

THE NORMATIVITY QUESTION IN QUINE'S NATURALISM: THE CONTEXT OF THE LANGUAGE LEARNING SITUATION

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Abstract:

Quine has been charged with eliminating the normative dimension from his naturalized epistemology. The aim of the paper is to look at the role of empathy in Quine's language learning situation, which in its simplest form is constituted by the parent-child relation. We will explore the normativity of the role of empathy thereof by exploiting the sociality of the language learning situation. Since the sociality of Quine's notion of empathy is implicit, to explore the normativity expression thereof, we will examine the explicit sociality of Wittgenstein's language learning situation—also constituted in its simplest form by the master-novice relation—and the normative character of it. By explicating the normativity of the calibrating role of the master and of rule following generally, we will parse the moral dimensions of the empathizing role of the linguist in Quine's language learning situation. Finally, by examining the nature of normativity in empathizing, we will establish that the normativity of empathizing involved in Quine's language learning situation is socially grounded without denying its individual dimension. We will conclude that the normativity objection against Quine's naturalism thus stands refuted.

Key words: empathy, language learning, naturalism, Quine's normativity, sociality, Wittgenstein's rule following.

1. Introduction

In his influential paper *Epistemology Naturalized* (1969b), Quine puts forward a theory of epistemology called naturalized epistemology, accord-

ing to which epistemology has to be made a chapter of psychology, which distinguishes it from the traditional epistemology. This view has been subjected to several objections. These objections target naturalized epistemology for its dramatic departure from traditional epistemology. The normativity objection, which holds that Quine has eliminated the normative dimension of epistemology, or that naturalized epistemology cannot account for the essentially normative character of epistemology, is one of the most common objections raised against naturalized epistemology. This objection has found various expressions in the literature. The severity of the complaint is such that one has to deal with it and give a certain satisfactory response to it if one wants to maintain a viable naturalist approach not only in epistemology but philosophy as a whole, that is, philosophical naturalism. The present paper is concerned with how the normativity objection may be met by examining Quine's language learning situation and the normative expression within it. The paper is divided into six sections.

The paper begins by recapitulating the main ingredients of the normativity objection by first pointing out how Quine's naturalized epistemology's goal departs from that of traditional epistemology. It will then discuss the key role that Quine's behaviourism plays in both his account of knowledge and theory of language. Quine's response since the late 1980s, in general, to this normativity objection is that normativity has entered

into the naturalized epistemology as a ‘the technology of truth-seeking.’ However, this response has not completely defeated the objection. It shows either that Quine’s view has been successfully refuted or that the objection has to be modified or abandoned. To present all of these objections is beyond the scope of the present work. What I will do is tackle the normativity objection by looking at Quine’s language learning situation and shedding light on the normativity expression thereof.

The third section will explicate Quine’s language learning situation with an aim to establish the normativity expression thereof. The role of the principle of charity and perceptual similarity in Quine’s behaviourist theory of language learning will be discussed. The role of the notion of empathy in Quine’s language learning, characterised by the master-novice learning situation, will also be discussed with an aim to explicate the implicit sociality and normativity thereof. The fourth section will discuss Wittgenstein’s language learning situation and explicate the normativity expression thereof. Wittgenstein’s rule following will also be discussed, and its normativity will be demonstrated by examining its social grounding, particularly the community standards which the master carries and the novice is made to conform to. The fifth section will look into the individual and social dimension of the normativity of language learning. It will aim to illustrate how the role of calibrating in Wittgenstein’s language learning is similar to that of Quine’s empathizing, allowing us to explain the normativity of the higher level empathy. It will, however, be argued that the same cannot be confidently said of the question concerning the normativity of the lower level empathy that operates at the unconscious neurological level. In this way, the paper will attempt to refute the normativity objection that Quine has eliminated the normative dimension from his naturalized epistemology.

2. The Normativity Objection and Quine’s Response

Quine rejects the traditional view that epistemology aims to establish and validates the grounds of science through a logical reconstruction of the theory’s formation, i.e., an investigation of the logical relation between our theories and their evidence (1969b, p. 75). He argues that epistemolo-

gy’s focus should be on discovering and explaining truths about how our beliefs about the world are causally related to evidence, or sensory data. According to him, epistemology

studies a natural phenomenon, viz., a physical human subject. This human subject is accorded a certain experimentally controlled input—certain patterns of irradiation in assorted frequencies, for instance—and in the fullness of time the subject delivers as output description of the three-dimensional external world and its history. The relation between the meager input and the torrential output is a relation we are prompted to study for somewhat the same reasons that always prompted epistemology; namely, in order to see how evidence relates to theory, and in what ways one’s theory of nature transcends any available evidence (1969b, p. 83).

Replacing epistemology with psychology implies that epistemology should use science, specifically psychology, to investigate and understand how we come to acquire beliefs or theories from our sensory experiences. Quine asks us to use psychology (1969, p. 75) because it can provide correct information about the necessary causal relation between our theories and the sensory evidence. Epistemologists should thus appeal to psychology in their quest to understand the world. Quine therefore thinks that since scientific theories are formed from evidence, considered as the totality of our sensory stimulations, the relation between science and its evidential base can be better investigated by using psychological methods, which give reliable causal information about our cognitive processes, including our sensory stimulations.

In taking verbal behaviour as the only evidence that we can conceive of for establishing the semantics as well as the epistemic claims, behaviourism can be taken to serve as the key to both Quine’s account of knowledge and of language. In other words, he uses his behaviourist theory to establish the relationship of the sensory input with verbal input as well as that of the evidence with theory. By conceptualizing the stimulation of sensory receptors instead of external objects as available for scientific theory (1969b, p. 75), Quine’s naturalised epistemology studies the input-output relation from a narrow basis of sensory evidence or stimulation.

Davidson (1986) claims that Quine has confused causes and reasons. According to him, the kind of relationship that sensory stimulations have with their observation-sentences counterpart has to be conceived of as a causal one. Therefore, their relationship is not a justificatory one because “nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief” (Davidson, 1986, p. 310). This implies that since naturalized epistemology focuses on how our scientific theory causally develops from our sensory evidence, it should refrain from the subject matter of justification of our beliefs or theories. Davidson's point is that naturalised epistemology so conceived is descriptive and not a normative discipline.

Jaegwon Kim (1988) also brought forward the normativity objection against Quine's naturalised epistemology. According to him, Quine takes the relation between sensory stimulations and scientific theory as a causal or nomological one (Kim, 1988, p. 389). So, Quine's naturalised epistemology aims to investigate how sensory stimulations causally lead to the formation of scientific theory about the world. Therefore, it is not the job of naturalised epistemology to investigate how we are justified in holding a scientific theory on the basis of sensory stimulation as available evidence. Justification is not a concern for Quine's naturalised epistemology. His argument is that since knowledge, defined as justified true belief, is itself a normative concept and justification is intrinsically normative, by eliminating justification from knowledge, Quine's naturalised epistemology eliminates the normative dimension from the theory of knowledge. Thus, he concludes that Quine's naturalised epistemology lacks a normative dimension.

In a nutshell, according to the normativity objection, there is no point in asking whether Quine's naturalistic epistemology satisfies the goal of traditional epistemology since it is deprived of the normative dimension to do so. However, Quine responds to these normative objections by arguing that

naturalization of epistemology does not jettison the normative and settle for the indiscriminate description of ongoing processes. For me normative epistemology is a branch of engineering. It is the technology of truth-seeking, or, in a more cautiously epistemological term, prediction...There is no ques-

tion here of ultimate value, as in morals; it is a matter of efficacy for an ulterior end, truth or prediction (1986, pp. 664–665).

Quine might, thus, be construed as claiming that naturalised epistemology retains its normative character insofar as, just like any other discipline of science, it aims to discover the truth and enhance our understanding of the world. The normative term which Quine employs is the ‘technology of truth-seeking,’ which implies that because truth-seeking is fundamentally evaluative or normative, epistemology is itself a normative discipline. In other words, while trying to unravel the causal story behind our true beliefs about the world, epistemology evolves its own norms in much the same way in which science evolves its norms while trying to establish truth claims about the world (Crumley, 2009, p. 192). In what follows, we will examine how the normativity issue may be dealt with in the context of Quine's language learning situation, keeping in mind that in Quine's philosophy, epistemology and language are intertwined. We will assess the normativity of the principle of charity and the notion of empathy in Quine's language learning situation.

3. Explicating Quine's Language Learning Situation

In his behaviourist theory of language, Quine asks how from impacts to our sensory surfaces, we have come to acquire or learn hitherto unknown language and develop our systematic theory of interpretation or translation of hitherto unknown language. Quine acknowledges that the field linguist relies on certain normative principles, the most important of which is the principle of charity.

The central idea of the principle of charity as a methodological strategy is that any translation manual according to which native speakers are construed as believing silly claims (e.g., the law of non-contradiction is false) is less likely to be accurate, making that translation manual a bad one (Wilson, 1959). Accordingly, it asserts that there is methodological ground for translating such that a native speaker can be construed as believing in claims that are true by the linguist's standards. Quine uses this principle when it comes to the task of translating observation sentences (1960). When carrying out the translating task, the field linguist

assumes that the native speaker is rational and is not generally wrong about anything. Quine states the principle as:

The maxim of translation underlying all this is that assertions startlingly false on the face of them are likely to turn on hidden differences of language. This maxim is strong enough in all of us to swerve us even from the homophonic method that is so fundamental to the very acquisition and use of one's mother tongue. The common sense behind the maxim is that one's interlocutor's silliness, beyond a certain point, is less likely than bad translation—or, in the domestic case, linguistic divergence (1960, p. 54).

This passage shows that Quine generally believes that the principle of charity can help make sense of the outcomes of translation. This means that they are not to be taken as limited to the circumstances of the field linguist because, while learning a language, no one has access to any evidence that the field linguist is lacking. In asserting that “one's interlocutor's silliness, beyond a certain point, is less likely than bad translation” (1960, p. 54), what Quine has in mind is that it may turn out that on the basis of the translations that we put forward, the native speaker may seem to deny obvious truths while denying that a statement and its negation both be true. It follows that some of our proposed translations can be wrong rather than that the native speaker does really deny the obvious truths.

The issue at hand is whether the principle of charity shows that translation is imbued with norms. By employing this principle, the translator is attempting to make sense of the utterances of the native speaker. But, the notion of “making sense” is essentially a normative one (Baghramian, 2016, p. 30). This line of thought may be objected to. It could be argued that unlike Davidson, Quine takes the norms of translation that are assumed by the field linguist as heuristic devices in radical translation and not as the indispensable presuppositions of the translating act. Critics may go so far on this point as to claim that even what we often regard as fundamental principles, such as the principle of noncontradiction, on Quine's account, are defeasible and not prerequisite of all linguistic ascription. Quine is willing to permit circumstances in which the field linguist may attribute irrational beliefs to

the native (1995, p. 80). Another objection one can raise is that the principle of charity, on Quine's account, is grounded in empirical considerations in his later writing. This is the case, for instance, when Quine (1970, p. 2) asks us to take the target of the translating task as “plausible messages,” and to provide an empirical account of such messages. However, we know that plausibility is a norm-governed notion that basically makes a claim about what is right to believe in certain situations (Baghramian, 2016). We can, thus, claim that Quine's naturalistic account of language is undermined by neither the normative demands of the assertoric usage of language nor those of radical translation.

The issue remains as to how we may establish that the speakers and learners act on the same stimuli. Quine responded to this by invoking two interconnected principles—the principle of similarity and the notion of empathy. The linguist will match the native speaker's ‘gavagai’ with his own ‘rabbit’ on the grounds that each sentence would be assented to and dissented from under the same pattern of nerve hits experienced by the native and himself (Quine, 1960). This view seems to require an extraordinary acquaintance with the minute details of his own and everyone else's physiology on the part of the linguist, and to rely on an implausible assumption of a close physical similarity among them. For this reason, Davidson (1990) has tried to persuade Quine to locate the relevant shared stimulus not in the sensory surfaces but farther out, in the publicly observable object or situations that cause the speakers to express assent or dissent regarding the sentences in question. That is, Davidson implores Quine to think that we can achieve the sameness of meaning by considering the role of what he called ‘distal stimuli’ shared by speakers, which would connect both ‘Gavagai’ and ‘rabbit’ with an animal (rabbit) that appears there—or at least with something that is publicly observable.

Quine, however, insists that his naturalistic view of translation allows only stimulations of nerve endings through the speaker's encounter with the world (‘proximal stimuli’ as Davidson calls these) as stimuli that are suitable for scientific consideration. This implies that Quine insists on locating stimulus meaning at the level of neural input and not publicly observable situations (Quine, 1990a, pp. 41-42). Although he insists on locating

stimulus meaning at the level of neural inputs, Quine acknowledges that the psychological account of individual speakers' assent and dissent regarding statements about stimuli cannot alone explain how the speakers could be said to share the sets of stimuli and also share a language(s). Consequently, in the 1980s, Quine began to adopt a new approach, postulating that it is the innate shared sense of similarity between speakers that grants the sameness of stimulus. That is, Quine emphasised that a certain sense of similarity is essential for language learning. Without this shared similarity, neither language learning nor induction and prediction would not be possible. He writes,

People have to be in substantial agreement, however unconscious, as to what counts as

similar if they are to succeed in learning, one person from another, when next to assent to a given observation sentence. Subjects radically at odds in this neural way could never learn observation sentences or anything else from one another. Our training even of a dog, horse, bear, seal, or elephant hinges on a conformity of his inarticulate similarity standards to our own (Quine, 1984, p. 294).

It may, however, be noted that since there are infinitely many ways by which an object and state can be found to be similar or to differ, we first have to pick the one respect in which they are found to be similar or differ. So, Quine admits that similarity in stimulus and response patterns does not itself alone guarantee the sameness of stimulus meaning. The similarity in patterns of stimuli and responses is not enough for language learning and translation. The particular way in which the object and state are similar or differ is contingent upon the characteristics of the context in question. We can observe that what can be considered similar cannot be exhaustively determined on a shared neuronal basis alone; context is also relevant in making these judgments. Since judgments of similarity, as Quine admits, may be relative to our own interests, in addition to a shared sense of similarity, a speaker may need to attune himself or herself to what other speakers consider similar in a given situation. It is at this point that Quine has begun to resort to the notion of empathy.

Quine, therefore, thinks that perceptual similarity is necessary for learning and that any creature

capable of learning must have some innate standards and principles of perceptual similarity. However, he thinks that there is a similarity in the sense data that results in the similarity of perception, which serves as the basis for objective knowledge (Quine, 1960). Objectivity is defined for only one individual if the perceptual response is the same irrespective of the difference in the sense stimuli (Quine, 1990b, pp. 3-4). This is similar to the notion of a specious present with which one can define the identity of a perceptual object, that is, the perceptual continuity of the same object at different times. The starting point for Quine is to acknowledge that we are born with some instinctive ability to recognize similarities. Recognizing similarity can be across space and across time. The ability to re-identify an object would be to recognize its similarity across time, and the ability to see the similarity among several objects would be the ability to acquire a natural kind term. For instance, we have the ability to identify and re-identify our lost bag. We can perceive motion when discrete pictures that resemble one another with slight variations are screened at the rate of eighteen frames per second. Quine has recognized this ability, which is normally identified as a specious present. Psychologists have measured that the span of perception is $1/16^{\text{th}}$ of a second. We retain any perception for this period even if the span of an object hitting our nerve endings is less than this. This human ability is the one that is able to give us continuity of perception of objects, eventually resulting in the identity of objects.

Since learning depends on perceptual similarity, perceptual similarity itself cannot be learned by using something else. Quine grants this basic learning of similarity to be innate. He believes that the standards of perceptual similarity change when we advance in learning (Quine, 1995, p. 19). The change in perceptual similarity does not result from a change in our innate abilities but from the change that is brought about by new perspectives and their concepts. Quine thinks that the innate standard of perceptual similarity is an evolutionary endowment (1993, p. 113). He considers it essential for two types of similarities, viz., one at the level of phonetics or language, and the other at the level of perception in order to have scientific knowledge (Quine, 1969b, p. 32). Similarity at the basic level is provided by our innate notion of natural kinds,

the basis for our primitive induction. We can learn the notion of one crow, two crows, three crows, and so on without involving the notion of inductive generalization by simple enumeration (Quine, 1995, p. 23). Quine takes the principle of shared similarity to be interconnected with the notion of empathy. In his behaviourist theory of language learning, the notion of empathy underpins language learning. In other words, the ability to empathise is the basis on which the child learns language and a necessary condition for language learning:

Empathy dominates the learning of language, both by child and by field linguist. In the child's case, it is the parent's empathy. The parent assesses the appropriateness of the child's observation sentence by noting the child's orientation and how the scene would look from there. In the linguist's case, it is empathy on his own part when he makes his first conjecture about 'Gavagai' on the strength of the native's utterance and orientation, and again when he queries 'Gavagai' for the native's assent in a promising subsequent situation. We all have an uncanny knack for empathizing with another's perceptual situation, however ignorant of the physiological or optical mechanism of his perception. The knack is comparable, almost, to our ability to recognize faces while unable to sketch or describe them (Quine, 1990a, pp. 42–43).

This sheds light on how an act of empathising underlies language learning. In her encounter with the parent, the child acts and adjusts her behavior according to the reactions of the parent to the situation. By observing the reactions of the parent to the situation, the child progresses in the process of learning one-word sentences, "Gavagai," "mama," etc., and learning other, more complex sentences later on. Any of the child's mistakes is corrected by the parent, which can be said to have two sides (Van de Herick & Rietveld, 2021). On the one hand, being corrected can be rightly considered as a normative phenomenon that occurs between two or more persons who are interacting in a given situation. On the other hand, this empathising act or interaction that influences the child is such that it enables her to act or assess linguistic behaviour appropriately in the given situations. As such, it is

the empathising ability that underlies the development of the linguistic skills of the child. As such, one interesting aspect of this phenomenon of the learning situation is that it extends the established communal pattern of linguistic behaviour.

The behaviour that is characteristic of the learning situation is empathising in nature in a double sense. Firstly, in responding to a situation, an individual exhibits his/her capacity to be *affected* by the world and others. Secondly, this behaviour is accompanied by the possibilities of being *motivated* by the world and others, as manifested in the subsequent development and use of linguistic behaviour and skills. This kind of empathising behaviour expresses the tendency of an individual to pre-reflectively experience the situation and act on certain possibilities for linguistic behaviour. Since socio-cultural practices have shaped an individual situation, the act of empathising, even in an unreflective form, is social in nature. Individuals with developed linguistic skills have a tendency to be drawn to those possibilities for linguistic behaviour afforded by the encountered situation that is appropriate to socio-cultural practices. The unreflective empathising reaction is social because the conditions that constitute better or worse or appropriate or inappropriate linguistic behaviour can be traced to socio-cultural practices. We can see that this sociality is inbuilt in Quine's notion of language learning:

The linguist will rely also on observation of the local folkways...the linguist will not accept everything the native says as true. He will indeed assume sincerity, barring evidence to the contrary, but he will try as an amateur psychologist to fit his interpretations of the native sentences to the native's likely belief rather than to the facts of circumambient nature. Usually, the outcome will be the same, since people are so much alike; but his observation of the folkways is his faltering guide to the divergences (1995, p. 80).

With her improvised cognitive background, the linguist enacts the material conditions that allow for the possibility of language learning and the expression of appropriate linguistic behaviour. Our linguistic behaviour is not an expression of private judgments. Instead, it is an expression of our attunement to certain linguistic practices. By empathis-

ing, the child is initiated into language learning and hence into certain ways of acting and judging the world. In her linguistic behaviour, she gives expression to these ways. Of course, the view that language is primarily social is at the core of Quine's view (1969a, p. 26). Seen as a social art, language expresses skilful behaviour that attends to certain aspects of a given situation. Language, thus, is primarily a means by which the linguist/parent conditions the child/novice to recognise and respond to certain aspects of a given situation in ways that are appropriate to socio-cultural practices. The linguist/parent may teach the child/novice how to recognise similar situations by pointing out that one aspect of the given situation is similar to earlier situations. For example, the master can teach the child to learn to say the word 'rabbit' by ostensively pointing to the object 'rabbit.' When the child uses that word correctly on a subsequent occasion, she has thus learned to correctly treat the thing in front of her as a 'rabbit'. This is why we can assert that linguistic behaviour links the given situation to situations encountered earlier, thereby suggesting a way of treating the given situation appropriately according to certain socio-cultural practices.

Empathising involves adopting a certain behavioural response towards the situation encountered. It is a form of engaged interaction in that the appropriate linguistic behaviour is not determined in advance but spontaneously produced in the lived experience of situations. The fact that the empathetic response on the part of the master can be more or less directed or immediate points us towards an important function that empathising plays in language learning. What came up in the process of empathising interaction is the way the child imitates the way the linguist usually behaves and talks; that is, how she comes to learn linguistic practices and uses linguistic terms in the appropriate situations. The empathising ability thus enables the master-child to engage in a situation together, with the master attempting to draw the child's attention to certain aspects of the situation in ways that are appropriate to the social practices the master is already a part of. In serving as the basis for the language learning activity, empathising is part and parcel of the pair's socio-cultural practices rather than standing outside of these practices. This empathising is one of the constitutive parts of a particu-

lar situation in that the child learning which term to use in order to be understood is a part of this activity. Hence, language learning is an engaged activity. There is a relation between what satisfies a master and what is appropriate in a particular practice. In general, what satisfies a master who is attuned to a particular practice is what is appropriate in that practice. Through ostensive teaching, the master attempts to condition the child to learn and recognise the linguistic behaviour that is appropriate to certain socio-cultural practices. Through such empathising attunement, the child acquires normative behaviour that is appropriate to a certain socio-cultural practice. Thus, Quine's learning situation is normative; further, it is also an engaged and not a detached interaction.

The sociality of Quine's language learning situation, and, of course, that of the normativity expression thereof, still stands in need of further explication. To this point, we now turn to Wittgenstein's language learning situation, similar in structure to that of Quine, which demonstrates explicit sociality and normativity.

4. Explicating Wittgenstein's Language Learning Situation

Similar to how the notion of empathy is fundamental to Quine's linguistic naturalism, bedrock judgments of normative similarity are fundamental to Wittgenstein's linguistic naturalism.¹ In particular, Wittgenstein takes bedrock judgments of normative similarity as fundamental to language learning (William, 2010). Similar to the way that the linguist-child relation is characterized in Quine's learning situation, the master-novice relation is characterized in Wittgenstein's language learning situation. Indeed, he identifies ostensive pointing as the method of language learning:

How do I explain the meaning of 'regular', 'uniform', 'same', to anyone?...if a person has not yet the concepts, I shall teach him to use the words by means of examples and by practice.

¹ Wittgenstein discusses this in his book *Philosophical Investigations* (1953/2009). In his other works, such as *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics* (1966/1978), he also discusses the normativity of unreflective action in craftsmen, portrayed as a kind of aesthetic practice.

I do it, he does it after me; and I influence him by expressions of agreement, rejection, expectation, encouragement. I let him go his way, or hold him back; and so on.

Imagine witnessing such teaching. None of the words would be explained by means of itself; there would be no logical circle.

The expressions ‘and so on’, ‘and so on ad infinitum’ are also explained in this teaching. A gesture, among other things, might serve this purpose. The gesture that means ‘go on like this’, or ‘and so on’ has a function comparable to that of pointing to an object or place (PI, §208).¹²

Wittgenstein’s point is that the novice is initiated into language learning by ostensive teaching on the part of the master. The cognitive background of the master is an improvised one, while that of the novice is an impoverished one. That said, the novice comes to learn how to act and judge appropriately by looking at those examples that the master has displayed. Being without the requisite concepts or rules for acting and judging appropriately, the ostensive teaching cannot be conducted in reference to them. Ostensive teaching relies on our shared natural capacities to perceive and react to certain observable aspects of the physical world. Since the adult has the table-concept, he uses it to describe and make his judgment about the table-object when he sees it. On the other hand, since the child does not have the table-concept, his experience of the table-object is only a matter of perception of the table-object. The child acquires the ability to make an appropriate judgment about her experience of the table-object through ostensive teaching on the part of the master.

Wittgenstein thus advises the child with an impoverished cognitive background: “don’t think, but look!” (PI, §66). Through ostensive learning, the novice is calibrated into the bedrock practices. She is calibrated to say ‘table’ in seeing the tables as the master does. The similarity in their perceptual judgments is that they both use the table concept. For example, the master may point to a red apple and utter the words ‘this red apple is red’. For him, uttering these words is calibrating the novice to

acquire a standard of colour perception to become a competent participant in a language game. The similarity in their judgment or utterance that ‘this red apple is red’ or any other verbal judgment is possible given two things: the cognitive background that the master imparts in teaching the novice and their shared natural capacities to perceive and react to salient physical aspects of the environment. According to Wittgenstein, our shared natural capacities to perceive and react to salient features of the environment constitute the “common behaviour of mankind” (PI, §206) without which we cannot make bedrock judgments of the obvious. Ostensive teaching is the means by which this common behaviour is exploited. By acquiring the similarity of bedrock judgments, the child shares a cognitive background with the master. It is because of this shared cognitive background that there can be language games of colour, length, or numerosity, and so on between child and the master.

By calibrating the child with an impoverished cognitive background, she is made to conform to the master. That conformity of the child can best be described, in extreme cases, as blind obedience. The master provides the cognitive background against which the words and behaviours of the child are assessed and sustained. By blindly conforming to the master, the child blindly conforms to the normative practices of the community. Calibration of the child, thus, is a triangulation among the child’s words, adult’s words, and causal relation to the surrounding world that they share (William, 2010, p. 364). In other words, it is not only the child-master relation but also the normative practices of the community, the shared standards of members of a community, that are responsible for calibrating the child. Younger members of the community are calibrated by the masters of language to conform to the standards of the community. The child acquires mastery of the language through acceptance of the standards of the community. For the child, there is no alternative but to accept or conform to the community’s standards blindly, that is, to adopt the ways that the community acts and judges the world.

Wittgenstein claims that blind rule following is normative. In other words, according to him, the bedrock of immediate action where we act without justification but not “without right” (PI, §289) is

² The abbreviation PI will be used for *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, 1959/2009) and the symbol § for its section.

normative. Like McDowell (1984), we will claim that, according to Wittgenstein, the bedrock of both immediate action and 'blind' rule following are inherently normative. This implies that they are normative irrespective of whether or not the person can reflect or possesses linguistic expression since the normativity of bedrock immediate action results from the fact that the individual is already a participant in certain socio-cultural practices.

According to Wittgenstein, a bedrock of immediate action underwrites the practice of giving reasons and justifications. As he states,

'How am I able to follow a rule?' – if this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule in the way I do. If I have exhausted the justification I have reached bedrock and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do' (PI, §217).

That is, the bedrock of immediate actions is the most fundamental of actions in which we act without reflection. It explains how we embody norms blindly. As Wittgenstein states: "When I obey a rule, I do not choose. I obey the rule blindly" (PI, §219.) This shows that when we reach the bedrock, rule following should not be considered as the outcome of reflection or of a conscious decision to act in some way. The issue at hand is whether or not the bedrock of immediate action is to be construed as normative. According to Baker and Hacker (1985), the bedrock of immediate action is non-normative because it is not an explicit linguistic practice. By contrast, McDowell claims that Wittgenstein characterises even this most fundamental level of action as normative (McDowell, 1984, pp. 241-242). The question is, how can blind rule following be normative? The answer lies in the custom or regularity in the use of the rule induced through training:

How can a performance both be nothing but a 'blind' reaction to a situation, not an attempt to act on an interpretation...and be a case of going by a rule ...? The answer is: by belonging to a custom (PI, §198) (McDowell, 1984, p. 242).

The fact that the child is trained in a particular cultural setting provides the context in which the normativity of the bedrock practices can be under-

stood. Being trained in the community's custom, the child acquires the community's ways of speaking and behaving and hence the tendency to blindly respond to the environment or situation (McDowell, 1984, p. 255). Accordingly, the community's standards act as the basis by which to evaluate the appropriateness of the individual's words and behaviours. We claim that McDowell is right in thinking that Wittgenstein considers the bedrock of immediate action to be normative. In this way, the community of speakers of a language is responsible for the socialisation of the child. They will repeatedly train the child until she conforms, that is, until she is able to use words or behave in certain circumstances in expected ways.

By claiming that the answer to the issue of the normativity of blind rule following lies in the communal custom, what Wittgenstein means is that custom is a middle course between the pure behaviourist and purely rationalist means of language learning (William, 2010, pp. 368-369). That is, we are neither behaviourists nor Cartesian rationalists. This is because a pure perceptual novice, or behaviourist, whose behaviour is shaped by way of responding to the environmental stimuli could not make a move in the normative space, and the Cartesian rationalist, who formulates theories about the world and draws out their logical implications, cannot but makes move in a language game. In invoking the role of custom, Wittgenstein is thus in line with Quine. This is due to that fact that Quine (1960, p. 80) also refers to folkways in articulating empathetic language learning in that empathetic learning on the part of the child takes place against the cognitively impoverished background or the background of socio-cultural practices of the master or linguist. According to Quine, the speaker will manipulate the child until she conforms, that is, until she possess the ability to use the words rightly in given situations, or, as he states, until the child "ends up using the word to suit" (1960, p. 7). To enable a child to conform, the speakers use corrective behaviour that includes positive and negative responses on the part of the community—which may include rewards and punishments—towards the linguistic behaviour of the child. From this, in the fashion of Van de Herick & Rietveld (2021), we can claim that what follows is, according to Wittgenstein, the simple fact that one reliably participates in a communal custom rather than that one

possesses the capacity for linguistic reflection, and this is what matters for understanding the normativity of (even “blind”) rule following. Accordingly, it can be observed that it is the traditions of a community that the individual in question belongs to that constitute the normativity of his or her linguistic behaviour or practices. Individuals may sometimes act without any explicit reasons in an unreflective action. The unreflective action of a skilled individual as a blind response to certain situations is still normative.

5. Is the Normativity of Language Learning Situation Individual or Social?

We want to know what it means to act on the basis of empathising ability in a learning situation. How do we understand, for example, the way the linguist or parent reacts to the child’s actions to obtain appropriate linguistic behaviour in a situation? What kind of relation obtains between the empathising act and the normativity involved in the learning situation? The linguist’s empathising act is internally related to the normativity embedded in the language learning situation. Therefore, we can describe the learning situation by appealing to the current state of the child (the child showing signs of improvement in learning the linguistic expressions) and to the reactions of the expert (signs that she has improved the linguistic skills of the child or is dissatisfied with the state of the child’s linguistic skill) (Van de Herick & Rietveld, 2021). This shows that in such an empathising act, the correctness of the child’s linguistic behaviour and the linguist’s attitude are related. The correctness of the child’s linguistic behaviour is measured against the community’s standards, or what is considered appropriate according to his socio-cultural practices.

The child can learn whether she behaves appropriately from the linguist’s posture, facial expressions, etc. These are some of the ways by which the linguist normally corrects the child and encourages them to behave rightly. They indicate her normative state (Van de Herick & Rietveld, 2021). So, the state of satisfaction usually indicates the normative state in the unreflective empathising act of the linguist. We can say that to act in a learning situation means the linguist reacts to, for example, the impoverished linguistic state of the child or

that the child invites correction. The linguist’s readiness to correct the child and the experience of the child go together. So, correcting the child’s behaviour implies improving the linguistic capability of the child as a whole. Through this corrective measure, the linguist improves the child’s linguistic behaviour and skills. The normativity involved in correcting the child has an essentially public dimension.

There is a link between the normativity of the linguist’s socio-cultural practice and the normativity of the learning situation (Van de Herick & Rietveld, 2021). The fact that the empathising acts take place in the context of certain communal practices is crucial to grasping the normativity involved therein. When it is seen from the perspective of the linguist, the normative dimension of a situation is to be grounded in the practices that characterise the typical behaviours of the members of the community. So, the normative character of the empathising act is related to the norms established by the custom or tradition of the community in question. In this way, being trained to act rightly, the child is bound to behave in ways considered appropriate to certain socio-cultural practices. In other words, the child can experience the feeling that acting in some way is appropriate in certain situations. It is not only the child’s ability to empathise that plays a role in his learning of language but also the skills pertaining to participation in these socio-cultural practices. The sociality of the normative dimension can be seen in how the learning situation focuses on linguist-child relationship or interaction rather than each of the individuals considered separately. For example, consider how the linguist in a learning situation teaches the child what a rabbit is by behaving in certain ways in response to the child’s reaction. With training, over time, the child will learn to behave appropriately in accordance with the established custom of the community. By dint of learning from the linguist, training hard, trying repeatedly, the child will develop the linguistic sensitivities and abilities of the linguist. She will develop appropriate linguistic behaviours and skills for various situations. An important part of this training is that the attunement of the child to certain practice can occur implicitly, without her being aware that it is happening, as, for example, when she unconsciously imitates the linguistic behaviour of those around her. The community’s ways of be-

having and acting will become ingrained in the child in the long run. The child, then, will be able to display appropriate linguistic behaviour instinctively, in Wittgenstein's sense. Given this training and the child's empathising sensibilities, the child becomes accustomed to a certain socio-cultural tradition and learns what is and is not appropriate linguistic behaviour within this tradition. Accordingly, Stoutland (2000) asserts that the normativity of Quine's approach to meaning lies in (a certain degree of) uniformity amongst the speakers. This is required in order for one to learn the correct meanings of the terms of a language and to become a member of the community who speak it:

On this view, the normativity necessary for linguistic meaning and competence derives entirely from the fact that speakers of a language come to respond uniformly to certain sentences so that those who conform use the sentences correctly, those who deviate use them incorrectly. These sentences are such that speakers become competent in the language by acquiring the same dispositions to assent or dissent to them, so that a speaker who does not share those dispositions does not understand what the sentence means (Stoutland, 2000, pp. 184-185).

Clearly, the community in question can influence and correct the child, or anyone for that matter, introducing them to the acceptable associations of words or sentences with the corresponding stimuli in the relevant situations. The corrective apparatus of the linguistic community plays a crucial role in sustaining uniformity amongst its members. Language learning takes place by way of listening and using words of the language in question in the presence of the appropriate environmental stimuli that act both on the learner and the teacher. The social dimension, therefore, is at the heart of Quine's language learning as language is "socially inculcated and controlled" (Quine, 1969b, p. 81). This shows the essential role of communities—for example, their corrective behaviour—in language learning.

We can observe that the sociality of the normativity³ involved in the learning situation is estab-

lished beyond doubt. But, the individual dimension remains intact. In fact, normativity has both dimensions in that it should not be reduced to either of them. We can to certain extent confidently assert that questions of norms pertaining to a tradition can be answered rightly, especially by those who are the members of the community of the tradition in question. One way to understand this is by looking at the communal nature of actions of a particular community. This way of understanding the normativity of communal actions or practice—that is, by looking at the social dimension of the normativity of the practice—indicates that normativity cannot be reduced to the individual level. However, the individual dimension of normativity remains intact. Luntley (2003) claims that actions even at the communal level emerge from actions at the individual level. This may be correct, but it does not completely establish that the individual level is prior to the social level because the actions of individuals are, first of all, often influenced and shaped by their experience and training within a certain social practice. This does not, however, completely establish that the social dimension of practice is prior to that of the individual, because the individual must possess the natural capacity to learn in order to be trained by others. This comes to prominence when we take into account the fact that infants already possess the innate empathising capacity to act:

Empathy is instinctive. Child psychologists tell us that an infant just a few days old responds to an adult's facial expression, even to imitating it by the unlearned flexing of appropriate muscles. Dogs and bears are believed to detect fear and anger in people and other animals, perhaps by smell (Quine, 1995, p. 89).

The innate empathizing capacity of the individual is key to language learning. It is, in fact, presupposed by those who exclusively emphasise the social dimension of the normativity of the practice. The child's ability to empathise typically develops early and rapidly (McDonald & Messinger, 2011). Our ability to empathise is partly due to genetics. Contemporary studies in neuroscience have allowed us to understand the neural basis of empathy. They enable us to see how mirror neurons are activated and explain empathy's basic process-

³ See Mate (2022) for information about some attempts on establishing the sociality or social grounding of normativity in the scientific context.

es. Mirror neurons and the mirror neuron system, on their own, do not cause the feelings of empathy, but they do provide a neural basis for connecting our experiences with those of others (Iacoboni & Dapretto, 2006; de Waal & Preston, 2017). This is what Alvin Goldman (2011) calls the low level or the mirror route to empathy.

The view that, at a subconscious level, humans and some animals experience some sort of ‘mental mimicry’ or ‘mirroring’ is supported by the discovery of mirror neurons. The fMRI studies provide evidence that observation of a face that expresses disgust generates mental mimicry or empathy in the observer (Wicker et al., 2003). Quine goes as far as asserting that the perception of another’s unspoken language by means of instinctive empathy is older than language and that the responses of the newborn infant to the facial expressions of adults, or its tendency to imitate these with an unlearned flexing of the appropriate muscles, are in line with these recent findings in neuroscience regarding empathy (1995, p. 89). Besides this, Alvin Goldman (2011) talks about another, more complex kind of empathy called reconstructive empathy. It is a conscious and reflective process that is akin to attuning our feelings with others’ and involves the brain’s higher functions, such as the ability to ascribe mental states. Baghramian (2016) contends that it is the second type of empathy that essentially involves and relies on normative elements. According to her, the first type of empathy is an innate capacity for mimicry that works “at a preconscious level and is a non-linguistic or pre-linguistic stratum of cognition,” and hence, is deprived of normative concern (Baghramian, 2016, p. 35). Because the higher level empathy can be taken to be a kind of Wittgensteinian rule following that operates at the social level, its normativity can be explained by appealing to the social practices of the linguist. However, the lower level empathy that operates at the neurological level is deprived of the social dimension. We can see that although both blind rule following and low-level empathy operate at an unconscious level, the normativity of the former can be explained by appealing to the social practices that the latter, which operates at the neurological level, is deprived of.

We can see that there is a normative expression in Quine’s language learning situation involving blind rule following grounded in social practice.

We can, in principle, agree that rule following implies normativity, but the question concerning the role of empathy remains to be answered. As discussed above, in language learning, the child may blindly follow the instructions of the master. In this way, there is rule-following behaviour without conscious empathising on the part of the child. As the child grows and becomes accustomed to linguistic rules, rule following may become a part of his daily life and he does it at times unconsciously. This does not imply that there is no room for empathy. Rather, there is still a role for empathy to play or operate at the unconscious level. That is, it is possible to have unconscious rule following without higher-level empathising. In other words, we may conclude following Quine (1990a, pp. 42-43) that empathising is a necessary condition for learning (socially grounded) linguistic rules and practices.

6. Conclusion

The paper has reevaluated the normativity objection to Quine’s naturalism in the context of the language learning situation. By starting with Quine’s view that epistemology and language are intertwined, an attempt has been made to establish that Quine has retained the normative dimension in his naturalism by establishing the normativity and explicating the implicit sociality of the role of empathy in his language learning situation. Toward this end, the normativity and explicit sociality of the role of calibrating and rule following in Wittgenstein’s language learning situation (constituted similarly to Quine’s), in its simplest form (i.e., the master-novice relation), has been examined with an aim to aid us in explicating their implicit counterpart in Quine’s language learning situation.

Being equipped with the proper cognitive background, the calibrating act on the part of the master involves rule following and, of course, blind rule following for she may do it without reflection. The role of calibrating in Wittgenstein’s language learning situation has been found to be similar to that of empathising in Quine’s language learning situation. It has also been found that since the calibrating act involves (blind) rule following, it can be interpreted as normative. Since empathising in Quine’s language learning situation, as in the case of Wittgenstein’s, also operates against the cogni-

tively improvised background of the linguist, it can be interpreted as normative. This shows that Quine relies on an essentially normative notion of empathy to explain our ability to learn language. In other words, language learning, for Quine, is underpinned by empathy, a normative concept that underwrites our ability to learn a language. The normativity in the language learning situation is that of the higher-level empathy that operates against the cognitively improvised background of the linguist. The same, however, cannot be confidently said of low-level empathy, which operates at the neurological level, thus leaving the question of its normativity unanswered. By being characterized by the master-novice relation in its simplest form, the language learning situation is a social phenomenon and the normativity involved in it has a social aspect without denying its individual aspect, however.

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