Mental Fictionalism: The Very Idea

1. Introduction

Some of our sentences look *prima facie* fact-stating, but when a closer look is taken they turn out to be otherwise. The sentences 'This table is made of wood' and 'This action is vicious' are grammatically similar, they may seem to be true or false depending on whether the table has the property of being made of wood or the action has some property in virtue of which it is vicious. With the first sentence the case is pretty straightforward: the table either has the relevant physical properties that make the sentence true or not. But the second sentence is more problematic: what properties must an action have in order to be vicious? The moral status of an action does not follow from its descriptive properties. It does not help if I describe the trajectory of the hand that moves the weapon, the physiological background of the movement, or the properties of the matter it is bumped into etc., this description will not help in telling whether the action is vicious or not.

This problem may not only arise in exclusively moral contexts, but in evaluative contexts in general. The questions whether an object is beautiful or whether an action is rational are equally problematic. It is far from obvious which properties make an action vicious or rational, or make an object beautiful. The aesthetic value of an object cannot be straightforwardly derived from its physical properties, and the rationality of an action does not follow from its naturalistic description; it can only be made visible via the attribution of beliefs, desires, and other intentional states. The fit of these ascriptions into the physical description of the world is problematic because the latter does not mention properties or states directed at something else. The matter of which a table is made or the momentum of a lethal weapon are not 'about' anything in the world as opposed to our beliefs and desires that are purportedly 'about' certain states of affairs, i.e., the former represent the latter somehow.

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Fictionalist approaches try to render these discourses unproblematic, and promise to give an account of how these discourses work, while solving the problems posed by the properties they postulate. This issue of *The Monist* focuses exclusively on problems pertaining to the fictionalist interpretations of psychology. In this introductory paper I endeavor to provide a "big picture" of folk psychology that characterizes *a possible form* of mental fictionalism, certain aspects of which will be strengthened, and others of which will be questioned and undermined in the papers published in this issue. First I will suggest some considerations that may motivate the elaboration of a mental fictionalist position by undermining the commitment to the interpretation of folk psychology as a fact-stating discourse. In the second step, against this background, I take a quick look at how folk psychology might work in alternative ways once deprived of this interpretation. Third, I sketch a way of understanding how folk psychology can fulfill this alternative function, and I draw an analogy with musical expression. Finally I sketch a fictionalist interpretation that suits folk psychology so understood.

2. Why Folk Psychology Is Not a Fact-Stating Discourse

We have good reasons to contemplate the possibility that folk psychology (by which I mean everyday intentional psychology invoking beliefs, desires, emotions, etc.) is not a fact-stating discourse. That is to say, we have good philosophical reasons to argue that folk psychology is not a discourse in which we can describe how things are with respect to the putative mental components of the world. We have good reasons to say this despite the *prima facie* appearance of folk-psychological sentences as descriptive, declarative and *bona fide* fact-stating. Let me provide some.

Rationality. We can rely on psychological concepts in understanding behavior only if we presuppose that the agent is rational. Without rationality no matter what system of propositional attitudes one ascribes to an agent, no course of behavior would follow because irrational (or a-rational) behavior is such that it cannot be understood from its motivations. If the agent is not rational, then her beliefs and desires cannot provide reasons for action. Therefore rationality, as many philosophers like to say, is a constitutive principle of psychological interpretation.

Rationality is normative: given a set of propositional attitudes it points to the behavior (or further attitudes) that ought to follow. If the agent does not follow this 'ought' then he is irrational and according to folk-psycho-

logical standards his behavior cannot be made coherent. Rationality is thus not a descriptive law of nature or empirical generalization to which the agent's behavior conforms, but it is a norm that behavior can easily violate at the risk of threatening psychological interpretability.

The normativity of rationality also lends the interpreted course of behavior a certain teleological significance. This significance can be specified with reference to the conclusions towards which psychological interpretation gravitates. This can be the image of a person's character, an outline of future interpretations, a possible significance of a situation with respect to other events, etc. This is a feature of psychological interpretation that has no parallel in causal histories: causes and effects can follow one another in an endless chain without ever concluding. Rationality provides the framework within which psychological interpretations make sense of behavior: with an attention to its purpose and a commitment to finding a high degree of coherence in it. In this sense the logic of psychological interpretation is closer to that of narratives than causal explanations.[1]

The hard problem of rationality is that it resists naturalization and it is problematic to be fitted into causal chains.[2] Even if the rationality of nonsocial behavior can often be explained in terms of its evolutionary utility,[3] this option is not open in complex social situations, i.e., precisely in those cases in which the conceptual resources and practices of psychological interpretation find their proper home.[4] The elusiveness of rationality in these cases arises from the ambiguities of interpretation. In simple, nonsocial cases a given situation and the utility maximizing strategy can be calculated. But if psychological attribution enters the description of a situation, this strategy cannot be calculated because the psychological interpretation is not unequivocal, it always remains an open question.

Open question. There are various ways in which a given course of behavior can be made out to be rational. Behavior can be interpreted from different points of view, different interpretative commitments arising from past interpretations, different sets of psychological concepts, with emphases placed differently on various pieces of behavior, etc. Correspondingly, a given course of behavior may seem rational in different ways, and there is no independent, unbiased perspective from which a privileged interpretation can be developed.[5]

The extent to which an interpretation is precise, satisfactory, etc. can be judged only by relying on the psychological background which the

interpretation presupposes. Classifying behavior—which bodily movement, or the lack of it, counts as an action and is relevant to which mental states—belongs to the jurisdiction of folk psychology. Behavioral evidence invoked in the justification of psychological interpretations is already filled with folk-psychological significance: in order to use some bodily movement as evidence in an interpretation, one needs to specify its meaning and relevance; and *vice versa*, by ascribing mental states to an agent, one has to give meaning to some of his bodily movements. There are thus no relevant but discourse-independent facts in the business of folk-psychological interpretation.

Different interpretations may reveal radically different patterns in an agent's behavior, but these patterns cannot be identified without the psychological concepts deployed in the course of interpretation.[6] Neither can these patterns be identified in terms of a naturalistic description because their logic is different, i.e., they are not organized according to the constitutive principle of rationality. Naturalistic and psychological descriptions conform to different constitutive principles that make them fundamentally different.[7] For this reason naturalistic descriptions cannot supply evidence for settling a debate between competing interpretations.

Due to the difference of the constitutive principles, psychological interpretation faces a problem deeper than mere empirical underdetermination.[8] Even if ideal epistemic access is granted, it is still possible to give a coherent interpretation of an agent's behavior and internal states with radically different sets of propositional attitudes—and this is due not to less than ideal access to the relevant evidence, but to the lack of facts independent of the psychological discourse. The case is not that there are potentially relevant but verification-transcendent psychological facts (due to, e.g., the limits or theory-ladenness of experience, or our contingent inability to look beyond the constitutive principles of the discourse); rather, due to its nature, i.e., its constitutive principles, folk-psychological discourse is incapable of stating facts about an objective, discourse-independent, order which could be treated as mental reality. Instead, folk psychology organizes behavioral evidence by a rational and coherent system of propositional attitudes—and while relying on it, we cannot do otherwise. There is nothing that could challenge this framework as long as we are in the business of folk-psychological interpretation.[9]

The evidences relevant for interpretation are seen through concepts of the folk-psychological discourse in the first instance. One cannot step

back from the intentional stance and weigh evidence independently of it—that would entail not giving a psychological interpretation at all. One can give alternative interpretations but with them the supporting evidence is changed as well: some parts of the world cease to be noise and begin to make sense, other parts become noisy. But even then, alternative interpretations remain within the framework set by the constitutive principles of psychological interpretation. The case is thus not that we have different theories organizing and weighing pieces of evidence differently, it is rather that the same "theory" (i.e., folk psychology) allows for creating evidence and interpretations in divergent and incompatible ways.

In this sense psychological interpretations create the phenomena they seemingly describe.[10] Consequently, the question of the correct interpretation of a given behavior always remains an open question. Even if we have access to all the descriptive facts independently of psychological concepts, different psychological concepts connect the evidences differently, and distribute meaning and significance among them in divergent ways. This is the reason why in social situations the rational course of action is vague.

Conceptual connections. Due to the logic of psychological discourse, psychological interpretation is independent of facts about the agent to be interpreted. This independence arises from the constitutive principle of rationality that organizes psychological discourse in a radically different way than does causation in the discourse of descriptive facts. Different constitutive principles prevent the formulation of the same identity conditions in terms of psychological and naturalistic vocabularies: there are no pairs of identity conditions, put forward in psychological and physical terms respectively, that could identify the same event, because the identity conditions themselves belong to discourses organized by different constitutive principles.[11]

This difference in organization can be further illustrated by the conceptual connections on which psychological interpretation essentially relies.[12] There are, e.g., conceptual connections between the contents of perceptual states and the propositional attitudes that rely on them. Similarly, the way we identify an agent's behavior conceptually depends on the psychological states we ascribe to him or her. The logical interconnections among propositional attitudes, among mental states and actions are peculiar to the mental, and they have no analogy among the constituents of the physical world—as the latter are not constituted conceptually.

Due to the conceptual nature of the entities invoked in it, a folk-psychological interpretation of an action depends on its conceptual connections with motivations and intentions ascribed, and not on generalizations based upon previously observed empirical regularities. Correspondingly, putative psychological explanations do not relate independent facts: as conceptual connections between mental states identify the constituents of the mental world, there are no logically independent entities whose relation could make true a causal explanation relating them.[13]

The physical idiom is fitted to talk about conceptually independent entities and to mention them in proper causal explanations. The physical description of a situation portrays an a priori inaccessible connection of two conceptually distinct events: e.g., the connection between some activity in the agent's neural network and then a series of bodily movements. But the psychological idiom cannot represent events as conceptually independent, therefore the semantic surface leads us astray if in this idiom 'because' is understood as a causal connective. This suggests that while we can represent a relation by a physical description as a causal connection between two distinct events, we cannot do the same by a psychological one. The two kinds of description carve the world in qualitatively different ways and portray them from incompatible perspectives.

Evaluative concepts. Psychological concepts are essentially evaluative. Not only in the sense indicated above that their deployment is sanctioned by the norms of rationality and that actions can be accordingly evaluated, but also in the sense that psychological concepts provide the foundation of moral evaluation. Intentions, motivations, character traits, desires, beliefs, actions, etc. are all subject to moral judgment.[14] Implicit evaluative connotations are inseparable from psychological terms.

It is only through psychological concepts that agents can be represented as being moved by morally evaluable processes. This perspective is missing from descriptions devoid of psychological concepts: they can describe causal chains resulting in behavior, but this will be an impersonal description representing the agent as if events were happening to him rather than him doing something.

Representing an agent as a person entails the acknowledgement that it is appropriate to apply to her the categories of freedom and responsibility—categories that have no counterparts in scientific dictionaries. Agents can be seen as free only if they can be interpreted psychologically,

otherwise their behavior can be at most indeterminate. Without psychological ascriptions behavior can be explained physiologically in causal terms, but from this explanation one cannot see the contribution a person as a person makes to the situation—on the contrary: causal explanations reveal determining factors and thereby exempt agents from responsibility.

Moral evaluation presupposes that we treat ourselves as fairly stable intentional systems, to represent ourselves as such by psychological narratives.[15] They bestow moral features upon agents by attributing reasons, motivation, character, etc. to them. Psychological narratives bestow upon agents evaluative properties that we ascribe because we are especially sensitive to certain aspects of the surrounding world, namely to the contribution of agents similar to us.[16] Therefore, our psychological sensitivity is not merely the basis of our moral sensitivity, but it is partly moral in itself.

3. The Domain of Folk Psychology

The epistemic value of folk psychology may now seem precarious, and one may be tempted to argue for a position that folk psychology does not have epistemic virtues, but rather social ones. If the task of hermeneutics is based, as Gadamer likes to say, "on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness" (1993, 295), then folk psychology is a practical hermeneutic device of social interactions: it is a tool for weaving narratives that make the social world familiar to us, and therefore coherent narratives are valuable to us in themselves.

In this sense, psychological practice is a narrative practice, the basic cases of psychological understanding are not individual predictions and explanations but more complex narrative structures. These provide the raw material for interpreting behavior that does not fit smoothly with the habitual ways in which things are normally done. We need them where we feel uneasy with the situation, or feel some tension, or where we do not see clearly, etc. These affects create the need for and motivate psychological interpretation—typically when our psychological sensitivity is violated. What we need in these cases is the affective resolution of the situation:[17] psychological interpretation replaces "strangeness" by "familiarity."

The understanding available via folk psychology does not mean or entail knowledge. On the one hand, understanding is transparent:[18] whilst I can know something without knowing that I know it (e.g., some logical consequence of my knowledge that I have not thought of yet, but if I was

asked I would give the correct answer straightforwardly; or something that I have not tried yet, but if I was to try it, I would know it) I cannot understand something without understanding that I understand it. On the other hand, understanding, as opposed to knowledge, does not presuppose external criteria, more precisely: it does not presuppose truth.

The success of psychological narratives is not measured by the adequacy with which they represent, or map onto, the internal mechanisms underlying behavior, but by how effectively they can treat these situations. An interpretation is successful if one can understand the social world by it in the above sense, if the world is made familiar by it. Offering an interpretation for acceptance to others is an attempt at communicating affects: we express or recognize them depending on which part we are playing in the communicative process. This communication is successful if the listener understands how the interpreter feels about the situation, agent, etc. interpreted. In the cases of manipulation this process is successful if the listener accepts the narrative as expressing the interpreter's true feelings about the situation. Disagreements as to the correct interpretation are about how one should feel about the object of interpretation; in the process of communication these affective reactions are refined as well as our psychological sensitivity.

The standard process of psychological understanding is therefore as follows: a narrative in terms of folk psychology expresses the interpreter's affective reactions to the object of interpretation. Thereby the interpreter communicates affects so as to configure the listeners' psychological sensitivity. This orients them in the social world by shading light on the significance of the events interpreted. This is made possible by the conventional conceptual resources of folk psychology that configure our interpretative perspective. By acquiring the conventions of folk psychology we learn, on the one hand, how to express the affective reactions relevant in social matters so as to be effective in social interactions, and, on the other, how to understand others' expressions.

Paradigmatic narrative structures entail affective reactions that we learn during the process of socialization:[19] we learn which characters in tales to sympathize with, or have feelings against, and later, from everyday interaction and reading literature, we learn which comments express socially relevant reactions of the interpreter, etc. So, we acquire an expressive code, step by step, with which to encode our own affective reactions,

and decode those of others. This knowledge can be exploited for the purposes of manipulation: sometimes, psychological narratives may not express the interpreter's affective reactions, but serve only the purposes of dishonest orientation. The know-how of psychological narration allows us to influence others' sensibilities, and it can be deployed in various ways.

Our affective reactions are configured by our interpretative perspective and psychological sensitivity which make certain aspects of the characters' behavior salient and offer the conceptual resources for representing them by a coherent narrative. Both depend on our personal interpretative history: they supply us with the relevant concepts and narrative structures for expressing our affective reactions.

Psychological narratives do not communicate knowledge about the internal world of the agents they are told about. Interpretations proposed for acceptance aim at configuring affective sensibilities of others so as to feel similarly about the object of interpretation. Affective sensitivity is both the basis and the target of psychological narratives: they are expressed, accepted, or rejected on this basis, and they tune how we feel about the inhabitants of the social world. Our narratives reflect the way we feel about others and ourselves, and they influence our navigation in the social world. Interpretation and evaluation concur in this process.

Folk psychology thus turns out to be a set of conventions for psychological storytelling: it is a system of knowledge that we acquire in the process of socialization. Psychological narratives are fictions in which we represent agents' behavior by familiar concepts thereby facilitating its understanding. These narratives represent agents as morally responsible persons, and express the interpreter's affective states that arose in social situations. Folk-psychological representations thus convey the interpreter's affective states in a conventional way thereby allowing for the social orientation of those interpreting the social world in terms of similar concepts. Folk psychology is the foundation of our sociability.

4. The Conventions of Folk Psychology

Understanding psychological narratives as sketched above presupposes rules of composition and decoding which the community of interpreters must conform to. These rules can be understood as conventions stabilizing the use of folk-psychological expressions. The problem arising at this point is to provide a naturalistic account of conventions,

because in the classical analysis 'convention' is an intentional concept, and conventions are frequently distinguished from mere regularities on the basis that the former is built on an interlocking system of beliefs and desires.[20] The fictionalist account I am outlining here can be maintained only if there can be a nonintentional account of the concept of convention. Without it—if one denies the fact-stating character of folk psychology, but accepts the truism that linguistic meaning is conventional—there is no way of accounting for the possibility of communication, and particularly, one cannot meaningfully deny the fact-stating character of folk psychology and cannot explain how other discourses can still be fact-stating.

A naturalistic analysis of conventions rests on two pillars: reproduced patterns of behavior and their proliferation due to the weight of precedent.[21] Something is reproduced if it is derived from something else so that if the latter had been different in reproduced respects then its reproduction would be different in those respects too. This kind of reproduction is a necessary condition for the conventionality of a behavioral pattern: not only must a piece of behavior fit with some template; it must be reproduced from that template. Reproduction can take place via simple copying, but its more interesting form is counterpart reproduction. Ballroom dancing is a good example of the latter: it can be done successfully only if one party reacts to the movements of the other according to the relevant conventions. This kind of reproduction results in stability more effectively than mere copying as copying can more easily drift away from the original.

The function of linguistic conventions is to stabilize meaning by governing the speaker's use of linguistic patterns and the audience's response to them.[22] Patterns of natural language are stabilized by counterpart reproduction: if the speaker's contribution is fixed, the audience's response is not arbitrary. They occupy counterpart positions in a communicative situation and reproduce conventional behavioral (linguistic) patterns. Reproduction of a behavioral pattern in itself is not sufficient to convention: it must take place due to the weight of precedent, and proliferate because of it. Conformity fostered by precedent is to be contrasted with cases where a course of behavior has some kind of intrinsic utility. If a behavioral pattern could not have proliferated in a population without precedent and could be replaced by other patterns, these are reliable signs of its conventionality. From among the equally good solutions to the

problem one becomes a precedent by arising more frequently than others. Convention so understood depends only on the parties' ability to adapt to their environment by reproducing behavioral patterns that proved to be successful in the past.

Fact-stating discourses aim at truth, and as such they can be understood on analogy with signaling.[23] The use of its signals, e.g., alarm calls, can be maintained only if they are used for communicating truths. Otherwise the practice collapses. Conveying information via signals is possible only if there is a systematic correlation between signaling and the state of affairs relevant to it, only if signals are sent when its corresponding circumstances obtain. Hence, the fundamental convention of descriptive discourses is truthfulness: to try not to say anything false in a given language.[24] A communicative practice can tolerate a certain amount of lying (manipulative deception), but there must be sanctions protecting the practice against liars.[25] The very possibility of deception asymmetrically depends on the convention of truthfulness: while in descriptive discourses general conformity to the convention of truthfulness is possible, general nonconformity, or even the majority's nonconformity, is not possible without threatening successful communication.

This does not entail, however, that every discourse is founded on the convention of truthfulness—expressive and fictional discourses are not like that. The contents of moral, aesthetic and psychological discourses are not necessarily accounted for in terms of truth conditions. They can be understood as discourses expressing affects, not as reporting facts but orienting the audience's sensibility and attention. Successful communication in these contexts does not depend on truth, as the discourse does not aim at truth, but on whether the relevant affective states are successfully communicated or not. Hence, these discourses have the general potential to be used systematically for manipulative purposes, i.e., to express affective states without having them, and thereby not threatening the communicative practice itself.

In a fictionalist account folk psychology can be taken to be a solution to a coordination problem, namely the problem of social orientation—to orient, and to be oriented by, others in the social world. It is a mutual interest to configure social sensibilities of, and to have ours configured by, others: to let others know how we feel about others, to motivate others accordingly, and to be motivated by others in order to refine our naviga-

tion in the social world. It is in our mutual interest to form alliances. This can take place by affective orientation based on interpretation and evaluation as it is made feasible by folk psychology. Such orientation can work only if others and ourselves can be interpreted in accordance with public rules. Different folk psychologies can serve this purpose, and from this perspective, their internal structure, their concepts, and conventions are indifferent. What is necessary is that interpretations in a community generally conform to a set of conventions—to play the same psychological language-game; otherwise mutual understanding breaks down.

The relevant conventions are of two kinds. One set of conventions is the rules of composition of psychological narratives which by stabilizing conceptual connections provides their internal logic. These conventions are learned in the process of socialization and they constitute the standards of intelligibility: observing them is a precondition for successful communication. They govern the relation of narrative elements differentiating correct and incorrect continuations, and thus circumscribing the range of the possible implications a given interpretation can have. While developing a psychological interpretation one must follow these conventions in order to tell a coherent narrative, that is to say, to rationalize the agent or the piece of behavior to be interpreted.

The other set of conventions stabilizes the relation of narrative elements and affective reactions; they are thus conventions of expression. Again, these are learned during socialization: affective responses and their socially accepted expressions are both fine tuned by the increasingly complex situations one has to face. This process results in the mutual refinement of the narrative elements and the affective reactions one can express by them. Common knowledge of these conventions enables the reliable communication of motivationally significant affective responses arising in social situations.

Folk psychology thus turns out to be a set of linguistic conventions that regulate linguistic behavior and the ensuing affective responses. There is no factual communication involved here: folk-psychological representations of agents and situations need not be connected to facts they purportedly represent. They express affective reactions in a conventional way: it is not necessarily the speaker's actual affective state that they express, but an affective content fixed by conventions, and for this reason they can be used manipulatively.

Interpretations developed in conformity with these conventions solve the coordination problem of orienting one another in the social world, a problem that must be solved under evolutionary pressure in order to facilitate group cohesion and social cooperation within the group. This can be done in various more or less effective ways, and different folk psychologies can solve the problem differently responding to the actual needs of social organization.[26] There is thus no convention of truthfulness to be followed for the stability of folk-psychological discourse, as it does not communicate facts, but plays an orienting role. It is orientational success on which conformity to the conventions of folk psychology depend.

5. Analogies with Musical Expression

Not only folk psychology can be interpreted as a device for expressing affective states in conventional ways; musical expression can be invoked as an analogy that can perhaps shed light on the fictionalist account of folk psychology advertised here.

In Mozart's operas G minor is used typically for the expression of sadness and pain, as in the arias of Donna Anna, Arminda, Konstanze, Ilia, Pamina or the Queen of the Night. This role of G minor allows for a discussion of its role in the relationship between Belmonte and Konstanze, and to interpret the G minor aria of the Queen of the Night as Tamino's deception if considered against the background of the dissonance between the aria and the orchestra. Arguably, Mozart's music here provides us with evaluative and orienting signs: the conflict of the aria and the orchestra anticipates subsequent developments in the light of which the Queen of the Night seems less to be a suffering mother, and increasingly an evil creature.[27] Hence musical background here can be seen as a preliminary configuration of the audience's sensibility.

As a convention does not depend on the number of parties to it and on how long it is maintained, Mozart's use of G minor can be seen as a convention of composition, as none of its intrinsic features explains its utility in this context; some other key could do as well. Precedents here are the cases in which the relevant affective states were successfully expressed—which can be measured on subsequent interpretations, criticism, and the audience's response. Successful precedents serve as the basis of proliferation in future compositions thereby becoming a paradigmatic element. And here meet musical composition and psychological story

telling. Paradigmatic narrative structures are similarly conventional ways of expressing the interpreter's affective states, aversions and affinities, complex unstructured somatic responses in various social situations. Narrative elements of the psychological discourse are stabilized similarly, becoming recurrent components of psychological interpretations.

Contemporary philosophies of music share the conviction that the recognition of the expressive features of music presupposes some kind of preparation without which they may go unnoticed or be misunderstood.[28] There is also agreement in that the audience does not need to be able to articulate this knowledge, or to have formal technical or theoretical training in order to acquire it. This knowledge may be seen as implicit knowledge of interpretative conventions. The conventions of musical expression are bound to a specific cultural setting, their knowledge is presupposed by understanding of what is being expressed, and in that they are known tacitly.[29]

This is analogous with the knowledge of folk-psychological conventions that enable the discourse to function as an expressive code orienting the audience's sensibility. These conventions coordinate the way we can orient and manipulate how fellow humans relate to other fellow humans by conveying motivationally relevant affections via linguistic patterns.

The use of patterns can also be aptly compared to the logic of musical composition, i.e., the set of conventions to be relied on. These conventions stabilize the use of musical expressions and tell the composer what can be fitted with what. Deviations from the usual ways of composition are to be resolved in order to be acceptable.[30] And this is again similar with composing folk-psychological interpretations: striking moves in an interpretation, just as striking moves in musical composition, must somehow be resolved in the further course of interpretation in order to be coherent by the standards of the folk psychology one actually uses.

By knowing these conventions one can distinguish between cases of usual and unusual continuations, and discover mistaken steps, thus becomes possible the anticipation of the next passage, etc.[31] When a fugue is listened to for the first time, several continuations can be anticipated at various stages as it can be composed in various ways. But it is possible only within certain conventional constraints, as a fugue can be composed only in very specific ways. This is the case with folk-psychological narratives, too. Acquaintance with conventions sets up the frames within which

the composition and understanding of narratives are possible; conventions furnish us with the stock of narrative structures allowing for anticipation and the decoding of affective states expressed in them.

6. Fictionalism About Folk Psychology

One can discern three central tenets of fictionalist positions concerning any domain of discourse.[32] Fictionalism about a given discourse holds that its sentences express propositions that:

(i) have representational content;

(ii) are semantically evaluable at face value, nonreductively, i.e., they mean what they literally mean;

(iii) are not directed at stating truths about the putative field of inquiry, i.e., the discourse has nonepistemic virtues.

These commitments fit fairly well the image of folk psychology I have outlined here. Psychological propositions represent agents; their truth conditions can be specified; their real function and value do not depend on truth.

A fictionalist interpretation of folk psychology retains the superficial semantics of mental-state ascriptions: they admittedly express propositions ascribing mental properties to individuals. These propositions represent some region of the world, and this representational content is their fictional meaning—a meaning they have in the fiction. Folk psychology represents agents in a way similar to how some fictions represent the world: in a way they are not, and—as folk psychology does not state facts—they cannot be. In this sense folk psychology is a tool for making Escherian representations. Escher's *Drawing Hands*, for example, is not a representation of hands drawing one another, but a representation as if hands were drawing one another—as if it were possible.

The factually defective character of folk psychology is irrelevant for the fictionalist, because fictionalism does not see the function of a fictional representation as connected to its epistemic value. The fictional content of a sentence is the proposition it expresses, which can be given by truth conditions. If we are aware that the discourse in which we take part is a fiction, as in the case of role-playing games, then we proceed as if the sentence were fact-stating whilst knowing that in fact it is not—indeed, we

are pretending. But if we are not aware of this, as e.g. in the case of ideologies serving the purposes of social control, then we treat the sentence without this restriction.

If a discourse is interpreted in a fictionalist way then its real content is different from the fictional (semantic) content of its propositions.[33] One way of understanding the real content of psychological propositions may exploit Davidson's (1978) theory of metaphors (setting aside the question whether it is a good theory of metaphors or not). Accordingly, metaphors have no additional semantic content over and above their propositional content, and therefore they cannot be explained exhaustively in terms of meaning and truth conditions. What more there is to metaphors beyond their literal meaning is not semantic in nature; the role they play cannot be explained exclusively in terms of meaning and truth conditions.

Although metaphors are representations, their use is not focused on their semantic content. There is thus a distinction to be drawn between the meaning of metaphors, that is their propositional content, and their actual use, which may not be transparent for those taking part in the discourse: there is no need to know what we are using a proposition for in order for it to be used for that purpose. There is a difference between knowing how and knowing that: I can know how to use an expression, or technique, without being able to explain how it works—I can even be mistaken about it. The case may be similar with metaphors: as competent speakers we get along with metaphors fairly well, we can use them, but most of us have no theory about how they work.

Folk-psychological interpretations in the present fictionalist guise are similar to metaphors to the extent that they orient the attention of the audience, and can thus be understood from the influence they exert on it. One might understand metaphors as offering perspectives by inducing us to see things in special lights—this has been aptly called their "framing effect."[34] In a similar vein, their function may be seen as activating dispositions and abilities relevant in the given context.[35] And whilst we may not be able to explain what makes a metaphor apt, and what their principles of generation are, we are still capable of perceiving things within the frames they provide, e.g., hearing melodies as descending.

This analogy may help drive home the point that the real content of folk psychology is not propositional but affective, so what its sentences really express cannot be semantically evaluated. Folk-psychological nar-

ratives convey affective states relevant from the perspective of our psychological sensibility as configured by the conventions of the discourse and the history of our personal interpretative practice. Along with learning paradigmatic narrative structures we are conditioned to respond to them, if accepted, in ways considered as proportional and appropriate within the community. Affective states are communicated via these narrative structures that play a role in the fine tuning of psychological sensibilities, and improve the stock of narrative elements to be relied on in understanding persons. Narratives and affective states mutually influence one another, and this dynamic process is framed by the conventions of folk psychology. Interpretations relying on these resources cannot be accepted on the basis of facts about the situation interpreted, but on the basis of the conventions of interpretation and the affective responses it induces.

For the individual it is relevant what kind of narrative structures are acquired in the process of socialization with respect to the social environment in which those structures are to be applied. Interpretative sophistication can both be an advantage or a disadvantage depending on the social environment in which interpretations are put forward. Similarly, for the community it is relevant what kind of narrative structures emerge and disappear in the course of social development. The efficacy of folk psychology can be evaluated at the level of community depending on how the stock of potentially accessible narrative structures, and the affections communicated by them, contributes to group cohesion and behavioral motivation.

Max Weber (1930), for example, uncovers a unique psychology sustaining the emergence of capitalism. Weber reconstructs the narrative structures of this psychology from a plethora of historical sources, and groups them into several categories like “fear of damnation,” “inner isolation,” “inner-worldly asceticism,” etc. arising out of restraint from a culture of sensations, a sense of vocation, a sense of duty, etc. This psychology can be understood as the conceptual framework by which members of Calvinist and similar communities made sense of their own and their fellows’ behavior, by which they admired or condemned it. Narrative elements belonging to these categories configured their sensibilities, oriented them as to how to feel about courses of behavior, situations, themselves, etc., and hence motivated their behavior. If Weber’s reconstruction is accepted then it is plausible to think that understanding agents in terms of these categories had been a driving force in early modern social history—

independently of the question whether this "Calvinist psychology" is a true description of some cognitive architecture. What really matters is that in these communities these concepts provided the ways of being a person—members of communities could relate to one another through these concepts, and this understanding was motivationally relevant.

Weber's account may serve as an illustration of the social virtues of folk psychology. It is its influence on social relations, and not the knowledge it allegedly provides about the internal mechanisms of agents, that tells us about the value of folk-psychological interpretations. It is not our interest in a true theory of mind that brings into existence and sustains folk-psychological practices; rather it is the social necessity of influencing others' perspective on interpersonal matters. Thus the efficacy of folk psychologies in general, and of our psychological skills in particular, should not be measured by their capacity to represent our putative mental architecture, but on how effectively they can influence social navigation, the formation of alliances, and our psychological sensibility—at least for the kind of fictionalism I have outlined here.[36]

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Notes

1. See Velleman (2003).
2. I discuss some aspects of this issue in more detail in Demeter (2009a).
3. See e.g. Dennett's (1987) discussion of the optimal foraging theory.
4. For a distinction between this narrow and broader construals of folk psychology see Bermúdez (2003).
5. For a more detailed discussion see e.g., Dorris (2002, 76–80).
6. As Dennett (1991, 49) puts it:

> I see that there could be two different systems of belief attribution to an individual which differed *substantially* in what they attributed—even in yielding substantially different predictions of the individual's future behavior—and yet where no deeper fact of the matter could establish that one was a description of the individual's *real* beliefs and the other not. In other words, there could be two different, but equally real patterns discernible in the noisy world. The rival theorists would not even agree on which parts of the world were pattern and which noise, and yet nothing deeper would settle the issue. The choice of a pattern would indeed be up to the observer, a matter to be decided on idiosyncratic pragmatic grounds.

7. On the difference of the constitutive principles see Kim (2003, 119).

8. This deeper problem is subtly illustrated in many of Henry James's novels from which Robert Pippin (2000, 64–65) draws the philosophical lesson:

> Of course, to say that many James characters do not seem to know what they think does not mean that they are somehow unaware of their own mental states. It is to note that what I am in fact thinking consciously about my own attitudes, or what I think about others, might but need not have much relevance to what opinions and beliefs may rightly be (eventually) attributed to me about such matters. I may never have 'actually thought' the opinions I do have, and what I consciously tell myself I believe may not at all be what I believe. This might still seem to suggest that the problem is some sort of epistemological opacity (there *is* such an opinion and I am blocked somehow from acknowledging it), or am in self-denial, or it is unconscious, and so on. I might be said to reveal what I really believe by what I do, not by what I say or consciously think, for example. But . . . James's position seems much more radical than such 'opacity' positions. The question of what belief I actually hold, or what my true motivation was, and so on, is simply not the sort of thing that could be said to be 'there' at all, however, epistemologically refined our insight might become.

9. As Davidson (1974, 237) aptly points out: "My point is not merely that the data are open to more than one interpretation, although this is obviously true. My point is that if we are intelligibly to attribute attitudes and beliefs, then we are committed to finding, in the pattern of behavior, belief and desire, a large degree of rationality and consistency."

10. A good illustration here is the phenomenon Hacking (1995, 238, 246, 259–60) calls "semantic contagion."

11. The logical difference is illustrated by Winch (2008, 89, 119) and Hacking (1995, 248). For a more detailed discussion see Demeter (2009b).

12. As Davidson (1985, 196) explains, this could not be otherwise as long as we are in the business of psychological interpretation: "these obvious logical relations amongst beliefs; amongst beliefs, desires, and intentions; between beliefs and the world, make beliefs the beliefs they are; therefore they cannot in general lose these relations and remain the same beliefs. Such relations are *constitutive* of the propositional attitudes."

13. As Norman Malcolm (1984, 88) says, even if the inferences from attitudes to actions are not entirely *a priori*, the conceptual connection here "is strong enough to rule out the possibility of there being a merely contingent connection."

14. For a detailed discussion see Morton (2003).

15. See Hutto (2008).

16. See Morton (2003, 151–55; Doris 2002, 93).

17. Here I have in mind a kind of resolution similar to Velleman's (2003, 13–15) "emotional resolution" in the cases of narratives, but I am inclined to agree with Goldie (2000, 13–14, 103) that emotions have a narrative structure, which is not characteristic to affects. So, in this case I am talking about affective reactions and not emotions.

18. See Zagzebski (2001, 246–47).

19. For example, Adam Morton (1980, 47f) introduces the interpretation of Aida's behavior in five varied styles, some of which are compatible and some are mutually incompatible. These styles can be used as general strategies in interpreting agents, while they emphasize different aspects of the situations and represent differently what is to be understood in these cases. For example, "symbolic" and "primitive" interpretations are incompatible for Morton as they represent mental states radically differently, while "romantic" and "rational" interpretations ascribe different roles to character traits in under-

standing behavior. These conflicts can be well explained by pointing out that the core concepts used in these divergent styles have divergent conceptual connections. The concepts used in the initial interpretation specify different ranges of concepts and ways in which they can be used. What is, however, common to them, is that they define, as Morton says, a "moral universe" in which social situations can be represented.

20. See, of course, Lewis (1969). Crispin Wright (2002, 13–15) echoes a classical argument against eliminativism, namely that it remains incoherent without a nonintentional theory of conventions and linguistic meaning, because by arguing for the falsity of folk psychology it presupposes the concept of truth conditions, meaning and thus intentionality, i.e., everything that it wants to eliminate (see Boghossian 1990, 167, 174). Similarly, Adam Morton (2001, 603) in his review of Kusch (1999) argues that if folk psychology is taken to be a social institution then we presuppose something that is to be explained. Because, as Morton argues, conventions and institutional facts presuppose that the agents have the relevant concepts of intention, intention-ascription and inferences based on them.

21. For a promising account along these lines see Millikan (1998).

22. See Millikan (2005, 53–54).

23. For an evolutionary account of signals and signaling see Skyrms (1996; 2004; 2010).

24. See Lewis (1975, 167).

25. See Skyrms (1996, 100–101).

26. For a discussion of alternative folk psychologies incompatible with ours see Kusch (1999, 331–34), and Goldie (2000, 32).

27. For an in-depth analysis see Fodor (1999).

28. See Davies (2001, 173).

29. See Allanbrook (2008, 271–72).

30. As Haimo (1995, 277) points out: "For Haydn, and surely for his contemporaries, the choice of a remote key for a middle movement must have been a striking event, one that could not possibly be ignored, and one that would eventually have to be reconciled with the home key."

31. See Goldie (2000, 207).

32. I follow Rosen (2005, 14).

33. Kalderon (2005, 126–28) calls this the "non-assertion view" which holds that fictional sentences have no semantic content over and above their fictional content, so they do not assert anything.

34. See Moran (1989).

35. See Walton (1993, 81).

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