

## Patterns, Patterns, Patterns: Art and Meaning at the Crossroads between Two Opposing Forces

by

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*Abstract:* This article aims to defend the need to recognize the independent role of those cognitive abilities on whose behalf linguistic meaning is introduced from the proper institution of language. I call this capacity “private pattern recognition” (PPR) and argue that it plays an essential part not just in the instauration of linguistic meaning but also in other relevant cognitive phenomena such as artistic creation and understanding. Moreover, it is precisely the failure to separate both aspects that gives rise to important perplexities associated with the underdetermination of meaning. The first part of the article makes a case for this thesis and addresses its compatibility with Wittgenstein’s private language argument. It then focuses on the example of art to illustrate the differing roles of private pattern recognition and shared linguistic meaning. The second part of the article focuses on the paradox of resemblance (RP). It (i) considers the difficulties of Williamson’s response, (ii) illustrates how they instead support the current thesis, (iii) attempts to delineate how the role of meaning should be understood, and (iv) briefly revisits the rule-following paradox (RFP).

*Keywords:* patterns, family resemblance, rule-following, art, meaning

### 1. Introduction

WITTGENSTEIN’S METAPHOR OF “family resemblance” highlighted an essential aspect of human rationality that seems to characterize most of our cognitive actions,<sup>1</sup> namely, the capacity of pattern recognition, which undoubtedly plays an essential role in linguistic meaning but also appears to have a much broader reach. Making sense of a musical melody requires the capacity to recognize recurring segments in the chains of sound. Identifying common patterns in an art gallery, even when wholly ignorant of the style or artist they represent, is customary practice. Grasping a pattern<sup>2</sup> in a dance

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1 This is not to say that Wittgenstein’s aim was archaeological in nature (meant to dig deep into the structure of human cognitive abilities); but, rather, that by way of carefully observing the mechanism at play in meaning apprehension he, nevertheless, indirectly unearths them.

2 For now, I will have to operate with a pre-theoretical notion of “pattern” appealing to our collective understanding of what it is to recognize such patterns like the above described; thereby keeping in line with Wittgenstein’s implicit definition technic. The very kern of the problem is that even the explanation of that technic requires and presupposes the concept to be explained; the very understanding of this problem presupposes its understanding, thus making any direct attempt to give a descriptive account inauspicious. I can merely expect that in the course of the text, the intended concept will acquire more precise contours. Later in the article, however, some further clarifications are given.

performance, identifying a newly developed trend, and seeing (indeed) the eyes of the father in the son, to name a few, are all normal human activities. Wittgenstein himself alludes to such related phenomena when explaining what characterizes our grasp of linguistic meaning. The idea of “keeping in line” or “keeping step” with which he illustrates the idea of rule-following presupposes this very capacity.<sup>3</sup>

In a narrow sense, linguistic meaning would simply be a case of this broader phenomenon; although, as soon as there is an intersubjective consensus about what the right move to perform “the specific dance” or play “the specific melody” should be, things might be seen the other way around. Such practices can be considered linguistic too. Nevertheless, when I talk of “pattern recognition” here, I refer to the private capacity that makes such linguistic agreements possible. Pattern recognition in this sense need not be linguistic, although language does presuppose pattern recognition. I, therefore, take pattern recognition to be a much more extensive practice than that which actually becomes socially (linguistically) ruled, no matter the discipline. Thus, considering the ubiquity of this phenomenon in our cognitive exchanges with the world – not ignoring the use that has lately been made of a similar notion of pattern recognition in AI<sup>4</sup> – both its greater understanding and how exactly it interweaves with the notion of linguistic meaning demand more attention.

However, since pattern recognition, unlike language, is a private, cognitive (since it is conscious) performance, many are sceptical of acknowledging it as a cognitive ability independent of our linguistic practices. Well-known forms of realism have been put forward by authors such as McDowell (1994) and others, which deny any form of non-linguistic cognitive apprehensions of reality. In doing so, they appeal to, among others, Wittgenstein’s private language argument (PLA). Thus, this requires a direct confrontation with the PLA to determine whether there is a conflict.

It seems to me that precisely because an appeal to the notion of “family resemblance” and thereby to our capacity to recognize patterns was used to confront a previously dominant and too rigid conception of meaning, an overly narrow identification of family resemblance with linguistic meaning was applied whereby the understanding of meaning illustrated by this notion substituted the previous conception of meaning in terms of fixed necessary and sufficient conditions. For, even if a pragmatic account of meaning need not *per se* be understood in terms of family resemblance and could pass even if there were

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3 For example, *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, 1953, §208): “I shall make him find them and produce them, and so on. I shall, for instance, get him to continue an ornamental pattern uniformly when told to do so”.

4 See, for example, Sinha (2002).

necessary and sufficient conditions, Wittgenstein's explanations clearly advocated the first understanding. Therefore, it is this feature and the interrelated idea of meaning acquisition as a kind of rule-following that most strikingly introduced a new conception.

In my opinion, this narrow identification of family resemblance with linguistic meaning is responsible for some perplexities; most specifically, for what was seen as a specific underdetermination paradox,<sup>5</sup> to which I will refer as the "Resemblance of Paradox" (RP). A good number of papers testify to the initial difficulties found with this conception, while Timothy Williamson's (1994) and Hans Sluga's (2006) more recent attempts to deal with it reveal the pervading threat under which an understanding of meaning in its terms remains. However, since reverting to standard necessary and sufficient conditions did not appear a good option, the notion has been upheld despite being problematic. Thus, it will be a further job of this article to try to comprehend this paradox.

## 2. Private Pattern Recognition

The idea of a form of "private pattern recognition" (PPR) being a pre-linguistic capacity is not at all surprising – numerous empirical studies on babies and animals support this idea. Especially interesting, for example, is the work of Stanford researchers Antony Norcia and Faraz Farzin on facial recognition by babies, as well as that of Laura Schultz from MIT, which shows that this extends to the capacity to identify causal patterns at an early pre-linguistic stage and to react with according expectations.<sup>6</sup> There have been similar animal studies, although I will not elaborate on the details here; nevertheless, it seems that no mere explanation in terms of non-cognitive discriminations can give an appropriate account of such attitudes that resemble ours in almost all but the production of signs. Rather, I think that should empirical arguments not suffice,<sup>7</sup> several others speak crucially to defend our thesis. First is the impossibility of

5 As early as the 1950s and 1960s, after the publication of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, there was a polemic discussion around the notion of "family resemblance" since it was seen to raise this underdetermination paradox, threatening any sustainable conception of meaning. Richman (1962), Wennerberg (1967), Pompa (1967) and Bamborough (1969) were some of the authors involved.

6 See M. McClure, "Infants process faces long before they recognize other objects, Stanford vision researchers find", *Stanford Report*, 11 December 2012, <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2012/december/infants-process-faces-121112.html>; and TED Talk by Laura Schulz from MIT, "The Surprisingly Logical Minds of Babies", 2 June 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1KIVZw7Jxk> 06.02.2015.

7 Not everybody is satisfied with mere empirical arguments. Some authors (e.g., McDowell, 1994) have, despite them, denied both infants and animals "a world" beyond the mere natural one. As linguistically deprived beings they do not belong to the realm of reason and, thus, would not have a cognitive apprehension of their surroundings that could turn this environment into a comprehensible world.

introducing a language based on a non-conscious and merely naturalistic affecting of our senses. Although McDowell (1994) uses this argument to defend the opposite idea – the need to understand perception conceptually – there is no reason why the requirement of cognitive apprehension at the rational level that he stresses cannot be perfectly served by a non-conceptual cognitive one (Peacocke, 1992). Nor need this be understood in terms of the contents of some Cartesian theatre of the mind. Just as there are conceptual apprehensions of external reality, so, too, can there be non-conceptual cognitive ones. As Kant (1781, B177/A138) argued – contravening McDowell’s interpretation of him – what would be unexplainable is how we could know which concepts to apply to reality if we were unable to distinguish aspects of this reality in advance. Second, the capacity shown to persist in the introduction of new creative syntheses of patterns, even after the acquisition of language, as I will be defending, speaks to it being more than a non-rational activity.

In effect, beyond the pre-linguistic situations considered, some of the cases mentioned at the outset illustrate actions by already developed and mostly linguistically capable agents; moreover, they can be said to take place sometimes in the absence of an intersubjective coordinated practice, attesting to the prevalence and active use of this capacity in a linguistically independent manner after the onset of language too.

I will now focus on such cases, which I characterize for pragmatic purposes as “post-linguistic” to contrast them with those described earlier as “pre-linguistic”. However, since they equally imply a language-independent capacity, they will be in this sense pre-linguistic too. To be clear, we are referring to a capacity to *consciously* recognize patterns independent of a shared language in linguistically capable agents. Of course, this consciousness need not amount to knowing “what something is” in a more complex phenomenological and conceptual sense but recognizes that we are acquainted with something specific.<sup>8</sup> The private recognition of fashions or social trends provides an excellent example of such linguistically independent recognition of patterns that we will now proceed to examine.

### 3. “Post-Linguistic” Private Pattern Recognition

Even in a perfectly established, linguistically regulated society, the question of private pattern recognition can be seen to reappear at stages prior to a shared conceptual constitution. Normally, the introduction of a new “conceptual apprehension”, the “synthesis” (to use a helpful Kantian term) of a new pattern for shared use, takes place in a social setting. Different disciplines regularly introduce new

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<sup>8</sup> On this point too in the context of the discussion of Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*, see Ramírez (2017).

concepts in the common practice of our everyday life, and we are initiated into their use socially. A sociologist, for example, might direct our attention to some incipient recurring tendencies of young people (some not-yet-acknowledged social trend); she might make use of some explicit or implicit definition to help us recognize the intended pattern, in the form of descriptive features, by pointing out several examples, or both. We may subsequently be encouraged to continue ourselves in a supervised manner (mostly, at this level, by giving us descriptions<sup>9</sup> of what is or is not relevant to the case). In this way a new pattern is created, and soon we are ready to recognize instances of it around us.<sup>10</sup> We end up giving it a name, say BT<sub>1</sub>, and we can imagine the creation of thousands of BT<sub>2</sub>s and BT<sub>3</sub>s, etc. Before such a social introduction, however, it is entirely conceivable that the sociologist had been observing matters for a while and came to detect this pattern herself. Having singled out some recurring sequence, she then kept track of it for a while before considering it worthwhile to communicate her finding to others and record it linguistically.<sup>11</sup> However, could she not have decided otherwise? That is, could she not – and don't we often do precisely this? – have observed behavioural recurrences, new fashion trends, repeated gestures and the like without communication?

We often identify specific behavioural traits based on some recurrent experience (just as the sociologist did for the first time) without any previous description or communicating with others about it. We perform this work of synthesis and consider ourselves capable of re-identifying our observed pattern repeatedly. This is what I mean by “post-linguistic” pattern recognition, even if it is pre-

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9 Of course, none of these guiding, conceptually expressed, descriptions are themselves free of the resemblance problem; nor do they imply that “following the rule” further is a clear and fixed matter.

10 This surely works because we can easily reidentify the pattern. Now, would it be possible to take as our pattern some arbitrary bundle of things? Well, yes, if such an arbitrary bundle happened to repeat itself and we could go on recognizing its reappearance. No isolated grouping constitutes a pattern if it does not recur. This, however, also raises the issue regarding the purpose or significance of paying attention to a given pattern of things (see n. 12). Completely arbitrary groupings (like some mereological sorting out of things) with no further recurrences would, first, raise a question about the very purpose of distinguishing them and would, second, maybe require a checklist to remember if it happens to occur again. A different thing is if we are grouping partially unrelated things because, for example, they are “useful for holidays”. Here, the pattern has nothing to do with the ingredients bundled together but is instead in the use they can be given for a purpose. Thus, anything that can be useful for that purpose is a case of a pattern since we have to do with something like a “functional pattern”.

I thank an anonymous referee of *Theoria* for these questions about the understanding of “pattern building” and its possible arbitrariness. Keeping the fluidity and general coherence of the text counselled against discussing this point here, but it surely merits discussion at greater length.

11 There is a huge issue regarding why such recurrent features appear to us as being worthy of selection, igniting the suspicion of non-arbitrary and the search for an underlying reason, an intention, a cause or the mere discovery of a (non-arbitrary) natural “way things are”. However, this discussion is beyond the scope of this work.

linguistic to the extent that new concepts might subsequently be introduced (by sharing) on their behalf. Perhaps it is more accurate to speak of “higher-order private pattern recognition” (HO-PPR) since the term is better at capturing the idea that not only is this being performed by linguistically capable agents, but it amounts to assembling new, recognisable patterns at a higher complexity level without further communication.

#### 4. Does Pattern Recognition Refute the PLA?

It might be claimed that in cases such as my social trend example, we have served ourselves of the necessary conceptual tools in order to recognize the individual set of aspects that constitutes our pattern (we would be able to communicate them without difficulty), so building them up in a new synthesis is no problem. We could, therefore, question their private character. However, this is not the essential point since it is the new, specific grouping that is at stake and for whose correct further identification there are no external standards.<sup>12</sup>

This is precisely the problem with Wittgenstein’s private language argument (PLA), which, I agree with Kripke (1982), must be understood in a much broader sense than the arguments about private sensation from *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, 1953, §242–270). As Kripke convincingly argues, these last arguments present a special case,<sup>13</sup> while the main point of the PLA concerns the impossibility of following rules privately. In this sense, I concur entirely with Kripke and with other interpreters, such as Wright (2001), who have stressed this point.

The private character of HO-PPR is exhibited precisely by its falling in this sense under the PLA, in the same way as Wittgenstein’s classic Robinson case did. The difficulties with the private language argument pointed out by Wittgenstein are the same at this higher-order level. That is, there is no way of externally checking which features I enclosed in my mental pattern and which rule I intended to follow. If I made a mistake, misrepresented or forgot what I meant, no one could correct me. Alternatively, I could constantly and unconsciously

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12 Notice that while for our silent linguistic identification of the world we still have external standards – which repeatedly reinforce our application practice or correct us if we go out of tune with others when we communicate – for this higher order clustering of new patterns, there is absolutely no external standard beyond ourselves.

13 See, for example, the following paragraph:

[T]he sections following §243 are meant to be read on the light of the preceding discussion; difficult as they are in any case, they are much less likely to be understood if they are read in isolation. The “private language argument” as applied to *sensations* is only a special case of much more general considerations about language previously argued; sensations have a crucial role as an (apparently) convincing *counterexample* to the general considerations previously stated. (Kripke 1982, p. 3)

change my memory of the target phenomenon, and so on. Thus, since where there is no right and wrong, there is no rule, so the argument goes, I cannot be said to be following a rule at all. Therefore, it is not possible to obey a rule privately (Wittgenstein, 1953, §202).

However, none of this refutes the claim that if we were to use the same term socially, we would need to come to an agreement with others on how to use the corresponding sign; each of us separately referring to some private pattern in our heads, with no social coordination or sanctioning control, would not do. Hence, so far, the argument is undoubtedly right; our case need not deny that – it merely affects the question of whether it is possible to repeatedly create and recognize patterns and somehow “follow a rule” on a private basis. In fact, we need to distinguish two main aspects of the PLA: 1) we would not privately know which rule we intended to follow and there would be no pre-established intention we could keep to since we could be changing the course taken at will; 2) there would be no possibility of externally constraining whether my performance in detecting new instances of the case was right or wrong (e.g., in *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein, 1953, §265). Aspect 2 applies in HO-PPR cases, but what are we to make of 1?

First of all, the claim that I could not know which rule I intend to follow, and how I plan to expand it to unedited cases, does not apply exclusively to the private case. The possibility of changing the course of a rule from a given moment onwards is not just a result of possible slips of memory; it indicates a more profound problem (see, e.g., Wright, 2007) since there can be said to be no course of the rule given in advance, either privately or socially, for possible decisions we might make in unclear cases. Even if we had agreed up to then, we might differ from now on. If we split the community in two, we might end up using the same term in two different ways. It is because we need to agree to go on using the same term, avoid confusion and evaluate the truthfulness of our claims that divergence is settled through conceptual decisions until the next challenging case arises. However, if we consider what possibilities there are in continuing a series, the potential to branch off<sup>14</sup> is mostly greater than the actual paths taken, while in private we need not keep our word to ourselves – we can change course without damage or perhaps disremembering previously imposed restrictions. In that sense,

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14 Talk of “branching off” is in no way suggesting that there would be not one but several (traced) paths we could take. That would amount to a branched-up version of the idea of “rules as rails”. I thank Kristen Boyce for her advice to clarify this point in an earlier presentation of some of these ideas at the ASA, Pacific Division Meeting, Pacific Grove, 5–7 April 2017. It simply expresses the idea of deviating regarding the instances that will be accepted as cases of the pattern (including, for example, same-sex couples while the community might have decided otherwise). This does not prejudice which decisions will be taken in the future by the deviant person or group regarding new cases.

our establishment of a pattern is more naturally open-ended and depends entirely on the accuracy of our memory. Even if they are less stable in this sense, such private remembrances constitute a great deal of our cognitive activity. Perhaps the only thing we need to contest is giving pattern recognition the status of “a language”, reserving the term for cases of common use and social constraints.

Nevertheless, the normative character of this “re-cognition of patterns” surely raises a serious question. In fact, in any mnemonical recognition of a face, for example, there can be said to be a series of seen instances that are disregarded as not being the searched-for face; imagine a girl waiting for an unknown, good-looking guy she saw in a coffee shop the previous day, and a series of instances of matching it in recurring days whenever the man appears again. This already amounts to some level of sorting in terms of instances of the right or wrong face. Surely there is no external standard of correction, should she err (she could potentially recognize a different man each time, and we could not say that she was wrong; we simply would not know what she was up to). Nevertheless, from *her* perspective, there are still right and wrong matching cases. Everything that she says is right would be right, yes, although she *does* still feel constrained in her behaviour and is certain about the wrong cases (that fat lady on the corner is surely not him!). Any wordless baby would agree too, in their way, in not mistaking some old man for their mother. However, recognizing singular individuals might not be considered on par with recognizing general patterns applying to several individuals since the latter would not simply be a case of matching the right thing but of deriving some independent commonality not equivalent to any of the instances. This appreciation need not be right, though, since it could be a quantitative matter; the new apprehensions of the target individual are also variations that one accepts as representations of the same individual. So, the difference at this level might refer more to the number of matching points than to some qualitative, diverging phenomenon, as well, of course, as matters to do with the conceivability of spatiotemporal continuity that allows the more definitive singling out of identification.

In the latter case of generic terms too, and from the individual perspective, there can be said to be instances encountered in the world that should clearly be rejected as *not* cases of the pattern. For example, the tree over there is not a case of the newly identified social trend. It is even possible that the individual corrects himself: he believes, following a careless, quick and distant glance, that he is before an instance of his pattern. On closer inspection, he corrects himself when he finds that he clearly is not. A completely different issue is that, given my pattern, I might proceed in diverging ways, since again there is no pre-established direction and those events that seem to me to resemble it sufficiently cannot be prefigured in advance. In that sense, there is no rule; I establish it on the go. I do



not know what *I should do, come what may*, and nothing in my past behaviour can assist me; so far, *Kripkesteinian* criticism is right. I might forget what it was like exactly, but I will *not* think that a tree or an apple is a possible sequence of my social trend pattern, nor that of a melody; nor will I believe that they could in any way be the man I have repeatedly seen at the library – of that much I am certain. This is compatible with someone illustrating how it is possible to introduce such unexpected moves and attune them to my past behaviour as a case of a different rule, arguing that it would make sense of the whole too. That someone might suggest that I was considering some weird aspects (“branchy” looking kids’ behaviour, perhaps, or whatever), but it simply triggers no resembling points of remembrance in me, which is essential for me to consider something at all, regardless of what I may decide about it. Just as in a mathematical learning situation, I cannot pretend to teach my apprentice a rule that allows,  $x^2$ ,  $x^2$ ,  $x \cdot 2 \cdot x^2$ .  $x^2$ ,  $1x$ ,  $x^2$ ,  $x^2$ ,  $x \cdot 2 \cdot x^2$ .  $x^2$ ,  $x^2$ ,  $x^2$ ,  $x^2$ ,  $x^2$ ,  $x^2$ ,  $x^2$ ,  $x^3$ ,  $x^2$ ,  $x^2$ ,  $x^2$ ,  $x^2$ ,  $x^2$ ,  $x^4$ , and so on, by offering him examples in the learning situation that merely go up to  $x^2$ ,  $x^2$ ,  $2x$ ,  $2 \cdot x$ ,  $2 \cdot x$  and expect him to know how to proceed; similarly, if my pattern bases were Bacon’s paintings, there is no way a real standard banana would come into my consideration because I did not consider anything remotely like one when acquiring my pattern.<sup>15</sup> None of this, though, excludes us from wondering, at the sight of other unexpected cases, whether or not they should be included, allowing different progressions of the rule. How “clear exclusion” and openness to unforeseeable inclusion hang together is precisely the crux of the matter.

Nevertheless, what remains lacking in the private use of the considered individual is the absence of an exterior brake delimiting what he *should* include as a case of sufficient resemblance *if* he is to share a common language. The personal sorting out of “is and is-not” would not yet contain the kind of “normative should” which with the introduction of language is surely there in the social case. Linguistic normativity is social in the sense that it has more to do with what we should or should not do *if we are to share a common sign with the community*, not in there being real borders and distinctions that we may fail to consider. Again, could there not be something like this in the individual case? You *should* consider this the right case *if you are to follow your own pattern*, but would that not be like reduplicating consciousness, namely by making ourselves command ourselves about what we are to do each time? That is not the way we act; we simply do without further ado,<sup>16</sup> which in my picture, as clarified before, does not

15 Even if Bacon himself were to hang a simple banana in a museum, I need not consider it since I am targeting not the actions of an unknown painter, but a given style.

16 See, for example, Wright’s (2007) defence that it would be a form of “blind” rule-following, building upon some of Wittgenstein’s remarks.

amount to being unconscious of it. We realize not how we do it but that we do it; we are consciously aware that the instance in question resembles our pattern to a good extent. In contrast, language poses limits on our procedure and a “should and should not do” conditional to sharing common terms. So, I am ready to accept that although private pattern recognition implies some *is* and *is not* sorting out and “following”, or perhaps better “matching”, a pattern, it is not normative in the sense clarified.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the notion of pattern could also benefit from some further clarifications. The idea of family resemblance – that there are no fixed necessary and sufficient conditions that determine meaning but some variable mappings or intersections here and there – might appear to conflict with talk of patterns being extracted from some finite set of examples. This is because the very idea of a pattern would imply there being something in common that one can stylize and thus becomes the standard or measure for further use. However, although it does amount to finding some commonality, it does not necessarily require it to be *fixed*. Patterns will evolve in light of the requirements of a non-predictable reality that challenges whatever generality we tentatively gather with unpredictable particularity; and second, they can continuously be reassessed too, departing from their given use. It is like some mapping shadow that gets darker with each repetition, so that it shows darker and lighter zones while allowing for intersections at different zones in the spectrum, nevertheless showing commonality at the darker zones that can be highlighted but also readapted to future needs. Reconstructions along such lines appear to be at work in AI recognition processes. My notion of a pattern lends itself to such an understanding too and is thus not incompatible with the notion of resemblance.

From the above, we can conclude that PPR does not necessarily conflict with the PLA since it is not to be understood as a normative language which does indeed require the sharing of common signs and external constraints. However, acknowledging its independence from linguistic use enables us at least to uncouple both aspects: language and pattern recognition. I will now consider how this difference expresses itself in artistic experience and understanding because I believe it allows us to see better the intersection and the tension between both phenomena.

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17 Nevertheless, I want to insert a reservation here, since the step that goes from the distinction of the “is and isn’ts” to the reflexive step that recognizes the necessity of the difference of the sorted-out aspects from the excluded ones to obtain the pattern can be seen to lie within private reach. So, I tend to think that even if we cannot be said to have full-blown regulated normative activity, some basic inferential processes can be seen to take place at a private level too.

#### 4.1 *Language and pattern recognition in art*

In a way, the problem of art is not that different from that of language. At work is the same capacity to recognize patterns, learn shared linguistic categories with which to refer to them and expand their use to unedited cases, whether recognizing Gothic cathedrals or Impressionist art. But there is also what we might see as the non-linguistically supervised private introduction and recognition of patterns. Dancers might introduce new configurations of movements, and composers new configurations of sounds, while painters often capture whole patterns of lived situations or apprehended “experiences” (at whatever level this might be), synthesizing them into a comprehensive whole. They might include visual aspects together with emotional or psychological ones, whose “existence as such” (or in such complex grouping) we become aware of anew by regarding the artists’ paintings. Gordon Graham’s defence of the cognitive character of art stresses a similar point:

We need to remember that what is in view here is human experience in its widest sense: visual, aural, tactile, emotional, mental. Works of art can supplement the imaginative apprehension of experience in all these respects and their values derive from the fact that we ourselves may be deficient in this regard. This is the way in which art is a source of understanding. (Graham, 1997, p. 58)

Far from creating mere representations of an apprehended bundle of such experiences, more often the artistic act constitutes a new re-creation, a particular composed instantiation that intentionally allows us to perceive this assembled, multifaceted compound anew. For example, the different façades of war experience, from the straightforward physical destruction to the emotional despair, irrationality, brutality, etc. it causes, is captured anew in Picasso’s powerful depiction in his work *Guernica*, allowing us to recall all those facets together in one concentrated canvas. Surely the act of externalizing this apprehended pattern, as Picasso does, (supplemented by one’s imagination that draws on similar experiences of suffering, irrationality, etc., as Graham – in the above paragraph – well sees) aids memory, allowing us to re-experience this complexity, or, in the case of dance or music, to reproduce it further. Nevertheless, our capacity to gather such wholes – not just the type of situation but also its colour – and the emotional underpinnings or reactions to it, can be seen to form altogether higher-level patterns, whose constitution involves the productive business of the mind.

Although the many fascinating aspects of such creation processes deserve careful analysis, I will solely focus on a connected question, which concerns the private implementation of shared linguistic patterns in different directions of potential (although not necessary) sharing.

Music is a particularly illustrative example. The recognition and retention of sound patterns in a melody, essential for its apprehension, need not require any linguistic fixing in principle. Ancient cultures did not record their musical achievements yet exhibited a capacity to maintain and reproduce them repeatedly. The fact that different people can play the same piece makes it nevertheless a socially reproducible phenomenon; as with language, we can be corrected if our musical reproduction strays from the tune. These are normative traditions. However, since music is a sensorial experience, we appear to be able to record it privately, without any external reproduction or participation in social exchange. We can recognize the same melody again when we hear it alone on a private basis; although should we experience any confusion, no one could help.

Nevertheless, the moment a piece of music is written down, as in classical composition, the chain of pattern reproduction is more rigorously fixed (even if elements such as tone or intensity remain open to interpretative variation). It is also strongly socially constrained; all those who play it follow pre-written steps as well as further indications regarding how they should perform it. But this is not always the case. An interesting contrast<sup>18</sup> is posed by jazz, where rules are often not (or limitedly) written down but left open-ended. Specific steps in the sequence are taken as fixed points to allow recognition, but each singular pattern permits the player to “branch off” freely. Here, the lack of a (sufficiently) written inter-subjective language leaves open the role of the individual in determining the course to take, that is, which variations, or resemblances, of the pattern he takes to be acceptable. It is true that precisely for that reason, especially when the complexity of the improvisation is considerable, jazz musicians are incapable of reproducing the same piece twice. But experimentation with possibilities beyond the standard constitutes the whole thrill. As Don Heckman<sup>19</sup> puts it: “During the whole history of jazz there is a tendency to free growth towards the liberation of the improvised idea from the harmonic limitations”.

But, of course, the question remains regarding how much variation can be accommodated without losing full connection with listeners, or some sets of listeners, or the specific ensemble with which the artist attempts to integrate. This can vary between one group on the receiving end and another. In fact, some free jazz musicians were originally rejected because their solos were not seen to fit well or make sense in more traditional bands.<sup>20</sup> Their sequences may have diverged too much or for too long from the original pattern for standard

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18 Although, as I am told by my most expert friends, the contrast might not be as strong if we consider classical music in its origins, where interpreters were free to improvise much more than today.

19 Publisher and editor of the *International Review of Music*, <https://irom.wordpress.com/contact-information/>.

20 I thank A. J. Kluth for this example; ASA, Pacific Grove (2017).

musicians to recognize and accept them; thus, they were “not right” from their perspective. Others, meanwhile, adapted well and went along with it, giving rise to a divergent, new musical jazz style. Here, right and wrong are dependent upon the communities of listeners, as the improviser forces resemblances that might offend some ears. We can compare the problem, as is customary in the rule-following discussion, with mathematical progressions where the repeating sequences would adopt a too complex formulation rather than more easily captured ones. They might exhibit progressions of the rule some might have expected differently, but who said there was a course to go? Who said the player was playing according to one rule instead of another?

Here, the possibilities of varying applications are “created”, while in the standard linguistic (descriptive) case, it is reality that provides new unexpected cases and requires from us a decision regarding conceptual inclusion. Our jazz musician persevered with his performance after being rejected by the first band because he considered his extension of the rule a possibility “searching for a potential community” one might say. But how is this different from the standard linguistic case?

We can try to put it more plainly with the help of some examples. Let us call a significant deviant variation from the initiating pattern “DvP”. Given the deviant variation in the jazz case, different listeners ( $S^1$   $S^2$ ,  $S^3$  ...  $S^n$ ) might exhibit different reactions.

Consider the linguistic case now where we start with a standard “cart” pattern, for example, and get as a completely unedited DvP (what we call) a modern *car* (for the first time).<sup>21</sup> Here, the reactions might be the same. For instance, some subjects agree to consider it a case of the pattern, some do not, and some cannot make up their mind or do not care. An issue arises because in this second case (be it “a cart” or “an atom”), we cannot simply allow each individual to go on as they please, “waiting for a potential community of assent” then going on to include or exclude motorcycles or whatever else. This is not because there are no resemblances to be found or because others might not see the point, but rather because if we were to allow it with this, and with all other words, we would certainly end up in some confused Babel, with people expanding the use of words in very different ways. Here, we strongly feel the need to “rule things up” and find criteria to accord some commonality of use. This differs from jazz, whereby the

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21 This example is based on a characteristic difference between the use of the term “*carro*” in Spain and most countries in South America. In Spain, the term “*carro*” was reserved to apply to old traditional carts, shopping carts, etc., and the term “*coche*” was introduced to refer to progressively modern cars; while in South America the use of “*carro*” was expanded to cover the modern cars too. This provides an example of how the rule of use of a concept might split due to diverging decisions in separate communities.

musician wants precisely to push the boundaries beyond the standard, explore possible variations, and challenge our capacity to follow their path. But that is not because we could not do the same in language – we do precisely the same when we use language in artistic and poetic ways – but because we require more stringent regulations for truthful and communicative purposes. Indeed, it is when speakers start expanding terms in *sui generis* ways, calling the sun a “round captain” or the moon a “small well”,<sup>22</sup> that we assume we are straying into the territory of the playful and literary. Applying this to the musical domain, we might say that the role of Heckman’s harmonic limitations is played here by the social normative constraints favouring univocity in the use of language, while “the growth and liberation of the improvised idea” reflects the unconstrained exploring of possibilities in expanding rules which persists, in language too, despite the specific social decisions made.

What this suggests is that although at the private level users might expand application sequences in many different ways (awaiting or not some social coincidence), the goal of linguistic regulations is to exert precisely the opposite force – they are a mechanism of control.

Consider a parallel example from architecture. Some architectural schools characterize themselves by their attempts to maintain “the grammar” of a given cultural style, for example, “Islamic style”, but they simultaneously agree to deviate consciously from the standard by combining modern construction forms while maintaining the “family resemblance”. Here, too, some similarities are retained while deviant variations are allowed, which are then implemented in innumerable combinatorial possibilities. In principle, this need not imply talk of necessary and sufficient conditions either but rather, as Wittgenstein depicts it, some crisscrossing of similarities among the various instances. As in jazz, there is a constraining outline in advance fixing the song or cultural imprint which itself allows modification, but the freedom to expand the rule is granted. There will always be “traditionalists” who will deny that it is in any way an “Islamic construction” and that therefore it is wrong to call it so, but creative architects will ignore their assessment and go their own way.

Still, since we affect to call these variations “Islamic style” too, and we might even refer back (and therefore trace a causal-historical link) and somehow reproduce the standard, we are actually pretending that the linguistically fixed social pattern is rightly implemented; or, in the case of jazz, that we are dealing with *the same* melody or song. Even so, I think that what is specific of art is to challenge whether it is or is not. It defies the boundaries of what we are ready for or

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22 The sun as a “round captain” and the moon as a “small well” are metaphors borrowed from the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca (the latter comes originally from a popular song he revisited).

capable of recognizing or accepting as an instance of the same, beyond varying contexts, altered combinations and different presentation forms. It offers precisely those potential “alternative rules” – new sequences possible from the same initiating, past usage. It is this same idea of “growing free from the harmonic limitations” – here from clear converging meaning – that is also at issue here.

So, while we are playful transgressors, we are indeed also the “border guards”<sup>23</sup> of conceptual territories; we have to be, or else our terms dilute themselves. Through our linguistic concepts we try to delimit styles or genres, fix barriers and distinguish for differing reasons which range from the merely pragmatic<sup>24</sup> and taxonomic, to the economic or juristic: “Is it still a crime or not?”, “Is this a parcel or a letter parcel?”, because penalties and shipping prices differ; “Is it an illness or not?”, because the answer will change our way of dealing with it. But the thereupon based restrictions, which are tied to the having or lack of specific characteristics (the stricter the restrictions, the more relevant to our lives), do not cut off our ability to see a similarity between parcels and (some big) letters, some crimes and non-crimes, some mental illness and other similar behaviour, or even some dogs and horses (as children still learning exemplify). Privately, we could go on further implementing the rule in various ways, even if it would be considered wrong from the social perspective. This is precisely the practice distinctively found in art, but it is this distance that would also seem to allow for new discoveries, reformulations and conceptual developments. This is because it encourages individuals to explore, beyond the accepted standard, likenesses in behaviours, reactions, objects and so on that might challenge our previous theories and could end up reforming our categorical systems and become socially shared.

However, we need a more distinct conception of how social regulation is supposed to work if we do not merely want to revert to the previous model of necessary and sufficient conditions. To this end, I want to approach the problem from the perspective of the paradox of resemblance (PR). I believe Williamson’s attempt to respond to it by keeping to a too strict identification between linguistic meaning and the idea of family resemblance exhibits the inadequacy of such an approach. It is, rather, the failure to realize the important but differing role this private capacity has in the constitution of meaning that gives rise to the paradox,

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23 D. Goldblatt and T. Gracyk, *ASA*, Pacific Grove (2017), used the expression “fascist border guards” to characterize how essentialists looking for definitions are sometimes seen. I took “fascist” out of the expression, since I would not want to commit to that part, nor do I think that it need imply an essentialist position, as will be made clear.

24 Although my own approach differs, I think that Belleimey (1990) showed insight with his idea that there must be a determination of concepts in two directions, pointing out that our interests also play a role in it.

which is wrongly seen as threatening the very notion of linguistic meaning when what is indeed at stake is our private capacity to recognize patterns.

#### 4.2 *The paradox of resemblance*

§67. I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “family resemblances”; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. – And I shall say: ‘games’ form a family. (Wittgenstein, 1953)

The paradox is seen to arise from Wittgenstein’s explanation of rule-following in terms of “family resemblance” in the sections following §66 of *Philosophical Investigations*. According to the picture drawn, new instances of a concept might share arbitrary features with any of its other extension members, without them sharing a single set of necessary and sufficient conditions. Now, since this progression could go on forever, with subsequent new members resembling previously newly introduced features each time, ultimately anything could end up belonging to the extensional web of resemblances of a concept.

One of the latest attempts to respond to this problem before it slowly faded into the philosophical past is probably that of Timothy Williamson (1994) in his book *Vagueness*.<sup>25</sup> Williamson first acknowledges and explains the pervasive character of the paradox in the sense introduced and attempts to give an answer to it by appealing to a “resemblance-version” of conceptual opposition.<sup>26</sup> An examination of his proposal serves to strengthen the above perspective by showing how the notion of family resemblance, although relevant as a necessary presupposition for meaning constitution, in no way delivers on its own a satisfactory conception; nor, as I will be arguing, could any such conception prescind (to some extent) some of the restrictive features of the account it was meant to replace.

#### 4.3 *Williamson and the paradox of resemblance*

To see the limits of a concept as being defined by its opposition to others is a very old idea. According to Williamson (2002), if we understand the extension of a concept as the family of resemblances to which it belongs, its limits would be the family of resemblances of an opposite concept. In this way, if the progression of resemblances of the concept “game” goes in one direction, it will be stopped by the advancing of an army of resemblances of the concept “non-game” going

25 An interesting and exhaustive analysis of Williamson’s proposal is to be found in Olson (2014), who drew my attention to Williamson’s contribution to this question.

26 In this sense too, Richman (1962) saw the problem with the idea of family resemblance also in the need to account for what should be excluded from the extension.



in the reverse one, as determined by previously accepted cases of games and non-games. Therefore, the idea is that if a certain activity resembles an accepted case of “non-game” and is sorted into that heap, it can no longer be made to resemble “a game” and so the progression would end.

However, something is unsettling in this proposal. It presupposes that extension depends solely upon who is quicker, who arrives first to fix the flag in the new territory: the conquerors of “games” or those of “non-games”. So, if as in Williamson’s own example, there is a  $z$  that at time  $t_1$  is neither a “game” nor a “non-game”, it will depend on who has managed to find a  $z-1$  resemblance case (“gamers” or “non-gamers”) that allows conquering  $z$  as a  $z-1$  possible instance of resemblance. Even if the account should not be understood as plain nominalism, being one or the other would at the very end be a pure casualty.

In a way, Williamson’s position might be considered appealing if understood in the sense that a trained community has accumulated experience of what has so far been excluded and what has not as a case of “game” (what is a “game” and what is a “non-game”, if you will). This sets a *precedent* that, to some extent, precludes new cases much too similar to the excluded ones from being considered “games”. But a question remains regarding how the originally excluded ones are to be marked out, since there is no demarcating of a territory without it depending upon some recognizable differentiating features; at least, this is so if exclusion or inclusion is not, as stated, the mere setting up of the flag without conceptual relevance. Thus, if we allow that lacking or having characteristic  $D$  (or  $D_1, D_2 \dots D_n$ ) makes something a “non-game” from now on (should this not be an arbitrary setting apart), then we have just fixed a negative account, at least to some extent, of necessary and sufficient conditions which can be further delimited with each new exclusion case. On the other hand, new instances resembling other irrelevant respects of those marked as “non-games” might not be sufficiently significant to exclude them.

Let us, however, consider Williamson’s position more carefully since it comes in two different versions. While he first considers the example of “games” and “non-games”, he later turns to other opposing concepts, since “non-game” is not a real concept<sup>27</sup> but rather the whole world minus games. His example is the opposition between “game” and “warfare”. The proposal is that the set of resemblances of “games” can be prevented from raising the “paradox of resemblance” by advancing the set of resemblances of “warfare”. Yet my impression is that the opposition between these two concepts has lately come to rest on strict oppositions of the type “game/non-game”, since for the set of resemblances of “games” to be stopped by the set of resemblances of “warfare” we must be able to

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27 On this point, see also Olson (2014).

determine the set of resemblances of “warfare” as “non-games” beforehand, otherwise they could be a subset of games just as the new or old “Pokemon-chase” could be. This would bring us back to where we started, since in order to trace the boundary we need to determine some lacked or possessed features that necessarily exclude them from being “games”; or, alternatively, it must have already been settled through the expansionist success of “non-game” scorekeepers and thanks to some lucky chain of resemblances whereby “warfare” belongs in their territory.

The first option would seem to go against Williamson’s purpose and appears to hark back to a more traditional conception of meaning. In fact, if tracing boundaries is necessary, as argued, we have the problem of how to combine this with the assumed lack of rules and a liberal idea of resemblance. Let us explore this problem further.

As I suggested, the indebtedness of the opposition between “game” and “warfare” to more strict opposites or contraries appears to be a general constitutive aspect of conceptual demarcation. Some adjectives literally oppose each other in the way of contraries, such that a reduction in the applicability of one means an increase in the applicability of the other. Examples marked by this defining contrary relation were already apparent in ancient Greece – e.g., “wet/dry”, “full/empty”, “old/young” – which, as Heraclitus already pointed out, although opposing, belong together as extremes of the same process. These adjectives pose a sorites paradox: how much of a decrease in temperature must a “hot” weather experience undergo in order to be considered “cold”, or how much must the contents of a “full” glass decrease in order to be considered “empty”? Is there truly a point of inflexion?

The opposition between concepts such as “game” and “warfare” or “dog” and “horse” is not of this sort. For instance, there need be no decreasing chain of members of the species in the last case that goes from one to the other, so that the less *doggy* a thing is, the *horsier* it becomes. We may find an intermediate kind of opposition between “boy” and “man” or “puppy” and “dog” because we can see these in terms of a processual opposition, although, ultimately, it is because it depends precisely upon oppositions of the type “young/old, big/small” but applied to a specific sort of thing. It is like calling the cold version of a coffee a “frappé” (needless to say, real “frappés” have more sugar and fat than a cold coffee does, so in truth, you would have several characteristics with which to do the increasing and decreasing). Different subtypes of dogs might to some extent be seen on some such scale, where gradual variations in big/small, large/short, thick/thin etc. of various characteristics take us from one sort to the other. But in a sense, the difference between all sorts of things (including the proteins of

DNA) are differences in more or less of this or that, or more radically, the having or lack of this and that.

Importantly, this amounts to saying that strict oppositions of the kind considered at the outset – oppositions characterized by the fact that one extreme involves the negation of the other as a necessary condition – are what ultimately mark the differences between all sorts of things. The having or not having of content marks the difference between the full and the empty, the having or not having of liquid, between the wet and the dry, and so on. Wet is not-dry, and dry not-wet. Although there need not always be a new concept referring to the negation of the first, it is the possession or not of the specific property that determines the antagonism between members of the extension of the one, and those that are excluded and possibly included in a second. It is, of course, nevertheless challenging to say how much or how little of it still counts as having or lacking the said property in individual instances.

Going back, how should we understand “opposing” concepts of the “horse/dog” sort? More generally, how should we understand the opposition between more complex kinds, objects, practices, etc.? It appears that in such cases, the determining factor is the specific constitutive mixture (which might be variable, if you wish, and be more or less resembled by further instances), since most other kinds or types of objects etc. will not be determined by the increase or decrease of exactly those same aspects as these, although some subspecies or related classes might come close. Even so, if we cannot pin down once and for all what mixture this is, since that amounts to pretending that the concept or rule is fixed, what matters here is to see that decisions regarding inclusion or rejection (or inclusion in the opposed set “not-x”) are also argued ultimately through judgements about the possession or not of any number of them. The two kinds are ultimately not just different but incompatible or opposed because they lack or have several properties that are considered determinant *for exclusion* from each other. Difficulties can again arise due to problems of vagueness, whether some property can be said to be present at all (still large, white or round, or not), or whether the number of properties shared is enough to count as “the same”.

Now, some authors,<sup>28</sup> including Williamson, have argued that it is to this last type of case, of non-strict opposites (kinds, practices, etc.), that the resemblance problem applies and not to more simple or strict ones like those above; these latter ones can be said to register just one necessary and sufficient condition which might be more or less decreased, have borderline cases, but is clearly determined. Moreover, according to Williamson, neither are concepts of basic sensations, such as “blue”, cases of this. As he says: “Blue is vague by some standards, for it has

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28 See also Sluga (2006), for example.

borderline cases, but that doesn't make it a family resemblance term, for all shades of blue resemble each other in the same respect" (Williamson, 1994, p. 88). So, these concepts, he says, would pose a sorites problem, but since they refer to a single property, there should be no talk of resemblance. However, in accordance with the discussion above, it could be argued that more complex cases, like kinds, objects, practices, etc. with their plural properties, can be understood similarly and can also be seen as posing a sorites. How many properties can be lost or retained for a pile of properties determining a given *type* to be the same *type* or a different one? Correspondingly, how many might be shared by specific instances to be accepted as extension members? On the other hand, the question of resemblance can be seen to apply to cases such as colours too. Since some instances of a given colour, let us say some instance of "pink", might be seen to resemble different members of the extension of defined colours on the colour spectrum (e.g., an orange, a red, a purple), there will be a similar problem as to where to cut the chain of resemblances – as it is equally possible for it to be included under one colour concept or another – for it to be seen as resembling one or the other. There are, of course, clear instances of "pink", just as there are clear instances of "cats". By the strict opposites or contrary concepts considered before, the argument that they would refer to a single necessary condition can be seen to apply better. Here, Williamson is aware that the opposition depends on the setting of necessary conditions for exclusion. Nevertheless, if these strict opposites are part of opposing complex kinds, and we allow their opposition (despite vagueness at the borders) to depend upon a necessary condition, we can also use them to exclude other instances as members of the kind.

It seems to me that the only difference between the resemblance problem and the sorites one is a matter of quantity, and I suspect that the former is a variety of the sorites problem's inherited one. If several properties determine a kind, questions of vagueness regarding their presence by an instance apply at different levels: at the level of each property and that of the whole. Just as a single property (the rule we see as determining it) might seem to vary depending on the instances included, so too the *type* in question – its resemblances – will be reassessed depending on what has been included in the set so far.

In summary, we can say that Williamson's proposal, *pace* its originality, does not appear to solve the paradox, if it is not by involuntarily questioning the plausibility of the account of meaning that gives rise to it and having to appeal to some necessary and sufficient conditions (even if not once and for all fixed ones). As I have argued, I think this is precisely the result that we are accepting. We may have been too quick in dispensing altogether with the idea of necessary conditions for a plausible conception of linguistic meaning; I would say that at least some necessary conditions for opposition and exclusion must be granted.

#### *4.4 Expanding rules privately beyond common social criteria and following new private rules*

The suggestion in the previous sections was that it is precisely the identification of pattern recognition with linguistic meaning that gave rise to the appearance of paradox. That is, meaning constitution results from the contribution of two different factors: the first is our ability to recognize patterns, find resemblances and explore further innovative connections freely; the second is our need to bind ourselves to others to rely on commonly delimited terms to enable clear social understanding and assess our claims to truth.

In fact, our capacity to privately expand social rules in the use of common terms in differing and creative ways is nothing but an expression of the same cognitive ability that enables us to create new patterns and “follow” them on our own, as exemplified by my example of HO-PPR, even though some might see them as two different issues. The first comes much closer than the latter to what is considered standard linguistic “rule-following”. This is because in the first case, there would at least be a social standard that we might then try to force beyond what would elicit agreement, but we would still appeal to the capacity of at least some others to make sense of it based precisely on their knowledge of the standard. The standard lends significance, so to speak, to the new; the traditionally presumed “old rule” lends significance to the unexpected “new derivation”.<sup>29</sup> A picture might prompt in us the resemblance of both “a tree” and “a human”, inviting us to consider, for example, that there might be tree-like aspects in humans or human-like aspects in trees. Nonetheless, the terms need to retain their meanings (i.e., that it is wrong and untrue that humans are trees and vice versa, as the community of speakers would judge), otherwise not even this effect is possible, and everything ends up being “trees” or “humans” anyway. That is why in standard communicative linguistic use, as opposed to art, we only allow ourselves transgression, as argued above, in special circumstances or in a derivative or experimental sense. Of course, we could construct a whole story to explain why humans are tree-like, but the basis of it probably starts with the initial “artistic transgression” and the subsequent expansion of the resemblances.

However, there is no parallel here with the purely private case, where there are simply no others that could know about it. This is evident and relevant from a communication point of view; however, both amount to the use of the same available cognitive capacity, whether you use a normative standard to regulate it and

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<sup>29</sup> Speaking in these terms is not free of conflict; we have to clarify, in response to the RFP, how this assumed “standard” and “tradition” is possible at all. But, for now, we can say that however it might be, it is the naturalness of the existence of some such thing in our experience that makes the radicality of the paradox seem awkward to us.

target clear communication or simply go beyond it as you wish, or you make a non-shared creation and use of private patterns. The best way to put it is that the real normative aspect, the real rule, is the formal meta-commitment to follow as a rule the social restrictions whatever they might *become* in the use of a word. In this sense, the conclusion to draw is that to define meaning in terms of family resemblance and the capacity for pattern recognition is confusing.

But I still have not said enough about how social normativity and the establishment of social restrictions work. In fact, we may have made things appear too easily solved when there is a related problem that supposedly affects our very efforts to bind ourselves to a social rule. The whole rule-following paradox (RFP) discussion is concerned with this issue, so we must examine it.

### 5. Revisiting the Rule-Following Paradox

According to the RFP, there is no fact of the matter that either you or the community could appeal to that speaks against the rule going in unexpected directions in the future and thus being a different one. There is no fact of the matter about your mental state, nor about your behaviour, that makes it the case that you are following one rule rather than another. This is the standard Kripkean (1982) reading and also the one that I consider correct. In fact, Kripke (1982, pp. 96–97)<sup>30</sup> appears to emphasize the fact that there is nothing we can appeal to in order to show that it is a specific rule we are following, stressing finally, as Wright (1984) points out, that luckily we exhibit a tendency to come to an agreement (and really follow it).<sup>31</sup> However, this underplays the real problem – that is, that there *cannot be* a once and for all pre-given rule – turning it into one about our inability to appeal to any fact or explain how it is that we actually follow one rule rather than another. Kripke indeed makes it ultimately dependent upon the community, but

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30 For example, Kripke (1982, pp. 96–97):

There is no objective fact – that we mean addition by ‘+’, or even that a given individual does – that explains our agreement in particular cases. Rather our licence to say of each other that we mean addition by ‘+’ is part of a ‘language game’ that sustains itself only because of the brute fact that we generally agree.

31 I think this is because Kripke focuses on the mathematical case, for which (although different possibilities for proceeding further in applying a rule from a finite set of cases remain open) there is no parallel in a descriptive language where reality can continuously provide new and unexpected challenging cases that our concepts cannot anticipate. I would say that although the problem Kripke, and also Wittgenstein, poses for the mathematical case (the inexistence of a fact of the matter that allows us to say which rule we are following) is essential, the reasons for the impossibility of delivering once and for all accounts of meaning (and therefore of rules) are, in the empirical case, of a different sort.

the assumption is that we simply tend to give similar answers and so the problem is (sceptically) solved. What the community agrees upon is the meaning of “ $\varphi$ ”, but precisely because of the non-predictability of future uses, suddenly split communities might not agree at all and end up with *de facto* different rules. This highlights the irrelevance of possible agreements in determining which rule it is we are now following, for there can be a set of different likely agreements in the future driving the rule in different directions and thus making our actual rule a different one *now* (because of its different futures, so to speak). An agreement need not take place within the same community, without any party being at fault; it is then that we call for decisions. In this sense again, I tend to agree with the RFP line of interpretation offered in various papers, for example, Wright (2002, p. 8), who emphasizes the importance given by Wittgenstein to “decision” in *Philosophical Investigations*. However, if the argument is put in terms of there being nothing in my mental state that can foresee all possible unedited situations and proposes how I should be deciding on them, it is undoubtedly correct. All the same, we can agree that my training and personal behavioural experience in the use of the term is finite and therefore the connection, or rule, that one could draw from experience is just one among many possibilities when looked at from the perspective of potential futures. Nor can any behaviour of the community (or mental states of its members) determine the unknown. Nevertheless, I think it is essential to consider, too, that whatever rule appears to be displayed in the future, and thereafter in the following future again, it must cohere with the use already exercised (in our linguistic community) and with the set of cases accepted to date; furthermore, and more relevant, it must be incompatible with the set of cases that were previously *excluded* and with the reasons for their exclusion. That is, even if there are several possible compatible accounts of the rule with virtual futures, they must all be compatible with the past; and that is much more determining than it might appear.

Moreover, going back to my previous comparison of the resemblance problem with the sorites paradox, which I argued could be seen to apply to types too, I am safe to go on applying the term at the core intersection with prototype cases already accepted. I am also quite safe to assume that whatever rule it becomes, it will cover them too since unproblematic standard cases are more than not the case. This is not to deny that there might be small differences that play a considerable role (Quine’s “humans *with kidneys*”) and that this could be considered a reason for exclusion. However, should this be the case, and reasons for exclusion already settled in *precedent cases*, while in the learning process I will be given examples with those specific aspects which possessed or lacking will help me to determine exclusion (*not* without kidneys) and refine my future use further. If the term I am learning should, from the beginning onwards (i.e., not just as a possible

evolution of my rule), apply not just to apples but also oranges, I would expect my training (by those who know) to equip me with examples of these too in order to avoid confusion, and furthermore to advise me about lemons (whose inclusion might raise doubts) if we have already made up our minds to exclude them.

On the other hand, it makes no sense to ask whether my rule is one or a number of potential others if there is no community of users who already knows which (so far) it is; if there is no such community, and we are talking about possibilities of continuing the series, then none of them is the rule I am following. Alternatively, if you wish, all those that converge with past usage and the further application of the term to non-problematic, sufficiently coincident, standard-prototype cases are all my rule, since the rule followed could be any of them that might virtually deviate from standard-prototype cases up to a given point (if we should so decide). However, whichever it is, it must maintain consistency by treating “equal cases” alike, as long as no known rules for specific exclusions have been set. I call this “the point of precedence” which, not without reason, is essential in juristic law. Thus, if standard apples have so far been prototypically included (and no relevant reason for their exclusion has yet been offered as to why any instance with some little idiosyncratic difference should not be so), the next standard apple should be included too. In fact, when we talk of deviation in formulating the problem or of the possibility of different rules, it is because we can recognize more marked differences, which we can decide to include and standardize again or not.

Therefore, the critical insight here is that meaning is continuously evolving, and not a once and for all finished issue, thus, it must cohere with all my past actions and discount all prototype cases for which reasons for exclusion were given. I believe that this alone draws quite safe contours for guiding my application of it in familiar territories. Problems and possibilities will come along that go far beyond the familiar, and this is why I have made the normativity of meaning rely on my *meta-commitment* to submit my judgement to potential agreement, that is, to “whatever the decision of the community in unclear cases might come to be” – not because I assume it will (somehow) happen to coincide with the right one, but because it will have to set itself one way or the other and that way will mark the future prospects of meaning.

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