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Pre-conventions

A fragment of the Background

In this paper I argue that there exist conventions of a peculiar sort which are neither norms nor regularities of behaviour, partaking of both. I proceed as follows. After a brief analysis of the meaning of 'convention', I give some examples of the kind of phenomena I have in mind: bodily skills, know-how, taste and style, *habitus* (P. Bourdieu), "disciplines" (M. Foucault). Then I group some arguments supporting my claim: (i) considerations about the identity conditions of precedents (D. Lewis) and about the projectibility of predicates in inductive inference generally (N. Goodman); (ii) thoughts about rule-following (L. Wittgenstein); (iii) an examination of some of J. R. Searle's ideas about the "Background" of intentionality. I conclude with some remarks about the time-honoured antithesis 'nature' *v.* 'convention'. | The Italian original of this text was published in: *Ragion Pratica* 2014/2: 605–632.

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> "… because in every one habit [*ethos*; Bekker: *consuetudo*]
> is a matter of importance, since it soon becomes a second nature [*physis*]"
> Aristotle*, Problemata, XXVIII*

1 INTRODUCTION

I will argue that there are entities that can be plausibly called 'conventions', which are neither mere *de facto* regularities, nor rules (norms), but that – in a sense to be specified – have both the character of *de facto* regularities, as well as a normative character: they are, literally, 'normative facts'. This paper attempts to isolate these entities.

The matter is delicate. Philosophers usually distinguish, and with good reason, between rules and regularities, between facts and norms. In each pair, the two concepts are thought of as mutually exclusive. The distinction is intuitive, and it appears, at first sight at least, incontrovertible. The entities that we are trying to isolate are, mostly, at the edge of our visual field – and delimit it. For this reason, they usually go unnoticed, and to see them we need to try and look at them from the corner of our eyes. (These are only metaphors, of course).

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Usually, whenever we discuss particular moral, legal, or political problems, we distinguish between a *de facto* regularity, and a rule; on the one side we have facts, on the other, norms. We do well to distinguish between them. Confusing facts and rules *is*, indeed, a cardinal sin.[1]

The entities that I will discuss are, as I said, conventions. I do not mean to suggest, of course, that what I will try to pin down is the only meaning of 'convention'; nor, even less, the 'true' meaning of the word (whatever that might mean). The term 'convention' has, simply, more than one meaning. For this reason, it is appropriate to begin with an exploration – albeit only amateurish – of its semantic field.

2   THE WORD 'CONVENTION': SOME MEANINGS

As a first approximation, it is safe to say that, in Italian (as well as in similar languages[2]), the semantic field of "convenzione" (the word usually translating 'convention') is divided into two distinct areas. In a first sense, the term refers to an explicit agreement, which is conscious and deliberate, between multiple parties; or, to the result of such an agreement (sometimes, an assembly which is assumed to have the task of reaching an agreement of this kind). In a second sense the term refers instead to social norms, customs, ways of behaving, that are consolidated by tradition. The elements that are common to the two areas are:

(1) The idea of an 'agreement', using this term in a very generic and vague way: a generic '*con-venire*', 'being together', 'going together to the same place (or in the same direction)'. A very sketchy idea, nothing more.

(2) The idea of arbitrariness: a convention might have been (at least partly) different from what it is, without significant changes (with respect to some criterion, more or less precisely defined). When X – a rule, a sign, and so on … – is conventional, it is, within certain limits, immaterial (not necessarily *completely* immaterial) whether X has certain features rather than others; what matters is that those, and not others, are the features that are commonly accepted.

This is, however, only a first approximation. In the semantic field of 'convenzione', one should distinguish between two further areas. On the one hand, there is the idea of an agreement – which can be either explicit or tacit – informed by the "perception of a common interest", in Hume's words;[3] that is, the reasoned pursuit, by each of the parties involved, of their own goals (in this

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1   Celano 1994.

2   What I say in this section does not necessarily apply, in unrevised form, also to the English word 'convention' (stemming, of course, from the same Latin root as the Italian 'convenzione').

3   Hume 1975: 257.

case, I will speak of a 'rational explanation', or of a 'train of reasoning' explaining the behavior of the relevant parties; this reasoning, too, may, in turn, be tacit or explicit).[4] On the other hand, the idea of a shared, and established, manner of doing things, a way of thinking or acting, which is not explained by a train of reasoning, be it tacit or explicit.

This distinction produces an ongoing ambiguity in the use of the term. If one emphasizes the agreement-aspect (an agreement explained by a train of reasoning), leaving aside the antithesis 'tacit' *v.* 'explicit', one ends by oscillating between *contract* and *convention*,[5] or by recording a tight connection between *convention* and *custom* (according to some of the many meanings of the word 'custom').[6] But apart from this ambiguity, one should keep in mind the possibility of conventions – both explicit or tacit – that are not explained by a train of reasoning (that is, conventions which are not amenable to a rational explanation).

The semantic field of 'convenzione', in short, is articulated through two axes of differentiation: the antithesis 'rationalizable' (explained by a train of reasoning) *v.* 'non rationalizable', and 'tacit' *v.* 'explicit'.

If we now try to follow the thread of this double articulation, isolating these different conceptual possibilities, we move beyond a mere exploration of the semantic field of the word. Rather, we are engaged in the search for an explanatory redefinition of the term – more precisely, a rational reconstruction of a plurality of different concepts of convention (or 'convenzione'; from now on, I shall use the two terms indifferently).

3 CONVENTION: A FAMILY OF CONCEPTS

If we cross these two axes of differentiation, we obtain a matrix with four boxes, corresponding to four different notions of convention.

The entities that I will try to isolate occupy – but do not exhaust – one of these boxes. The main modern and contemporary theories of conventions occupy one of the remaining boxes. Let us see.

The box which results from the combination of the two traits: 1. ' train of reasoning', and 2. 'explicit' – that is, conventions that are explicit agreements, backed by a train of reasoning – is occupied by phenomena such as contracts, multilateral promises, treaties, and the like. The relevant theories try to account

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4   The mere *possibility* of reconstructing the relevant actions as having such a structure is not enough. This would make the notion too generic.

5   This is how one may come to the paradoxical interpretation of Hume as a contractarian (Gauthier 1979).

6   Celano 1995, 2013.

for these phenomena as the product of self-interested behavior by rational agents; in their extreme forms, they explain conventions as agreements that are reached by subjects whose behavior maximizes expected utility. (The crucial problem for these theories is to account for the principle *pacta sunt servanda* in terms of rational choice).

To date, the most influential theories of conventions are those of David Hume[7] and David Lewis.[8] These theories try to account for conventions that are agreements (in the generic sense; see above, sect. 2), backed by a tacit train of reasoning. Hume and Lewis – and, in their wake, others – provide an explanation of conventions as the result of decisions by rational individuals pursuing their own interests, in the absence of an explicit agreement (and in the absence of an authority that enforces it).

There remain, in addition to the two boxes marked by the presence of a train of reasoning (explicit agreements: contract; and tacit agreements: conventions *à la* Hume, or Lewis), two boxes left. Here, I will not deal with explicit agreements that are not backed by a train of reasoning. Social groups usually have explicit conventions that are not, or at least do not seem to be, amenable to rational decisions by the individuals involved.[9] The phenomena that interest me occupy the fourth box: tacit conventions that are not backed by a train of reasoning.

This covers different possibilities. The idea that interests me is this: convergent behavior (behavior which is in 'agreement', in the generic sense indicated above, sect. 2) which is not a biological regularity, and is the result of learning, but which is also automatic: it is spontaneous (unreflective), rapid, fluid, *effortless*.[10] Therefore, it may as well be particularly rigid, mechanical, blind, dumb. Conventions – to use yet another metaphor – that are part of the body, in the flesh, so to speak, and have become as natural as breathing, a 'second nature'.[11]

All of this, of course, stands in need of clarification. I will proceed as follows: in the next section, I will provide some examples of the phenomena I have in

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7 Hume 1976.

8 Lewis 1969.

9 Proponents of an inflexible rational choice-based methodological individualism will (implausibly) deny this. But I shall not go here into the controversy between advocates of *homo economicus* and defenders of *homo sociologicus*. It is enough for my purposes that the one indicated in the text is in fact a coherent conceptual possibility – even if the concept turned out to be an empty class.

10 These are, by and large, the traits that D. Kahneman (2011) attributes to the workings of System 1. I say 'by and large' because the workings of System 1 include biological phenomena as well.

11 See – albeit confusedly – Murphy 2007: especially at p. 54: "custom /…/ must be analyzed into two more basic notions, habit and convention" ("customs are habitual conventions and conventional habits: custom naturalizes conventions just as it conventionalizes human nature"). (Here, 'custom' expresses the notion of convention I am interested in). Notice the usual ambiguity between 'custom' and 'convention' (noted in sect. 2, above).

mind. Later on, I will present some arguments supporting the conclusion that there exist, indeed, conventions of the relevant sort, conventions that are 'embodied', and that these are normative facts. The arguments themselves are not mine; but the light in which I present them is, it seems to me, somewhat original – specifically, the idea that these arguments may illuminatingly be viewed as all leading to the same conclusion, and the spelling out of this conclusion.

4 PRE-CONVENTIONS: SOME EXAMPLES

Before going on, however, I should note a difficulty which is implicit in what has been said so far. I said that one of the axes articulating the semantic field of the term 'convention' is the antithesis 'tacit' *v*. 'explicit'. I pointed out that the entities that I am trying to isolate are 'tacit' conventions, 'tacit' in the sense of automatic: regular convergent behavior that, while not a biological regularity (e.g. breathing), is spontaneous, unreflective, fast, fluid, effortless. The difficulty is this: human beings are made in such a way that everything, or almost everything – even the demonstration of Gödel's theorem, or the selection of an efficient allocation of scarce financial resources on a certain market – can, by virtue of a learning process, become automatic. Anything, or almost anything, that can be learnt can become 'second nature'. This fact threatens to undermine our reconstruction. Thus, for example, it is possible that those who follow a convention *à la* Lewis (a tacit agreement supported by a train of reasoning; see above, sect. 3), and for which this convention has become obvious, have a "tacit understanding of it, which they cannot easily articulate to outsiders".[12]

This is an endemic problem when dealing with intentional phenomena. So, for example, each one of us has, in every moment of her life, countless tacit beliefs (I believe, for example, that the apartment that I live in is on the fourth floor); but it is not easy to identify the features that distinguish a belief of this kind from other similar entities, which are in some sense tacitly present in us, but that it would be quite odd to call *beliefs* – such as, for example, the 'belief' that the Earth existed before I was born.[13] Of course, if I were asked whether or not the Earth existed before I was born, I would answer, yes (that is what I'm doing right now), just as I would answer yes if I were asked whether or not I live on the fourth floor. But is this enough to say that 'The Earth existed before I was born' is, and was, the content of a *belief* of mine, albeit a tacit one? If so, there will be no limit to my tacit beliefs (do I have the tacit belief that I am not a worm?). Similarly, returning to the case of those who follow a Lewis-convention which has become for them 'second nature' we can say, of course, that what they

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12 Sugden 1998: 379.
13 See in general Lycan 1986. The example is taken from Wittgenstein 1969.

are doing is implementing a train of reasoning that is 'within them', in a tacit and non-articulated way – just as a tacit belief proper. But it is unclear what that might mean, if not that they behave *as if* they were doing this. But this appears to be question begging. When the convention has become 'second nature' what guides their conduct is, in some sense (see below, sect. 6), what they actually *do*.

These considerations show, I think, that it is necessary to distinguish two senses of the adjective 'tacit'. In the first sense, it is used to refer to a tacit belief proper ('I live on the fourth floor'); in the second, it refers to entities that can only improperly be called 'beliefs' ('The Earth existed before I was born'; 'I'm not an earthworm'). Or, returning to our case, one should distinguish between the sense in which a 'train of reasoning' supporting a Lewis-convention can originally – i.e., when the convention comes into existence – be called 'tacit'; and the sense in which it can be called 'tacit' when the convention has become 'second nature'. The entities that interest me are agreements which are 'tacit' in the latter sense. (The crucial point, as we shall see – below, sect. 7 – is that the entities in question are not intentional phenomena).

Let us now consider some examples of the kind of phenomena I have in mind. Not all the things that fall in each of the areas that we shall now review are conventions. But in each of these areas there is room for the conventional.

(4.1) Consider learning a sporting skill such as front crawl.[14] What is *the correct swimming stroke* in front crawl?

Human life is full of things like that: a certain way of walking, of sitting ... these things are not sets of rules. We can certainly, in many such cases, identify or conjecture relevant rules – rules that maybe we cannot formulate. But *the correct stroke* in crawl (not, of course, *a* stroke, a token, but the type), the way of walking we call 'marching' etc., are not, in themselves, sets of rules.

Nor are they, on the other hand, *de facto* regularities. Granted, when one or more individuals swim the crawl, or march, their behaviors are, under some respect, regular. But *the correct stroke* of front crawl, or the way of walking we call 'marching', are precisely the respect under which their behaviors are regular, and what *guides* these behaviors.

The essential point is that these things are abstract entities (not an actual behavior, but its form); but they are *in the body*: those who know how to swim the crawl, or march, have these forms in their body. *The correct stroke* of front crawl or the way of walking we call 'marching' are tacit bodily schemes, which are intermediate between an image (e.g., a mental picture of somebody swimming, or marching) and rule:[15] embodied diagrams that establish what to do, what is the *correct*, the right or proper way to proceed. And in these diagrams,

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14 The example is taken from Casey 1998: 208–212.
15 Casey 1998: 211.

or at least in many of them, there is a more or less conspicuous conventional component. Human biology sets the limits, a frame. But within these limits we then indulge our whims; and the limits themselves can, sometimes, be manipulated. What front crawl is, is – in part – an arbitrary agreement (in the generic sense introduced above, sect. 2).[16] Because of this conventional component, these wired-in forms (forms in the body, that is) are, inseparably, both natural (a 'second nature') and cultural[17] (I return below, in sect. 8, to the antithesis 'nature *v.* culture').[18]

The point may be further clarified by recalling familiar experiences, e.g. learning to ride a bike. John Searle provides an illuminating description of this kind of process:

> As the skier gets better he does not internalize the rules better, but rather the rules become progressively irrelevant. The rules do not become 'wired in' as unconscious Intentional contents, but the repeated experiences create physical capacities, presumably realized as neural pathways, that make the rules simply irrelevant. 'Practice makes perfect' not because practice results in a perfect memorization of the rules, but because repeated practice enables the body to take over and the rules to recede into the Background /.../ On my view, *the body takes over* and the skier's Intentionality is concentrated on winning the race.[19]

The central idea is aptly captured by the phrase *the body takes over*. What the body is doing, from now on, is not a mere *de facto* regularity, but something that is in between a norm and a regularity: A way of doing things, the way in which 'one does' this or that.

We shall examine later on (below, sect. 7) Searle's argument. But I should indicate a point of crucial importance now. L. Wittgenstein, as we shall see (below, sect. 6), has shown that similar considerations apply also to that particular kind of human ability that is the mastery and use of concepts, or rule-following.

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16 If these things were rules, we should say that they are 'constitutive conventions'. (This notion has been worked out by Marmor 2009, exploiting Searle's notion of a constitutive rule). But they are, in fact, constitutive conventions which are not rules.

17 Casey 1998: 212.

18 A comment is in order here. As remarked above (see sect. 2), Hume's account is usually regarded as the paradigm case of an account of 'conventions' in the sense of tacit agreements backed by a train of reasoning. Hume's well known example of the two rowers (1976: 490) who mutually adjust the pace of their rowing, however, is an example of the exercise of a physical ability. True, the two rowers' actions are guided, as Hume says, by the perception of a common interest: the two want the boat to proceed, and to proceed as fast and smoothly as it can; and they realize that, in order to accomplish this, they need to synchronize their rhythm. But what they do – synchronizing their actions, that is, their convention – consists in a bodily activity that, in it and of itself, does not – not necessarily – include a train of reasoning. Hume's account has a wider scope than it is usually believed.

19 Searle 1983: 150–151. Italics are mine.

(4.2) G. Ryle[20] famously distinguishes between two kinds of 'knowing', or knowledge: *know-that*, or propositional knowledge; and *know-how*: knowing how to do something, even if you are not able to say which are the rules one should follow in order to do it. The content of 'know-that' is propositional: it can in principle be expressed – even though it is not necessarily conscious – through a declarative clause (a *that-clause*). This may be a descriptive proposition, or a set (possibly, a system) of propositions of this kind; or a rule, a directive, or a set of rules. To 'know-that' is, in this sense, knowledge of a set of propositions.

The basic idea is that 'know-how' is heterogeneous with respect to, and therefore irreducible to 'know-that' – in opposition to the idea that, e.g., to know how to play chess is not different from knowing the rules of chess, and that playing chess is nothing but to be guided by these rules[21] (below, in sect. 6, I will focus, following Wittgenstein, on the apparent simplicity of 'rule-following'). Not only in the sense that it may well happen that I know how to do a certain thing, and I do it, without knowing the rules that I have to follow in order to do it, or without knowing many of the relevant facts – general or specific –, or even having erroneous beliefs thereabout. But also in the sense that, often, those who do not know how to do a certain thing are able to state – they know – the same propositions about what doing such a thing requires, as those who, in addition, know how to do it. So, turning back to the example cited above (the cases discussed in the present section, sub 1), are, in fact, cases of 'know-how'), someone who cannot ride a bicycle may well be able to say the same things about how you go cycling, as someone who can do it ('One must keep in balance', 'You must push one pedal, then the other'). The difference between the two seems to consist precisely in knowing how to ride a bicycle.[22] It may even happen that the former has propositional knowledge which is much more complex and in-depth than the one the latter has (e.g., knowledge of the physical laws that govern the complex processes we call 'cycling'), but does not know how to ride a bicycle (unlike, e.g., a child who has not studied physics). To put it with Searle once again, at some point in the process of learning, *the body takes over*.

The question of whether 'knowing-how' is indeed irreducible to any form of 'knowing-that' is controversial. Proponents of an, as they say, 'intellectualist' account of 'know-how' reject non-reducibility. Proposals for reduction, more or less ingenious, have been numerous. I cannot here adjudicate the merits of this debate. I shall limit myself to two observations.

(A) From a conceptual standpoint, reduction proposals, even though sophisticated (sometimes precisely because too sophisticated), appear implausible.

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20 Ryle 1949.
21 Fantl 2012.
22 Fantl 2012.

(B) Recent studies in cognitive psychology[23] tend to corroborate, experimentally, non-reducibility.

Activities that can be the subject of 'know-how' may be of a more or less conventional kind – e.g., to swim front crawl, or to play chess. Which acts constitute 'playing chess' depends on arbitrary (in the sense indicated above, sect. 2) agreements (in the generic sense indicated above, sect. 2).

(4.3) We say of a person that she has style, or that doing this or that is in her style. The same may sometimes be said of groups, variously identified. Style does not so much depend on what one does, but on how – the 'way' in which – one does it. And often it is style that makes the difference: worth – better, worse, admirable, unseemly, etc. – is often a matter of style.

What is style? Taste is a similar phenomenon. Tom has 'good taste' (or 'bad taste'), in general or, more plausibly, in this or that field (wine, cinema, etc.). Maybe Harry has learnt that tasteful people appreciate x, y and z (this or that wine, for example), but when it comes to choosing between new options, which are not already included in the list, he mistakes disastrously: he does not have good taste (a person of good taste would have never preferred q over w).

Style and (good) taste are notoriously not sets of rules. In two ways: first, purported codifications of style or taste in handbooks or manuals ('The Art of ...') have something hopelessly contrived and cloying. It is not so much that the rules are too complicated to be compressed in a handbook – the very idea of a codification (of style, or taste) betrays a misunderstanding (someone who engages in the project of codification does not understand, in fact, what is at issue; the very idea of reducing style, or taste, to a set of rules betrays a certain lack of style, shows bad taste). Second, someone who has style, or has good taste, does not choose this or that by applying rules but spontaneously (those who follow the manual will be, at most, a boor who tries to pass himself off as a person of good taste). Granted, in the relevant fields (be it wine, cinema, or any other) there may be rules, of various types, that cannot be violated by those who have style, or taste. But style and taste, in themselves, are precisely what exceeds the mere application of rules – or, if you will, they are the right way of applying them.

And this takes us to the other side of the coin. Style and taste are not, as we have just seen, sets of rules. But neither are they, on the other hand, mere *de facto* regularities. Of course, he who has style, or taste, chooses certain things regularly. His is a *disposition* to choose in a certain way. But this is not a disposition of the same kind as, e.g., the disposition to close one's eyes in the presence of a strong light source, or a conditioned reflex. It is a disposition to choose in the *right* way – where, as we have just seen, which way is the right one does not

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23   See for example Wallis 2008.

depend (solely) on rules. Therefore, it is a *normative* disposition – again, an embodied norm (*the body takes over*).

And it is plausible, if not obvious, that this territory – who has style, what good taste requires – is also occupied by arbitrary agreements (in the generic sense; above, sect. 2), i.e. conventions.

(4.4) Style and taste are parameters of social differentiation, and of classification and hierarchy within social groups. This idea was developed systematically by P. Bourdieu.[24]

Differences and hierarchies of social class, or of gender, are embodied in styles: one's gestures, posture, or the way one eats, or walks, and so on. "Taste, a class culture turned into nature, that is, *embodied*, helps to shape the class body /.../ the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste".[25]

In order to account for these phenomena Bourdieu works out the concept of *habitus*. An *habitus* is a set of dispositions (inclinations, tendencies, proclivities), acquired (most of them inculcated when we were children), consolidated, which are "*a way of being, a habitual state* (especially of the body)",[26] and operating as "generative schemes":

> principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules.[27]

An *habitus*, therefore, is not a set of rules. Rather, it is a set of dispositions that have been acquired and have now become natural ("history turned into nature"[28]), fixing the *right* way (an embodied norm) to proceed in new circumstances: the "generative principle of regulated improvisations".[29]

(4.5) M. Foucault[30] developed the concept of "disciplinary power". Disciplinary power is a form of power which, according to Foucault, has been a common feature of European society since roughly the eighteenth century (the reliability of Foucault's historic claims does not concern us here), modeling and shaping the bodies on which it is exercised – its correlates are "docile bodies". It works, that is, through continuous, uninterrupted coercion, in the form of indefinitely repeated exercise, and examination; each exercise becomes a phase in a perpetual examination, and *vice versa* each exam is an exercise. Disciplinary power does not seek to bring about the performance of actions, or

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24 Bourdieu 1979.
25 Bourdieu 1979: 199.
26 Bourdieu 1977: 214.
27 Bourdieu 1977: 72.
28 Bourdieu 1977: 78.
29 Bourdieu 1977: 78.
30 Foucault 1975: part III.

omissions, via the threat of punitive sanctions in case of breach of directives. Its typical form is, instead, training. In this way, it aims to model the bodies that are its object to the most minute detail, in what they do, in their attitudes, their gestures, their looks, tone of voice, and so on; and this for every moment of the performance of the activities that are so regulated – at its extremes, the entire life of the subject. In barracks, colleges, schools, prisons, hospitals, factories (and, as always, in convents) disciplines transform farmers into soldiers, unruly children into school-kids, criminals into prisoners, sick people into patients, and so on, through uninterrupted training, affecting every detail and every moment of the life of those disciplined. They aim to wire dispositions into bodies that become 'second nature'.

In each of the areas we have reviewed there is room for arbitrary (in the relevant sense, above, sect. 2) and tacit (in the second of the two senses distinguished at the beginning of this section) agreements (in the generic sense; above, sect. 2).[31] I shall call these entities 'pre-conventions'. The term 'pre-conventions' is not used to suggest that these are things that precede, or in some way come before, conventions. Rather, it should be understood in the sense of 'conventions that are first' (or 'come before'): conventions that are mostly in the background of our activities and thoughts, and that, passing usually unnoticed, delimit their spaces.[32]

5 ARGUMENTS (I): INDUCTION, SALIENCE AND PROJECTION

I now turn to a summary presentation (it is, in fact, the evocation of arguments that I assume to be, more or less, already known to the reader) of some arguments that support the view that there exist pre-conventions – more specifically, these arguments show that there is room for the existence of pre-conventions (they 'leave room', or 'open up space', for the latter), and that it is very probable – in fact, obviously true – that this space is not empty. These arguments are different in their content, in their conclusions, and in their conse-

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31 It is true that these two senses have not been defined, but merely illustrated (at the beginning of the present section). But, as I said, the problem – which is an hard one, and that I am unable to resolve – of satisfactorily defining them does not specifically concern the phenomena that we are discussing; it affects, rather, the whole domain of intentional phenomena. I hope that a simple illustration is enough.

32 I wish to clarify, once and for all, that there is nothing inherently nice, or good, or just, or holy, in pre-conventions. A pre-convention may well be abhorrent. The fact that a pre-convention is normative does not entail, or in any way imply, that it conforms to justice. It does entail, presumably, that it somehow expresses one or more values. But the connection might be a distorted, a perverted, or a paradoxical one. Or, in any case, it may well be that, in the circumstances, its value is very low, or close to irrelevant.

quences. But they turn out to have similar implications from the point of view that concerns as here.

The first argument is drawn from Lewis' theory of conventions. According to Lewis' account, conventions are solutions to recurring coordination problems: strategic interaction problems, that is, that are characterized by a coincidence (not necessarily complete coincidence) of interests between the parties, and by the availability of a plurality of equilibria, with respect to which the parties are relatively indifferent. Given a recurring coordination problem, a Lewis-convention is a regularity of conduct R such that each of the individuals involved prefers to conform to R, provided that the others conform to R (and, furthermore, each prefers that all the others comply, if the others – including himself – do, too), and this is common knowledge among them. For this reason, all conform to R each time the opportunity presents itself: expectations of conformity bring about conformity, and, in turn, conformity brings about expectations of conformity.

Lewis' theory has been amply and fruitfully debated. An overall assessment of its strengths or weaknesses does not concern us here, however. The important point for our purposes is, as we shall see in a moment, a different one (also identified by Lewis himself, and by some of those who discussed his ideas).

The main idea of Lewis' account of convention is captured by what I have elsewhere called the 'dependency condition':[33] when there is a convention (in this specific sense), each of the individuals involved does A (an action of a certain kind) in S (a recurring situation) because the others do it, because the others do it, because the others do it … (and so on). So, for example, a purely conventional (in this sense) fact is the fact that a given social venue is trendy: each one goes there because she expects to meet the others there, because she expects each one of the others to expect to meet the others there; and each one of them, for this reason, goes there – thus confirming, the others' expectations of meeting the others there. In this sense, we go to this place because we go to this place because we go to this place ...

This is, however, only the pure case. Lewis' approach can be used to mold a plurality of concepts of convention. The dependency clause ('everyone does it because everyone else does') can be understood in several different ways, thus generating a plurality of definitions that capture different phenomena.[34]

It is not necessary to develop this line of inquiry here. The relevant point for our present purposes is this. Definitions *à la* Lewis begin with the clause: 'A certain kind of behavior (performing action A) in a recurring situation S – i.e., a regularity of conduct R – is a convention among the members of the social

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33 Celano 1995, 2013.
34 Celano 1995; for a detailed exploration of the main possibilities, see Celano 2013.

group *G* if and only if ...' (as I said, one can proceed in several ways, ending up with different concepts). The relevant problem here is the problem of the identity conditions of *A* and *S* (i.e., *R*); in particular, the conditions for the identification, by the members of *G*, of *A* as a certain *type* of behavior (how can one say that a_1 is a case, an instance, of *A*?), and *S* as the *same* situation that recurs (how can one say that s_1 is a case of *S*?). In virtue of what, that is, do members of *G* recognize $a_1, a_2, ... a_n$ as instances of the same type of behavior, and recognize $s_1, s_2, ... s_n$ as instances of the same type of situation? In short, how do they identify *R*, i.e. how do they determine what counts, now, as doing the same thing they did in the past?[35]

The existence of a Lewis-convention (and generally of a 'convention' in one of the senses defined following this approach) presupposes that the members of *G* have the ability of doing this. What does it consist of?

The problem is, at bottom, how it is possible to *learn* a convention (in particular, a Lewis-convention): "learning by experience", through pattern recognition.[36] It is, generally, the problem of projection from past experience to the present case: what does it mean, here and now, to follow a precedent? What identifies a set of past cases as a set of *precedents*? In short: *which precedent*?[37] And here is Lewis' response:

> [O]f course, we could never be given exactly the same problem twice /.../ We cannot do exactly what we did before. Nothing we could do this time is exactly like what we did before – like it in every respect – because the situations are not exactly alike /.../ Guided by whatever analogy we notice, we tend to follow precedent /.../ There might be alternative analogies. If so, there is room for ambiguity about what would be following precedent and doing what we did before /.../ In fact, there are always innumerable alternative analogies. *Were it not that we happen uniformly to notice some analogies and ignore others /.../ precedents would always be completely ambiguous and worthless.*[38]

Lewis' answer to the question of what justifies one in considering certain behaviors and not others as the proper continuation of *R* – i.e., what counts as 'following suit' with R – is thus: as a matter of fact, we notice the same analogies; and that is what fixes the identity of *R*, disambiguating past cases, and thus enabling us to proceed – to follow precedents. Certain options, and not

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35 The problem is formulated very clearly, concerning language, in Millikan 2008, who follows Lewis. See also Canale 2008 and the definition of the problem in Schauer 2008: 23–26. Schauer calls this difficulty "Wittgenstein's problem" in the interpretation of custom. The reason for this reference to Wittgenstein will be clear in what follows. The fact that both Canale and Schauer discuss the problem when dealing with customs, and not conventions, is explained by the usual ambiguity (see above, 3) between the two notions.

36 Sugden 1998: 379.

37 Sugden 1998: 396–397.

38 Lewis 1969: 37–38. Italics are mine.

others, appear to us as 'doing, now, what we have done in the past'. Sugden comments: for Lewis, "all that matters /…/ is that people have concepts" – roughly the same ones for the members of a certain group – "of 'natural' or 'obvious' *patterns*, which allow the concept of 'repeating successful actions' to make sense *to them*".[39]

This fact – the fortunate fact that, for the most part (there is no guarantee for this to happen, and there is no conceptual necessity involved), certain analogies, and not others, appear obvious to us – is not, therefore, a mere regularity: it is also what fixes the identity of *R*, disambiguating past cases, and thus determining what is the *correct* way to behave.[40] It is, in short, a normative fact.

This claim opens up a large space for the possibility of conventions – not, of course, Lewis-conventions (what we are talking about are precisely the facts that make the existence of a Lewis-convention possible), but *pre-*(Lewis-)conventions.

To realize this, we only need to ask a simple question. What fixes the identity of *R* – disambiguating, thus, past cases –, it is said, is the fact that, for the most part, 'we' grasp the same analogies: certain analogies, and not others, appear to 'us' as obvious. But who is the 'we'? Who does the 'us' - or the first person plural - refer to?

Most likely, the fact that 'we' happen to notice the same analogies will depend, in many cases, on traits characteristic of human beings in general: 'we', as members of the human species (features of the species' cognitive apparatus). In other cases, however, we shall be dealing with local regularities: 'we', the members of this or that tribe. (For this to happen, it suffices that the patterns that are recognized as obvious be roughly the same for all members of the group, not necessarily for all human beings.) And this is precisely the space that can be occupied by, more or less arbitrary, agreements (in the generic sense indicated above, sect. 2), which are neither mere rules nor mere regularities, but which partake of both – they guide action, fixing the *correct* way to proceed: pre-conventions.

Lewis' solution can be reformulated (Lewis himself does so) by resorting to the notion of *salience*.[41] The identity of *R* is fixed by the fact that, luckily (if and when that happens; as it has been said, nothing guarantees that it will happen),

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39 Sugden 1998: 387.

40 It is worth emphasizing a point that, in light of what I have said so far, should be rather obvious. Here, the question is not whether we should or shouldn't follow *R*, and why (this depends on whether the further conditions specified by a Lewis-type definition are met or not; here, we are assuming that they are). The question is, rather, what counts, each time, as complying with *R*: which action would be following the precedent (doing *the same* thing that we did in the past).

41 See Schelling 1960 and Sugden 1998: 404.

the same traits – roughly – appear salient to 'us' (who? See above); and this makes it the case that they *are* salient (they are salient precisely because they appear to be so to all of 'us') [42]. In this way, it is the same analogies – between present and past cases – that strike us. And this allows 'us' to understand, here and now, what counts as the precedent to be followed.

The problem of learning and practicing (i.e., the activity of complying with) a Lewis-convention – determining what counts as doing the same thing in the same (the same type of) situation – is a special case of the 'new' problem (or 'riddle') of induction.[43]

The so-called 'old' problem of induction was raised by Hume: the possibility of inferring a prediction on the basis of past experience is based on the assumption that, in the future, things will continue to go as they did in the past. What grounds this assumption? It cannot be an empirical thesis – this would simply beg the question – but neither can it be a logical truth, since it is, by definition, contingent.

The 'new' problem of induction is this: why the infinite traits of past experience that we could project onto future experience, we select some (e.g., 'blue', 'green'), while we exclude others without much thought (e.g., 'bleen')?[44] What – if anything – justifies the fact that predictive inferences in which certain predicates occur appear – more or less – plausible, while inferences in which other predicates occur are useless, even though the latter predicates are equally well formed, and the inferences in which they occur have the same form as the plausible ones?

The answer to this question seems to be the following: it is nothing more than a brute matter of fact that certain traits are projectible while others are not; and, therefore, that – even if formally identical – certain inductive inferences are (more or less) good, while others are worthless.

This is a generalized version, covering the entire field of inductive inferences, of the answer that Lewis gives to the problem of the identity conditions of a conventional regularity of conduct.[45] Some predicates appear salient to 'us', and therefore *are* projectible – that is, can *legitimately* be projected. "Projectibility is no more than a kind of salience".[46] What fixes the correct way to build 'our' vision of what will probably happen – the right way to proceed in drawing inferences, based on past experience, about future experience (Lewis: following the

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42 If two individuals take as salient different traits, then neither of them is right (this simply follows from the definition of the relevant concept of salience).

43 This is noticed and explained in Sugden 1998: 386–387.

44 Goodman 1983.

45 The order is not chronological. Chronologically, Goodman's argument comes first.

46 Sugden 1998: 404.

precedent, 'doing the same thing') – is a set of matters of fact: 'we' project, or have projected, some traits and not others.

Two observations. (1) This argument, in the same way as Lewis' one, leaves room, opens up space, for the existence of pre-conventions. 'We' project some traits and not others; some traits and not others appear salient to 'us'. Who are 'we'? Once again, which traits are salient – and, therefore, which inferences are legitimate – probably depends, in most cases, on features characteristic of human beings in general ('we' as members of the human species: features proper of the human species' cognitive apparatus). In other cases, however, we shall be dealing with local regularities; with, specifically, more or less arbitrary agreements among particular groups of people ('we' the members of this tribe): pre-conventions.

(2) The fact that Lewis' solution – which specifically regards regularities of conduct in recurrent strategic problems that have a certain structure (namely, coordination problems) – applies, in general, to the entire field of inductive inferences, means that a very large portion of the predicates that we habitually use – i.e., a very significant part of our ('our' must always be understood in light of what has been said above) concepts – are subject to the regimen indicated by Lewis. That is, the identity conditions, and the conditions of use – of understanding and application –, of a very large part of our concepts (those of the objects which are the subject matter of inductive inferences, and their properties), have the same structure as the identity conditions of a regularity of conduct which is a Lewis-convention. In short, our mastery of concepts, or at least a very large and significant proportion of it, has, according to the argument under examination, this structure. And that, *prima facie*, implies a remarkable expansion of the space that could be occupied by pre-conventions. Our conceptual competence – this is the hypothesis – is interwoven (also) with pre-conventions.

With this, however, we have now reached Wittgenstein.

6 ARGUMENTS (II): TO FOLLOW A RULE

Ludwig Wittgenstein famously asks what it is to follow a rule. The core of Wittgenstein's considerations on this issue appears in §§185–242 of *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). §§198–202 contain the climax of the argument.

These pages have been the subject of fierce exegetical controversy, and this is not the place to take an articulated stand on them.[47] I will present the bare bones of what I believe to be Wittgenstein's main conclusions relating to the matter at hand.

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47 I follow J. McDowell's interpretation of these passages of Wittgenstein's (see especially Mc-Dowell 1979: 60 ff., and 1984: 238–254).

A preliminary point. When he speaks of 'following a rule', in these pages, Wittgenstein is actually talking about the use – the understanding and application – of concepts generally. His arguments and conclusions concern the mastery of concepts as such. His main problem is: what are the identity conditions of a concept? That is, under what conditions, when we say (or think) something about something, are we doing the same thing that we have done in the past – attributing, now, to this thing here, the same property that, in the past, we have attributed to other things?

A concept is, therefore, a rule: the problem is that of its *correct* application. (Or, if we got it *right*.) The correct use consists of the application of *the same* concept. The question is thus: under which conditions a set of cases of alleged application of the same concept can be said to correspond to a rule – that is, to be constituted by a set of cases which are, in fact, cases of *correct* application of that concept? Under what conditions a number of cases is a regularity i.e., the application of a rule? What fixes the identity of a – potentially infinite – series of cases of correct application of a concept?

And Wittgenstein's answer is: a finite set of cases, which we were shown during our training in the use of that concept – in the case of many concepts, when we were children, often in school – and the practice, "use" (Germ. *Gebrauch*), and "habit" (Germ. *Gepflogenheit*) (§§198, 199) which, living together, we have developed.

Now, it is essential to understand that this concept of 'practice', 'use' or 'habit', designates something very peculiar. Not a rule, of course. It designates a set of facts. But it designates a set of facts that fixes the identity of a rule. A set of facts, that is, which is a regularity – or a set of cases that corresponds to a rule (in the relevant sense here, stated above: a concept) – by virtue of itself: literally, a normative fact.

And this set of facts is produced in the course of the growth and upbringing of a person, thanks to the fact that this person *does* many things together with other people. It is only by living together with others, and doing things with them, that this practice is formed – this is the only way we learn to follow the rule 'table', 'ice cream', 'walk', '+ 2', and so on and so forth. This is what Wittgenstein calls a "form of life". (There is nothing idyllic in sharing a form of life; there is nothing edifying in the fact that the basis of our mastery of – the ability to properly use – concepts is the sharing of a form of life. A form of life may include, to be sure, repugnant or unpleasant things.)

Despite the usual oracular style of the author, two quotations from *On Certainty* clarify what has been said so far:

139. Not only rules, but also examples [Germ. *Beispiele*] are needed for establishing a practice [Germ. *Praxis*]. Our rules leave loop-holes [Germ. *Hintertüren*] open, and the practice has to speak for itself [Germ. *für sich selbst sprechen*].[48]

Here, the term 'Praxis' means what, above, we called a 'practice': a regularity that "speaks for itself", and on which depends the identity of the rule of which it is the application.

204. Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; – but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game.[49]

Here, "language game" means, first of all, correctly (well enough, that is) using – understanding and applying – some concepts.

Two predictable observations. (1) In this case as well (above, sect. 5), 'we' ('our', the first person plural) can have both universal and local scope. All, or almost everyone, of the members of the human species may share certain practices, and, thus, certain concepts. (It may be the case that the mastery of concepts is, or certain aspects of the mastery of concepts are, common to all, because, at some level of abstraction – as a function of common biological, psychological or ethological traits –, all human beings share a certain form of life.) Or it may be practices, and therefore concepts, of our tribe: the particular form of life, which is peculiar to a particular group of human beings, not shared by others. The distinction, which in the abstract is neat, can be, in particular cases, nuanced.

(2) The argument opens up a large space for the possibility of pre-conventions. If the ability humans have to identify, understand and apply concepts has this structure, then it is possible that what fixes the identity of some concepts – especially, local concepts – are arbitrary agreements (in the generic sense indicated above, 2). The use of at least some concepts would be, in the sense which is relevant here, a 'second nature'.[50]

Starting from Wittgenstein's reflections, quite a natural step is to hypothesize that the concepts in our minds are schematic representations of individuals, which fix the paradigmatic traits of the thing (the thing which they are the concept of). These may be either fictitious individuals which display traits from different experiences ('prototypes'), or real individuals, which constitute the paradigm of that thing for us ('The setter that my aunt had is, for me, *the* dog'; 'exemplars'). This is the path that cognitive psychology has in fact taken.[51] The

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48 Wittgenstein 1969

49 Wittgenstein 1969.

50 On the mastery of concepts (the ability to use them correctly) as a 'second nature' see McDowell 1994: 123–124.

51 Rosch 1973; 1975. Usually, people relate the theory of prototypes to Wittgenstein's idea that the identity conditions and the conditions of the use of concepts, or at least of many concepts, are not sets of necessary and sufficient conditions, but depend on family resemblances. The

hypothesis is that it is these representations of individual instances that establish what counts as a correct application of the concept to new cases, following the analogies that appear salient to 'us' (above, sect. 5). When we think, we follow precedents. The concept – the rule – is the *ratio decidendi* which is buried in past cases.

7 ARGUMENTS (III): THE BACKGROUND OF INTENTIONALITY

John Searle, following Wittgenstein,[52] elaborates the 'thesis of the Background':

> Intentional phenomena such as meanings, understandings, interpretations, beliefs, desires, and experiences only function within a set of Background capacities that are not themselves intentional /.../ all representations, whether in language, thought, or experience, only succeeds in representing given a set of nonrepresentational capacities. [53]

Or, in other terms, "[i]ntentional states function the way they do only given a presupposed set of Background capacities", a "pre-intentional" Background,[54] which consists in a "set of capacities, abilities, tendencies, habits, dispositions, taken-for-granted presuppositions, and 'know-how' generally".[55] And the Background of intentionality is a territory, which is inhabited by, among other things, more or less arbitrary agreements (agreements – in the generic sense indicated above, sect. 2 – that are embodied), or pre-conventions:

> Part of the Background is common to all cultures. For example, we all walk upright and eat by putting food in our mouths. Such universal phenomena I call the 'deep Background,' but many other Background presuppositions vary from culture to culture. For example, in my culture we eat pigs and cows but not worms and grasshoppers, and we eat at certain times of day and not others. On such matters cultures vary, and I call such features of the Background 'local cultural practices.'[56]

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convergence of this idea and the conclusions stemming from the eule-following arument are apparent.

52 Searle 1992: 177.

53 Searle 1992: 175. Searle puts forward various arguments and considerations in favor of this claim (Searle 1983: ch. 5; 1992: ch. 8); here, I cannot discuss them.

54 Searle 1999: 109.

55   Searle 1999: 107–108. On *know-how* in the Background, see Searle 1983: 143; 1992: 194; and 2010: 155. Remember that 'know-how' is one of the territories that can host pre-conventions, that I have indicated above, at 4.

56 Searle 1999: 109. See also Searle 1983: 143–4; and 1992: 194. In 2010: 155–160, Searle shows that within the Background (but the notion is used here in a wider sense than in the text) one can find elements, which may vary from one community to the other, that impose 'normative constraints', or that in general establish the way in which, in situations of a certain kind, people 'should' behave.

In *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995) Searle provided an extensive discussion of the Background in relation to social rules (specifically, in relation to the problem of the nature and role of the rules which are constitutive of institutional facts),[57] the topic we are interested in here. Let me report the essentials of Searle's account, with some comments.

Institutional facts and activities, Searle argues, depend for their existence and structure on sets of rules. But what is, in causal terms, the explanatory value of these rules? The problem arises out of three considerations.

(1) Normally, the creation of institutional facts is not the result of a set of conscious and deliberate, intentional acts, but occurs unintentionally.[58] (2) Even in cases in which the creation of institutional entities takes place, originally, by means of a complex of conscious, deliberate, intentional acts directed at this purpose (such as, e.g., in the case of the entity 'President of the Italian Republic'), "the subsequent use of the entities in question need not contain the intentionality" by virtue of which they were originally created.[59] (3) The rules of an institution, for the most part, are not coded. Even when they are, "most of us are unaware of these codifications". And finally, even if we are aware, "the codifications are not self-interpreting. We have to know how to interpret or apply the codified rules"[60] (this is a special case of the initial move in Wittgenstein's argument, above, sect. 6: it cannot be a rule, of course, that satisfies this need, as this would produce an infinite regress).

These considerations allow Searle to conclude that, even though the logical structure of institutions is made out of (systems of) rules, those who participate in institutional activities, usually, do not follow these rules, either consciously or unconsciously.[61] Rules, moreover, are not by themselves sufficient to determine what counts as participation in a given institutional activity.[62]

But, given this conclusion, what causal role can be attributed to the rules of an institution in the explanation of the actual behavior of the participants to the institutional activity? It is in order to answer this question that Searle introduces, here, the notion of the Background.

According to Searle, as we know, intentional states only work against a Background of unintentional skills, dispositions, tendencies, whose work is a particular form of "neuropsychological causation".[63] This is true, Searle claims,

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57 For a critical presentation of Searle's theory on institutional facts, see Celano 1997.

58 Searle 1995: 125–126.

59 Searle 1995: 126.

60 Searle 1995: 128, 142–143.

61 If we restrict our view to a naïve, pre-Wittgensteinian, picture of what it is to follow a rule, of course.

62 Searle 1995: 127–128, 137.

63 Searle 1995: 129.

also in the case of the participation in institutional activities. Participants develop tendencies, dispositions, skills that, while not intentional, are "sensitive to specific structures of intentionality"; e.g., to systems of rules. In the case of institutional activities, these skills, dispositions, tendencies are "functionally equivalent" to the systems of constitutive rules of the institutions in question, while not containing any representation of them.[64]

This is the crucial step. Here, once again, entities intermediate between rules and regularities, embodied norms (or, if you will, the pineal gland), emerge. Tendencies, dispositions, skills that are in the Background are not intentional in character: they are bodily elements. At the same time, however, they are "sensitive to /.../ structures of intentionality", such as the constitutive rules of an institutional activity; they are "functionally equivalent" to them – which can only mean that they guide conduct, fixing the distinction between *correct* and *incorrect* behavior (i.e., they perform the role of norms).

Thus, Searle concludes,[65] rather than saying, about the participants in an institutional activity, that e.g. 'Tom acts so and so because he is following the rules of the institution', we should usually say: 'Tom behaves so and so because he has a structure that predisposes him to behave in this way', and 'Tom is predisposed to behave in this way because this is the way that *conforms* with the rules of the institution' (the term in italics indicates that what is at issue, here, is not a mere *de facto* regularity: the relevant bodily structure is "functionally equivalent" to the rule: it fixes what counts as *correct* behavior). In an explanation of this kind, the idea of a Background of unintentional skills, tendencies, and dispositions, makes it possible to account, in causal terms, for the explanatory value of the rules of an institution, even when we assume that the participants in the institution are not following rules (either consciously, or unconsciously).[66] *The body takes over*.

8 CONCLUSION: NATURE AND CONVENTION

I conclude with some general remarks. These will be somewhat imprecise and not very strict considerations, because I will make intuitive use of the concept of nature, without specifying its content; and, of course, 'nature' is a term that has multiple meanings, and so we should distinguish.[67] My only aim in

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64 Searle 1995: 141–142.

65 Searle 1995: 144.

66 In this paragraph too, 'rule-following' should be understood in a naïve, pre-Wittgensteinian, way. As we have seen, Searle's argument is aimed precisely at demonstrating that rule-following in fact requires, just as Wittgenstein himself claimed (*supra*, 6), 'practice', 'habits' (among these, possibly, the entities that I called 'pre-conventions'); that is, it requires sharing a "form of life".

67 Aristotle, *Metaphysica*: V, 4.

this section is to make explicit the connections between the ideas presented so far – in particular, the claim that there are pre-conventions – and some habitual moves in philosophical conversation.

The antithesis 'nature' *v*. 'convention' is one of the topoi of Western philosophy, beginning with the Sophists. (The antithesis 'nature' *v*. 'culture' is its modern guise. The two antitheses do not overlap perfectly, but it is not important here to try and single out the differences.) Whether a certain thing – language, justice, the political community, logic or arithmetic, and so on – is what it is either 'by nature' (*physei*) or 'by convention' (*nomo*, *kata syntheken*) is one of the typical questions in Western philosophical inquiries. Conflicting traditions (e.g., at least according to some simplistic characterizations, natural law and legal positivism in legal theory, or the Aristotelian tradition and the modern one in political theory) are identified according to which of the alternatives they favor.

The antithesis is, however, a bit too naïve. Not because there is nothing that is unmistakably so by nature (fire burns) or unmistakably so by convention (the fact that the yellow traffic light has a certain meaning; art. 138 of the Italian Constitution; the Treaty of Maastricht). But because the two terms are not mutually exclusive: there are phenomena of great importance for human life which do not fall exclusively in one or the other category, while participating in both.

The entities I have called pre-conventions – embodied conventions that have become 'second nature' – are of this kind. If and when we glimpse at them, against the background of the things which we habitually direct our attention to, we land behind the scenes of the antithesis 'nature' *v*. 'convention' (or 'nature' *v*. 'culture').

I did not argue, and it does not seem likely at all to me, that pre-conventions are the only inhabitants of this territory. This is why I said that the arguments which I reviewed 'leave room', or 'open up space', for pre-conventions. The geography of this area, beyond the naive antithesis, is certainly very complex and varied. Pre-conventions are but a fragment of the Background. But it is here that we may find the conditions allowing us to frame one phenomenon as purely natural, or purely conventional (or cultural).

Translated from the Italian original
by Marco Segatti.

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