Week 2: Normativity

I.   *MIE* 1:

Recent history:
Interest has evolved from the "rule-following considerations" after Kripkenstein, to the broader issue of the normativity of meaning, to concern with the normativity of reasons (including *logical* reasons). (Kantians and inferentialists see this last evolution as natural.) A witness to this evolution is:

New: Cf. The Oxford Handbook of Reasons and Normativity
Edited by Daniel Star
Print Publication Date: Jun 2018
Can recommend Hannah Ginsborg's contribution: "Normativity and Concepts."

1. History of idea of normativity of intentionality, intentional content, and meaning:
- Kant
- Frege and neo-Kantians
- American pragmatists (esp. Peirce)
- Wittgenstein
- Sellars

(Frege and Sellars will come up again in the ancestry of semantic inferentialism.)

A big divide in contemporary philosophy is how seriously one takes coming to terms with this idea.
I think of philosophy as concerned with understanding *us* as:
>   *Normative* beings, and
>   *Rational*, *discursive* beings.

I connect "reasons" talk with *inference* (concepts, content…), eventually, with *logic*. That subject will be introduced next time under the rubric of "semantic inferentialism and logical expressivism." Today's topic is the first *Existentiale* of *Dasein*.

a) <u>Kant</u>'s normative turn.
    Kant, the great, grey, mother of us all. Don't lose the forest in the trees. The shape of his overall contribution is determined by his Big Ideas.
    Kant's four biggest ideas (which interlock and support one another):
    i.   Normative turn: Judgings and intentional doings are things we are in a distinctive sense *responsible* for. They are exercises of our <u>authority</u> to undertake *commitments*.

This responsibility includes having *reasons* for them, integrating them into a *rational* synthetic unity of apperception (on cognitive side).

Judging and acting intentionally (endorsing claimables and doables) is binding ourselves by norms in the form of rules. Concepts are rules that determine what one is responsible for.

ii.   Categories as pure concepts of the understanding, available *a priori*: Besides concepts whose expressive job it is to describe and explain empirical goings-on, there are concepts whose distinctive expressive job it is to make explicit implicit structural features of the framework within which alone description and explanation are possible/intelligible.

iii.   Combining α) Rousseau's principle that "Obedience to a law one has laid down for oneself is freedom," with β) a principle he shares with the empiricists that one is only responsible for what one has done freely and with γ) the idea in (i) that what one *does* in the central sense of intentional agency is just what one is *responsible* for to yield an account of agency in terms of *autonomy*: freedom as the capacity (authority) to bind oneself by concepts and (so) make oneself responsible to reasons.

iv.   The idea of deriving *morality* (specifically moral reasons) from this account of *intentional agency*, by finding moral reasons as implicit in discursive, purposive activity. The invention of a modern conception of morality as a secular successor to theological normative notions is perhaps the greatest contribution philosophers have yet made to Western culture.

b)   Frege's anti-psychologism. "Logic is a normative science." Here he was in synch and sympathy with the neo-Kantians of his time. They insisted on normativity as distinguishing us, especially cognitively. The rock on which they foundered was turning the normative/factual *distinction* into a *dualism*.

c)   Pragmatists' key idea: the selectional processes common to learning and evolution fund a naturalistic notion of normativity (for justification and semantics). Perfection of this line of thought is Millikan's version of teleosemantics. Normal Explanation and Proper Functions.

d)   Wittgenstein: Idea of norms implicit in social practices. See (2), (3), (4) below.

e)   Sellars: "Some Reflections on Language Games" (in *In the Space of Reasons*) is *locus classicus* for his treatment of normativity.

2.   Main fork (Scylla and Charybdis):

Regulism: The regress argument, against the idea that behind every norm implicit in practice is a norm explicit as a principle. (platonism vs. pragmatism.) Issue: interpreting, applying, following a rule is something that can be done correctly or incorrectly, i.e. is itself a norm-governed practice, which supports assessments of correctness and incorrectness. If those, too, must be a

matter of principles (interpretations, *Deutungen*) then a regress results. Kant already appreciated this argument.

Regularism: The gerrymandering argument. (Disjunctivitis a special case.) Can always find a way of construing the content of the regularity so that it is exceptionless. One then can't make sense of *violating* the norm.

3. Via media: norms implicit in social practices. LW on signposts. "Customs, uses, institutions…" (But: teleosemantics and pragmatist=selectional modal approaches). But can one fill in this idea? Cf. (6) and (7) below.

4. Kripkenstein's setting of the problem, and its deficiencies.

Clearer statement of claim that "meaning is a normative concept," is in terms of conditionals (codifying inferences or implications):

If one means plus by "+", *then* if asked "7+5=?" one *ought* (is *committed, obliged,* it would be *correct*) to answer "12."

The meaning statement has *normative* necessary conditions, i.e. can only be true or correct itself if some normative statement, about what one ought to do, what one is obliged or committed to do, what would be correct, is true or correct.

Aside: Compare rendering the notion of modal concept by the truth of conditionals whose consequent involves subjunctives:

If the coin is copper, *then* it *would* melt if heated to 1085°C.

Since the truth of the claim about copper has modally rich necessary conditions, copper is a modal concept. [Hint: *all* "extensional" empirical concepts are modal concepts in this sense: their applicability in one world depends on what is true at *other* possible worlds. But if there are *no* empirical concepts that are *non*-modal, in the sense of their applicability depending only what is true at *one* world, then how does possible world semantics get started?]

Kripke asks what *fact* it is about a language-user in virtue of which they mean one thing rather than another by their words. He professes to put *no* constraints on the answer. But in fact he requires that the fact be specified in *non-normative* vocabulary. Appeal to the "proper" or "correct" use of the term he would see as question-begging.

If normative concepts are not semantically reducible without remainder to non-normative concepts, then it seems we have a dilemma: either read norms and so meanings out of our understanding of the realm of the real (variant: intelligible), or admit a kind of Kantian dualism of fact and norm as a successor to the Cartesian dualism of body and mind.

5. Arguments against thesis that meaning is a normative concept, by Hattiangadi and Glüer.

If norm is constitutive of meaning (say, plus) then mistakes are impossible. For one who fails to conform to the norm just shows they means something different, follow a different norm. (This is really a version of the gerrymandering argument.)

Response: One can be "bound" by a norm in the sense of *subject to assessment* according to it, even if one does not conform to the norm (i.e. makes errors or mistakes). Using an English word (e.g. "arthritis," "molybdenum") in this sense binds you by the public norms governing the proper use of those terms. The distinction of social perspective between what norm one *acknowledges* and what others *attribute*, between the context of *deliberation* and the context of *assessment*, is crucial here.

6. *Social* account of institution of normative statuses by normative attitudes. Teleosemantic alternative.

Crispin Wright's LW: individuals go right or wrong, the community just goes.

Two objections: i) community does not apply concepts, individuals do.

ii) community membership is itself a normative notion: it is only members of the community that are bound by or answerable to its norms.

7. Account of *sanctions* as genus of practical attitudes. Reinforcement. Dennett-Chomsky argument against behaviorism. Normatively internal sanctions. Speculative status of this account (good Popperian methodology).

II. BSD 1:

The "vocabulary vocabulary" is a post-Quinean attempt to be amphibious between "language" and "theory," ("meaning" and "belief").

8. Main point of reading this in connection with *MIE* 1 is:
a) PV-sufficiency, is a set of practices (or abilities) such that anyone who engages in those practices (exercises those abilities) is using vocabulary V_1 so as to express the meanings in question.
   Semantic pragmatism claims there must be PV-sufficient practices for every vocabulary.
b) VP-sufficiency, is a vocabulary sufficient to express sentences such that anyone of whom those sentences is true is engaging in the practices (exercising the abilities) in question. The aspiration to find an explicit codification of what is implicit in practice is what inspires *logical expressivism*. But there is no guarantee that we can find such a vocabulary. Q: Is it guaranteed that *there is* such a vocabulary, (i.e. that for any discursive practices there is such)? What does the existential claim *mean*?
   A much more plausible claim is that there are vocabularies that are VP-*necessary*, in the sense that there is a vocabulary (no doubt, more than one) such that there is a set of sentences in it such that if one is engaging in practices sufficient to deploy V_1, then that set of sentences must be true of one.
c) The normative pragmatics claim is that, at least if V_1 is an ADP, V_2 must be a *normative* vocabulary, in the sense that normative vocabulary is VP-*necessary* for *any* practices PV-*sufficient* for any ADP.

This is a precisification of the "normativity of meaning" claim, which is put less clearly and precisely by the claim that the concept of <u>meaning</u> is a normative concept.

9. Background and overview of *BSD* 1:

Begin with a way of retrospectively rationally reconstructing the tradition of analytic philosophy. (Note: as I have done for German Idealism and American Pragmatism.) I see it as fundamentally a reductive semantic program: relating base and target vocabularies, to try in some favored sense to *say in* the base vocabulary (some or all of) what one can *say in* the target vocabulary. All of these are parameters: target, base, desired relation between them (reduction, definition, paraphrase, supervenience…).

Principle programs are empiricism (epistemologically privileged base), naturalism (ontologically privileged base), and functionalism (normative base, intentional target). I actually endorse a version of this last core program.

Q: Why not just give up on this obviously wrong-headed enterprise? (Rorty, McD)

A: Can pursue a program along these lines in a pluralist spirit, if one does not take the privileging of the base vocabulary to be permanent and absolute. Then one is pursuing the program in an exploratory way.

Then: Pragmatist critique comes from side of anthropological approach to language, as directed at the logistical approach. It urges attention to *use* over *meaning*. Wittgensteinian *semantic nihilism* denies that postulating meanings will help systematize or codify proprieties of use.

Response: meaning-use analysis.

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