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## "This Is Simply What I Do": Primitive Normativity in Following a Rule

Taojie Wang  
*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*

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“THIS IS SIMPLY WHAT I DO”:  
PRIMITIVE NORMATIVITY IN FOLLOWING A RULE

by  
Taojie Wang

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## ABSTRACT

### “THIS IS SIMPLY WHAT I DO”: PRIMITIVE NORMATIVITY IN FOLLOWING A RULE

by

Taojie Wang

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2019  
Under the Supervision of Professor Edward Hinchman

In this paper I propose an account of normativity of meaning that answers the skeptical challenge against meaning which Kripke puts forward on behalf of his reading of Wittgenstein. According to Kripke (1982), the skeptic asks us to identify the fact that constitutes a language user as meaning addition, instead of some other mathematical functions, by “+”. On the view I develop, such facts are facts about a certain type of normative attitude, the primitively normative attitude, that we have as a part of our human nature.

In illustrating my account, I start with discussing a similar-sounding proposal that Hannah Ginsborg proposes. The common feature that her account and mine share is the idea that the normativity of meaning is conceptually prior to the notion of meaning. This construal of the normativity of meaning is called “primitive normativity”. In Ginsborg’s proposal, she suggests that the facts which constitute the meaning of words are partly dispositional and partly primitive. I argue that this appeal to dispositions is unsatisfactory. I argue that the facts about our primitively normative attitudes are not subject to dispositional analysis. Rather, we should take those facts as a distinctive kind of their own, which are not subject to any naturalistic analysis.

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*“Once I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I’m inclined to say: “This is simply what I do.””*

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation*, §217.

## **1. Introduction**

In his influential reading of Wittgenstein on rule-following and private language, Kripke (1982) presents a skeptical paradox which attracted an enormous amount of attention. The skeptic asks us to identify the fact that constitutes a language user as meaning addition, instead of some other mathematical functions, by “+”.<sup>1</sup> One popular answer to the skeptical paradox is to cite our dispositional facts to use “+” in various contexts. However, Kripke argues that this dispositionalist answer fails to capture the fact that meaning is normative, thereby failing to answer the skeptical question. Defenders of dispositionalism attempt to rebut the claim that meaning is normative. The general strategy they employ is to argue that the normative character of meaning identified by Kripke does not pose a threat to their answer.

In this paper, I offer an account of normativity of meaning which is immune to the extant arguments against it. On the view I develop, normativity of meaning is not, as many philosophers assume it to be, dependent on the antecedent grasp of the meaning of a word. Rather, it is conceptually prior to grasping the meaning of a word. The possibility of this kind of normativity is first identified by Hannah Ginsborg, which she calls “primitive normativity”.<sup>2</sup> By appealing to primitive normativity, Ginsborg offers a novel solution to Kripke skeptical paradox that accommodates the normativity thesis. I show, however, that Ginsborg’s account faces a dilemma due to her way of understanding primitive normativity. Given the dilemma, I

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper I’ll take for granted that the rule of using a word is just the meaning of the word, as is widely agreed within the literature on rule-following. I’ll use the two notions interchangeably throughout the paper.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Ginsborg (2011a), (2011b), (2012) and (2018).

argue that my way of understanding primitive normativity and the solution to the skeptical paradox should be preferred.

Here is the plan for the paper. I start in section 2 by briefly outlining Kripke's skeptical paradox and explain why reductive dispositionalism cannot be an adequate solution to the skeptical challenge. In section 3, I discuss some important arguments against Kripke's normativity thesis. I then sketch Ginsborg's solution to the rule-following paradox, and explain how it accommodates the normativity thesis by appealing to primitive normativity. In section 4, I show that Ginsborg's solution, which employs the notion of naturalistic dispositions, faces a dilemma. The dilemma is generated by scrutinizing the relation between primitive normativity and the naturalistic dispositions. In section 5, I illustrate my account of primitive normativity which avoids the dilemma. I propose that we should divorce primitive normativity from the naturalistic dispositions and accept a different understanding of primitive normativity. In section 6, I address a possible response from the skeptic and illustrate my account more clearly. Finally, I show how my account answers the skeptical paradox.

## **2. Kripke's rule-following paradox and reductive dispositionalism**

Suppose that a skeptic asks you to perform the "+" function on two numbers, say, 68 and 57. Also suppose that you have never performed the "+" function on these numbers before. After you give your answer, 125, the skeptic challenges you to explain why you give this answer instead of some other answers, say, 5.

What the skeptic asks here is whether the symbol "+" *means* the mathematical function that we are familiar with.<sup>3</sup> The skeptic demands a *fact* about me that distinguishes my meaning

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<sup>3</sup> There is another way to understand this challenge. On this understanding, the skeptic asks whether or not the number "68" plus the number "57" yields the number "125". This understanding takes the question to be one about a mathematical fact, yet this is not the skeptic's intention.

addition, which when applied to “68” and “57” yields “125”, from, say, quaddition which, when applied to any number less than 57 would yield the same results as addition, but would always give “5” when applied to larger numbers. If the skeptical challenge cannot be met, then, the skeptic claims that there is no fact about what we mean when we use “+”, and this can be generalized to other linguistic terms. In other words, the general skeptical conclusion would be that there is not fact about us using any word to mean anything.

To answer the skeptical question, first, we must give an account of what fact it is that constitutes my meaning addition by “+”. But Kripke claims that this is not enough. He argues that, the candidate fact must show how one is justified with one’s answer (1982, 11). This is because, barring any problems with one’s computation and memory, if one means addition by “+”, then, when asked “ $68+57=?$ ”, one is justified in answering “125” (ibid.). The failure to meet this requirement would make one’s answer indistinguishable from any arbitrary responses. To use Kripke’s own words, one would be making an arbitrary “unjustified leap in the dark” or giving a “mere jack-in-the-box” response (1982, 10&23). So, to meet this second requirement, the candidate fact has to show that one’s rule-following behavior is not arbitrary.

One common answer to the skeptical paradox is reductive dispositionalism. The dispositionalist cites facts about our dispositions to give answers that accord with addition instead of quaddition.<sup>4</sup> For example, the dispositionalist would claim that she means addition by “+” because, roughly, she is disposed to answer “125” to the question “ $68+57=?$ ”.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the dispositionalist claims that she can be justified with “125” because she has been

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<sup>4</sup> One note here is that there are various proposals for what a disposition is. Since the discussions in this paper will proceed on a naturalistic understanding of dispositions, I take up a, more or less, Quinean notion of disposition throughout the paper. This notion of disposition is such that, roughly, for all disposition, they always refer to physical/psychological constructs in the rule-follower.

<sup>5</sup> Some people argue that the dispositions should be characterized under idealized conditions, where by idealized conditions they roughly mean conditions which, in this case, allows the agent to give answers in accordance with addition (see, e.g., Blackburn (1984, 289-90) and Ginsborg (2011a, 157-8)). Regardless of which specific characterization the dispositionalist prefers, it will not affect the argument I present in this paper.

so disposed all along in past cases involving “+” (Kripke 1982, 23-4). The reasoning here is that, so long as one possesses the disposition to give answers which accord with the meaning of addition, then it is safe to say that one’s meaning addition by “+” is rooted in the fact that one has that disposition.

Kripke argues that the dispositionalist faces some objections. One of the most serious objections Kripke puts forward is based on his claim that meaning is normative.<sup>6</sup> Let’s call this claim the normativity thesis. Although there are various ways to explicate the normativity thesis, the idea is that my meaning addition by “+” puts normative constraints on my responses in future cases involving “+”. The violation of those normative constraints would make my response incorrect. Given the normativity thesis, Kripke questions:

What is the relation of this supposition [my meaning addition by ‘+’] to the question how I will respond to the problem ‘68+57’? The dispositionalist gives a *descriptive* account of this relation: if ‘+’ mean addition, then I will answer ‘125’. But this is not the proper account of the relation, which is *normative*, not descriptive.

(1982, 37, bracket mine)

So, it seems that if one accepts the normativity thesis, then reductive dispositionalism is flawed – it cannot capture the normative character of the meaning of a word.

At this point, there are two ways to go. The first is for the dispositionalist to circumvent the normativity objection – for example, by showing that the normativity thesis does not threaten her answer. The second option is to abandon reductive dispositionalism and take the nonreductionist route. Roughly, the nonreductionist suggests that the fact which constitutes our meaning addition by “+” is a special kind of state, which is not dispositional. Let me consider the first option now.

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<sup>6</sup> In Kripke (1982), he discusses three objections to the dispositionalist view – the finiteness objection, the problem of error, and the normativity objection. For the purpose of this paper, however, I will focus mainly on the normativity objection, as I take it to be the most important of the three. In the next section, I discuss further the claim that meaning is normative.



### 3. The normativity thesis and primitive normativity

If the dispositionalist wants to save her proposal, then she needs to circumvent the normativity thesis. The first move she can make is to press Kripke on what exactly the normativity thesis amounts to.

In extant literature, generally, there are two ways to understand the normativity thesis. The first is to say that meaning is normative in the sense that it is prescriptive of my future actions.<sup>7</sup> Understood in this sense, the normativity thesis essentially means that my meaning addition by “+” constitutes some practical reasons for me to answer “125” instead of “5”. These reasons may, for example, have to do with pragmatic considerations to use words in accordance with the linguistic community. If I do not comply with the relevant norm, then I would not be able to communicate with other people.

If this is what the normativity thesis means, then, the dispositionalist argues, meaning is not normative *in itself*. The dispositionalist claims that, by merely meaning addition by “+”, I have no reason whatsoever to answer “125” to “68+57=?”. It is only when put in conjunction with, for example, my desire to communicate with other people does my meaning addition by “+” prescribe me of answering “125”.<sup>8</sup>

Another way to understand the normativity thesis is to explain it by appealing to linguistic terms’ possession of correctness (or truth) conditions. This way of understanding the normativity thesis is evident in Boghossian (1989), when he suggests that:

The normativity of meaning turns out to be ... simply a new name for the familiar fact that, regardless of whether one thinks of meaning in truth-theoretic or assertion-theoretic terms, meaningful expressions possess conditions of *correct* use.

(513)

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Hattiangadi (2007, 37) and Glüer and Wikforss (2009, 32).

<sup>8</sup> For an argument of this kind, see Hattiangadi (2007, 181). There are arguments against this dispositionalist’s claim. For example, see Whiting (2009). For the sake of this paper, however, I assume that the dispositionalist is right that meaning does not give one any reason to use a word in a certain way.

Given this understanding, the reason why I should answer “125” is because “125” is the correct, or true, answer to the question “ $68+57=?$ ”. In other words, the normativity thesis essentially means the following: if “125” is the correct (or true) answer to “ $68+57=?$ ”, then I should answer “125”. This conditional, however, can only be true if the concept of correctness or truth here is a normative concept, otherwise it would either be false or would need normative input from sources other than the meaning of “+”.

However, some people have claimed that the concept of truth is not a normative concept.<sup>9</sup> For example, Papineau (1999) argues that the concept of truth is a descriptive rather than normative concept.<sup>10</sup> He suggests that the concept of truth is like the concept of car speed or celibacy, which may carry normative weight in certain contexts, depending on the agents involved, but “that is additional to its nature” (1999, 20). If Papineau is right, then the above conditional on which the normativity thesis depends is false, which would then allow the dispositionalist to maintain her theory.

If all there is to the normativity thesis are these two kinds of normativity (normativity in terms of practical reason or truth), then reductive dispositionalism is left intact by the skeptic’s objection which depends on it. However, Ginsborg (2011b, 2012) suggests that there is another sense in which meaning is normative, and this kind of normativity of meaning is immune to the dispositionalist’s arguments.

The kind of normativity of meaning that Ginsborg proposes is different from either of the understandings of the normativity thesis we looked at. The above understandings assume that grasping the rule/meaning is antecedent to the rule-following action. On this assumption, meaning is normative only in the sense that the grasp of rules puts normative constraints on

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<sup>9</sup> In a more recent paper (Boghossian, 2003), Boghossian renounced the claim that the concept of correctness or truth is normative in the sense that it renders the above conditional true (39).

<sup>10</sup> Although Papineau’s argument focuses on the concept of truth, in the literature, people who take truth to be a descriptive concept usually take correctness to be a descriptive concept as well.

future rule-following behaviors. Ginsborg claims that meaning is not normative in this sense. Rather, meaning is normative in the sense that, in a given context, one *ought* to use a word in certain ways even if one doesn't have an antecedent grasp of what the word means. She suggests that this special notion of ought does not invoke the concept of truth or practical reason, hence immune to the dispositionalist's criticisms.

Ginsborg calls this special ought the "primitive ought", and what it expresses is primitive normativity (2011b, 233). This kind of normativity is primitive in the sense that it does not depend on antecedent conformity to a rule. To illustrate the notion of primitive normativity, Ginsborg invites us to consider the following case. Suppose that a child is learning to count by two. Also suppose that the child successfully counts up to 40. If we ask the child to continue this series, she would probably say "42", and, Ginsborg suggests, she would do so "unhesitatingly, with an apparent assurance that this is the appropriate continuation." (ibid.). In this case, the child has a normative attitude towards "42" without being guided by the count-by-two rule, because she may be too young to grasp the relevant concepts. It is this fact that the child takes what she does in a context to be appropriate *simpliciter* that the notion of primitive normativity intends to capture.

However, given that appealing to primitive normativity may appear to be an unintuitive way to understand the normativity thesis, the dispositionalist might question the possibility of primitive normativity.

Ginsborg offered us some hints in her (2011b, 2018) when she talks about the connection between the notion of primitive normativity and her interpretation of Kant on aesthetic judgment. In judging whether or not a piece of art is beautiful, one does not grasp a set of rules antecedent to the judging. Rather, an aesthetic judgment exemplifies lawfulness (normativity) in the sense that the judgment claims that a piece of art ought to be judged this way. Furthermore, the *ought* here is inter-subjectively valid. This is to say that the subject who

possesses the primitively normative attitude demands that others in a similar context have the same attitude.<sup>11</sup>

I agree with Ginsborg that primitive normativity points in the right direction in understanding the normativity thesis. The dispositionalist presupposes that the concept of meaning is conceptually prior to, or independent of, the normativity of meaning. But that is not the correct way to construe the relation between the two. Instead, I propose, the notion of normativity conceptually precedes the notion of meaning, i.e., normativity is what makes the concept of meaning possible.<sup>12</sup>

Now, if we accept the claim that meaning is primitively normative, which would be immune to those arguments against the normativity thesis, then the dispositionalist would have to face the skeptic's objection from the normativity of meaning again.

Ginsborg offers a way for the dispositionalist to go. Her solution to the rule-following paradox is one which she takes to represent a middle ground between the dispositionalist and the non-reductionist (2011b, 237). The solution consists of two parts. First, she adopts reductive dispositionalism.<sup>13</sup><sup>14</sup> Second, she suggests that, in realizing the disposition, the rule-follower takes what she does to be primitively appropriate in the sense specified above.<sup>15</sup> In Ginsborg's own words, she says:

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<sup>11</sup> For details of what primitive normativity in the third *Critique* exactly is and how it claims inter-subjective validity, see Ginsborg (1997, 2006a & 2006b).

<sup>12</sup> Due to the space limit, I cannot offer a full argument for this way of construing the relation between the normativity of meaning and the concept of meaning.

<sup>13</sup> Ginsborg is not clear about what exactly the notion of disposition she has in mind is. But in many places she claims that the notion of disposition she uses is a naturalistic one (2011b, 2012, 2018). Given this, when she talks about disposition, I take her to mean the notion of disposition I specified in fn.4.

<sup>14</sup> As I have mentioned in fn.2 above, there are other objections the dispositionalist is faced with. To see Ginsborg's defense of the dispositionalist view against the other two objections the skeptic put forward, see her (2011a).

<sup>15</sup> I want to note a point about the scope of Ginsborg's proposal. One might wonder whether Ginsborg's proposal applies to all rule-following cases, or just to the ones such as the child's learning to count case. It is not immediately clear what Ginsborg would say. For the purpose of this paper, however, I will focus only on the cases involving primitive rule-following.

[Y]ou mean addition by "plus" if you are disposed to respond to a query about (say) "68 plus 57" with "125," where, in responding that way, you take that response to be primitively appropriate in light of your previous uses of "plus".

(2011b, 244).

We can summarize Ginsborg's solution to the rule-following paradox as follows where A refers to a rule-follower and F refers to a rule-following action:

1. A has the disposition to F.
2. A has the primitively normative attitude towards F-ing.

Let's call Ginsborg's solution the *Primitive Normativity Thesis* (henceforth PNT). The PNT answers the skeptical challenge by offering the skeptic, first, dispositional facts about how we use "+". Second, the PNT suggests that one's answer is not arbitrary because one takes the primitively normative attitude towards that answer.

#### **4. A dilemma for the PNT**

Although I agree with Ginsborg that meaning is normative in the primitive sense, I argue that the PNT faces a dilemma. The dilemma starts from questioning the relation between 1 and 2 in the PNT. From Ginsborg's presentation, it is not clear how the disposition to F and the primitively normative attitude towards F-ing are related.

One candidate for construing the relation between the two, I propose, is a determination relation. That is to say that either the dispositions determine what one takes to be primitively normative or the other way around. One possibility is that the F-ing in 2 is determined by the disposition to F in 1. Call this the *determined interpretation* of the PNT. Another is that the F-ing in 2 determines the disposition to F in 1. Call this the *determining interpretation*. Let me illustrate more clearly what these interpretations are.

According to the determined interpretation, the determination relation is such that A's disposition to F determines A's taking F-ing to be primitively appropriate. That this might be

the case is suggested by Ginsborg when she says that "... it is because her [the child's] natural dispositions lead her to go on with "42" rather than "43" that it is "42" rather than "43" which she takes to be the appropriate continuation." (2011b, 237, bracket mine).

On the determining interpretation, the rule-follower, when following a rule, possesses the disposition to act in accordance with the rule. However, the notion of disposition invoked here is slightly different. If one is disposed to F, on this interpretation, it is because one takes F to be primitively appropriate. This makes the primitively normative attitude a necessary component of one's dispositions. That this might be the case is suggested by Ginsborg when she says that "The normative proviso *builds into* your disposition the feature that every response you are disposed to give involves a claim to its own appropriateness to the context in which you give it" (2011b, 244, italics mine).

The two quotes from Ginsborg seem to suggest an oscillation between the two interpretations. But clearly a proper account of rule-following has to rest on one. As I will argue, neither of them would be satisfactory. In a nutshell, if we choose the determined route, the PNT would fall prey to the skeptical objection that what response we give is arbitrary; if we choose the determining route, the dispositional part of the PNT would be superfluous.

#### **4.1. The first horn of the dilemma**

First, I argue that the determined interpretation cannot accommodate the skeptic's requirement that, in following a rule, one's response is not arbitrary. To see this, suppose we ask the rule-follower in virtue of what she acts in one way rather than another. On the determined interpretation, the answer that the PNT gives is the dispositions.

This answer is suggested by Ginsborg herself. For she says that, when comparing the child's counting by two with the parrot's same behavior (where the parrot is playing the role of an automaton), "[i]t is part of my proposal that a child's counting the series with "42" or applying the word "green" to a green spoon can be explained in the same naturalistic way that

we explain the parallel behavior in the case of the parrot” (2011b, 237). But this result makes the determined interpretation fail the skeptic’s second requirement that one’s response should not be, according to Kripke, an arbitrary “unjustified leap in the dark” or “mere jack-in-the-box” response (1982, 10 & 23).

To meet the skeptical requirement that what one does is not arbitrary, according to Kripke, the rule-following fact must satisfy this condition: it must “*tell* me what I ought to do in each new instance” (1982, 24). Call this condition the *guidance condition*. If the candidate fact for rule-following fails to satisfy this condition, then it would fail the skeptic’s second requirement.

It should be noted here that Ginsborg rejects the guidance condition as necessary for meeting the skeptic’s second requirement. But her rejection depends on, as I will show, an implausible reading of it. Ginsborg bases her rejection on the following ground (2012, 129). First, she suggests that positing the guidance condition is question-begging against the dispositionalist. Second, she suggests that satisfying the guidance condition would lead one’s account of rule-following to an infinite regress.<sup>16</sup> For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on the first one.

As a part of my proposal, satisfying the guidance condition is necessary for one’s rule-following behavior to be non-arbitrary. We can put the guidance condition this way: a rule-following behavior is guided if and only if it is not an “unjustified leap in the dark”.

Now, there are two ways to satisfy this condition. One is to offer a justification which, in the case of “+”, may be that “+” means addition. This makes the rule-following behavior not a leap. Call this the *strong reading* of the guidance condition. The other is to negate “dark”, where one does not need to know what “+” means. But one still use “+” under some light, in

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<sup>16</sup> For a response to this point, see, e.g., Miller (2017), especially section 4, and Haddock (2012, 155-6).

some sense, and it is because one uses “+” under some light that one’s response is not arbitrary.<sup>17</sup> Call this the *weak reading*.

Ginsborg clearly has in mind the strong reading of the guidance condition. For she interprets it as asking the rule-follower, in her case Wittgenstein’s building assistant, for an “inner item which puts him in a position to apply ‘slab’ to slabs by ‘telling’ him” (2012, 136). Although Ginsborg does not explicitly state it, I take it that this “telling” is supposed to provide the building assistant with the meaning of “slab” to justify her application of the term. On this reading, admittedly, satisfying the guidance requirement would beg the question against the dispositionalist. This is because it makes a claim about what following a rule must consist in - the rule-follower must have “an inner item” (the meaning of a word) telling her what to do, which, prematurely at least, constitutes a philosophical theory of rule-following that is incompatible with dispositionalism.

But Kripke does not need to hold the strong reading. The weak reading, which does not make any philosophical claim beyond intuition, would suffice to make one’s response non-arbitrary. According to the weak reading, the skeptic asks the building assistant to show that, in applying “slab” to slabs, her response is given under some light. Understood in this sense, the guidance requirement does not ask for any mental object, such as the meaning of “slab”, to justify her response. It is a mere intuition that, when carrying out a rule-following behavior, one’s behavior is guided *in some sense*. Therefore, the weak reading does not beg the question against the dispositionalist.

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<sup>17</sup> One may wonder what it means for us to say a response is unjustified but is given under some light. Examples of such cases include making educated guesses and scientific hypotheses. Consider this case. Emma runs a local bakery. Suppose that, on one day, she needs to bake a cake for seven minutes but her timer is broken. It is not hard for us to imagine that Emma, as a professional baker, can make an educated guess about when she should turn off the oven. In this case, Emma’s guessing is not justified. The justification would require, for example, a timer. But her guess is nevertheless given under some light, and therefore guided, in the sense that something Emma grasps, whatever that is (not a rule), contributed to her turning off the oven at a certain time.



Although Ginsborg rejects the strong reading as necessary for making one's rule-following behavior non-arbitrary, it is not clear whether she would endorse the weak reading as necessary for the non-arbitrariness of rule-following behaviors. Nevertheless, it is clear that she does not think that rule-following behaviors are arbitrary. For she says that "what the intuition (about language) has in common with Kripke's is that meaningful use of an expression requires more than 'jack-in-the box' responses on the part of the language-user" (2012, 139). However, being more than a "jack-in-the-box" response does not entail that the response is given under some light. Therefore, it cannot make one's rule-following behavior non-arbitrary.

The reason is this. For a response to be non-arbitrary is for it to be given under some light. The focus is the *process* of the production of the response. The light has to contribute to, whatever that means, the process of producing the response. In this way, if one is asked why she gave a particular response, the "light" will be cited as a part of the explanation – hence making the response non-arbitrary.

On the determined interpretation, however, the PNT counters the worry about arbitrariness by adding primitive normativity on top of the dispositional, jack-in-the-box, response. In this case, primitive normativity does not contribute to the formation of the behavior, so the response cannot be explained by anything other than the disposition. However, in this case, if one is asked why she gave a particular response, she will not be able to give an explanation that's different from the explanation she gives for any other arbitrary responses. Therefore, the skeptic would still claim that the determined interpretation of the PNT fails to show that one's rule-following behaviors are not arbitrary.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> One might protest, on behalf of Ginsborg, that the PNT can meet the weak reading of the guidance condition. For Ginsborg suggests that the "child's saying "42" is appropriate *in light of* the preceding sequence of the numerals" (2011b, 241, italics mine). So, one might say, isn't the child's response given under some light after all? But given the determined interpretation, it cannot be that the "light" contributes to the child's giving "42", for the response is essentially dispositional. The best we can make of this suggestion is that the child acquired a disposition by previous training. The child doesn't really respond with "42" in light of the preceding sequence. Her response is given in exactly the same way any arbitrary, dispositional, response is given.

## 4.2. The second horn of the dilemma

Now, let's consider the determining interpretation. On the determining interpretation, what the rule-follower takes to be primitively normative determines the "F" in the "disposition to F". This interpretation makes the primitively normative attitude a constituent part of the disposition. A problem immediately follows. In the determined interpretation, the notion of disposition employed there is the usual naturalistic notion<sup>19</sup>, which can be taken for granted. The determining interpretation, on the other hand, cannot adopt such a notion. This is because the realization of the dispositions, on the determining interpretation, necessarily involves a normative element, which the naturalistic dispositions don't.

Perhaps we can invent a new disposition for this interpretation, say, a normative disposition.<sup>20</sup> This normative disposition is of a kind such that it has a naturalistic aspect and a normative aspect. On the one hand, it is similar to the naturalistic disposition in the sense that it represents a behavioral pattern. On the other hand, it is more than naturalistic disposition in the sense that it necessarily has a normative element.

But this is hardly satisfactory. We may ask, first, what the relation is between the naturalistic aspect of this special disposition and the normative aspect of it.<sup>21</sup> The relation cannot be that the naturalistic determines the normative. Otherwise it would face the same problem as the determined interpretation. Therefore, we have to say that the normative aspect determines the naturalistic aspect.

However, this route makes the naturalistic part of the disposition superfluous. Suppose we ask the rule-follower why she acts in one way rather than the other. Naturally the rule-follower

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<sup>19</sup> See fn.4.

<sup>20</sup> Notice here that positing such a kind of disposition is already a cost, and is contradictory with Ginsborg's own words. For she says that the notion of disposition she employs in the PNT is the kind "which also could be shared by an animal which lacked any consciousness of normativity" (2011b, 237). Given that animals lack the ability to have normative attitudes, they cannot have the normative dispositions we invent here.

<sup>21</sup> One may wonder why there has to be a relation between the two aspects of this normative disposition. I will not address this worry here. For the sake of my argument, I assume that there has to be such a relation.

is supposed to cite this special disposition. But if the naturalistic behavioral pattern is determined by the primitively normative attitude she takes towards the particular way of acting, then it seems that the rule-follower only needs to cite the primitively normative attitude. Therefore, as it turns out, the determining interpretation seems to threaten the necessity of the dispositional part of the PNT.

So this is the dilemma for the PNT. The dilemma started with a scrutiny of the determination relation between the notion of primitive normativity and the disposition. On the first horn of the dilemma, if we read PNT as taking disposition to determine what one takes to be primitively normative, then PNT cannot counter Kripke's skeptical charge against the dispositionalist that what we do is a "leap in the dark". On the second horn of the dilemma, if we read PNT as taking what one takes to be primitively normative to determine what disposition one has, then the dispositional part of PNT becomes superfluous.

## 5. An attitudinal reconstruction of the PNT

I believe the above dilemma points to a better understanding of primitive normativity. Since we do take our rule-following behavior to be non-arbitrary, we can only push through the second horn of the dilemma. I propose that we drop 1 and reformulate the PNT as the PNT<sub>A</sub>:

- 2\*. In following a rule, A has the primitively normative attitude towards F-ing.
3. In following a rule, necessarily, A carries out F-ing *in virtue of* her taking F-ing to be primitively appropriate.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> One might wonder whether 3 can be formulated in terms of dispositions. If it can, then one may worry that my proposal here would be just like the PNT, with my disagreement with Ginsborg being a merely verbal one. I agree that it is possible to construct a notion of disposition in terms of which 3 can be expressed. But I don't think that this possibility makes my disagreement with Ginsborg a verbal one. There are two reasons. First, the notion of disposition that one has to construct would be very different from the naturalistic notion employed in the PNT. This is because 2\*, which contains a non-reducible normative attitude, will be the only constituent of the disposition. Second, in the rest of the paper, I will show that my substantive disagreement with Ginsborg lies more on how, in the context of rule-following, we should understand primitive normativity. Moreover, in fact, I take it to be a virtue of my proposal that it can explain the rule-following behavior without invoking the notion of disposition, because disposition is a much debated notion for which it is hard to find a widely-agreed definition.

Some clarifications are needed regarding 2\* and 3. First, the primitively normative attitude in 2\* is, as I will explain further below, different from the PNT. Second, the “in virtue of” is intended to capture the determination relation between what A takes to be primitively appropriate and what A does. This is to say that what A does, namely, F-ing, has to necessarily be a result of A’s taking up the normative attitude towards F-ing. Given this relation, from A’s own perspective, when following a rule, it is because A takes one way of acting rather than another to be primitively appropriate that she carries out that particular action. From our perspective, it is because of this “in virtue of” relation that we take A’s particular action as rule-governed (because the action is carried out in virtue of A’s attitude) rather than an arbitrary leap in the dark.

To see how the  $PNT_A$  avoids the dilemma illustrated in section 4, it would be helpful to contrast the PNT with the  $PNT_A$ . Let me first bring out their differences on a more intuitive level. I’ll delineate more specifically what’s distinctive about the  $PNT_A$  later.

Consider the epigraph I quoted from Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* at the beginning of this paper. The crucial expression there is Wittgenstein’s pronouncement that “[t]his is simply what I do”. The PNT and the  $PNT_A$  would give different analyses of what this pronouncement amounts to. Both the PNT and the  $PNT_A$  agree that, by saying “this is simply what I do”, the rule-follower expresses a primitively normative attitude towards what she does. What they disagree is how the “do” should be explained. According to the PNT, what the rule-follower does is a result of her possessing a disposition, which is essentially the same as what one does when one gives an arbitrary response. For the PNT, “this is simply what I do” amounts to claiming the appropriateness for having a particular disposition, and it does not explain why she does what she does. According to the  $PNT_A$ , on the other hand, the “do” is a result of the rule-follower’s taking the primitively normative attitude towards the particular action. “This is

simply what I do” amounts to an *explanation* of why she does what she does, because it is in virtue of possessing the attitude that the rule-follower acts in a particular way.

The reason why the  $PNT_A$  and the  $PNT$  give different analyses here is because they employ different notions of the primitively normative attitude. To distinguish the primitively normative attitude in  $2^*$  from the one involved in  $2$ , let’s call the primitively normative attitude in  $2^*$   $PNA_A$  and the one in  $2$   $PNA$ .

The main difference between  $PNA_A$  and  $PNA$  is that  $PNA_A$  does not depend on dispositions for its content (a particular way of acting, for example) while  $PNA$  does. Consider Ginsborg’s case of the child’s counting by two. According to the two interpretations of the  $PNT$  I discussed in section 4, there are two ways to explain how the child takes the primitively normative attitude towards a particular way of counting. First, it can be that the child takes up the attitude on top of her having the naturalistic disposition to count by two (the determined interpretation). Second, it can be that the child possesses a special kind of normative disposition, with the primitively normative attitude being a necessary part of it (the determining interpretation). In both interpretations, the content of  $PNA$  is supplemented by the disposition that the child has. This is why the child’s action is explained not by her attitudes but by her dispositions. That this is so is suggested by Ginsborg when she says “this consciousness of (primitive) appropriateness does not explain why she goes on with “42” or applies “green” to the spoon ...” (2011b, 237).

For  $PNA_A$ , on the other hand, the attitude does not depend on dispositions for its content. Rather, a particular way of acting is a constitutive part of the attitude. This is to say that, even for a dispositionless agent, she can still have the  $PNA_A$  towards a particular way of acting. For Ginsborg,  $PNA$  is primitive only in the sense that it is not dependent on the agent’s conforming to an antecedent rule (2011b, 233). However, according to my proposal,  $PNA_A$  is primitive not only in this sense, but also in the sense that it necessarily contains, as its content, a particular

way of acting, which is not amenable to naturalistic explanations. Moreover, what actions the agent takes to be primitively appropriate in what context is also a primitive matter.<sup>23</sup>

Now we can see why the PNT and the PNT<sub>A</sub> would give different analyses of the quote from Wittgenstein. According to the PNT, one's action is always explained by dispositions. According to the PNT<sub>A</sub>, however, the only way to explain one's action is to cite the PNA<sub>A</sub>.

As one of the central theses of this proposal, one might naturally demand an argument for 2\* and PNA<sub>A</sub>. An immediate thought is that it helps the PNT to get around the dilemma. However, only offering this consideration might fall prey to the protestation that this is a mere *ad hoc* maneuver. Therefore, it seems that it would be better if we can offer some independent considerations for divorcing the PNA<sub>A</sub> from dispositions. Moreover, these considerations have to show that PNA<sub>A</sub> has two characteristics:

- a. The havings of the PNA<sub>A</sub> necessarily involves taking a certain way of acting to be appropriate.
- b. The havings of the PNA<sub>A</sub> are conceptually independent of the havings of dispositions.

If the PNA<sub>A</sub> is conceptually independent of the naturalistic dispositions, then the following claim must be true: for agent A, it should be possible for there to be cases in which A's primitively normative attitude entails rule-governed actions that differ from A's natural disposition. In what follows, I offer two cases that support this claim.

Consider the following case first. Suppose that we are to teach a child, call her Alice, to count. Also suppose that we have successfully taught Alice to count up to twenty-nine. Now, as she continues, she counts "twenty-ten" instead of "thirty". In this case, saying "twenty-ten" rather than "thirty" is a result of Alice's natural disposition. Suppose we correct Alice, and

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<sup>23</sup> One worry here is that, if the PNA<sub>A</sub> is different from the PNA, then it would be a questionable matter whether it can claim inter-subjective validity in the way that PNA does. In other words, one may protest that when one takes PNA<sub>A</sub> towards F-ing, one does not necessarily take others to have the same attitude. This worry is well-placed. Here, however, I will take this as an assumption of my argument.

train her to say “thirty”, “forty” and so on. Later when Alice has counted up to fifty-nine, she would likely to respond with “sixty”. It will be a questionable matter whether this is a result of her having the PNA<sub>A</sub> to say “sixty” or it is from her having the disposition to do so. I think it is the former. That this is so can be seen from imagining a case in which Alice has had a slip of the tongue and said “fifty-ten”. I take it that this scenario shows that Alice’s natural disposition is to continue with “fifty-ten”. However, this conflicts with the PNA<sub>A</sub> she has which says that she should respond with “sixty”. So here we have a case in which Alice’s PNA<sub>A</sub> tells against her natural disposition.<sup>24</sup>

If we expand our current consideration to involve rule-following actions in certain moral contexts, that is, actions that are governed by moral rules, the asymmetry between dispositions and the PNA<sub>A</sub> would become more obvious. Consider the following case. Suppose Alice goes out on a Halloween night to trick-or-treating with her friends. Also suppose that, at one house when they’re getting treats, Alice finds in the candy bowl one of her favorite candies, which happens to also be her friend Bruno’s favorite candy. However, there is only one such candy in the bowl. Now, there is a sense in which we can say that Alice is disposed to take that candy.

But we could imagine that, given that Alice is a kind kid, she feels that she should give the candy to Bruno. One thing that I need to stress here is that there are no explicit deliberations going on in Alice’s decision to leave that candy to Bruno. She simply takes leaving the candy

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<sup>24</sup> One might protest here that this is not the only way to describe the case at hand, therefore failing to establish that PNA<sub>A</sub> is independent of dispositions. There are two ways the defender of the PNT could go. The first is to say that Alice has two conflicting dispositions – one is to continue with “sixty” and the other to continue with “fifty-ten”. What makes Alice prefer “sixty”, they may argue, is because she takes PNA towards “sixty”. But this move takes primitive normativity to be a part of the explanation of Alice’s behavior, which I don’t think the defender of the PNT would accept. The second move is to say that, given certain teachings, Alice would develop a second-order disposition to correct her first-order mistakes, and she takes PNA towards the second-order disposition. In this case, Alice’s first-order disposition is to make a slip of the tongue and say “fifty-ten” and the second-order disposition, the one towards which she takes PNA, is to correct such a slip and say “sixty”. According to this line of reasoning, the reason why Alice takes “sixty” to be the response she should give is still a dispositional matter. The pushback against this move is that it is not clear why Alice takes PNA towards the second-order dispositions but not the first-order disposition. Appealing to the naturalness of the second-order disposition would not help here. This is because, one might argue, “fifty-ten” is a more natural response of the counting behaviors.

to Bruno to be the appropriate thing to do. If what I described here is sound, then it seems that Alice's action, although it is what she takes to be primitively appropriate, is not what she is disposed to do.<sup>25</sup> I think that the consideration of these two cases render some support for a and b, and therefore 2\*.

## 6. The resurging skeptical worries

Given what I have discussed so far, however, the skeptic might push forward another worry. Suppose one answers the skeptical challenge by saying that one responds with "125" in virtue of one's having a  $PNA_A$  towards "125". According to the  $PNT_A$ , the havings of  $PNA_A$  is conceptually prior to meaning anything, then, the skeptic can still challenge what rule one follows by responding with "125". There are numerous possibilities, and the  $PNT_A$  alone cannot be adequate in determining which.

To be clear, the skeptical challenge here is different from the original one Kripke discusses. Given the  $PNA_A$  towards a particular action, now, the skeptic asks us to determine which rule one is following by carrying out the related action.

The skeptic might ask how one can show it is, in Kripke's case, addition rather than quaddition that one means even if one has the relevant  $PNA_A$ . The root of this worry is that a series of  $PNA_A$  that accord with the rule of addition cannot guarantee that one won't diverge from it in the future.

If the skeptic puts forward this worry, then she has misunderstood the  $PNT_A$ . The reason why the skeptic puts forward this worry may be that she takes the  $PNA_A$  to be similar to token-dispositions. On this understanding, the skeptic could ask that, since a token-disposition cannot determine what one means because there are numerous rules that are compatible with that

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<sup>25</sup> Again, there could be different descriptions of this case, given different meta-ethical commitments. But the  $PNT_A$  can easily explain the apparent conflict between Alice's wanting to take the candy and her giving it to Bruno. This easiness, I take it, gives us a *prima facie* reason for believing a and b.



disposition, by parity of reason, there are numerous rules compatible with the havings of that particular  $PNA_A$ .

The  $PNA_A$  should not be construed as disposition-like. Most importantly, it is not a disposition that is simply induced with a normative element. Rather, we should think of the facts about  $PNA_A$  as the facts about a distinct part of the human nature. Construed in this way, the  $PNA_A$  won't face the challenge that skeptic puts forward here. Although I won't be able to go deep into what this part of human nature is, a rough description should be possible.

When the child continues the mathematical series in the way she takes to be primitively appropriate, for example, we cannot say that the child is disposed to take what she does to be primitively appropriate. Rather, by having the  $PNA_A$  towards certain ways of acting, we should say that the child understands what she is doing at the primitive level. By not construing the havings of  $PNA_A$  in a disposition-like manner, we will have a better time explaining the child's (supposed) sensitivity to criticism, especially the intuition that the child *learns* from criticisms.<sup>26</sup>

If we take the havings of the  $PNA_A$  to be more of a matter of understanding rather than having dispositions, it will be clear why the  $PNT_A$  is not subject to the skeptical worry mentioned above. This is because the rule-follower cannot do anything that diverges from the rule if she is to make sense of what she is doing.

Here's why. For us to understand the quaddition rule, we need to employ more than one rule. This is to say that we understand the quaddition rule as consisting of two different rules. But this cannot be the case at the primitive level. When we think of the meaning of addition, we think of it not as requiring further rules for understanding. Therefore, if a child follows the quaddition rule at the primitive level, we will not be able to make sense of what she does, and,

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<sup>26</sup> A more thorough illustration of why this is the case is needed here. However, I cannot give an explanation here due to space/time limit.

if the child is like us, she won't be able to make sense of herself either. The skeptical pushback therefore loses its attraction once we abandon the disposition-like construal of the  $PNA_A$ .

Now, I want to illustrate briefly how my account answers Kripke's skeptic. First, the facts that the  $PNT_A$  cites are the facts about our  $PNA_A$ . These facts are taken to be primitive. Second, these facts meet the skeptic's second requirement which asks us to show that our responses are not arbitrary. Recall that to satisfy the second requirement, the  $PNT_A$  should meet at least the weak reading of the guidance requirement. As I presented it in section 4, the weak guidance requirement claims that one's rule-following actions must be carried out in light of something. According to the  $PNT_A$ , one's rule-following actions are carried out in virtue of one's  $PNA_A$  towards that particular action. So long as the  $PNA_A$  contributes to the formation of the action, I take it, then the  $PNT_A$  satisfies the second requirement. Third, besides the facts about our  $PNA_A$ , we will also need to cite facts about our linguistic communities.

The  $PNT_A$  thus represents a non-reductionist solution to the skeptical paradox. In general, as I noted at the end of section 2, a non-reductionist solution to rule-following/meaning would assume some non-naturalistic notions and claim that those notions are primitive. In the  $PNT_A$ , the  $PNA_A$  are non-reducible in the sense that they cannot be reduced to any naturalistic facts such as dispositions. My proposal is that  $PNA_A$  can be cited to answer both requirements of the skeptical challenge.

## **7. Concluding remarks**

To conclude, my main argument is this. I think there is a particular way to understand Kripke's normativity thesis, and it is to take the normativity of meaning to be antecedent to grasping the meaning of a word. This kind of normativity of meaning is largely ignored in the extant literature on rule-following and normativity of meaning until Ginsborg introduced primitive normativity recently. However, I argue that her account of primitive normativity faces a

dilemma. As an alternative to her account, I propose the  $PNT_A$ . In my proposal, I suggest that we should divorce primitive normativity from dispositions and characterize the primitive normativity in terms of the  $PNA_A$ .

Here I want to point out some further research directions that my proposal hints at. I think there is a lot to be explored about the notion of  $PNA_A$  that I propose in this paper. By introducing  $PNA_A$ , we can start to investigate a particular nonreductionist way of answering Kripke's skeptical paradox more deeply. Moreover, we can carry this project further, for example, by cashing out the differences between cases involving my version of primitive normativity and cases involving other kinds of normativity – for example, normativity that depends on antecedent rules. We might also want to explore the relation between the  $PNA_A$  and the rule-dependent normativity. The questions here would include whether one can be reduced to another or not. If there is such a reductive relation between the two, then we could also investigate in what ways one type of normativity is reducible to the other. The result of this project, I think, would greatly help us understand the problem of rule-following, the nature of meaning, and normativity in general.

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