Is Psychologism Unavoidable in a Phenomenologically Adequate Account of Mental Content?

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Abstract

In my paper I focus on psychologism in the theory of mental content and critically consider a variety of it—"intentional psychologism" (Pitt 2009)—that has recently entered the stage in the philosophy of mind literature. My aim is twofold. First, I want to provide a critical evaluation of this new variety of psychologism, considering in particular whether it is immune from (some of) the most famous classical criticisms. Secondly, I want to provide a diagnosis of what ultimately motivates the current revival of the "psychologistic attitude". My aim in so doing is to consider whether such a motivation ought to be taken on board by any account of mental content that aspires to be phenomenologically adequate, and, in the positive case, to assess whether psychologism is ultimately the best option to adopt for this purpose. I conclude by claiming that psychologism can be resisted without compromising the phenomenological adequacy of one's account of mental content provided one is willing to ascribe to the subjective aspects of our mental life a more prominent role than the one given to them by the traditional anti-psychologist picture.

Keywords: Intentional psychologism, Cognitive phenomenology, Phenomenal intentionality, Mental content, Concepts, Objectivity.

1. Introduction

The fight against so-called psychologism is a leitmotiv of early twentieth-century philosophy, not only within the analytic tradition, but also in the phenomenological one. Many philosophers, from Frege, Husserl, Wittgenstein (just to mention a few), condemned psychologism as a pernicious and deleterious mistake with severe and unbearable consequences in many different subject areas. The arguments that those philosophers put forward looked so devastating that the impression one would have reported in the middle of the last century was that the battle was over (score: 1 to 0 for the "anti-psychologistic team") and that the adversaries were dead and buried. And yet such an impression proved to be wrong. Not only psychologism, like the phoenix, raised again from its ashes af-

Argumenta (2022): 1-20
ISSN 2465-2334

DOI 10.14275/2465-2334/202200.sac

ter a couple of decades, but it also progressively evolved in new and even more radical varieties which, according to their advocates, are immune to the traditional criticisms and therefore more respectable than the variety that had been the critical target of the earlier anti-psychologists. According to some people, not only psychologism is not a mistake one should avoid and condemn, but it is the right position to adopt in order to provide a phenomenologically and empirically adequate account of intentionality and mental content or, more generally, of the mind.[1] Whether they are right in so claiming is my main focus here.

Let me start by providing some terminological clarifications. By *mental content* I mean what our mental states represent. For example, in entertaining the thought that *Paris is the capital of France*, I am in a state that represents Paris as being the capital of France. That Paris is the capital of France is therefore what my state represents, or is intentionally directed at. Even though this is not the only possible characterization of the notion of mental content,[2] I take it to be quite standard in the philosophy of mind literature. The other notion to consider is *psychologism*. Things are more complex here because, as a matter of fact, this label can be (and indeed has been) applied to several different positions.[3] We can distinguish at least three readings of the notion as applied to the domain of mental content according to which psychologism would amount to (i) the rejection of the tenet—clearly endorsed by the advocates of the "linguistic turn" in analytic philosophy—according to which linguistic content (or meaning) has explanatory priority over mental content (Dummett 1993); (ii) the claim that mental contents are determined by subjective, psychological features; (iii) the claim that mental contents are entities having a psychological nature.

In my paper I shall focus on the third reading and accordingly address the title-question by considering a particular variety of psychologism that has recently come to the fore. I shall use the label "phenomenological psychologism" to designate it,[4] and to distinguish it from other varieties, namely: the classical variety (endorsed by the British empiricists of the seventeenth-century), and the

[1] This point is clearly expressed by Crane in the following passage: "Psychologism is the view that the study of the mind should not be a purely conceptual investigation. Psychologism holds that there is a single self-standing psychological reality, a single subject-matter which may be investigated phenomenologically and empirically as well as conceptually. […] [It], then, aims for a more phenomenologically realistic account of mental phenomena than is obtained in a purely conceptual investigation" (Crane 2014: x-xi)

[2] In the philosophy of mind literature one can find characterizations of the notion of mental content that are wider than the one here provided. Examples can be found, inter alia, in Montague 2010: 768 and Strawson 2011: 291. According to their characterization, the content of a mental episode is everything that one experiences in entertaining the mental episode, everything that is given to one experientially in having the experience, or everything one is aware of.

[3] Historically, the term 'psychologism' got introduced and used to designate the anti-idealistic trend promoted by those interpreters of Kant (mainly Fries and Beneke) whose aim was to "psychologize" Kant's doctrine of pure intuition by replacing it with introspection. Several characterizations of the "psychologistic attitude" in philosophy can be found in the philosophical literature. For an overview on this topic see Kutsch 2007-2020. Here I shall mainly focus on psychologism as regards the representational content of mental states.

[4] This terminological choice is motivated by the fact that this variety of psychologism identifies mental contents with phenomenological entities.

cognitive variety (endorsed by the advocates of the "cognitive turn" in analytic philosophy). I take phenomenological psychologism to be stronger than cognitive psychologism because, unlike the latter, it treats as psychological entities not only the (representational) vehicles of contents, but the contents themselves.

In my paper I shall critically assess this recent variety of psychologism by focussing on the proposal put forward by Pitt (2009) under the label "intentional psychologism", and consider whether it is true, as he claims, that this variety is immune from the classical criticisms. In addressing this issue, I shall concentrate on one particular criticism, namely the one according to which psychologism ought to be resisted because it ends up subjectivizing what is objective.[5] Contra Pitt, I shall claim that not even his version succeeds in treating contents as objective in a sufficiently strong reading of the notion.

My aim is not however confined to provide a critical evaluation of this new variety of psychologism. Rather, what I also want to do is to provide a diagnosis of what motivates the current revival of the "psychologistic attitude". According to the interpretation I provide, what ultimately feeds such an attitude is the need to account for the relationship between mind and mental contents in a way that matches, as accurately as possible, the phenomenology of the experience that we, first-personally, enjoy when we consciously entertain a contentful mental state. In pursuing this aim, the new psychologists try, rightly in my view, to overcome some deep-seated limitations that characterize not only the traditional anti-psychologistic attitude, but also, the variety of psychologism promoted by the advocates of the cognitive turn in the theory of content. Such limitations have to do with the fact that, in order to preserve the objectivity of mental contents, both the classical anti-psychologists and the cognitive psychologists have ended up drawing so radical a distinction between the subjective and the objective features of our mental life as to make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to account for the way in which the contents of our occurrent states feature in our mental life, that is: as items that we consciously entertain, that we can directly access, that present themselves to us.

Both parties in this debate pursue the goal of accounting for the relationship between the objective and the subjective features that are involved in our mental episodes. The classical anti-psychologists' s recipe on this regard was to sharply *separate* them by ascribing them to different items (namely: mental contents—or thoughts, in Frege's terminology—and Vorstellungen/ideas respectively).[6] I side with the psychologists in deeming such a recipe wrong, in so far as it promotes an implausible picture of "the life of the mental" from both a cognitive and a phenomenological point of view. And yet, as I claim in the following, I consider the alternative recipe put forward by the new psychologists (the "phenomenological ones") wrong as well because, as I try to show, it is in danger of erasing the distinction between the two kinds of features. Whether it is possible to overcome the drawbacks of the traditional picture—by bridging the gulf (or shortening the distance) between the mind and its contents—without challenging the

[5] This criticism has played a crucial role within the classical fight against psychologism, in particular in Frege's writings (Frege 1884; 1918-1919).

[6] The use of the word 'separation' is motivated by the fact that as Frege acknowledges in his *Logic* "in the form in which thinking naturally develops the logical and the psychological are bound up together" (1879-91: 5).

objectivity of what our mental states represent is the central question that this paper aims at addressing.[7]

The road for the paper is as follows. In section 2. I provide a brief reconstruction of the different stages of the psychologistic debate in order to highlight the main features that distinguish the phenomenological variety from both the classical and the cognitive ones. In section 3. I focus on Pitt's proposal and claim that not even his version of psychologism succeeds in accounting for the objectivity of mental contents *in a sufficiently robust sense* of this notion. On this ground, I claim that intentional psychologism should be resisted. Finally, in section 4, I consider whether and how one could satisfy the demands that motivate it without giving up on the objectivity of mental contents. The upshot will be that phenomenological psychologism can be avoided without compromising the phenomenological adequacy of one's account of mental content.

2. The Multifarious Varieties of Psychologism

This section provides a brief overview of the main stages of the anti-psychologist/psychologist debate that took place within the analytic tradition starting from Frege.[8] According to Frege, psychologism is a pernicious tendency, always lurking in philosophy, that leads to treat as subjective all that is not concrete, not located in space-time, and not endowed with causal efficacy. According to this tendency, things like numbers, meanings, logical laws and any other non-concrete, non-actual "entities", are not objective, but subjective, in the sense of being dependent on a mind for their being and nature. The failure to acknowledge the exact extent of the objective domain is responsible, to Frege's light,[9] for a huge series of confusions popping up in many areas of the philosophical inquiry: the identification of numbers with numerals (in arithmetic), the identification of logical laws with psychological laws of thinking (in logic), the identification of the meaning of linguistic expressions with the ideas that those expressions elicit in a subject's mind (in philosophy of language). What Frege did to counter the psychologistic tendency was twofold. On the one side he provided arguments against it and,[10] on the other side, he put forward what he took to be the best "therapy" to take in order to recover from the "psychologistic illness". His recommended therapy consisted in the adoption of a two-levels de-

[7] Trying to account for the subjective, first-personal aspects of the mental is a leitmotif of most current philosophy of mind (Loar 1987; Searle 1992; Siewert 1998; Georgalis 2006). Trying to provide one such account in such a way as to preserve the objective, third-personal aspects of the mind is in my view even more timely and urgent given the recent resurrection of radical psychologistic positions.

[8] Actually, some anticipations of the anti-psychologistic dispute are already traceable in the writings of Herbart, Lotze, and Bolzano.

[9] For Frege the objective domain does not coincide with the domain of what is actual (that is: concrete, located in space-and-time and causally efficacious), but it also encompasses what is not actual.

[10] The bulk of Frege's arguments hinges on the consequences that in his view ensue if one fails to clearly separate what is objective from what is subjective: the communication between different people would be impossible, because no one would attach the same meanings to the same expressions, there would be no common body of knowledge among people, truth would be relativized to subjects and equated with what someone takes to be true.

psychologized semantics in which any recourse to subjective notions like ideas was banned. What connects us with the world (both in speaking and in thinking) are senses (*Sinne*), not ideas (*Vorstellungen*), and senses are objective in the sense of being public and independent from subjects. But what does ground their objectivity? Frege's initial answer pointed to language, in full conformity with the accomplishment of the "linguistic turn" inaugurated in his *Foundations*.[11] But towards the end of his life—and probably in consequence of Russell's discovery of the paradox in the axiomatic system of the *Principles*—Frege lost his confidence in language and, eventually, by making what someone has considered a sort of desperate, suicidal move (Dummett 1993), Frege tried to preserve thoughts from any psychologistic contamination by putting forward his notorious Platonist theory of the Third Realm. According to that theory, thoughts (i.e. mental contents)[12] turn out to be self-standing entities wholly unconnected from both the world and the mind. If on the one hand this move guaranteed the objectivity of thoughts, on the other hand it threatened the very possibility for thoughts to be thought. Not a minor problem indeed, if one considers that it is a distinguishing feature of thoughts that they can be entertained and grasped in mental acts. But how can the mind connect with thoughts if they are ontologically separated from it? Even though Frege attempted to address this crucial issue in his *First Logical Investigation*,[13] the question stayed almost unanswered, because what was needed, to start with, was a theory of thinking, and for Frege to provide one such theory was not a task for a philosopher to accomplish. In so doing, he left the anti-psychologistic stance open to future attacks. The subsequent revivals of psychologism can therefore be seen as attempts to overcome the drawbacks of the anti-psychologistic conception of the relationship between mind and mental contents in such a way as to bridge the gulf, or at least shorten the distance, between them.

One first step in this direction was taken by Fodor. Fodor's theory is paradigmatic of the variety of psychologism that I have labelled "cognitive" and that characterizes all those positions in the theory of content that rejected the (explanatory) priority of language over thought, that was characteristic of the "linguistic turn" of the early analytic philosophy, and endorsed the reversed priority. This variety of psychologism can be taken as an attempt to overcome some of the problems that Frege's theory left unaddressed,[14] in particular to account for how the mind can "reach" mental contents. Fodor did this by providing a theory of thinking framed in terms of mental representations. In his view, and to put it roughly, to think that p is for S to entertain a mental representation that means that p in virtue of the fact that S's representational state tracks the external state-of-affairs that is its meaning. Well, does this proposal ultimately succeed to fully do justice to the way in which mental contents feature in our mental life? In addressing this question, I shall start by putting forward what I take to

[11] For this interpretation see Dummett 1993.

[12] It has to be stressed that, for Frege, thoughts are not only what declarative sentences express, but also the objects of the psychological attitudes and therefore they also qualify as the contents of our mental states.

[13] For an analysis of Frege's account of "grasping" thoughts see Sacchi 2006.

[14] This point is explicit in Fodor 1978. In this work Fodor provides a psychologistic account of Frege's theory of thought by treating Frege's modes of presentation (senses) as mental particulars literally occurring in the mind of thinking subjects.

be the main motivations underling the latest variety of psychologism—what I have labelled the 'phenomenological variety'—that represents in my view an attempt to promote a picture of mental content more faithful to the phenomenology of our cognitive experience by further shortening the distance between mind and mental contents.

In fact, it should be stressed that even though the cognitive variety of psychologism brought the bearers of mental content (i.e. mental representations) inside the mind, it didn't do the same (and rightly so, in my view) with mental contents themselves which, instead, kept on being treated as extra-mental items to which mental states are (contingently) related by some kind of external relation.[15] A mental state, within this picture possesses a content in virtue of its standing in some kind of external relation with worldly items (objects, properties and combinations thereof). But, one could ask, does this way of conceiving the mind and the contents of mental states adequately account for the kind of experience that we, first-personally, enjoy when we entertain our occurrent, conscious, contentful mental states? Isn't it true that what we entertain, think about, in our occurrent, conscious mental episodes shows up in our mental life as something that we "host", and that enjoys a psycho-phenomenological reality that we can introspectively, directly access? This point is connected with what has been labelled the "psychological involvement" thesis of mental content that Mendelovici characterizes in the following way:

> Psychological involvement is a matter of playing a role in mental life, such as that of being introspectively accessible, affecting further cognition or behavior, or merely partly constituting our representational perspective on the world; in short, psychological involvement is a matter of contents behaving as if they're there (2018: 205).

Psychological involvement is definitely a datum to account for. But how to account for it, one could ask, if contents are treated as extra-mental *relata* of our mental states? Moreover, and giving voice to what Mendelovici labels the "Real problem" that in her view affects relationalist accounts of any stripe, "it is hard to see how any relation to distinctly existing items can make them entertained or otherwise intentionally represented" (Mendelovici 2018: 204).

I take these two last points—namely: the psychological involvement thesis and the claim that no external-relational picture of mental content can account for it—as the two most crucial motivations underlying what I have labelled phenomenological psychologism. I take this position as one of the most radical versions of psychologism, for it doesn't just say that what determines content is something mental, or that the bearers of content are psychological entities, but that the contents themselves are entities having a phenomenological nature.

Phenomenological psychologism arises out of a particular combination of theses that have recently been put forward within two ongoing debates in the philosophy of mind: the debate on phenomenal intentionality and the debate on cognitive phenomenology. Let me provide a general characterization of these two theses. To endorse the *phenomenal intentionality thesis* is to claim that there is a fundamental kind of intentionality that has its source in the phenomenology of

[15] A similar point has been stressed by Crane 2014: 9-10.

occurrent, conscious mental states.[16] This thesis is subscribed by all the adherents of the so-called Phenomenal intentionality research program (PIRP) (Kriegel 2013a).[17] To endorse the *cognitive phenomenology thesis* is to claim that not only sensory mental states (i.e. perceptual experiences, bodily sensations, imagistic experiences of a non-linguistic sort, conscious linguistic imagery)[18] have a phenomenology (that is: something it-is-like for someone to be in them),[19] but that also cognitive states (states like believing, desiring, surmising) do and, moreover, that such a phenomenology is proprietary, that is: irreducible to a phenomenology of a purely sensory kind.[20] Both formulations, in the general form provided, stay neutral as regards the nature of mental content. But things change if one considers more specific formulations of the two theses.

What I am going to focus in the following is a family of positions that combines particularly strong versions of them. In particular, as regards the phenomenal intentionality thesis, it adopts an identity reading of the relationship between content and phenomenology by claiming that a mental state's phenomenal intentional content (i.e. the content that a mental state has purely in virtue of its phenomenology) is identical to the very phenomenology of the mental state. Moreover, as regard the cognitive phenomenology thesis, it claims that such a phenomenology is not only *proprietary* or *sui generis* but also, *distinctive* (what it is like consciously to think a particular thought is different from what it is like consciously to think any other thought) and *individuative* (the phenomenology of a

[16] People endorsing the phenomenal intentionality thesis provide different accounts of the phenomenal source of intentionality. For more on this point see Kriegel 2011: 156-58. For an overview of the phenomenal intentionality thesis see Bourget and Mendelovici 2019.

[17] It has to be stressed that PIRP is not a monolithic research project. Rather it is one that comes in many different varieties. Its different varieties differ as regards several parameters. Among them, one parameter concerns the way in which the relationship between intentionality and phenomenality is conceived: either in terms of identity, or of grounding, or of constitution, or of realization. A second parameter concerns the strength of the thesis: the strong versions claim that phenomenal intentionality is the only kind of intentionality (representatives of this position are, e.g., Pitt (2004), Strawson (2008), Farkas (2008), Mendelovici (2018)); the moderate versions claim that phenomenal intentionality is the only basic kind of intentionality from which any non-phenomenal kind is derived (representatives of this position are, e.g., Searle (1992), Horgan and Tienson (2002), Loar (2003), Kriegel (2011)). These differences notwithstanding, it is possible to group all the several varieties under a unique research program. What unifies them is not so much the (negative) fact that they all reject the externalistic-tracking account of intentionality, but rather the (positive) fact that they all endorse (partly or wholly) a given set of tenets that are characteristic of PIRP. In the introduction to his (2013), Kriegel provides a list of these tenets. Fundamental among them is the claim that intentionality is determined by the phenomenal character of conscious mental states and that it is inherently narrow, and subjective (i.e. what is represented is always represented to *someone*).

[18] For this characterization of the sensory domain see Lormand (1996: 242-3).

[19] People who take the scope of phenomenology to be restricted to the sensory domain are called conservatives/exclusivist/restrictive/frugal. Advocates of conservativism are, e.g., Tye 1995, Carruthers 2005; Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson 2007. The conservative position has recently been contested by a number of people (Strawson 2011, Siewert 1998, Horgan and Tienson 2002, Pitt 2004) who have stressed the irreducibility of cognitive phenomenology to a merely sensory one. They are called inclusivist/liberal/expansive.

[20] For an overview of this debate see Bayne and Montague 2011.

thought constitutes its representational content).[21] The upshot of this double move is that not just sensory mental states, but also cognitive ones, are taken to have a content that is indistinguishable and inseparable from the phenomenology of the state. Even though this position is by itself neutral as regards the issue as to whether the property of having a content for a mental state is relational or intrinsic, the preferred and most common reading is the latter one. According to such a reading, the content of a mental state is not something to which a mental state is related by some kind of relation, but rather it is an intrinsic aspect of it. Such a position, which is labelled "aspectualism", represents in my view the strongest version of phenomenological psychologism.

In the next section I shall focus on such a position in order to assess it. In my view, even though it succeeds, better than any other version of psychologism that has preceded it, in bridging the gap between mind and mental content, the way in which such a result is obtained—namely: by endorsing a very strong, literal, reading of the claim that mental contents are psychologically involved—ends up challenging the objectivity of mental contents. In so far as one takes objectivity as a non-dispensable feature in any adequate theory of mental content, the moral to draw is that phenomenological psychologism does not provide a tenable theory of mental contents after all. What I shall claim is that mental contents cannot be both objective and psychologically involved (in the sense of being "parts" or aspects of our mental life). If one wants to preserve their objectivity—as the advocates of phenomenological psychologism by the way do—then one has to provide a reading of the psychological involvement thesis that does not take contents to be "literally" in the mind. I shall try to put forward one such reading in the final section.

3. Intentional Psychologism

"Intentional psychologism" is the label that Pitt (2009) uses to qualify his position about the nature of mental contents. As he says, his position qualifies as psychologistic, because it identifies mental contents with psychological entities, more precisely with "cognitive phenomenal objects" (121).[22] According to the tripartite distinction we draw between the different readings of the notion of psychologism, the position he puts forward amounts to the strongest reading. It has to be stressed that this article represents a change in his way of treating the relation between intentional content and phenomenal character. In it he rejects his previous account (Pitt 2004)—which treated a mental state's intentional content as determined by, and yet not identical with, the state phenomenal character—in favour of an identity account. According to the new account, which he labels the 'constitutive view', "a thought is the thought that p because it tokens a phenomenal type that is the intentional content that p. The phenomenology of a particular thought determines the thought's content by being a token of that con-

[21] The individuative claim is connected with the phenomenal intentionality thesis. Even though there is a close connection between the two theses (one that is not always easy to articulate), it has to be acknowledged that they are different, and that neither implies the other.

[22] According to Pitt's characterization of the notion of psychologism "What makes a theory psychologistic is its identification of objects of some kind with psychological objects" (2009: 122).

tent" (Pitt 2009: 119).[23] While acknowledging that the constitutive view is a form of psychologism, Pitt claims that his view is immune from the classical criticisms. In what follows I shall focus on one particular criticism that he considers, namely the one according to which psychologism in the theory of mental contents should be resisted because it ends up treating contents as subjective. Pitt agrees that an adequate theory of mental contents has to treat them as objective, and in his 2009 paper he aims at showing that his variety of psychologism can satisfy this non-dispensable requirement. Well, is he right in so claiming?

Whether this is so or not very much depends, he claims, on whether intentional contents are identified with tokens or with types of phenomenal mental entities. He says:

> There are two ways of understanding the thesis that one or another kind of (supposedly abstract) objects are mental. They may be identified with token mental objects […]. It is to psychologism so understood—call it ''token-psychologism"—that Frege's objections […] most clearly apply. If a proposition is a thought token, then (perhaps) it is only accessible to the thinker to whom it occurs, it cannot occur to any other thinker, it cannot occur to the same thinker more than once (Pitt 2009: 121).

And he adds:

> But there is another, more sophisticated version of the view, to which Frege's objections are not so clearly relevant. One may propose that the logical objects in question be identified, not with psychological tokens, but with psychological types. Call this sort of view 'type-psychologism' (Pitt 2009: 121).

In what follows I shall claim that even though I agree with Pitt that type-intentional psychologism (TIP) is less vulnerable than token-intentional psychologism (tIP) to the classical objections, I think that it too has troubles in accounting for the objectivity of mental contents. I shall argue for this point by focusing on concepts, namely the constituents of thoughts. That for Pitt type-intentional psychologism holds for concepts as well is clearly expressed in the following passage, "thoughts types are composed of concepts types which are also phenomenal types" (Pitt 2009: 135). The question to consider now is therefore the following: is the identification of concepts with cognitive phenomenal types able to account for the objectivity of concepts?

In addressing this question I shall argue that such an identification has troubles in accounting for the objectivity of concepts in any sufficiently strong reading of this notion, where by "sufficiently strong reading" I mean one in which objectivity requires *publicity*.[24] I shall claim that to identify concepts with

[23] By contrast, in his previous account, the "relational view", he claimed that "a thought is the thought that p because it tokens a phenomenal type that expresses the intentional content that p" (2009: 119).

[24] Here I shall not argue for this claim, but I think that to reject it, and therefore to claim that something can be objective and yet not public would amount to subscribe to a very implausible notion of objectivity. Frege seems to have subscribed to some such notion in those passages of *The Thought* where he talks about the sense that the first-person pro-

cognitive phenomenal types does not satisfy the publicity requirement that, according to many people, any adequate theory of concepts ought to satisfy.[25] I shall interpret such a requirement as one implying two features: i.e. *shareability* and *manifestability* in overt (linguistic and/or non-linguistic) behaviour.[26] It has to be stressed that sometimes the publicity requirement is cashed out only in terms of shareability: to be public is for concepts to be capable of being shared by different individuals and also by the same individual on different occasions. And yet, even though manifestability is not always explicitly mentioned, I think that it too is required to adequately capture the very idea of publicity.[27] To be public for something amounts to not being private. Privateness can be declined in two senses: an ontological and an epistemological one. To be private in the ontological sense is for something to belong to one and only one subject (no one different from the subject to whom it belongs can have it: non-shareability). To be private in the epistemological sense is for something to be accessible only by the subject to whom it belongs (only the subject to whom it belongs can know that she has it and what it is that she has: non-manifestability). It follows that in order for something not to be private, and therefore to be public, both shareability and manifestability are required. I consider these two features as the ontolog-

noun 'I' has for the thinking subject. And his position on the issue has been-and arguably rightly so-strongly criticized. See e.g. Perry 1993.

[25] Within both the philosophical and the psychological literature concepts have been identified with many different entities: abstract, mind-and-language independent entities (Frege), mental representations (Fodor), sets of abilities (Wittgenstein, Peacocke), empirically-based simulations (Barsalou), proxi-types (Prinz). As many concept theoreticians have claimed (Peacocke 1992, Fodor 1998, Prinz 2002), the issue as to whether a given proposal qualifies as a plausible candidate very much depends on whether it satisfies certain requirements that are taken (almost by everyone) to be non-negotiable. Even though there is no unanimous consensus on what these requirements are, the one about publicity is nearly always present.

[26] It is important to stress that while shareability is a requirement on concepts (a theory of concepts has to account for them in such a way as to allow for the possibility that they be shared), manifestability is instead a requirement on their possession (what manifestability demands is not so much that concepts be manifestable, but rather that their possession on the subject's part be). There has been a huge debate in philosophy as regards which question a theory of concepts ought to take as basic: whether such a question is "what concepts are?" (Fodor 1998) or rather "what is it to possess a concept?" (Peacocke 1992). Even though there are divergences as regards this issue, everyone agrees that a theory of concepts has ultimately to address both (in so far as an answer to one question can be straightforwardly derived from an answer to the other). Therefore, my claim that a theory of concepts has to satisfy both the shareability and the manifestability requirements stays neutral on the priority issue and therefore can be accepted no matter how such an issue is addressed.

[27] For, what the point would be to say that concepts are public if a subject' s possession of a given concept could not be intersubjectively detected, at least in principle? If concepts are public, it must be possible in principle to discover which concepts a subject is mobilizing in her thoughts. And the only way in which this requirement can be satisfied is that the subject's possession of a given concept be manifestable in her overt behaviour (first and foremost in her practical abilities to use language in a certain way). Not to accept this requirement would imply that possessing a concept makes no detectable difference in what a subject can do, and this would enormously impoverish the sense of publicity that the requirement demands.

ical and the epistemological side respectively of publicity. To recap, I shall assume that both shareability and manifestability are required for publicity which, on its turn, is required for objectivity. That is: nothing can qualify as objective unless it is public. And nothing can qualify as public unless it is sharable and manifestable. In what follows I shall consider whether the publicity requirement is satisfied by concepts as Pitt's intentional psychologism conceives them. [28]

Let me now start with the shareability requirement. As regards this requirement Pitt is rather quick, because in his view its satisfaction is guaranteed by the fact that concepts are identified with types instead of tokens. He says:

> If (as I will assume) types are themselves mind-independent abstract objects, then they are not subjective but objective […] one and the same phenomenal type can be tokened by more than one thinker, and by a single thinker more than once. Hence, indefinitely many distinct thought tokens can have exactly the same content, and one and the same thought can be shared by indefinitely many thinkers (Pitt 2009: 122).

Actually, the mobilization of the type/token distinction seems to allow for shareability in so far as what is claimed to be shared is an abstract entity that can be instantiated a potentially unlimited number of times by a potentially unlimited number of individuals. This is a move that also other theoreticians of concepts have made in order to account for shareability.[29] I therefore agree with Pitt that in his picture, concepts, being types, can be shared. But, my question is, besides being in principle shareable, are concepts, taken as cognitive phenomenal types, actually and frequently shared among people? As a matter of fact, given the type/token distinction, a given concept can be said to be shared among different people, if the items that get tokened in their respective mental states (the ones that correspond to the concept) belong to the same type. But what is it for different tokens to belong to one and the same type? Well, it very much depends on how types are characterized. Since Pitt provides a phenomenological characterization of them, I think that the correct answer to that question is that different tokens can be said to belong to one and the same type if they possess the phenomenal properties that are individuative of that very type (i.e. the properties that account for what it is for a type to be the type it is: the type CAT, say, instead of the type DOG). Leaving aside the issue as to what those properties actually are, let us consider whether there actually is such a uniformity in the phenomenal properties that are tokened when a given concept is mobilized in a given thinking episode. Intuitively, and by considering our first-person experience, such a uniformity does not seem to be present.[30] One could retort that the appar-

[28] One could assess the adequacy of Pitt's account of concepts by focussing on some other requirement. Forrest (2017), for example, criticizes it (or better: the family of positions to which it belongs) on the ground that it is incompatible with our best theories of how our concepts are structured.

[29] Such a move can be found in Fodor (1998) for example.

[30] For this criticism see, e.g., Georgalis 2003. According to Georgalis, whereas sensory states present both intra-personal and inter-subjective uniformity as regards their phenomenal properties, this does not hold in the case of cognitive states. As he says "When I attend to my intentional states, I fail to find any uniform features type-identified by 'what they are like' to me, neither for the attitude nor the content types […]. To the extent that there is a phenomenal WIL [what-it-is-like] for me on these different occasions, there is

ent lack of uniformity is due to variations in the accompanying sensory phenomenology, but that there is no variation at the cognitive phenomenal level. But what about (inter-subjective or intra-subjective) cases in which a given concept gets instantiated in the mental states of different people (or of the same person in different times) who present remarkable differences in their respective conceptual mastery? For example, do an expert botanist and a layman actually instantiate tokens of the same phenomenological type when they both think about a given kind of tree, say a pohutukawa? Cases such as these have been used within so-called "phenomenal contrast arguments" to show that there is a difference in the phenomenology of those episodes. Some people claim that such a difference only concerns sensory phenomenology (maybe of a high-level kind),[31] but such an answer does not seem to me to be congenial to the liberal position that Pitt endorses in the cognitive phenomenological debate. To be faithful to what he calls his CREDO (Pitt 2011), I think that Pitt ought to say that cases such as the ones considered present differences also at the cognitive phenomenal level and that therefore people with different degrees of conceptual mastery instantiate tokens with different cognitive phenomenal properties, i.e. tokens of different (albeit similar) types. Actually, given that differences in conceptual mastery are quite widespread among people, the above conclusion generalizes: the mental episodes of different people that mobilize a given concept (that is: that mobilize something they would put into words by using the same expression or a translation thereof) often differ in the cognitive phenomenal properties that get instantiated in correspondence to that concept. Does this comport that concepts are not shared, or that only rarely are? Well it depends. This conclusion ensues if one claims that all the cognitive phenomenal properties that a given token instantiates are relevant for typifying it. This claim seems to me to be in line with the individuation thesis that Pitt endorses according to which thoughts that differ in their cognitive phenomenology also differ in their contents. I therefore think that this is the line that he would coherently have to take and consequently accept the conclusion that, besides some rare cases (say, me and my phenomenal twin, for example), people do not in fact share the same concepts. Actually, such a conclusion could be avoided by revising the individuation thesis, and maintain that what matters for cognitive content is just a proper subset of the whole set of the cognitive phenomenal properties that get instantiated. In addition, one should claim that such a subset plays an individuative role as regards a given concept and that it is in place whenever a given concept gets mobilized, no matter how different the other cognitive phenomenal properties that get instantiated turn out to be. Even though this is a possible move, I see several problems here. First of all it is not clear how a principled distinction could be drawn between those cognitive phenomenal properties that are constitutive of a given concept and those that are not.[32] Secondly, even granting that

no uniformity; […] whatever WIL aspects I do find on such occasions seem affected by the specific background conditions in place on those different occasions, not the contents themselves" (2003: 248-49).

[31] See, e.g. Siegel 2010.

[32] One could say that a mammal-ish, feline-ish, small-ish phenomenal character is constitutive of the concept CAT. But what about other traits such as having a tail, a soft fur, being one's favourite pet? The problem here seems to be similar, *mutatis mutandis*, to the notorious problems that inferential-role theories of concepts meet, namely how to draw a

such a distinction could be drawn, and that there actually were a common core of cognitive phenomenal properties that any token of a given type instantiates when a given concept gets mobilized, I think it is implausible to identify it with a (full) concept and not instead with something (a representational vehicle endowed with phenomenal properties for example) that stands for a (whole) concept.[33]

All in all, I think that less of revising the overall picture and less of committing to not very plausible claims, Pitt's account is in trouble in accounting for concepts being actually shared. Not a happy news indeed for a position that aims at defending the objectivity of concepts.

This said, let us now consider how things stand with the manifestability requirement. In what follows I shall try to show that type-intentional-psychologism (TIP) has troubles accounting for it as well. To that end, let me present what I take to be the dilemma that in my view TIP faces on this regard. Let me put it as follows: if concepts are identified with phenomenal types, they do not satisfy the manifestability requirement (first horn); if such a requirement is satisfied, concepts cannot be identified with phenomenal types (second horn).

First horn. Let us start by saying that what allows a given characterization of concepts to satisfy the manifestability requirement is the existence of a determination relation between the subject's possession of a given concept and the subject's practices of use involving that concept. Such a determination relation would be in place if there were an intrinsic connection between the instantiation of a token of a given phenomenal type in the mind/brain of a given creature and the way in which that creature uses the concept in her linguistic practices. Again, if such an intrinsic connection existed, it would be impossible to even only conceive scenarios such as the following:

(1) scenarios in which creatures indistinguishable from us in their practices of use of a given concept instantiate types of phenomenal properties different from the ones we instantiate when we entertain it;[34]

principled distinction between the elements that are constitutive of a given concept and those that are not.

[33] For a development of such an idea see Mendelovici 2018: chp. 7. According to Mendelovici, what we phenomenally represent when a given concept is mobilized in an episode of thinking is a representational element (she labels it "immediate content") that stands for/is a mental tag of a concept alleged content. She takes it implausible that such a content (the alleged content) could be phenomenally represented, because it doesn't match its phenomenal character.

[34] As an example of this scenario, let us consider a world populated by creatures very much like us except for the fact that they are endowed with extraordinary imaginative powers, far higher than ours. Unlike us, when they mobilize a concept in any of their thinking episodes, they entertain a vivid and clear representation of the corresponding category. To make use of an example that has been much discussed in philosophy since Descartes, let us consider the concept CHILIAGON. Both we and those creatures possess this concept, share the same beliefs about the respective category (we both believe that a chiliagon is a geometrical figure, that it is a polygon with 1000 sides, that it has less sides than a myriagon but more sides than a decagon, and so on and so forth) and, accordingly, use it in the same way. And yet, due to our different imaginative powers, what we respectively entertain in our mind when the concept is mobilized is, arguably, very different from both a cognitive and a phenomenological point of view. Same use but different phenomenology.

(2) scenarios in which creatures indistinguishable from us as regards the types of phenomenal properties they instantiate when entertaining a given concept differ from us in their practices of use of that concept.[35]

And yet, such scenarios are conceivable and therefore logically possible.[36]

What ought one to say about them if TIP were right? The answer is straightforward: creatures in the first scenario do not possess the concept CHILIAGON, no matter how similar their practices of use are to ours, and creatures in the second scenario possess the same concept OR that we possess even though their practices of use differ from ours. I think that Pitt would agree with this since he claims that

> If the content of the thought that p is identified with the phenomenology had by my (or some other individual's) thought, or even human thought in general, then it would seem that there could not be other humans, or creatures other than humans, who could think that p without tokening that very phenomenology (Pitt 2009: 133).

Yet, to endorse that conclusion would amount to admit that a subject's possession of a given concept does not satisfy the manifestability requirement. It serves no purpose saying, as Pitt does in discussing a connected point (2009: 123), that if physicalism is true, then phenomenal properties are some kind of physical properties and therefore properties whose presence in a subject's brain is in principle detectable. The fact that their presence could be read off from the display of a brain scanning machine would not make them manifestable in the sense required by publicity. This concludes the discussion of the first horn.

Let me now move to the second horn and consider a possible move that an advocate of TIP could make in order to connect possession of concepts with practices of use. One could retort that to claim that a concept is a phenomenal type does not mean that a subject could find herself in a mental state in which such phenomenal type is instantiated without having had certain experiences (either perceptual—say, having seen cats—or communicative—having been told about the existence of cats and their main distinguishing features), having thereby acquired certain discriminative abilities, having been trained by some members of her community to use a given linguistic label for things of that sort, having learned a body of knowledge concerning them and so on and so forth. So even though it is true that concepts are phenomenal types, their instantiation does not arise out of nowhere, so to say, but presupposes a complex, rich corpus

[35] As an example of this scenario we could consider creatures who, when they deploy the logical concept of disjunction OR, instantiate the same type of phenomenal properties that we instantiate, and yet differ from us insofar as they always use the concept in its exclusive reading "xor" (exactly one), and never use it in the inclusive "and/or" reading (at least one). This would be a case in which the phenomenology is the same, but the use differs.

[36] A third scenario, even more radical than the previous ones, would be that of a zombie world inhabited by creatures whose conceptual mastery is indistinguishable from ours despite their being completely devoid of any phenomenological dimension. As an alternative, one could consider meaning-blind creatures, that is creatures who lack—stably or temporarily-any experience of meaning. For a discussion of the phenomenon of meaning-blindness very much debated by Wittgenstein, see Voltolini 2022: chp. 7.

of sensory and cognitive activities. Not only that. It can also be assumed that for people belonging to the same species (as we humans are), constructed along essentially the same lines and grown up in similar (social/linguistic) environments, not only what each one experiences in certain circumstances is very much like what all the other conspecifics experience (both cognitively and sensorily) in those circumstances, but also their overall verbal and non-verbal behaviour is analogously similar in virtue of their being exposed to similar stimuli and to similar social and linguistic practices (Pitt 2009: 123).[37] On the basis of these considerations one could conclude that the above considered scenarios, while *logically possible*, are not *nomologically possible*.

By means of this move, the advocate of TIP could undoubtedly succeed in showing that there is a close connection between the possession of a given concept and the practices of use that make that possession publicly manifest. I agree on this point. But, does the fact that cognitive phenomenal types covary (among other things) with practices of use show that concepts as cognitive phenomenal types are manifestable in the subject's overt behaviour? I think that, pace the advocate of TIP, the correct answer to provide is no. The way in which the correlation is explained does not bring flour to her mill, simply because the determination relation does not hold in the required direction (from possession of concepts to practices of use), but rather in the opposite one. From a genealogical point of view what come first are the practices of use. A subject would not be credited with possession of a given concept if she had not been adequately introduced to the practices of use present in the social, linguistic community in which she grew up. What is manifestable are therefore the abilities, capacities, skills whose acquisition is presupposed by the alleged instantiation of cognitive phenomenal properties in the subject's occurrent mental states. Maybe, the upshot of such a training is the instantiation of novel phenomenal properties by her occurrent mental states, properties she did not instantiate before acquiring possession of a given concept. And yet, such properties seem to be side-effects of the acquisition of concepts rather than what concepts amount to. This concludes the second horn: if the manifestability requirement is satisfied, concepts cannot be identified with cognitive phenomenal types.

If my critical remarks are correct, intentional psychologism seems to have trouble in accounting for the objectivity of thoughts and their constituent concepts. If one takes objectivity to be a non-dispensable requirement (as Pitt by the way does), one ought to conclude that intentional psychologism does not ultimately qualify as a tenable position in the theory of concepts and, more generally, of mental content.

And yet, I think that what motivates it (as well as similar positions within the ongoing debate in the philosophy of mind) is a worry that ought to be taken as seriously as possible, namely: that no account of mental content can be phenomenologically adequate unless it provides an explanation of the fact that the contents that we entertain behave (and indeed appear to us) *as if* they were literally "there" (in our mind). This is the psychological involvement thesis that people endorsing aspectualism tend to interpret in terms of literal presence in

[37] On this ground Pitt observes "though I cannot access your token experiences, I can have very good reason to think that—indeed, I can know that—you are having one of a particular type, tokens of which I am familiar with in my own case" (Pitt 2009: 123).

our mind of the phenomenally represented content (Mendelovici 2018: 205). Unfortunately, if what I have said so far is right, such an interpretation does not allow for contents to be objective. Treating them, along with Pitt, as phenomenological abstract entities that get instantiated in the mind, does not prove to be much better. Phenomenological psychologism ought to be resisted then. However, in order to neutralize the worry that feeds it, one has to provide an alternative explanation of the psychological involvement thesis, an explanation that does not end up threatening the objectivity of mental contents. Is it possible to provide one such alternative account? In the concluding section I shall sketch how such an account could look like.

4. Mental Content and Psychological Involvement

As I said, I think that the psychological involvement thesis should be accepted and that a phenomenologically adequate theory of content ought to account for it. When we entertain a content in a conscious mental episode, the content that we entertain truly behaves *as if it* was there, before our mind, ready to be grasped, accessed and variously used in different cognitive processes. The way in which such a phenomenological datum is explained by the family of positions to which intentional psychologism belongs is either in terms of literal presence of the contents in the mind,[38] or in terms of the contents' having a phenomenological, abstract nature that gets instantiated by concrete items literally occurring in the thinking subject's mind. But, as I have tried to argue in the foregoing, neither way succeeds in accounting for the objectivity of contents in any sufficiently strong reading of this notion. To sum up this point in a slogan: mental contents—by which, to repeat, I mean what our mental states represent—cannot be literally psychologically involved in any of the two senses stated if they are to be objective, because nothing that is so involved can be objective (in the sense required by publicity). And yet, I think that even though the contents that we entertain in our mental episodes do not run through our heads when we think them—they do behave as if they do, but they do not really do—, there actually is something that so behave, something whose occurrence accounts for the phenomenological impression that the contents themselves are there and, moreover, that accounts for the kind of access that we have towards them. I take the something in question to be *mental representations that play the role of modes of presentation* of the contents. Some people in the ongoing debate would call them contents, maybe of a presentational, rather than a representational, kind. I prefer to qualify them as *representational vehicles having a presentational side*. They resemble somewhat to the vehicles acknowledged within the computational-representational framework (think for example to Fodor's MOPs in his 1998), but differ from them because, besides having formal properties, they also have qualitative/phenomenal properties (they are concrete mental entities having both a psychological and a phenomenological reality). Their qualitative properties are what accounts for the presentational role that consciously occurring representational vehicles play. According to the view I wish to promote, when I consciously think a thought (say, that the magnolia in my garden has

[38] As far as concepts are concerned, for example, Mendelovici says that there is in these cases a phenomenally represented content (she labels it "immediate content") that is "before our mind's eye" or that "runs through our heads" (2018: 127).

bloomed) something gets tokened in my mind, and what gets thus tokened is the way in which what my thought represents (an abstract, non-phenomenological entity) presents itself to me.

Curiously, Pitt himself in his (2009) considers the possibility of accounting for his phenomenological types in a similar way, but he rules it out. He takes such an option into account in his discussion of what he labels the 'propositional objection' (i.e. how can thought-contents, treated as phenomenal types, be propositions given that they patently differ from widely accepted philosophical views about the nature of propositions?). In addressing this issue, Pitt acknowledges that a possible response could be to treat phenomenal types as modes of presentation of propositions (as ordinarily understood). But he rejects such a move,[39] and concludes that phenomenal types are intentional contents that are neither propositions nor modes of presentation thereof. Besides the remarks previously made as regards objectivity, I find his proposal problematic also as regards the issue of the relationship between thought-contents and sentence-contents. In fact, saying that thought-contents are not propositions makes it difficult (if not impossible) to account for the parallelism (known as "Vendler's condition") between thinking and saying (the idea that the things we can be said to think are the very same things we can be said to *say*).[40] Of course one could restore the parallelism by claiming that not even sentence-content is propositional and that (phenomenal)-intentional psychologism also applies to the linguistic domain. I personally find such a suggestion (which, for the record, is not the one that Pitt ultimately adopts) unacceptable, but I cannot enter into it now. In my view, the best move to make for one who wants to preserve the idea that sentence-content is propositional, and also be in a position to adequately account for all those phenomena concerning the relationship between mental and linguistic content, is to abandon the idea that mental contents are phenomenal types. This leaves open the possibility of saying that phenomenal types are modes of presentation of the mental content of conscious states that get instantiated by concrete, particular items in the subject's mind.

My proposal is therefore the following: mental contents are abstract, mind-independent entities having typically a propositional structure. Their mind-independence allows for them to be not only shareable but also actually shared, and their propositional structure allows for them to be expressed in language and therefore to be manifestable in overt linguistic behavior. Whenever a mental content is entertained (either consciously or non-consciously), a representational vehicle gets instantiated in the thinking subject's mind/brain. When a given content is consciously entertained, the vehicle that gets instantiated possesses not only representational properties (the ones that account for what is represent-

[39] Pitt's reason for so doing is that such a move would re-propose the problems of the relational view he (2004) previously endorsed and subsequently abandoned in favour of the constitutive view (2009: 135).

[40] Pitt is well aware of this problem and says "The idea that thought-contents and sentence-contents are the same kinds of things […] allows for efficient explanations of a variety of phenomena, including language understanding, language use, the intentionality of language, the structural isomorphisms of language and thought, and the form of propositional-attitude attributions" (2009: 134).

ed), but also presentational ones.[41] These latter properties account for the way in which what is represented is presented/given to the thinking subject, and their having such a presentational role is made possible by their qualitative-phenomenal nature. The psychological involvement thesis is accepted (mental contents do actually behave *as if* they were "there", in the mind), but the way in which the phenomenological datum is explained is radically different: the reason why mental contents do so behave is that in conscious thinking they are associated with (subjective, mind-dependent) entities that really and literally run through our heads, and that play the role of presenting those contents to us. They do so by "hinting at them", by "giving us a feeling" of what they stand for.

That in thinking episodes there is a complex interweaving of objective and subjective features was very clear to Frege, the analytic forefather of the anti-psychologistic dispute, and even though in *The Foundations* he put as a methodological maxim "always to separate the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective" (Frege 1884: xi-x), he did not strictly comply with it when in *The Thought* he tried to address the issue of what it is to grasp a thought. There, he went as far as to admit that subjective elements (*Vorstellungen*) do actually play a role in connecting the second with the "third realm" (the psychological/subjective domain with the logical/objective one). And yet, he did not go on developing this idea,[42] nor did he consider the possibility of treating those subjective elements that act as bridges between mind and thoughts as modes of presentation of the thoughts themselves. Frege could not have accepted that something subjective could function as a mode of presentation of a thought for at least two reasons. First, because in his view a necessary (albeit not sufficient) condition for something to be a mode of presentation (a sense) is for it to be objective, and, secondly, because he thought that nothing that is objective (either of the third or of the first realm) could have been given by something subjective. The reason why he ruled this out is that he took modes of presentation to provide identity criteria of the presented entity. Maybe he was right as regards his modes of presentation (senses)—let us use the label 'objective' to qualify them—but once one distinguishes them from the particular mental vehicles that get instantiated in the mind of a thinking subject, one can reject the idea that such mental elements—let us call them "subjectivemodes of presentation"—[43] pro-

[41] On the issue of the differences between conscious and non-conscious representations see e.g. Kriegel 2013b.

[42] For a recent development of a similar idea see Georgalis 2006 where he presents a picture that distinguishes between thoughts (in Frege's sense) and thought-tokens, characterizing the latter as what an agent is actually thinking on a given occasion. Even though I am sympathetic with Georgalis's picture, and in particular with his acknowledgment of the role of subjective features in thinking (what he labels 'minimal content'), I prefer to apply the type/token distinction at the level of vehicles instead of at the level of contents.

[43] Instead of distinguishing them from (Fregean) senses by using the qualification 'subjective', it could be preferable to use a different label for them (maybe 'manners of presentation' would do a better service), because they actually are different kinds of entities. Senses are contents (either propositional or sub-propositional), whereas subjective modes of presentation are vehicles, that is bearers of content. I take my distinction to differ from the one that Mendelovici (2019) draws between immediate and reflective senses. While her immediate senses are meant to account for semantic differences, differences in what we think, my subjective modes/manners of presentation are meant to account for differ-

vide identity criteria and claim that their only role is to provide the subject with knowledge of what she is entertaining.

What ensues from this picture is a radical revision of some current ideas about the so-called psychological involvement thesis. Mental contents are psychologically involved only indirectly, that is via the direct psychological involvement of their representational vehicles. And yet, even though the contents that our mental states hint at are not "citizens of the mental realm", they are not "citizens of a third realm" either. They are abstract entities, all right, but they are not unconnected with the mind. What connect them to the mind are the concrete, first-personal mental representations that literally feature in our mind and that play the role of (subjective) modes of presentation of mental contents.[44]

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ences in how we entertain what we think. This distinction between the "what-aspects" and the "how aspects" of our conscious episodes is clearly drawn by Loar 2003.

[44] Acknowledgments: Previous versions of this work have been presented in several conferences both in Italy and abroad (2021 "Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society", University of Hertfordshire; 2021 SIFA Conference "Shaping the Future", Noto (SR); 2022 Bergamo's Workshop "The Borders of Cognition"). I would like to thank the participants for their comments and observations. In particular: Fabrizio Calzavarini, Giulia Martina, William Ramsey, Alberto Voltolini. This work has been carried out within the "Mark of the Mental" (MOM) 2017 PRIN Project (No. 2017P9E9NF_003).

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