Inferentialism and the normativity trilemma*

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Abstract

It is common to base an inferential semantics on a social, normative pragmatics, thus conceiving meaning as consisting in certain normative relations (Wittgenstein, Sellars, Brandom). This position faces a trilemma, which is of wider application, concerning all normative statements: (1) Normative statements are true or false. Regarding a certain normative statement as true does not imply that it is true, not even if a whole community takes the statement in question to be true (cognitivism). (2) There are no normative entities in the world that make normative statements true (naturalism). (3) It is not possible to deduce normative statements from descriptive statements (naturalistic fallacy). Each of these principles is well grounded considered in isolation, but their conjunction is inconsistent. We have to give up one of these principles. I shall argue in favour of abandoning (3) and outline a naturalistic account of the normative relations that constitute meaning in an inferentialist perspective, while preserving the objectivity of meaning.

1. The trilemma

According to inferential semantics, the meaning of a statement (and the content of a concept or a belief) consists in certain inferential relations. In the tradition that can be traced back to Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical investigations* (1953) and Wilfrid Sellars' *Empiricism and the philosophy of mind* (1956 / edition as monograph with study guide 1997), these inferential relations are determined by social, normative practices. Consequently, these relations are normative. The most elaborate account of that position is Robert Brandom's *Making it explicit* (1994). Following Brandom, if a person makes a statement (or has a belief) of a certain type, she is *committed* to certain statements of other types, she is *entitled* to certain statements of other types, and she is *precluded from being entitled* to certain statements of other types. Let us consider an example. In an appropriate situation, a person makes the statement

(1) The animal over there in the water is a whale.

The person then is *committed* to

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(2) The animal over there in the water is a mammal.

The person then is *entitled* to

(3) The animal over there in the water has meat that some people like.

The person then is *precluded from being entitled* to

(4) The animal over there in the water is a fish.

14 Statements of the type "Person x is committed to …, is entitled to …, is precluded from being entitled to …" are normative statements. Meaning (content) is normative in the sense that the meaning of the statements and the content of the beliefs of a person are expressed by such normative statements.

Where do the norms come from? Brandom proposes a normative phenomenalism that traces norms back to normative attitudes which persons adopt towards each other. But he does not endorse reductionism: normative statements cannot be reduced to statements describing behavioural dispositions of persons in a naturalistic vocabulary.

The aim of this paper is, first, to show that Brandom's position leads to a trilemma (this section), and, second, to discuss the possible ways out of this trilemma (section 2). I shall plead in favour of a naturalistic solution and apply this solution to meaning norms as determined by social practices (sections 3 & 4).

The trilemma is a general one. It concerns all norms. Let us therefore call it the "normativity trilemma". The trilemma consists in the fact that each of the following three principles is well grounded taken individually, but that their conjunction cannot be true:

1) *cognitivism*: Normative statements are true or false. Taking a normative statement to be true does not imply its truth – not even if a whole community takes the statement in question to be true.
2) *naturalism*: There are no norms out there in the world over and above the physical entities.
3) *naturalistic fallacy*: It is a fallacy to seek to deduce normative statements from sets of premises that contain only descriptive statements.

Cognitivism implies that if a normative statement is true, there is something beyond communal assent that makes it true. Whether the normative statements that we accept and thus take to be true are in fact true does not depend on us, but on something beyond us that we seek to discover. *Naturalism* implies that there is nothing beyond the physical entities that makes normative statements true. By physical entities, we understand the whole domain of what can be described in the vocabulary of the natural sciences. *Naturalistic fallacy* excludes the possibility to get from statements in the vocabulary of the natural sciences to normative statements. This principle thereby leads to the conclusion that nothing physical, described by statements in the vocabulary of the natural sciences, makes normative statements true.

In order to reach this conclusion, we need the following auxiliary premise: if an entity or a set of entities x makes true a descriptive statement of the type P 15 and a normative statement of the type N (or any other two statements belonging to two different classes of statements),

there is a logical way of deduction that leads from the one statement to the other one. An argument for this auxiliary premise will become evident in section 2. Let us simply note here that by entities, we do not understand a coarse-grained individuation in terms of substances or events that may instantiate properties of different types, but a fine-grained individuation in terms of property tokens. An entity, in short, is a property token.

The problem then is this one: cognitivism calls for truthmakers of normative statements beyond communal assent. Naturalism tells us that there are no norms out there in the world over and above the physical entities that could make normative statements true. The principle of the naturalistic fallacy leads to the conclusion that physical entities cannot serve as truthmakers for normative statements. The trilemma can be put as follows:

a) *Cognitivism and naturalism imply that the principle of the naturalistic fallacy cannot be true*. If there are truthmakers of normative statements beyond communal assent and if there are no norms out there in the world over and above the physical entities that make normative statements true, then physical entities have to serve as truthmakers for normative statements. Consequently, given the mentioned auxiliary premise, it cannot be in general a fallacy to seek to deduce normative statements from sets of premises that contain only descriptive, physical statements.

b) *Cognitivism and the principle of the naturalistic fallacy imply that naturalism cannot be true*. If there are truthmakers of normative statements beyond communal assent and if physical entities do not make normative statements true, then there have to be norms out there in the world over and above the physical entities that make normative statements true.

c) *Naturalism and the principle of the naturalistic fallacy imply that cognitivism cannot be true*. If there are no norms out there in the world over and above the physical entities that serve as truthmakers for normative statements and if physical entities do not make normative statements true, then there are no truthmakers for normative statements: there then is no distinction between taking a normative statement to be true – at least in the case of a whole community – and its being true.

This is a trilemma because each of the three principles cognitivism, naturalism and naturalistic fallacy is well grounded taken individually, but considering them together shows that one of these principles has to be abandoned.

2.   *The possible solutions*

16 We can solve this trilemma only by giving up one of the mentioned three principles. There are thus exactly three possibilities of solution, consisting in abandoning one of these principles and providing an argument why it is acceptable to reject the principle in question.

If we abandon cognitivism, we are committed to social relativism. We can in that case no longer maintain that normative statements are simply true or false. The truth or falsity of these statements reduces to what the members of certain social groups take to be true or false. In other words, if the members of a certain social community take certain normative statements to be true or false, then these statements are true or false; their truth-value is relative to the normative attitudes of the members of a certain community.

If we abandon cognitivism, we thus reject the claim to objectivity of normative statements. Assume for example that the members of a certain social community draw a normative, inferential connection between the concept of being a whale and the concept of being a fish.

That is to say, a person who makes a statement of the type "*x* is a whale" is in the light of the members of this community committed to a statement of the type "*x* is a fish". If we abandon cognitivism, we can only take notice of the fact that for the members of this community, there is a normative, inferential link between the concept of being a whale and the concept of being a fish. But we cannot say that it is simply false to draw such a link: the members of the community in question take a person who makes a statement of the type "*x* is a whale" to be committed to a statement of the type "*x* is a fish"; in fact, however, any person who makes a statement of the former type is precluded from being entitled to make a statement of the latter type. We can adopt such a position only on the presupposition of cognitivism – that is, by presupposing that there is something beyond the social community in question (and indeed beyond any social community) that makes the normative statements that the members of the community in question endorse true or false.

The same applies to moral normative statements. Assume for example that the members of a certain social community take slavery to be morally right – that is, they take it to be morally right to hold the members of other social communities as slaves. If we abandon cognitivism, we can only say that slavery is morally wrong *by our standards* – in our community, we accept the statement "Slavery is morally wrong", in that community, people accept the statement "Slavery is morally right"; but we cannot maintain that slavery is *simply* morally wrong. If one regards moral normative statements to be simply true or false, one 17 presupposes that there is something beyond the practices of *any* social community that makes these statements true or false.

If we abandon cognitivism, we end up in a sort of scepticism. This scepticism is a philosophical position that one can obtain easily. It simply consists in rejecting the claim that there is something in the world that makes normative statements true or false – in distinction to individual persons or groups of persons taking such statements to be true or false. Let us try to maintain a more substantial philosophical position, endorsing cognitivism.

If we abandon naturalism, we are committed to ontological dualism. Over and above the physical entities, there is something normative out there in the world that makes normative statements true if they are true. We can thus uphold cognitivism and hence the position according to which normative statements have an objective truth value that is distinct from our normative attitudes, being simply true or false. We are in that case, however, committed to an ontology that faces strong objections. The most important objection is that any form of an ontological dualism runs into what is known as the causal exclusion problem: the physical domain is causally complete – every physical entity has a complete physical cause insofar as it has a cause at all. Non-physical, normative truthmakers for normative statements in the world would therefore be entities that cannot have any physical effects, including no effects on the behaviour of persons. (It is logically possible to maintain that some physical effects are overdetermined by physical and non-physical, normative causes. However, in that case, the non-physical, normative causes would not cause anything that is not at the same time caused by physical causes as well. Since there always are physical causes, a world with such additional non-physical, normative causes would be indiscernible from a world in which the normative, being non-physical, is an epiphenomenon) (see, as regards this problem in general, the detailed argumentation by Kim 2005, in particular chapter 2).

Such an ontological dualism does not have to take the form of a Platonist dualism of two distinct *realms of being*. One can also simply maintain a dualism of physical and non-

physical, normative *properties.* Taking property dualism into account is the reason why I adopted a fine-grained individuation of entities in terms of property tokens in section 1. The problem of property dualism is that the tokens of the non-physical, normative properties are epiphenomenal with respect to the physical. If one upholds cognitivism and the principle of the 18 naturalistic fallacy, one is in any case committed at least to property dualism. Consider the position of McDowell (1994). He maintains an enlarged naturalism according to which, in brief, the physical as such is normative or includes something normative. However, McDowell simply employs a misleading terminology. If his position is not to be mystical or unintelligible, he cannot want to deny that the properties physics describes – such as mass, charge, position, velocity and the like – are nothing normative. But in that case he is committed to an ontological dualism of such properties and the properties that are normative.

In brief, if we abandon naturalism, we can maintain cognitivism, but the price is too high. More precisely, the price is epiphenomenalism with respect to the non-physical, normative properties. Epiphenomenalism, however, invites an eliminativist conclusion – there is no reason to maintain that epiphenomena really exist, given that they do not have any function for an explanation of the world. One thus falls back into scepticism in the end. Ontological dualism is hence not capable to serve as a basis for cognitivism and to refute scepticism.

If we wish to hold on to cognitivism without pursuing the – short-sighted – option of ontological dualism, we are committed to endorsing the position that the physical is sufficient to make normative statements true (in case they are true). We thus have to abandon the third principle: under certain conditions it is not a fallacy to seek to deduce normative statements from descriptive, physical statements. More precisely, for every normative statement or set of normative statements, there is a logical way of deduction that leads from descriptive, physical statements to the normative statement(s) in question. This position is a physicalist reductionism: normative statements are traced back to non-normative, physical statements.

One can explain the commitment to such a reductionism by means of the following reasoning: let x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4, etc. be the entities in the world. Let us choose a fine-grained individuation of the entities and consider them to be individual property tokens, as mentioned in section 1. Naturalism means that every entity in the world makes true a descriptive, physical statement: every x makes true a P. Some entities also make true a normative statement: some x make true an N. It may be that only several x taken together make true a normative statement (or a whole system of normative statements); this is a well grounded assumption. However, for the sake of our principled reasoning, we can leave this complication aside for the time being. Truthmaking always is the same relation. That is to 19 say, if an x makes true a P and an N, then P and N are in the same way true statements about x.

Basing ourselves on this identity of truthmakers for physical and normative statements, we can put forward the following argumentation:

(1) Assume that x_1 makes true a statement of the type P_1 and a statement of the type N_1. We can thus correlate this N_1 with this P_1 – at least in this case the extension of N_1 is the same as the extension of P_1. Since any x that makes true an N-statement also makes true a P-statement, we can correlate every token of an N-statement with a token of a P-statement.

(2) Assume that we duplicate x_1. We then have a second entity that is qualitatively identical with x_1. Consequently, this entity also makes true a statement of the type P_1 and a statement of the type N_1. We can on this basis put forward the following nomological bridge principle,

linking physical with normative statements: whenever a statement of the type P_1 is true, then a statement of the type N_1 is also true. Given that bridge principle, it is possible to deduce N_1 from P_1. The truth of a statement of the type P_1 is a sufficient condition for the truth of a statement of the type N_1. Since any x that makes true a token of an N-statement also makes true a token of a P-statement, there is for any type of an N-statement at least one type of a P-statement whose tokens are a sufficient condition for the truth of a token of an N-statement of the type in question. (The inverse is not the case: not any x that makes true a P-statement also makes true an N-statement).

Note that there is no question here of *defining* normative concepts in terms of descriptive, physical concepts. The meaning (intension) of the normative vocabulary remains distinct from the meaning of the physical vocabulary. The argument under consideration is only concerned with the extension of the normative and the physical concepts. The point at issue are bridge principles that build up a nomological connection between P-statements and N-statements. One-way conditionals of the form "If a statement of the type P_1 is true, then a statement of the type N_1 is true as well" are sufficient to serve as such bridge principles. They enable the deduction of N-statements from P-statements. In that manner, the necessary and sufficient condition for a reduction of any N-statement to a P-statement is satisfied. These bridge principles are empirical. There is no question here of claiming that it is possible to deduce all true normative statements about the world *a priori* from a complete physical description of the world (such a position is defended by Chalmers & Jackson 2001; see the objections by Laurence & Margolis 2003).

(3) 20 The considerations in the last two paragraphs are entirely formal. They are based exclusively on the premise that any entity that makes true an N-statement also makes true a P-statement. These considerations are able to refute the reasoning behind the principle of the naturalistic fallacy only if one can show how an entity makes true an N-statement *because* it makes true a P-statement. Only if one is able to explain how an entity makes true an N-statement *by* making true a P-statement can one vindicate the position that it is the same entities, individuated in a fine-grained way as property tokens, that make true P-statements as well as N-statements. Otherwise, the consequence is that one risks falling back into ontological dualism – at least property dualism in the sense of entities making true P-statements and N-statements in virtue of different properties that they possess (that is, physical and normative properties, being ontologically distinct properties).

If one can meet this condition, one has achieved what is known as a *reductive explanation* (Chalmers 1996, pp. 42-51): for each individual case in which an N-statement is true, it can be explained in terms of P-statements why the N-statement in question is true in this case. Such an explanation implies that whenever a P-statement of the same type is true, an N-statement of the same type is true as well.

Such reductive explanations do however not amount to theory reduction: they do not constitute the reduction of a theory couched in N-terms to a theory couched in P-terms. The nomological bridge principle "If P_1, then N_1" does not imply that whenever a statement of the type of N_1 is true, a statement of the type of P_1 is true as well. Statements of the type N_1 can be true in some cases because statements of the type P_1 are true (reductive explanation of N_1 through P_1); but in other cases, they can be true because statements of the type P_2 are true (reductive explanation of N_1 through P_2), etc. In short, the bridge principle "If P_1, then N_1" does not rule out that there also is a nomological bridge principle "If P_2, then N_1", etc. In that

case, the theory that contains N_1 cannot be reduced to the theory that is couched in terms of P_1. That case is known as multiple realization in the literature (multiple realization of N_1 by P_1, P_2, etc.). Multiple realization is considered to be the strongest objection to theory reduction (see notably Fodor 1974). But reductive explanations are compatible with multiple realization.

In order to get from reductive explanations to theory reduction one has to circumvent the objection from multiple realization: one has to be able to transform 21 the mentioned bridge principles, which connect physical statements with normative ones in the form of one-way conditionals ($P_1 \rightarrow N_1$), into biconditionals ($P_1 \Leftrightarrow N_1$) – "<u>If and only if</u> P_1, then N_1". One has to be able to show by means of such biconditional bridge principles that for each concept that figures in a normative theory, it is possible to construct a physical concept that has the same extension as the normative one. Only in that case is it possible to reduce the normative theory to a physical theory by deducing the statements couched in the normative vocabulary from *one* physical theory. This is the classical conception of theory reduction (see as regards this conception Nagel 1961, chapter 11, and see Endicott 1998 for an argument that establishes that biconditional bridge principles are indispensable for theory reduction).

The challenge that a reductionist position has to meet is of course to show how normative statements and their objective truth value can be explained by a theory that is couched in descriptive, physical vocabulary. We would have already gained much in this sense if we could show how reductive explanations are possible, even if they do not immediately amount to theory reduction. Let us come back against this background to a social, inferentialist account of meaning norms such as the one of Brandom.

3. *From behavioural dispositions to normative, social practices*

We can reconstruct the transition from behavioural dispositions to normative, social practices essentially by means of the following steps (for a more detailed account, see Esfeld 2001, chapter 3.2.1,[1] as well as Pettit 1993, pp. 76-108, and Haugeland 1998, pp. 147-150; Hattiangadi 2003, pp. 424-427, 431 argues in favour of interpreting – or changing – Brandom's account in the sense of such a reconstruction):

1) *Persons have specific behavioural dispositions towards their environment.* These include especially dispositions to classify objects in a certain way (for instance as eatable, etc.).

2) *Persons who have the same biological equipment and who share a physical environment do in general not have bizarrely different dispositions.*

3) *The dispositions of persons who have the same biological equipment and who share a physical environment include a disposition to coordinate at least parts of one's own behaviour with the behaviour of one's fellows.* This step goes beyond dispositions to respond to stimuli from the environment in a certain way. It brings other beings of the same kind into the focus of the being who 22 has this disposition. This disposition is a second order disposition: it is a disposition to change some of one's dispositions and one's behaviour as a result of the behaviour of one's fellows, being directed at coordination. This change does not have to be a conscious process. Manifesting such a disposition is a necessary and sufficient condition for behaviour to be social behaviour.

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[1] In the book Esfeld 2001, I did not consider such an account to be reductionist. But it is reductionist as the considerations at the of end section 2 of the present paper show.

4) *Owing to the disposition to at least partial coordination persons react to each other's behaviour by applying sanctions in the sense of reinforcements or discouragements.* They reinforce behaviour in others that agrees with their own behaviour, and they discourage behaviour in others that disagrees with their own behaviour. Agreement or disagreement signifies at this stage accord or failure of accord in the reactions towards a shared environment. Sanctions are exclusively physical reinforcements and discouragements at this stage.

5) *Sanctions manifest normative attitudes.* Persons reinforce behaviour of their fellows that they take to be correct and they discourage behaviour of their fellows that they take to be incorrect.

6) *Sanctions can get a process of determining content (meaning) off the ground, because they make available for a person a distinction between correct and incorrect behaviour.* Sanctions introduce an external perspective: due to them, there is a distinction between what a person takes to be correct or incorrect and what is correct or incorrect in the light of others.

7) *Sanctions are a means to come to conditions under which persons agree in their ways of reacting to their environment* – more precisely, agree in their manner of classifying the objects in their environment (which objects they group together and which ones they distinguish from one another). In the case of agreement, sanctions reinforce the dispositions of persons in the way in which they react to their environment. In the case of disagreement, sanctions in the form of discouragements trigger a process of finding out the obstacles in the persons or in the environment that prevent agreement. That is to say: persons react to disagreement in such a way that they take disagreement as a sign that something has gone wrong and that they have to do something in order to get things right. They try to find out why they disagree. In some cases – those ones which then lead to determining the content of concepts about the environment – they discover conditions under which they overcome their disagreement. These then are the normal conditions for the use of a certain concept. Sanctions thus induce a process of mutual adjustment that leads to convergence.

8) 23 *As a result of the process of coming to conditions under which persons agree, the content of a concept can be conceived as being fixed by the convergence of persons in their ways of continuing a given sequence of examples of employing the concept.* The concept thus determines what is correct and what is incorrect in continuing a given sequence of examples. What is correct and what is incorrect for these persons is not identical with the dispositions of any one of these persons, but negotiated in a process of mutual reinforcement and discouragement of certain forms of behaviour.

9) *The mutual reinforcement and discouragement of certain forms of behaviour determines the content of one concept only together with determining the content of many other concepts that constitute the inferential context of the concept in question.* That inferential context can be made explicit in terms of norms of commitment, entitlement and precluded entitlement, as set out by Brandom (1994).

These nine steps represent an extremely simplified sketch of a naturalistic theory of meaning that takes meaning nonetheless to be normative. Meaning (conceptual content) is determined by social, normative practices of considering each other to be committed to, to be entitled to and to be precluded from being entitled to certain beliefs or statements. This theory fulfils the

condition posed at the end of the last section, namely to show a way how descriptive, physical statements imply normative statements: we start with physical statements about the behaviour and the behavioural dispositions of persons in an environment that is described in physical terms, and we end up with statements about commitments, entitlements and precluded entitlements of persons.

This transition from physical to normative statements presupposes that the persons in question have normative attitudes (5). To sanction certain behaviour positively (to reinforce it), shows that one regards the behaviour in question as being correct, and to sanction certain behaviour negatively (to discourage it) shows that one regards the behaviour in question as being incorrect. Exercising sanctions in this sense is a necessary and sufficient condition for having normative attitudes: sanctions of reinforcing or discouraging certain forms of behaviour as described in a physical vocabulary are, provided that they are differentiated enough, a necessary and sufficient condition for normative attitudes. Nothing less and nothing more is needed for normative attitudes. Note that according to the position under consideration normative attitudes cannot be mental states with conceptual 24 content, for according to a normative theory of meaning, conceptual content presupposes normative attitudes. Furthermore, there is no need to claim that the *concept* of normative attitudes can be *defined* in a physical vocabulary in terms of sanctions of reinforcing or discouraging certain forms of behaviour. Nothing in the theory sketched out above speaks against the view that the normative vocabulary is conceptually closed, that is, that no normative concept can be defined without invoking other normative concepts. But this does not hinder that there can be necessary and sufficient conditions expressible in a physical vocabulary that capture what is referred to by normative concepts (token identity, as argued in section 2 above).

This extremely simplified sketch of a naturalistic theory of meaning satisfies the condition that the transition from physical to normative statements be nomological. Same behavioural dispositions in the same physical environment lead to the same sanctions and hence to the same normative attitudes so that, in the end, there are the same norms of concept use. More precisely, any duplicate of given behavioural dispositions in a given physical environment also is a duplicate of the norms in which conceptual content consists.

Does such a naturalistic reconstruction of normative meaning also provide an explanation? What is explained is how people get to accepting such and such meaning norms – that is, why they attribute to each other certain commitments, entitlements and precluded entitlements. This is explained by means of a detailed physical description of the behavioural dispositions of the persons and their physical environment – that is, a detailed description of how these persons get from certain behavioural dispositions towards their environment to certain sanctions and from there to certain meaning norms. If the description of the behavioural dispositions and the physical environment does not achieve such an explanation, then nothing can do so. We thus get to reductive explanations of why there are certain meaning norms.

Do we reach in that way not only a reductive explanation, but also a theory reduction, that is, a reduction of the normative theory of meaning to a physical theory of the environment and the behavioural dispositions of persons in a certain environment? The answer to this question depends on the following point, as mentioned at the end of the last section: can we get from nomological bridge principles in the form of one way conditionals of the type "If such and such an environment and such and such behavioural dispositions, then such and such meaning norms" to biconditionals of the type "If and only if such and such an environment and such

and such behavioural dispositions, then such and such 25 meaning norms"? The question thus is whether or not the practices of establishing certain meaning norms are multiply realizable.

The answer to this question depends on the degree with which one specifies the meaning norms. If one contends oneself with a coarse-grained specification of the meaning norms by an exemplary indication of some commitments, entitlements and precluded entitlements, then the meaning norms thus specified certainly are multiply realizable by different combinations of behavioural dispositions and physical environments. However, the more fine-grained the specification of meaning norms is, the less credible is the thesis of their multiple realizability, insofar as this thesis constitutes an argument against theory reduction (compare in that respect Bechtel & Mundale 1999, pp. 201-204). Consider the following example: the Eskimos dispose of detailed meaning norms that distinguish different concepts of white colour corresponding to different shades of white. It is plausible to maintain that such detailed and differentiated meaning norms with respect to concepts of white colour can come up only in an environment such as the one of the Eskimos, that is, an environment in which white objects are very important for the survival of the people so that they develop very differentiated behavioural dispositions towards white objects. This example can be generalized. The claim thus is the following one: provided that reductive explanations are available, it is possible to move on to theory reduction by means of a fine-grained specification of the concepts of the theory that is targeted for reduction. That is to say, if one specifies the normative concepts that express meaning norms in a very fine-grained way, it becomes possible to construct physical concepts capturing behavioural dispositions in a physical environment that are coextensive with those normative concepts (see Esfeld & Sachse 2007 as regards this stance on theory reduction in general).

4.   *Cognitivism: the distinction between taking to be correct and being correct*

In the last section, we have sketched out an account how to reduce the normative vocabulary expressing the normative attitudes of persons to a physical vocabulary describing behavioural dispositions in a given physical environment. This scheme can be generalized. A similar account can be put forward with respect to the moral, normative concepts expressing the moral attitudes of people, showing how the moral normative statements that people accept can be reduced to statements describing the behavioural dispositions of these people in a given physical 26 environment (see, for instance, Jackson 1998, pp. 129-134, 140-143, who applies the approach of functional reduction to moral normative statements). However, such a scheme is not sufficient to establish cognitivism. What has been shown so far is how it is in principle possible to get from physical statements to normative statements in the sense of the normative statements that persons or groups of persons *take to be correct or incorrect*. But in order to establish cognitivism in a naturalistic framework it is crucial to show how one can get from physical statements to normative statements that express what *is correct or incorrect*. The task thus is to develop the scheme proposed in the preceding section in such a way that it includes the distinction between taking something to be correct and its being correct.

This task can be easily achieved in the case of the normative statements that express the way people use concepts about the physical world. The constitution of the world determines whether or not our normative attitudes determining the content of our concepts about what there is in the world are correct or not. In the case of these concepts, the decisive step has already been achieved if one is able to deduce the normative statements that express what

people take to be correct or incorrect from descriptive, physical statements by means of the mentioned bridge principles. Let us come back to the example introduced at the beginning of the paper. In an appropriate situation, a person makes the statement

(1)   The animal over there in the water is a whale.

We regard this person as being *committed* to

(2)   The animal over there in the water is a mammal.

We regard this person as being *entitled* to

(3)   The animal over there in the water has meat that some people like.

We regard this person as being *precluded from being entitled* to

(4)   The animal over there in the water is a fish.

27 Whether or not it is correct to regard the person as being committed to (2), entitled to (3) and precluded from being entitled to (4) depends on the constitution of the world. The distinction between regarding something as correct and its being correct derives in the case of concepts about what there is in the world from the constitution of the world. We thereby presuppose Quine's holistic thesis according to which there is no separation between analytic and synthetic statements – and thus no separation between statements about meaning and statements about facts (Quine 1951). It is always possible to criticize the normative attitudes of a whole community as not being correct with respect to the constitution of the world – such as in the case of a community who takes a person that makes the statement "The animal over there in the water is a whale" to be committed to the statement "The animal over there in the water is a fish". Whether whales are fish or mammals does not depend on the social practices of a community. There is an objective distinction between fish and mammals in the world. That objective distinction is sufficient to determine what is correct and what is incorrect in the normative attitudes in question that persons or groups of persons adopt. Of course, the epistemic problem to find out what is correct and what is incorrect as determined by the constitution of the world remains.

   This argument presupposes scientific realism. To give reasons for scientific realism, however, is not a task that is specific for a normative theory of meaning. We have adopted cognitivism in section 2, and our problem was to bring together cognitivism and naturalism, facing the objection stemming from the principle of the naturalistic fallacy. The necessary and sufficient condition for solving this problem is, as far as meaning norms for statements about what there is in the world are concerned, to develop a scheme such as the one sketched out in the preceding section that enables us to deduce normative statements, expressing meaning norms, from descriptive, physical statements.

   The matter becomes of course much more complicated when we take moral normative statements into account. As regards these statements, one cannot simply say that the constitution of the world provides a distinction between taking something to be morally

correct and its being morally correct. Nonetheless, there is in this case also a proposal for an easy solution available, namely to refer to the considered, rational interests of each individual person. However, first, it is questionable whether the project to base the correctness of moral normative statements on the considered, rational interests of the individual persons can be 28 carried out successfully. Furthermore, one can argue that this project misses the essence of moral, normative attitudes – these attitudes consist in going beyond one's own interests. To develop an account of the distinction between regarding as correct and being correct with respect to moral normative statements is the biggest challenge for the position sketched out in this paper.

However that may be, as far as the normative view of meaning is concerned, that view can go together with a naturalistic and reductionist position. If one takes the general arguments for this position to be sound, there is no reason to oppose a normative theory of meaning for principled, naturalistic reasons. If one grants cognitivism, one has to find in any case a way to deduce normative statements from descriptive, physical statements – and in the case of the statements that express meaning norms, it is relatively easy to find such a way.

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