

Chapter 2

Rule-Following and A Priori Biconditionals – A Sea of Tears?

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2.1 Pettit's Solution to the Problem of Rule-following: Response-Dependence

The discussion of the problem of rule-following can be traced back to the Kripkean reading of Wittgenstein's remarks on rules and private language in his *Philosophical Investigations* (Kripke 1982).¹ Since the problem of rule-following is discussed extensively in philosophy, we do not intend to give a detailed account of the problem here.² Instead, we simply use Pettit's own characterization. Pettit himself states what the problem of rule-following is about in the following quote:

"How is basic rule-following possible? How is it possible for a simple creature like you or me, starting from a point that is free of normative connotations, to target a rule in the required sense? How is it possible for us, as purely naturalistic systems, to break into the space of rules and reasons in the first place? This is a basic challenge for anyone who thinks that reasoning is important to mental life." (JD, 243)

Also, Pettit tells us about the motivation of the problem:

The rule-following problem is often motivated by the fact that everything is like everything in some respect, and that from any finite set of samples there will be nothing inherently wrong about extending the set in any of an indefinite range of directions. (JD, 246)

¹Many Wittgenstein-commentators are skeptical that Kripke's reading is a correct *interpretation* of Wittgenstein (see e.g. McGinn (1997), chapter 3). Kripke himself is agnostic about this issue (see Kripke (1982), 5).

²For an overview see McGinn (1997), chapter 3 and Miller (2002). For a collection of seminal papers see: Miller/Wright (2002).

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To illustrate what the problem is about, imagine that you master to apply a certain symbol correctly, say, the well-known symbol “+”. If so, you are in a position to apply the symbol correctly in an indefinite number of cases. If you are a competent user of the symbol “+”, you follow a certain rule; namely the rule of addition. But how can a finite set of examples (like that set of examples in which you correctly operated with “+”) determine just the one rule of addition? What determines the correct way of using the symbol in a new situation? Who is to say that by “+” I did not mean another operation – call it “quaddition” – according to which it is correct to answer “68+57” by “5”?³ How is it possible to avoid a skeptical conclusion about rule-following and correctness? (Kripke (1982), 21)

The challenge posed by the problem of rule-following can – as Pettit himself believes – hardly be overstated: “There is no extant philosophical challenge that compares on the scale of iconoclasm with the skeptical challenge to rule-following” (Pettit 2002b, 31). If we do not find a way to reject skepticism about rule-following, then we “put in jeopardy some of our most central notions about ourselves” (ibid.). In the end, the basic challenge of the problem of rule-following is to provide an account of how we can target normativity and correctness.

In order to understand how Pettit aims to avoid the skeptical conclusion, one should consider two prominent, competing attempts to solve the rule-following problem: the dispositional solution and the communitarian solution. The basic idea of the dispositionalist is that “[t]he claim that [by ‘+’] I meant *addition* would be true if I was disposed in the past, when asked to compute ‘ $x+y$ ’ to produce the *sum* of the two numbers” (Miller 2002, 8). Kripke – and Pettit seems to agree here (Pettit 2002b, 34f.) – argues that the dispositionalist fails to account for the normativity of meaning: “The point is *not* that, if I meant addition by ‘+’, I *will* answer ‘125’, but that, if I intend to accord with my past meaning of ‘+’, I *should* answer ‘125’. [...] The relation of meaning and intention to future action is *normative*, not *descriptive*” (Kripke 1982, 37). The communitarian account – sometimes attributed to Kripke himself⁴ – suggests that “what makes your answer ‘125’ correct and the answer ‘5’ incorrect is that others in your community agree with your results” (Kusch 2002, 210).⁵ This solution, however, appears to lead to a form of general relativism concerning normativity which is unpalatable for many philosophers. We will see in the following that Pettit’s account can be described to aim at incorporating the best aspects of both accounts: dispositionalist and communitarian – obviously by trying to do so without buying in the problems.⁶

³Our example is, of course, Kripke’s famous example of “quus”: “So perhaps in the past I used ‘plus’ and ‘+’ to denote a function which I will call ‘quus’ and symbolize by ‘ \oplus ’. It is defined by: $x \oplus y = x + y$, if $x, y < 57$, [or: $x \oplus y = 5$, if $x, y \geq 57$]. Who is to say that this is not the function I previously meant by ‘+’?” (Kripke (1982), 8f.).

⁴See Boghossian (2002), 157, Kusch (2002), 210.

⁵See also Wright (1980), 219–220.

⁶In response to our talk Pettit admitted that his account can be described to be a kind of mixture of these two classical accounts.

The key to Pettit's attempt of solving the rule-following problem is global response-dependence.⁷ We can describe his proposed solution by summarizing it in three steps (see Pettit 2002a, 4ff).

[First Step:] For a given subject, "a finite set of examples may exemplify a more or less determinate way of going on" (Pettit 2002a, 4). That means that "although any finite set of examples instantiates an indefinite number of rules, for a particular agent the set may exemplify just one rule" (Pettit 2002b, 36). If so, then it is possible that [Second Step:] "the examples induce a more or less blind disposition to extrapolate in that direction" (Pettit 2002a, 4).

Up to this point, we have a classical dispositional answer to the problem; an answer that Pettit himself rejects (see Pettit 2002b, 34; CM, 85/86). The first and second step are not sufficient to solve the problem of rule-following since agents cannot be mistaken if they only possess this *individual* disposition: Pettit insists that the relationship between the disposition and the rule needs to be explained. As Pettit says, steps 1 & 2 provide us with an account of the independent identifiability and the direct readability of rules, but the fallible readability is excluded:

Under the story we have developed, a certain sort of biconditional holds a priori: [...] It is going to be a priori under the story so far that a new case *x* is an instance of the rule *r* if and only if *S* is disposed, given full information about *x*, to treat it as similar in relevant respects to cases that it takes to exemplify *r*. In other words, according to our story, there is going to be an a priori connection between the rule *r* and the inclination in virtue of which certain cases exemplify the rule (CM, 91).

However, according to Pettit, "[i]f the rule is a priori connected in this way with the subject's inclination, then there is no room for fallibility" (CM, 91). How is it possible that the inclination can mislead the subject on some occasions? Pettit argues that we must distinguish between favorable and unfavorable circumstances in which the inclination is operative. If we can do so, then "the inclination in itself will not be a priori connected with the rule; it will be a priori connected with it in favorable circumstances only. And so there will be a possibility of securing fallibility" (CM, 92).

We can see now why Pettit thinks that global response-dependence is necessary to solve the rule-following problem: The a priori biconditionals are introduced to illuminate the relationship between our inclinations to go on in a certain way and the *correct* way to go on in a certain way. But nevertheless, they should allow for the possibility of our inclination to go wrong, that is, in cases where circumstances are not favorable. But which circumstances are favorable or normal? Pettit refers to an account he calls "ethocentric" to answer this question:

[Third Step:] "Normal circumstances are identified by reference to how the participants carry on; they are the circumstances that survive intrapersonal or interpersonal negotiation about how to handle discrepant responses. [...] The account is ethocentric, because it identifies normal circumstances by reference, first, to the habits of response among subjects –

⁷"And I have argued that, if we are to make sense of thinking, in particular if we are to resolve Kripke's version of the Wittgensteinian problem of rule-following, then we must acknowledge a global form of response-dependence." (Pettit (2002c), 50).

say, their dispositions to have certain sensations in the presence of red objects – and, second, to their practices of negotiation about discrepancies in those responses.” (CM, 93).

Therefore, since on Pettit’s ethocentric account normal circumstances are identified with habits of and negotiations over *responses*, it implies a global form of so-called “response-dependence”. This, in fact, is the communitarian element in Pettit’s dispositional account. Pettit sums up:

If a rule is to be fallibly readable, then it cannot be a priori connected with the inclination in virtue of which it is exemplified and under the influence of which it is read. It must be connected to that inclination in an a posteriori fashion, so that it is a matter for empirical checking that the inclination leads a subject correctly or incorrectly. What can the connection be? In particular, what can the connection be, given that we have to keep enough of our earlier story in place to explain the independent identifiability and the direct readability of rules? The answer to which we have been driven, and there is no obvious alternative, is that the rule is a priori connected to the inclination under circumstances that count, by the ethocentric criterion, as normal or ideal (CM, 95f.).

Therefore, with Pettit’s ethocentric account in terms of habits of and negotiations over responses, we can see that according to Pettit, global response-dependence is central to solving the problem of rule-following. Unfortunately, we have to admit, that we have not yet understood what global response-dependence exactly is about, and in turn, we therefore do not see how it solves the rule-following problem without being committed to implausible consequences.

2.2 What Is Response-Dependence?

In order to get a grip on response-dependence, we should note that for Pettit a certain a priori biconditional is decisive: “When a basic term or concept is response-dependent [...] that will entitle us to assert a certain *a priori* biconditional.” (Jackson and Pettit 2002, 100).

Our puzzlement with respect to response-dependence stems from Pettit’s formulation(s) of the response-dependence biconditional(s) and has mainly two sources. First, we do not understand what exactly the so-called “response-dependent biconditional” is supposed to connect. Second, we are not really sure what, according to Pettit, “a priori” means in the context of the response-dependent biconditional. In this section, we will address these two issues separately.

2.2.1 What Is the Response-Dependent Biconditional?

In his most recent statement on the issue in question, Pettit distances himself from some of his earlier formulations of the response-dependent biconditional, suggesting that he has changed his position on response-dependence (see JD, 248, Fn. 19). A motivation for that could have been the harsh criticism of response-dependence

by authors from the realist camp; these authors believe that global response-dependence “provides an example of the semantic path to Worldmaking and for that reason alone should be rejected” (Devitt 2006, 3).⁸ We think that in reaction to this, Pettit aims to move to more cautious formulations of response-dependence than in his earlier papers. However, we do not think that Pettit was completely uncautious before and is completely cautious now, but that he has been and still is cautious and uncautious in all of his papers. Thus in early papers, we find different formulations of response-dependence within one and the same text, and alas, this situation has not completely changed until today.

To prove that, let us take a look at several quotes from different papers of Pettit from 1991 to 2007; we will always compare the quotes within one paper to show that the formulations differ not only from paper to paper, but also in one paper. We will start with one of his earliest statements on response-dependence.

2.2.1.1 Realism and Response-Dependence (1991)

The first formulation we want to have a look at is the following:

Given our story about the concept of red, we can see how it can come to be a priori knowable that something is red if and only if it is such as to look red to normal observers in normal circumstances (Pettit 2002c, 66).

This suggests that something has a property T iff it seems T to normal observers in normal circumstances. However, one page later, Pettit’s claim appears to be slightly different:

[My story] points out that we commentators are in a position to hold it to be a priori that something is red for the participants in a discourse if and only if it looks red to them under conditions that survive negotiation across times and persons: that is, under conditions that count as normal (Pettit 2002c, 67).

Here, compared with the quote before, we have a constraint: In this quote, we seem to have the idea that something has the property T relative to a certain group of speakers. As far as we are concerned, this is different from the claim in the quote before. Nevertheless, what is connected biconditionally in both quotes are properties and sensations. However, one page later again, Pettit states:

Consider the biconditional for the concept of redness. [...] With [...] a biconditional understood in the light of our ethocentric story [...] we are presented with concepts on the right-hand side such that it is not so much a grasp of those concepts, but rather a capacity to display the responses and follow the practices to which the concepts refer us, that yields all that is required for a proper grasp of the target concept (Pettit 2002c, 70).

We are puzzled. Why does Pettit claim here that the response-dependent biconditional connects (the concept of) redness with other concepts? Before, we always had sensations or dispositions and not concepts on the right-hand side of the biconditional. Furthermore and relatedly, we are puzzled with the way Pettit denotes the

⁸For a discussion of realism and response-dependence see also Norris (2005).

response-dependent biconditional: In the latter quote, he claims that it is a biconditional for the concept of redness. This biconditional is also called shortly “the response-dependence biconditional” (Pettit 2002c, 71, emphasis added) by Pettit on the next page. However, at the top of page 70, he speaks of an “[...] a priori biconditional associated with redness – the response-dependence biconditional – [...]” (Pettit 2002c, 69/70, emphasis added). Thus it seems to us that sometimes, *the* response-dependence biconditional is about the *concept of redness*, and sometimes it seems to be about *redness itself*.⁹

2.2.1.2 Terms, Things and Response-Dependence (1998)

We now turn to a later paper by Pettit. In his *Terms, Things, Response-Dependence*, Pettit introduces the response-dependent biconditional in the following way:

Colour terms provide the least contentious examples, for it is agreed on many sides that something is red, as an *a priori* matter, just in case it is disposed to look red to normal observers in normal circumstances. (Pettit 1998, 55)¹⁰

The quote seems to state that it is a priori that something has the property T iff it is disposed to seem T to normal observers in normal circumstances. We should be careful not to overstate Pettit’s claim here: He insists that adhering to such a response-dependent biconditional does not imply that redness is a dispositional property.¹¹ Nevertheless,

[e]ven if we do not think about redness as dispositional, that property does indeed have a dispositional aspect: if they can name the property, then its presence in something goes *a priori* with the thing’s being disposed to look red to normal observers in normal conditions. (Pettit 1998, 58).

This quote expresses the idea that if a property T can be named, it is a priori that something is T iff it is disposed to seem T. Note that this is different from the former formulation of the response-dependent biconditional: Pettit mentions a condition for the correctness of the a priori biconditional, namely the denominability of the property in question. The addition of this condition of denominability is by itself unproblematic, because it does not change the a priori biconditional as it was stated before. However, let us have a look at the following quote: “Why is it *a priori*, then, that if they can name the property, something is red if and only if it looks red to normal observers in normal conditions?” (Pettit 1998, 62).

⁹“It does not say that something is red if and only if it looks red in conditions that ensure that red things look red; it says that something is red if and only if it answers in a certain way to the sensations and practices of those who use the concept.” (Pettit (2002c), 68).

¹⁰See also: “The claim that it is *a priori* that something is red just in case it is disposed to look red to normal observers in normal circumstances” (Pettit (1998), 56).

¹¹“Under these accounts we do not think of the property of redness as a disposition, in the way that we think of fragility as a disposition, and yet the *a priori* linkage between redness and the disposition to produce certain sensations of redness is firmly established” (Pettit (1998), 56).

Here, we have the impression that something else is a priori¹²: It is not just the biconditional, but a new conditional whose antecedent is the denominability of T and whose consequent is the biconditional. Thus, we do not have the statement that if something is denominably T, then it is a priori that it is T iff it is disposed to seem T, but the statement that it is a priori that if something is denominably T, then it is T iff it is disposed to seem T. Expressed in a semi-formal way we have the statement “Denominably $T \rightarrow$ A Priori ($T \leftrightarrow$ Disposed to look T)” in contrast to the rather different statement “A Priori (Denominably $T \rightarrow (T \leftrightarrow$ Disposed to look T))”. We are puzzled about the scope of the a priori here.

Though we have a problem with the scope, until now the biconditional itself has not changed: It was always the property of T that was biconditionally connected to the disposition to seem T. However, let us have a look at the following quote: “And so it is a *a priori* – it is knowable from a knowledge of how we are guided – that a certain mind-independent property will count as redness if and only if it engenders appropriate looks.” (Pettit 1998, 62)

Here, it is a priori that a property will count as T iff it seems T. It seems to us that this is quite different from the former formulations: In all other formulations, it is a priori that something is T iff it seems T. We take it that there is much difference, especially once it concerns the question of realism whether we make a statement about something being T or something counting as T.¹³

2.2.1.3 Overview (2002)

We want to focus our attention to a later part of Pettit’s work now. In the *Overview* of a collection of papers on *Rules, Reasons, and Norms* he summarized his proposed solution to the rule-following problem. Here he characterizes response-dependence thus:

This response-dependence means that the representations – the terms or concepts – mastered satisfy a certain *a priori* biconditional. [...] In schematic form, it implies that, for a given term or concept T, it is a *a priori* that something is T if and only if it is such as to seem T in favorable conditions (Pettit 2002a, 11).

¹²Note that there is also another difference between the quotes: in the first one, Pettit speaks about a *disposition* to look red whereas in the second quote he talks about looks. We are not sure whether this makes any difference according to Pettit.

¹³There are some other quotes we do not really understand in *Terms, Things and Response-dependence*, e.g. the following one: “Consistently with ‘red’ referring to a mind-independent property, [...] there will still be a question as to why that property gets to be identified as redness. And the answer to that question must be that given how we use the word ‘red’, it is a *a priori* knowable that it will refer to a property that causes things to look red” (Pettit (1998), 62). Here, we have a priori knowledge not of a biconditional, but of some causal connection. We leave it to the reader to decide whether this is a new formulation of the biconditional or not.

In this quote, we find the idea – to take Pettit’s example of redness – that for the term “red”, it is *a priori* that something is red iff it is such as to seem red.¹⁴ Note that what is connected here in an *a priori* manner is the property of being red with the sensation of redness in favorable conditions. Expressed semiformally, we can say that according to this formulation, the following holds true:

(a) *A priori* (property of T \leftrightarrow sensation of T)

This impression is confirmed, though in a slightly different manner, by the following quote four pages later:

[I]t is not in virtue of the nature of redness that there is an *a priori* connection between the property and such red sensation. Rather, it is in virtue of the denominability of redness, as hinted at earlier, that such a connection obtains (Pettit 2002a, 15f.).

Again, we have an *a priori* connection between a certain property and a certain sensation. The difference is that in the latter quote, Pettit provides us with a reason or condition for this connection to obtain, namely the denominability of the property in question. As Pettit explains,

It is *a priori* that red things are those that actually look red in favorable conditions because we identify the property that we ascribe with the predicate ‘red’ – we fix the semantic value of the predicate – by the fact that it produces such sensations (Pettit 2002a, 16).

Expressed semiformally, the idea seems to be the following: Denominability of T \rightarrow *A priori* (property of T \leftrightarrow sensation of T). In any case, though Pettit speaks of the denominability of T, what is connected *a priori* still is a property with a sensation. It is surprising, however, that Pettit gives a different formulation only two pages before the just quoted passage:

What is linked *a priori* with being seen as T in favorable conditions, then, is not so much the fact of something’s being T as the related fact of its deserving to be designated and treated as ‘T’: the fact of being denominably T (Pettit 2002a, 13).

We see, that also in this case, the denominability of T plays a crucial role. However, we think it is obvious that this formulation does not connect a property T with the sensation of T because of the denominability of T, but that in this quote we find the claim to an *a priori* connection between the denominability of T and the sensation of T. Most importantly, Pettit seems to reject that response-dependence implies an *a priori* connection between a property T and the sensation of T, which he endorses in the other quotes we have mentioned. Therefore, it seems that Pettit wants to express the following two biconditionals:

(b) Not (*A Priori* (property of T \leftrightarrow sensation of T))

(c) *A Priori* (Denominability of T \leftrightarrow sensation of T).

¹⁴“It is *a priori* that something is red, in the canonical example, if and only if it is such as to look red in favorable conditions” (Pettit (2002a), 11); “On the account developed here being red is connected *a priori* with a certain response: looking red in favorable conditions [...]” (ibid., 15).

As far as we can see, these statements are at best different from and at worst contradictory to his other statements in *Overview* – most obviously to (a).¹⁵

2.2.1.4 Joining the Dots (2007)

Pettit might simply object: “You’re completely right. This was all muddle-headed. But you have not noticed that in my recent ‘Joining the dots’ I explicitly accommodate your concern and move to a more cautious formulation of the biconditional. And that is my official position now. So you’re preaching the converted!” We answer: Admitted. But the puzzle goes on. Here is Pettit’s cautious formulation:

“For any response-dependently mastered term or concept, F, then, it will be a priori knowable that something is available to be named as F if and only if it is such as to give rise to the appropriate response under favorable conditions. It will be necessary and sufficient for the denominability of something as F that it be the sort of thing that occasions the relevant response in favorable conditions. And this will be a priori knowable, being knowable on the basis of considerations to do with how a basic term like ‘F’ is mastered and gains its meaning.” [Footnote 19 attached to the second sentence: “I moved to this cautious formulation, employing the notion of denominability, once it became clear to me that the fact that something is denominable as ‘F’ only if a certain condition holds does not entail that it is F only if the condition holds”] (JD, 248f.).

We think that also this formulation does not offer a clear statement of the response-dependent biconditional. Let us formulate our criticism by focusing on the following question: Is Pettit talking about *properties* or *concepts* in this quote? At the beginning of the quote Pettit introduces the symbol ‘F’ to stand for a *term* or a *concept*; i.e. the term – *without quotation marks* – F. However, in formulating his cautious biconditional Pettit appears to use the symbol ‘F’ to denote *properties*. This is most obvious from the fact that Pettit also speaks of the term – *in quotation marks* – ‘F’; thus, he switches between talking about the term F and about the term ‘F’ and between talking of the denominability of something as F and the denominability of something as ‘F’. In view of the fact that Pettit’s explicit intention for introducing his cautious formulation is his acknowledgement of the difference between talking about something being denominably ‘F’ and something being F, it is astonishing that he does not seem to adhere to this distinction consistently in his own formulation.

¹⁵In the paper *Response-Dependence without Tears* that was also published in 2002 and co-authored with Frank Jackson, we seem to have the same incongruity. Thus, we find the following statement: “It may be *a priori* that something is denominably T, as we can put it, if and only if it is such as to seem T under independent, favorable specifications.” (Jackson and Pettit (2002a), 102). Here, we have an *a priori* connection between something being *denominably* t and something seeming T. On the same page, however, it is also referred to the “*a priori* connection between being and seeming, [...] a connection that supposes denominability” (ibid.). Here, denominability is a *condition* for the connection between *being* and *seeming*. We think, as the title of our paper suggests, that we are far away from response-dependence *without tears*.

2.2.1.5 Summary

To sum up, we think that Pettit's characterization of response-dependence is not totally clear: We have seen that in papers from 1991, 1998, 2002 and 2007, we find similar ambiguities. First of all, it is not quite clear what exactly is supposed to be a priori; the scope of the a priori changes in the different formulations of the response-dependence biconditional. Though this is unfortunate with respect to clarity and precludes an understanding of response-dependence, by itself this fact is not necessarily philosophically questionable. As opposed to this, the other ambiguity we have found could have wide-ranging philosophical consequences; it seems to us that Pettit's biconditionals sometimes connect properties and sensations (or dispositions), sometimes terms and sensations (or dispositions) and sometimes concepts with other concepts. We approvingly quote Pettit on this matter: In order to defend global response-dependence against charges of wholehearted realists, Pettit insists that

[t]he crucial point to grasp is that there is a large difference between saying that the non-parasitic mastery of a predicate is response-dependent and saying that the predicate itself is definitionally response-dependent or, even more extremely, that the property it ascribes is ontologically response-dependent. (JD, 247)

We completely agree with this, as any realist will do. But we have seen that Pettit himself defines response-dependence in all the supposedly different ways he mentions in the quote, so that it is entirely difficult to grasp what response-dependence is supposed to be, and consequently, the implications of response-dependence for the question of realism remain unclear. Pettit himself thinks that response-dependence is consistent with realism¹⁶; however, we must admit we are not even sure about that.¹⁷

2.2.2 What Does “A Priori” Mean in the Context of the Response-Dependent Biconditional?

“Here, and henceforth, the notion of the a priori is introduced without a commitment to any particular theory.” (Pettit 2002c, 52, Footnote 8; same note in CM, 107, endnote 7).

Pettit talks a lot about a priori in the course of discussing response-dependence, although in this context, as he states, he does not commit himself to any particular theory. We agree with Pettit that in this context it is not required to have a detailed theory of the a priori; nevertheless, we believe that for understanding response-dependence, it would be very helpful to know precisely what Pettit means

¹⁶Cf. JD, 248; Menzies and Pettit (1993), 100; Pettit (2002c), 75.

¹⁷Thus, we find the statement that “response-dependence fits well with realism, even with the cosmocentric aspect of realism” (Pettit (2002a), 14) and also the statement that “response-dependence entails a rejection of the realist cosmocentric thesis” (ibid., 17). We do not see how *the same* thesis can both fit well with *as well as* entail a rejection of the cosmocentric aspect of realism.

by “a priori”. Moreover, whether or not there is any a priori knowledge is highly disputed (Devitt 1998). A necessary condition for deciding whether there is any a priori knowledge would be to know exactly what it means to say that something is a priori. This is important also because many believe that the notion of the a priori is not coextensive with concepts like necessity, infallibility and analyticity.¹⁸

In order to find out what Pettit means by “a priori”, let us start with the following quote:

[T]his [...] biconditional is true *a priori*. Anyone who is party to the way people follow their sensations and adjust in face of discrepancies will be in a position to know the truth of the biconditional; it does not require empirical information (Pettit 1998, 58).

This quote seems to contain two characterizations of the a priori; we are not quite sure whether these are coextensive or not. The second one seems to be the classic conception of the a priori (see Kant 1998, B2), which can be found also in other places in Pettit’s work. Thus in *The Common Mind*, he states the following: “Under the story we have developed, a certain sort of biconditional holds a priori: it holds in such a way that we do not have to employ ordinary empirical checks to establish its truth” (CM, 91).¹⁹ It remains unclear, however, how the first characterization in the first quote relates to the second characterization in the first quote. Is it really true that we do not need empirical information in order to be party to the way people follow their sensations and adjust in face of discrepancies? What exactly is required to become such a competent follower of sensations?

A few pages after the first quote, Pettit claims with respect to the response-dependent biconditional that “it is *a priori* – it is knowable from a knowledge of how we are guided” (Pettit 1998, 62). Pettit probably means the same here as he meant in the first part of the first quote. However, we would appreciate if Pettit could elaborate on this notion of a priori since it is at least not obvious that this characterization is coextensive with the classical one. We suspect that what Pettit has in mind here is a specific thesis about language usage. This is also the case in the following quotes, though in a slightly different manner: “[...] and this is necessarily knowable to anyone who understands the utterances; it is knowable a priori” (Pettit 2002c, 52).²⁰

In these formulations it is clear that Pettit takes a priori knowledge to be knowledge on the basis of linguistic competence. Thus the notion of a priori does not only

¹⁸ See e.g. Kripke (1980), Scholz (2009), and Spohn (2009), 31–36.

¹⁹ See also Pettit’s characterization of a posteriori: “It must be connected to that inclination in an a posteriori fashion, so that it is a matter for empirical checking that the inclination leads a subject correctly or incorrectly” (CM, 95/96).

²⁰ See also: “And this will be a priori knowable, being knowable on the basis of considerations to do with how a basic term like ‘F’ is mastered and gains its meaning.” (JD, 249); “It is a priori knowable, it is knowable just in virtue of understanding how the referent of the concept is fixed.” (CM, 196). “But what the biconditional tells us is still plausibly a priori. Knowledge of the practices current among those who use the concept is sufficient to give knowledge of the truth of the proposition; we do not have to know in detail about which conditions actually pass the discounting test.” (Pettit (2002c), 68/69).

seem to denote an epistemic category, as was suggested by the classical formulation, but also a category having to do with linguistic considerations. Note that in philosophical discussions, usually the *a priori/a posteriori* distinction is understood as an epistemic distinction, whereas once it concerns knowledge on the basis of linguistic competence, it is the analytic/synthetic-distinction that is used. We are not altogether sure whether Pettit wants to differentiate between apriority and analyticity. This is especially important because Pettit at one point claims that the response-dependent biconditionals express “*a priori*, contingent truth[s] on a par with the *a priori* synthetic truths to which Kant gave such importance” (Pettit 2002c, 90). Just as we are not sure about the difference/connection between apriority and analyticity, we are also not sure if Pettit wants to differentiate between apriority and infallibility; the following quote could point to the fact that he does not want that: “On such a view it is *a priori* that the participants are correct in a large number of their claims: thus there are limits on error, and anthropocentrism holds” (Pettit 2002c, 56).²¹

We would like to know if Pettit thinks that *a priori* knowledge implies infallibility, especially because recent discussion has suggested the contrary. (see Scholz 2009 *passim*, Spohn 2009, 33).

2.3 Conclusion

We tried to elucidate Pettit’s proposed solution to the very important philosophical problem of rule-following. Pettit wants to establish an account of global response-dependence in order to free us from rule-following skepticism. We scrutinized this account by focusing on his *a priori* response-dependent biconditionals. Our discussion has shown that Pettit’s proposed solution is not totally clear because he does not seem to differentiate between quite different formulations of the response-dependent biconditional. As far as we see, this unclarity is debilitating with respect to a final assessment of whether global response-dependence is consistent with realism. Though Pettit thinks that we can have response-dependence without tears, we are driven to the conclusion that by accepting global response-dependence we are left drowning in a sea of tears. Can Pettit drain this sea by conclusively answering the following questions?

- (a) What exactly is supposed to be *a priori*? How can the change of scope of the *a priori* in the different formulations be explained?
- (b) What exactly is the response-dependent biconditional supposed to connect?
- (c) What is the relationship between the *a priori/a posteriori* distinction and the analytic/synthetic distinction?
- (d) What is the relationship between apriority and infallibility?

²¹ See also Pettit (2002c), 69.

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