding:

At the bottom there are propensities to operate with words in one way or another; these help constitute our implicitly following the rules of our language game; and this activity of rule-following constitutes our words' meanings. In light of the values of (i) desire satisfaction, (ii) smooth communication, and (iii) believing the truth, we can see that our meaning what we do has at least three kinds of normative import. But according to this picture, meaning is not *intrinsically* normative – a word's meaning what it does is not *itself* an evaluative fact – but it does have a variety of evaluative implications. (Horwich 2012, 121)

The core passages might be better understood by looking at the following schema, where the arrow indicates a relation of constitution:



Basic propensities constitute the activity of implicit Rule-following which, in turn, constitutes the meaning of the word.

I argue that there are three problems both from an exegetical and a theoretical point of view, that is, these problems concern an incorrect reconstruction of Wittgenstein's remarks and a problematic conception of meaning: 1. Propensities as natural grounding; 2. The kind of normative import; 3. The role of the community.

1. Propensities, or dispositions to operate with words are not pre-existing, rather they are acquired. It is true that, regarding language use, human's agreement is an agreement in reactions and shared behaviour rather than an agreement in judgements and opinions. This is what Wittgenstein claims by stating that the agreement is in forms of life. However, if we look at Horwich's reconstruction it seems that such an agreement comes spontaneously in virtue of innate traits and properties which are the way they are independently of the subject's interaction in a wider context. It is as if, by pure chance, people tend to operate with words in a certain way given some basic intrinsic dispositions and then the most shared way of operating becomes the one that everyone should then follow.

However, by contrary, such an agreement is gradually construed within the boundaries of a cultural system. It is true that understanding the meaning of a term and meaning something by a word are well characterized in terms of the subject's propensity, or disposition, to employ that term in a certain way. However, the propensity, or disposition is not unqualified, that is, it is not "in one way or another"; it is already codified and it is not a set of various and casual reactions that tend to converge in some cases.<sup>190</sup> The subject's disposition is already the product of training and it is the way it is in the light of the social environment in which it is embedded.

Indeed, it is not surprising that Horwich distinguishes between «*actual* use-dispositions» and «*correct* use-dispositions (i.e. the applications that would be *true*)» (Horwich 2012, 167). According to him, the former represent Wittgenstein's perspective, while the latter represent Kripke's view on meaning and normativity. Such a distinction is better spelled out in the following passage:

“...the meaning is the use we make of the word ...” (PI 138). – That is, our *actual* use of the word, not the *correct* use or the use we *ought* to make of it! (Horwich 2012, 120, footnote 14)

However, Horwich is wrong in thinking that those are the only two alternatives: either the meaning is constituted by the actual use of words with a lack of inherent normativity, or meaning is constituted by the correct use of the word, in the problematic kripkean sense. Wittgenstein invites us to look at the actual use of the words in order to better clarify our conceptual system, but this is a methodological indication that should prevent us from falling into the deceptive pictures of mentalistic and platonist accounts of meaning and understanding. Thus, I think we should distinguish between a methodological aspect and a grammatical aspect regarding the concept of meaning: saying that we have to look at the way we actually employ the terms does not entail a non-normative conception of meaning, for it is a way of suggesting an alternative way of looking at things than the traditional denotative, or Augustinian theory of meaning and the mentalistic theory of meaning: in the former case we should look for the referents of words in the world, in the latter case we should have an insight of the subject's inner mental life for meanings are thought to be mental entities associated to the words. Looking at the actual use is a move against psychologism and mentalism, in all the senses we have specified in the previous chapter (SM, PM). Given this, it is still conceptually possible to characterize the meaning of the term as the correct use of it, that is, as the use in accordance with its grammatical rules. Normativity is still conceptually internally related to the concept of meaning: the meaning of a linguistic expression is not its *mere* use but rather its *proper* use, i.e., use in conformity

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<sup>190</sup> That is why, as stated in the previous chapter, dispositions are “assumed”.

to the rules of grammar. Normativity thus becomes a fundamental element of language as a condition of meaning. A word has a meaning as used in accordance with the rules.

2. The normative element is intrinsic to meaning and it is not a mere implication of meaningfulness. However, stating that meaning is normative does not necessarily entail either the postulation of some normative facts, or the construction of the normative power in terms of imperatives and “oughts”. As we have seen, Wittgenstein’s conception of Rule-following as a practice and the key role assigned to the paradigmatic application of the rule suggests a possible alternative to this. Indeed, if we conceive the disposition as not a mere regularity, we do not even need to postulate normative facts for we have everything we need in order to give a proper account of human’s rule-governed behaviour: a subject is disposed to follow rules like the other members of the linguistic community to which he belongs, but the very notion of rule entails the distinction between correct and incorrect application of it. The subject’s disposition to use the word in a certain way is constitutive of meaning if such a way is the “correct way”, but this means that a distinction between correct and incorrect application is intelligible already at the dispositional level for such linguistic disposition is a pattern of behaviour which is learned in a communal context which furnishes the standard of correctness. The use is public, open to public evaluation and correction.

3. Contrary to Horwich’s thesis, the community does not play the role of constituting the meaning of a term by looking at the use of the majority or “the experts” (Horwich 2012, 120). The correct use is not the use of the majority; it is not construed democratically. In particular, we do not follow rules in virtue of a communitarian *decision*. Agreement in action comes first: when we follow rules, we collectively act in a certain way without any grounding metaphysical reason.

To conclude, Horwich’s interpretation rightly recognizes the dispositional character of Wittgenstein’s later views on meaning and understanding. However, his dispositionalism is part of a naturalizing move which is not correctly ascribable to Wittgenstein; Horwich’s Wittgenstein is a philosopher who endorses a kind of reductive and deterministic naturalism: “reductive” for the references on nature are reduced to mere biological traits belonging to human’s natural history – and the same applies to the alleged behavioural dispositions – “deterministic”, for the nexus between nature and meaning is construed in terms of causal determination. Both aspects do not respect Wittgenstein’s distinction between grammatical enquiry and factual enquiry, and Wittgenstein’s rejection of any kind of scientific, or naturalizing, naturalism, in virtue of the rigid distinction between philosophy and science.

I will now move to another naturalistic reading of Wittgenstein's later philosophy presented by Penelope Maddy.

### 6.1.2 Maddy's Wittgenstein as a “Second philosopher”

Maddy's (2014) dispositional reading is part of her general attempt to accommodate Wittgenstein's early and later philosophy to the realist and scientist view of the “Second philosophy”, through a reflection on Wittgenstein's philosophy of logic. The chapters' titles are indicative, in this sense: Maddy starts from “Naturalizing Kant on Logic” (chapter 2), then she moves to “Naturalizing the *Tractatus*” (chapter 4) and she ends by “Naturalizing the logical must” (chapter 7). In what follows I will first briefly expound Maddy's naturalistic perspective, called “Second philosophy”, then I will move to her naturalized interpretation of the “second Wittgenstein”.

“Second philosophy” is a new term that refers to a «particularly austere form of naturalism», coined in virtue of the fact that «the term [naturalism] has come to mark little more than a vague science-friendliness» (Maddy 2007, 1). Maddy's austere naturalism has two main features: 1. The absence of a predetermined definition of science; 2. A strong continuity thesis between philosophy and science, which inevitably leads to the pursuing of a process of naturalization of traditional philosophical concepts and problems.

1. Contrary to other kinds of contemporary naturalism, it recognizes the fact that «there is no hard and fast specification of what ‘science’ must be, no determinate criterion of the form ‘*x* is science iff ...’» (Maddy 2007, 1). Therefore, the “Second philosophy” does not preliminarily rely on a fixed definition of science and it does not limit the kind of things science could legitimately discover.

2. It abandons any attempt to pursue the ideal of “First philosophy” – hence the expression “Second philosophy” – and it promotes a kind of philosophy which should entirely rely on the methods of science – without having the pretension to metaphysically ground them – in order to resolve traditional philosophical problems. As a consequence, the “Second philosopher” thinks that traditionally philosophical problems can and should be transformed into scientific problems and that they can be addressed through scientific methods. According to Marconi (2012, 21-22), Maddy's point is not that philosophical problems should be substituted by scientific problems; rather, she would state that there are scientific versions of traditional philosophical problems, so treating a philosophical problem as a scientific one consists in trying to answer to a question traditionally considered philosophical using exclusively the methods of science and scientific knowledge. This perspective is explicitly in contrast with the conception of philosophy as a kind of conceptual analysis, which is traditionally endorsed by Wittgenstein and part of the analytical tradition. According to this

perspective, philosophical problems are not scientific or empirical problems, that is, problems that are resolved «by coming up with new discoveries», but they are conceptual problems, that is, problems that «are solved by assembling what we have long been familiar with», «through an insight into the workings of our language [...]», and that in such a way that these workings are recognized – *despite* an urge to misunderstand them» (PI §109).

Maddy's naturalizing move in *The logical must*, therefore, consists in trying to adapt Wittgenstein's early and later philosophy to the two features exposed above.<sup>191</sup> For the sake of the present work, I will deal only with Maddy's reflections on Wittgenstein's later philosophy; in particular, she takes into account Wittgenstein's *Remarks on the Philosophy of Mathematics* and the *Philosophical Investigations*.

Maddy does not explicitly use the notion of disposition. However, she employs the related notions of ability, tendency and inclination in order to throw light on Wittgenstein's dissolution of the Rule-following problem. She indeed traces the dispositional character in the following passage, where she agrees in stating that one of Wittgenstein's main points is the methodological invitation to recognize some general facts about us:

Wittgenstein notes how our *ability* [my emphasis] to follow rules, our *practice* [my emphasis] of rule-following, rests on a number of these obvious and very *general facts* [my emphasis] about us.  
(Maddy 2014, 68)

She rightly specifies that such facts regard both human nature, and nature in general, that is, some world's features and regularities. Indeed, Wittgenstein's remarks on general facts of nature involve aspects of human being's nature and some features of the environment where humans are placed. However, her reading is fairly naturalizing because it is an *empirical reading* of Wittgenstein's description of Rule-following, which rests on two main aspects: 1. The reductive conception of human's general facts of nature; 2. The foundational character of the relation between nature and concepts.

1. Maddy includes three different types of facts under the label “general facts of nature”: Humans' contingent abilities and inclinations; world's features and regularities; human's interests and

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<sup>191</sup> Already at this stage, doubts could be raised about the legitimacy of an accommodation of Wittgenstein's philosophy to Maddy's naturalistic perspective, for Wittgenstein entirely rejects the thesis of the continuity between philosophy and science. Wittgenstein is not uninterested in the methods and in the acquisitions of science, but he firmly thinks that philosophical problems are not scientific problems, therefore any attempt to reduce the first to the second is a category mistake.

motivations. The first fall under the expression “human’s nature”, while the second fall under the expression “facts about the world”.

First of all, contrary to Wittgenstein, Maddy does not include human’s interests and motivations within the category of human nature. Indeed, abilities and inclinations are here read in terms of mere natural tendencies, «rooted in our most basic cognitive machinery, presumably as a result of our (and our ancestor’s) experience with those very general features [of the world]» (Maddy 2014, 79). Natural tendencies and abilities are acquisitions of the species in a quite Darwinian sense, rather than acquisitions that come from constant training and education within a specific context; they are part of humans’ natural apparatus, in the sense of biological nature, or belonging to one particular biological species.

Secondly, there is no reference whatsoever to cultural and social background. Therefore, Wittgenstein’s reference to nature is read exclusively as a reference to general facts which are context-independent. Even human’s motivation and inclinations are not conceived against a background of social practices.

Thirdly, Maddy’s notion of facts about the world tends to wrongly allocate Wittgenstein within the tradition of current metaphysics and the philosophical acceptance of *de re* necessity. Indeed, she argues that Wittgenstein would not reject the following commonplaces taken from Stroud’s reply to Lear (1984):

We all know that, for the most part, thinking does not make it so, and that, in general, something’s being so does not require that it be thought to be so – or than anything else be thought to be so either. Many of the things we think – in astronomy, geology, and biology, for example, were so (or were not) long before there were any people or other beings who could have thought anything [...]. (Stroud 1984, 83)

Wittgenstein would not reject those commonplaces in the sense that he is not an idealist philosopher and he is not interested – from an ontological point of view – in raising doubts about the existence of things in the world that are independent from individual’s perception and conceptualization. Even when he rejects semantic mentalism and psychologism, he does not deny the existence of mental states and processes. However, he does not endorse the idea that, in virtue of that, the necessary character of our practices rests on some necessary properties of things taken in themselves. As we have seen, Wittgenstein belongs to the Kantian tradition and he thinks necessity to rather lie in grammar or, in general, in the conceptual systems through which we see and conceptualise the world. Indeed, Wittgenstein’s remarks on general facts of nature are not meant to provide a metaphysical

basis for our practice of Rule-following and meaningful talk. However, that is precisely how Maddy's reconstructs Wittgenstein's ideas on meaning and understanding.

## 2. These natural facts ground the practice of Rule-following and they fix the meaning of terms.

These ordinary facts about our human nature and about the world in which we find ourselves are the grey rags and dust, and they are enough to *ground* [my emphasis] our practice of continuing series, including the *correctness* [my emphasis] of 1002 and the incorrectness of 1004 in continuing '+2' after 1000. (Maddy 2014, 69)<sup>192</sup>

Our meanings are fixed by a complex interaction of our interests and motivations, our natural inclinations, and very general features of the world. (Maddy 2014, 79)

Maddy's claim is twofold: the general facts of nature determine both the adoption of a particular rule rather than another (A) and the correctness of the applications of existing rules:

*Both* correct application of existing rules *and* the choice between possible rules rest on the familiar Wittgensteinian trio of our interests, our nature, and the world's regularities. (Maddy 2014, 78)

Concerning (A), Maddy reads the adoption of a particular rule rather than another in pragmatic terms, as the rule which better suits our pragmatic interests and motivations in the sense that it would be advantageous rather than disadvantageous. For example, «there might be nothing particularly disadvantageous about employing an arithmetical rule that changes from our '+2' to our '+4' after 100, but a rule that calls for random choices or coin flips at each point would not serve the purposes of the practice of arithmetic». Or, concerning the logical inference, «we want to know about the world around us; we enhance that knowledge by having a reliable method of moving from truths to truths» (Maddy 2014, 78). However, first of all, Maddy's first quotation seems to be quite circular for it presupposes the existence of the practice that humans' interests and motives should ground: if the features of the practice itself should rest on some general natural facts, then these facts could depend upon the practice's purposes. Indeed, Wittgenstein's point is more subtle and it conveys the idea that our life receives its physiognomy from the linguistic game we actually adopt, and that physiognomy is contingent. «You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there-like our life» (OC §559). Secondly, Maddy's pragmatic considerations are more similar to Quine's point of view, rather than Wittgenstein's. In particular, Quine's reason in favour of the adoption of scientific methods, which, not surprisingly, is quite circular too: according to Quine, scientific knowledge is not different

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<sup>192</sup> See also Maddy 2014, 70: «In the rule-following case, the method is to display the ordinary answers to our questions and the general facts that ground them».

in kind from our ordinary knowledge; rather it is the result of our attempts to improve our ordinary knowledge of the world: «Science is not a substitute for common sense but an extension of it» (Quine 1957, 229). The scientist is indistinguishable from the common man except that the scientist is more careful, clearer and systematic in order to reach the goals of truth and objectivity. Given our interest in enquiring about the world, the methods and techniques of science are the best way to find out this and this claim too is based on natural science. From a Quinian perspective, if this is circular, we should simply accept the circularity, for priority goes to the efficacy of the adopted method.

Concerning (B), it is doubtful whether such an account could guarantee the normative element of Rule-following, given that the general facts of nature are construed in non-normative terms and no normative implication of meaning is spelled out by Maddy. Her account, with proper integrations, could well be an account of the genesis of human language use from a scientific point of view but it does not seem to provide enough elements for answering the “why” question in terms of reasons, rather than causes. Moreover, it does not face the issue of the possibility of mistake, which is clearly acknowledgeable even if we admit and recognize the role of biological and innate human traits and properties.

It is not the aim of the present work to comment in detail Maddy’s interpretation; my aim was mainly to show how Maddy traces dispositional elements in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy but she then reads them as part of a naturalizing move which, according to her perspective, would place Wittgenstein’s philosophy in the conceptual net of the austere “Second philosophy”. It is a reading which strongly differs from the one I tried to sustain in the previous chapter. However, I would like to conclude by briefly outline the reasons why I think that Maddy’s interpretation of Rule-following in terms of “Second philosophy” is improper. It is improper both from an exegetical point of view, and from a theoretical point of view.

Maddy states that Wittgenstein and the “Second philosopher” would agree on the following points: 1. The emphasis on the role of very general features of the world and of human beings for the fixation of meaning (Maddy 2014, 73); 2. A more direct interaction between logical practices and human’s interests and inclinations, like in the natural sciences: «the world has whatever structure it has, but what we notice, what we study depends on our aims» (Maddy 2014, 78). First of all, from an exegetical point of view, Wittgenstein rejects exactly what Maddy argues, that is, a nexus of determination between nature and concepts captured by hypothesis. If Maddy states that «if a large groups of terrestrial plants did not share structural and life-cycle features, botanical classification would be impossible» (Maddy 2014, 73), Wittgenstein would immediately specify that such a sentence does not function like an hypothesis, but it helps the philosopher to understand the way we

actually talk about plants, or the way we employ some botanical concepts. Secondly, we may well transform Wittgenstein's fairly naturalistic remarks into parts of an austere naturalism, but in this way, we step out of Wittgenstein's path; it is not a way to accommodate his philosophy to the "Second philosophy", for Wittgenstein does not share the essential aspect of it: the continuity thesis between philosophy and science. Indeed, Maddy justifies her exegetical move by limiting Wittgenstein's methodological concerns to the a-theoretical character of philosophy and his personal antipathy to the scientific spirit of his time: the former provides no reason to challenge the "Second philosopher" move, while the second is an assumption that can be removed. However, this is too simple. Wittgenstein's critical attitude towards science is more complex and – rather than being a mere personal antipathy – it involves methodological aspects which stand at the core of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy: philosophy and science are not continuous; they are different in the method, in the object of research and in the main goals. Given this, Wittgenstein has no quarrel about the methodology of the "Second philosopher" itself – he is not against scientific method. Wittgenstein's point is that such a method could not be applied to problems that are not scientific, but rather conceptual or linguistic, and the Rule-following problem or, in general, the problem of meaning, is of the latter type. Therefore, even theoretically, the "Second philosophy" move cannot be properly applied to a conceptual issue, because it would be a category mistake: it cannot answer semantic questions.

## 6.2 Wittgenstein de-naturalized

In the remaining of the chapter I will present some significant dispositional readings of Wittgenstein's later philosophy that does not lead to a naturalization of his philosophy and that generally work with a de-naturalized notion of disposition. All the authors share two important points: 1. The rejection of Kripke's sceptical interpretation of Wittgenstein's remarks on Rule-following; 2. A notion of disposition applied to Wittgenstein's philosophy that does not fall under the "simplification fallacy", for it is not used to refer to mere natural tendencies and physical dispositions of the matter.

### 6.2.1 Tait's *mild* dispositionalism

Edward Tait is rarely cited among Wittgensteinian scholars. However, in his *Wittgenstein and the "Sceptical Paradoxes"* (2005), he advances a critique of Kripke's interpretation that precedes the similar critique presented by Fogelin (2009).<sup>193</sup> Tait states that, contrary to Kripke's claim, Wittgenstein does not endorse any sceptical paradox and, as a consequence he does not provide any

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<sup>193</sup> The article was first published in *The Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): 475–88. 1986. Then it was reprinted in Tait 2005.

sceptical solution. The paradox is faced in order to highlight the conceptual confusion that lies at the bottom of the paradox, that is, «thinking that understanding a rule consists of having an interpretation of it» (Tait 2005, 199). However, Wittgenstein's critical target is twofold: he rejects the interpretational account of Rule-following, *and* a conception of understanding as a state of the mind of the subject who understands. Indeed, Tait traces the most significative move against this perspective in PI §149, where a kind of dispositionalism is put under scrutiny.

Understanding the rule as having an interpretation (in the broad sense mentioned above) and understanding the rule as being in a certain mental state: these seem to me to be the principle views of understanding that Wittgenstein, on different grounds, is arguing against. But his discussion of understanding is by no means all negative. (Tait 2005, 200)

Tait's reading is particularly indicative for the following two reasons:

1. It provides an explicit dispositional reading of Wittgenstein's positive account of Rule-following;
2. It involves a de-naturalized notion of disposition which differs both from Wittgenstein's notion employed in PI §149, and Kripke's notion.

Wittgenstein's positive move consists in showing that there is a way of grasping and following a rule which does not consist in having an interpretation of the rule (PI §201) and which does not identify understanding with the subject's mental state. Such positive account consists in characterizing understanding a rule as being master of a technique. According to Tait, «this is a *dispositional* notion» (Tait 2005, 200), and if we still offer resistance against the use of the term “disposition” in this context it is because «Wittgenstein and Kripke use it in a sense that does not seem [...] to be the proper sense, and in any case, they do not use it in the sense in which» the author wants to use it (Tait 2005, 200).

How does Tait use the word “disposition”? First of all, conceptually, the disposition should be distinguished from (1) «the possible underlying state», and (2) the «causal mechanism (governing the evolution of the states) in terms of which we may explain the disposition» (Tait 2005, 201). Thus, we have three elements: 1. The disposition, 2. The underlying state, 3. The causal mechanism. It is interesting to note that the dispositional perspective rejected in PI §149 presupposes a sort of conceptual collapse of all these three things. Let us take the example of a machine that is disposed to print out the series “#, #, #, #...” some number of times. Surely, we can account for the machine's behaviour in terms of the initial state of the machine and the laws governing the evolution of its states – from the initial one, to the production of the output. However, if we conceptually confuse these two

elements, then we would have two criteria for the disposition: the machine's internal structure and what the machine actually does. This is what Wittgenstein objects to such an account in PI §149, although he does use the term "disposition" to refer to the state. Contrary to this perspective, if we conceptually distinguish between the disposition, the underlying state and the causal mechanism, then we could work with just one criterion for the having of the disposition: what we actually do.

To understand a rule is to have a certain disposition, and the criterion for having that disposition lies in what we do. (Tait 2005, 201)

Understanding a rule, knowing how to proceed is a *competence*. Indeed, this seems to me to be an account that better fits with humans' rule-governed behaviour, like the case of the student who learns at school how to operate with numbers, or how to speak. The student is tested by looking at his overt behaviour, what he actually does, how he actually operates with numbers. Now, it is important to specify that, again, the dispositional character is part of a conceptual clarification of the concepts of understanding, meaning and following a rule; it is not part of a theory of meaning and understanding. The disposition does not fix or constitute the meaning of terms. Indeed, I don't think that Wittgenstein would be contrary to the possibility of a science of meaning and language competence based on a specific theory of mind or the brain and nervous system; simply, such a theory would not answer conceptual questions on the concepts involved, for the very grammar of those concepts is actually presupposed in the scientific practice. The same applies to the very notion of disposition; I can try to enquiry the neurophysiological base of the alleged dispositional state, however, I am here already operating with a concept that has a grammar – norms of usage – therefore the scientific enquiry is neither the way we enquire concept functioning, nor the way to fix only one and determinate meaning of the term.

Secondly, according to Tait, the understanding of the rule does not warrant the correct application of it in the kripkean sense, i.e., by fulfilling what we have called "the foundational requirement" and "the normative- justificatory requirement". Since understanding consists in having a certain disposition, the disposition itself «does not warrant my applications of the rule» in that sense (Tait 2005, 203): my having a disposition to assert *X* is not a warrant for *X*. However, the point is that no such fact is needed, for Wittgenstein precisely intends to show that the meaning of an expression is not the meaning conferred on it by something about us when we utter it; it is rather the role that it plays in our language. It is true that, within the kripkean dispositional perspective the statement that I ought to assert *A* is not warranted by my dispositions (in the kripkean sense) or my mental state; there may be something in my mind that determines in a causal sense what I actually say in a certain circumstance, but this does not determine the correctness of what I actually say. However,

Wittgenstein point is precisely that «there is nothing paradoxical about the fact that nothing about me on the occasion that I utter *A* determines whether or not *A* is true or anything else about the meaning of *A*», for my linguistic competence is indeed a fact about me: it is a fact that «that I am disposed to use and react, linguistically and otherwise, to expressions in more or less suitable ways» (Tait 2005, 204). This fact is metaphysically neutral: it is a fact that I am disposed to conform to the meanings of the expressions, but this fact about me does not determine those meanings.

Thus, that Jones means addition by “+” is a fact about the world and, indeed, is a fact about Jones. But this fact is not warrant for what he says. Rather, it is what he says that is a *criterion* [my emphasis] for the fact that he means addition by “+”. (Tait 2005, 205)

I agree with this perspective and I think it provides the ground to reject the kind of dispositional account presented in PI §149. If we identify knowing – for example, knowing the ABC – with the possession of a certain disposition, then we violate in a certain sense the conceptual feature according to which knowing the ABC should characterize the linguistic behaviour: we would be obliged to state that subject *S* knows the ABC when the mental state occurs, even if it is not followed by the correct type of behaviour and, correspondingly, we would abstain from ascribing knowledge of ABC to subject *S* if the mental state does not occur even if *S* manifests the proper type of behaviour, that is, the correct one.

To conclude, Tait’s dispositional reading consists in stating that Wittgenstein’s remarks on Rule-following are meant to show that «to follow a rule, one must have a language, and to have a language is to have certain dispositions to use and react to symbols (i.e., to things that function as symbols in the language» (Tait 2005, 206).<sup>194</sup> This reading does not lead to a naturalization of Wittgenstein’s philosophy because:

1. Tait’s notion of disposition is thought to be different from the one endorsed by Wittgenstein in PI §149 and Kripke;
2. The term “disposition” does not refer to an inner process, state, or mechanism, nor to a biological property of the subject;

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<sup>194</sup> We might impute to Tait a poor reference to the communitarian dimension. Indeed, rejecting the community view cannot prevent us from focusing on the essential element of the community as a background against which the practice has to be considered. Teichmann (2015) offers a dispositional reading where the role of the community is better spelled out: according to Teichmann, Wittgenstein’s remarks on understanding provide a conception of understanding as being able to do certain things, that is, to do what counts as “acting in accordance” to the standard provided by the linguistic community to which the subject belongs.

3. The dispositional fact does not determine and fix meanings but it is an element which helps to give an account of language use and competence.

In the next two paragraphs I will present Kenny's (1989, 2002, 2010) and Voltolini's (2009) dispositional readings. They both specify how the notion of disposition applied to Wittgenstein's philosophy refers to a rule-governed activity and practice, rather than natural capacities like conductivity, solubility or flammability. They differ in the adopted conceptual strategy: while Voltolini restricts the term "disposition" to the mere natural capacities, Kenny accepts a conceptual pluralism regarding the same linguistic term and he extends the meaning of the term "disposition" using a fairly Aristotelian sensibility; there is no opposition between dispositions and abilities but rather types of dispositions and conceptual distinctions within the dispositional talk.

### 6.2.2 Kenny's Aristotelian dispositionalism

I shall reconstruct Kenny's dispositional reading by focusing on three works: 1. The book *The Metaphysics of Mind* (Kenny 1989); 2. The article *Wittgenstein, Mente e Metafisica* (Kenny 2002); 3. The article *Concepts, Brains and Behaviour* (Kenny 2010). The first offers a non-empirical study on the nature of mind against the Cartesian metaphysics of mind; the latter two share and deepen the thesis on the nature of mind but they contain more explicit references on the dispositional reading of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Globally, Kenny's philosophical project might be summarised as follows:

1. Aristotle's study on actualities and potentialities is part of a kind of metaphysical study, called "Dynamical Metaphysics", that helps refuting the Cartesian conception of mind without endorsing behaviourism or materialism in the philosophy of mind (Kenny 2002).<sup>195</sup>

2. Wittgenstein's reflections on the concept of mind are an instance of a philosophical critique of the Cartesian conception of mind that does not lead to the acceptance of behaviourism and materialism.

3. (2) is theoretically possible because Wittgenstein shares the Aristotelian study of actualities and potentialities. Therefore, although Wittgenstein explicitly refuses any kind of foundational and spiritualistic metaphysics, he does fully belong to the tradition of the dynamical metaphysics.

The dispositional element is what distinguishes Kenny's and – according to him- Wittgenstein's conception of the mind from Cartesian, materialistic and behaviouristic conceptions of the mind.

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<sup>195</sup> Kenny classifies Descartes's conception of mind in the field of the "Spiritualistic Metaphysics". This perspective consists in trying to find substances for every linguistic noun and, where no physical body can be found, spiritual activities and substances are postulated.

Kenny states that «the mind is a capacity (That, as Wittgenstein would say, is a grammatical remark) [...] to acquire linguistic and symbolic skills, which are themselves abilities of a certain kind» (Kenny 2010, 105).<sup>196</sup> Among these abilities we find concepts; their peculiarity is that they are abilities that are particular exercises of the capacity that is the mind. Possessing and understanding the concept *C*, then, should be characterized as *having mastered* the use of a word for “C” in some language. Given this, I will deepen Kenny’s insight by focusing on the following points:

1. Where the notion of disposition does come from and how it is used by Kenny;
  2. Further specification of the type of nexus between dispositions and language use;
  3. Some perplexities about Kenny’s account.
1. Kenny (2002) uses the term “disposition” to refer to a particular type of potentiality, or possibility which is linguistically captured by the term “can”. First of all, Kenny (1989) rightly distinguishes between three different uses of the term “can”:
    - A. The word refers to logical possibility, like in the sentence “4 can be divided by 2”;
    - B. The word refers to epistemic possibility, i.e., possibility related to given data, like in the sentence “It can be that *P*” (given such an evidence);
    - C. The word refers to a type of possibility in the field of philosophy of mind vehiculated by the sentence “S can do such and such”. In this case the term refers to the subject’s ability to do certain things after having been trained.<sup>197</sup>

I think that this conceptual distinction is useful and important for the overall aim of the present work.<sup>198</sup> First of all, the talk on possibility does not necessarily coincide with the talk on potentiality,

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<sup>196</sup> Kenny uses the term “capacity” rather than “ability” to highlight the fact that the mind is an ability to acquire further abilities. It could be called a second order ability, but this «would be to underestimate the possible stratification of abilities. There can be abilities to acquire abilities to acquire abilities ... without limit» (Kenny 2010, 105).

<sup>197</sup> There can be further two specifications to be drawn. 1. When we utter the expression (*P*) “John can/cannot swim” we might refer to his acquired ability but also to another conceptually different thing: the occasion, or opportunity, that is, the conditions of the exercise of the ability. I might utter *P* and mean that John can swim in the sense that the pool is filled with water, whereas I might say that John cannot swim because there is no water in the pool. In this case, the word “can” does not refer to the subject’s ability but to the contingent possibility of the exercise of the ability. Obviously, John *can* still swim even if he *cannot* concretely swim in that specific moment. 2. The expression “can” might refer to a natural capacity, like the capacity of water to freeze. In this case, necessary conditions for the manifestation of the capacity are also sufficient: when the appropriate conditions occur, the capacity is inevitably exercised.

<sup>198</sup> Wittgenstein presents a similar grammatical elucidation of the word “can” in *The Brown Book*. If we look at the «role the words "can" or "to be able to" play in our language» (BB, 100), we would «see that a vast net of family likenesses connects the cases in which the expressions of possibility, "can", "to be able to", etc. are used» (BB, 117). He then distinguishes between three uses: the description of the subject’s state; the expression of possibility, and the formulation of some conjectures. I will expound this point in the next chapter.

or dispositionality: to state “S can do *m*” is conceptually different from stating “S would do *m* under certain conditions”. Of course, the two expressions might coincide, as in the case where the disposition refers to an acquired ability rather than a mere natural capacity, but they do not necessarily coincide in the ordinary linguistic use.<sup>199</sup> Secondly, even when the term “possibility” is used in the dispositional talk, we should distinguish between a kind of metaphysical possibility – a possible state of affairs – and a kind of possibility related to the mastery of a certain technique – capacity or mastery of a certain practice. For example, when we utter the expression “I *can* play chess” we are not necessarily expressing our free-will, that is, the contingent character of our action so that we could well refrain from playing chess if we wanted to, nor the contingent possibility which Kenny reads in terms of occasion, or opportunity (see footnote 19), for example the fact that we can play chess because we have time and we have a chessboard at home. Rather, with such an expression we usually refer to our mastery of the game: we can play chess, we *know how* to play because we know the rules.

Secondly, the term “ability” belongs to the third of the three senses of “can” mentioned above and it refers to what Aristotle calls “rational powers” and which are distinguished from the “natural powers”, or Kenny’s natural capacities: while the latter refer to a natural tendency to behave in a certain way, like the capacity of water to wet, and the capacity of fire to burn, the former refer to capacities that are acquired through practice and exercise, like the chemist’s ability to make medicines. For this reason, “rational powers” are peculiar for human beings.

Within the category of “rational powers”, dispositions are peculiar powers because they stand between pure potentiality and pure actuality: they are on the one hand *abilities* whose exercise consist in the corresponding activities of liber arts – for example, the correct uttering of a german sentence, or the understanding of a german text – and, on the other hand, they are *actualisations* of the capacity to learn – for example, the capacity to speak german. Dispositions, therefore, are not mere natural capacities. With such a notion of disposition in mind, the dispositionality of meaning and understanding is thus expressed: language competence and understanding has a dispositional character because it is «a potentiality, exercised in the actual, episodic, use of the language. But it is itself an actuality, a skill acquired on the basis of the underlying human, species-specific, capacity for language learning» (Kenny 2010, 109). Similarly, individual mastery of concepts «is a very specific skill, an actuality acquired at a certain stage of the subject’s development; but it is also a potentiality, exercised in the application of the concept on particular occasions» (Kenny 2010, 109).

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<sup>199</sup> As we have seen in the first part of the present work, some authors nowadays argue that disposition ascriptions are semantically equivalent to possibility claims rather than counterfactuals. See Vetter (2014) and Aimar (2018).

2. Firstly, Kenny states that the ability is a sufficient but not necessary condition for the possession of the concept: «A sufficient, but not a necessary condition for a person to possess the concept of F is that she shall have mastered the use of a word for ‘F’ in some language» (Kenny 2010, 106). That is, a subject can possess concept *F* even if he does not master the use of the word “F” in some language.

Secondly, when we give an account of human mind and behaviour we should “respect” the grammatical-conceptual distinction between the ability, or disposition, the possessor of the ability – who or what has the ability –, the exercise, or manifestation of the ability – what counts as exercise and application of the ability –, and the vehicle of the ability (Kenny 1989).<sup>200</sup> Kenny defines the vehicle as something concrete and localizable in virtue of which the possessor has the ability which is then expressed in the concrete and particular exercise. For example, alcohol is the vehicle of whisky’s capacity to intoxicate; the brain is the vehicle of human rational capacities. The distinction between the ability and its vehicle is a distinction between conceptual characteristics of abilities and empirical conditions for their exercise: that the alcohol is the vehicle of intoxication is a contingent and empirical fact, whereas «it is a conceptual truth that a round peg has the power to fit into a round hole», but «roundness was not the vehicle of the power to fit into a round whole. For the whole point of distinguishing between powers and their vehicles was to separate conceptual features of powers from the empirically necessary conditions of their exercise» (Kenny 2010, 107). While the nexus between ability and vehicle is contingent and discoverable by empirical science (we might say, it is an external relation), the nexus between ability and its exercise is conceptual, or internal. According to Kenny, from this it follows that the individuation of the vehicle *explains* the possession of the particular ability by the possessor, in virtue of the fact that the relation between the two is *causal*, while the notions of exercise and possessor help *individuating* specific abilities and capacities; a particular ability’s, or disposition’s physiognomy is given by specifying its possessor and its exercise. The case of the mind is an example: we could not understand what the mind is if we did not understand what things count as exercises of mental capacity.

According to Kenny, such conceptual distinctions should be bear in mind in order to avoid three unfortunate drifts: 2a. Hypostatisation of dispositions; 2b. Materialism; 2c. Behaviourism.

2a. With the expression “hypostatisation”, Kenny means the idea that abilities and dispositions are part of the world, that is, ontologically autonomous entities. He speaks of a “transcendentalist mistake” (Kenny 1989) which occurs when we consider the ability as a sort of immaterial vehicle, an

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<sup>200</sup> While the distinction between power, possessor and exercise is Aristotelian, Kenny introduces the element of vehicle.

inconsistent and faint actuality. We get into the muddy ground of hypostatisation when we consider the grammatical-categorical distinctions as ontological ones. For example, we think that it is the ability, and not the vehicle, that causes its exercise and we treat the ability as a substance with causal power instead of looking at the exercise as one of the elements which conceptually identify the specific ability, or disposition.

In the recent literature on dispositions the issue of the identification is usually faced through two different questions (Borghini 2009): an epistemic question about individuation, that is, under what conditions we individuate disposition *D*, and a metaphysical question of identity, that is, what renders *D* a disposition. As we have seen in chapter 1, according to some dispositional realists, dispositions are primitive irreducible modal entities that do modify reality, whereas others think that dispositions are neither events, nor facts, but rather properties of individuals and things. Kenny would judge such positions as cases of hypostatisation. Indeed, I think that in Kenny's reconstruction the metaphysical question collapses into the epistemic one. It is not surprising that Kenny establishes conceptual distinctions in order to distinguish between the conceptual and the factual. This philosophical move is Wittgensteinian in spirit, for it alludes to Wittgenstein's focus on the ontological role of grammar. According to Wittgenstein, the grammatical proposition shows the rules of use of the term – for example, "understanding" – and, *eo ipso*, it tells what kind of thing the act of understanding is.<sup>201</sup>

2b. Materialism derives from the conceptual confusion between ability and vehicle: we identify the ability with its vehicle. For example, we identify the mind (capacity) with the brain (vehicle). Kenny states that «there is nothing misguided in speaking of images in the brain, if one means patterns in the brain, observable to a neurophysiologist, that can be mapped onto features of the visible environment» (Kenny 2010, 111). What is misguided is treating those brain images as visible representations of the mind and stating, for example, that seeing consists in the mind's perception of these images, as the mind was a second autonomous subject inside our head. Here we reach the core of the homunculus fallacy: «The picture of mind's relation to body as that between a little person or homunculus on the one hand, and a tool or instrument or machine on the other» (Kenny 2010, 111). The key mistake of the homunculus theory is that it does not provide a proper solution of the problem it intends to address: if we want to enquiry what seeing consists in, stating that seeing consists in the mind's perception of images of the brain does not help, for it proposes again the very same problem;

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<sup>201</sup> «*Essence* is expressed in grammar» (PI §371), that is, «grammar tells what kind of object anything is» (PI §373). This point has a Fregean matrix: according to the Fregean tradition the identity criterion for *X* is also a criterion for the identification of *X*. See also PI §§288, 376-378, 404.

seeing is explained by using the concept it should explain instead. Wittgenstein rejects a kind of homunculus fallacy in the *Remarks on Philosophy of Psychology*:

An event leaves a trace in the memory: one sometimes imagines this as if it consisted in the event's having left a tract, an impression, a consequence in the nervous system. As if one could say: the nerves too have a memory. But then when someone remembered an event, he would have to infer it from this impression, this trace. Whatever the event does leave behind in the organism, *it isn't the memory.* (RPP I §220)

In this passage, Wittgenstein rejects an idea that that is easily accepted by cognitive scientists: the idea that the mind produces inferences from events that take place in the brain and in the nervous system.

2c. Behaviourism derives from the conceptual confusion between ability and exercise: we identify the ability with its exercise. For example, we identify the mind (capacity) with its behavioural exercise. According to Kenny, Wittgenstein's focus on practice and behaviour does not amount to behaviourism because Wittgenstein establishes an *internal* or, I would rather say, *criterial*, relation between mind and outer behaviour. In this sense, he respects the conceptual distinction between mental capacity and its exercise. Indeed, in the *philosophical investigations*, Wittgenstein's interlocutor, at a certain point, asks: «“But doesn't what you say amount to this: that there is no pain, for example, without *pain-behaviour?*”». Wittgenstein answers that «it amounts to this: that only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious» (PI §281). Wittgenstein does not identify experience with behaviour; rather, he wants to highlight the fact that the experiences people can do depend on how people can behave: only who is able to play chess can feel the desire to castle. Let us recall the Wittgensteinian distinction between symptoms and criteria discussed in the previous chapter: these two notions also stand for two different types of evidence for the obtaining of a certain state of affairs.

Where the connection between a certain kind of evidence and the conclusion drawn from it is a matter of empirical discovery, through theory and induction, the evidence may be called a *symptom* of the state of affairs; where the relation between evidence and conclusion is not something discovered by empirical investigation, but is something that must be grasped by anyone who possesses the concept of the state of affairs in question, then the evidence is not a mere symptom, but a *criterion* of the event in question. (Kenny 2010, 110)

The relation between mental capacity and outer behaviour is internal and criterial, and this insight offers a particular way of looking at dispositions and disposition ascriptions: the relation between a

disposition, or capacity, and its exercise expressed in the external behaviour is criterial, that is, it is part of the conceptual definition of the dispositional predicate. Therefore, according to this perspective, dispositional ascriptions, and dispositional accounts of meaning and understanding are not the product of empirical discovery – they are not constituted by factual propositions – rather, they already presuppose the mastery of the dispositional concept.<sup>202</sup>

3. I conclude this paragraph by presenting two perplexities about Kenny's account: 3a. Nature and justification of the classification of powers; 3b. The idea that mastery of the concept is a sufficient but not necessary condition for the possession of the concept.

3a. Kenny's classification of powers is clear and neat, however there is the methodological issue concerning the source of such classification. Why ability instead of capacity, or *vice versa*? A generic reference to Aristotle does not seem sufficient and there can be space for an objection regarding the mere linguistic nature of those classifications, that is, distinctions whose value is limited to the system where they play a role.

3b. I think that – even from a Wittgensteinian perspective – mastery of the concept is rather a *necessary condition* and not a sufficient condition for the possession of the concept. That the ability, or disposition is necessary condition is acknowledgeable if we look at a certain priority that Wittgenstein gives to the dispositions – mastery of the rules – over two things: 1. The feeling of familiarity and naturalness granted by the habitual character of the practice. The spontaneity and immediacy of rule-governed behaviour comes from the habitual character of Rule-following, that is, the idea that following a rule is a custom, or institution. However, in order for a practice to be such, people should be able to master it, hence, the practical element is already presupposed.<sup>203</sup> 2. The secondary use of words which is discussed in the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*. The notion of secondary use is employed by Wittgenstein in order to find a proper place for the experiential aspect of language use and understanding in order to answer to the possible objection that the picture of meaning and understanding as mastery of technique does not fully account for some aspects of the phenomenology of understanding: for example, the fact that we experience a loss of meaning when the word is repeated several times (RPP I §194), or the fact that we experience different meanings of the same word, such as experiencing “bank” as meaning a financial institution

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<sup>202</sup> However, this does not mean that empirical enquiry is totally removed from the dispositional talk. We could well accept the role of empirical discoveries and empirical facts for the individuation of particular dispositions, in particular regarding physical dispositions of the matter. Simply, such factual considerations do not determine the meaning of the dispositional concept, because they can be taken into consideration precisely because we already know what we are talking about, i.e., we already master the concept, or word.

<sup>203</sup> See chapter 5 for a detailed exposition of Wittgenstein's remarks on Rule-following as a practice.

and then as meaning a river's edge, or we take a proper name to be intimately connected to its bearer (PI §282). Overall, these considerations are used to argue in favour of the idea that understanding a word is having a particular experience; it seems that every familiar word «carries an atmosphere with it in our minds, a corona of faintly indicated uses» (PPF §35). As we have seen, the experiential model is one of the critical targets of Wittgenstein's remarks on meaning and understanding. Far from denying any experiential element in the ordinary practices of Rule-following, Wittgenstein intends to show that the expression “to experience the meaning of a word” is a secondary use of language, that is, an expression for which the primary use of “meaning” is essential, for the secondary use presupposes the primary use, i.e., the use in terms of mastery of grammatical rules.

Only of someone *capable* of making certain applications of the figure with facility one says that he saw it now this way, now that way. The substratum of this experience is the mastery of a technique. (PPF §224)

Finally, mastery of the concept is not a sufficient condition for the possession of the concept because Wittgenstein does not define a fixed quantity of correct behaviour that should be sufficient condition for ascribing understanding to a subject. There is no predetermined, definite and fixed limit that should grant the fact that the subject has finally mastered the use of a concept or, in general, a particular rule. Going back to the mathematical example of the pupil who has learned to write down series of natural numbers, Wittgenstein's interlocutor asks «how far does he have to continue the series correctly for us to be able rightly to say that», and Wittgenstein replies that «clearly, you cannot state a limit here» (PI §145). Similarly, there is no limit that can be stated as when someone starts being able to read, and not just pretending to read. Consider the case of a pupil who is being thought to read: «if he is shown a written word, he will sometimes produce random sounds, and now and again the sounds will ‘accidentally’ come out roughly right». Now let us suppose a person, who is not the teacher, «hears this pupil on such an occasion and says, “He is reading”. But the teacher says, “No, he isn't reading; that was just an accident”». Then we see that the pupil continues to react correctly to further words that are shown to him and after a while, the teacher says, “Now he can read!”. «When did he begin to read? Which was the first word that he *read*? This question makes no sense here. Unless, indeed, we stipulate: “The first word that a person ‘reads’ is the first word of the first series of 50 words that he reads correctly” (or something of the sort)» (PI §157).

The mistaken characterisation of the ability as sufficient but not necessary condition for mastery of words and concepts is not part of Voltolini's interpretation (2009), to which we now turn our attention. However, differently from Kenny, Voltolini does not properly admit the conceptual

pluralism of dispositional words and he limits the term “disposition” to the mere natural capacities of physical substances. That is why, according to him, Wittgenstein’s position is *para-dispositional*.

### 6.2.3 Voltolini: para-dispositionality of meaning and understanding

Voltolini (2009) rightly places the para-dispositional character of Wittgenstein’s philosophy in the positive account of understanding and meaning which comes from the rejection of the misleading platonist and mentalist conceptions of Rule-following. This account is expressed in PI §150, where Wittgenstein speaks of understanding as a mastery of a technique. Understanding is thus approachable in terms of a capacity, that is, as something with a dispositional nature. However, why does Voltolini speak of “para-dispositionality of understanding”? Because he draws a strict distinction between the term “capacity”, or “disposition” and the term “ability”, or “mastery of a technique”. With the term “capacity” Voltolini refers to what we have called “physical dispositions of the matter”, like fragility, solubility, or conductivity. Capacities are mere natural tendencies. The term “ability”, instead, refers to a particular type of capacity, namely, the mastery of an acquired technique (Voltolini 2009, 64).

According to this perspective, dispositions belong to the first type of capacities whose necessary and sufficient conditions coincide with the occurrence of a structural physical or biological state. The structural state *causes* the manifestation of the disposition and the nexus between the two relata is empirical. For this reason, disposition ascriptions do not need the subject to have concretely manifested the disposition in the past and the subject should not necessarily manifest it in the future; given the acknowledgment of the structural state, the assumption of the counterfactual hypothesis is sufficient. For example, let us consider the human capacity of speaking in the sense of producing articulated phonatory acts. According to Voltolini, a wolf-child possesses this capacity even if he has only produced inarticulate sounds so far because, in virtue of his structural state, if he had been placed under the proper conditions, he would have talked.

The case of abilities is different. The term “ability” refers to a capacity which has to be concretely manifested in order to be ascribed to the subject. For example, let us take the case of the ability to play the guitar. According to Voltolini in this case the counterfactual hypothesis is not sufficient: we can ascribe such an ability to the subject only if the subject manifests, or has manifested the ability by playing correctly the guitar. The manifestation of the ability is necessary condition for the existence and the ascription of the ability itself.

Voltolini’s point is that «according to Wittgenstein, understanding is something more than a capacity» in the first sense, that is, a natural capacity, or disposition, for «it should not just a capacity that could be manifested, but a capacity actually manifested». Therefore, Wittgenstein’s conception

of understanding as mastery of a technique can be better captured using the term “ability”. Indeed, in order to ascribe understanding to a subject, the subject should concretely manifest his ability by correctly employing the expression: the necessary condition is not the physical or biological structural state that should lie at the bottom of the capacity, but the actual manifestation of the ability. It is in this sense that understanding, according to Voltolini, is a para-dispositional capacity which is irreducible to any psychic or neurophysiological fact about the subject.

Voltolini’s reading provides further evidence for a dispositional reading of Wittgenstein’s remarks on meaning and understanding where the dispositional notion involved is not naturalized. Talking about the dispositional character of rule-governed behaviour is different from talking about natural capacities of the matter. However, Voltolini is not willing to extend the meaning of the term “disposition” so to include normative dispositions of human beings, and he rather employs the notion of ability. He still maintains what we have called the “simplification fallacy”, that is, the idea that the term “disposition” has a unique and fixed meaning and that it refers to natural and physical capacities like fragility, flammability, and so on. In this respect, Kenny’s reading, although exegetically problematic, takes into account the ordinary use of the term “disposition” and it admits a plurality of usage which is fundamental if we intend to face some problematic assumptions of the current debate which rest on conceptual unclarities about the notion.<sup>204</sup>

#### 6.2.4 Peacocke on Wittgenstein and experience

I now present the last dispositional reading that I choose to expound in this chapter. It is presented by Peacocke (1982) in the article *Wittgenstein and experience*, which is a critical study of the first volume of Wittgenstein’s *Remarks on the philosophy of psychology*. Peacocke employs the notion of disposition in two contexts: 1. Wittgenstein’s account of the meaning of psychological concepts against the deceptive denotative model; 2. Wittgenstein’s distinction between dispositions and states of consciousness.

1. Peacocke rightly states that Wittgenstein’s main point regarding psychological concepts is to show that «sensation vocabulary does not designate inner states the existence and nature of which can be known only to their possessor. First-person present-tense psychological utterances are not

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<sup>204</sup> We find a similar attitude in Thompson (2008). Thompson, indeed, uses the term “disposition” to refer to a kind of capacity which differs from the natural capacity. In the introduction of the volume, Thompson (2008) distinguishes between the psychological notion of disposition and the philosophical notion of disposition; the latter is a specifically practical notion which plays a role for the explanation of action, together with the notion of social practice. Practice, or social practice, is the manifestation of our vital form (first nature) which develops into different historical practices. A disposition is a regularity in the individual’s behaviour which can be reconducted to the practice. The subject’s concrete action incorporates a general rule, that is, an action which conforms to the social practice in virtue of habits rather than rational choice. Action is done thanks to the disposition, but disposition itself is not grounded in the practice.

descriptive at all», that is, psychological and experiential vocabulary is not designative. Rather, like the case of understanding and Rule-following, «to fall under a psychological concept is to have an *ability* [my emphasis]» (Peacocke 1982, 162). In this context, Peacocke – by twisting the grammatical character of Wittgenstein's remarks – ascribes to Wittgenstein two different theories: a. A *mastery claim*; b. An *etiology claim*. There is no mutual implication between the two claims, however the latter is a natural prosecution of the former.

a. The *mastery claim* is thus spelled out:

Wittgenstein holds that someone who has mastered English vocabulary for pain has come to have this property: he is disposed (*ceteris paribus*) sincerely to utter 'I'm in pain' in exactly the same circumstances as those in which he is disposed (*cet. par.*) to engage in non-linguistic pain behaviour. (Peacocke 1982, 163)

Peacocke, thus, explicitly presents a dispositional account of mastery of concepts where human's dispositions can be linguistic and non-linguistic. The *ceteris paribus* clause is added in order to accommodate the fact that the subject can refrain from manifesting the dispositions if he is capable to, or if he has reasons and whims to do it. It is a clause that, from Peacocke's point of view, can accommodate the non-deterministic character of human action and it should provide an alternative account of the relation between disposition and manifestation other than the mere stimulus-response.

b. The *etiology claim* is a claim about the etiology of the expression "I am in pain":

A disposition to utter this sentence ["I am in pain"] replaces certain primitive, non-linguistic manifestations of pain (such as crying in the presence of mild pain. (Peacocke 1982, 163)

This claim captures Wittgenstein's substitutive account of the meaning of psychological concepts: these concepts do not have the meaning they have in virtue of the fact they designate inner objects. We learn how to use psychological concepts in substitution to primitive natural expressions; primitive behaviour is replaced by linguistic-behaviour. For example, I learn to utter "My leg hurts", or "I am in pain" instead of merely shouting and crying. The important thing to note is that, according to this account, the relation between the subject's utterings and pain is not causal, but it is rather internal, or criterial, as we have previously seen by discussing Wittgenstein's rejection of behaviourism.

Peacocke states that, using the two claims mentioned above, it is possible to construct Wittgenstein's account of the infallibility of first-person ascription of psychological concepts without postulating any epistemic privilege of the first-person:

Someone is in pain iff he is disposed (*cet. par.*) to engage in (mature) non-linguistic pain-behaviour; and by the mastery claim, a master of English will be so disposed iff he is disposed (*cet. par.*) sincerely to utter 'I'm in pain'. (Peacocke 1982, 163)

However, there might be the case of someone who is in pain but lacks the relative linguistic-disposition, or the case of someone who has the linguistic-disposition although he is not actually in pain. These cases are not counterexamples of the conditional formulated above, because in such cases the subject either lacks the concept of pain, or he has not mastered the vocabulary (in this case, English vocabulary) for it.

Peacocke's account has the merit to trace the dispositional element of Wittgenstein's account of meaning and understanding without employing a notion of disposition as the one assumed in PI §147. The term "disposition", here, is related to the concepts of ability, practice and mastery of technique. Thus, it does not refer to a property or state of the subject and the dispositional talk, from a grammatical point of view, is not a description of the subject's condition in terms of his mental states and processes. However, first of all, I think that if we want to talk about Wittgenstein's notion of ineffability, then it should be more a matter of non-designative character of psychological ascriptions, rather than a dispositional account captured by a conditional of the form quoted above. It is true that Wittgenstein writes that one cannot properly being mistaken about whether he is in pain or not. But here, mistakes are impossible in the sense that the expression "I am in pain" is not assertoric; it does not report anything. That sentence properly has not truth conditions in the tractarian sense because it is not a "depiction" of a state of affairs that could obtain or not. This does not mean, however, that the subject cannot make mistakes in the uttering of the expression: he might still make mistakes but these mistakes regard the mastery of the term. Secondly, Peacocke's mastery and etiology claims seem to be circular. The criterion for someone being in pain is rightly individuated in the non-linguistic behaviour which stands in a criterial relation to the state: behavioural reactions such as crying and shouts are criteria of pain and they define the concept of pain from the inside. Therefore, Peacocke states that «someone is in pain iff he is disposed (*cet. par.*) to engage in (mature) non-linguistic pain-behaviour» (Peacocke 1982, 163). In the same passage, he seems to presuppose that the criterion for having the linguistic disposition to utter "I am in pain" is the fact that the subject has mastered the use of the relative concept; it is in virtue of this, that he is then disposed to utter sincerely "I am in pain". The practice is prior to the acquisition of the disposition, and this is something that I do admit in my account. However, in the formulation of the mastery concept, the same mastery of the concept is defined in terms of the subject's being disposed to utter; therefore, it seems that having the appropriate linguistic disposition is criterion for the subject's mastery of the relative concept. But this

sounds circular, for the dispositional character is specified using elements that the same character should explain, still in a non-causal sense.

2. In the second part of the article, Peacocke focuses on some paragraphs of the *Remarks on Philosophy of Psychology*, where Wittgenstein does engage with a classification of some psychological concepts and he does establish a distinction between dispositional psychological states and states of consciousness, or undergoings. In the former group Wittgenstein includes the concepts of knowing, understanding, believing and intending, while in the latter group he includes images and representations. According to Peacocke, «Wittgenstein is vividly aware» (Peacocke 1982, 166) of such distinction applied to psychological concepts, but he simply does not employ the notions in a clear and systematic way; the distinction is not a technical distinction, as it is instead in Ryle's *The concept of mind*, for example. Specifically, Wittgenstein does not clearly answer the question about *what* differentiates states of consciousness from dispositions and he merely gives some hints that prove how he was actually interested in the matter: for example, we can attend to states of consciousness (RPP I §972) and a notion of intensity is applicable to them, while dispositions are not interrupted by a break of consciousness or lack of attention (RPP I §45). The most explicit point is found in the second part of the volume, where Wittgenstein writes that «the general differentiation of all states of consciousness from dispositions seems to me to be that one cannot ascertain by spot-check whether they are still going on» (RPP II §57).

It is not the aim of the present chapter to enter into the details of Wittgenstein's distinction between dispositions and states of consciousness. This will be central in the next chapter, where I will also argue against Peacocke. Whereas Peacocke comments the above passage stating that «'they' here refers to the disposition» (Peacocke 1982, 166), I will argue that the word "they" rather refers to states of consciousness. For now, my aim is to show that the structure of Peacocke's reading is interesting because it introduces an element which was absent in the previous dispositional readings: a focus on Wittgenstein's own use of the term without looking merely to PI §149.<sup>205</sup> Therefore, the dispositional character of Wittgenstein's philosophy comes from not only the critic's interpretation of the Rule-following considerations – even applied to psychological concepts – but also from Wittgenstein's own use of the concept which is broader and more complex than what the critics generally think. This

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<sup>205</sup> See also Ter Hark's mapping of psychological concepts (Ter Hark 2010, 198). «Wittgenstein presents his 'genealogy' mainly on the basis of concrete psychological concepts such as 'sensation' and 'emotion', but in one case he draws a more formal distinction: 'states of consciousness' versus 'dispositions'. As examples of 'states of consciousness' Wittgenstein gives: '... the seeing of a certain picture, the hearing of a tone, a sensation of pain or of taste, etc.' (RPP II, §45). As examples of 'dispositions' he mentions: '... believing, understanding, knowing, intending, and others, ...' (RPP II, §45)» (Ter Hark 2010, 194).

is what I will discuss in the next chapter, but first a preliminary consideration should be done, which is actually the conclusion of the present chapter.

### 6.3 Conclusive remark

In this chapter, together with chapter 5, I tried to show that it is plausible and useful to characterize Wittgenstein's later philosophy as a perspective which incorporates a kind of dispositionalism. Such dispositional reading borrows legitimacy from a notion of disposition as acquired and embodied practice; a propensity to action which is part of human's second nature. The authors we have discussed in this chapter provide further proofs for the legitimacy of such an interpretative move because they present dispositional readings where the notion of disposition is applied to human rule-governed activities and practices. However, all of them – indeed many scholars, in general – argue that this notion of disposition, even if it is correctly applicable to Wittgenstein's account of meaning and understanding, is not endorsed by Wittgenstein, because they think that he had in mind by contrast a narrow and materialistic conception of disposition. In other words, they only take into account PI §149 and they think that Wittgenstein endorses the naturalized and materialistic conception of disposition which is assumed in that paragraph, without looking at Wittgenstein's own use of the concept which is found in other works.

Tait (2005), as we have seen, explicitly states that it is difficult to employ the concept of disposition in this context (Rule-following considerations) because Wittgenstein does not work with such a notion of disposition and his notion is intrinsically mistaken, that is, it is part of that kind of misleading dispositionalism applied to knowing and understanding in PI §149. Gilmore (1999) criticizes Tait's reading sharing his basic assumption: Tait's reading does not work because it rests on a notion of disposition which is not shared by Wittgenstein. Unfortunately, Gilmore does not further expound this point, but this is a move that we find in Foster (2004). Foster argues that Wittgenstein rejects the dispositional account of understanding because he assumes a too realist and narrow notion of disposition, that is, a disposition as a physical state of the apparatus (PI §149). Therefore, according to him, Wittgenstein reads dispositionalism exclusively as a theory that identifies understanding with a mental apparatus or state of the brain. However, Foster admits that such a perspective is not entirely endorsed by Wittgenstein; it is rather a critical target, given that Wittgenstein would rather use a non-realist concept of disposition. Baker and Hacker (2005), on the contrary, states that Wittgenstein does employ and endorse a narrow and materialistic notion of disposition and for this reason they argue that such notion is mistaken, or at least limited to what they call "central state materialism": the idea that understanding an expression consists in being in a certain brain state.

In the next chapter I intend to argue that this shared assumption is false. I will argue that, if we look at other places of the Wittgensteinian corpus, it is possible to trace a Wittgensteinian use of the notion of disposition which is line with my dispositional reading of Rule-following and which is presented in contrast to what we have called the “guidance conception” of meaning and understanding. Wittgenstein employs a de-naturalized notion of disposition and he even warns the reader against some misleading uses of the same notion which share many aspects of the contemporary use of the concept in metaphysics and philosophy of mind. The dispositional reading of meaning and understanding, together with the legitimacy of a de-naturalized and normative notion of disposition, is not just the product of an interpretative work, but it finds also internal evidence, that is, it is legitimized if we look also at Wittgenstein’s own use of the notion of disposition.

## Chapter 7

### Wittgenstein on dispositions as abilities: a normative notion<sup>206</sup>

#### 7.1 Introduction

As we have seen, the issue regarding Wittgenstein and dispositions is twofold: on the one hand, there are dispositional readings of Wittgenstein's philosophy given by the scholars – that is, many authors do employ the notion of disposition to give an account of Wittgenstein's ideas on language and understanding, and one of the first steps is the rejection of Kripke's sceptical interpretation. On the other hand, there is Wittgenstein's use of the concept; Wittgenstein's talk on dispositions which is not limited to paragraph 149 of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

When we use the notion of disposition and we apply it to Wittgenstein's philosophy, we are working with a notion of disposition as ability, competence, and not as a mere innate natural capacity. In the previous chapter I tried to show that scholars generally think that this notion of disposition – even if it is correctly “applicable” – it is not endorsed by Wittgenstein, because they think that he had in mind a narrow and materialistic conception of disposition which cannot be used in order to give a proper account of meaning and understanding. It is an intrinsically non-normative notion which cannot provide space for the role of normativity of human rule-governed practices (PI §149).

In this chapter I will argue that this assumption is exegetically improper, for Wittgenstein does use the notion of disposition in a de-naturalized way and such a notion is precisely what we need in order to provide a proper account of Wittgenstein's views on meaning and understanding without falling into misleading mentalistic and behaviourist pictures. Moreover, such use provides important elements for a critique of the current paradigm on dispositions for it criticises one of the main basic assumptions: the idea of the mental and, accordingly, of the dispositional, as a latent depositary of pre-determined courses of action.

Globally, this chapter contains a textual research that I have done in order to show how Wittgenstein's own use of the concept is more extensive and complex than expected. This use is also twofold: there are explicit references, that is, passages where Wittgenstein explicitly uses the term “disposition”, and implicit references, that is, passages about the *related* concepts of ability, understanding and possibility. In the following pages I will also try to justify the relevance of the

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<sup>206</sup> Part of the content of the chapter has been published in an article that I have written for *RIFL (Rivista Italiana di Filosofia del Linguaggio)*, for the issue “Wittgenstein: language, practical knowledge and embodiment”, edited by Annalisa Coliva. Morelli A. (2018), “Wittgenstein on dispositions as abilities. A de-naturalized perspective”, *Rivista Italiana di Filosofia del linguaggio*, 12, (2), pp. 100-110.

implicit references for the present issue and I will conclude that even in Wittgenstein's writings is possible to find an alternative use of the concept which is not equivalent to the model of state of an apparatus assumed in PI §149. Wittgenstein, indeed, far from being against the philosophical use of the concept of disposition, is rather against one particular misleading way to use the notion.

I will be working mainly with the following texts: 1. *Philosophical Investigations*; 2. *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*; 3. *The Blue and Brown Books*; 4. Waissman's typescripts, dated 1931-1934 and collected in the volume *The voices of Wittgenstein*.<sup>207</sup> Firstly, I will trace alternative uses of the concept in the second part of the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* and in *The Blue and Brown Books*. Secondly, I will present Wittgenstein's criticism on a misleading conception of dispositions by looking at Waissman's typescripts, hence, in writings that belong to Wittgenstein's *transition* period.<sup>208</sup> Finally, I will sketch some other dispositional elements of Wittgenstein's philosophy, by focusing in particular to the discussion on perception and aspect seeing. Such discussion provides further material in order to better expound the normative character of linguistic human dispositions, hence it provides further evidence against the shared assumption that the term "disposition" refers to something intrinsically non-normative.

## 7.2 Dispositions vs states of consciousness

As we have seen, in PI §149, reference to dispositions is negatively judged by Wittgenstein as a deceptive image of understanding and knowing. This paragraph is part of a section where Wittgenstein presents some grammatical remarks on the notions of understanding and following a rule and it precedes the paragraphs where Wittgenstein expounds his positive account of meaning and understanding as mastery of a technique by establishing an explicit conceptual nexus between the concept of understanding and the concept of capacity (PI §150). The implicit interlocutor of PI §149 states that knowing the ABC is a *state of the mind*, where "state of the mind" means *state of a physical apparatus of the mind*, such as the brain, or the mind itself if considered as a kind of mechanism. The expression "state of the mind", thus, does not properly refer to any conscious mental process in this context. Here, the term "disposition" is used by Wittgenstein to refer to such a state of an apparatus

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<sup>207</sup> From now on "VW". In particular, references to dispositions and dispositional predicates are found in "Dictation for Schlick" TS 302, Notebook I, parts of the collections "Altere reste" and "Vorstufen".

<sup>208</sup> A Wittgensteinian reader might rise two methodological concerns: first, this material is chronologically prior to PI, RPP II and BB. In this sense, we might wonder whether it would be plausible to use this material to clarify remarks written later, given the transitory nature of this phase of Wittgenstein's thought (Stern 1995). Second, this material is an indirect presentation of Wittgenstein's thought; it contains Waissman's notes. However, there is an extensive use of the notion of disposition. Furthermore, we find many examples, even remarks, that we find in the same form in later works. In these texts we already find philosophical issues that will be extensively debated in later writings, although other elements will be abandoned, such as the use of the notion of calculus and the characterization of language as a mechanism governed by a definite set of rules.

and this kind of dispositionalism consists in (causally) explaining the manifestations of knowing by appealing to such state of the mind, or disposition.

However, we find a different attitude in RPP II §§43, 45, 178 and 243. In this context, Wittgenstein is dealing with the clarification of some psychological concepts and, in order to provide a classification of those concepts, he establishes a distinction between *states of consciousness* and *dispositions*. Wittgenstein uses the label “disposition” for those concepts that *do not* signify *states*. Among these concepts we find the concept of knowing, understanding, believing, meaning and intending.

The essential thing about seeing is that it is a *state*, and such a state can suddenly change into another one. But how do I know that a person is in such a state, and therefore is not in one comparable to a *disposition* [my emphasis], like knowing, understanding, or having a conception? What are the logical characteristics of such a state? (RPP II §43)<sup>209</sup>

I want to talk about a "state of consciousness", and to use this expression to refer to the seeing of a certain picture, the hearing of a tone, a sensation of pain or of taste, etc. I want to say that believing, understanding, knowing, intending, and others, are not states of consciousness. [...] for the moment I call these latter "dispositions". (RPP II §45)

Now, we know that, according to Wittgenstein, in PI §149 «it is not unobjectionable to speak of a state of the mind here», for then there would be two different criteria for the ascription of such a state of the mind: the manifestations of the state, and the structure of the apparatus. However, Wittgenstein concludes the paragraph stating that «nothing would be more confusing here than to use the words “conscious” and “unconscious” for the contrast between a *state of consciousness* and a *disposition* [my emphasis], For this pair of terms covers up a *grammatical difference* [my emphasis]» (PI §149). In this ending passage, the grammatical distinction established in RPP II §45 seems to be implicitly at work.

To sum up: in PI §149 Wittgenstein writes that knowing is not a state of the mind, or disposition, whereas in RPP II §§43-45 he suggests to think of understanding and knowing as disposition rather than states of consciousness and this very same distinction is presupposed at the end of PI §149. Is Wittgenstein using the term “disposition” in two different ways in these two different contexts? Is he establishing a further difference between “state of the mind” and “state of a physical apparatus”?

### 7.2.1 State of an apparatus vs state of consciousness

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<sup>209</sup> In the original german edition, Wittgenstein employs the term “Disposition”.

First of all, I argue that Wittgenstein does draw a distinction between “state of consciousness” and “state of an apparatus”. When Wittgenstein talks about dispositions as states of the mind, he specifies that those states are states of a physical apparatus, hence something different from conscious mental phenomena, like feeling pain, having toothache, or having an inner experience (*Erlebnis*). We find further evidence for this distinction in *The Brown Book*, in a section where Wittgenstein tries to clarify the concept of power («can» and «be able to»). In this context, Wittgenstein writes that we erroneously tend to «to look at the fact of something being possible, someone being able to do something, etc., as the fact that he or it is in a particular *state* [my emphasis]» (BB, 117). This tendency is embodied in our language and it manifests itself even when we call “state of the mind” the capacity to resolve a mathematical problem, or the capacity to enjoy a piece of music.

Roughly speaking, this comes to saying that "A is in the state of being able to do something" is the form of representation we are most strongly tempted to adopt; or, as one could also put it, we are strongly inclined to use the metaphor of something being in a peculiar state for saying that something can behave in a particular way. And this way of representation, or this metaphor, is embodied in the expressions "He is capable of...", "He is able to multiply large numbers in his head", "He can play chess". (BB, 117)

These examples are informative because they are similar to the scenario of PI §149: when Wittgenstein uses the expression «state of the mind» without referring to a state of consciousness, he is working with examples of activities governed by rules; activities that presuppose mastery of a certain technique. Moreover, Wittgenstein explicitly states that in these cases with “state of mind” we do not mean “conscious mental phenomenon”, but “state of a hypothetical mechanism”, or model of mind. This alleged mechanism would explain mental phenomena because such phenomena would be manifestations of such mechanism and their possibility would depend on its particular features.

The same tendency shows itself in our calling the ability of solving a mathematical problem, the ability to enjoy a piece of music, etc. certain states of mind; we don't mean by this expression “conscious mental phenomena”. Rather, a state of the mind in this sense is the state of a hypothetical mechanism, a mind model meant to explain the conscious mental phenomena. (BB, 117-118)

We easily overlook the distinction between stating a conscious mental event, and making a hypothesis about what one might call the mechanism of the mind (BB, 115)

Here, we find something similar to PI §149 and even here Wittgenstein has something to say against such a way of seeing things: we tend to describe the way in which a subject plays games such as reacting to orders, carrying on sequences, having in mind the mechanism that makes a musical

instrument such as a pianola work. The account of mental activity is construed using the model of a machine as a term of comparison.<sup>210</sup> This, as we have seen in chapter 4, is one of the main thesis of the guidance conception of understanding and the conception of understanding as the source of use; such a perspective implies a model of mind in terms of inner mechanism, therefore it is subjected to a kind of category mistake that Wittgenstein expresses in the following way: «in the working of the pianola we have a clear case of certain actions, those of the hammers of the piano, being guided by the pattern of holes in the pianola roll», however, «it is clear that although we might use the ideas of such mechanisms as similes for describing the way in which B acts in then games 42,43, no such mechanisms are actually involved in these games» (BB, 118), that is, this is just one case among many different other cases.<sup>211</sup> If Wittgenstein talks about dispositions as states of the mind in terms of states of a physical apparatus in PI §149 and he talks about dispositions in opposition to states of consciousness in RPP II 45, then, presumably, the distinction is not between state and disposition, but rather between state of consciousness and disposition - which might be further defined as a state of an apparatus.

Some questions might arise at this point: according to Wittgenstein, is a disposition a state of the mind but not a state of consciousness? If so, what are the characteristic of a dispositional state? Does Wittgenstein endorse the use of the notion of disposition as a state of an apparatus, or is it just another example of philosophical confusion? In the first case, Wittgenstein's attitude towards dispositional accounts would then be totally negative, because it would involve the very same notion of disposition and not just dispositional accounts of knowing and understanding. In the second case, it might be possible to find a Wittgensteinian use of the concept – not a technical use, though – which does not correspond to the one presented in PI §149; others call “disposition” the state of a physical apparatus. I argue for the second case and, in order to answer to the above questions, we should look closer to the grammatical distinction established in the second part of the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*.

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<sup>210</sup> Such a critique echoes Ryle's notion of para-mechanical fallacy. As we will see in the third part of the present work, Ryle also deals with the conceptual issue of a model of mind which is construed using a “preconceived” distinction between what is mental and what is not mental; however, such a comparison is established starting from the mechanical paradigm, which is the model whose functioning is clearer to us, therefore what is mental is defined starting from the physiognomy of the non-mental or, as Ryle (1990) calls it, the para-mechanical.

<sup>211</sup> Moreover, I would add, we often tend to make a kind of “semantical shift” between related uses of the very same term: we employ a specific model to describe a phenomenon which is actually conceptualized using a different model instead. I think that this is what Wittgenstein is trying to say in the following passage: «we think of a particular application of a word, e-e. an application in certain verbal contexts, say together with the word “try” or “measure”; we tell ourselves that we now know its meaning and we look for the same meaning, i.e. the same grammar, in cases of its application in other contexts. It is as if we imagined that there must surely be an east pole and a west pole, since in certain cases the directions north, south, east and west seem to be equally admissible» (VW, 58).

## 7.2.2 Criteria of the dispositional

Preliminarily, it is important to specify that Wittgenstein introduces the distinction between states of consciousness and dispositions in a section where he is dealing with the classification of some psychological concepts belonging to the “folk psychology”. The philosophical work is justified since such psychological concepts are concepts belonging to ordinary language; they are «just everyday concepts» (RPP II §62), «embedded in human life, in all of the situations and reactions which constitute human life» (RPP II §16). In this sense, they are not «newly fashioned by science for its own purpose, as are the concepts of physics and chemistry» (RPP II §62).<sup>212</sup>

First of all, the distinction between states of consciousness and dispositions is purely functional. It is a term of comparison, like “language game” or “form of life” whose value resides in the role it has within the philosophical practice of clarification of the concepts involved; that is, it is not an ontological distinction, nor a distinction based on an alleged common essence of the phenomena falling under the concepts. Wittgenstein’s move is to employ such a distinction in order to show in what sense it is misleading to think that the meaning of some psychological concepts resides in the inner state they would refer to. For this reason, Wittgenstein presents examples of phenomena falling under those concepts: states of consciousness are seeing an image, feeling pain, having a particular experience, feeling a particular taste, and so on. Knowing and understanding, by contrast, are thought of as dispositions, *rather than* states of consciousness. I say “rather” because Wittgenstein characterises these concepts in a negative way: he does not say that knowing, understanding and believing *are* dispositions of the subjects. He rather says, for example, that seeing is a state which is not comparable to a disposition, like knowing and understanding (RPP II §43), or that intention and intending are neither emotions, nor moods, or sensations, or representations (RPP II §173). The notion of disposition, then, seems useful to clarify the grammar of such psychological concepts and it helps avoiding the perspective – that Wittgenstein ascribes to James (1890) – according to which such concepts would refer to certain inner experiences of the subject that are known introspectively and that guarantee epistemic priority of the subject himself. The functional character of the distinction shows the fact that Wittgenstein does not employ the notion of disposition as a technical term in a systematic way.<sup>213</sup> Indeed, Wittgenstein himself employs the notion with caution and he writes that he calls such concepts “dispositions” «for the moment» (RPP II §45).

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<sup>212</sup> For example, we get the concept “thinking” «from everyday language [...] and that can of course be said of all psychological verbs. Their employment is not so clear or so easy to get a synoptic view of, as that of terms in mechanics, for example» (RPP II §20). See also Z §113.

<sup>213</sup> From a methodological point of view, Wittgenstein’s distinction between states of consciousness and dispositions is very different from Ryle’s distinction between dispositions and occurrences.

Secondly, given the functional nature of the distinction, Wittgenstein highlights three main criteria of the dispositional:

1. A disposition «is not interrupted by a break in consciousness or a shift in attention. (And that of course is not a causal remark.)» and this is «an important difference between dispositions and states of consciousness» (RPP II §45). In my opinion, this remark highlights the grammatical fact that adverbial phrases which presuppose duration cannot be applied to dispositional expressions. We cannot say “I have been continuously understanding since yesterday night”, whereas we can reasonably say “I have been having toothache since yesterday”. Similarly, «really one hardly ever says that one has believed or understood something "uninterruptedly" since yesterday», for «an interruption of belief would be a period of disbelief, not, e.g., the withdrawal of attention from what one believes» (RPP II §45).

2. Dispositions can be experienced.<sup>214</sup> For example, «the *inclination* toward jealousy [...] is a disposition in the true sense. Experience [*Erfahrung*] teaches me that I have it» (RPP II §178). In my opinion, this remark suggests that, contrary to what stated by Peacocke (1982) and Ter Hark (2010), the word “they” in RPP II §57 refers to states of consciousness, rather than dispositions. Since dispositions can be experienced, tests are needed to testify that some dispositions are still present, whether, in the case of states of consciousness, «one cannot ascertain by spot-check whether they are still going on» (RPP II §57).

3. Dispositions are learned and trained. «Knowing is having learned and not forgotten» (RPP II §300).<sup>215</sup> Someone might object that in this paragraph, actually, Wittgenstein does talk explicitly about dispositions and states of consciousness. However, I think that the functional distinction is still at work and it can be applied here: if knowing, believing, intending, etc. are best characterized as dispositions rather than as states of consciousness, then Wittgenstein’s use of the concept of disposition can be enquired by looking also to his grammatical remarks about such concepts.

Finally, I do not think that Wittgenstein uses the notion of disposition as status of a physical apparatus in these paragraphs. The notion does not refer to the subject’s state of consciousness, but no materialistic shift seems to be present here as in PI §149. The notion has a different role in the

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<sup>214</sup> As we have seen in chapter 1, such a remark is exactly the opposite of the traditional empiricist rejection of dispositions and any modal concept; traditional empiricism works with the assumption that dispositions cannot be experienced in virtue of their potential nature. However, such an epistemic problem is grounded in the hypostatisation of dispositions, that is, it comes from the assumption that dispositions should be autonomous entities.

<sup>215</sup> Ryle (1990, 257) uses the same expression to characterize knowing as a capacity, for in Ryle’s system a capacity is one type of disposition together with liabilities, propensities and habits.

broader context of discussion. In these paragraphs the concept is used as a term of comparison, whereas in PI §149 Wittgenstein is referring to a dispositional account of understanding, hence applied dispositionalism in philosophy of language. Moreover, what differs is the “logical character” of the concept and this point is testified by Wittgenstein’s extensive treatment of the concept of power in *The Brown Book*. That is what we will look at in the following paragraph.

### 7.3 Variety of use of the concept of power

In the first part of *The Brown Book*, we find both explicit references, that is, passages where Wittgenstein employs the term “disposition”, and implicit references, that is, passages where he uses the related concepts of power and ability.<sup>216</sup> Overall, I distinguish three different contexts: 1. Discussion of a kind of dispositionalism applied to the learning of rule-governed activities (BB, 95-100); 2. Grammatical elucidation of the expressions “can” and “be able to” [*Können, Fahigkeit*] (BB, 100-104, 110-126); 3. Discussion of a kind of dispositionalism applied to the Rule-following problem which is similar to the one disputed by Kripke (1989) (BB, 141-143).

1. We find the first occurrence of the concept of disposition at page 95, where Wittgenstein is dealing with a kind of dispositional account of knowing, hence in a context very similar to PI §149.<sup>217</sup> Wittgenstein asks the reader to reflect upon a case of acquired rule-governed activity and the way we ascribe knowledge to the subject that shows to have mastered a certain rule. Let us consider the case of a subject who «has been supplied with a system for constructing numerals» (BB, 95). When we say that the subject has learned the system for constructing numerals,

we generally think of one of three things: a) of giving him a *training* similar to that described in 30), which, experience teaches us, will make him pass tests of the kind mentioned there; b) of creating a *disposition* in the same man's mind, or brain, to react in that way; c) of supplying him with a *general* rule for the construction of numerals. (BB, 95)<sup>218</sup>

The concept of disposition, here, refers to the state of a physical apparatus which would explain the manifestations of knowing. However, Wittgenstein’s concern is the discussion of a philosophical

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<sup>216</sup> Someone might rightly ask why we should take into account even the implicit references. My answer is that, as we have seen, Wittgenstein introduces a functional distinction between state of consciousness and disposition. Moreover, he classifies the concepts of believing, knowing, understanding as dispositions rather than state of consciousness. At the same time, Wittgenstein characterizes understanding as mastery of a technique, as an ability. For these reasons we are justified in treating Wittgenstein’s implicit references, in particular his remarks on the concept of power, as useful elements for a talk about dispositions.

<sup>217</sup> This is another example of the complexity of Wittgenstein’s remarks about such issue: on the one hand, the concept of knowing does not refer to a state of consciousness but rather to a disposition RPP II §§42,45, on the other hand Wittgenstein rejects in BB a kind of dispositionalism applied to knowing.

<sup>218</sup> Note that case c) is another example of platonist response to the Rule-following problem (see *the platonist candidate*, discussed in chapter 5), while case b) echoes the kind of dispositionalism discussed in PI §149.

issue that, as we shall see, is already discussed in some writings from the 30's (VW): we do use dispositional statements every time we ascribe an ability to someone, and such an ascription involves the ascription of a kind of possibility which is linguistically expressed by the word "can", or "be able to". We say that someone *can* play the piano, or that someone *is able to* resolve a mathematical problem, or that someone *can* speak French. However, Wittgenstein intends to make clear and then reject the temptation to construe such dispositional statements as statements that point to and describe a particular condition or state of the subject in a particular moment. We tend to consider a man's ability, that is, the fact that a man has learned an activity, or he is able to do an activity, as a particular state, or condition of the subject, even if we can't point to anything specific when we are asked to specify such a state (BB, 100; RPP II §§43, 44). In other words, we are inclined «to look at the fact of something being *possible* [my emphasis], someone being able to do something, etc., as the fact that he or it is in a particular state» (BB, 117). But where does this inclination come from? Why are we always tempted to look at the matter in this way? Because, according to Wittgenstein, this form of representation is embodied in our language; it is implicitly presupposed and it is at work every time we use language as we ordinarily do.

Roughly speaking, this comes to saying that "A is in the state of being able to do something" is the form of representation we are most strongly tempted to adopt; or, as one could also put it, we are strongly inclined to use the metaphor of something being in a peculiar state for saying that something can behave in a particular way. And this way of representation, or this metaphor, is embodied in the expressions "He is capable of...", "He is able to multiply large numbers in his head", "He can play chess": in these sentences the verb is used in the *present tense*, suggesting that the phrases are descriptions of states which exist at the moment when we speak. (BB, 117)

I think that this is the central point which Wittgenstein intends to "dissolve" making clear the grammar of the concept of power ("can" and "be able to").

2. Given the deceptive form of representation, what we can do to better clarify and dissolve the philosophical problem is to «see what role the words "can" or "to be able to" play in our language» (BB, 100). Wittgenstein's grammatical remarks on the concept of power are very important and informative because they suggest a possible use of the notion of disposition which, on the one hand, preserves the distinction between state of consciousness and something that is not a state of consciousness and, on the other hand, it does not reduce the meaning of the word "disposition" to the state of a physical apparatus. By contrast, these remarks are meant to "heal" the temptation to see abilities and dispositions as inner states of the agent which are empirically inaccessible.

The first Wittgensteinian move is to show the variety of uses of the concept of power by presenting several imaginary cases. If we look at the examples and we take into account the differences between the cases, we could then see that «a vast net of family likenesses connects the cases in which the expressions of possibility, "can", "to be able to", etc. are used» (BB, 117). As a whole, Wittgenstein traces three main uses: 1. The description of the state/condition of an object or a subject; 2. The expression of possibility; 3. The expression of conjectures. I will present 12 significative imaginary cases in order to spell out the three different uses of the concepts at issue.

*Case n. 1.* «Imagine that for some purpose or other people use a kind of instrument or tool; this consists of a board with a slot in it guiding the movement of a peg» (BB, 100). The slot can be differently shaped: it can be circular, straight, elliptical, etc. Now consider the following activity, or game: the man slights the peg along the spot. Then consider a language game where two types of expressions are used: the first type consists in expressions such as “moving the peg in a circle, in a straight line, etc..”, while the second type consists in expressions such as “this is a board in which the peg *can* be moved in a circle”, or “this is a board in which the peg *can* be moved in a straight line”, etc. In the first case, the expressions are used to describe the activity of moving the peg in the slot; in the second case the expressions are used to describe the instrument, or tool: here, Wittgenstein observes, «one could [...] call the word "can" an operator by means of which the form of expression describing an action is transformed into a description of the instrument» (BB, 100).

*Case n. 2.* Imagine a language where «there is no such form of sentence as "the book is in the drawer" or "water is in the glass"», but whenever we would use those expressions, people employing that language would use the following ones: «"The book *can* [my emphasis] be taken out of the drawer", "The water *can* [my emphasis] be taken out of the glass"» (BB, 100).

*Case n. 3.* Consider a tribe where men test sticks as to their hardness (BB, 101). People belonging to that tribe use the expressions “this stick *can* be bent easily”, or “this stick *can* be bent with difficulty” as we do use the expressions “This stick is soft”, or “This stick is hard”. In other words,

they don't use the expression, “This stick can be bent easily” as we should use the sentence, “I am bending the stick with ease”. Rather they use their expression in a way which would make us say that they are describing a state of the stick. (BB, 101)

*Case n. 4.* In our language, «we may say that a car travels 20 miles an hour even if it only travels for half an hour», because, even if that particular car travels only for half an hour, it travels with a speed that enables it to make 20 miles an hour. In this case «we are inclined to talk of the velocity of the car as of a state of its motion» (BB, 101).

*Case n. 5.* Consider a tribe whose members use expressions such as “He *can* run fast”, or “He *can* throw the spear fast” whenever we use expressions such as “This man has bulging leg muscles”, or “This man has large biceps”. The members of that tribe employ expressions that ascribe certain powers in order to describe men’s build. Thus, «if they see a man with bulging leg muscles but who as we should say has not the use of his legs for some reason or other, they say [anyway] he is a man who *can* run fast» (BB, 101).

*Case n. 6.* Consider a tribe whose members «are subjected to a kind of medical examination before going into war» (BB, 102): they are put through a set of tests by an examiner; for example, they have to lift some weights, or swing their arms, or skip, run, etc. However, the language of this tribe does not include any «special expressions [...] for the activities performed in the tests; but these are referred to only as the tests for certain activities in warfare» (BB, 101). The examiner, indeed, gives his verdict in the following form: “Subject *X can* throw a spear”, “Subject *Y can* run fast”, “Subject *Q is fit to* pursue the enemy”, or “Subject *Z can* throw a boomerang”, etc.

*Case n. 7.* Consider a tribe where there is an expression corresponding to our expression "He has done so and so", and another expression corresponding to our expression "He *can* do so and so", but the latter expression is used «where its use is justified by the same fact which would also justify the former expression». So, for example, the members of this tribe would say “Peter *can* climb on that tree” only if Peter actually did climb that particular tree in his life; only if he has climbed on that particular tree in a certain occasion. They would not utter that expression if Peter actually has climbed competently thousands of trees in his life, but not that specific tree they are referring to. According to Wittgenstein, this shows that the members of this tribe «have a form of communication which we should call narration of past events because of the circumstances under which it is employed» (BB, 103).

*Case n. 8.* Consider a tribe where «contests are held in running, putting the weight, etc., and the spectators stake possessions on the competitors» (BB, 110) by laying a certain property, like some pieces of gold, under one of the pictures of the competitors. If a man has placed his piece of gold under the picture of the winner of the competition, then he gets back his piece doubled, otherwise he loses his stake. Now, we surely would call such a custom “betting”, even if we observe that in the tribe’s language there are no expressions of betting like “I bet on this man because he has kept fit, whereas the other has neglected his training”, or “I do not bet on this man because his legs are too thin”, etc. However, Wittgenstein observes that, even if those expressions are not uttered by the members of the tribe, we would still be able to understand why someone has decided to bet on that competitor rather than another one. For example, «in a competition between two wrestlers, mostly

the bigger man is the favourite; or if the smaller, I find that he has shown greater strength on previous occasions, or that the bigger had recently been ill, or had neglected his training, etc.». This shows that «observation has taught me certain *causes* for their placing their bets as they do, but that the bettors used no *reasons* for acting as they did» (BB, 110).

*Case n. 9.* Imagine a context where a certain rock has to be blasted using gunpowder. In this context, it makes sense to make conjectures «as to whether a certain load of gunpowder will be sufficient to blast a certain rock» (BB, 111). Let further suppose that in this context, the conjecture is expressed using phrases of the form “This quantity of gunpowder *can* blast this rock”.

*Case n. 10.* Consider a language game where the expression «"I *shall be able* [my emphasis] to lift this weight", is used as an abbreviation for the conjecture "My hand holding this weight will rise if I go through the process (experience) of 'making an effort to lift it'"» (BB, 111).

*Case n. 11.* Consider an imaginary game where B writes a sequence of numbers. A observes B and tries to find a system in the sequence of numbers. When A finds the system, he then utters ‘Now I *can* go on!’. «This example is particularly instructive because 'being able to go on' here seems to be something setting in suddenly in the form of a clearly outlined event» (BB, 112).

*Case n. 12.* Imagine a language, similar to case n. 7, «which has two expressions for such sentences as "I am lifting a fifty pound weight"» (BB, 117). One expression is used to refer to the action when it is performed as a test, for example before a competition, and the other expression is used to refer to the action that is not performed as a test.

Firstly, cases 1-6, are cases where the concept of power is used to *describe the state of the object*. So, dispositional statements can actually be used as descriptions of the state of an object. When the members of the tribe discussed in case n.3 utter “This stick can be bent easily”, or “This stick can be bent with difficulty”, they are saying something about the sticks, they are describing the sticks. However, «there are great differences between these examples» (BB, 101), for they involve different uses of the expression “state of an object”: in cases 1, 2, 5, the expression is used to refer to a «stationary sense experience» (BB, 101), that is, we see the state described before our eyes. We see that the board has a circular slot, or we see that it has a straight slot. Similarly, regarding case n. 2, we could see the objects in the box, the water in the glass, etc. In cases 3, 4, 5, 6, however, the expression “state of an object” does not refer to a particular sensory experience: we do not see that the stick is soft; in order to state that the stick is soft we need to do some tests. In other words, what is different is «the defining criterion for something being in this state»: in the first case the criterion

is provided by the sensory experience, while in the second case we use tests as criteria for the ascription of that state to the object.

Secondly, in case n.7, the expression is used as an *expression of possibility* and «the use which is made of the word "can"—the expression of possibility [...] can throw a light upon the idea that what *can* [my emphasis] happen must *have happened* [my emphasis] before (Nietzsche)» (BB, 105). In this passage, Wittgenstein deals with a misleading conception of possibility that we will call the “shadowy picture” and that it is mainly discussed in the writings from the thirties.<sup>219</sup> According to such a perspective, what is not the case but it is nonetheless possible is somewhat the case in a stronger sense than what is not the case and it could not be the case; what is possible is somehow already the case in the gaseous realm of the possibility. This is what Wittgenstein means by the expression «what happens can happen» (BB, 104) whose use is presupposed in the imaginary case n. 7. Similar considerations are presented regarding cases n. 6, 7, 12 where, as we have seen, the ability is ascribed to the subject only when the subject has actually manifested the ability, that is, when the subject has concretely done the particular activity. In this context, Wittgenstein states that «there is not the *metaphysical* difference between [these] [games] and one in which other justifications are accepted for saying "I can do so and so"» and that, such cases «shows us the real use of the phrase "If something happens it certainly can happen"» (BB, 117). Even here, such a phrase is judged “useless” in our language, for «it sounds as though it had some very clear and deep meaning, but like most of the general philosophical propositions it is meaningless except in very special cases» (BB, 117).

Thirdly, in cases n. 10 and 11, dispositional statements are used to express conjectures. The expression «This quantity of gun-powder can blast this rock» expresses a conjecture as to whether a certain load of gun-powder will be sufficient to blast the rock (BB, 111). Wittgenstein explicitly states that in these two cases «the word "can" characterized what we should call the expression of a conjecture» and he specifies that this does not mean that we have called those cases “expressions of conjectures” just because they contain the word “can”; rather «in calling a sentence a conjecture we referred to the role which the sentence played in the language game; and we translate a word our tribe uses by "can" if "can" is the word we should use under the circumstances described». (BB, 111-112).

In case n. 11, the ascribed capacity is conceived as something that is manifested as a determinate event. «'Being able to go on' here seems to be something setting in suddenly in the form of a clearly outlined event» (BB, 112). If we say that, however, we should then specify what this “something is”. In other words, the capacity gets hypostatised. We would then ask questions such as “What did it

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<sup>219</sup> See also PI §194.

happen when suddenly he saw how to go on?" and Wittgenstein wants to make us aware of the fact that there is no unique answer to be given here, for «a great many different things might have happened» (BB, 112)<sup>220</sup>:

while A wrote one number after the other, B busied himself with trying out several algebraic formulae to see whether they fitted. When A had written "19" B had been led to try the formula  $a = n^2 + n - 1$ . A's writing 29 confirms his guess.

Or, no formula came into B's mind. After looking at the growing row of numbers A was writing, possibly with a feeling of tension and with hazy ideas floating in his mind, he said to himself the words "He's squaring and always adding one more"; then he made up the next number of the sequence and found it to agree with the numbers A then wrote down.

Or, the row A wrote down was 2, 4, 6, 8. B looks at it, and says "Of course I can go on", and continues the series of even 113 numbers.

Or he says nothing, and just goes on. Perhaps when looking at the row 2, 4, 6, 8 which A had written down, he had some sensation, or sensations, often accompanying such words as "That's easy!" A sensation of this kind is, for instance, the experience of a slight, quick intake of breath, what one might call a slight start. (BB, 112-113)

Given this, could we sensibly say that these phenomena are what the expression "A *can* now go on" refers to? Does the expression *mean* that one of those phenomena did take place? Actually, we could say that the occurrence of one of those phenomena is not sufficient for ascribing the capacity to the subject; «If a parrot had uttered the formula, we should not have said that he could continue the series. – Therefore, we are inclined to say "to be able to..." must mean more than just uttering the formula – and in fact more than any one of the occurrences we have described» (BB, 113). This might lead to think that the uttering of the formula is only a symptom of the subject's being able to go on, and it is not the ability of going on itself; something similar to one of the category differences established by Kenny (1989, 2010). However, such a way of looking at things presupposes precisely the hypostatisation of the ability itself. Indeed, Wittgenstein states that «what is misleading in this is that we seem to intimate that there is one peculiar activity, process, or state called "being able to go on" which somehow is hidden from our eyes but manifests itself in those occurrents which we call symptoms (as an inflammation of the mucous membranes of the nose produces the symptom of sneezing)» (BB, 113). The two expressions "A can go on" and "A utters the formula" are different

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<sup>220</sup> This case echoes the already discussed applied dispositionalism presented in BB, 95. Point 1 of the present chapter.

not because they refer to two different activities, but in virtue of the different circumstances in which they are used.

The error we are in is analogous to this: Someone is told the word "chair" does not mean this particular chair I am pointing to, upon which he looks round the room for the object which the word "chair" does denote. (The case would be even more a striking illustration if he tried to look inside the chair in order to find the real meaning of the word "chair"). (BB, 113)

An analogy might get the point clearer. The question "Can he talk?" has different meanings: with that question I might mean "Is his throat alright?", or "Has he learned to talk?". But those uses are justified and understood by reference to the circumstances under which the expressions are used: in the first case the state of the throat is concerned, especially when we wish to oppose this condition for talking to some other physical condition, say the state of the tongue. In Kenny's terms, we are concerned with the opportunities of the exercise of the ability, which are external to the ability itself. In the second case, we are concerned with the subject's capacity and no physical state or trait is used as a defining criterion. In a like manner, the expressions "A can go on", or "A can continue the series" can be used under different conditions:

it may distinguish *a*) between the case when a man knows the formula and the case when he doesn't; or *b*) between the case when a man knows the formula and hasn't forgotten how to write the numerals of the decimal system, and the case when he knows the formula and has forgotten how to write the numerals; or *c*) [...] between the case when a man is feeling his normal self and the case when he is still in a condition of shell-shock; or *d*) between the case of a man who has done this kind of exercise before and the case of a man who is new at it. These are only a few of a large family of cases. (BB, 115)

Overall, the analysis of all these cases should help seeing that a «vast net of family likenesses connects the case in which the expressions of possibility, "can", "to be able to", are used» (BB, 117) and that the descriptive use of the concept of power is only one among many others.

3. The last significative occurrence of the concept of disposition is found at page 141, where Wittgenstein is discussing the Rule-following problem and, in particular, a situation very similar to the scenario presented in PI §185 (the case of the Wayward Child): «what does it mean to follow the rule *correctly*? How and when is it to be decided which at a particular point is the correct step to take?» (BB, 142). The interlocutor's first answer is that «the correct step at every point is that which is in accordance with the rule as it was *meant*» (BB, 142), that is, when we give an order to someone, we mean that someone should do something rather than something else. For example, when I give the rule "Add 1" to subject S and *mean* it, I mean the subject to write "101" after "100", "98" after

“97”, and so on. It is important to note that here the act intending is ascribed to the subject that gives the order and not to the subject that has to react to the order, or follow the rule. It is not an intending, or meaning in the sense of grasping the order in order to correctly respond to it. It is a notion of intending which suggests a nexus with the concept of knowing, even if this is misleading from a Wittgensteinian perspective; the concept of intending seems to be used here as exhaustive knowledge of the rule which is given, as if the verbal expression of the rule contained in itself that particular knowledge and that, in virtue of this, it could then be used as a fair guide both for the interlocutor who has to react to the order and for the subject who gives the order and has to judge the interlocutor’s reaction. In this way, when I give the order “Add 1”, I would then be inclined to say something as “I knew that, when I gave the order, I *meant* that he wrote ‘101’ after ‘100’. This kind of expression, according to Wittgenstein, is misleading for it comes from a confusion about the grammar of the expression “to know” (BB, 142).

Was knowing this some mental act by which you at the time made the transition from 100 to 101, i.e., some act like saying to yourself "I want him to write 101 after 100"? In this case ask yourself how many such acts you performed when you gave him the rule. Or do you mean by knowing some kind of *disposition* [my emphasis]? (BB, 142)

Unfortunately, Wittgenstein does not really specify the characteristics that knowing should have in order to be a disposition. He only states that, if we say that knowing is some kind of disposition, then «only experience can teach us what it was a disposition for» (BB, 142). This reminds of the already quoted passage in RPP II §178, where Wittgenstein, after having distinguished dispositions from states of consciousness (RPP II §45) and after having established a grammatical relation between the concept of knowing and the concept of disposition (RPP II §§43, 45, 55), he further distinguishes between a “true sense” and “misleading expression” of the term “disposition”. The main difference between the two uses lies in the experiential element: experience teaches that I do have a disposition.<sup>221</sup> In this sense, saying that intending is not a mood, or an emotion, or a sensation ,but rather a disposition is misleading «inasmuch as one does not perceive such a disposition within himself as a matter of experience» (RPP II §178). The intention was present at the time I spoke, but then now it is not present anymore, although I have not forgotten it, whereas «in one sense knowing is to have learned and not forgotten» (RPP II §300). On the contrary, the inclination [“Neigung”] towards jealousy is a disposition in the true sense, because experience teaches me that I have it. That

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<sup>221</sup> It is important to specify the here Wittgenstein is using the term “Erfahrung” and not “Erlebnis” when he speaks about experience. The experiential element, thus, does not refer to the inner primary experiences of the subject, but rather to a kind of mediated and collected experience which is part of the history of the subject and the community in which he is placed.

is why I have said that, contrary to what stated by Peacocke (1982), in my opinion the expression «one cannot ascertain by spot-check whether they are still going on» refers to states of consciousness and not to dispositions (RPP II §57).<sup>222</sup>

If knowing was a disposition, then only experience could tell me what it was a disposition for. But the interlocutor might reply, «but surely if one had asked me which number he should write after 1568, I should have answered "1569".», that is, the interlocutor could give a kind of dispositional response similar to the one discussed by Kripke (1989). Actually, we could even accept such an answer and we could not raise doubts about the sincerity of the interlocutor and the truth of the conditional involved. However, as Wittgenstein puts it, the problem is how we can be so sure about that. And here, again, the philosophical problem arises from the underlying misleading picture of the guidance conception: «Your idea really is that somehow in the mysterious act of *meaning* the rule you made the transitions without really making them. You crossed all the bridges before you were there» (BB, 141).

### 7.3.1 Where we are and where we are leading to

Before moving on, it might be useful to take stock of what we have obtained so far: 1. Further specification of the criteria of the dispositional; 2. The variety of contexts of usage of the notion of disposition.

1. In the light of what we have seen at point 3 of the previous paragraph, we could summarise the characteristics of the notion of disposition – which is not used as a state of a physical apparatus – in the following way:

- There is no element of duration; adverbial expressions concerning duration are not correctly applicable to dispositional expressions for it is improper to speak of an act or a process;
- There is the experiential element, that is, the idea that experience teaches us if we have a particular disposition and tests are needed to check if the disposition is still present.
- It is product of learning; it is something acquired. I think that we should read in this way the passage where Wittgenstein says, after having stated that when we say, for example "Bank!" we could

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<sup>222</sup> Actually, the passage is indeed problematic, for the focus can be put on the experiential element, on the one hand, that is the idea that tests are needed in order to verify the presence of the state and, on the other hand, on the element of duration, that is, on the word "still" in the expression "still be present". In the first case, "they" should refer to the states of consciousness given that, in the second case, it should rather refer to dispositions because, according to Wittgenstein, dispositions do not have duration. See RPP II §51: «Think of this language-game: Determine how long an impression lasts by means of a stop-watch. The duration of knowledge, ability, understanding, could not be determined in this way».

intend the bank where money are stored, or the bank of a river, that « the intention was present when I said "Bank"; now it is no longer present; but I have not forgotten it» (RPP II §243). Concepts of memory, remembering, forgetting, are not related to the concept of intention and they cannot be applied to it. They are, rather, related to the concept of knowing. I have not forgotten the intention, because intention is not something that I have acquired and lost, and this one of the reasons why it is not completely precise to call intention a disposition, which can by contrast be learned and forgotten.

2. Wittgenstein employs the notion of disposition in different contexts:

- In the second part of the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, the context is the grammatical classification of some psychological concepts. The notion of disposition helps the philosopher to clarify the notion of state of consciousness to which is opposed;
- In the *Philosophical Investigations*, the notion is representative of a misleading way of giving an account of Rule-following and understanding;
- In *The Brown Book*, the notion is employed in three different contexts: applied dispositionalism, that is, a kind of dispositionalism applied to knowing and understanding, grammatical remarks on the concepts “can” and “be able to”, finally, a kind of dispositionalism applied to the Rule-following problem.

Overall, we might distinguish two macro uses:

1. «Disposition» versus «state of consciousness». In this case the concept of disposition is actively used as a term of comparison in order to clarify the grammar of the concepts of meaning, understanding, intending and believing;
2. Applied dispositionalism in the fields of philosophy of language and philosophy of mind. In this context, Wittgenstein faces philosophical thesis according to which knowing is a disposition of the subject, understanding consists in having a certain disposition, where «disposition» stands for a status of a physical apparatus.

My point is that Wittgenstein’s attitude seems clearly critical in context 2, but not entirely critical in context 1. Therefore, it seems to be possible to trace within Wittgenstein’s own use of the concept a de-naturalized use, that is, a use which does not assume that the term “disposition” exclusively refers to the state of a physical apparatus. In order to argue this, in what follows I will take into consideration Waissman’s typescripts from the 30’s. It will be shown that Wittgenstein explicitly uses the notion of disposition in order to characterize his perspective on language. Therefore, the employment of this notion is not just a critical device used by the scholars. Moreover, Wittgenstein

traces a deceptive use of the concept of disposition which clearly echoes the use informed by the model of the state of a physical apparatus we have previously discussed (PI §149).

#### 7.4 Dispositions, but in a de-naturalized sense

The volume *The Voices of Wittgenstein. The Vienna Circle* gathers a selected, edited and organized version of two sets of typescripts found among Waismann's papers after his death in 1959. All of the texts contained in the volume date from the period 1928–39, which broadly coincides with the transition period, that is, that period which stands between the publication of the *Tractatus* and the whole set of remarks that constitute Wittgenstein's later production. During this period, Wittgenstein is in contact with some members of the Vienna Circle and all of the texts are connected with the project of writing the intended first volume of the Vienna Circle's series of publications, called *Die wissenschaftliche Weltanschauung*, which was to be entitled *Logik, Sprache, Philosophie*.<sup>223</sup>

I will first present three important elements of continuity with the observations presented above and contained in Wittgenstein's later and mature works: 1. The distinction between the state of consciousness and the state of an apparatus, together with the employment of the distinction between state of consciousness and disposition in the context of reflection about psychological concepts; 2. The paradox of possibility; 3. A more explicit dispositional account of meaning and understanding. Then, I will present some new elements, that is, richer remarks on disposition which are not found in later writings but which do integrate the general discussion on Wittgenstein's own use of disposition coherently with what we have already seen in the previous paragraphs.

1. In the “Dictation for Schlick”<sup>224</sup>, Wittgenstein does draw an explicit distinction between “state of consciousness” ad “state of a mind-model” which corresponds to the already mentioned “state of a physical apparatus”. At the beginning of the text, the concept of understanding is at issue. Is understanding a *process* or *state* which accompanies reading or hearing a proposition? Wittgenstein considers two kinds of responses: 1. If we mean by it that understanding is a *state of consciousness*, then «*knowing how* [my emphasis] to play chess is not a state of consciousness any more than *knowing how* [my emphasis] to multiply or the *ability* [my emphasis] to repeat the alphabet» (VW, 3). We

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<sup>223</sup> As clearly stated by Baker in the preface of the volume, «all of them [the texts] date from the 1930s, when Waismann's principal concern was to produce formulations of Wittgenstein's ideas on logic, language, mathematics and philosophy. They are evidently drafts of material for his book. [...] In fact, closer analysis of the multi-stage project of producing this book suggests that nearly all of these texts date from the middle phase in which Wittgenstein was collaborating closely with Waismann. In many cases, they seem to be transcriptions of material that Wittgenstein dictated to Waismann, and all of them seem to be rooted in Wittgenstein's dictations or typescripts, probably with minimal editing by Waismann. In content, they belong with the evolution of Wittgenstein's thinking in the period 1931–34» (VW, xvi).

<sup>224</sup> The text is a typescript of a dictation to Waismann of material that Wittgenstein wished to transmit to Moritz Schlick. It probably dates from December 1932 (VW, xvi).

might rather say that understanding a word means *knowing how* to use it, and this *ability* is not a state of consciousness that accompanies the use of the word.<sup>225</sup> Wittgenstein, here, specifies that such an observation is a grammatical remark on the concept of understanding and that it «corresponds at least to one way of using the word ‘understand’» (VW, 3) that is, I think, to one of the «kinds of use of “understanding” [that] make up its meaning» (PI §532): the use of the word as mastery of a technique, and the use of the word that entails a conception of understanding as something connected to the experiential element of meaning: understanding a sentence in the sense in which it cannot be replaced by another sentence which says the same (PI §531). 2. Given this, however, if we call an ability a “state”, «then it is a state in a *physiological sense* [my emphasis], or the *state of a mind model* [my emphasis]» (VW, 3). It is something opposite to the state such as toothache, which is rather a state of consciousness and, in this sense, the statement saying that this state (of a mind model) is present is a *hypothesis*.

It is right after this observation that we find a passage really similar to the end of paragraph 149 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, where Wittgenstein indeed talks about dispositions in terms of status of a physical apparatus. In PI §149 Wittgenstein writes that «nothing would be more confusing here than to use the words ‘conscious’ and ‘unconscious’ for the contrast between a state of consciousness and a disposition. For this pair of terms covers up a grammatical difference». Similarly, at page 5 of the text under scrutiny, Wittgenstein contrasts a state such a toothache with the ability defined in terms of physiological state and he writes that «if one now distinguishes between conscious and unconscious toothache and calls them both states, then the word ‘state’ has a different grammar in each of these cases» (VW, 5).

Even here, thus, Wittgenstein traces two different uses of the term “state” in order to dissipate conceptual confusions at the bottom of the ordinary way of speaking about understanding and abilities. We could ask, again: is the notion of ability as a state of a physical apparatus, or model of mind, presented here a product of a philosophical misunderstanding? Or is it rather Wittgenstein’s own use of the term? I mean, is there a sense in which the term “ability” does not exclusively refer to a state in a physiological sense? I will argue in favour of the first option and the whole material presented in the following part is used as a proof for such a thesis.

Indeed, even if Wittgenstein does reject a conception of ability as a physiological state, he does already draw and use the distinction between states of consciousness and dispositions (RPP II §§45, 57, 178, 243, 300) in the section entitled “Psychological concepts” and, in particular, in the paragraph

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<sup>225</sup> We have already a first formulation of the dispositional character of meaning and understanding in Wittgenstein’s terms.

on the concept of intention. The guiding question is, again, what it means to understand a proposition, for «this is connected with the general question of what it is that people call *intention, meaning* something, *signifying*» (VW, 437). And, again, as in the later works, Wittgenstein criticises the idea according to which understanding is a mental process which occurs somehow and somewhere “inside” the subject by suggesting that we understand a proposition by applying it, that is, we understand it if we have the *ability* to operate with it (VW, 437). What concerns us in the present section is Wittgenstein’s following passage: «the view I wish to argue against in this context is that understanding is a *state* that occurs inside me, like (e.g.) toothache». I want to focus on the comparison with the toothache which, as we have seen, is used as an example of a state of consciousness.

When we say that understanding is a state that “happens” in the subject, then we have to specify the nature and the structure of this state. According to Wittgenstein, we give an answer to this question by using an analogy with a state such as toothache. However, «that understanding has nothing to do with a state is very clearly seen» if we compare the question “Do you understand the word Napoleon”, with the question “Have you been meaning this without interruption?” (VW, 437). We have to admit that it does not make sense to say “I have been meaning this all the time”, whereas it does make sense to say “I have been having toothache without interruption”. Here, as in the second part of the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, the element of duration is one of the elements which distinguish the state of consciousness from something that is not a state of consciousness and that it rather might be called a “disposition”.

I can only say ‘I am aware of the meaning of «Napoleon» in the same way that I know that  $2+2=4$ ’, namely not in the form of a state, but in the form of a *disposition*; that means, I have the *ability* [my emphasis] to use this word”. (VW, 441)

This passage contains two important elements for the general purpose of the present work: 1. A use of the concept of disposition as a subject’s ability rather than a physiological state; 2. A characterisation of the disposition in line with what Wittgenstein later writes in RPP II: A disposition is not a single process which occupies a definite time interval.

Understanding is always an ability to apply [words]; it is not a *single* process, but rather something spread out over many instants of time, [namely] the whole extensive network of words, operations and actions which makes up the application [of a word]. It is, as stated, an ability, and this ability unfolds only in the course of time. (VW, 443)

Moreover, there is no element of duration, that is, we cannot apply expressions of duration such as “continuously”, “without interruption”, “constantly”, etc.<sup>226</sup>

2. In the “Dictation for Schlick”, Wittgenstein extensively talks about a misleading conception of possibility which he will discuss again, as we have seen, in *The Brown Book*, and which stands at the origin of a deceptive use of the concept of power (“can”, “be able to”). In the present text he calls this misleading conception “The paradox of possibility” and he defines it as the idea that when we say «that something which is indeed not the case is nonetheless possible, it seems as if in this case something were not the case, and yet more the case that if it couldn’t have been the case» (VW, 39). Something is not the case, but it “is” in a stronger sense than something that is not the case and it couldn’t even be the case. Wittgenstein employs the metaphor of the “shadowy picture” in order to expound this point: we conceive possibility as a “shadowy reality”, that is, as a kind of de-potentiated reality which stands, as a shadow, behind reality itself.

One often has the feeling that reality moves, so to speak, on the rails of possibility, that everything that happens is, as it were, already prefigured or prearranged as possibility. (VW, 361)<sup>227</sup>

This misunderstanding is similar to the confusion between the grammatical and the ideal, that we have encountered when we have discussed the ideal sense of the word “existing” that is implied by the followers of the idea that all future applications of the rule are contained in the expression of the rule:<sup>228</sup> we see that the proposition “the edges of a cube are equal in length” is not an empirical proposition as “the edges of this wooden cube are equal in length”. However, we conclude that, given that the first proposition does not refer to a real cube, it must refer to an ideal one, that is, the geometrical cube. In other words, we postulate a “shadowy entity” which should stand behind something “more real”, stronger, empirically accessible.

Now, this misunderstanding easily applies to the concept of ability too: in this case we conceive the ability as a “shadowy performance”. This misunderstanding is connected to a certain use of the word “can”: we tend to think that, for example, the fact that a distance cannot be at the same time both one and two metres long is a fact concerning the nature of distance. That is, we are forgetting about the variety of uses of the concept of power and we are operating with a concept of “can” as a concept that describes the object, or the state of the object. In this way, we erroneously confuse grammatical rules of a concept with descriptions of natural facts with natural necessity.

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<sup>226</sup> The expression “can’t” here is a logical one: it’s a possibility which is excluded by the grammar of the word.

<sup>227</sup> The same thought is expressed also by Frege, when he states in the *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik I*, that a straight line is already drawn before it is drawn, that is, the geometrical line appears as a “shadowy picture” of the actual line.

<sup>228</sup> See chapter 5.

3. The volume overall testifies that Wittgenstein's did draw a conceptual connection between the concepts of disposition, ability, knowledge-how and understanding, and that a kind of dispositional account of understanding and meaning is presented in contrast to the mentalistic platonist accounts.

«To understand a word means knowing how to use it» (VW, 3), that is, having the ability to use that word in a correct way. For example, «we could also speak of understanding a clock as a clock and mean thereby [...] a capacity or ability to make use of the clock (hence not a state of consciousness)» (VW, 23). In the section “Logic” we find another reference:

Understanding the meaning of a word is comparable with what we call an ability or capacity. That is there is a correspondence between the grammar of the word ‘be able’, ‘be capable of’, and that of the word ‘understanding the meaning’. One could indeed more or less state that understanding its meaning is being able to apply the word correctly. (VW, 357)

«Understanding a word is knowing how to apply it» (VW, 439) and such knowledge should not be seen as an inner state of the subject who knows, but rather as «a *disposition*; that means, I have the ability to use this word» (VW, 441). So, according to Wittgenstein it might be useful to characterize understanding as a kind of knowledge-how in order to face the «ordinary view» according to which «understanding is a mental process which occurs in me» (VW, 437).

We disentangle things \perhaps\ most effectively by employing the concept of a *disposition* [my emphasis]. Understanding a sign can be conceived as a disposition, namely the disposition to apply the sign. (VW, 369)

However, such a philosophical move is necessary but not sufficient, for «the same difficulties hold for the word “ability” as for the word “understanding”» (VW, 437) and, I would add, for the word “disposition” too. Wittgenstein, indeed, states that we could well employ the notion of disposition,

Only one must be clear that this disposition is essentially something hypothetical. That is we are not using the word ‘disposition’ to refer to a shadowy Something that contains in embryonic form all the future applications [of the sign]. (VW, 369)

#### **7.4.1 Don't be misguided by the term “disposition”**

In the following two paragraphs I will expound Wittgenstein's grammatical analysis of the concept of disposition by presenting some insights that are part of the volume *The Voices of Wittgenstein* but that are not further expounded in the later writings.

As we have seen, Wittgenstein explicitly suggests the utility of the notion of disposition in order to dissolve misunderstandings on the concepts of understanding and meaning. However, he also states

that this way of looking at things is necessary but not sufficient, because «the same difficulties hold for the word “ability” as for the word “understanding”» and the word “disposition” (VW, 437).

What are the “same difficulties” quoted in the passage above? The “very deep-rooted mistake”, or “false picture” consists in working with a concept of possibility as “shadowy reality”; what we have previously called “the paradox of possibility”. In particular, in the case of abilities and dispositions, we conceive of the ability or the dispositions as a “shadowy performance”. In the same way, Wittgenstein talks about a deceptive theory of meaning that treats meaning as the “shadowy body” of words.<sup>229</sup> This is a conception according to which

the use of a word, the rule according to which this word ought to be used, follows from the meaning of this word. This conception derives its support from the idea that we can apparently explain the meaning of a word by a single explanation and that from this explanation the rest of the use of this word follows while certain kinds of use conflict with this explanation. (VW, 11)

This is another way to express one of the assumptions that, as we have seen in chapter 5, stand at the basis of the interpretational account of Rule-following: the idea that a sign in itself is dead and that something must be added to it in order to give it “life”. Meaning, so conceived, is thought in terms of something that is added to the dead sign in order to make it meaningful; something autonomous and separated from the word itself. Whereas mind, so conceived, «has other powers than dead signs» (VW, 17). This conception stands within the general picture of the “shadowy model” because, in Wittgenstein’s words

it seems to us as if the word were a visible surface of a *meaning-body* [my emphasis]. (The simile of invisible glass solids that are painted red on one surface. The shape of the bodies behind the surface determines, so it seems, the possibility of the structural arrangement of the red surface.) In other words, it seems that the geometry of a solid is inherent in the solid itself. It seems that this can be read off from the solid. (VW, 13)

The misleading idea – platonist in nature – that the rule, or the order, can anticipate and predetermine in a special manner its execution, is another instance of the “shadowy picture”, for the idea is that «an order seems to anticipate its execution in a *shadowy manner* [my emphasis]» (VW, 17).

one might say: if not the order, then the *sense* of the order contains the execution of the order in some way or other. And here one pictures the sense once more as a *shadowy entity* [my emphasis] which stands behind the expression of the order. This or the thought, just has the capacity which

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<sup>229</sup> See also VW, 133, 135-41, 483.

no concrete sign has: in a word, to anticipate in a certain sense what does not yet exist. Hence the thought must be something peculiarly mental. (VW, 17)

Overall, I think there is an analogy between the conception of possibility as “shadowy reality”, the conception of meaning as the word’s “shadowy body”, the conception of sense at the “shadowy entity” behind the order, and the conception of ability/disposition as a “shadowy performance”. The common root of all these misleading pictures is the paradox of possibility: in all these cases we match what is real – we might say, what is *actualised* – with something that is postulated and hypostatised – a “shadowy entity”- which stands behind and anticipates what does not exist yet. This entity contains in embryonic and ethereal form what is not the case but could be the case. We use this image, indeed, when we try to answer to questions such: “How is it possible to imagine something which does not exist?”, or “How can it be that we are able to imagine the very thing that later happen?”, “How can we understand a false proposition?”, “How is it possible that when I give an order the person react in accordance with it with actions that are not mentioned in the expression of the order?”<sup>230</sup>.

Therefore, I argue that, from the Wittgensteinian perspective, what is to be avoided is not the employment of the notion of disposition itself, but rather a particular use of that term, namely, the use which comes from the misleading image of the mental as a non-physical reservoir of potential elements.<sup>231</sup> In the case of dispositions, the mistake lies in our using the term to point to a mental state that would contain all the acts that still have to be actualised. As if these acts were already embryonically present and actualized in the disposition and had just to manifest themselves.<sup>232</sup> In this sense the disposition should be treated as something hypothetical, that is, as something which does not contain in latent but actualized form what is possible but still not concretely exercised. The disposition is hypothetical in the sense that it does not contain all its future applications. Borrowing an expression that I have used when I discussed the implications of the guidance conception of understanding, a disposition is not a “source of use” i.e. a mental reservoir of pre-arranged courses of action. It is the same misunderstanding as when we think that a person correctly understands an order

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<sup>230</sup> For this reason, I think that here lies the problem of pre-determination which will be a core element of the later/mature Rule-following discussions.

<sup>231</sup> Moreover, in these contexts there are remarks very similar to Ryle’s critique of the para-mechanical model of mind in *The concept of mind*, and I think that here there might be the link between the semantical problem and a problem of philosophy of mind. The postulated «shadowy entities» are states, or processes classified as mysterious, badly characterizable. For this reason, they are situated in the indistinct and airy category of the mental. They are thought to belong to the realm of the mental because it seems impossible, or at least very difficult, to situate them in the material world without violating its laws. The misunderstanding leads us/or is grounded on an image of the mind as «a kind of protoplasm in which things appear to happen that are unknown to physics and chemistry» (Ryle 1990, 43).

<sup>232</sup> What is misleading is a notion of disposition as something latent but already actualized in the ethereal realm of possibility.

because when the order is given, he means the order in a particular way, that is, as if in giving the order we also give a compacted set of reactions that fulfil it.

#### 7.4.2 Against the causal account of language (*pace* Horwich)

The latter point is traced also in the paragraphs on the causal conception of language and on the notion of order, where the notion of disposition is used one more time (VW, 91-99). Actually, Wittgenstein's attitude is negative here, for it might seem as if he is rejecting the employment of the notion of disposition in this context.

If one says: the order that p should occur is the process which, together with a *disposition* [my emphasis] in a person, effects p, then whether something is the order that p should occur depends from the start on what future experience we will have. There would be no point at all in giving an order since the wording of the order would only be proved to be correct or incorrect by the future. (VW, 105)

On the contrary, I now argue that Wittgenstein's concern here is the causal conception of language and orders, informed by the “shadowy picture”, rather than the use of the notion of disposition. Followers of the causal view of language state that signs induce movements, or reactions thanks' to training. According to this perspective, the order coincides with the sign that *causes* a certain action given a process of association. If the movement is done, then the order has been followed.<sup>233</sup>

The train of thought is this: In this case the movement is executed, *therefore* the order has been followed. Hence, the order is the sign which triggers the movement. (VW, 93)

A follower of the causal view should then admit that even a dog follows the order if it does the movement *provoked* by the sign. We should say the same in the case of a machine. The definition of the order is what is at issue here, namely, the criteria we use to say that something is an order. Wittgenstein's remarks are not about the understanding of the order.<sup>234</sup> The causal theory of order defines the order by looking at its effects. However, Wittgenstein seems to suggest that if something is an order in virtue of its produced effects, then if the system does not generate the effects, then that

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<sup>233</sup> «This conception corresponds exactly to Russell's conception of desire. If one learns only from future experience what it was that one wanted, then something different is here understood by ‘want’ than what is usually called wanting» (VW, 99). I think Wittgenstein is here referring to Russell's conception of desire presented in *The Analysis of Mind*. In this work, Russell gave a slightly behaviouristic analysis of desire using the notion of “behaviour-cycle”: «a “behaviour-cycle” is a series of voluntary or reflex movements of an animal, tending to cause a certain result, and continuing until that result is caused, unless they are interrupted by death, accident, or some new behaviour-cycle» (Russell 2008, 45). In the case of human beings, a mental occurrence causes a series of actions that continue unless the desired state of affairs is realised. The behavioural cycle is caused by a feeling of “discomfort”, while the ending of the cycle is called “pleasure” (Russell 2008, 51).

<sup>234</sup> In this respect, it is different from the Rule-Following discussion.

something is not an order anymore. Consequently, with this perspective it makes no sense to speak of violation of the order, but this would be a very queer way of using the word «order». Someone might try to object that is still possible to add new elements to the causal chain in order to accommodate the idea that the order of doing *P* is still an order even if *P* does not follow. Nevertheless, if we define the order with *P* and all the other elements of the causal chain, the problem arises again in the same form.<sup>235</sup> According to Wittgenstein, followers of this theory confuse causal/empirical consequences and logical consequences. Take for examples these two sentences: “The device is structured in a way that ‘a’ produces this movement”, and “The letter ‘a’ is the order of moving in this way”. Wittgenstein wants to make us aware that these two sentences are independent: the former is verified by experience, the latter is the product of an agreement. I think the main point is that the question “What is the execution of the order?” is about the sense and the answer is then a grammatical explanation (VW, 97). It is not a question about an empirical fact that we can experience, it is rather a question about that concept of order because we lack that concept or maybe we are still not able to use it. So, even if in this part Wittgenstein uses the notion of disposition, I think that his critique is against the causal conception of order, and not the employment of the concept of disposition itself.

## 7.5 Preliminary conclusions

So far, in this chapter I have presented the outcome of a textual study on the Wittgensteinian use of the concept of disposition. I would like to conclude by stressing two main points:

1. We find several uses of the notion of disposition in Wittgenstein’s writings. Scholars have generally taken into account only one of them by looking merely to paragraph 149 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Therefore, Wittgenstein does not endorse the narrow and materialistic conception of disposition as a state of a physical apparatus. Indeed, Wittgenstein does not criticize the employment of the notion of disposition. He writes against a particular use of the concept which comes from a misleading conception of possibility- the “shadowy model”: conceiving the linguistic disposition as a mysterious entity or state that contains all the future applications of the word in a latent but already actualized form. Moreover, Wittgenstein himself employs the notion of disposition in order to characterize his own perspective on language, understanding and meaning and this notion does not correspond to the model of state of a physical apparatus. Therefore, it is legitimate to give a

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<sup>235</sup> That is why, adding a *ceteris paribus* clause would be useless. I think something similar could be said in response to the failure of the *ceteris paribus* analysis conditional analysis of disposition ascriptions.

kind of dispositional reading of Wittgenstein's later philosophy by using a notion of disposition which is found in the Wittgensteinian corpus.

2. Wittgenstein's use of the concept of disposition suggests a de-naturalized notion of disposition, that is, a notion which is different from the one which is presupposed in the most recent technical works on the topic. Wittgenstein explicitly draws a grammatical relation between the concepts of disposition, ability, understanding and knowledge-how. In this sense, he does not commit himself to the "simplification fallacy" that I have discussed in chapter 2, that is, he does not use the word "disposition" only to refer to mere natural capacities such as solubility, fragility, conductivity. The concept of disposition is used to give an account of human practices. Dispositions, in this sense, are abilities and skills which do not reduce to states of the brain or the mind conceived in terms of inner mechanism. They are rather *patterns of behaviour* which have been learned through training and education in a particular system, or form of life.<sup>236</sup> Therefore, the notion of disposition, if correctly de-naturalized, might be used to highlight the relevance of Wittgenstein's philosophy to current issues at the interface between the philosophy of language and the philosophy of mind.

In the remaining of the chapter I will present other dispositional elements of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. In particular, I will focus on the dispositional character of aspect-seeing and the theme of novelty and creativity of behaviour within the boundaries of the conception of understanding as a kind of knowledge-how, in order to further define the normative character of the concept of disposition.

## 7.6 Other dispositional elements

1. So forth I have always talked about the dispositional character of Wittgenstein's later philosophy by looking at Wittgenstein's account of meaning and understanding as it comes from the remarks on the Rule-following problem. However, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein does often employ a dispositional language and this way of speaking is strictly connected to the philosophical method through which we disentangle conceptual confusions by reflecting on imaginary cases. In this case, it is not a kind of applied dispositionalism, that is, the notion of disposition is not employed in order to give an account of a particular phenomenon, such as meaningful talking, or understanding; I am rather referring to the employment of dispositional expressions.

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<sup>236</sup> Talking about «patterns of behaviour» does not imply the reduction of human action to mere behaviour, given that we are operating with a richer notion of behaviour. Patterns of behaviour are, in this context, patterns of use, i.e., embodied ways of employing linguistic expressions which are part of a practice embedded in the relevant socio-cultural context. We might further define patterns of use as embodied ways of correctly employing linguistic expressions so to stress their normative character.

Imagination plays an important role in what we have called Wittgenstein's comparative, or morphological method. Wittgenstein continuously expresses his main points by asking the interlocutor, or the reader, to consider some hypothetical, imaginary cases; such cases provide scenarios which are generally very different to the ones we are used to consider and live in. Linguistically, such cases are introduced by Wittgenstein with expressions such as "Imagine a case/a language..." (PI §§179, 271, 282, 556, 577), "Let us imagine..." (PI §§ 2, 265, 270, 151), "Consider now the case..." (PI §§31, 48, 50, 66, 79, 157, 172, 181, 253, 372, 379, 441, 513, 627, 630), "It is easy to imagine a language..." (PI §19), "We/you can/could imagine..." (PI §§323, 390). Now, what is important to note is that the presentation of the scenario, or imaginary case, has a methodological value in virtue of the fact that it provides the background for the following questions: "*what would you do if...?*", "*what would you say in such a case?*", "*what would you be disposed/inclined to utter in this situation?*", and so on. Let us consider the following examples:

- A. [...] We might also be *inclined to* [my emphasis] express ourselves like this: we're at most under a psychological, not a logical, compulsion. [...] What was the effect of my argument? It called our attention to (reminded us of) the fact that there are other processes, besides the one we originally thought of, which we should sometimes *be prepared to* [my emphasis] call "applying the picture of a cube". (PI §140)
- B. I wanted to put that picture before him, and his *acceptance* of the picture consists in his now being *inclined to* [my emphasis] regard a given case differently: that is, to compare it with *this* sequence of pictures. I have changed his *way of looking at things*. (PI §144)
- C. Suppose that a man who is under the influence of a certain drug is presented with a series of written signs (which need not belong to any existing alphabet). He utters words corresponding to the number of the signs, as if they were letters, and does so with all the outward characteristics and feelings of reading. [...] In such a case, some people would be *inclined to* [my emphasis] say the man was *reading* those signs. Others, that he was not. (PI §160)
- D. Now suppose those two people to yell and stamp instead of playing the form of chess that *we are used to* [...]; and this in such a way that what goes on is translatable by suitable rules into a game of chess. Would we still be *inclined to* [my emphasis] say that they were playing a game? And with what right could one say so? (PI §200)

My point is twofold: such a language is dispositional for, even if it does not contain explicit uses of the term "disposition", it involves the use of related notions, such as inclination and propensity. Moreover, such a dispositional language is neutral with respect to both a strong normativism discussed in chapter 4 and, borrowing Maddy's term (2014) a kind of "austere" naturalism.

In these passages, and in many others, the dispositional expression is not used to refer to an inner state of the subject, maybe discoverable by science and traced in neurophysiological terms; rather, it is used to refer to the subject's propensity to act and react in a certain way *given* the particular social context and given the adoption of some images embodied in the language at use. The fact that we would be inclined to say that the players of case D are not playing chess is not independent from the fact that we are used to play chess in a certain manner; it is not independent from a particular *custom*. We are disposed to judge, say things, behave in a certain way given the kinds of habits we have internalized while living in the context where we actually live. We are disposed to behave in a certain way in virtue of the fact that we are human beings and in virtue of the fact that we acquire certain patterns of action thanks to the interaction with members of the form of life we are embedded in. Such propensities are thus acquired. This point is surprisingly stated in an explicit and clear way by Wittgenstein in *The Philosophical Grammar*:

By *nature* and by a *particular training*, a *particular education*, we are *disposed to* [all emphasis added] give spontaneous expression to wishes in certain circumstances. (A *wish* is, of course, not such a 'circumstance'.) In this game the question whether I know what I wish before my wish is fulfilled cannot arise at all. And the fact that some event stops my wishing does not mean that it fulfils it. Perhaps I should not have been satisfied if my wish had been satisfied. (PG §441)<sup>237</sup>

The subject's disposition is an acquired pattern of behaviour; it derives from education, training, but nature as well. Indeed, as we have already seen, Wittgenstein employs the notion of nature to refer both to what is natural in a biological sense and what is not innate and biological but it has become natural after having been incorporated; humans are trainable for nature, that is, they have the natural capacity to acquire cultural heritage in virtue of some characteristics of humans as a specific species among other species; but what they then acquire is not reduced to such a natural capacity; it rests on a different level of description which still admits the use of dispositional elements, for dispositional concepts are not merely used to refer to natural capacities. At the same time, though, the subject's disposition does not causally explain the subject's behaviour because no causal connection is established here. The disposition as propensity does not cause action, but it rather provides reasons for giving an account of the course of action. Moreover, it does not oblige the subject to behave in a certain way as suggested by some kind of strong metaphysical normativism: there are no normative dispositional facts; rather, it is a fact that I am disposed to correctly employ a word, that is, uttering

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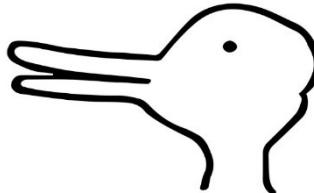
<sup>237</sup> In the *philosophical Investigations* the expression "disposed to" is substituted by "predisposed to": «By nature and by a particular training, a particular education, we are *predisposed to* [my emphasis] express wishes in certain circumstances. (A *wish* is, of course, not such a 'circumstance'.) In this game, the question as to whether I know what I wish before my wish is fulfilled cannot arise at all. And the fact that some event stops my wishing does not mean that it fulfils it (PI §441).

the word in the suitable situations, and such a fact is what understanding that word consists in; it is part of the way the concept of understanding is used. It does not explain the understanding of the meaning of the word. Normativity lies in the already operative distinction between what is correct and what is incorrect, and in the fact that such dispositions are part of a rule-governed behaviour which is not mechanical and which allows the possibility of mistake and deviation. I will now further expound these latter points by looking at Wittgenstein discussion of aspect-seeing with the help of Eldridge (2010) and Child (2018).

2. In the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein extensively writes about one of the main themes of any theory of perception i.e. aspect-seeing, and it shows how this can throw light on many issues regarding the philosophy of psychology, in particular the reflection on the meaning of psychological concepts. The phenomenon of aspect-seeing, indeed, stands between the mechanisms of sensory information and those of conceptual elaboration (Casati 2002, 232) and it is broadly described by Wittgenstein in the following way:

The *somewhat queer* phenomenon of seeing this way or that surely makes its first appearance when someone recognizes that the optical picture in one sense remains the same, while something else, which one might call "conception", may change. (RPP I §27)

Wittgenstein's most famous example is the "duck-rabbit" figure.



The peculiarity of this figure is that it can be seen as a duck's head, or as a rabbit's head: the expression "seeing as" expresses the use of the concept of seeing as to indicate the seeing of a particular aspect. This means that the word "seeing" can be used in two different ways: "I see this thing"; in this case I can draw a picture of what I see, or I can give a description of the object seen. This is an expression which we use to express seeing *tout-court*. Or we can say "I see a likeness in these two faces"; in this case «I observe a face, and then suddenly notice its likeness to another. I see that it has not changed; and yet I see it differently. I call this experience "noticing an aspect"» (PFF §113). Indeed, the concept of aspect-seeing stands between seeing *tout-court* and thought, for there is a genuine perceptive element but there is also a voluntary element.

Now, here I am concerned with two of Wittgenstein's main points: first, aspect-seeing is not perception of a different object – for the aspect is not a thing or entity – but it is a different way of

seeing the very same object: I do not see something different; I see *differently*; secondly, aspect-seeing is an *ability* which presupposes the *mastery of a certain technique*.

Only of someone *capable* of making certain applications of the figure with facility would one say that he saw it now this way, now *that* way. The substratum of this experience is the mastery of a technique. (PFF §222)

Only of someone who *can do*, has learnt, is master of, such-and-such, does it make sense to say that he has had *this* experience. And if this sounds silly, you need to remember that the *concept* of seeing is modified here. (PFF §224)

Aspect-seeing is not perception of a particular property of the object seen but rather it involves the activation of some capacities of recognition that are exercised in virtue of the fact that we master the application of the figure. That is why Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect-seeing play a clarificatory role for the issue of meaning and understanding too, for the same goes for the use of words according to their meaning: when I see a word *as* a meaningful word and not as a mere sign, I already master its use. It is not surprisingly, then, that here again the dispositional notions of ability and mastery of technique – different from the notion of disposition as state of physical apparatus – are used to face misleading experiential and mentalistic account of meaning and understanding. Indeed, Eldridge (2010) thinks that the technique which is the substratum of the experience of aspect-seeing, or the experiencing of the meaning of a word, is the ability to make connections between the word and the various possible contexts of use, «associated with various construals embodied in the word as a tool» (Eldridge 2010, 176).

The skill of knowing one's way about is a matter of knowing what one can do next – mastering the technique for it – in such a way that one immediately sees or hears these words as leading to these next possible responses. (Eldridge 2010, 176)

Two points are worth noticing: firstly, this skill is developed given the capacity to be trained, on the basis of training experienced in contexts of integrations that confer to subjects a certain kind of power, in the sense of knowledge-how: knowing how to go on, how to proceed, how to correctly behave (Eldridge 2010, 177-178). This echoes what I previously said about dispositions as acquired patterns of behaviour: they are acquired in virtue both of nature – in the sense of biological structure – and in virtue of education and training.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Such a reconstruction is similar to Tomasello's account of language learning in *The cultural origins of Human Cognition* (1999); a work which is explicitly influenced by Wittgenstein's philosophy. According to Eldridge (2010), Tomasello's work provides a good example of an empirical study which does not lead to causalist, conventionalist and intellectualist models. Tomasello tries to answer one of Wittgenstein's questions: «How does one become master of a

Secondly, in the exercise of this skill, or ability there is still some possibilities both of novel noticing, such as jokes, metaphors, intimacies, and of noticing that are felt to be wayward, incoherent or incorrect, by the others or by oneself upon reflection. In other words, we cannot abstain from dealing with the issue of novelty, creativity and variability within the boundaries of the conception of understanding as a capacity. Wittgenstein's characterisation of understanding as mastery of technique and of meaning has the value of taking into account little changes, deviations from the norm which are typical of the phenomenon of understanding, language's plasticity and the normative character of meaning. Things go different in the case of metaphysical normativism, on the one hand, and a naturalized dispositional analysis which construes human's linguistic disposition on the model of stimulus-response.

Let us return for a moment to quotation B. In that passage, Wittgenstein explicitly expresses one of the main characteristics of his way of doing philosophy: after the dissipation of a conceptual confusion we *see differently* the same case that troubled us. The philosophical work can change the way people look at things, for this is actually what a conceptual work amounts to, by contrast to an empirical work that leads to new discoveries and formulations of new theories. This could be read as a further formulation of the common view according to which the acquisition of new sets of concepts or beliefs leads to seeing things in a different, new way. Within the Wittgenstein tradition, as stated by Child (2018), this can be interpreted as a way to state that there is a special connection between aspect-seeing and novelty. If, as previously stated, aspect-seeing is, we might say, another exercise of the subject's mastering of concepts, and if this mastering of concepts consists in being disposed to correctly employ them, we might wonder whether the acquisition of dispositions, so conceived, does lead to see things in a different way or, at least, if the acquisition of the disposition does not preclude some kind of deviation or novel pattern of behaviour. I answer to this question by making a parallel between the type of explanatory role of seeing-as regarding understanding and the kind of explanatory role of dispositions regarding understanding and language use. I will then make use of Child's reflection on this point (Child 2018, 6-8).

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game?» (PI §131). In few words, his main thesis is that individual human beings have the *capacity* to live culturally, and that capacity is part of their biological heritage. However, this amounts to saying that human beings are the kind of beings who can learn to produce cultural performances, such as language, and not that they come to life already able to produce them. Biology is only one of the contributions, for learning takes place in the context of historical and social background. Indeed, the development of explicit linguistic and conceptual abilities depends also on ontogenetic-developmental processes and these processes are enabled but not determined by the biological heritage.

Child (2018) rightly states that it is misleading to think that the ability to see things differently explains the innovator's success in grasping new concepts, for seeing things differently is part of what grasping new concepts consist in. This is what Wittgenstein tries to show with the remarks on Rule-following: the misleading interpretational account assumes that grasping of a rule depends on seeing things in the right way, as if we should first understand the rule and then apply it. On the contrary, grasping a rule consists in having the ability to do the right thing; there is no gap between the formulation of the rule and its application in a new case. Similarly, I think we can further expound on the same lines the non-causal role of dispositions, which I have already discussed in chapter 5. Being disposed to utter *X* in the proper/correct way, that is, for example, in the proper occasion, is part of what grasping the concept *X* consists in. It is in this sense that dispositions do not causally explain behaviour and they are normative: there is still space for novelty, for a change of perspective. The acquisition of the disposition or, if we prefer, a new pattern of behaviour, does not necessitate the subject's behaviour; on the one hand, it plays a *criterial role* in ascribing understanding and competent use to the subject and, on the other hand, it provides *reasons* for a kind of explanation which is different from the causal one and which is one of the tools for who intends to engage with conceptual analysis.

# Part three

## De-naturalizing dispositions

## **Chapter 8**

### **Fighting the current paradigm: Ryle helps Wittgenstein**

#### **8.1 Introduction: what we have gained so far**

Before moving to the conclusive part of the present work, a summary of the results of the enquiry gained so far is needed. In the previous parts two different notions of disposition have been discussed: a naturalized notion, which stands at the core of the current paradigm, and a de-naturalized notion which is taken from ordinary use of the concept and which gains philosophical legitimacy from Wittgenstein's later philosophy. I tried to argue that such de-naturalized notion informs a kind of dispositionalism which faces what I suggested to be the main problems of the current paradigm, for it does not stand on the same deceptive presuppositions.

The current paradigm on dispositions is globally characterized by the following three aspects: 1. A factual, or empirical interest. The question "What is a disposition?" is taken to be a factual question on the dispositional entity; 2. A denotative theory of meaning applied to the term "disposition": dispositional terms denote hidden states or properties of objects; 3. Dispositions are thought to be real entities separated from their manifestations and located somewhere inside their bearers. Given this, the current paradigm recognizes and faces the traditional empirical suspect against dispositions: dispositions are empirically inaccessible; they cannot be observed, because we can only observe their manifestations. The problem arises for it is assumed that we need some empirical access to dispositions in order to ascribe them. By contrast, the kind of dispositionalism informed by Wittgenstein's philosophy (1) is not part of a factual enquiry on dispositional entities; rather, what is at issue is the concept of disposition and its role in language, i.e., the norms that govern their employment, and (3) it keeps the conceptual nexus between dispositions and their manifestations; dispositions are not hypostatized. Consequently, Wittgenstein's reflection on the concept of disposition does not start from the traditional empiricist problem of empirical inaccessibility; on the contrary, dispositions are thought to be empirically testable through tests and exercises. Dispositions, in a certain sense, are seen in the outward behaviour.

If we adopt a more detailed perspective, in addition to this general background, we see that the current paradigm operates with a notion of disposition which is informed by the underlying image of the machine; dispositions do work like machines do, but dispositions are part of an inner machine which is more difficult to describe. Dispositions, then, are thought to be kinds of objects possessed by the bearer which have, either intrinsically, or due to a categorical basis, a causal power:

dispositions do produce their manifestation and they are intrinsically non-normative. This means that only a kind of descriptive perspective is allowed.<sup>239</sup> By contrast, Wittgenstein's remarks on the use of the concept of power show that such concept is not always used to refer to inner states and properties of objects and that the kind of explanation involved in the dispositional talk is not causal but it is an explanation in terms of reasons for action. Moreover, the concept of disposition can be accommodated with a talk on normativity without assuming the problematic existence of some primitive normative facts; in this sense, Wittgenstein's kind of dispositionalism is different from Kripke's, for it essentially includes reference to human life and its activities.

Finally, if dispositions are objects (states, or properties) possessed by other objects and if they are real entities of the actual world, how can we then give an account of their referring to potential behaviour? Dispositions, when ascribed, do not need to actually manifest themselves. I suggested that the current paradigm works with an underlying image of potentiality as something that lies in a box: dispositions are thought to be latent depositaries of pre-arranged courses of action; they are then latent but already actualized in the “realm” of possibility. This image is exactly what Wittgenstein calls the “shadowy picture” and it stands at the basis of misleading conceptions of meaning, possibility, and dispositional concepts too, such as abilities and dispositions. This is the same image which informs the mentalistic guidance conception of Rule-following too. In particular, what is at issue is a notion

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<sup>239</sup> Davidson too works with a non-normative notion of disposition. The notion of disposition appears, quite extensively, in the essays-collection *Essays on Action and Events* (Davidson 2011). Globally, Davidson's view on dispositions might be summarised as follows: 1. Dispositions are states or conditions of their bearers (objects or human beings); they are not events. In the essay “The material mind”, Davidson talks about the speaker's language ability in terms of the speakers' dispositions. He then distinguishes between two types of description: according to a psychological description, such an ability is a complex disposition but, «described physically, it is not a disposition, but an actual state, a mechanism» (Davidson 2011, 208). Moreover, in the essay “Actions, Reasons and Causes”, Davidson (2011, 20) specifies that «states and dispositions are not events, but the onslaught of a state or disposition is»; 2. Dispositions have a causal role in virtue of some other causal factor. When I say that this lamp of sugar dissolved in this glass of water because it is soluble, «the implication runs from description of cause to description of effect but not conversely» (Davidson 2011, 22): naming the cause still gives information because “Placing it in water caused it to dissolve” does not entail “It's water-soluble”. Solubility has a definitional connection with the event to be explained, but the explanation would be more interesting if we refer to the property – the particular crystalline structure, whose connection with the event of dissolution in water is known through experiment; 3. Two different levels of explanation are acknowledged: generalisations in terms of reasons and explanations in physics. Appeal to dispositions belongs to the first type, in a similar way as Quine (1975) suggests. In the essay “Hempel on explaining action”, Davidson (2011, 215) argues that «the laws implicit in reason explanations are simply the generalizations implied by attributions of dispositions». Let us consider this particular event: a lamp of sugar dissolved in a warm coffee. Two different kinds of explanation can be given for this event: 1. The first kind «takes as premises the facts that if something is soluble it dissolves in liquids of a certain sort, that warm coffee is such a liquid, that all sugar is soluble, and that this cube is sugar»; 2. The second kind, less informative and shorter, goes as follows: «this cube was soluble; soluble things dissolve in coffee, this cube was in coffee» (Davidson 2011, 222). Now, reasons explanations are of the second kind, where explanation in terms of dispositions – sugar's solubility – is involved. According to Davidson, this kind of explanation «is not high science, but it isn't empty either, for solubility implies not only a generalization, but also the existence of a causal factor which accounts for the disposition: there is something about a soluble cube of sugar that causes it to dissolve under certain conditions» (Davidson 2011, 223).

of disposition as something latent but already actualized in some mysterious and gaseous dimension which *precedes* the dimension of the factual existence of things.

### 8.1.1 Russell's insight

The notion of disposition plays a relevant role in Russell's work *The Analysis of Mind* [1921]. Here, Russell (2008) seems to implicitly deal with the problem of finding the best characterisation of a concept which refers to something that is not actualized. Globally, I argue that Russell does employ the notion of disposition in contrast to what is actualized in order to mark the potential character of the concept. However, he does not seem to endorse the idea of dispositions as something latent, if we mean by the term "latent" something not manifested, though already actualized in some other form. Moreover, I think that Russell's account of dispositions might be one of the sources of Wittgenstein's notion of disposition as status of a physical apparatus.<sup>240</sup> Wittgenstein might have been familiar with Russell's work for two reasons: first of all, Russell was one of his main philosophical interlocutors by that time; secondly, there are indeed several elements in Russell's work which echo Wittgenstein's early and later remarks. For example, already in the 30's, Wittgenstein explicitly talks about Russell's theory of desire and belief discussed in chapters three and twelve (VW, 79, 99, 419). Again, Wittgenstein's anti-intellectualist attitude and his critique against the idea of the need of mental intermediaries might already be glimpsed in the chapter on consciousness, where Russell states that we do not need "thought" in order to answer an arithmetical query, for all that we need is an acquired habit.<sup>241</sup>

Suppose two children in a school, both of whom are asked "What is six times nine?". One says fifty-four, the other says fifty-six. The one, we say, "knows" what six times nine is, the other does not. But all that we can observe is a certain language-habit. The one child has acquired the habit

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<sup>240</sup> Another important source might be James' *The Principles of Psychology* [1890]. As argued by Goodman (2002), James exerted a pervasive positive influence on Wittgenstein's thought. Wittgenstein, indeed, worked with *The Principles of Psychology* from the 30's till the end of his life and he thought James to be a serious philosophical interlocutor. In his masterpiece, James (1983) extensively uses the notion of disposition and he seems to use it in a variety of ways. In chapter x, while dealing with the spiritual self, he speaks about dispositions as "psychic faculties" and he writes that they are «the most enduring and intimate part of the self, that which we most verily seem to be» (James 1983, 296). In another passage, he employs the notion to refer rather to a kind of disposition more similar to Aristotle's notion of *hexis*: James employs the expression "spiritual dispositions" of the body as tools that leads it towards longevity or destruction (James 1983, 231-233). Finally and, I think, more extensively, James talks about dispositions as physical modifications of the body, as in the following passage, where he speaks of a change in disposition as a change «probably due to modifications in the perviousness of motor and associative paths, co-ordinate with those of the sensorial paths rather than consecutive upon them» (James 1983, 390). It is not the aim of the present work to enquiry James' use of the concept of disposition; in this context, I wanted to suggest that James might be one of the sources of Wittgenstein's notion of disposition as state of a physical apparatus. This point might be the object of further research.

<sup>241</sup> However, Wittgenstein does not endorse the behaviouristic flavour of Russell's views.

of saying “six times nine is fifty-four”; the other has not. There is no more need of “thought” in this than there is when a horse runs into his accustomed stable. (Russell 2008, 22)

In what follows, I will expound Russell’s use of the notion of disposition and I will focus on those aspects that can be linked both to Wittgenstein’s employment of the concept and to the current naturalized paradigm on dispositions.

Russell’s general attempt is to use James’ radical empiricism to harmonize the materialistic tendency of the behaviourist school with the anti-materialistic tendency of physics expressed in the works of Einstein and Eddington.<sup>242</sup> Indeed, on the one hand, behaviouristic psychologists make psychology dependent on physiology and external observation and they think of the matter as something more indubitable than mind; on the other hand, physicists who endorse Einstein’s theory of relativity make matter less material. Russell’s strategy consists in opposing James’ neutral monism<sup>243</sup> to the dualistic assumptions of the other two tendencies: «the “stuff” of the world is neither mental nor material, but a “neutral stuff”, out of which both are construed» (Russell 2008, 9).

In particular, Russell is interested in the way such a perspective might be applied to the study of psychological phenomena, or those «occurrences which we are in the habit of calling “mental”» (Russell 2008, 11), such as consciousness, habits, desires, perceptions, sensations, memory, emotions, will, and beliefs. Russell wants to «analyse as fully as [he] can *what* [my emphasis] it is that really takes place when we, e.g. believe or desire» (Russell 2008, 11). It is interesting to note that Russell’s object of enquiry is similar to Ryle’s (1990) and Wittgenstein’s (RPP, PPF, LPP): they all reflect upon psychology and philosophy of psychology by taking into account the concepts we use to refer to some psychological phenomena. However, what changes is the kind of question and the level of description. While Russell is interested in the psychological phenomenon itself and in what happens in the subject, Wittgenstein and Ryle’s interest is more conceptual: they are rather concerned about how we talk about the mind, what is the concept of mind we use when we elaborate psychological theories.

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<sup>242</sup> James’ radical empiricism is the label used to refer to the *Weltanschauung* presented in his *Essays on Radical Empiricism*, which constitutes his mature philosophical work. It is empiricist, for it is opposed to Rationalism: «Rationalism tends to emphasize universals and to make wholes prior to parts in the order of logic as well as in that of being. Empiricism, on the contrary, lays the explanatory stress upon the part, the element, the individual, and treats the whole as a collection and the universal as an abstraction»; it is radical, for it does not «admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy, *the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as ‘real’ as anything else in the system*» (James 1996, 41-42).

<sup>243</sup> «My thesis is that if we start with the supposition that there is only one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff ‘pure experience,’ then knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort of relation towards one another into which portions of pure experience may enter» (James 1996, 4).

Russell employs the notion of disposition in two chapters, or lectures: (1) lecture IV, on the influence of past history on present occurrences in living organisms, and (2) lecture XII, on Belief.<sup>244</sup>

1. Lecture IV is about the characteristic which «broadly, though not absolutely», distinguishes the behaviour of living organisms – vital movements (reflex, voluntary) – from the behaviour of dead matter – mechanical movements (Russell 2008, 53). This characteristic is the fact that the response of a living organism to a given stimulus is not merely dependent upon the stimulus and the hitherto discoverable present state, but it is often dependent upon the past history of the organism. Such characteristic is embodied in the saying, for example, “a burned child fears the fire”. Russell’s thesis is that past occurrences, in addition to the present stimulus and the present ascertainable condition of the organism, enter into the *causation* of the response. These phenomena are called “mnemic phenomena” and the kind of causation linked to those phenomena is called “mnemic causation”. A mnemic causation occurs whenever the effect resulting from a stimulus to an organism differs according to the past history of the organism.

According to Russell, there are six classes of mnemic phenomena:<sup>245</sup> 1. Acquired habits (the past experience is essential to the causation of the response, or reaction), 2. Images (they are copies of past sensations), 3. Association (when we experience something we have experienced before, we call up the context of the former experience), 4. Non-sensational elements in perception (when we perceive a familiar object, what appears to be immediately given is derived from past experience), 5. Memory as knowledge (remembering is caused by past occurrences and present stimulus), 6. Experience (the modification of behaviour produced by a past occurrence, that is, what is experienced).<sup>246</sup>

It is important to clarify that Russell is concerned with mnemic causation because in this way it is possible to formulate the laws of mnemic phenomena wholly in terms of observable facts, without appealing to the notion of engram and brain connections. This is something, Russell argues, still too hypothetical. Mnemic causation enables to state laws of behaviour in less hypothetical terms than we should otherwise employ if we introduce, for example the engram: engram and appeal to brain connections is hypothetical from an epistemological point of view; we still do not know much about

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<sup>244</sup> Russell’s book is a collection of xv lectures given in London and Peking. Each lecture presents a particular analysis of a specific psychological phenomenon (consciousness, instinct and habit, desire and feeling, influence of past history of present occurrences in living organisms, psychological and physical laws, introspection, perception, sensation and images, words and memory, general ideas and thought, belief, truth and falsehood, emotions and the will, mental phenomena in general).

<sup>245</sup> Russell follows the view suggested by the zoologist and evolutionary biologist Richard Semon in his *The Mneme* (1921).

<sup>246</sup> To be more precise, I think that Russell is thinking about experience in the sense of the german term “Erfahrung” and not “Erlebnis”.

it. In the following passage, Russell states the point in a clear way and it introduces the reflection on the characterisation of what is latent:

Memories, as mental facts, arise from time to time, but do not, so far as we can see, exist in any shape while they are “latent”. In fact, when we say that they are “latent”, we mean merely that they will exist under certain circumstances. (Russell 2008, 58)

Here, already, Russell seems to avoid the characterisation of a latent thing as something that has a certain form in the dimension of possibility. Mental facts do not properly exist in a particular shape while they are latent, for when we say that a mental fact is latent, we are simply describing it as something that will exist under certain circumstances; it is not already existing in an actualized form. From this, Russell concludes that we cannot appeal to such a latent mental fact to distinguish between a person who is in a particular state and a person who is not in a particular state. If mental facts, while they are latent, do not exist in any other form in the mind of the subject, then we can only look at the brain and its states however still hypothetical this might be.

If, then, there is to be some standing difference between the person who can remember a certain fact and a person who cannot, that standing difference must be, not in anything mental, but in the brain [...] but its nature is unknown and it remains hypothetical. (Russell 2008, 58)

Latent mental facts are not properly approachable, in virtue of their potential nature, but the nature of the brain is still a matter of research and there is no much knowledge about it. From a pragmatic point of view, then, Russell argues that mnemonic causation is the best we can aspire to and he writes a single law (**SL**) of mnemonic phenomena that should contain the essential feature without admixture of anything hypothetical, i.e., thesis about the brain:

**SL:** «if a complex stimulus A has caused a complex reaction B in an organism, the occurrence of a part of A on a future occasion tends to cause the whole reaction B» (Russell 2008, 58).

Mnemonic causation is the kind of causation involved in the study and observation of the behaviour of human beings. It is a kind of causation different from the physical one, which applies to inert matter too. Russell, indeed, states that causation is involved in psychological phenomena too, but it is a specific and “special” kind of causation different from the kind involved in phenomena studied by physics.<sup>247</sup> In ordinary physical causation many sequences are invariable, but it is different with the

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<sup>247</sup> The distinction between psychology and physics is testified also by the difference established between physical causal laws and psychological causal laws. Psychological phenomena are subjected to laws, but such laws are different from the ones governing physical phenomena. Since «physics treats as a unit the whole system of appearances of a piece of matter, whereas psychology is interested in a certain of these appearances themselves, [...] The laws which physics seeks, can, broadly speaking, be stated by treating such systems of particulars as causal units. The laws which

behaviour of human beings and Russell, with no surprise, works with the example of language understanding. The effect of words upon the reader, he writes, is a mnemonic phenomenon because «it depends upon the past experience which gave him understanding of the words» (Russell 2008, 59). It is in this context that Russell writes about dispositions; the notion of disposition, then, plays a role in the formulation of psychological causal laws without taking account of the brain and the rest of the body.

If there are to be purely psychological laws they will have to be of the form, not “X now causes Y now”, but “A, B, C...in the past, together with X now, cause Y now.” For it cannot be successfully maintained that our understanding of a word, for example, is an actual existent content of the mind at times when we are not thinking of the word. It is merely what may be called “a disposition”, i.e. it is *capable of being aroused* whenever we hear the word or happen to think of it. A “disposition” is not something actual, but merely the mnemonic portion of a mnemonic causal law. (Russell 2008, 59)

A disposition is characterized as a portion of a mnemonic causal law – hence a psychological causal law – and this is a way to account of the fact that it is not something actual. Therefore, saying that a disposition is something latent does not mean to assume that it is anyway an actual existent content of the mind. Russell’s view on mnemonic phenomena can be seen as a strategy to employ the concept of latent but non actualized for, according to Russell, this perspective helps avoiding the misleading idea according to which «all our knowledge, all our store of images and memories, all our mental habits, are at all times existing in some latent mental form and are not merely aroused by the stimuli which lead to their display» (Russell 2008, 59). The latter observation echoes, in part, Wittgenstein’s description of the misleading “shadowy picture”.

2. The notion of disposition appears in lecture XII, too; a chapter focused on belief. Overall, Russell states that whereas words have meanings, beliefs have truth value which depends upon something that lies outside the belief (Russell 2008, 151). A belief *B* has an *objective* and a *reference*: the objective is the fact that makes *B* true or false; the reference is the relation of *B* to its objective. For example, let us consider the belief that Columbus crossed the Atlantic in 1492. According to Russell, the objective of the belief is Columbus’s actual voyage. The reference of the belief is the relation between the belief and the voyage, that is, the relation in virtue of which the actual voyage makes the belief true (or, in another case, false). The truth value of the belief, then, entirely depends upon the nature of its relation to the objective, hence it does not depend upon something intrinsic to

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psychology seeks cannot be so stated, since the particulars themselves are what interests the psychologist» (Russell 2008, 69, 70).

the belief. Moreover, Russell distinguishes between the mental event, or process of believing, and what is believed (the content): «I may believe that Columbus crossed the Atlantic, that all Cretans are liars, that two and two are four, or that nine times six is fifty-six; in all these cases the believing is just the same, and only the contents believed are different» (Russell 2008, 152).<sup>248</sup>

The notion of disposition appears in the context of reflexion about *what* constitutes believing as opposed to the content believed, given that there are various different attitudes that may be taken towards the same content. For example, *I hope* she will come tonight, *I am afraid* she will come tonight, *I think* she will come tonight; these are different attitudes towards a same content. Russell discusses and criticizes a theory of belief which defines “belief” by efficacy in causing voluntary movements, that is, focusing merely on the effects. According to this perspective, that Russell intends to combat, a content is said to be “believed” when it causes us to move; when it causes bodily movements.

The first objection to this theory is that many things which we certainly believe do not call for any bodily movements; for example, “I believe that Great Britain is an island”, or “I believe that Charles I was executed”. However, Russell admits that when we investigate the matter more closely it becomes more doubtful:

To begin with, we must distinguish *belief as a mere disposition* [my emphasis] from actual active belief. We speak as if we always believed that Charles I was executed, but that only means that we are always ready to believe it when the subject comes up. The phenomenon we are concerned to analyse is the active belief, not the *permanent disposition* [my emphasis]. Now, what are the occasions when we actively believe that Charles I was executed? Primarily: examinations, when we perform the bodily movement of writing it down; conversation, when we assert it to display our historical erudition; and political discourses, when we are engaged in showing what Soviet government leads to. In all these cases bodily movements (writing or speaking) result from our belief. (Russell 2008, 159)

To this response, Russell replies that

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<sup>248</sup> If this is so, then, I find it difficult to accommodate this view with Russell’s critique of Brentano’s view, presented in lecture I. The distinction between believing and what is believed is a distinction between the mental event and its content, or object. However, Russell explicitly rejects Brentano’s view that mental phenomena have a relation to their objects and Meinong’s thesis that there can be no thought without an object, for the connection between the two is essential (Russell 2008, 15-16). It may be argued that Russell is concerned with the mentalistic idea that relation to the object is the most important and irreducible characteristic of the mental, but still his distinction between process of believing and object believed does seem to fall into the perspective he intends to combat.

the conclusion seems to be that, although a belief always may influence action if it becomes relevant to a practical issue, it often exists *actively* (*not as a mere disposition*) [my emphasis] without producing any voluntary movement whatever. (Russell 2008, 160)<sup>249</sup>

In this context, Russell does not further specify his notion of disposition; no definition, even partial, is provided and there is no reference to other philosophers or other dispositional theories. However, we might nonetheless highlight some points if we consider both passages cited above.

First of all, there seems to be a tension in the characterisation of the disposition. On the one hand, in the first context discussed, Russell gives a definition of disposition as mnemonic portion of a mnemonic causal law. This definition stands on a notion of disposition that is used in contrast to the notion of “actual”. A disposition is not something actual. This comes from passage 2 as well, where the “mere disposition” is distinguished from the “active and actual belief”. In both passages, a disposition is thought to be latent, but not in an actualized form, as entailed by the discussed “shadowy model”. On the other hand, Russell talks about permanent dispositions as “being always ready to”: is a disposition permanent by definition? Are there permanent and non-permanent dispositions? It seems to me to be a way of stating that such a disposition is not actual, but then the above characterisation of what is latent does not seem to fit with the idea of a permanent disposition, for a certain degree of hypostatisation seems to be presupposed.

Secondly, Russell’s notion of disposition does not coincide with the notion of disposition as a state of a physical apparatus, discussed by Wittgenstein in PI §149). I do not think we are dealing with a materialistic notion of disposition; however, a disposition seems to be a state, or a property, as assumed within the current paradigm. It is state which is not actual, but latent. Moreover, Russell shares with the current paradigm also the intimate connection between dispositions and causality, because he seems to see the stimulus-manifestation relation as a cause-effect relation. Indeed, the disposition is considered a portion of a mnemonic causal law. This observation suggests the idea that dispositions contribute to cause the psychological phenomena.

Finally, Russell too presents a kind of dispositional theory of understanding: understanding is a disposition, that is, something that is capable of being aroused when we hear the word or think of it. Russell contrasts the dispositional account with the view that understanding is an *actual* existent

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<sup>249</sup> Russell’s remarks against such a conception of belief are similar to Wittgenstein’s remarks against the causal conception of language. As we have seen in chapter 7, in the 30’s Wittgenstein criticized the idea that language signs induce movements, or reactions thanks’ to training. This picture of language informs the misleading characterisation of the order as the sign that *causes* a certain action given a process of association (VW, 91-99). The causal conception of order echoes the characterisation of belief that Russell wants to combat: the idea that a belief causes bodily movements. This might be another aspect which testifies the fact that Wittgenstein might have been familiar with Russell’s book.

content of mind. Again, even here, it seems to me that Russell thinks of dispositions as something not actual: “latent” is employed in opposition to “actual existent” which, I suggest, refers to the misleading picture of a latent but already actualized thing which occurs in the mental realm.

## 8.2 A difficult task

At this point of the research, a methodological concern has to be faced. The concern is about the proper way to connect the first part of the research – the current paradigm on dispositions – and the second part of the research – Wittgenstein and dispositions – given the great difference between the two paradigms. I employ the term “paradigm” for a specific purpose: these are not merely two different views on dispositions; rather, we can speak about two different paradigms on dispositions which differ in basic presuppositions, methodology and goals. Actually, the two paradigms have interacted throughout the work and connections have been suggested between the two; I have tried to show how Wittgenstein’s dispositionalism differs from the current paradigm and how it avoids the misleading presuppositions presented in the first part. However, the difficult task is to legitimize the idea that Wittgenstein’s perspective is not completely elusive, even though it cannot provide a direct response or solution to the main issues of the contemporary research on dispositions.

The difficulty is due to three main differences, which derive from Wittgenstein’s own conception of philosophy:

1. Theoretical character vs a-theoretical character of philosophy. Nowadays, the idea that philosophers engage with theories and elaborate theories is, at least within philosophers themselves, almost a platitude. Contemporary metaphysics elaborate specific theories on dispositions, on their metaphysical status, or they suggest dispositional theories of traditional philosophical concepts. In any case, it seems to be obvious that philosophical research is made up by specific theories: philosophers present and discuss particular *thesis* that can be demonstrated or refuted. Indeed, what philosophers would do otherwise? However, this is not what Wittgenstein thinks philosophy consists in. Throughout his life, he firmly maintained that philosophy is not a doctrine and that philosophical research should not consist in the elaboration of theories. Indeed, if we look at recent reconstructions of the history of analytical philosophy, Wittgenstein seems to be the most controversial figure, given his peculiar philosophical style and his resistance to the elaboration of philosophical theories (Andronico 2002, 81).

What is important to note is that the a-theoretical character of philosophy should be understood in the light of the difference between philosophy and science; the rejection of the continuity thesis which will be at the centre of Quine’s perspective and the philosophical trend of philosophy from the

second half of the twentieth Century.<sup>250</sup> Already in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein firmly states that philosophy is not one of the natural sciences because it is not a corpus of positive knowledge about the world: philosophy is not a proper discipline, rather it is an *activity* which clarifies language and highlights the misunderstandings to which people are subjected when they speak nonsense.<sup>251</sup> However, at the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein criticizes his first work because he thinks it is not a good expression of the correct philosophical method: it is still a dogmatic work, for the clarificatory role of philosophy stands on the particular theory on propositions – the picture theory – whereas philosophical activity should be free from any theoretical formulation. How could we then talk about language, deal with language, without elaborating any theories about language? Wittgenstein specifies that philosophy should describe and quietly weight «linguistic facts» (Z §447) in order to represent them perspicuously: the aim of philosophy is the perspicuous representation (*übersichtliche Darstellung*) of the grammar of linguistic expressions, for philosophical confusion comes from misunderstandings incorporated in language and language use.

2. Metaphysical interest vs critique of metaphysics. The obliteration of the distinction between philosophical conceptual enquiry and scientific factual enquiry is the mark of metaphysics. According to Wittgenstein, the traditional metaphysical mistake is to consider as factual propositions those that are grammatical. «Philosophical investigations: conceptual investigations. The essential thing about metaphysics: it obliterates the distinction between factual and conceptual investigations» (Z §458). An empirical, or factual proposition, talks about something; it describes an aspect of the world and, in virtue of this, it has truth-conditions, that is, it can be true or false. A grammatical proposition, by contrast, does not describe an aspect of the world; it expresses the rules that govern the use of linguistic expressions and, in virtue of this, it cannot be true or false. It is like a standard of measurement, or a paradigm.<sup>252</sup> Perissinotto (2010, 113) helps grasping this point by distinguishing

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<sup>250</sup> Tripodi (2009) argues that Wittgenstein's rejection of the continuity thesis is one of the factors that contributed to the decline of interest of Wittgenstein's philosophy in the context of Anglo-American philosophy from the second half of the twentieth Century. Wittgenstein's a-theoretical conception of philosophy and his critique of metaphysics seemed incompatible with the philosophical spirit of that time: such a spirit was influenced on the one hand by the naturalistic Quinian philosophy and, on the other hand, by the metaphysical flavour of Kripke's philosophy. Wittgenstein's philosophy was easily considered anti-naturalistic and obsolete, partly due to Wittgenstein's attitude towards the challenge of the scientific knowledge: philosophers considered inadequate Wittgenstein's responses to this challenge, i.e., an excessive delimitation of the role and objects of science and the rigid separation between philosophical conceptual analysis and the theoretical character of science (Tripodi 2009, 432).

<sup>251</sup> «Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences. (The word 'philosophy' must mean something whose place is above or below the natural sciences, not beside them.)» (TLP 4.111). «Philosophy aims at the logical clarify cation of thoughts. Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations. Philosophy does not result in 'philosophical propositions', but rather in the clarification of propositions. Without philosophy thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct: its task is to make them clear and to give them sharp boundaries» (TLP 4.112).

<sup>252</sup> The distinction is functional. A proposition is empirical, or grammatical, in virtue of the way it is used, not in virtue of some intrinsic feature. The same proposition can play a factual role and then a grammatical role.

between propositions that describe a language game – they exhibit its rules and they delimit its region – and propositions that are moves of the language game.<sup>253</sup>

Let us consider the following proposition *P*: “A rose cannot be entirely red and entirely green at the same time”. If I consider *P* empirical, then I am inclined to think that *P* talks about some aspect of reality external to me and independent from the activity of conceptualisation; therefore, I take *P* to be true if it correctly depicts such a reality. If I take *P* to be empirical, I take it to say something substantial about roses. According to Wittgenstein, this is exactly a metaphysical illusion that can be avoided only if we realize that *P* plays a grammatical role, hence it is a grammatical proposition: *P* governs the use of the expressions “entirely”, “red”, and “green”. Indeed, we could employ *P* in the presence of a subject which does not master the grammar of the terms involved. In other words, metaphysics, by obliterating the distinction between empirical and grammatical, tends to hypostatized rules of language.

3. Hypostatisation vs de-substantialization of dispositions. As we have seen, current debates on dispositions are mainly about the ontological status of dispositions and they presuppose the hypostatisation of dispositions. However, hypostatization is exactly what Wittgenstein criticizes, together with authors who, at least in part, endorse his perspective, such as Kenny and Ryle.

Given the traditional empirical problem of the inaccessibility of dispositions, philosophers tended to give two main solutions: dispositions are either autonomous real entities of the world that can be legitimized through metaphysical demonstration (Mumford 1998, Molnar 2007) – no matter the empirical evidence – or they are mere heuristic tools destined to be substituted at some point by more precise scientific language and explanation (Quine 1975). The first response, through being still naturalized, incorporates a kind of mentalistic conception of dispositions, for they are thought to be inner states or properties which are latent but already actualized, while the second response gives a behaviouristic account of dispositions merely in terms of causal connection between stimulus and response. On the contrary, Wittgenstein’s kind of dispositionalism constitutes a third way between mentalism and behaviourism, because the notion of disposition is used precisely to avoid both extremes.

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<sup>253</sup> «Why don't I call cookery rules arbitrary, and why am I tempted to call the rules of grammar arbitrary? Because 'cookery' is defined by its end, whereas 'speaking' is not. That is why the use of language is in a certain sense autonomous, as cooking and washing are not. You cook badly if you are guided in your cooking by rules other than the right ones; but if you follow other rules than those of chess you are *playing another game*; and if you follow grammatical rules other than such-and-such ones, that does not mean you say something wrong, no, you are speaking of something else» (Z §320).

It is difficult to give a proper account of dispositions, and both mentalism and behaviourism are not free from critics and counterexamples. Nevertheless, reflection on the levels of description of human action suggests a sort of indispensability of the dispositional talk; even if we don't hypostatise dispositions, the concept of disposition seems useful and important in philosophy, so it cannot be completely eliminated. Given this, how can we highlight this importance without endorsing current metaphysical-ontological approaches – namely, without giving dispositions ontological autonomy – and without conceiving of dispositions as mere heuristic tools?

Authors belonging to the current paradigm employ a naturalized notion of disposition and they consider dispositions as something alien to normativity. Throughout the whole work a tried to show that the very same naturalized concept is not completely free from normative elements; consequently, the concept of disposition is not “so naturalized” and scientifically acceptable as naturalists think it is. I think that this means that the metaphysical debate is self-sufficient only superficially, because if we look closer, we could see that the debate gains authority and importance from a notion of disposition which is broader than the presupposed one. The current debate uses and transforms a notion of disposition which is taken from ordinary language and that already has a physiognomy and a use; that use, however, does not coincide with the technical one assumed in the more specific debates. Authors, indeed, generally treat the term “disposition” as a term with one and only one definite meaning, but this assumption contrasts with the plurality of circumstances and uses of the term in ordinary language and in the history of philosophy.

In what follows, I will argue that my strategy gains further philosophical evidence and legitimacy if we critically operate with Ryle's notion of “para-mechanical fallacy”, as it is presented in *The Concept of Mind*. Wittgenstein criticizes a particular use of the term “disposition”: according to such a misleading use dispositions, or abilities are latent depositaries of unmanifested actions that are nevertheless predetermined and actualized in the realm of possibility. This is the “shadowy model”. This use is incorporated in the current naturalized paradigm too, and in the conception of potentiality as something that lies in a box. As we have seen, Russell too tries to characterize the concept of potentiality without assuming the existence of latent but predetermined objects in the mental realm. Given this, the core question is the following: could we speak about latent dispositions without adhering to the deceptive conception of possibility as “shadowy reality”? In other words, could we speak about latent dispositions without thinking about dispositions as latent but actualized hidden entities that are simply empirically inaccessible because they occupy the realm of possibility?

I will expound my point in three steps:

1. Firstly, I will state that current metaphysical debates stand on what Wittgenstein thinks to be the traditional mistake of metaphysics: the confusion between the grammatical and the factual, or empirical. This point gets clearer if we look also at Ryle's distinction between concrete factual questions about something and questions about the concept of that something (Ryle 2009).

2. Secondly, in the next chapter I will show that it is desirable to reflect not merely upon a concept of latent still not actualized disposition, but to work with a concept of latent disposition without assuming that such a disposition is actualised *like something in particular is*. The misleading picture of disposition informed by the "shadowy model" would then constitute what Ryle (1990) calls a *category mistake*.

3. Finally, I will present some examples of philosophical views that include a de-naturalized and normative notion of disposition.

In the following paragraph, I will deal with point number 1.

### **8.3 Empirical questions vs conceptual questions**

In order to introduce the central point of this paragraph, I suggest to think about two different kinds of object of enquiry: we can distinguish between dispositions that produce something mental and dispositions that produce something material, or we might rather distinguish between dispositions that are themselves something material and dispositions that are mental. Both distinctions are meant to settle in some way the intuitive distinction between physical dispositions, such as fragility, solubility, conductivity, and what we may call psychological dispositions, or mental dispositions, such as character traits, but also abilities and skills. However, there is an important difference between the two: in the former case, no substantial account of the entity disposition is necessarily involved, for what is mainly taken into consideration is the characteristic manifestation of the disposition: the manifestation, rather than the stimulus conditions, is employed as a criterion for identifying the disposition and such a criterion is internal and logical, i.e., it belongs to the grammar of the dispositional concept. In the latter case, by contrast, what is at issue is the nature or status of dispositions taken as real entities of the world. As we have seen, the current paradigm incorporates the latter approach, while the Wittgensteinian and de-naturalized account on dispositions incorporates the first.

The starting distinction also suggests a difference between two types of enquiry on dispositions: an enquiry about *the nature* of the dispositional entity, and an enquiry about *the concept* of disposition, or the use of the notion. In other words, the distinction is between *factual* enquiry and *conceptual* or, using a Wittgensteinian vocabulary, *grammatical* enquiry. But working on concepts,

again, might seem elusive, for indeed it does not provide appropriate answers to current debates. It does seem to simply avoid the discussion of what is thought to be the central point of the matter. However, I argue that a conceptual approach is indeed elusive only if we pretend it to be an answer to a factual problem. Current debates on dispositions stand on the idea that the question “what is a disposition?” is a factual, or empirical one; consequently, in order to answer it we should point to something and that something can be discovered through experiments. By contrast, I tried to show that some of the main issues stand on some misleading presuppositions, hence what should be clarified is primarily the concept of disposition.

A metaphysical question is always in appearance a factual one, although the problem is a conceptual one. (RPP I §949)

The question “what is a disposition?” should be addressed as a conceptual question about the use of the notion and any factual response would be of no use. In particular, such a question would be a grammatical one, or a conceptual question of the type presented by Ryle in his article “Abstractions” dated 1962.

### 8.3.1 Physiology (sometimes) misses the mark

But what is a conceptual enquiry? In order to answer the question, it might be useful to specify what Wittgenstein opposes to the conceptual enquiry, that is, the factual one. Factual enquiries are what constitute science, broadly conceived.<sup>254</sup> Factual investigations of phenomena (1) aim at discovering their *possible causes* and the natural facts that lie at their bottom (RPP I §46); (2) knowledge about possible causes permits to *predict* phenomena (RPP I §46) and, finally (3) experiments are thought to be the best method to achieve the goal and resolve problems (RPP I §1039). Concerning language, a factual enquiry would treat language as a natural phenomenon that has to be explained through the discovery of the possible causes of adopted concepts and the natural facts on which they are grounded.

However, as we have seen in chapter 5, although Wittgenstein clearly establishes a relation between concepts and general facts of nature, he explicitly specifies that this does not amount to transforming philosophy into natural science.

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<sup>254</sup> To be precise, when Wittgenstein talks about science, he has in mind experimental sciences. In particular, together with Carnap, he considers physics as the ideal science. Wittgenstein thinks that physics is intrinsically linked to the idea of measure and to engineering. «One of the most important things about an explanation [in Physics R, T] is that it should work, that it should enable us to predict something [successfully – T]. Physics is connected with Engineering. The bridge must not fall down» (LC, 27). However, differently from Carnap, he does not seem inclined to extend the analogy between physics and other sciences. «When we are studying psychology, we may feel there is something unsatisfactory, some difficulty about the whole subject or study – because we are taking physics as our ideal science. We think of formulating laws as in physics. And then we find we cannot use the same sort of 'metric', the same idea of measurement as in physics» (LC, 42).

The correspondence between our grammar and general (seldom mentioned) facts of nature does concern us. But our interest does not fall back on these *possible* causes. We are not pursuing a natural science; our aim is not to predict anything. (RPP I §46)

If colours were to play a different role in the human world than they now do, what consequences would this have for colour concepts? This is actually a question of natural science, and I don't want to ask such a question. (RPP I §207)

The distinction between conceptual enquiry and factual enquiry is at the centre of Wittgenstein's observations in the *Remarks on the Philosophy of psychology*. This collection of remarks is particularly important for two reasons: 1. Wittgenstein deals with the difficulty of defending the need and the importance of a conceptual enquiry against the idea that rejection of theories would lead to rejection of philosophy itself; 2. Wittgenstein's treatment of psychological concepts constitutes a concrete example of application of such a methodological distinction that can be applied to the case of dispositional concepts too.

The latter point must be expounded. Someone might wonder why we are legitimized to look at Wittgenstein's philosophy of psychology in order to sustain ideas on dispositional concepts. I think we are legitimized for two main reasons: 1. Dispositional concepts – at least those applicable to human beings – constitute a kind of psychological concepts; 2. Even if we reject 1, I think that dispositional concepts fall under the main characteristic that Wittgenstein ascribes to psychological concept, that is, the fact that they are concepts of ordinary life. Like psychological concepts, dispositional concepts «are just everyday concepts» (RPP II §62), «embedded in human life, in all of the situations and reactions which constitute human life» (RPP II §16). They are not «concepts newly fashioned by science for its own purpose, as are the concepts of physics and chemistry» (RPP §62); indeed, even if the concept of disposition got, in a certain sense, technical in contemporary debates on the topic, it “was born” ordinary. The ordinary concept, embedded in human life and activities, became a technical term employed in metaphysical discussions.

If this so, then, it would be useful to see what Wittgenstein has to argue against the naturalizing tendency in psychology, for it clearly echoes the naturalizing move operated on the concept of disposition. Actually, Wittgenstein himself does not talk about naturalization; rather, he deals with what he calls the metaphysical mistake, i.e., the confusion between the factual and the conceptual. However, what I here mean by naturalizing move falls under the very same mistake, for it stands on the mistake of trying to answer empirically to a conceptual problem. Wittgenstein's critical target, as stated by Perissinotto (2018, 219), is exemplified by the view endorsed by Wolfgang Kölher; Kölher thought that the confusion in psychology – for example, issues regarding the nature of thought –

should be explained by its being a "young science". Consequently, experimental development is what is needed in order to improve our way of dealing with problems that keep worrying us (RPP I §1039). According to such a view, a psychologist would be one that tries to «determine what matter and spirit are by chemical experiments» (RPP I §1093), or that thinks that only physiological explanations of psychological phenomena are to be considered real explanations. To such a perspective, Wittgenstein objects that, first, experiments «quite by-pass the thing that is worrying us» (RPP I §1039), for thinking is considered an enigmatic process and experiments are done «without realizing *what* it is that makes thinking enigmatic to us» (RPP I §1093). Secondly, trusting the experimental method means «assuming that confusion in psychology comes from the lack of experimental data and, consequently, that there can be an experimental response to a conceptual confusion» (Perissinotto 2018, 220, my translation). However, this is exactly the source of the failure of experiments in dealing with such a confusion: experiments cannot succeed for they cannot be the proper way to deal with a conceptual problem; what is needed is a conceptual enquiry and a grammatical elucidation of the concept. Physiology, sometimes, misses the mark. Of course, this does not mean that Wittgenstein is rejecting physiology *in toto*; surely, we can try to enquire sadness or jealousy experimentally. What he wants to criticize is «the assumption that only from them [experimental explanations] there can be a clarification of conceptual problems in psychology» (Perissinotto 2018, 223, my translation).

Concretely, Wittgenstein thinks that conceptual clarification consists in putting concepts in the proper drawer, in the proper category. Putting something in the wrong category leads to considering it intelligible, mysterious, difficult to describe; here lies then the mentalistic tendency to postulate mental and ghostly reams in order to accommodate what cannot be accounted for using laws and principles taken from science.

Don't put the phenomenon in the wrong drawer. *There* it looks ghostly, intangible, uncanny. Looking at it rightly, we no more think of its intangibility than we do of time's intangibility when we hear: "It's time for dinner.". (RPP I §380)

The second part of the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, indeed, contains a sketch of the «plan for the treatment of psychological concepts» (RPP II §63) and, as we have seen in chapter 7, it is in this context that Wittgenstein employs the notion of disposition in opposition to the notion of state of consciousness. Such a plan is one of the ways in which Wittgenstein tries to achieve what it should be achieved through a conceptual enquiry: mastering «the kinships and differences of the concepts» (RPP I §1054), connections and the analogies between concepts. Conceptual classification, however, has two main features that have to be always kept in mind: 1. It does not stand on the recognition of a common element which is possessed by all the elements constituting one specific

category; 2. It is not comparable to the kind of classification employed in natural sciences, such as botanic. Conceptual distinctions «are not like distinctions of botanical variety: they are distinction of category. [...] it is like the difference between King and Queen in chess» (LPP, 60).

Let us consider a “famous” conceptual problem around the concept of sadness: what is sadness? is it a sensation? Should we put sadness in the drawer of sensations? Followers of Köhler would try to answer the first question by doing some experiments on subjects. They would do a physiological research. It might be discovered, for example, that «the glands of a sad man secrete differently from those of a cheerful one; also, that this secretion is the, or a, cause of sadness» (RPP I §802). Such a discovery would be of great importance in medicine. However, the point is whether such a discovery would help us in classifying sadness. «Does it follow from this that sadness is a *sensation* brought about by this secretion?» (RPP I §802). Wittgenstein’s answer is negative. Such a discovery does not provide an answer to the conceptual problem. The difficulty is expressed by the following example, presented by Perissinotto (2018, 223-224, my translation): let us suppose that I feel sad and I affirm to be sad even if the secretion of my glands is different from the one predicted by experiments; «would we be disposed to object that I cannot be sad and I merely believe to be sad because the correspondent glands secretion is lacking?». Evidently not.

Now let us go back to the case of dispositions. The question “what is a disposition?” is a conceptual one. It concerns the physiognomy of the concept; its use in language. If the question is taken to be factual, then we encounter the already discussed difficulties: dispositions seem something mysterious, difficult to be grasped and classified. Such a question is about the correct drawer into which dispositional concepts should we put: such a drawer is different, for example, from the one of material objects. But it is also different from the one containing episodes and occasions, for potentiality is one of the main marks of the dispositional.

In 2013 on *The Guardian* appeared an article called “Jealousy: it’s in your genes”.<sup>255</sup> A Swedish research, published online by Cambridge University Press, aimed to demonstrate that there is genetic influence on jealousy (Walum, Larson, Westberg et all. 2013).<sup>256</sup> Researchers compared the answers given by 3,000 pairs of Swedish twins and they argued that levels of jealousy across the population are likely to be genetic in origin. Moreover, women reported more jealousy than men and they were more troubled by the thought of potential emotional infidelity rather than the thought that a partner had been sexually unfaithful, while the contrary applies to men. Great news! If jealousy is in our

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<sup>255</sup> URL : <https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2013/nov/01/jealousy-genes>

<sup>256</sup> URL: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/twin-research-and-human-genetics/article/sex-differences-in-jealousy-a-populationbased-twin-study-in-sweden/13A32725C74065D017B795E6D2BE4606>

genes it might be kept under control; maybe researchers will find out that this difference is due to two particular genes, one possessed by women, the other possessed by men. Let us suppose that this particular gene has been actually discovered: is jealousy such a gene? Could we use such a discovery to dissipate conceptual confusions on the concept of jealousy and, in general, dispositions? That the answer is negative is suggested by the fact that the concept of jealousy is already at work in our acknowledging the experiment; even more: the concept is already presupposed by researchers too! It cannot be what is discovered, for it was, in a certain sense, the guiding concept that provided the direction of the research. In order to state that jealousy is in human being's genes we need to know what jealousy is; we need to master the concept, hence, we need to know the meaning of the term "jealousy"; therefore, such a discovery cannot be the answer to a conceptual problem. It can be an interesting improvement in science: it can indicate the causes of jealousy. Maybe it can be the starting point for researches aimed at implementing pharmacological cures to fight pathological jealousy. However, it cannot tell in which drawer jealousy should be put, for categorisation is already presupposed.

Moreover, the meaning of the term "jealousy", like the meaning of many other dispositional terms, "disposition" included, is learned neither through experiments, nor through introspection. Such concepts, as the concept of thinking, or the concept of sadness, are learned «by living with people» (RPP II §29). If a child has not mastered the concept of jealousy, if he does not know what jealousy is, reporting to him the experiment and the above discovery would be of no use.

The distinction between the factual and the conceptual is something that Ryle too is careful to bear in mind. My point, therefore, finds further evidence in Ryle's distinction between concrete questions and abstract questions.

### **8.3.2 “Spontaneous in the morning.... puzzled in the afternoon”: ordinary practices vs philosophical reflection**

St. Augustine perfectly knew that what happened yesterday is more recent than what happened three days before. He knew how to specify dates and times. He surely was able to talk about time in ordinary conversations; that is, the term "time" surely appeared in some ordinary and unproblematic sentences. However, he could not give a reply to the abstract question "What is Time?" Is Time a thing, or a process, or a relation?

Similarly, we can presume that Hume perfectly knew how to distinguish in ordinary life between fortuitous coincidence from non-fortuitous conjunctions of affairs. For example, he was able to distinguish between the occasion when he met a friend by chance and the occasion when he met a

friend by appointment; again, he knew how to distinguish between the case of a player who wins purely by sheer luck and the case of a player who wins thanks to strategy. Still, according to Ryle, he failed to answer the abstract question about what chance is. Hume connects chance to something whose cause is unknown to us, hence the phrase “by chance” is thought to be equivalent to the phrase “from unknown cause”. However, this cannot be true, for we are ignorant of the cause of many things – such as cancer – that we would never say come by chance.

He says that since whatever comes about is due to some cause, and since chance is not a cause, therefore, to say that something, like a meeting between friends, has come about by chance can only mean that it has come about from some cause of which we are ignorant. But this answer must be wrong, for though we are ignorant of the cause of cancer, we should never say that cancer comes about by chance. (Ryle 2009, 449)

Taking a case even more familiar to us. We would not be embarrassed if asked questions about knowledge such as “Do you still know the formula of Pythagoras’ theorem?”, or, “Do you know the date of the French revolution?”. Still, we would be puzzled if asked the abstract question “What is knowledge?”. Philosophers are puzzled as well: is knowledge a state? A process? Is it an experience, or a sensation?

What is the difference between the two cases? Why are we able to deal with concrete tasks and still be unable to answer abstract questions about the concept used? Ryle makes sense of the above observation with the distinction between concrete factual questions about something and questions about the concept of that something.

Questions like those that perplexed Augustine and defeated Hume, namely the abstract questions about Time and Chance, can be classified as conceptual questions. They are questions *about* Concepts. But a question such as ‘How long did the battle last?’ or ‘Did the friends meet by chance or by design?’ is a question *about* a battle or a meeting. Here the ideas of temporal duration and of fortuitousness are being operated *with*; but they are not here being operated *upon*. (Ryle 2009, 450)

The common impasse is further clarified through the metaphor of morning and afternoon: in the morning we do not feel embarrassed by concrete factual questions such as “Do you still know the date of the French revolution?”, or “At what age did you learn Pythagoras theorem?”; however, in the afternoon we feel embarrassed by the abstract question “What is knowledge?”. While in the former case the idea of knowledge is *operated with*, in the latter case the idea is *operated upon*.

Let us see how this works with the case of dispositions. In the first chapter I have drawn a distinction between the use of dispositional terms in order to give an account of something, i.e. applied dispositionalism, and theories on dispositions. Here I suggest another important distinction: the use of dispositional terms, and/or the term “disposition”, whether in the context of applied dispositionalism or in the context of metaphysical theories on dispositions, and the grammatical, or conceptual enquiry about the concept of disposition. In the first case, the notion of disposition is an evaluative term, while in the second case it is the evaluated term. What I want to highlight is the fact that specific studies on dispositions work with a notion of disposition as an evaluative term, and conceptual clarification of the concept itself is often missing. Indeed, we might perfectly add another example to Ryle’s list: we perfectly know how to use some dispositional words; we know what it means for sugar to be soluble, we perfectly manage to employ dispositional terms about character, we can answer the question whether we are able to play tennis or football, we sometimes say that we are disposed/not disposed to do such and such. However, we might find difficulties in answering the abstract question: “What is a disposition?”. Is it a state? An event? The recent debate seems to presuppose that such a question is a factual one. Scholars then try to argue what kind of thing a disposition is. However, the question point is in what drawer dispositions should be put in. The question is a question about the proper category and, as Wittgenstein taught us, questions concerning proper categories are conceptual questions, or abstract questions, in Ryle’s terms. We know how to operate with dispositional concepts, but we feel puzzled when the idea of the dispositional is operated upon.

If we are perfectly at home with the idea of things known and unknown, with fortuitous things and duration, with potential behaviours and actual behaviours, and then we find challenged to describe what it was that we were earlier familiar with, why do we feel this need anyway? What is added? That is, why do we need to philosophize? Ryle’s metaphor of morning time and afternoon time illustrates the difference between ordinary use of concepts and philosophical reflection on the ideas involved. Interestingly, Ryle compares the philosophical work with the work of mapping; this image is extensively employed by Wittgenstein too in order to characterize the peculiarity of the philosophical work.

Instead of thinking of a man who knows onions from beetroots but cannot tell us to what botanical sorts they belong, let us now think instead of the inhabitant of a village who knows well every house, field, stream, road and pathway in the neighbourhood and is, for the first time, asked to draw or consult a map of his village—a map which shall join on properly to the maps of adjacent districts and in the end to the map of his country and even of his continent [...]. In the morning he can walk from the church to the railway station without ever losing his way. But now, in the

afternoon, he has to put down with compass bearings and distances in kilometres and metres the church, the railway station and the paths and roads between. In the morning he can show us the route from anywhere to anywhere; but it still puzzles him in the afternoon to describe those routes—describe them not just in words but in such cartographical terms that his local map will fit in with the maps of his entire region and country. (Ryle 2009, 454)

The conceptual work consists in showing the directions and the limits of the implication threads that a concept contributes to the statements in which it occurs. According to Ryle, the new ability involved – which is different from the “morning ability” to employ familiar concepts and concrete assertions – is to think systematically *about* what normally we think competently *with*. Mapping «a geography of our everyday talks» (Ryle 2009, 457).

Mapping dispositional concepts, however, does not consist in working with fixed and definite definitions. Conceptual elucidation puts each concept in the right place – its categorical space – but conceptual classification is different from classification employed, for example, in botanic. Types of concepts are not like botanical sorts. Reference to botanic, as we have seen, is extensively used by Wittgenstein too in order to highlight the specificity of the grammatical enquiry of psychological concepts. Dispositional concepts do not differ from each other like a Bartlett pear and a Red Anjou pear do; rather, they differ in virtue of their role in a system of language, like the various pieces that compose the game of chess.

In *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle presents a concrete example of such a kind of conceptual mapping. While in Wittgenstein’s plan dispositions constitute one of the drawers in which psychological concepts are allocated, together with emotions and states of consciousness, Ryle’s classification is about dispositional concepts themselves: he tries to allocate them in the proper drawer, or category.<sup>257</sup> Ryle classifies dispositional concepts in virtue of the way they are used and the objects to which they are applied. He rightly and efficaciously shows that the words we commonly use to describe and explain human behaviour are dispositional rather than episodic. Some dispositional words are applicable only to human beings, since their function is to give an account of an intelligent behaviour, while others are applicable to inanimate objects too (physical dispositions, natural capacities).<sup>258</sup> In this sense, it is important to notice that Ryle endorses an interesting kind of conceptual pluralism. He

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<sup>257</sup> Wittgenstein distinguishes between emotions (joy, fear, depression, etc.) and sensations, or impressions (sensations of pressure, temperature, etc.). They both have authentic duration, but emotions are not localised while sensations are. Emotions and sensations are what he calls “states of consciousness” (RPP II §53). He then distinguishes a third group of psychological concepts such as intending, believing, understanding and knowing which he calls «for the moment» “dispositions” (RPP II §45). See chapter 7.

<sup>258</sup> The possibility involved is logical in kind and neither physical, nor epistemological. It is a possibility related to the meaning of the term.

admits that «there is at our disposal an indefinitely wide range of dispositional terms for talking about things, living creatures and human beings» but he specifies that

we are concerned only with those which are appropriate to the characterization of such stretches of human behaviour as exhibit qualities of intellect and character. We are not concerned with any mere reflexes which may happen to be peculiar to men, or with any pieces of physiological equipment which happen to be peculiar to human anatomy. (Ryle 1990,121)

However, before going into the details of Ryle's classification of dispositional concepts a better understanding of the general goal of his masterpiece is needed. Therefore, I will expound this point in the next chapter, where we will mainly deal about Ryle's view on dispositions and the way it might elucidate the kind of mistake at the bottom of the naturalized conception of dispositions.

## Chapter 9

### From the “category mistake” to the “shadowy model”

At the end of the previous chapter I tried to show the way in which a naturalized conception of dispositions comes from a confusion between the factual and the conceptual. In this chapter I will argue that such a mistake is a category mistake in the sense expressed by Ryle in *The Concept of Mind* and that naturalization of dispositions in response to a conceptual question is another instance of the para-mechanical fallacy, hence it reduces to a kind of pseudo-science. Moreover, I will suggest that Ryle’s notion of category mistake applies to the kind of conceptual misunderstanding which stands at the basis of Wittgenstein’s picture of the “shadowy model”. The current paradigm on dispositions, therefore, is further approached through a sort of combination between Wittgenstein and Ryle: from the category mistake to the “shadowy model”. As we have seen in chapter 7, Wittgenstein’s remarks are meant to show that the misleading picture of abilities and dispositions as “shadowy performances” derives from the misleading picture of possibility as “shadowy reality”. Why is this picture misleading? My idea is that it constitutes what Ryle (1990) explicitly calls a category mistake, with the difference that it would be specifically about the notion of disposition and not, as we will see, about the notion of the mental.<sup>259</sup>

#### 9.1 Ryle’s para-mechanical fallacy

*The Concept of Mind* is Ryle’s first and best-known book, written in 1946. As clearly stated in the title, the object of the book is the notion of mind. In particular, Ryle attacks the traditional metaphysical view of mind-body dualism, which he thinks to be Cartesian in nature. It is important to specify that Ryle does enquire mind neither from a factual point of view, nor from a metaphysical one; rather, he intends to analyse the way in which people talk about the mind, the way in which terms are employed to speak about the mind. Indeed, he explicitly describes his book as a whole as a «discussion of the logical behaviour of some of the cardinal terms, dispositional, and occurrent, in which we talk about the mind» (Ryle 1990, 121). The work can be seen as a project of conceptual analysis of terms that Wittgenstein classifies within the domain of the philosophy of psychology, for the basic assumption is that traditional dualistic conception of the mind is problematic because it

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<sup>259</sup> Although a misleading conception of the mental stands at its bottom.

stands on a category mistake, hence it can be faced only through a clarification of the logical behaviour of the concepts involved.<sup>260</sup>

I will expound Ryle's view by focusing on the following three aspects:

1. The main critical target: the official doctrine about the mind;
2. Ryle's notion of category mistake;
3. Positive account of knowledge-how and intelligent capacities;

Points 1 and 2 constitute Ryle's *pars destruens*, while point 3 constitutes the *pars construens*.

#### 9.1.1 The official doctrine, a.k.a., “The dogma of the Ghost in the Machine”

According to Ryle (1990), the traditional metaphysical conception of mind, also called “the official doctrine”, hails from Descartes and it is essentially dualistic: it construes the nature of the mind in opposition to the nature of the body, so that people are described as living two parallel and collateral histories; the history of what happens in the body and the history of what happens in the mind. Such mind-body dualism is both ontological and epistemic or, at least, I would say, with epistemic consequences. Ryle's full passage about it is worth to be mentioned entirely:

With the doubtful exceptions of idiots and infants in arms every human being has both a body and a mind. [...] His body and his mind are ordinarily harnessed together, but after the death of the body his mind may continue to exist and function. Human bodies are in space and are subject to the mechanical laws which govern all other bodies in space. Bodily processes and states can be inspected by external observers. So a man's bodily life is as much a public affair as are the lives of animals and reptiles and even as the careers of tree, crystals and planets. But minds are not in space, nor are their operations subject to mechanical laws. The workings of the mind are not witnessable by other observers; its career is private. (Ryle 1990, 13)

Ryle presents the official doctrine through a sort of parallel between the body and the mind where mind is described by taking bodily features as a reference point: mental features are their contrary.

Mind	Body
Survives after death	Extinguishes with death
Not in space	Localised in space

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<sup>260</sup> The notion of logical behaviour plays a similar role to the one of the Wittgensteinian notion of grammar: it refers to the characteristic use of the term which constitutes its meaning. A word's logical behaviour is the way in which the word “behaves” – hence it is used – in language.

Not subjected to mechanical laws	Subjected to mechanical laws
Not observable states and processes	Observable states and processes (inspectable by external observers)
Privacy	Publicity
Inner/internal	Outer/external

While the body extinguishes with death, mind survives after death. While the body is localized in space, mind is not localized in space. However, if we speak about the mind and we state that humans have both body and mind, where does the mind stand? If mind does not occupy the physical space, then a specific realm of the mental is postulated in order to accommodate the fact that mind has to be somewhere. While the body is subjected to mechanical laws studied by sciences, mind is not subjected to mechanical laws. Again, if this is so, how does mind work? Proper mental laws are postulated in order to give an account of the way mind works and is constituted. Finally, while the body is observable and public, that is, it is constituted by observable states and processes, mind's processes are not observable for they are inner and only introspectable. Ryle (1990, 17) calls this perspective "the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine" because minds are characterized as gaseous and ghostly entities which inhabit a special realm inside the body, which is itself described using the analogy of the machine.

Such a picture, as already suggested, is underlined by three philosophical assumptions: (1) from an ontological point of view, two types of existence are postulated: physical existence and mental existence. Mental things exist differently from bodily things. There exist two different kinds of existence; (2) from an epistemic point of view, two different kinds of knowledge are presupposed, one concerning the mental and one concerning the body. Indeed, if the mental is inner, private and not subjected to physical laws, what kind of knowledge could we have of it? According to the official doctrine, the mental realm is known by direct acquaintance in the case of the first person and such a knowledge is guaranteed by consciousness, while in the case of the third person, knowledge of the mental is indirect and inferential and it is reached through analogy; (3) from a semantic point of view, the denotative, or referential model of mental vocabulary is presupposed: mental concepts denote inner and hidden episodes, events, and processes. Consequently, only an individual's own «privileged access to this stream [of consciousness] in direct awareness and introspection could provide authentic testimony that these mental-conduct verbs were correctly or incorrectly applied» (Ryle 1990, 17).

### 9.1.2 They are doing pseudo-science!

The first source of dissatisfaction towards the official theory lies in the fact that, given that minds are thought to be not in space, we can wonder how we describe them as being partially inside something, or as having things going on spatially inside them. To face such an impasse, two strategies are possible, according to Ryle, but both fail: on the one hand the antithesis between the outer and the inner can be meant to be a metaphor. However, if this is so, then theorists of the official doctrine relapse from this good intention for they actually try to give substance to the relation between the two different realms: they elaborate theories about how external stimuli can generate mental responses, or how mental processes cause external movements. On the other hand, theoretical difficulties arise even if we stick to the intention to treat the dichotomy as a metaphor: there remains the problem of how mind and body influence one another. The transactions are mysterious because by definition they cannot belong to neither of the two realms, so they reduce to mere «theoretical shuttlecocks which are forever being banded from the physiologist back to the psychologist and from the psychologist back to the physiologist» (Ryle 1990, 14).

The second source of dissatisfaction is more profound. Ryle wants to argue that the official doctrine is *entirely false*: «it is false not in detail, but *in principle* [my emphasis]» (Ryle 1990, 17), for «the central principles are unsound and conflict with the whole body of what we know about minds when we are not speculating about them» (Ryle 1990, 14). The doctrine's central principles are unsound because the doctrine stands on a *category mistake*.

My destructive purpose is to show that a family of radical category mistakes is the source of the double-life theory. (Ryle 1990, 19)

But what is a category mistake? Using a metaphor introduced in the previous chapter, we might define the category mistake as the allocation of something to the wrong drawer, or category. Broadly speaking, you commit a category mistake when you represent something as it belongs to one logical type or category when it actually belongs to another logical type or category. The notion is clarified by Ryle through four interesting illustrations (Ryle 1990, 17-19):

1. Let us imagine that a foreigner is visiting the University of Oxford for the first time. The category mistake is committed when the foreigner, after being shown colleges, libraries, museums, playing fields, and departments, asks where the University is. Such a question contains a category mistake, for the foreigner by asking it shows to have allocated the University in the same category of colleges, libraries, museums and so on. We should then explain to him that the University is not another institution counterpart to colleges, offices etc, but it is just «the way in which all that he has already seen is organized» (Ryle

1990, 18). The word “University” does not refer to an extra member of the class of the other visited units: it belongs to another category.

2. Let us take the case of a child watching a march-past of a division. The child sees battalions, batteries, squadrons, etc. The category mistake is committed when the child, after having seen all the units of the division, asks when the division is going to appear. He is supposing that the division is a counterpart to the units already seen, a further element still to be seen. However, the division does not belong to the same category of its units, because those units are units of the division. «He would be shown his mistake by being told that [...] the march-past was not a parade of battalions, batteries, squadrons *and* a division; it was a parade of the battalions, batteries and squadrons *of* a division» (Ryle 1990, 18).

3. A person is watching cricket for the first time. By looking the match, he learns what are the functions of the bowlers, the batsmen, the fielders, the umpires and the scorers. The category mistake is committed when he asks who contributes to the element of team-spirit. Such a question presupposes the idea that team-spirit belonged to the same category as bowlers, batsmen etc., hence that it would be an additional element constituting the team. To such a person «it would have been explained that he was looking for the wrong type of thing. Team-spirit is not another cricketing-operation supplementary to all of the other special tasks. It is, roughly, the keenness with which each of the special tasks is performed, and performing a task keenly is not performing two tasks» (Ryle 1990, 18).

4. Let us think about a student of politics and let us assume that he has learned the differences between the British, the French and the American constitutions. Moreover, he has also learned the differences between the Cabinet, the Parliament, the Ministers, the Judicature and the Church of England. However, he has problems in grasping the connections between the Church of England, the Home office and the British Constitution because «while the Church and the Home office are institutions, the British Constitution is not another institution in the same sense of that noun. [...] “The British Constitution” is not a term of the same logical type as “The Home Office”» (Ryle 1990, 19).

In every example, people allocate concepts to the wrong logical type, or category. However, there is a difference between the first three cases and the fourth one: while cases 1-3 are about non-competent speakers, that is, people that did not really know how to wield the concepts involved (the concepts of University, division and team-spirit), case 4 is about competent speakers who are able to apply concepts in ordinary speaking but they are liable to allocate those concepts to the wrong logical type

in abstract thinking. Given this, I think we might distinguish two main types of category mistake: (1) conceptual mistake, or lack of mastery of the concept which leads to wrong hypostatisation; (2) wrong logical allocation of familiar and habitual concepts in abstract thought. The latter type is interesting because it leads to an important theoretical consequence, that is, the characterisation of the postulated elements as occult, elusive and mysterious things.

So long as the student of politics continue to think of the British Constitution as a counterpart to the other institutions, he will tend to describe it as a mysteriously occult institution. (Ryle 1990, 19)

Having spelled out the notion of category mistake, we should now see how such a mistake is involved in the official theory about the mind. According to Ryle, mind-body dualism is construed inside the conceptual category of the physical – we might say, it is construed by adhering to the grammar of the mechanical – therefore mind is described by mere negative with a parallel with the body, as obverse to it, and inside the framework of the categories of “thing”, “cause”, “effect”, “change”, “state”, “stuff”.

As the human body is a complex organized unit, so the human mind must be another complex organized unit, though one made of a different sort of stuff and with a different sort of structure. Or, again, as the human body, like any other parcel of matter, is a field of causes and effects, so the mind must be another field of causes and effects, though not (heaven be praised) mechanical causes and effects. [...] Minds are things, but different sorts of things from bodies; mental processes are causes and effects, but different sorts of causes and effects from bodily movements. And so on. Somewhat as the foreigner expected the University to be an extra edifice, rather like a college but also considerably different, so the repudiators of mechanism represented minds as extra centres of causal processes, rather like machines but also considerably different from them. Their theory was a para-mechanical hypothesis. (Ryle 1990, 20-21)

A difference is postulated aprioristically between the mind and the body, but the differences between the two are represented inside the common framework of the category of the physical: the official doctrine represents the mind as belonging to the wrong logical category. This is the source of the expression “mental processes are like...but also different in...”: minds are represented like machines, but also essentially different from them, therefore the official doctrine maintains that «there exist both bodies and minds; that there occur physical processes and mental processes; that there are mechanical

cause of corporeal movements and mental causes of corporeal movements» (Ryle 1990, 23). This is what Ryle means by “para-mechanical” theory.<sup>261</sup>

Before moving to Ryle’s *pars construens*, two further points need to be clarified for the sake of the present argument. First of all, Ryle’s conceptual move is a philosophical move against the legitimacy of reduction, being it reduction of the mental to the physical or the other way around. If the official doctrine is composed by para-mechanical hypothesis, then it follows that «both Idealism and Materialism are answers to an improper question» (Ryle 1990, 23). The former reduces the material world to mental states and processes, while the latter reduces the mental states and processes to physical states and processes, but reduction itself presupposes the category mistake. According to Ryle, indeed, the two expressions “There exist minds” and “There exist bodies” are both meaningful, but they do not indicate two different species of existence; rather, they indicate two different senses of the expression “to exist”, they have a different «logical tone of voice» (Ryle 1990, 24).<sup>262</sup>

Secondly, it is interesting to highlight the source of such a para-mechanical model. According to Ryle, the para-mechanical model is grounded in a particular presupposition, namely, a pre-defined distinction between mind and body. That is why philosophers felt the need to construe and define the mental; they already presupposed that it was something different from the physical. Now, if this is so, then some criteria for the distinction were already operating and presupposed. Descartes and the others tried to characterised the mind by already assuming that it was different from the body. However, if so, then they were already using criteria for this distinction, they were already operating with a concept of mind.

The question ‘how persons differ from machines?’ arose just because everyone already knew how to apply mental-conduct concepts before the new causal hypothesis was introduced. This causal

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<sup>261</sup> I think this is something still present in Russell’s *The Analysis of Mind*: as we have seen, Russell (2008) maintains a distinction between physical causal laws and psychological causal laws. For this reason, I think that Ryle’s conceptual perspective is another philosophical move against mind and matter dualism. Russell’s *The Analysis of Mind* and James’ *Essays on Radical Empiricism* represent another kind of move: both Russell (2008) and James (1996) try to overcome cartesian dualism by postulating neutral stuff, the so called “neutral monism”. The move is metaphysical. By contrast, Ryle (1990) tries to dissipate the contrast by showing it to be illegitimate since it presupposes that both terms belong to the same logical type, whereas they do not.

<sup>262</sup> I think this is one of the reasons why we should stop thinking about Ryle as a logical behaviourist. Dennett (1990, ix) states that Ryle is a logical behaviourist. However, saying that the enquiry is about the logical behaviour of mental concepts – as Ryle actually does – does not mean adhering to logical behaviourism. Logical behaviourism is a reductionist project about the mind: as clearly stated by Benham (2000, 10) «the basic claim of logical behaviorism is that statements containing mental vocabulary can be analyzed into statements containing only the vocabulary of physical behavior». Logical behaviourists employ the notion of disposition in order to sustain a particular semantic thesis according to which mental terminology does not refer to unobserved phenomena located in the head of the subject, but rather to the observed dispositions to behave (an example is found in Hempel 1999). Ryle does not adhere to such a perspective for two reasons: firstly, he does not reduce meaning to behavioural dispositions of the speakers; secondly, as we have seen, he rejects reduction as another product of the category mistake. Ryle does not adhere to any reductionist project about the mental.

hypothesis could not therefore be the source of the criteria used in those applications. (Ryle 1990, 22).

Descartes «instead of asking by what criteria intelligent behaviour is actually distinguished from non-intelligent behaviour, he asked “given that the principle of mechanical causation does not tell us the difference, what other causal principle will tell it us?”» (Ryle 1990, 23). He then realised that the problem was not one of mechanics and assumed that it must therefore be one of some counterparts to mechanics. Hence, the conceptual character of Ryle’s enquiry. The antidote to the para-mechanical fallacy is a work of rectification of the logic of mental-conduct concepts.

I am not denying that there occur mental processes. But I am saying that the phrase ‘there occur mental processes does not mean the same sort of thing as ‘there occur physical processes’, and, therefore, that it makes no sense to conjoin or disjoin the two. (Ryle 1990, 23).

### 9.1.3 Against the “intellectualist legend”

The naturalized account of dispositions can be easily accommodated within the picture of the para-mechanical, for it stands on the same category mistake: first of all, as mind-body dualism is construed from a pre-constituted distinction between the two, the concept of disposition as a non-normative, causal property of the object is established by working with a pre-constituted notion of disposition which does not have such features and which is not naturalized; the project of naturalization borrows legitimacy from an ordinary notion of disposition which is embedded in ordinary language and in human life. Secondly, the characterization of human dispositions in terms of brain states or, in general, physiological states of the subject does not answer the conceptual question and it is another instance of the para-mechanical fallacy: naturalization, in this context, is a kind of pseudo-science, or para-science, for it pretends to give a scientific explanation in terms of experiments and hypothesis of something that is very difficult to be grasped by such a net. It is difficult to be grasped for such a method is not the one that we should rely on in order to disentangle a conceptual confusion. In other words, dispositions are something of a different logical type than things that can be seen or unseen through direct observation. Naturalists keep trying to accommodate dispositional concepts to the scientific net of the actual science, without thinking that maybe dispositional terms play a different role than the technical words of physics and mechanics and that they are used to give an account of a kind of behaviour which is different in kind from the one of the machines, for it is intelligent behaviour or, broadly, a behaviour which is expression of human being’s mental capacity. I think that dispositional terms that are employed to characterize humans’ intelligent behaviour should be understood within the broader discussion of the difference between propositional knowledge and knowledge-how for there also lies their normative character.

Even intuitively, it is recognized that when we say, for example, that Paul knows how to swim, we are talking about something different from the case when we say that Paul knows what is the chemical formula of oxygen. In the latter case we are alluding to Paul's theoretical knowledge while in the former case we are talking about Paul's practical knowledge. In ordinary language, such a difference is expressed by the two expressions "that" and "how": Paul knows *that* the chemical formula of oxygen is O<sub>2</sub>, and he knows *how* to swim. Ryle (1990, 2009) is perhaps most famous for making the distinction between knowledge-how – the practical knowledge, or ability to do things – and knowledge-that – propositional knowledge of some truths about the world.<sup>263</sup> He indeed introduces the importance of dispositional concepts by showing how they are employed to give an account of what the bearers can, or are able to do. We say that people know how to talk grammatically, to play chess, to swim, to make jokes, to play football, to argue, to write, etc. One of Ryle's main intuitions is that when we describe people as knowing how to do something, we do not merely mean that those people perform those activities well – correctly, efficiently, or successfully – that is, they satisfy certain standards, but that they correctly apply those criteria rather than merely satisfying them. The subject regulates his own actions and he does not satisfy the standard by chance.

A person's performance is described as careful or skilful, if in his operations he is ready to detect and correct lapses, to repeat and improve upon successes, to profit from the examples of others and so forth. He applies criteria in performing critically, that is, in trying to get things right. (Ryle 1990, 29)

Now, this intuition is commonly recognized but it is described in intellectualistic terms, that is, it is thought that an action exhibits intelligence if, and only if, the agent thinks about what he is doing while he is doing it and that the success of the performance is due to such a thinking process. Intellectualism has its roots in the official doctrine of the mind, "The dogma of the Ghost in the Machine", for it presupposes the dichotomy, both ontological and epistemic, between mind and body. Intellectualism about the mind resembles that kind of intellectualism that Wittgenstein thought to involve the concept of meaning: as the sign is thought to be a mere dead ink mark without the addition to some other extra element that should make it live and meaningful, so action is thought to be a mere physical process, a mere muscular affair, that needs to have a mental counterpart in order to be

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<sup>263</sup> The distinction between theory and practice has been at the centre of philosophy from ancient times. Already in Plato and Aristotle, indeed, we find a gnoseological interest in the distinction: whereas Plato, in the dialogue *Menon*, argues that moral conduct consists in the application of general moral rules to particular cases, Aristotle argues in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, that ethical knowledge is eminently practical, even it is accompanied by reason. However, the terminological distinction between knowledge-that and knowledge-how is the product of the twentieth century philosophy of language and it is found for the first time in Ryle (1990). See also Ryle's article "Knowing how and knowing that", in Ryle (2009, 222-235).

considered intelligent, skilful and cunning. In other words, the intellectualist legend is the view that knowledge-how depends on knowledge-that, so the two get assimilated.

Champions of this legend are apt to try to reassimilate knowing-how to knowing that by arguing that intelligent performance involves the observance of rules, or the application of criteria. It follows that the operation which is characterized as intelligent must be preceded by an intellectual acknowledgement of these rules or criteria. (Ryle 1990, 30)

Ryle does not mention any of the supporters of such a doctrine, however, as suggested by Kremer (2017), Stout (1901) represents a good example. In his *Manual of Psychology*, he distinguishes between “animal intelligence” and “human intelligence”: while the first is guided by perceptual processes and concerns action that is actually performed, the second depends on some ideational processes that permit the subject to construct schemes of action in the head before carrying them out. According to Stout (1901), not all intelligence depends on prior mental planning, but the higher form of human intelligence does. Such a perspective, for example, depicts the chef as someone that must recite the recipe to himself before he can cook the dish, it depicts the hero that saved two drowning men as someone that needs to reflect upon moral rules in his head before swimming into the open sea. The intellectualist legend constructs every human action as the product of some previous mental action performed inside the head. Such a legend is endorsed by the followers of mentalistic conceptions of Rule-following, which are at the centre of Wittgenstein’s criticism. Mentalism, as we have seen in chapter 5, is indeed the view that a mental intermediary is needed in order to follow rules: one first has to understand a rule, maybe repeating the rule to himself, and then he can apply it concretely, because the grasping of the rule is thought to provide secure guidance for the application of the general rule to the new case. Such illusion of pre-determination is captured by Wittgenstein through the metaphor of the rules-as rails, and the bridge that gets crossed even before arriving at it. Interestingly, we find the latter imagine in Stout (1901), one of the champions of intellectualism:<sup>264</sup>

Man constructs " in his head," by means of trains of ideas, schemes of action before he begins to carry them out. He is thus capable of overcoming difficulties in advance. He can cross a bridge before he comes to it. (Stout 1901, 276)

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<sup>264</sup> This observation suggests that Wittgenstein might have been familiar with this text. Stout’s passage is quoted in the exact same form in *The Blue Book*, and *The Philosophical Grammar*. «However many steps I insert between the thought and its application, each intermediate step always follows the previous one without any intermediate link, and so too the application follows the last intermediate step. We can't cross the bridge to the execution until we are there» (BB, 160), «We can't cross the bridge to the execution (of an order) until we are there» (PG VII §110), «Your idea really is that somehow in the mysterious act of *meaning* the rule you made the transitions without really making them. You crossed all the bridges before you were there» (BB, 141), «We meet again and again with this curious superstition, as one might be inclined to call it, that the mental act is capable of crossing a bridge before we've got to it» (BB, 143).

Ryle (1990) presents two objections to intellectualism: first of all, there are indeed «many classes of performances in which intelligence is displayed, but the rules or criteria of which are unformulated» (Ryle 1990, 30). In Wittgenstein's terms, this is implicit Rule-following. Not only rules and criteria are not always formulated and explicit, but they are often unknown. It is possible to learn an activity without knowing explicitly the rules: how many times do we find difficulties in explaining to a novice how to practice an activity that we perfectly master? We know how to do but we do not know how we do it. I am good at drawing, I can draw, but I cannot explain to someone how to do some kinds of shades, I can only show to them some drawings, or I can draw in front of them. Similarly, my father is an autodidact percussionist. He knows how to play the drum. However, he has never thought me. Secondly, intellectualism faces infinite regress:

The consideration of propositions is itself an operation the execution of which can be more or less intelligent, less or more stupid. But if, for any operation to be intelligently executed, a prior theoretical operation had first to be performed and performed intelligently, it would be a logical impossibility for anyone ever to break into the circle. (Ryle 1990, 31)

Moreover, if intelligent action needs a previous acknowledgement of maxims and reasons for acting, how are we led to make a suitable application of those maxims to the particular situation which action has to meet? «The endless of this implied regress shows that the application of the criterion of appropriateness does not entail the occurrence of a process of considering this criterion» (Ryle 1990, 31).

If intellectualism fails at giving a proper account of human being's abilities and skills, what is the correct positive account of knowledge-how? According to Ryle, knowledge-how is a multitrack disposition whose exercises and manifestations are observances of rules and canons for the application of criteria, rather than being «tandem operations of theoretically avowing maxims and then outing them into practice» (Ryle 1990, 46). Ryle's response to intellectualism involves the endorsement of a kind of dispositionalism which is neither metaphysical, nor naturalistic. It is a kind of dispositionalism that shares Wittgenstein's main sources of suspect against the use of the notion of disposition as a causal physical state of the subject – as a “shadowy performance” located in the realm of possibility.

In opposition to this doctrine, I try to show that intelligence is directly exercised as well in some practical performances as in some theoretical performances and that an intelligent performance need incorporate no ‘shadow-act’ of contemplating regulative propositions. Hence there is no gap between intelligence and practice corresponding to the familiar gap between theory and practice.

There is no need, therefore, to postulate any Janus-headed go-between faculty, which shall be both amenable to theory and influential over practice. (Ryle 1990, 223)

## 9.2 Ryle on dispositions

Overall, I think that Ryle's talk on disposition is interesting because it suggests the idea that adhering to the conditional analysis of dispositional statements does not imply endorsing a realist and naturalized conception of disposition. Ryle does not employ a naturalized notion of disposition, even though he is commonly cited among the authors that endorse the conditional analysis. Firstly, I will settle the background of Ryle's talk, then I will present Ryle's analysis and classification of dispositional terms.

### *Why thinking about dispositions?*

Ryle's interest in the notion of disposition comes from the fact that «a number of the words which we commonly use to describe and explain people's behaviour signify dispositions and not episodes» (Ryle 1990, 112). Dispositional words and statements are used in our talk about the mind and they help giving an account of knowledge-how.

To say that a person knows something, or aspires to be something, is not to say that he is at a particular moment in process of doing or undergoing anything, but that he is able to do certain things, when the need arises, or that he is prone to do and feel certain things in situations of certain sorts. (Ryle 1990, 112)

Ryle does not write about the nature of dispositions (metaphysical enquiry); he writes about the logical behaviour of dispositional words and statements because, if we need to clarify the vocabulary we use to speak about the mind and if such a vocabulary is mainly composed by dispositional words, then special attention should be given to this kind of terms and expressions.

### *The philosophical problem*

It is not sufficient to recognize the grammatical fact that many of the concepts we use to describe specifically human behaviour are dispositional concepts, because it is easy to ignore the ways in which these concepts actually behave. According to Ryle, the supporters of the para-mechanical legend did this mistake. That is why it is important to clarify the grammar of these concepts. In particular, the mistake consists in interpreting sentences embodying dispositional words as categorical reports of particular but unwitnessable matters of fact (Ryle 1990, 133).<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> This point is interesting because some authors argue that the recent distinction between dispositional and categorical properties is different from Ryle's distinction between dispositional words and episodic words. As stated in chapter 1, at

This is precisely what Wittgenstein tries to convey in *The Blue Book*, with the grammatical elucidation of the concept of power. As we have seen, the illustration of the various functions of such a term in language is meant to show that it is misleading to treat ascriptions of powers – abilities and skills – as descriptions and reports of states and conditions of the subject to which they are ascribed, at the moment of speaking. Indeed, Ryle's account of the philosophical mistake about dispositional concepts echoes Wittgenstein's discussion of the concepts of disposition and ability in the 30's expressed in the already discussed Waissman's material (VW). In particular, I think we might compare Ryle's category mistake with Wittgenstein's discussion about the paradox of possibility and the “shadowy model”: if we interpret dispositional sentences or words as categorical reports of hidden matters of fact we are working, I think, with a notion of disposition as a latent and actualised property which is simply not empirically accessible, therefore, we are operating with the notion of possibility as “shadowy reality”. The problem consists in what Ryle calls a category mistake, namely, a confusion between dispositional concepts and episodic concepts. Actually, Ryle explicitly uses the metaphor of the “shadowy entity”.

When we describe people as exercising qualities of mind, we are not referring to occult episodes of which their overt acts and utterances are effects; we are referring to those overt acts and utterances themselves. There are of course differences, crucial for our enquiry, between describing an action as performed absent-mindedly and describing a physiologically similar action as done on purpose. But such differences of description do not consist in the absence or presence of an implicit reference to some shadow-action covertly prefacing the overt action. They consist, on the contrary, in the absence or presence of certain sorts of testable explanatory-cum predictive assertions. (Ryle 1990, 26)

In opposition to the dogma, I am arguing that in describing the workings of a person's mind we are not describing a second set of shadowy operations. We are describing [...] the ways in which parts of his conduct are managed. (Ryle 1990, 49)

When we characterize people by mental predicates, or when we explain intelligent behaviour, we do not reason inferentially, that is, we do not make inferences from outer behaviour to some ghostly processes occurring inside the subject that would be the causes of the external reaction. Simply, we describe the ways in which people conduct their public behaviour. It is true that when we ascribe

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the voice “Disposition” of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Mumford characterizes the spirit of the recent studies on dispositions as a step against Ryle's thesis that dispositional terms do not denote inner states. The passage, then, would be from the conceptual distinction between dispositional words and episodic words to the distinction between dispositional properties and categorical properties. However, Ryle does not seem to further distinguish between categorical and episodic. It seems to me that episodic words and sentences are reports of categorical properties or facts, while dispositional sentences are not. As we will see in the next paragraph, dispositional sentences are rather testable, open hypothetical and “semi-hypothetical” sentences.

dispositions to subjects we go, somehow, beyond what we empirically see, for we make ascriptions even when we do not actually see subjects behaving, but «this going beyond is not a going behind, in the sense of making inferences to occult causes; it is going beyond in the sense of considering, in the first instance, the powers and propensities of which their actions are exercises» (Ryle 1990, 50).

### 9.2.1 The logic of dispositional words and statements

Dispositional statements are statements to the effect that a mentioned thing/beast/person has a certain capacity, tendency, or propensity, or is subject to a certain liability.<sup>266</sup> I will present Ryle's account by focusing on four aspects: 1. The logical opposition between dispositions and occurrences; 2. The role of dispositional statements as inference-tickets; 3. The non-causal account of dispositions; 4. The normativity of dispositions.

1. Dispositional words have a different logical behaviour from episodic words. We can say that dispositions are different from acts, occurrences, episodes and events, but we should bear in mind that we are not describing dispositions' metaphysical status; rather, we are explicating part of the use of the concept, because the difference is a difference in the logical type. It is not a matter of empirical accessibility – what can be seen and what cannot be seen – it is not a matter of denoting visible or invisible matters of fact. A disposition is different from an event not because the event can be seen while the disposition cannot and this is because such a distinction is not applicable to dispositional concepts: «a disposition is a factor of the wrong logical type to be seen or unseen, recorder or unrecorded» (Ryle 1990, 33). The traditional scepticism about dispositions can be seen as the product of the category mistake.

According to Ryle, indeed, it is the confusion between dispositional and episodic words that lead philosophers to argue against the use of dispositional concepts in philosophy. As we have seen in chapter 1, modern empiricist philosophers shared a general and quite intuitive objection against the talk on potentiality: potentialities are nothing actual, so when we say that a piece of sugar is soluble in water or that a sleeping man knows French we are somehow pretending to accord an attribute and still to put that attribute in a cold storage, on deposit account. But an attribute either does, or does not, characterize something. Now, Ryle tries to argue that this objection is valid in response to a particular account of dispositional statements, namely, the account that construes such statements as asserting extra matters of facts. This is what I referred to when I said that the traditional empiricist suspect is

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<sup>266</sup> Four kinds of dispositional words are already mentioned here: “capacity”, “tendency”, “propensity” and “liability” (Ryle 1990, 119). Indeed, Ryle recognizes the risk of what I have called the “simplification fallacy”: he states that the practice of considering only simple models of dispositions, such as fragility and solubility, is useful but it might lead to erroneous assumptions if we indefinitely generalize from those cases (Ryle 1990, 43).

grounded in the denotative model of dispositional meaning and the hypostatisation of dispositions, that is, the separation between dispositional entity and corresponding manifestation. If we think that dispositional words denote occult agencies or causes, then we actually have to face the dilemma of entities existing in a sort of limbo world. However, Ryle rightly states that «the truth that sentences containing words like “might”, “could”, and “would...if” do not report limbo facts does not entail that such sentences have not got proper jobs of their own to perform» (Ryle 1990, 115). We might say, using a Wittgensteinian terminology, that reporting matters of facts is just one language game among others, it is just one of the many uses, or functions sentences can have, and do have in language.

A skill is not an act. It is therefore neither a witnessable nor an unwitnessable act [...]. The reason why the skill exercised in a performance cannot be separately recorded by a camera is not that it is an occult or ghostly happening, but that it is not a happening at all. It is a disposition, or complex of dispositions, and a disposition is a factor of the wrong logical type to be seen or unseen, recorded, or unrecorded. (Ryle 1990, 33)

Dispositional statements are neither reports of observed or observable states of affairs, nor yet reports of unobserved or unobservable states of affairs. They narrate no incidents. But their jobs are intimately connected with narratives of incidents, for, if they are true, they are satisfied by narrated incidents. “John Doe has just been telephoning in French” satisfies what is asserted by “John Doe knows French”. (Ryle 1990, 120)

In this sense, the “old” empiricist scepticism about dispositions might be the product of the category mistake. Empiricist philosophers did not recognize the philosophical relevance of dispositional notions because they thought that these notions denoted occult and mysterious properties which were not directly accessible. But this is grounded in the tendency to treat dispositional words as words which denote occult categorical matters of fact, or properties. Ryle cites the philosophical criticism about the notion of force:<sup>267</sup>

The old error of treating the term ‘force’ as denting an occult force-exerting agency has been given up in the physical sciences, but its relatives survive in many theories of mind and are perhaps only moribund in biology”. (Ryle 1990, 113)

But I think this point applies to logical Neopositivism as well. The conditional analysis (Carnap 1936/7) was mainly an answer to a problem of empirical accessibility.<sup>268</sup> Moreover, Wittgenstein too

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<sup>267</sup> I think he is alluding to Leibnitz’s notion of force.

<sup>268</sup> In this sense, it might be interesting to compare Carnap conditional analysis to Ryle’s hypothetical account; they are often cited together but there are differences, especially because Ryle does not endorse any empiricist concern about

suggests to think about the hypothetical character of the concept of disposition and, in general, the concept of power, in different terms from the empiricist and scientific ones: he highlights the fact that the concept of disposition refers to something hypothetical, but this precisely means that «we are not using the word “disposition” to refer to a shadowy something that contains in embryonic form all the future applications of the signs» (VW, 369). Therefore, the term “hypothetical” is not used as synonym of “latent but actualised”; it does not refer to empirical inaccessibility.

To possess a dispositional property is not to be in a particular state, or to undergo a particular change; it is to be bound or liable to be in a particular state, or to undergo a particular change, when a particular condition is realized. (Ryle 1990, 43)

If dispositional statements are not report of hidden processes and episodes but they still have a job, what is their job? According to Ryle, it is a job strictly connected to the one of law sentences.<sup>269</sup> Law sentences can be stated grammatically in indicative sentences and hypothetical sentences, such as “Whatever is so and so, is such and such”, or “If a body is left unsupported, it falls at such and such a rate of acceleration” (Ryle 1990, 116). A hypothetical sentence is called a law when it is variable and open, that is, one of which the protasis can embody at least one expression like “any” or “whenever” (it is for this reason that a law applies to instances without mentioning them). Law sentences do not report matters of fact about the instances involved but, according to Ryle, we have to learn to use statements of particular matters of fact before we can learn to use the law statements which apply to them. Indeed, «at least part of the point of trying to establish laws is to find out how to infer from particular matters of fact to other particular matters of fact, how to explain particular matters of fact by reference to other matters of fact, and how to bring about or prevent particular states of affairs» (Ryle 1990, 117). That is what Ryle means when he states that laws work as *inference-tickets*: laws licence to move from asserting factual statements to asserting other factual statements. Teaching a law, indeed, is teaching to do new things, both practical and theoretical, with particular matters of fact.

Just as a student, to qualify as knowing rules of grammar , multiplication, chess, or etiquette, must be able and ready to apply these rules in concrete operations, so, to qualify as knowing a law, he must be able and ready to apply it in making concrete inferences from and to particular matters of

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empirical inaccessibility of dispositions. I cannot expound this suggestion here, but it might be the object of future research.

<sup>269</sup> Interestingly, similar “imperative” sentences can be found in the earlier and later Wittgenstein, especially in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, although the earlier Wittgenstein – and possibly the later – would disagree with the view that such sentences would work as inference-tickets. I thank Prof. Tejedor for such a suggestion that can be the object of future research.

fact, in explaining them and, perhaps also, in bringing them about, or preventing them. (Ryle 1990, 117)

However, once we accept this grammatical feature we should refrain from adhering to the misleading metaphor of the “rails of inference”, which is a sort of hypostatisation of the causal connection: when we discover a law – for example we discover the law that enables to infer from certain diseases to the existence of certain bacteria – we think that we have discovered a third new existence, a new thing that cannot be observed, i.e., the causal connection between the two objects. However, according to Ryle, this is another instance of the «old habit of construing open hypothetical statements as singular categorical statements» (Ryle 1990, 118). It is, again, a category mistake which comes from the erroneous assumption that all sorts of sentences do the job of ascribing a predicate to a mentioned object. Saying that we discover causal connections simply amount to saying that we have established laws that enable to infer from something to something else and to explain something by referring to something else. When we discover a causal connection – say between diseases and bacteria – we have not discovered a third entity, a sort of railway line of inference construed using the model of the railway lines of trains, but rather we have indeed inferred, we have argued «because so and so, therefore such and such» (Ryle 1990, 118). Arguing and inferring is different from reporting or, better, the sentence job of stating facts is different from the job of stating an argument from factual statement to factual statement.

2. Dispositional statements are not laws because they mention particular things or persons, but they resemble laws because (1) they are partly variable, or open, (2) they are often deductions from laws, that is, we often have to learn some laws before we can use them, although in general the learning process goes the other way around (i.e., we often learn how to use dispositional statements about individuals before we learn laws stating general correlations between such statements) and, most important (3) they are inference-tickets: dispositional statements are satisfied by the actions, or reactions or states of the object and they license us «to predict, retrodict, explain, and modify these actions, reactions, and states» (Ryle 1990, 119).

In particular, Ryle argues that dispositional statements can be semantically construed with hypothetical or semi-hypothetical statements (mongrel-categorical statements).

To say that a glass is brittle is to say that if it ever is, or ever had been, struck or strained, it would fly, or have flown, into fragments. (Ryle 1990, 43)

To say that sugar is soluble is to say that it would dissolve, or would have dissolved, if immersed in water. (Ryle 1990, 43)

To say that this lump of sugar is soluble is to say that it would dissolve, if submerged anywhere, at any time and in any parcel of water. (Ryle 1990, 119)

To say that this sleeper knows French, is to say that if, for example, he is ever addressed in French, or shown any French newspaper, he responds pertinently in French, acts appropriately or translates it correctly into his own tongue. (Ryle 1990, 119)

First of all, the examples show how Ryle recognizes the variety of dispositions: not only physical dispositions of the matter, but dispositions as abilities and linguistic competences too. Secondly, according to Ryle, the brittleness of glass and the solubility of sugar do not consist in the fact that the glass is at a given moment *actually* being shivered, or that the sugar is *actually* dissolving in the water. He indeed construes the logical force of the ascription of dispositional concepts with the counterfactual conditional. To possess a dispositional property, therefore, is not to be in a particular state, or to undergo a particular change, rather it is to be bound or liable to be in a particular state or undergo a particular change when a particular condition is realized.

Ascriptions of dispositional properties then implicitly convey testable hypothetical/or semi-hypothetical propositions, so when we want to describe dispositions we should, in a certain sense, unpack the hypothetical proposition/s which is/are conveyed: To be brittle= to be bound or likely to fly into fragments *in such and such conditions*; to be a smoker= to be bound or likely to fill, light and draw on a pipe *in such and such conditions*.<sup>270</sup> A disposition is then actualised under certain circumstances, but not all dispositions have a uniform actualisation: «there are many dispositions the actualizations of which can take a wide and perhaps unlimited variety of shapes», or «the exercises of which are indefinitely heterogeneous» (Ryle 1990, 43-44). This is precisely the already mentioned difference between single-track and multi-track dispositions.<sup>271</sup> For this reason, Ryle states that dispositional statements have much in common with statements subsuming things under laws. Indeed, even in this context there is the philosophical trouble of the “the rails of inference”. The semantic problem which commonly arises is this: how could the statements be true unless there were something now going on, even though going on, unfortunately, behind the scenes? This question arises from the assumption that «all true indicative sentences either describe existents or report occurrences» (Ryle 1990, 119). If we adhere to such a paradigm, then we will demand that sentences like “This wire conducts electricity”, or “John Doe knows French” convey factual information of the same type as

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<sup>270</sup> Using a more recent vocabulary, conventional dispositions can be unpacked and expressed through canonical dispositions. See chapter 1, paragraph 1.1.

<sup>271</sup> See chapter 3, paragraph 3.1.3.

that conveyed by “This wire is conducting electricity” and “John Doe is speaking French”. Ryle’s answer to this objection is very interesting:

They [the supporters of the para-mechanical model] have to agree that we do often know that a wire conducts electricity and that individuals know French, without having first discovered any undiscoverable goings on. They have to concede, too, that the theoretical utility of discovering these hidden goings on would consist only in its entitling us to do just that predicting, explaining, and modifying which we already do and often know we are entitled to do. They would have to admit, finally, that these postulated processes are themselves, at best, things the existence of which they themselves infer from the fact that we can predict, explain, and modify the observable actions and reactions of individuals. But if they demand actual “rails” where ordinary inferences are made, they will have to provide some further actual “rails” to justify their own peculiar inference from the legitimacy of ordinary inferences to the “rails” which they postulate to carry them. (Ryle 1990, 120)

The para-mechanical, or intellectualist model, is obliged to postulate an endless hierarchy of “rails” that could hardly be attractive.

3. Ryle endorses a non-causal account of dispositions. A disposition is *exercised*; it is not the cause of an effect. According to Ryle, talking about something as the exercise, or actualisation of something else does not mean to define it as a physical effect of a mental cause.

The traditional theory of mind has misconstrued the type-distinction between disposition and exercise into its mythical bifurcation of unwitnessable mental causes and their witnessable physical effects. (Ryle 1990, 34)

Dispositional statements, therefore, have the role to describe and explain people’s behaviour but not in the classic causal sense and this is important because that means that Ryle does not conceive the counterfactual conditional in a causal sense. The manifestation is not then an effect, but rather an actualisation or exercise of the disposition which furnishes the grammatical criteria for the ascription to a subject. In Ryle’s account, dispositions are not hypostatized because they are kept logically linked to their manifestations. There is, in a certain sense, a kind of dispositional explanation which is different from the causal one: “The glass broke, when the stone hit it, because it was brittle” differs from “The glass broke because the stone hit it” (Ryle 1990, 84). While in the second case we are alluding to the cause of the break, in the first case we are explaining in terms of dispositions and, as already suggested, dispositional explanations are about reasons and not causes. Indeed, like Wittgenstein, Ryle distinguishes between causes and reasons in three passages:

There are at least two quite different senses in which an occurrence is said to be “explained”; and there are correspondingly at least two quite different senses in which we ask “why” it occurred and two quite different senses in which we say that it happened “because” so and so was the case. The first sense is the *causal sense* [my emphasis]. To ask why the glass broke is to ask what caused it to break, and we explain, in this sense, the fracture of the glass when we report that a stone hit it. [...] When we say that the glass broke when struck because it was brittle, the “because” [...] states a law-like proposition. People commonly say of explanations of this second kind that they give the “reason” for the glass breaking when struck.<sup>272</sup> (Ryle 1990, 86)

4. Dispositions are not divorced from normativity. This gets clear if we look at Ryle’s account of knowledge-how as a multi-track disposition and of understanding as part of knowledge-how.

First of all, Ryle provides a dispositional account of knowing-how, hence it employs the notion of disposition to give an account of human rule-governed behaviour and human intelligent activities. Already at this stage, normativity is included for intelligent conduct is a conduct which is done correctly with respect to certain established rules and criteria. Secondly, the normative element is explicitly present in Ryle’s account of knowledge as a capacity to get things right which, according to Kremer (2017) suggests how Ryle maintains the unity of knowledge, even though he distinguishes between knowledge-how and knowledge-that.<sup>273</sup>

In general, Ryle speaks of the word “know” as «a capacity verb and a capacity verb of that special sort that is used for signifying that the person described can bring things off or get things right» (Ryle 1990, 128) and when he says that «to know is to be equipped to get something right and not to tend to act or react in certain manners» (Ryle 1990, 129) he is laying out the basic logical structure of the term “know”. Such a disposition refers to an activity which has the following characteristics:

- a. It is acquired by practice;
- b. It is done regularly and normally;
- c. It is habitual, but still different from mere habit, for training is never completely concluded and the agent still learns: one performance of the habitual practice is modified by its predecessors.

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<sup>272</sup> See also «When we ask “Why did someone act in a certain way?” this question might, so far as its language goes, either be an inquiry into the cause of his acting in that way, or be an inquiry into the character of the agent which accounts for his having acted in that way on that occasion» (Ryle 1990, 86-87).

<sup>273</sup> Kremer (2017) addresses an objection raised by Stanley (2011), one of the champions of contemporary intellectualism. Stanley (2011) argues that Ryle’s distinction undermines the unity of knowledge and that Ryleans must treat the word “know” as an ambiguous word: the distinction would then be between proper knowledge and knowledge-how, which is “knowledge” only so-called.

Such features get clearer if we look at the following example. Let us think about a pupil who is learning to play chess. Chess is a game governed by rules, so we are thinking about a rule-governed activity which is learned through training and practice. At first, the teacher tells the pupil some basic rules of the game, the name of the pieces, the allowed moves, and so on, or he might give the pupil a piece of paper with the basic rules written on it. During the first games, the pupil probably has to go over the rules aloud or in his head, or he has to frequently consult the paper before making the move; he probably asks the teacher when he can do this move, when he should apply that rule, etc. The teacher responds with signs of approval or disapproval: he might stop the pupil while uttering “No, you cannot do this!”, or “Remember the rule! You should do...”; he might even reformulate the rules if needed, or read them again aloud to the pupil. This is legitimate and it is part of what we mean by “training” and “learning process”; this is what training looks like for *us*. However, as soon as the pupil starts mastering the game, he comes to observe the rules without thinking of them; he acts, in a certain sense, blindly, without preliminarily thinking about what is permitted and what has to be avoided. In other words, «it has become second nature to him to do what is allowed and to avoid what is forbidden» (Ryle 1990, 41). The pupil might even forget the explicit formulation of the rules, so that he would not be able to teach the game to someone else. When the pupil has mastered the game, he has acquired an ability: he knows how to play chess, he can play chess. Abilities and skills are dispositional concepts. Such dispositions, therefore, are acquired by practice, watching the move made by competent players, noticing which moves are forbidden and which ones are allowed, making mistake and being corrected. Moreover, such an ability, in order to be correctly ascribed, must not be exercised by chance, that is, the pupil is said to know how to play chess if he normally does make the permitted rules, avoid the forbidden rules and maybe protest if his opponent tries to cheat. Finally, and most importantly, the incorporation of the practice does not rule out the possibility of mistake: the pupil who is correctly said to know how to play chess can still make mistakes; the acquisition of the ability, or disposition, does not necessitate the pupil’s behaviour.

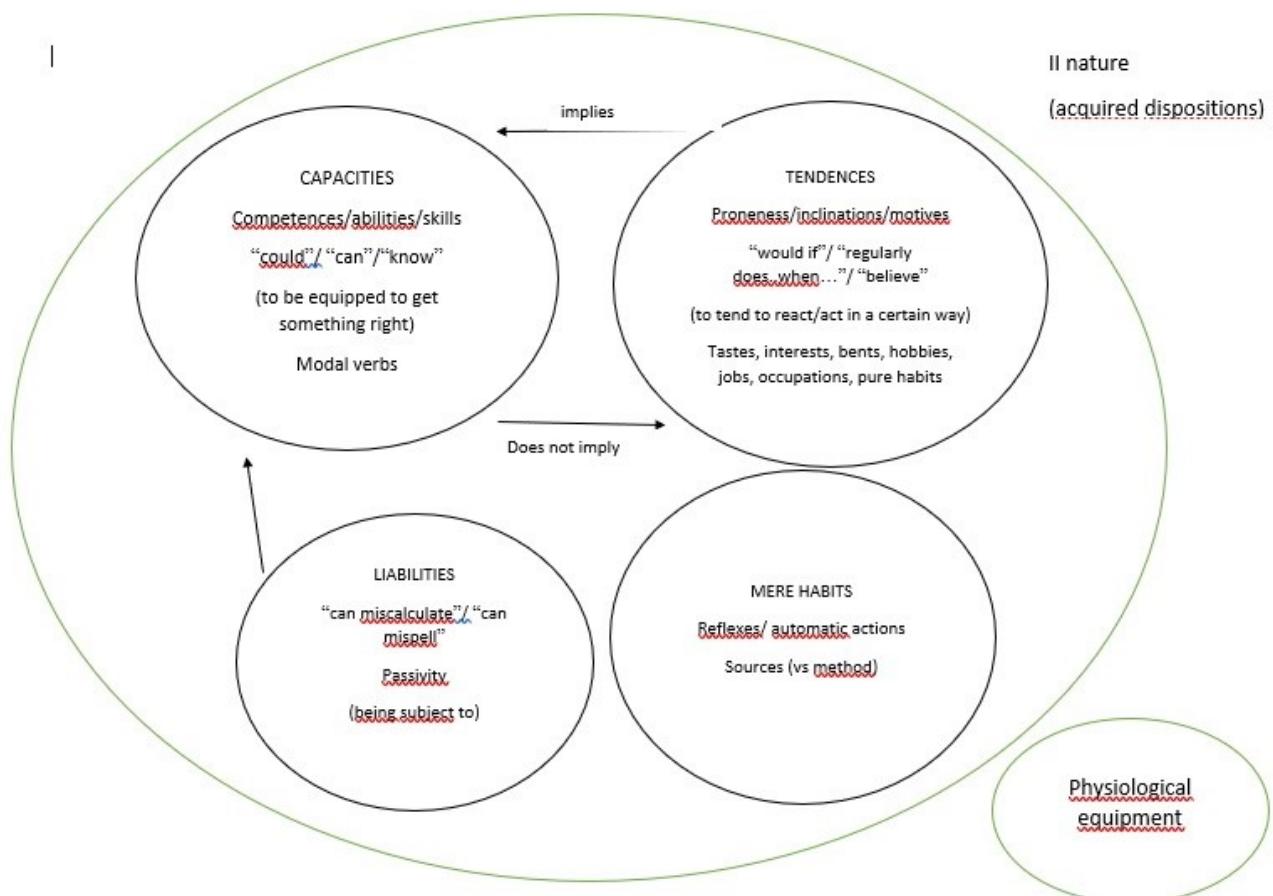
Such a scenario echoes Wittgenstein’s dispositional conception of understanding and meaning as I have presented it in chapters 5 and 6: we have learned to use words in this way; we have learned arithmetic and rules of grammar in this way. Through training and constant practice, we have acquired abilities, that is, dispositions to behave in a certain way and to normally and spontaneously follow rules without being deterministically programmed to respond in a determinate way. Indeed, Ryle too characterizes human understanding as part of knowledge-how and he rejects those views that characterize it as a process of divination of occult and inner processes. Ryle’s account of understanding can be seen as a more substantial theoretical version of what has been glimpsed by Wittgenstein – the characterisation of understanding as mastery of a technique.

Understanding does not consist in inferring, or guessing, the alleged inner-life precursors of overt actions. [...] Understanding is a part of knowing how. The knowledge that is required for understanding intelligent performances of a specific kind is some degree of competence in performances of that kind. (Ryle 1990, 53)

Ryle's main point is that the qualities of people's minds are reflected in what people do and say, so his account avoids equating understanding with psychological diagnosis and, in general, with causal inferences from overt behaviour to inner and private mental processes in accordance with still unknown and undiscovered laws. The competent critic of prose-style, for example, has to know how to write and it is irrelevant whether he has learned some psychology: it would matter as much as he had learned any chemistry, neurology or economics (Ryle 1990, 53).

### 9.2.2 Classification of dispositional concepts

In the above observations I have written that, according to Ryle, the word "know" is a capacity word and it is different from words that refer to liabilities. Within the group of dispositional words and sentences, Ryle classifies different types of dispositional words and the criterion of the classification is not the type of object to which they refer to. Ryle's classification might be summarised as follows:



First of all, Ryle distinguishes between terms that refer to humans' physiological equipment and terms that refer to humans' intelligent dispositions: competences and skills «are certainly second natures or acquired dispositions» and they differ from mere habits (Ryle 1990, 41). Capacities and mere habits are both part of humans' second nature but they differ in two respects: 1. It is part of the concept of habitual practices that one performance is a replica of its predecessors. By contrast, it is part of the concept of intelligent practices that one performance is modified by its predecessors. In other words, the agent is still learning and the training process is not concluded; 2. While habit is built by drill and direct conditioning, intelligent capacities are built up by training which involves «the stimulation by criticism and examples of the pupil's own judgement» (Ryle 1990, 42).

Secondly, he gathers dispositional terms applied to human beings' intelligent behaviour into three main groups: capacities, tendencies and liabilities. Capacity words are abilities, competences and skills. In the drawer of capacities, we find rule-governed activities that are acquired by practice and which can be said to be done cleverly, efficaciously, correctly, and so on; that is, what Ryle means in general with the expression "knowing-how": capacity to get things right; to have learned and not forgotten. Tendencies words are proneness, inclination and motive. In this drawer we find tastes, interests, bends and hobbies. While capacities are linguistically expressed by expressions such as "can do", "being able to", tendencies are linguistically captured by the expressions "would do *x*", "being inclined to", etc. Liabilities words are applied in a way that the subject is passive: the subject is liable to undergo a change or a process. Tendencies usually imply capacities or, in other terms, "tends to" implies "can" (but not the way around), because while to say "can" is to say that «it is not a certainty that something will not be the case», to say "tends" «is to say that it is a good bet that it will be, or was, the case» (Ryle 1990, 126). Tendencies legitimize expectations.<sup>274</sup>

### 9.2.3 Other sources

So forth I have referred mainly to Ryle's considerations contained in *The Concept of Mind*. Actually, there is no further sustained treatment of the topic in earlier and later essays, but there is clear evidence that Ryle worked with the notion of disposition from the 30's. In particular, Ryle was still not content with the dispositional account of knowing and believing in 1930, as testified in the article "Are there propositions?" (Ryle 2009 II, 14-40). However, he maintained that the nature of the ordinary uses of "believing" and "knowing" is somehow dispositional.

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<sup>274</sup> However, I think that capacity words too licence expectations. If I say that Paul can speak German, I expect him to correctly answer to a German question, or to correctly utter a German sentence.

I have found passages on dispositions in other five articles: “Internal relations” 1935 (Ryle 2009 II, 90-104), “Categories” 1938 (Ryle 2009 II, 178-193), “Conscience and moral convictions” 1940 (Ryle 2009 II, 194-202), “On forgetting the difference between right and wrong” 1958 (Ryle 2009 II, 394-403), and “Phenomenology versus ‘The concept of mind’” 1962 (Ryle 2009 I, 187-204). The last one is particularly interesting because Ryle gives a summary of his earlier work.

I have found some constant points, which are better expounded in *The Concept of Mind*:

1. The characterisation of the general mark of the dispositional: Ryle constantly states that a concept is dispositional when it does not denote a momentary occurrence but, rather, a *more or less enduring condition* (1930). In “Phenomenology versus ‘The concept of mind’”, we find an interesting metaphor: possessing a bicycle is not something that is happening or in process at a particular time, but the owner may remain in possession of the bicycle *throughout a span of time*;
2. The distinction between types of dispositions. Ryle distinguishes between “having knowledge” (capacity), and “believing” or “having a bad temper” (tendencies);
3. The peculiarity of psychological dispositions;
4. The notion of knowledge-how, which is called here “operative knowledge”: knowledge which manifests itself in the disposition to behave in accordance with the principle which is said to be known or believed;
5. Dispositional conceptual pluralism: Ryle rightly states that not all dispositional concepts have to do with persons – we can indeed talk about the flexibility of a piece of steel, some dogs’ habits, solubility of a lump of sugar, and so on. However, dispositional concepts which do apply to mental life of human beings have a peculiarity: in this case, if we treat the active verb as signifying an action, we are forced to regard the postulated act as a peculiar occult act. This is one of the elements of the official doctrine and the para-mechanical fallacy.

If the schoolboy is persuaded by his school-grammar that owning a bicycle is doing something, he is forced to suppose that owning a bicycle is an occult sort of doing, since he never meets anyone occupied in doing it. (Ryle 2009 I, 197)

# Chapter 10

## Normative dispositions: some examples

### 10.1 Introduction: dispositions and rules

In this final and conclusive chapter, I will present some examples of philosophical views where a notion of normative disposition is actually employed. The views I will deal with belong to the context of philosophical research on Wittgenstein and, in general, on the philosophy of mind. I will first present the theories of Dretske (1988) and Wedgwood (2009). They both employ the notion of disposition together with the notion of rule, but they are not explicitly influenced by Wittgenstein's philosophy. Then, I will present Elder-Wass' (2012) and Williams' (1998) views. Unlike Dretske and Wedgwood, Elder-Wass and Williams do cite Wittgenstein and their use of the notion of disposition is part of their reflection on sociological normativity. Again, dispositions and rules are linked together. Finally, in the last paragraph, I will go back to the issue of Wittgenstein's kind of normativity and I will state again the features of a de-naturalized notion of disposition in the light of what we have gained so far.

Before moving on, something should be said about the connection between dispositions and rules. Throughout the work, I maintained that conceptual dispositional pluralism is respected when dispositional terms are not identified with mere natural capacities. In addition to terms that refer to physical dispositions of inert matter, there is a group of dispositional terms that are applicable to human beings and that are used to characterize and explain rule-governed behaviour. A de-naturalized account of dispositions, therefore, is mainly construed around the concept of rule.

The concept of rule, as the concept of disposition, has no precise boundaries. Several taxonomies of rules have been proposed. However, it seems that – at least within the context of reflection on rule-governed behaviour – two main meanings of the term “rule” are acknowledged: a rule can express a *generality*, that is, it refers to what is, but it can also express a *prescription*, that is, it refers to what should be (Reese & Fremouw 1984). For this reason, in this context I will refer to Reese's distinction between normal rules and normative rules: the former is a generality, the latter is a prescription (Reese 1989, 27).<sup>275</sup> While normal rules do not guide action, normative rules do guide action and they can

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<sup>275</sup> Reese presents the above distinction as an alternative to Argyle's. Argyle (1984) distinguishes between norms, rules and conventions: a norm expresses what most people do; it is modal behaviour. A rule expresses which behaviour the members of a group believe that should or should not be performed in certain situations. A convention is an arbitrary custom. Reese thinks that the distinction between rule and convention is superfluous, because «both rules and conventions are to some extent arbitrary, both involve consequences that are at least implicit, and both can sometimes control behavior» (Reese 1989, 27). For this reason, he suggests to distinguish between normative rules and norms, or normal rules.

be followed or ignored.<sup>276</sup> A normative rule can either specify the way one ought to behave, or proceed, or it can specify a way to succeed. In the first case, it is a prescription, in the second case it is a practical advice. Reese's thesis is that «a normative rule is a disposition, and as such, it is a kind of competence» (Reese 1989, 6). But what does Reese think dispositions are?

Reese (1989, 29) states that dispositional concepts are linguistically captured by conditional sentences and that the relation between dispositions and action is the same as Aristotle's distinction between *hexis* and *energeia*: *hexis*, as we have seen in chapter 3, is a potentiality that could be actualized but that is not presently actualized. *Energeia* is action characterized in terms of present actualisation. According to Reese, the distinction is the same also as that between *competence* – ability, capacity – and *performance* – the actualisation or application of competence. Given this, a disposition is thought to be «competence to perform in a specified way; performance is the actualization or application of competence» (Reese 1989, 30). The notion of disposition, therefore, is used to characterize rule-governed behaviour. What I want to highlight is the idea that there are indeed some dispositions that refer to *normative* rules and rules as competence and these dispositions can be labelled “normative”.

However, my perspective differs from Reese in two main respects: 1. Instead of defining normative rules in terms of dispositions, I have rather tried to highlight the normative character of dispositions by showing that some dispositions are normative, i.e., they are like normative rules. 2. The normative character of dispositions is better captured by the notion of rules as competence, rather than rules as prescriptions or practical advices.

## 10.2 Dretske and Wedgwood

In *Explaining behaviour*, Dretske (1988) employs the notion of disposition next to the notion of rule. His general aim is to argue that some of the things we do are *causally explained* by the *reasons* we have for doing them, rather than by biological causes. Reflection on human agency, then, aims at resolving the apparent conflict between the idea that when I move, I move in virtue of some reasons, purposes, intentions, desires, or beliefs, and the idea that bodily parts and processes listen to a different drummer, that is, they are caused to move. For example, I go to the kitchen *because* I want a snack and I think I can get one there, but my muscles and bodily processes respond to some electrical impulses coming from my nervous system. These two kinds of explanation can lead to a dualistic characterisation of the way human beings behave, as if individuals and their bodies «march[ed] to the

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<sup>276</sup> Here, normal rules coincide with generalisations in nature. In virtue of this, behaving constantly with a normal rule is a matter of fact; it is inexorable.

beats of different drummers» (Dretske 1988, ix). Dretske's general attempt is to show that the rejection of the dualistic perspective does not necessarily entail the reduction of psychological attitudes and states to the causes of bodily movements studied by neuroscientists.

The project is to see how reasons – our beliefs, desires, purposes, and plans – operate in a world of causes and to exhibit the role of reasons in the *causal* explanation of human behaviour. [...] The project is to understand the relationship between the psychological and the biological. (Dretske 1988, x)

For the purposes of the present research, I will consider chapter 5, where Dretske introduces the notion of disposition. The chapter is dedicated to the explanatory role of belief. In this section, Dretske applies Ryle's notion of single-track disposition to implicit beliefs and he then distinguishes this kind of disposition – with intrinsic intentional elements – from a kind of physical disposition which lacks intentional elements. My aim is to highlight the following points: 1. Dretske employs the notion of disposition in the context of what he calls “procedural knowledge”, or skill acquisition; 2. A distinction seems to be presupposed between dispositions that are implicit beliefs – hence with normative and intentional character – and dispositions that are not implicit beliefs.

Dretske introduces the notion of procedural knowledge as a kind of knowledge-how, but still different from a mere piece of knowing-how. The explanatory role of beliefs applied to goal-directed behaviour cannot be exhibited merely by pointing out that the subject's behaviour leads to the result he desires in the conditions he believes to obtain. What is needed, is to show that the subject knows, or believes that his behaviour will lead to results he desires. In other words, we should make sense of the difference between getting the desired result by mere chance, and achieving it through a behaviour that is believed to lead to such a result. Let us imagine the following laboratory case: two different rats are put in a box. Inside the box there is a bar. When the scientist turns a red light on, if the rats press the bar, they will get some food. Rat *A* is untrained, while rat *B* has been trained. Now, let us think about the following two cases: rat *A* is untrained and hungry. He sees the red light and he accidentally press the bar, out of curiosity, or simply at random. He gets the food and he satisfies his desire to eat. Rat *B* has been trained to press the bar in order to get food. *B* wants food. He sees the red light, he believes the red line is on, he then presses the bar and he gets food he desired. The difference between the two cases is that while rat *B* did press the bar because he wanted food and he saw the red light on, rat *A* did not; he was hangry, he saw the red light and he believed that the red light was on, but he pressed the bar by accident. His belief was not a reason for acting as he did.

The moral of this story is that rat *B* has procedural knowledge, that is, «a knowledge of *how* to achieve those results, a knowledge of *what* to do, and *when* to do it» (Dretske 1988, 116). This kind

of knowledge is called by Dretske “cognitive skill” and it is distinguished from a motor skill: one thing is knowing how to press the bar, another thing is knowing when to press the bar, that is, when to press it in order to achieve a desired result.

However, procedural knowledge, even if possessed, may fail to yield the usual result and this happens especially in abnormal, or simply changed, circumstances. Here is where implicit beliefs come to play. Let us consider again rat *B*, of the above example. Let us suppose that, after a certain time, the scientist stops rewarding the rat for pressing the bar when the light turns red. Nevertheless, *B* presses the bar. Why? Dretske (1988, 117) argues that in this case, *B* does not press the bar because he knows that he will get food; he presses the bar because he still thinks that he will get food in that way and he will probably continue to behave in this way until he stops thinking that he will get food by pressing the bar, after a sufficient numbers of disappointments. *B* has an implicit belief.

Dretske’s thesis is that an implicit belief is «a single-track disposition, acquired through learning, to do or believe something *given* certain other beliefs and desires» (Dretske 1988, 117). However, an implicit belief is a certain kind of disposition, that is, «a disposition or a rule that describe the relationship among entities that are already intentionally characterized (believes and desires, for instance) or among such intentionally characterized entities and movements» (Dretske 1988, 118). This kind of disposition is distinguished from dispositions that are mere regularities of some kind. Dretske provides two examples of the latter kind: an individual’s disposition to perspire when it gets hot, and a car’s disposition to start when the ignition key is turned. Even these dispositions can be expressed through formulation of rules, but such rules express mere regularities. For example, we might say the car “follows” – even though it is not proper Rule-following – the rule “start the engine when the key is turned on, the battery is charged and there is gas in the tank” (Dretske 1988, 118). But a rule, or disposition that says simply “produce movement *M* when conditions *C* and *F* do obtain” is not an implicit belief; it is not a disposition with intentional character. I would add, it does not function as a normative rule. However, dispositions that constitute what Dretske calls procedural knowledge, do function as normative rules in the form of rules of competence. Such dispositions (1) guide action, (2) they are acquired, (3) they do not necessitate human’s behaviour and (4) they are defined over intentional elements such as desires and beliefs.

The connection between dispositions, intentionality and normativity is at the centre of Wedgwood’s article “The normativity of the intentional”. Wedgwood (2009) refers to dispositions in order to provide an argument in favour of the normativity of the intentional: his main thesis is that only a normative kind of dispositionalism can give an adequate account of the nature of intentional mental states and that such dispositionalism is made up by a concept of normative, or rational

disposition. It is not the aim of the present work to enquire the still flourishing debate on the nature of intentionality; my aim is to present a concrete philosophical example of a kind of dispositionalism where dispositions are not divorced from normativity. However, in order to expound Wedgwood's normative dispositionalism, few words should be spent on what he means by the expressions "intentional" and "normative".

Wedgwood (2009, 421) takes the intentional to be a subset of the mental. Mental states have intentional content, that is, they are directed towards something; they are about something. For example, some of my beliefs are *about* Italy, I have intentions *about* travelling to England, I have thoughts *concerning* human rights and equality, and so on. As far as normativity is concerned, Wedgwood takes "ought", "should", "right", "wrong", "correct", "incorrect", "rational" and "irrational" – together with their closest equivalents in other languages – to be paradigmatic normative terms. Such terms are context sensitive, but they are generally used to regulate and evaluate human practices and activities.

Given this, the claim that the intentional is normative can still take two different forms: it can be either a metaphysical claim about the nature or essence of intentional states, or a claim about the concepts of intentional mental states. In the first case, intentional facts are thought to be partly constituted by normative facts, so in giving an account of the nature of intentional states we must mention those normative facts and properties.<sup>277</sup> In the second case, the claim is that it is an essential feature of our concepts of intentional mental states that competent users of these concepts must think of intentional mental states in partly normative terms.<sup>278</sup> Now, whichever philosophical team we prefer, the basic idea at the bottom of the thesis of the normativity of the intentional is that it is possible and desirable to give an account of intentional mental states, or concepts, in partly normative terms.

Reference to dispositions plays a double role in Wedgwood's general argument: on the one hand, it is part of Wedgwood's argument in favour of the necessity of an informative account of the intentional, against a quietist perspective; on the other hand, it is essential part of Wedgwood's positive account of the intentional in normative terms.

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<sup>277</sup> This account assumes a factualist, or truth-conditional semantics for normative concepts. Propositions that contain normative concepts and that are true, are thought to be true in virtue of the fact that they correspond to some normative facts. These normative facts, in turn, involve normative properties and relations.

<sup>278</sup> This account assumes an expressivist account of normative concepts, instead of a factualist one. The idea is that although the expressions "normative facts" and "normative properties and relations" are commonly used in ordinary language – i.e., they have a meaning and a role in language – no normative facts, properties or relations are postulated as elements that should explain the essence or nature of intentional mental states.

As far as the former aspect is concerned, Wedgwood (2009) states that an informative account of the intentional is needed, given a plausible point regarding the connection between intentional states individuals are in and the individuals' dispositions. Even if Wittgenstein is not explicitly cited, Wedgwood explicitly makes a parallel with the conception of meaning as use: as the meaning of a linguistic expression is determined by the ways in which the members of the community are disposed to use that expression, so the identity of a concept is determined by the ways in which people are disposed to use that concept in thought. Therefore, Wedgwood thinks that which concept does figure in people's thought is determined both by people's dispositions and certain facts about their environment. I would like to highlight three points that are connected to the general argument of the present work:

1. Wedgwood (2009) employs the term "disposition" to refer to what he calls "mental dispositions", as opposed to "behavioural dispositions".<sup>279</sup> Mental dispositions are, for examples, dispositions to revise beliefs, intentions and attitudes in response to certain conditions;
2. He seems to endorse a communal dispositional account of meaning, similar to the one presented by Horwich (2012);<sup>280</sup>
3. Dispositions are thought to determine meaning. Wedgwood (2009) seems to endorse also what Kemp (2014) calls "linguistic naturalism": the idea that there is an array of basic dispositions at the bottom of a subject's linguistic competence.<sup>281</sup> The subject's dispositions determine what intentional state he is in, and the philosopher should try to give some explanatory account of this. However, differently from Kemp (2014) – who endorses a form of scientific naturalism – Wedgwood thinks that such an account should not take a reductive form, where dispositions are characterized in wholly non-intentional, non-normative terms. On the contrary, within this account, dispositions should be characterized in general intentional terms, that is, as *mental* dispositions. It could be said that Wedgwood shares the main concern of the kind of dispositionalism discussed by Kripke (1982), but he presupposes a different notion of disposition: he thinks, as the kripkean dispositionalist does, that we are able to infer in which intentional state a subject is – or, what the subject means by a certain

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<sup>279</sup> It seems to me that Wedgwood (2009) intends to make a broad distinction between dispositions that we generally ascribe only to human beings, for they are exercises of their mental capacity, and dispositions that are ascribable to inert matter too. I think that he employs the term "behavioural dispositions" in the same way as I employ the term "physical dispositions" in order to refer to the latter kind. However, I prefer distinguishing between "physical dispositions", or "mere natural capacities", and "psychological dispositions", because all dispositions can be said to have a behavioural manifestation. The expression "behavioural dispositions", therefore, is not particularly informative because it can be applied to both kinds, unless we specify that we use the term "behaviour" exclusively to refer to mere bodily reactions aroused by some external stimuli.

<sup>280</sup> For an exposition and a critique of communal dispositionalism, see chapter 6, paragraph 6.1.1.

<sup>281</sup> For an exposition of Kemp's view, see chapter 4, paragraph 4.1.1.

word – from his dispositions. However, differently from Kripke (1982), he thinks that some dispositions could do this job because they can be said to be intentional and normative. This is something that both Kripke and his dispositionalist interlocutor rejected aprioristically.<sup>282</sup> Here we reach the second part of the presentation – the core of Wedgwood’s proposal – that is, a kind of rational dispositionalism that lies at the bottom of a normative account of intentionality. I summarise Wedgwood’s proposal with the following five claims:

First, the possession of a concept is a cognitive power, or ability. For this reason, according to Wedgwood, dispositions in virtue of which one possesses the concept must be rational dispositions.

Second, the disposition that determines the identity of the concept that figures in the subject’s thought is the causally most basic one with respect to that concept among the other rational dispositions possessed by the subject.

Third, for each concept there is some specific rational disposition that is necessary condition for the possession of the concept. Wedgwood states that, for example, it seems impossible that a person who possesses the concept “if” does not also have any rational disposition for accepting *modus ponens* inferences, while it seems possible that a superhuman individual possesses the concept of “if” but does not have any disposition to commit fallacious reasoning involving that concept. If this is so, then it will be impossible for any thinker to possess the concept without having the corresponding rational disposition.

Fourth, rational dispositions, broadly speaking, are dispositions to engage in certain forms of *rational reasoning*, that is, dispositions to revise or form our own beliefs, desires, intentions, and so on, in a rational way. Those dispositions might be exercised, for example, while engaging with some kind of task, in cases of rule-governed behaviour, or in order to reach some goal. Wedgwood argues that a disposition can be said to be rational when the stimulus conditions to which it responds are conditions that essentially involve normative properties and relations. He then provides some examples: a disposition to form a belief that predicates a concept of the form “*x* is yellow” when a visual experience presents an object in a certain distinctive way; a disposition to form an intention – an intention to  $\varphi$  – from the possession of rational beliefs of the form “All things considered, I ought

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<sup>282</sup> Given this, I still have doubts about Wedgwood’s view that dispositions determine meaning. According to the perspective I am trying to sustain, human dispositions do not determine concepts in the way metaphysical grounding facts do; rather, dispositions manifest the understanding of the meaning. Mastery of a concept, or a term, is an exercise of acquired abilities and dispositions, but the meaning of the term is not fixed through these abilities and dispositions. Indeed, if a specific disposition  $D$  determines the meaning of a specific word  $W$ , what if one of the members of the community is said to correctly employ  $W$ , but he does not have  $D$ ?

to  $\varphi$ ", or, in general, dispositions to accept some rational deductive or inductive reasonings. All these examples illustrate some rational reasoning which cannot be properly specified without mentioning the relevant normative properties or relations.

Fifth, normative specification of rational reasonings of the type cited above is needed because this kind of reasoning is *defeasible*.

That is, even if one is in the input mental states for this sort of reasoning, certain defeating conditions must be absent if it is to be possible to form a rational belief or intention by means of this form of reasoning. But the nature of defeating conditions is precisely that they are those conditions that make it *irrational* for one to regard it as reliable in the circumstances to form the belief or intention in question in response to these input mental states. (Wedgwood 2009, 427)

Now, if (1) relevant forms of rational reasoning cannot be specified without mentioning the absence of defeating conditions, and if (2) there seems to be no way of specifying these defeating conditions without mentioning normative properties or relations, and if (3) dispositions that are essential for possessing concepts must be rational dispositions, that is, dispositions to engage in rational forms of reasoning, then rational dispositions cannot be specified without mentioning normative properties or relations.

Wedgwood's proposal is interesting because it stands on the assumption that reference to dispositions is needed in order to defend something that is traditionally considered alien to the talk on dispositionality, namely, normativity. He works with a de-naturalized concept of disposition but, differently from Wittgenstein or – broadly speaking – a Wittgensteinian informed perspective, he ascribes a foundational and causal role to dispositions. The normativity of the dispositional resides in the fact that dispositions cannot be specified without reference to some normative properties and relations. In a slightly different manner, instead, Dretske links dispositions and normativity on the ground of rule-governed activities and structured modalities of human action. The latter point is what lies at the core of the other two perspectives I will present in the following paragraph: Elder Wass' theory of normative circles, and Williams' social theory of normativity.

### 10.3 Elder-Wass and Williams: sociological normativity

In *The Reality of Social Construction*, Elder-Wass puts dispositions at the centre of his argument in favour of a sociological sense of normativity. From a general point of view, the aim of his book is to defend a social theory where realism and constructivism are kept together, thereby rejecting the common assumption according to which they are mutually exclusive. In other words, Elder-Vass tries to argue that «social scientist should be *both* realist *and* social constructionists» (Elder-Vass 2012,

3). The idea is that any attempt to make sense of the social world should explain what roles language, discourse and knowledge have in it. For the purposes of the research, I will mainly take into consideration chapters 2, 3, and 6, where issues regarding language, meaning and Rule-following are addressed through the use of the notion of disposition.

Interestingly, Elder-Vass starts with a question that resembles part of Wittgenstein's reflection on following rules: how to explain the tendency that people have to follow practices that are relatively standardised across a social group? This question represents the normativity problem (Elder-Vass 2012, 22). Traditionally, normativity has been given what the author calls a "philosophical sense", that is, it has been thought that common conformity to rules and standardised practices is the product of normative pressures in virtue of the fact that there is a sort of mysterious moral force behind certain norms. This account is meant to reject the idea that conformity is merely the product of ordinary causal processes. Contrary to this perspective, Elder-Vass claims that we should give normativity a sociological sense, that is, stating that we are persuaded to act in one way rather than another through the action of some ordinary causal processes.<sup>283</sup> The causal role is possessed by what the author calls "norm circle". A norm circle is a group of people which is committed to endorse and enforce a particular norm. A norm, in turn, is a social entity build up by people. Members of a norm circle interact and produce – in this sense, they are thought to have causal power – a tendency in individuals to follow standardised practices. The idea is that people tend to internalize, or incorporate a tendency to conform to norms that are endorsed and enforced by people around them. For example, let us consider a norm sanctioning messy eating (Elder-Vass 2012, 31). Subject *A* has internalized a tendency to eat in a certain way in certain circumstances. The theory of the norm circle states that the *Bs* that have influenced *A* form part of the norm circle for the "messy eating" norm, and *A*'s new tendency has been causally produced by the norm circle; the tendency is a causal effect. *Bs* have actually endorsed and enforced the norm while interacting with *A*, and *A* has been directly influenced by them. This is an example that involves a norm that can be called, using Argyle's vocabulary, a "convention", or arbitrary custom.<sup>284</sup> However, the same schema can be applied to norms of use; competence rules and skills. For example, let us consider the already familiar example of the game of chess. A competent player can be described as a player who plays correctly, and correctness can be further characterised in terms of following the rules like the other competent players: a competent player plays chess in conformity to the way other players play, otherwise no game would be possible. The player's behaviour can be described too as set of internalized tendencies to make certain moves.

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<sup>283</sup> The distinction between sociological sense and philosophical sense of normativity is taken from Turner (2010, 5-6).

<sup>284</sup> See Reese (2009, 27).

Subject *A* has internalized the tendency to move the King exactly one square either horizontally, or vertically, or diagonally. *A* has been directly influenced by *Bs*, that is, other people that play chess and both endorse and enforce the rule “King can move exactly one square horizontally, vertically, or diagonally”. *A* has probably been guided, corrected, and so on, during the learning process. *Bs* form part of the norm circle, and *A*’s new tendency is an effect of the influence of the norm circle.

Elder-Vass argues that what happens in the above and similar cases, is that

the norm circle has produced a *disposition* [my emphasis] in *A* to conform to, and perhaps to endorse and enforce, the [“messy eating”/“King can move”] norm through the influence of the particular members of the circle who happen to have endorsed and enforced it in *A*’s presence. (Elder-Vass 2012, 24).

People behave like they do when they follow rules because they have acquired some dispositions to appropriate behaviour after having been exposed to the influence of a relevant norm circle.

In what follows I will provide some reasons to sustain the view that Elder-Vass’ perspective is not committed to the misunderstandings of the current paradigm on dispositions, and that he assumes a characterisation of normativity close to the one I endorse with respect to human dispositions.

First of all, dispositions, so conceived, *do not* themselves *compel*; rather, they create a tendency to observe the concerned norm, without necessitate behaviour. Elder-Vass admits that dispositions can be *normative*: people have many dispositions, normative and otherwise, and what people actually do depends on the way these numerous dispositions interact in a particular context (Elder-Vass 2012, 27).

Secondly, dispositions are not hypostatised: they do not have causal power and they are not autonomous entities.

Dispositions, as I understand them, are properties of human individuals: one could have the disposition to hold one’s fork with the hand when eating, for example, but such a disposition could not exist independently of a particular person. It is not an entity in its own right, but a mental a mental property of a human being. (Elder-Vass 2012, 49)

Rules do not get reified; it is not the rule, or the disposition that possesses the causal power; rather, it is the norm circle that possesses it.

Finally, from a general point of view, Elder-Vass’ perspective is anti-intellectualist: he gives an account of Rule-following as the product of repeated experience, rather than being the result of conscious analysis of given rules. Moreover, he rejects cultural realism as an ontological claim,

because the content of culture *has not* some kind of ideational existence beyond its existence as beliefs and dispositions of individual human beings (Elder-Vass 2012, 54).

The author himself admits that his account may converge in some respects with Wittgenstein's treatment of rules (Elder-Vass 2012, 50). I think that, although Elder-Vass endorses a kind of communitarian view of rules which is absent in Wittgenstein, a general convergence can be acknowledged. In particular, as I tried to show, the author's perspective is Wittgensteinian in spirit given its anti-intellectualist character and a de-idealized conception of rules. Moreover, Elder-Vass does not endorse two of the main presuppositions of the current naturalized paradigm on dispositions, that is, causal efficacy of dispositions, and hypostatisation of dispositions. Dispositions are not independent things, they do not possess causal power; rather, they have a role in the normative process, that is, they are acquired patterns of action in virtue of which individuals behave the way they do in accordance with shared rule-governed practices and activities. The dispositional, so conceived, is an essential part of the cultural.

Dispositions play an essential role in the definition of sociological normativity also in Williams' work *Wittgenstein, Mind and Meaning*. Globally, the work enquires the connection between Wittgenstein's criticism of the Cartesian theory of mind – the introspective and phenomenalist trend – Wittgenstein's conception of language, and Wittgenstein's understanding of the mind. Wittgenstein's philosophy is placed on the philosophical agenda in order to face and criticize cognitivist and computational conceptions of the mind. Williams (1998) argues that Wittgenstein endorses a social conception of the mind that conflicts with the naturalistic and reductionist aspirations of the computational theory. While contemporary cognitivist theories of mind are firmly committed to naturalism, «Wittgenstein [...] seeks a naturalism with respect to the mind as the formation of a second nature through acculturation into our normatively structured language games» (Williams 1998, ix). Such a de-naturalized naturalism is traced in particular in Wittgenstein's remarks on the social basis of Rule-following and in Wittgenstein's focus on the philosophical significance of language learning.

Reference to dispositions is found in two main places: 1. Williams' social theory of normativity; 2. Williams' dispositional conception of belief and understanding. I will first present these two points, then I will expound Williams' use of the notion of disposition.

1. Like Elder-Vass, Williams (1998, 147) claims that normativity is basic to human intentionality because human intentionality, unlike animal one, is marked by its being sensitive to norms and standards. Intentional states can be accurate or inaccurate, correct or incorrect. Similarly, words can

be used correctly, or incorrectly, accurately or inaccurately. The problem of normativity is the problem of understanding how such standards are fixed; what are the criteria in virtue of which something is said to be correct or incorrect.

Williams claims that standards are socially fixed. Instead of adhering to causal and individualistic accounts of intentionality, Williams claims that the needed context, or background network, is provided by social practice. In particular, the social practice provides a background which is made of dispositions.

Social practice provides the needed context, and that just consists in the patterned and harmonious ways of acting and judging that exist among the members of the community. The beliefs, desires, and other attitudes of the individual are embedded within this natural and social environment. They are best understood as *dispositions*. (Williams 1998, 151)

However, Williams immediately specifies that the above observation «is not a recommendation to revive a strongly reductionist account of these dispositions» (Williams 1998, 151). Indeed, dispositions are here conceived as patterned ways of acting, and not as inner states or properties of objects. Rather, «it is a recommendation to see beliefs and other such states as acquired dispositions, the exercise of which involves both patterns of behavior and structured circumstances» (Williams 1998, 151). I now move to the second point.

2. Beliefs and other intentional states are allocated by Williams to the drawer of human dispositions. Again, this kind of dispositionalism, like Elder-Vass' one, constitutes an attempt to give an account of normativity and human behaviour which stands between, on the one hand, scientific naturalism and, on the other hand, intellectualism: basic linguistic competence and, in general, human beings action within a social context, are read as ways of acting and judging non-reflectively in accord with the other members of the relevant system, rather than being ways of rationally interpreting the world.

Williams' dispositional account of belief consists in treating beliefs «as expressing sets of dispositions to behave in certain ways under certain conditions» (Williams 1998, 141). This has the advantage to accommodate the conception of propositions as sets of possible worlds, rather than being something that actually exist in some platonic realm. As far as understanding is concerned, Williams reads Wittgenstein's positive remarks on understanding and Rule-following as stating that «understanding is a disposition of the individual, namely, the ability to act in appropriate ways under appropriate circumstances» (Williams 1998, 177). Such an ability has a normative content, that is, it involves the distinction between acting appropriately and acting inappropriately. There is a

correct way of behaving and an incorrect one. If this is so, then this ability, or disposition, can only be exercised within a social context because social context is what provides the standard needed in order to make sense of the distinction between correct and incorrect: it constitutes the *de facto* harmony in the actions and utterances of a group of people.

But what kind of dispositions are intentional states? Is Williams working with a naturalized concept of disposition? I claim that she is not. She employs what I have called a de-naturalized notion of disposition, informed by Wittgenstein's philosophy, which has the following features:

First of all, dispositions are characterised as patterns of action, as ways of behaving and reacting. Williams rejects the common assumption that dispositions have categorical bases that explain the disposition itself, at least in the case of psychological and human dispositions.

In emphasizing patterns of action, I intend to press against the idea that where there are dispositions, there must be the categorical bases of the dispositions, bases *whose properties explain the disposition* itself. In the case of psychological states, there is no reason to expect to find such underlying bases. (Williams 1998, 152)

Secondly, Williams recognizes the peculiarity of the kind of explanation involved in dispositional talks and she seems to avoid to commit the discussed category mistake: dispositions and ordinary dispositional descriptions are thought to be something different from descriptions belonging to neurophysiology, physiology, or chemistry. Indeed, only if we recognize such a difference we can face the lack of correlation between, for example, neural patterning and ordinary disposition ascriptions.

There may well be no interesting and systematic correlations between neural patterning and ordinary dispositional patterning. This gap does not warrant, however, the conclusion that ordinary descriptions are to be eliminated on the ground that they constitute a bad theory of human behavior. This is because they are not part of a theory in rivalry with neurophysiology. (Williams 1998, 152)

Thirdly, Williams makes sense of conceptual dispositional pluralism, hence she does not commit the simplification fallacy. She indeed distinguishes between reflex, or conditioned dispositions, and skill dispositions (Williams 1998, 181). The latter are what constitutes Rule-following. Following a rule, indeed, is a matter of having the right sort of disposition, and such a disposition is acquired, it is not part of the biological apparatus. Understanding and Rule-following, therefore, belong to the realm of knowledge-how – as exercises of skills – rather than to propositional knowledge. Skill dispositions or, better, concepts of skill dispositions, have the following features: they are intimately connected to their manner of acquisition. The manner of acquisition is indeed what mainly distinguishes them from

reflex, or conditioned dispositions; they are acquired; they cannot be rendered as a stateable set of instruction; ascriptions to individuals need public exercise to be done; finally, they can be exercised only within a patterned and standardised social context.

#### **10.4 Wittgenstein's normative dispositionalism: a (provisional) conclusion**

In the second part of the present work I tried to show how a Wittgensteinian informed kind of dispositionalism admits a normative notion of disposition applied to human understanding and language use. However, dispositions are generally thought to be essentially non-normative. This assumption, indeed, is endorsed both by authors belonging to the current naturalized paradigm on dispositions and by authors who defend the normative character of meaning and intentionality. Kripke (1982), together with the critics who engaged with his thought, is an example.

In this chapter, I tried to show that the concept of normative disposition and, generally speaking, a normative kind of dispositionalism, is not something alien to philosophy. In the fields of philosophy of action and philosophy of mind, dispositions are also used to give an account of the normativity of intentional states; dispositions are thought to be patterned ways of acting that are acquired and that explain, not in a causal sense, the fact that people do conform to shared rules that govern activities, practices, and language use itself, since a conception of language as a social, or cultural construction is accepted and presupposed.

The views I have presented so far share at least two aspects of what I think to be Wittgenstein's kind of normativity of human practices and human dispositions: the idea that dispositions do not necessitate action, and the formulation of a dispositional account of intentional mental states such as beliefs, desires, understanding and knowledge. Broadly speaking, dispositional concepts are not merely used to refer to natural capacities of objects that can be better enquired through scientific research; rather, they are mainly employed to give an account of human being's normative behaviour, that is, the fact that people follow rules and, in doing so, they can act correctly or incorrectly. However, as we have seen in chapter 5, the normative dimension of dispositions that comes from Wittgenstein's remarks has two main features. These features are not always accepted by the authors who admit a normative kind of dispositionalism. First of all, the normative character, as I understand it, is well characterized in terms of contingency. Contingency, is then thought in terms of a "sense of possibility": everything that is the case could have been different if developed under different conditions. Secondly, Wittgenstein's norms, or rules, are not reducible neither to constitutive norms of action, nor to prescriptions, or conventional customs.

The first feature is, essentially, the claim that no facts – neither natural, nor metaphysical – lie at the bottom of language and human practices. From this, we get that (1) there is no causal or necessary relation between human beings' dispositions and the behavioural reaction, and that (2) there are no normative facts; the validity of a norm does not come from the fact that it refers to alleged independent and primitive normative facts.

The second feature, if applied to human dispositions, suggests the following picture: the expression "Being disposed to *X*" is conceptually different from the expression "*Ought* to do *X*" in the context of rule-governed human behaviour. The two expressions might be thought to collapse because their use shares a common feature: the possibility of a different reaction, or deviation from the norm. I can still refrain from correctly employ the term, or I can make mistakes. Similarly, I can perfectly understand a moral ought and still refrain from acting in accordance with it. In this sense, both dispositions to action and moral imperatives have a normative power which consists in allowing the possibility of a different course of action which preserves the non-mechanistic character of human action. However, as I tried to argue, the kind of deviation from an acquired disposition, or pattern of action, is conceptually different from the kind of deviation from a prescription, or moral ought: in the latter case I do something immoral, or wrong, while in the former case I do something incorrect, or inaccurate. If, while playing chess, I move the King two squares horizontally while it can be moved only one square, I am not breaking a moral rule; rather, I am simply playing badly and the other player can stop the game and inform me about the incorrect move. He can shout at me and utter "No, you cannot do this!".

In the case of linguistic meaning, a dispositional account is suggested by the Wittgensteinian characterisation of understanding as mastery of a technique and of meaning as use. In both cases, language use and understanding are conceived as a kind of ability or, in general, an exercise of knowledge-how. Understanding the meaning of a term can be characterised as knowing how to employ that term, that is, having the disposition to employ the term in conformity with its grammatical rules. However, such a disposition is not what constitutes the meaning, for the meaning is already fixed: it is a fact that I am disposed to correctly employ a word, that is, uttering the word in the suitable situations, and such a fact is what understanding that word consists in. Normativity, then, lies in the already operative distinction between correct use and incorrect use of the term.

In this last and conclusive paragraph, I would like to go back and expound a point that I have already suggested throughout the work, that is, the idea that dispositions can be seen although they are not empirically accessible. It is true that dispositions, as suggested by Ryle (1990), are not something of the kind that can be observed, seen or unseen. Failure to recognize this aspect of

dispositional concepts constitutes a category mistake. However, the idea that dispositions can be seen does not contrast with the above claim because a different kind of empirical accessibility is assumed. Indeed, as we have seen, traditional empiricist scepticism about dispositions stands on a concept of empirical accessibility shaped on the picture of direct observation of objects. Authors belonging to the current paradigm work with the same notion of accessibility; they identify what is real exclusively with what is physical, material and approachable through the methods of science. Consequently, they try to defend dispositions by naturalizing them, because they generally work with the assumption that appeal to dispositions must be scientific in order to be legitimate. Only in this way dispositions can be real, accessible, then legitimately ascribable to objects. My general suggestion is to think that dispositions *are not* something of the kind that can be seen, or unseen, recorded, or unrecorded, *like* a book locked into a drawer is, or a candy hidden inside a pocket is.

Contrary to the above shared assumption, I claim that a different notion both of empirical accessibility and of reality should be used. In this way it is possible to avoid the category mistake applied to dispositional terms, on the one hand, and to guarantee a place for dispositions and dispositional terms in ordinary language and ordinary life without reducing dispositions to mere heuristic tools, or *façons de parler*. In particular, dispositions can be seen in the way Wittgenstein states that we see «the glance of the eye» (RPP I §1100).

#### 10.4.1 The inner-outer divide

Firstly, I claim that the category mistake applied to dispositional terms is of the kind Wittgenstein's imputes to the traditional *inner-outer divide*.<sup>285</sup> In particular, dispositions are thought to be inaccessible and unobservable in the same way as inner mental entities are thought to be private and inaccessible. Therefore, if this is so, then the philosophical problem of dispositions does not differ substantially from the traditional problem about the existence of other minds and the sceptical responses to it.

As we have seen, the official doctrine about the mind is dualistic in both an ontological and an epistemological sense. In this section I will take into consideration the epistemological import of such a picture of mind and body. From an epistemic point of view, the outer is thought to differ from the inner because it is observable and accessible, while the inner is hidden behind it. This picture, actually, is not completely counterintuitive, for it seems to give a proper account of many ordinary experiences

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<sup>285</sup> What Ryle (1990) calls “the official doctrine”, or “the Dogma of the Ghost in the Machine”. The expression “inner-outer divide” is a technical English expression that refers to the philosophical views that oppose mind and body; it is a widespread perspective in epistemology and philosophy of mind (Perissinotto 2018, 228).

of human life: we often feel puzzled by others' feelings, we sometimes find difficult to understand another person and then we employ expressions such as "I cannot see what lies inside his head!". Again, we might wonder whether a friend of us is sincere when he says that he has headache; we are not sure, we feel uncertain because, we say, we cannot see inside him and prove what he is actually feeling. Wittgenstein does not want to deny such experiences; rather, his aim is to show that the inner-outer divide does not explain our uncertainty, but it expresses such uncertainty; it is a picture that expresses such uncertainty (Perissinotto 2018, 232). The point I want to focus on, however, is that such a picture is misleading for it stands on a category mistake.

The problem of the existence of other minds, together with the problem of the reality of dispositions given their empirical inaccessibility comes from a false appearance produced by analogies and similes that have been absorbed into the forms of the given language (PI §112). Wittgenstein illustrates this point with two significative examples, taken from *The Blue Book*. Let us consider the two following propositions: a. "*A* has a gold tooth", b. "*A* has toothache" (BB, 49). Proposition a. is generally used to say that there is a gold tooth inside *A*'s mouth and that I cannot see *A*'s gold tooth unless *A* opens his mouth. There is something that I am not able to see because it lies inside a closed mouth and I do not have access to it. Proposition b., if compared to a., causes puzzlement. Is it similar or different from proposition a.? On the one hand, it seems that the two propositions are similar, because we actually say, for example, that we cannot feel *A*'s toothache because it is in *A*'s mouth and not in ours; *A*'s mouth is inaccessible to us. On the other hand, though, it seems that the two propositions are different because, while I can see the golden tooth if *A* opens his mouth, I cannot feel *A*'s toothache if *A* opens his mouth.

Similarly, let us think about the following propositions: c. "I can't feel his pain", d. "We can't have [...] pains in another person's tooth" (BB, 49). The two propositions seem to be similar and still different in some important respects: it seems that in both cases there is something that we cannot do. However, it is not clear in proposition c. what is exactly that cannot be done. Indeed, pain, like sadness, or joy, is not something that can be hidden like a candy hidden in a jacket pocket. If I open the pocket of the jacket, I find the candy, but I cannot have a similar access to people's inner lives. Pain, joy, sadness, are still thought to be objects that are inner, that is, they lie inside the subject. However, they are thought to be hidden in a stronger sense than a candy hidden in the jacket pocket, or a necklace stored inside a safe. For this reason, sensations and emotions are thought to be super-private objects: even if I wanted to, I could not exhibit them in the way I can exhibit my necklace locked into a safe.

Wittgenstein states that «it is the apparent analogy, and again the lack of analogy, between these cases which causes our trouble» (BB, 49). In the first example, the apparent analogy occults the grammatical fact that in the two propositions the verb “to have” is used in two different ways. Because we fail to recognise this grammatical feature, we are then liable to think that the difference between proposition a. and proposition b. lies in the different kind of object that we have: a material and public object in the first case (the golden tooth); a mental and private object in the second case (toothache) (Perissinotto 2018, 229). Regarding the second example, Wittgenstein suggests to focus on the grammar of the expression of power “can”, or “be able”. The misunderstanding lies in the confusion between the empirical use of a proposition and a grammatical use of a proposition: proposition d. can be considered an empirical proposition. The expression “can't” «is used in the same way as in the proposition “An iron nail can't scratch glass”», that is, «we could write this in the form “experience teaches that an iron nail *doesn't* scratch glass”» (BB, 49). Proposition c., instead, functions as a rule governing the use of the expressions involved. “I can't feel his pain” is not a declarative sentence about my epistemic limits; rather, it is a grammatical remark on the use of the word “pain”, or on the concept of pain.

The trouble caused by the analogy and then the lack of the analogy, is exactly what Ryle (1990) thinks to characterise the official doctrine about the mind and the para-mechanical fallacy. As we have seen, according to the official doctrine, mind is described by mere negative with a parallel with the body, as obverse to it: mind and body are thought to be similar, still different in some respects. They both must stand somewhere, but mind is not localised in space like the body is, then it should lie in a different realm, the mental one. Their functioning is thought in terms of a mechanism, but mental mechanism seems difficult to be accommodated to the physical laws that govern the body, then specific mental, or psychological laws are postulated. To summarize, mind is something like the body, still different in many respects.

The same, I suggest, applies to dispositions. The traditional empiricist suspect against dispositions comes from the fact that the expression “You cannot see irritability” is thought to function like the expression “You cannot see my molar tooth”; similarly, the expression “*A* has a bad temper” is thought to function like “*A* has four banknotes in his wallet”. Dispositions are thought to be like hidden banknotes or teeth, still very different from them. Why? Because, while I can perfectly take my friend's wallet, open it and see the four banknotes, or I can ask my friend to open his mouth in order to see his molar, I cannot properly “open” a person to see his bad temper. The misleading idea is that dispositions should, or even must be seen like banknotes and teeth are, but they fail to be so, hence they are considered “super-hidden”, or “super-inaccessible” objects, that is, objects more

inaccessible than a molar tooth in a closed mouth, or a banknote in a wallet. The misleading comparison, of course, has an ontological import too. From an epistemic point of view, dispositions are thought to be special kinds of inaccessible objects. From an ontological point of view, they are thought to be made of a different material from objects inhabiting the physical world: since the comparison leaves open a proper characterisation of their nature, dispositions are then thought to be gaseous and ethereal objects. Note that such a picture lies at the bottom of the attempt to give substance to dispositions, either by allocating them in the fundamental ontology, or by reducing them to physical and empirically accessible properties of objects.

#### 10.4.2 The transparency of human nature

Contrary to the common assumption, empiricist in nature, of the “super-inaccessibility” of dispositions, I suggest that dispositions are things of a kind that can be seen like we see joy in a joyful face, or sadness in a sad glance. From a conceptual point of view, the point is that the expression “to see” can be employed differently or, in other words, that our language allows for different uses, hence different meanings, of the expression.

Wittgenstein writes important remarks on this topic in the first part of the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (RPP I §§1100-1101), where he writes about the human eye and its glance. Wittgenstein wants us to note that «we don't see the human eye as a receiver» like we see, for example, the ear, or the nose. Indeed, while the ear receives, «the eye looks. (It casts glances, it flashes, beams, coruscates)» (RPP I §1100). The eye does send something out, rather than letting something in. This is exhibited by the fact that people may terrify using their eyes, but they cannot terrify with their ears. In other words, «when you see the eye, you see something go out from it. You see the glance of the eye» (RPP I §1100).

Wittgenstein is here addressing and rejecting the view that we cannot really see the glance of the eye. The glance of the eye cannot be seen; at least, we can see the shape or the colour of the eye. This is a view that a naturalist philosopher might perfectly endorse. Indeed, Wittgenstein thinks that such a view is nothing more than a “physiological prejudice”. A reductionist naturalist philosopher might think that the glance cannot be seen, because it cannot be seen like the shape or the colour of the eye. But why should we admit that I see the glance in the same way as I see the colour and the shape of the eye? Our concept of seeing admits both cases, and the second case is not shaped on the model of seeing applied to physical objects or properties. «When you get away from your physiological prejudices, you'll find nothing in the fact that the glance of the eye can be seen». The glance can be

seen as I see, for example, «the glance that you throw someone else. And if someone wanted to correct me and say I don't really *see* it, I should hold this to be a piece of stupidity» (RPP I §1101).

Given this, how can the above remarks be applied to dispositions? Human dispositions are an easier case. Let us recall the inner-outer divide. According to the followers of the dualistic conception of mind and body, the inner-outer divide is a picture that exhibits the fact that we often feel uncertain about other people's feelings and thoughts. As stated by Perissinotto (2018, 232-233), according to Wittgenstein, the inner-outer divide fails on two levels: on the one hand, it fails to give a proper account of why we sometimes fail to understand others; on the other hand, it is not a good picture, because others are not generally so extraneous to us.

Concerning the first level, Wittgenstein does admit that sometimes «one human being can be a complete enigma to another» (PPF §325).

We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even given a mastery of the country's language. We do not *understand* the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.) We cannot find our feet with them.  
(PPF §325)

However, if a human being is an enigma for me is not because I do not have access to his inner life and I cannot see what happens, or what lies inside him. Rather, I cannot understand him because I am not familiar with his traditions, for example, or because I am part of a different form of life. If I want to understand him better, I should rather try to live with him in his cultural system, than trying to inspect his alleged inner soul.

Concerning the second level, Wittgenstein suggests that the above case is rather an exception to the rule. Indeed, «we also say of a person that he is transparent to us» (PPF §325). For example, «if I see someone writhing in pain with evident cause, I do not think: all the same, his feelings are hidden from me» (PPF §324); rather, his humanity is transparent to us for it is shown through both his shouting and writhing, and my reaction to it. We can say that we see the person's pain in his shouting and writhing. I see it; simply, I do not see it in the way I see the person's injured leg, for example. The same goes for other states. I can see a person's joy in his glance, in his smile, in his hugs and jumps.

Human being's dispositions can be seen in this way. This applies both to character traits and to abilities, or skills. We see an individual's shyness in his red cheeks, in his glance, maybe in his nervous movements. There is a typical shyness-behaviour, and this is what provides the criterion for correctly employing the concept of shyness. This observation helps to better explain what I have

already suggested at the beginning of the work, that is, the idea that we see the pianist's ability in his concrete performance.<sup>286</sup> We see shyness, we see a person's ability; simply, we do not see them as we see a person's cheek, or as we see the pianist's fingers.

Finally, I would like to end by suggesting that the same observation can be applied to mere natural capacities, or physical dispositions. Why? Because even in this case, dispositional terms are used by reference to behavioural expressions; criteria are the same. We learn to use the concept of solubility by looking at soluble objects dissolving in water. The term "solubility", like "fragility", "conductivity", and so on, is not meaningful in virtue of the fact that it refers to an inner state, or property of the object. Scientific or metaphysical enquiry about such an entity is a further step, but it does not have a role in the definition of the concept. If we consider human beings' abilities as unobservable objects, we are then assuming that abilities are some kind of entities separated from the subject's performance and located somewhere in the subject's mind or body. Similarly, if we think that sugar's solubility is not observable, then we are assuming that such a disposition is something separated from the actual manifestation and located somewhere "inside" the object to which it is ascribed. We see sugar's solubility like we see sadness in a sad glance.

Throughout the work I maintained that the naturalized account of dispositions is at least incomplete, that is, it cannot provide a proper account of some kinds of dispositions intimately related to human beings' normative practices. Maybe in the case of solubility, a non-normative concept of disposition does not raise any trouble. However, if what I argued in this paragraph seems legit, my critical remarks could cover the case of natural capacities too, that is, it can be stated that the naturalized account fails if applied to physical dispositions too and that Wittgenstein's remarks on the misleading picture of the "shadowy model" can be applied retrospectively to all kinds of dispositional concepts.

Whatever the answer to this last question might be, I hope to have shown at least two things: 1. The importance and the philosophical interest of the notion of disposition; 2. The role that a Wittgensteinian informed perspective can have with regards to contemporary – non-Wittgensteinian – philosophical issues. This research could be globally considered as an attempt to place Wittgenstein back on the philosophical agenda, out of the ivory tower where he is often locked.

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<sup>286</sup> See chapter 1, paragraph 1.1.

## **Wittgenstein's works and abbreviations**

**BB** *The Blue and Brown Books* (1969) [1933–1935], ed. R. Rhees, second edition, Oxford: Blackwell.

**BT** *The Big Typescript: TS 213* (2005) [1933], ed. and trans. C.G. Luckhardt, M.A.E. Aue, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

**CV** *Culture and Value: A Selection from the Posthumous Remains* (1977/1998), Ed. G.H. von Wright in collaboration with H. Nyman, revised edition of the text by A. Pichler, trans. P. Winch, Oxford: Blackwell.

**GB** *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* (1967) [1931, 1936], ed. R. Rhees, *Synthese*, 17, pp. 233–253. **RFGB** (2013) *Note sul "Ramo d'oro" di Frazer*, tr. it. S. De Waal, Milano: Adelphi.

**LPP** *Wittgenstein's Lectures on Philosophical Psychology 1946–47, Notes by P.T. Geach, K.J. Shah, and A.C. Jackson* (1988), ed. P.T. Geach, Sussex: Harvester.

**OC** *On Certainty* (1974) [1951], ed. G.E.M. Anscombe, G.H. von Wright, trans. D. Paul, G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell.

**PG** *Philosophical Grammar* (1974) [1932–1934]. (1974), ed. R. Rhees, trans. A.J.P. Kenny, Oxford: Blackwell.

**PI** *Philosophical Investigations* (2009) [1938–1945], ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, fourth, revised edition by P.M.S. Hacker, J. Schulte, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, J. Schulte, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

**PO** *Philosophical Occasions* (1993) [1912–1951], ed. J. Klagge, A. Nordmann, Indianapolis: Hackett.

**PPF** *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment* (2009) [1946–1949], in PI (2009), pp. 183–243 [Previously known as PI “Part II.”].

**PR** *Philosophical Remarks* (1975) [1929–1930], ed. R. Rhees, trans. R. Hargreaves, R. White, Oxford: Blackwell.

**RFM** *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (1978) [1937–1944], ed. G.H. von Wright, R. Rhees, G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, third, revised, and reset edition, Oxford: Blackwell.

**RPP I** *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (Vol. 1) (1980) [1945–1947], ed. G.E.M. Anscombe, G.H. von Wright, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell.

**RPP II** *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (Vol. 2) (1980) [1948], ed. G.H. von Wright, H. Nyman, trans. C.G. Luckhardt, M.A.E. Aue, Oxford: Blackwell.

**TLP** *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1961) [1922], trans. D.F. Pears, B.F. McGuinness, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. References are to numbered sections.

**VW** *The Voices of Wittgenstein – The Vienna Circle, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Friedrich Waismann* (2003), ed. G.P. Baker, trans. G.P. Baker et al, London: Routledge.

**Z** *Zettel* (1967) [1945–1948], ed. G.E.M. Anscombe, G.H. von Wright, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell.

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