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PRIMITIVE NORMATIVITY AND SKEPTICISM ABOUT RULES*

In his *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Saul Kripke develops a skeptical argument against the possibility of meaning.¹ Suppose that all your previous uses of the word “plus” and of the “+” sign have involved numbers less than 57. You are now asked “what is 68 plus 57?” and you answer “125.” But a skeptic proposes the hypothesis that by the word “plus,” or the “+” sign, you previously meant not addition, but *quaddition*, where x quus y is the sum of x and y if x and y are less than 57, and otherwise 5. If you are to use the word “plus” as you used it in the past, the skeptic says, then, on the hypothesis that you meant quaddition, you ought to answer “5.” Against your insistence that you know what you meant by “plus,” the skeptic challenges you to cite some fact in virtue of which you meant addition. All your previous answers, he points out, were consistent with the hypothesis that you meant quaddition, so how can you justify your claim that you meant addition instead? The upshot of the skeptical

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¹ Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1982). Unless otherwise noted, page references are to this work.

considerations is not merely the epistemological conclusion that you do not know what you meant, but the metaphysical conclusion that there is no fact about what you meant. And this conclusion generalizes to all supposed cases of meaning or rule-following, present as well as past. There can be no fact as to whether anyone means anything by any word, or is following any one rule rather than any other.

Kripke's argument proceeds mostly by elimination: he considers, and rules out, various proposals as to what the fact of meaning addition might consist in. Two in particular are worth highlighting. The one which Kripke discusses in more detail is that your meaning addition by the word "plus" is a fact about your dispositions with respect to that word. You meant addition in the past because you were disposed to give the sum rather than the quum in answer to questions using the word "plus." Kripke raises three objections to this proposal, turning respectively on the supposed finiteness of our dispositions (26–27), on the fact that we are sometimes disposed to make arithmetical mistakes (28–32), and, most importantly, on the proposal's apparent failure to account for what he calls the "normativity of meaning": that one is or was *disposed* to respond in a certain way on a given occasion cannot make it the case that one *ought* so to respond (23–24, 37).² The other, which Kripke treats much more briefly, is that your meaning addition by "plus" is a primitive or *sui generis* state (51). This proposal is antireductionist in spirit: the fact that you mean addition, on this proposal, cannot be reduced to facts about your behavior or dispositions, or to any nonintentional psychological facts about you. While Kripke acknowledges that this proposal may be "irrefutable," he rejects it as "desperate": it leaves, he says, the nature of the *sui generis* state "completely mysterious" (51).

Many of the responses to Kripke's skeptical puzzle have been aimed at defending one or the other of these two proposals. Kripke's attack on the dispositional view has been countered by invoking a notion of disposition on which dispositions are ascribed on the basis of behavior in ideal conditions, or subject to *ceteris paribus* clauses. We can say, for example, that salt has a disposition to dissolve in water even though it

² Boghossian classifies both the second and the third objections under the heading of the "normativity of meaning"; he also regards the second objection as much the more important of the two. See Paul Boghossian, "The Rule-Following Considerations," *Mind*, xcvi, 392 (October 1989): 507–49, at pp. 530–31. In referring to the "normativity" objection, I have in mind exclusively the third. On the distinction between the second and third objections, see for example Simon Blackburn, "The Individual Strikes Back," *Synthese*, lvi, 3 (March 1984): 281–301, at p. 291; Crispin Wright, "Kripke's Account of the Argument against Private Language," this JOURNAL, cxxxi, 12 (December 1984): 759–78, at pp. 771–72; Scott Soames, "Skepticism about Meaning: Indeterminacy, Normativity, and the Rule-Following Paradox," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplementary Volume, xxiii (1997): 211–49, at pp. 217–19.

fails to dissolve in a saturated solution or when something interferes with the electric charges on the water molecules. This addresses both the finiteness objection and the objection regarding dispositions to make mistakes: we can say that I am disposed to give the sum even though that disposition is not actualized if I am given numbers that are too large for me to grasp or if my habitual carelessness interferes with my calculations.³ And it has also been thought to address the objection regarding normativity, since the claim that a person is doing as she ought might seem to be grounded in the idea that she is responding as she would under ideal conditions.⁴ In support of the proposal that meaning is a *sui generis* state, Kripke's critics have simply accused him of unargued reductionism.⁵ Why should we suppose that the fact of someone's meaning something, or the fact of her following a rule, should be specifiable in purely naturalistic terms? These facts are, in a metaphor which John McDowell draws from Wittgenstein, "bedrock." We should not suppose that we can dig down below them to find more fundamental facts about verbal behavior and accompanying feelings on which the facts of meaning and rule-following rest.⁶

But it is widely accepted that neither the dispositionalist nor the anti-reductionist account is fully satisfactory. Regarding the dispositionalist approach, it is not at all clear that the kinds of modifications that address the objections about finitude and mistakes also address the normativity problem. The idea that someone is responding or not responding as she would respond under ideal circumstances does not on its own license the idea that she is responding, or failing to respond, as she *ought*. We do not say of a sample of salt that dissolves or fails to dissolve in water that it is doing or not doing as it ought, but only that it is or is not manifesting its disposition to dissolve. So the dispositionalist account fails, on the face of it, to do justice to the

³ The response is developed in detail in Graeme Forbes, "Skepticism and Semantic Knowledge," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, n. s., LXXXIV (1983–1984): 223–37. See also Blackburn, *op. cit.*, pp. 289–91; Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 772; and Jerry A. Fodor, *A Theory of Content and Other Essays* (Cambridge: MIT, 1990), pp. 94–95. I consider this line of response further in Hannah Ginsborg, "Inside and Outside Language: Stroud's Non-reductionism about Meaning," in Jason Bridges, Niko Kolodny, and Wai-hung Wong, eds., *The Possibility of Philosophical Understanding: Reflections on the Thought of Barry Stroud* (New York: Oxford, forthcoming).

⁴ Warren Goldfarb, "Kripke on Wittgenstein on Rules," this JOURNAL, LXXXII, 9 (September 1985): 471–88, at pp. 477–78.

⁵ See especially Colin McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p. 150ff. Other antireductionist approaches include Boghossian, *op. cit.*; John McDowell, "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule," in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1998), pp. 221–62; and Barry Stroud, "Mind, Meaning, and Practice," in *Meaning, Understanding, and Practice* (New York: Oxford, 2000), pp. 170–92.

⁶ McDowell, *op. cit.*, §7, p. 241f.

intuition that a person's meaning something by a term, or her following a rule for its use, has normative implications.

While the antireductionist approach is a better candidate for accounting for the apparent normative implications of meaning states, it suffers from what is, in a sense, the converse difficulty. For it fails to account for the way in which what someone means, or what rule she is following, seems to determine not just what she *ought* to do, but what she in fact *will* do. Paul Boghossian raises a version of this general worry when he points out that the antireductionist view fails to account for the causal efficacy of meaning states. Another version of the worry is raised by Crispin Wright when he draws attention to the "disposition-like" connections to behavior which content-bearing psychological states exhibit. Such states, as Wright puts it, "resemble dispositions in the manner in which they have to answer to an indefinitely circumscribed range of behavioral manifestations."⁷ At least on the face of it, as Wright points out, this quasi-dispositional character of meaning states is something for which the antireductionist has difficulty accounting.

My aim in this paper is to propose a solution to the skeptical puzzle which offers a middle way between these two approaches. This solution attempts to do justice to the way in which meaning and rule-following resemble dispositional states while still accommodating what Kripke calls the normativity of meaning. While my approach is partly reductionist, in that it aims to reduce facts about meaning to facts that are in a sense more primitive, it does not attempt a reduction of meaning to facts conceived purely naturalistically. "Bedrock" on this approach is located below the level of facts about meaning, but as we shall see it is still irreducibly normative, and hence it remains above the level of mere behavioral responses and their psychological concomitants. My solution centers on a notion which I call "primitive normativity" and which I take to be Kantian in origin. In the first of the four sections which follow, I introduce this notion in the context of the dialectic initiated by Kripke's skeptic. In section II, I say more about the notion of primitive normativity in its own right before going on, in section III, to show how it can be invoked to meet the skeptical challenge. In section IV I will address some objections and then go on to explain briefly why I take the view to be Kantian.

I

I want to begin by questioning an assumption which Kripke makes early in his development of the skeptical dialectic and which has

⁷Wright, "Critical Notice of Colin McGinn's *Wittgenstein on Meaning*," *Mind*, xcvi, 390 (April 1989): 289–305, at p. 293.

not so far been challenged, to the best of my knowledge, by any of his critics. The assumption is implicit in a passage where Kripke describes the skeptical challenge as “taking two forms”:

First, [the skeptic] 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’. The two forms of the challenge are related. I am confident that I should answer ‘125’ because I am confident that this answer also accords with what I *meant*. (11)

Now, as the development of the dialectic makes clear, Kripke’s main concern is with the first of these challenges: to show that there is a fact that you meant “plus.”⁸ The relevance of the second challenge is that it imposes a constraint on any satisfactory answer to the first challenge. If any fact counts as the fact of your meaning addition, it must serve to justify your confidence that you ought to say “125” rather than “5.”

What I want to question here is the way in which Kripke takes these two challenges to be related. Kripke assumes that the first challenge must be met as a prior condition of responding to the second: in order to claim legitimately that you ought to say “125,” you need first to establish that you previously meant addition. This is because he assumes that your claim about what you ought to say must rest on a claim about what you meant. As he puts it in the passage just quoted, “I am confident that I should answer ‘125’ *because* I am confident that this answer also accords with what I meant” (11, my emphasis). The skeptic can thus challenge your confidence about the former of these by challenging your confidence about the latter. On this assumption, a response to the skeptic must proceed by first showing, against the skeptic’s first challenge, that you did indeed mean addition. Only then are you in a position to claim, in response to the skeptic’s second challenge, that you ought to say “125” if you are to accord with your previous usage. But I want to deny that this is the order in which the two challenges must be addressed. I want to propose that you can legitimately reply to the skeptic that you ought to say “125” independently of any assumption about what you, or indeed anyone, meant previously by “plus.” That means that you can dismiss the second challenge by pointing out that it is unmotivated: you can maintain your previous confidence that “125” is the appropriate answer regardless

⁸ Although Kripke refers in this passage to “two forms” of the skeptical challenge, he has the skeptic present them as two distinct, albeit related, challenges, and this is how I will treat them in what follows.

of whether or not you can answer the first challenge.⁹ Now, as we saw, it is the first challenge which is most central to Kripke's skeptic, so this proposal on its own does not yet amount to a reply to the skeptical puzzle. But I shall argue in section III that if you can respond to the skeptic's second challenge in the way I have suggested, that puts you in a position to show that you meant addition rather than quaddition and, hence, to answer the skeptic's first challenge as well.

It is important to be clear that the skeptic's second challenge concerns not how you ought to respond *simpliciter*, but how you ought to respond in light of your previous use of the term "plus." You and the skeptic agree that you previously responded to "2 plus 3" with "5," to "7 plus 5" with "12," and so on. Your disagreement concerns whether "125" is what you ought to say relative to that past history of use. The question, as Kripke puts it, is "whether my present usage agrees with my past usage" (12): it is not whether "125" is now the answer which should be given to "68 + 57," but rather whether "125" is what "[I should say] to accord with my previous usage" (12). Kripke treats interchangeably the idea that "125" is what you ought to say if you are to accord with your past *usage*, and the idea that this is what you ought to say if you are to accord with your past *meaning* or with your past *intentions*. He glosses the skeptic's question of "whether my present usage agrees with my past usage" as the question "whether I am presently conforming to my previous linguistic intentions" (12; Kripke's emphases removed); the question is, "How do I know that '68 plus 57', as I *meant* 'plus' in the *past*, should denote 125?" (12). This is because he takes for granted that accordance with how you used the term in the past can be understood only as accordance with the meaning with which you used the term, or as accordance with the rule which you adopted for its use. But I am denying that the idea of conformity to past usage depends on the idea of conformity to past meaning. While I accept that the "ought" in question is conditional on the circumstances in which you used the word "plus" in the past, I reject the assumption—which is of a piece with Kripke's assumption about how the skeptic's two challenges are related—that the "ought" has to be conditional on your past meaning or past intentions, or on a rule which you previously had in mind for the use of the term. I maintain that there is a sense in which you ought to say "125," given

⁹ I am assuming here, with Kripke, that the past and present meanings of all signs except those referring to addition can be taken for granted. When you say "125" you can be understood either as saying the name of the number 125, or as asserting that the answer to the question you were asked is "125." *Pace* Soames, *op. cit.*, p. 217, you do not have to be understood as asserting that 68 plus 57 is 125.

the finite list of your previous uses, independent of what meaning, if any, those uses expressed.

II

The sense of “ought” I am invoking here expresses what I am going to call “primitive normativity”: very roughly, normativity which does not depend on conformity to an antecedently recognized rule. To bring this notion into focus I want to begin by considering a simpler analogue of Kripke’s skeptical challenge, based on the example Wittgenstein gives at §185 of the *Philosophical Investigations*.¹⁰ Imagine a child who is familiar with the numerals and able to recite them well into the hundreds, and who has just now learned to count by twos, that is, to recite numerals in the sequence 2, 4, 6, 8, and so on. Suppose that on one occasion she recites the sequence up to “40,” and then goes on, as we expect, with “42.” Moreover, she does so unhesitatingly, with an apparent assurance that this is the appropriate continuation. Now we stop her. “Why did you say ‘42’? Shouldn’t you have said ‘43’ instead?”

How we imagine her replying will depend on how we imagine that she learned her new skill. We might suppose that before learning to count by twos she was familiar not only with the numerals, but also with the words “plus” and “addition,” and relatedly, that she was able to give answers to simple addition problems. In that case she might have been taught to count by twos by being given successive addition problems: she was asked to add two to 2, then to 4, then to 6, and so on. A child who learned counting by twos in this way could explain that she had said “42” because she had been adding two and because two added to 40 makes 42. Although she might not use words like “rule” or “justification,” this would amount to a justification of her response in terms of its according with a rule which she had adopted antecedently. She would be citing a rule which she had been following up to this point (the “add-two” rule) and claiming that, in this particular case, the number she had given was an application of that rule.

But we could also imagine the child having learned to count by twos without receiving any specific instructions, in the same way that she learned to count by ones, that is, to recite the series of natural numbers. A child does not learn to count by following instructions like “Add one to the previous number,” but rather by following the example given by other people and responding appropriately to their encouragement or correction. She learns initially by rote memorization,

¹⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1953).

first of the numbers up to 19 and then of the decades (20, 30, and so on), but at a certain point she becomes able to recite sequences without relying exclusively on memory, at which point it becomes clear that she has acquired a capacity to count on her own.¹¹ We could imagine a child learning to count by twos in much the same way, by listening to other people reciting “2, 4, 6, 8...” and following their example. Such a child could go on confidently with “42” after “40,” even if she had not heard this sequence before, or did not remember it, without being able to answer or even understand the question, “What is 40 plus 2?”

Now, it is possible that a child who had learned to count by twos in this way could come up with an explanation of why she said “42” after “40.” In particular, she might have arrived on her own at a conception of what she was doing at each step of the process, and she might now be able to articulate that conception by saying, for example, that each number she said was “two more” than the one before, and that 42 came next because it was two more than 40. But it is at least equally as likely that the child would be unable to explain or justify her having said “42,” not just because she lacked the appropriate vocabulary, but because she lacked any conception of what her saying “42” after “40” had in common with her having said “40” after “38.” And yet this does not seem to rule out her reacting with surprise and puzzlement to the suggestion that she should have said “43” instead. Rather, it seems plausible to imagine her insisting, with no less conviction than a child who was able to cite the add-two rule, that “42” was the right thing to say after “40”: that it “came next” in the series, or “belonged” after 40, or “fit” what she had been doing previously.

Suppose that the child does react in this way. On the face of it, there is a normative claim implicit in her reaction: she is claiming that “42” is appropriate, or what she ought to say, given what she has said previously. But this claim does not appear to depend on any prior claim to the effect that her response conforms to a rule. If we take this appearance at face value, then the child has made a claim to what I call primitive normativity. The utterance, from her point of view, is not appropriate to the context in virtue of its conforming to a general rule which the context imposed on her, for example, the add-two rule. Rather, she takes it to be appropriate to the context *simpliciter*, in a way which does not depend for its coherence on the idea of an

¹¹ For details, see Thijs Pollmann, “Some Principles Involved in the Acquisition of the Number Words,” *Language Acquisition*, xi, 1 (2003): 1–31. Learning to recite the sequence of number words is distinct from, and apparently to some extent precedes, the capacity to understand what they mean. I overlook this complication in what follows.

antecedently applicable rule to which it conforms. This is not to deny that the normativity depends on any facts about the context, since the appropriateness of “42” depends on her having recited that particular sequence of number words. But it *is* to deny that her claim to the appropriateness of “42” depends on her recognition of a rule imposed by the context in virtue of the relevant facts, or *a fortiori* on her recognition of “42” as a correct application of the rule.¹²

I began with the child counting by twos both because of the familiarity of Wittgenstein’s example on which it is based and because Wittgenstein’s example presumably served as the prototype for Kripke’s quaddition case. However, the phenomenon I am illustrating is not restricted to numerical examples, but pervades concept acquisition and language learning more generally. Imagine a child who is not yet obviously in command of color concepts—for example, who has not yet mastered use of the word “green”—but who, following an adult’s example, is successfully sorting a collection of variously shaped and colored objects so that all the green ones go in one particular box. As she puts each green object in the designated box, it is plausible that she does so with a sense that this is the appropriate thing to do. She takes it that the green spoon “belongs” in the box containing the previously sorted green things and that the blue spoon does not, just as the child in the previous example takes 42 and not 43 to “belong” after 40 in the series of numerals. But her sense of the appropriateness of what she is doing does not, at least on the face of it, depend on her taking what she is doing to accord with a rule which she was following, for example, the rule that she is to put all the green things in the same box. For her grasp of such a rule would presuppose that she already possesses the concept *green*. The same holds if we suppose that her sorting behavior is linguistic, that is, if instead of putting each green object in a box, she says “green” when she is shown it or points to it when the teacher says “green.” A child learning to use linguistic expressions in this way is not conscious of a rule which specifies, for example, that when a teacher says “green” she is to point to a green object. But this does not prevent her taking her response to the teacher’s utterance to be appropriate, that is, to “fit” what the teacher has just said. She can hear the teacher’s

¹²For a further illustration of primitive normativity in a numerical context, consider children who learn arithmetic using Cuisenaire rods, which are wooden rods of different lengths proportional to the numbers one through ten. A child who has successively laid out the two-, four-, six-, and eight-unit rods might be confident that it is the ten-unit rod which should come next, and that another child who wants to put down the nine-unit rod is going on “wrong,” without yet grasping that each rod in the pattern is two units longer than the previous one.

utterance as, so to speak, calling for her to point to the green object, without taking her response to conform to the meaning of, or to a rule for the use of, "green."

It will be useful here to compare the child's learning to recite series of numerals or sort objects by color with an animal's being trained to produce discriminative responses. Consider, say, a parrot being taught to say "green" when shown a green thing, or to peck at a green thing when the trainer says "green." This kind of training typically results in the parrot acquiring a disposition to say "green" when, and only when, a green thing is presented to it. In the case of the parrot we can distinguish two factors which go into its acquisition of the disposition. One factor is the training it receives. The characteristics of this training are responsible for the parrot's being disposed to produce the particular responses it does, for example, to say "green" rather than "grün" when shown a green thing, or, when the trainer says "green" in the presence of something green, to peck at, rather than step on, the green thing. The other factor is the parrot's innate disposition to "go on" from its training in a way which tracks the presence of greenness, as opposed to any of the other features common to the objects in the training sample. Suppose that the parrot's initial training was with a sample of objects which were not only green, but also opaque and inedible. A typical parrot trained to associate "green" with the objects in this sample will go on to say "green" not only when shown objects which are green, opaque, and inedible, but also when shown a translucent green cup or a green apple. The fact that the parrot's training results in a disposition to associate the "green" response with all and only green things, as opposed to things which are green, opaque, and inedible, is not a consequence of the training itself, but rather of what we might think of as an innate second-order disposition to respond to its training in one way rather than another.

Now, I am assuming that these two factors also operate in the case of the child who learns to sort things by color or to count by twos. It is worth emphasizing the role of the second in particular. That the child recites series of numbers at all, or that she begins with "2, 4, 6, 8..." in response to the words "add two" as opposed to some other expression, is a consequence of the training she has received. But her being disposed to go on after "40" with "42" rather than "43" is a reflection not of how she has been trained, but of her natural tendency to go on in a way which tracks the series of even numbers. We can conceive of an abnormal child, like the pupil in Wittgenstein's example at *Investigations* §185, to whom it "comes naturally" to respond to the same training by going on with "43" rather than "42." Similarly,

we can conceive of an abnormal child who responds to the standard training by using “green” as we do, except that she withholds it from green spoons and applies it to spoons which are blue. No amount of training, however, short of giving explicit instructions about what to say after “40,” or how to apply “green” to spoons, could bring a normal human child to recite numbers or use the word “green” in these nonstandard ways. As in the case of animals, it is a fact about the nature of our species—a nature which, at least as regards our ability to sort by color, many animals share—that we acquire the first-order counting and sorting dispositions that we do.

It is part of my proposal that a child’s continuing the series with “42” or applying the word “green” to a green spoon can be explained in the same naturalistic way that we explain the parallel behavior in the case of the parrot. But, I suggest, the situation of the child differs from that of the parrot in that the former takes herself, in continuing the series with “42” or saying “green” when shown the green spoon, to be responding appropriately to her circumstances in the primitive sense of “appropriate” which I have described. This consciousness of appropriateness does not explain why she goes on with “42” or applies “green” to the spoon, since, as I have just indicated, this is sufficiently accounted for in terms of her natural second-order dispositions to respond to training one way rather than another, and this is the kind of disposition which also could be shared by an animal which lacked any consciousness of normativity. On the contrary, it is because her natural dispositions lead her to go on with “42” rather than “43” that it is “42” rather than “43” which she takes to be the appropriate continuation. But it still makes a difference to her behavior, which we can put metaphorically by saying that, unlike the parrot, she does not respond “blindly” to her circumstances. Even though she does not say “42” as a result of having grasped the add-two rule, nor *a fortiori* of having “seen” that 40 plus two is 42, she nonetheless “sees” her utterance of “42” as appropriate to, or fitting, her circumstances.

My proposal represents a middle ground between two alternative, contrasting interpretations of the phenomena to which I have been calling attention. One interpretation would deny that the child adopts a genuinely normative attitude to her own behavior. What appears to be a sense of the appropriateness of what she is doing is in reality a complex of feelings without normative content: for example, pleasure at the prospect of an adult’s approval. On this interpretation there is no qualitative difference between the child’s response to her circumstances and the parrot’s, only a difference in the degree of psychological refinement they manifest. The contrasting

alternative would allow that the child, in saying "42," genuinely takes her utterance to be appropriate, but it would deny that this claim is, as I have put it, "primitive." On this alternative, the child says "42" after "40" because she recognizes, although without being able to put that recognition into words, that she has been adding two and that 40 plus two is 42. Her sense of the appropriateness of what she is saying thus derives from her recognition that it fits the rule she was following: a rule which she grasps, even though she is unable to articulate it.

I do not think that either of these alternatives can be ruled out definitively. My primary reason for preferring the middle ground lies in the solution it promises to Kripke's skeptical problem. The dispositionalist solution available on the first alternative and the antireductionist solution available on the second are both unsatisfactory, and the main advantage I claim for my proposal is that it offers a middle way between them. But the respective shortcomings of these interpretations can be characterized without explicit reference to the skeptical problem, in terms of their inability to account for the apparent role of activities like counting or sorting by color in the child's acquisition of concepts and rules. If, as on the second interpretation, the child needs to grasp the add-two rule or the concept *green* as a prior condition of being able to count by twos, or to distinguish the green from the nongreen objects, then her becoming competent in these activities could not be a way of coming to grasp the add-two rule or to acquire the concept *green*. In getting better at these activities, she would be getting better at manifesting her grasp of the relevant rule or concept, but for an explanation of how she had come to grasp the rule or concept in the first place, we would need to look elsewhere. But if, as on the first interpretation, we suppose that there is nothing more to the child's learning to sort or count than her acquisition of a parrot-like disposition to respond discriminatively to green things or to recite a series of numerals which conform to the add-two rule, then it is equally hard to see how her activity could contribute to a grasp of the corresponding rule or concept. For unless we simply identify grasp of the concept *green* with a capacity to discriminate green things, there is no reason to suppose that the acquisition of that capacity should put the child in a position to grasp the concept. What seems to be needed, if her becoming competent in the activity of sorting green things is to amount to her "catching on" to what green things have in common, is that, in acquiring that competence, she comes to see the green things as in some sense "belonging" together. And that idea of "belonging" is just what the element of normativity in my account tries to accommodate.

There are, indeed, other ways one might try to occupy a middle ground between the two alternatives I have described. One approach would allow, as on my proposal, that the child takes “42” to be appropriate in a way which does not rest on conscious recognition of the add-two rule, but it would ascribe her sense of appropriateness to an implicit grasp of that rule. Here, however, we need to be clear about what it is to grasp or follow a rule implicitly. Implicit rule-following is typically conceived as the operation of a “subpersonal” mechanism, where the rule is viewed as a representation to which the subject’s cognitive system, but not the subject herself, has access. On that conception, I would grant that the child may be engaged in implicit rule-following and, more specifically, that there might be a mental representation corresponding to the add-two rule somewhere in her cognitive system, but I would deny that her taking “42” to be appropriate could be based on her recognition that it accords with that representation. For that would require that the “rule,” that is, the representation, be accessible to her at the personal level. The hypothesis of implicit rule-following, on this subpersonal understanding, could help account for her actually saying “42”—perhaps, in both her case and the parrot’s, training by reinforcement works precisely by building up the subpersonal psychological mechanisms in which implicit rule-following consists—but the hypothesized rule could not underwrite her claim to its appropriateness.¹³

Another possibility would be to account for the child’s normative attitude in terms of the notion of sameness or similarity. The child takes “42” to be appropriate because she takes it that, in saying “42,” she is doing the same thing as or something similar to what she was doing before.¹⁴ Now, it might be objected against this approach that we cannot make sense of the notions of similarity or sameness without supposing some specific respect in which the items are similar, so that the child’s claim to be doing the same thing is empty unless she conceives of herself, for example, as adding the same number. But I do not take this objection to be decisive in the present context, since if we are allowing ascriptions of primitive normativity, which do not depend on the assumption of some respect in which a given performance is appropriate, then there seems to be no ground for excluding a

¹³The proposal I offer in section III might be said to ascribe “implicit” rule-following to the child, but in a different sense from the subpersonal sense described here.

¹⁴This is suggested by David Lewis: “adding means going on in the same way as before when the numbers get big, whereas quadding means doing something different.” Lewis, “New Work for a Theory of Universals,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, LXI, 4 (1983): 343–77, at p. 376. For Lewis, this is not only the “naïve” solution to Kripke’s rule-following puzzle, but also the “correct” one.

parallel notion of “primitive similarity,” which can be ascribed without reference to a respect in which the items are similar. There is, however, a further difficulty, which I think is decisive: namely, that the child’s recognition of similarity is not sufficient to account for her taking herself to be going on appropriately. She must not merely take herself to be going on the same way; she must also take it that going on the same way is the appropriate thing to do in the context, which is to say that she must grasp a rule with a content like *go on the same way* or *do the same thing you were doing before*. We are thus left with the problem of how to account for her grasp of this rule, and a related difficulty in addressing Kripke’s skeptical problem. For if her claim to the appropriateness of “42” is based on the claim that it accords with the rule *do the same as before*, then it is open to the skeptic to claim that by “same” she meant *quame*, where doing the *quame* requires saying “43” instead.¹⁵

I have introduced the notion of primitive normativity with examples of children, because the case for ascribing consciousness of primitive normativity in the performance of a given activity is clearest for people who have not yet mastered the relevant rule or concept. But I take it to be no less applicable in the case of adults. That an adult counting by twos conceives of herself as following the add-two rule, and takes “42” to accord with that rule, does not exclude her taking “42” to fit the preceding series *simpliciter*, in a way which does not depend on the assumption that she was following the add-two rule rather than a quadd-like variant.¹⁶ Moreover, I take it not just that we in fact do make claims to primitive normativity, but that we are entitled to do so. I am committed not merely to the truth of the anthropological claim that human beings are disposed to take “42” to be appropriate in the circumstances described, but to the legitimacy of the normative attitude it ascribes. While this may look like a strong theoretical commitment, it is, as I see it, merely the articulation of a pretheoretical intuition which we all share. We would have no hesitation in telling a child who has counted by twos up to 40 and now wants to know “what comes next” or “what she ought to say now” that she should say “42,” regardless of whether it has been specified that she is adding two each time. And, outside of a philosophical

¹⁵ Cf. Kripke on “quimilar,” p. 59n45. This kind of challenge is ineffective against my own proposal, since the child’s claim to be going on appropriately does not rest on the assumption that she antecedently gave herself a rule to “go on appropriately.” What she previously meant by “appropriate”—in particular, whether she meant *appropriate* or *quappropriate*—is thus irrelevant to her present claim to be going on appropriately.

¹⁶ In fact, as I shall argue in section III, our grasp of the rules in terms of which we justify responses in particular cases is not only compatible with, but depends on our being able to take responses like “42” to be appropriate in the primitive sense.

context, it would not occur to us to question one another's entitlement to answer the child's question in that way. The same pretheoretical intuition underlying our judgment that "42" is appropriate to the preceding series, independently of any assumptions about which rule the series instantiates, underwrites the claim that such judgments are legitimate. It is on this kind of intuition that my proposed response to the skeptic's second challenge relies. Regardless of what you meant by "plus" in the past, I propose, your saying "125" in response to the "68 plus 57" query is appropriate in light of your previous responses to "plus" questions in the same way that the child's saying "42" is appropriate in light of the preceding sequence of numerals.

III

I have argued so far for a response to the skeptic's second challenge which does not depend on an answer to his first, and more important, challenge. Now I want to show that the notion of primitive normativity can be used to answer the first challenge as well. My proposal for answering that challenge can be seen as a modification of the dispositional view, so I want to begin by looking at what I take to be the most serious objection to that view. Recall that Kripke raised three objections to the dispositional view, turning respectively on the supposed finiteness of dispositions, on the fact that people can be disposed to make mistakes, and, most importantly, on the dispositional view's supposed failure to accommodate the normativity of meaning and rules. For the purposes of this paper, I assume that the first two objections can be addressed.¹⁷ This still leaves, however, the normativity objection: namely, that if one's meaning something by a term is identified with a disposition to use that term in a certain way, then we cannot account for the normative relation between what one means by the term and how one uses it. Kripke summarizes the objection as follows:

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'....The relation of meaning and intention to future action is *normative*, not *descriptive*. (37)

This objection has come under a lot of criticism, in particular for its assumption of what has come to be called the "normativity of

¹⁷I defend this assumption in Ginsborg, *op. cit.*

meaning.”¹⁸ But I think that much of the criticism can be answered if the normative relation between meaning and use is understood properly. Before offering a positive account of that relation, I make two negative points. First, the relevant notion of normativity is not that associated with rationality. The claim that one “should” or “ought to” do something is often understood as implying that one has reason or, more strongly, conclusive reason to do it. But we can also speak of how one “ought” to use a term in a thinner sense which correlates with talk of how the term “ought to be used” and which also can be captured in terms of correct, as opposed to incorrect, use. How one ought to use a term in this sense does not depend on how one has reason to use it, since we can make perfectly good sense of someone having reason to use a term incorrectly. But unless we are reserving the term “normative” for the demands of rationality, this is no obstacle to describing the relevant “ought” as having normative content.¹⁹ Second, the meaning with which one uses a term at one time imposes no normative requirements, even in this thinner sense, regarding subsequent use. Kripke’s reference to “future action” notwithstanding, the fact that you now mean addition by “plus” does not make it the case that you should say, or that it will be correct for you to say, “125” in the future. It indeed does make it the case that if you do not say “125” you will not be conforming to what you now mean by “addition.” But unless we make the further assumption that it is correct for you to mean the same by “plus” in the future as you do now, then nothing follows regarding what you should say in the future.²⁰ The same is true in the case of rules more generally. That you have now adopted a rule

¹⁸ Challenges to the normativity of meaning and, relatedly, mental content, can be found in George Wilson, “Kripke on Wittgenstein on Normativity,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, xix, 1 (1994): 366–90; David Papineau, “Normativity and Judgement,” *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, LXXIII (1999): 16–43; Åsa Wikforss, “Semantic Normativity,” *Philosophical Studies*, cii, 2 (January 2001): 203–26; Boghossian, “The Normativity of Content,” *Philosophical Issues*, xiii, 1 (October 2003): 31–45; Anandi Hattiangadi, *Oughts and Thoughts* (New York: Oxford, 2007); and Kathrin Glüer and Wikforss, “Against Content Normativity,” *Mind*, cxviii, 469 (January 2009): 31–70.

¹⁹ Here I agree with a point made by Gideon Rosen at pp. 620–21 of “Brandom on Modality, Normativity and Intentionality,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, lxiii, 3 (November 2001): 611–23.

²⁰ Millar argues that meaning involves a commitment which is (as John Broome puts it) “wide-scope”: your meaning what the community means by a term makes it the case that you ought either to use the term in accordance with the communal practice for the use of the term, or to abandon the practice. See Alan Millar, “The Normativity of Meaning,” in Anthony O’Hear, ed., *Logic, Thought and Language* (New York: Cambridge, 2002), pp. 57–73. But it is not clear what it would be for you to abandon the practice, other than for you to stop using the term in accordance with the practice, and if that is all it takes, then the commitment is not a substantive one, since you can discharge it simply by using the word differently.

to behave in a certain way makes it the case that if you do not behave that way in the future you will not be conforming to the rule, but it does not follow that you ought, or that it is correct for you, to behave that way in the future.

This second point raises the question of whether there is anything normative about the notion of a rule. If your adopting a rule creates no normative commitments regarding your future behavior, then it might be concluded that there is nothing more to the idea of a rule than that of a description which your behavior in a given instance might or might not satisfy. But this conclusion mislocates the normative element in the notion of a rule. The notion of a rule has normative content not because your adoption of a rule at one time makes it correct rather than incorrect to behave a certain way in the future, but rather because your adoption of a rule licenses or makes intelligible the application of the concepts of correctness and incorrectness to your behavior in the first place.²¹ That someone has adopted or is following a certain rule creates a context in which we can sort her behavior not merely into behavior that does or does not meet a certain description, but into behavior that is correct or incorrect. We can put this by saying that a rule is something which stands in a normative relation to behavior, such that certain instances of behavior count as contravening or violating the rule and others as conforming to it (in a normative sense which contrasts with contravening, and which we might convey with terms like “comply with,” “obey,” or “respect”). But it is important to keep in mind that this normative relation to a rule does not bring it about that instances of your behavior are correct or incorrect except in the sense that it enables them to *count* as correct or incorrect, where this contrasts with their merely satisfying or not satisfying the corresponding description. The same holds in the case of meaning. Meaning stands in a normative relation to use not because your meaning something by a term now creates a commitment

²¹ I am using “correct” here in a sense which contrasts with “incorrect,” that is, on which the denial of correctness amounts to the ascription of incorrectness. The idea of primitive normativity presented in the previous section also might be formulated in terms of “correctness,” as the idea that we can take responses to be correct in a given context without the recognition of a rule in virtue of which they qualify as correct. But that would be to think of correctness as contrasting not with incorrectness, but with a broader notion of not being correct, where behavior that is not correct might include not only behavior which we might later classify as mistaken, but also behavior which is not subject to normative evaluation at all. If we understand the notion of correctness in that way, then we can regard your behavior as correct independently of the assumption that you have adopted a rule. Rules then can be regarded as having normative significance because their adoption makes intelligible a characterization of your behavior as incorrect or mistaken.

with respect to future use, but because it makes it intelligible to characterize your uses of the term as correct or incorrect. Regardless of whether or not “plus” has a meaning for you or anyone else, we can characterize your responses to “plus” questions by saying that they do or do not give the sum. But it is only on the assumption that “plus” means addition that we can describe your responses as correct or mistaken. The normativity of rules and meanings thus understood is extremely minimal, but it is enough to exclude the possibility of simply replacing talk of rules and meanings with talk of dispositions. For the notion of a disposition as such does not license any normative characterization of the behavior to which one is disposed. If you are disposed to use “plus” in such a way as to respond to “plus” questions with the sum, we can characterize your uses of “plus” not only as either giving or not giving the sum, but also as actualizing or not actualizing your disposition. But we still cannot, without further assumptions, characterize you either as responding correctly or as making a mistake.²²

With this understanding of the normativity objection in place, I now want to suggest a way in which the dispositional view can be modified to meet it. This is to follow the standard dispositional line of identifying the state of meaning addition by “plus” with that of being disposed to give the sum in answer to queries using the word “plus,” but to add the proviso that in actualizing that disposition, one takes oneself to be responding as one ought in the primitive sense. On this suggestion, you mean addition by “plus” if you are disposed to respond to a query about (say) “68 plus 57” with “125,” where, in responding that way, you take that response to be primitively appropriate in light of your previous uses of “plus.” The normative proviso builds into your disposition the feature that every response you are disposed to give involves a claim to its own appropriateness to the context in which you give it. Thus, your disposition is not just to say “125” in answer to “68 plus 57,” “126” in answer to “68 plus 58,” and so on; it is also, in each case, to take what you are saying to be the appropriate response to the

²² The account I have given makes no mention of the idea that meaning guides, justifies, or instructs us in the use of the word, although, as emphasized in Stroud, *op. cit.*, and in Bridges, “Rule-Following Skepticism, Properly So Called,” in James Conant and Andrea Kern, eds., *Varieties of Skepticism: Essays after Kant, Wittgenstein, and Cavell* (Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming), this is part of Kripke’s own understanding of the relation between meaning and use. Bridges takes the idea to be essential to the normativity objection, rejecting the account I have offered on the grounds that it fails to rule out the antireductionist approach (§2). But since I do not take the objection to be aimed against antireductionism, I think that it can and should be articulated independently of the idea that meaning justifies use. Readers who disagree may take my account as a sympathetic reconstruction rather than an accurate rendering of Kripke’s view.

query. You are disposed not only to respond with a number which is in fact the sum, but to consider that particular response appropriate.

If your meaning addition is understood in this way, then, I suggest, it allows us to make sense of a given response being correct or incorrect. For we can intelligibly describe your various possible responses on any occasion not only as cases of your giving or not giving the sum, or of your actualizing or not actualizing your disposition to give the sum, but as your doing or not doing what you are disposed to regard as appropriate to the context. And the idea of your doing or not doing what you are disposed to regard as appropriate gives what is needed for you to count as responding correctly or making a mistake. If, in responding to the “plus” question, you forget to carry and say “115” instead of “125,” then you not only did not do what you were disposed to do, but also did not do what you were disposed to regard as appropriate. This, I suggest, is sufficient to give content to the idea that you made a mistake. Conversely, if nothing interferes with your disposition and you respond with “125,” you have done what you are disposed to regard as appropriate, and this makes it possible to think of your response as correct. In other words, modifying the dispositional view as I have proposed allows us to think of a disposition as the kind of thing which can be normatively conformed to or contravened in the way characteristic of rules and meaning. We can say that “125” normatively conforms to what you mean by “plus,” or to the rule you have adopted for the use of the plus sign, and that “115” or “5” contravene what you mean, or the rule you have adopted, because these responses are not what you are disposed to regard as appropriate to the context. Because your disposition is infinite, in the sense that you are disposed to an infinite number of responses to all the possible “plus” questions, this approach does justice to the infinitary character of the state of your meaning addition by “plus.” But it also does justice to the demand, implicit in the idea of a normative relation between meaning and use, that you represent all those uses as correct. That demand can seem impossible to satisfy, given that you cannot actually represent all the correct answers to possible queries. But you can be disposed, with respect to each of those answers, to regard it as correct, and my proposal works in part by exploiting this possibility.

If the proposal is accepted, then it yields an answer to the first and more important of the skeptic’s two challenges. When the skeptic asks what it was about you in virtue of which you previously meant addition rather than quaddition, you can say that it was your being disposed to give the sum rather than the quum and, in so doing, to take yourself to be doing as you ought in the primitive sense. This answer satisfies

Kripke's normativity constraint on acceptable answers to the challenge because it allows us to make sense of the idea that you ought now to say "125" if you are to conform to your past meaning. For if you now say "5" you are failing to give what you were then disposed to regard as the primitively appropriate response, so that your response is incorrect relative to your past meaning. But it is important to keep in mind here that the normative relation between your past meaning and your present use is different from the normative relation between past and present use ascribed in a claim to primitive normativity. That is, we need to distinguish between your taking "125" to be appropriate to the past sequence of your responses to "plus" questions, or "42" to fit the child's recitation of even numbers up to 40, and your taking "125" to be correct relative to the meaning of addition, or "42" to conform normatively to the add-two rule. First, while we saw that your meaning addition by "plus" in the past has no normative implications for your subsequent uses of "plus" and, more generally, that the normative significance of your meaning addition at any time is limited to its making intelligible ascriptions of correctness or incorrectness to your uses, this is not true of the sequence of your past responses to "plus" questions. That you responded as you did to past questions makes it the case that it is appropriate, in the primitive sense, for you now to "go on" with "125" in answer to " $68 + 57$," just as the child's having recited the series of numbers makes it appropriate for her now to go on with "42."

Second, the appropriateness that you ascribe to "125" cannot be identified with correctness, at least in the sense that contrasts with incorrectness. When you take "125" to be appropriate with respect to your past uses, your attitude to other possible responses is not, at least in the first instance, that they are wrong, mistaken, or inappropriate, but simply that they are not appropriate, that is, that they lack the privileged normative status which you ascribe to your own response. Similarly, a child who takes "42" to be appropriate need not take another child who goes on with "43" to be making a mistake. Her attitude to her own response commits her to denying the appropriateness of "43," but this is not to say that she has to regard the second child as going on incorrectly rather than, say, uttering a word at random. Her conceiving the second child as mistaken requires something further, for example, the assumption that the second child is following the add-two rule or that she is disposed, like the first child, to regard "42" as appropriate. This point is essential to my account, which otherwise would be circular. Since I am using the notion of primitive normativity to make sense of the notion of meaning and claiming, in turn, that we need to ascribe meaning in order to make

sense of the uses of expressions counting as correct as opposed to incorrect, it is crucial that we be able to understand the notion of primitive normativity in a way which does not depend on the notions of correctness or error.

We can see the contrast between primitive normativity and normative conformity to meaning by considering a case in which the two come apart. Suppose that the skeptical hypothesis is true of you now, so that, without realizing it, you now mean quaddition rather than addition. You are thus disposed, if queried about " $68 + 57$," to respond with "5" and to take yourself, in so doing, to be responding as you ought given your previous uses of the "+" sign. It follows that if nothing interferes with your disposition and you do, in fact, respond to the query with "5," then you are normatively according with what you mean by "+." That you mean quaddition makes it the case that "5" can be counted as a correct response, a point which we might also express by saying that " $68 + 57 = 5$ " is true in your idiolect. If you had said "125," your answer would have counted as a mistake. But it is still the case that you are not responding as you ought in the primitive sense. Assuming that the "+" queries you have encountered so far have all involved numbers that are less than 57, the appropriate thing to say in the context created by your previous uses of "+" is not "5" but "125." Now it might be objected that if "5" is correct, or expresses a truth in your idiolect, then it must be the appropriate thing for you to say, or what you ought to say, regardless of your previous uses of "+." But it is appropriate only on the assumption that you ought to say what is true in your idiolect. And even if that assumption is accepted, the relevant normativity is different from, and less fundamental than, the primitive sense of normativity in which "125" is appropriate given your previous usage.²³

I have proposed in this section that someone's meaning addition by "+" consists in her having a reliable disposition to use "+" in a certain way (specifically, in such a way as to respond to "+" questions with the sum) and, in so doing, to take that use to be primitively appropriate to the context.²⁴ This proposal extends to facts about grasping concepts

²³ The point here does not turn on " $68 + 57 = 5$ " being true only in your idiolect rather than in the public language, but rather on the more general point that truth does not have intrinsically normative implications, that is, that the truth of an utterance does not make it the case that you ought to assert it (or ought to refrain from asserting its negation) except in conjunction with explicitly normative principles, for example, moral or prudential principles prohibiting lies. This point is made by Boghossian, Wikforss, Hattiangadi, and others (see references in footnote 18).

²⁴ This account is not fully generalizable. If I stipulate that "*" is to mean quaddition and use it accordingly, then I might indeed be disposed to respond to "*" queries with

and following rules more generally. Although in many contexts we do not count someone as having grasped a concept or rule unless he or she can articulate it explicitly, there is a less demanding notion which can be made out along the same lines I have suggested for meaning facts: what it is to grasp the add-two rule or the concept *green* is just to be reliably disposed to count by twos or to discriminate green things, with the proviso that one's counting or sorting behavior involves the consciousness of its primitive appropriateness to the context. It follows from this account that to the extent that the child in our initial example is competent in, say, counting by twos, she *eo ipso* grasps the add-two rule. And it is of a piece with that consequence that her utterance of "42" can be described as a case of her applying or following the add-two rule.²⁵ This might seem to call into question my characterization of the normativity revealed in these examples as "primitive." If, as in the case of the competent child, every case in which she takes herself to be going on as she ought is also a case in which she is applying the add-two rule, then, it might be argued, we cannot say that her taking herself to be going on as she ought does not depend on her recognizing that she is conforming to the add-two rule. On the contrary, it does depend on it, in the sense that if she does take herself to be going on as she ought, then it follows that she must be applying, and presumably also recognizing the applicability of, the add-two rule.

Here it is important to keep in mind that the account I am offering of meaning and rule-following is partially reductive in character. I am claiming that someone counts as grasping the add-two rule *in virtue of* being disposed to count by twos with the consciousness of primitive normativity, where both the disposition and the consciousness of the appropriateness of its actualizations are more basic than, and thus

the quum, but (unless my use of the "*" sign happens to be restricted to numbers less than 57) I will not take any of my responses to be primitively appropriate to the sign in light of its previous uses. In this case, the fact in which my meaning quaddition consists is a different kind of fact than in the addition case: it consists in my having made the stipulation and (perhaps) being disposed to use the term accordingly. But this case is atypical because, in contrast to most cases where we mean something by our words, someone cannot come to mean quaddition by an expression in any way other than explicit stipulation. The account which I have given is intended to apply only to cases—like those of "plus" and "green" in English—where we can come to use an expression meaningfully through the natural processes by which children typically acquire their first language.

²⁵ I disagree here with Boghossian's claim that what we ordinarily call rule-following requires an "intentional attempt to bring one's behavior in line with the dictates of [the] rule." See "The Rule-Following Considerations," p. 517. The conception I have offered represents a middle ground between that idea and the idea of "merely conforming" to a rule (*ibid.*, pp. 516–17).

explanatorily prior to, the fact of her grasping the rule. Now, it is the case for any reductive account that, if we accept it, we will have to accept a sense in which the reducing phenomena entail the facts to be reduced. If my account is correct, it will then follow that for someone who is reliable in counting by twos, the fact of her taking a given performance to be appropriate entails that she is applying the add-two rule and, presumably, taking her performance to conform to that rule. But if the idea of reductive explanation is intelligible at all, then there must remain a more fundamental sense in which the appropriateness she ascribes can be understood coherently as prior to and independent of her recognition that her performance conforms to the rule. So it can be accepted as a consequence of my account that claims to primitive normativity are never made without the recognition of corresponding rules, without undermining the primitive character of the normativity.²⁶

IV

I turn now to a brief consideration of some objections that might be raised against my account. The first concerns my assertion, at the end of section II, that we not only make claims to primitive normativity, but are also entitled to do so. If we cannot appeal to rules or concepts in order to make such claims, it might be objected, what could possibly legitimize them? As I indicated at the end of section II, my commitment to the idea that such claims can be legitimate is based on our pretheoretical intuitions about particular cases. There is nothing to legitimize the child's claim to the appropriateness of "42" except our own intuition that "42" is appropriate. And that intuition, in turn, cannot be legitimized by appeal to any rule or principle, because it too reflects a claim to primitive normativity. But, on my proposal, this does not mean that such claims are illegitimate. On the contrary, if the account of rule-following sketched in the previous section is correct, it is only if we endorse the pretheoretical intuitions on which I am relying that we can make sense of there being justification in terms of rules in the first place. However, this appeal to intuition may seem unsatisfactory, in a way which can be brought out by imagining cases in which different people's intuitions conflict. Consider the "abnormal" child who goes on with "43." Her intuition that "43"

²⁶ In fact, I am not inclined to accept this consequence, both because I think that children in the kinds of examples I have given can take certain of their performances to be appropriate without having acquired a reliable competence, hence without grasping a corresponding rule, and because I do not think that it holds in the case of aesthetic judgment. But it is not an essential commitment of my view that claims to primitive normativity can be made in isolation from the application of rules.

is appropriate, let us suppose, is just as strong as the normal child's intuition about the appropriateness of "42." What entitles her to claim priority for her own intuition? Since the situations of the two children appear to be symmetrical, isn't it arbitrary for us to uphold the first child's claim while rejecting the second child's? Here my answer is simply to deny that the apparent symmetry is genuine. More specifically, while we might have the theoretically motivated thought that the two children's claims are equally legitimate, that thought is trumped by the pretheoretical intuition that "42" is appropriate and that "43" is not. That intuition is not undermined, as I see it, by the thought that in principle there could be intuitions which conflict with it, even if we know that the conflict would not be resolved by appeal to any neutral principle.²⁷

Here, and this is the second objection I want to consider, it might seem that I am simply missing Kripke's point, which is to undermine precisely the kind of pretheoretical intuition on which I am relying. Doesn't Kripke's argument boil down to the idea that since there is no justification for the appropriateness of "42" or "125," our uttering them must be a matter of going on blindly or making an "unjustified leap in the dark" (10)? So doesn't it exclude precisely what I am asserting, namely, that we can make claims to primitive normativity? I think, however, that this objection misrepresents Kripke's line of argument. It reads Kripke's skeptic as denying the legitimacy of claims to primitive normativity, whereas, as I see it, Kripke's skeptic and, presumably, Kripke himself do not consider the possibility of such claims. The skeptic does challenge our entitlement to claim that this or that response is appropriate in light of a preceding sequence of responses, but his challenge assumes just what the notion of primitive normativity is intended to deny, namely, that such a response can be appropriate only in virtue of its conformity to a rule exemplified by the preceding sequence. In section I, I drew attention to this assumption in connection with Kripke's quaddition example, but we also can see it in his discussion of an example closer to the one we have just been considering. "[Although] an intelligence tester may

²⁷ Bernard Williams makes a related point in the domain of ethical and political thought when he argues that our commitment to the basic principles of our own ethical outlook, for example, that every human being deserves equal consideration, is not undermined by the thought that there are competing outlooks which cannot be ruled out through arguments based on neutral premises. See Williams, "Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline," *Philosophy*, LXXV, 4 (October 2000): 477–96. In effect, Williams takes our intuitive commitment to our own ethical outlook to trump whatever intuitions we might have favoring a symmetrical treatment of competing outlooks. I am proposing something analogous for the "outlook" exemplified by its being "42" rather than "43" which strikes us as the appropriate way of continuing the series.

suppose that there is only one possible continuation to the sequence 2, 4, 6, 8, ..., mathematical and philosophical sophisticates know that an indefinite number of rules...are compatible with any such finite initial segment. So if the tester urges me to respond, after 2, 4, 6, 8, ..., with *the* unique appropriate next number, the proper response is that no such unique number exists" (18). Here I want to draw attention to the "so" which begins the second sentence. Kripke is indeed denying the tester's entitlement to claim that "10" is the appropriate response, but his reason for denying it is that "2, 4, 6, 8..." might express the result of following any number of rules. He simply does not consider what I am proposing, namely, that we might legitimately regard "10" as appropriate to "2, 4, 6, 8..." in a sense which does not depend on its conforming to one rule rather than any other.²⁸ That proposal is of course open to challenge, but that would require a further stretch of argument which Kripke does not provide.

The third objection I want to consider concerns the adequacy of the positive account of meaning I offered in section III. My account relies on the idea that a subject can take her response, in a given context, to be appropriate, and that would seem to require that she entertain the thought *this is appropriate*. But Kripke's skeptical challenge is directed no less against the possibility of entertaining contentful thoughts than against the possibility of using expressions meaningfully. How then can I help myself to the idea of the subject's thinking of a response as appropriate? Isn't the subject's grasp of the concept *appropriate* vulnerable to the same kind of skeptical argument through which Kripke undermines the possibility of grasping *addition*? My answer is that while my account does presuppose that the subject

²⁸ It might appear that I am simply being naive here, given that the segment "2, 4, 6, 8" figures in many sequences that are specifiable even without recourse to quus-like devices (637 such sequences are listed in N. J. A. Sloane, *The On-Line Encyclopedia of Integer Sequences*, published electronically at www.research.att.com/~njas/sequences [2010]). Imagine a child, who, when asked by the tester to continue the sequence, says "30, 32, 126, 128, 8190, 8192, 13170," giving no explanation, but simply insisting—perhaps with surprise that the tester does not see it the same way—that this is the right way to go on. The tester might at first think that the child is saying numbers at random, only to find out later that the numbers coincide with the sequence of the nearest neighbors of the Mersenne primes. At this point, the tester will presumably conclude that the child is some kind of mathematical genius. It would seem absurd to claim that she was not "going on as she ought" from the initial segment. I still want to maintain, however, that she is not going on as she ought in the primitive sense with which I am concerned. Specifically, she is not entitled to claim that her utterance of "30" is appropriate in light of the sequence "2, 4, 6, 8," independently of any specification of a rule which that sequence instantiates. In effect, unlike the child who says "10," she owes the tester an explanation of why "30, 32" fits that initial sequence. And if, hard though this is to imagine, she lacks any disposition to continue the sequence with "10," then we can legitimately take there to be some defect in her mathematical abilities, in spite of her extraordinary gifts.

has the capacity to entertain a concept of normative fit, which we might label as the concept *ought* or *appropriate*, there are grounds for treating it as a special case. In particular, I do not think that it is susceptible to the same kind of skeptical challenge which can be developed for *addition* or *green*, since our grasp of it does not seem to depend on a capacity to “go on” from the use of the corresponding word in particular cases. Now, it remains true that in taking for granted the consciousness of normativity, my approach falls short of a fully general account of intentional content. But this is just to say that the response it offers to Kripke’s skeptical argument is only partially reductive. As I noted in the introduction, I aim to offer a middle way between a fully reductive naturalistic dispositionalism and the antireductionist view that meaning or content states are *sui generis*. My view has the advantage over traditional antireductionism that it is able to accommodate the quasi-dispositional character of meaning and rules, and so to tie meaning to our actual patterns of response. But it is nonreductionist to the extent that it requires us to accept at least one *sui generis* intentional attitude, namely, the attitude through which we take each of our actual responses to be appropriate to the circumstances.

I want to conclude by indicating briefly the Kantian antecedents of my account. The notion of primitive normativity is drawn from the *Critique of Judgment* and, in particular, from Kant’s account of judgments of beauty. According to Kant, a judgment of beauty makes a claim to universal agreement which does not, as he puts it, “rest on any concept” (§8, 5:215).²⁹ When you respond to an object in such a way as to experience it as beautiful, you respond to it in a way which involves your taking it that everyone ought to respond to the object in the same way you do. But the claim to agreement implicit in your response is not based on your recognition of the object as falling under a concept or satisfying a criterion. In my terms, then, you make a claim to primitive normativity. Your response is analogous to the child’s saying “42,” or your saying “10” in the example of the intelligence test: it involves your taking yourself to respond as you ought, but where the “ought” does not depend on the assumption that you are bound by an antecedently specified rule.

Aesthetic judgments are, of course, a special case, so one might wonder about the propriety of drawing on Kant’s model of aesthetic judgment to make a point about rules and meaning in the nonaesthetic

²⁹ All references to Kant are either to the *Critique of Judgment* or to the associated “First Introduction.” I cite the section number followed by volume and page number in Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1902–); these page numbers are typically found in the margins of recent English translations of Kant. Translations are my own.

domain. But Kant makes clear that he takes his account of aesthetic judgment to have broader implications. The principle of aesthetic judgment, he says, is the “principle of the faculty of judgment in general” (5:286), and the faculty of judgment has a significance for Kant that goes far beyond the aesthetic domain. Judgment, in its most general definition, is the faculty for “thinking the particular as contained under the universal” (Introduction IV, 5:179); that is, it is our capacity for subsuming particular things under rules or concepts. Now, judgment in the first Critique is treated either as subordinate to the faculty of understanding or as identical with it. The rules or concepts under which judgment subsumes particulars are thought of as already grasped by the understanding, and the role of judgment is simply to apply these concepts to the particular instances that satisfy them.

But in the third Critique Kant introduces the idea that judgment can function independently of the understanding in situations where the relevant rules or concepts are not already specified. To exercise judgment in this independent way is to judge particulars to be contained under rules or concepts which are, so to speak, not already in the understanding but rather made possible by those acts of judging, themselves. Aesthetic judgment is the paradigmatic exercise of judgment in this autonomous capacity. It is in aesthetic judgment, Kant says, that the faculty of judgment “reveals itself as a faculty which has its own special principle” and thus as claiming a place of its own, beside understanding and reason, in the “general critique of the higher cognitive faculties” (First Introduction XI, 20:244).

Kant’s claim that aesthetic judging reveals the faculty of judgment as an independent capacity obviously deserves more discussion than I can provide here. But I believe that what lies behind it is the idea that the apparently anomalous character of aesthetic judgments—that they involve normative claims to agreement which do not rest on rules or concepts—indicates something which is required for the possibility of rules or concepts in the first place. For I understand Kant to hold that the possibility of grasping rules or concepts, which in turn can be applied in particular cases, depends on the possibility of our taking our responses to those particular cases to be normative in a way which does not rest on the assumption of rules or concepts.³⁰ That is the point which I have been trying to make by applying the notion of primitive normativity against Kripke’s skepticism. Kripke’s skepticism, I have argued, **is motivated by an unexamined assumption about the**

³⁰ For more discussion of this point, see my “Lawfulness without a Law: Kant on the Free Play of Imagination and Understanding,” *Philosophical Topics*, xxv, 1 (1997): 37–81; and “Aesthetic Judgment and Perceptual Normativity,” *Inquiry*, xlix, 5 (October 2006): 403–37.

proper relation between rules and meanings on the one hand, and claims to the normativity of one's particular responses on the other: such claims are coherent, for Kripke, only in relation to antecedently adopted rules which determine how we ought to respond in particular cases. Kant's conception of judgment as a faculty which can function independently of understanding reverses that relation. Our claims to the normativity of our own responses ultimately make possible, rather than presuppose, our grasp of the rules by which those responses are seemingly determined.

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