CHAPTER 37

INFERENTIALISM AND NORMATIVITY

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37.1 INFERENTIALISM VS. REPRESENTATIONALISM

The term 'inferentialism' was coined by Robert Brandom, as a name for his own sweeping and ambitious philosophical doctrine, which drew strongly on the ideas of Brandom's mentor Wilfrid Sellars. It may be characterized as the conviction that to be meaningful, in the distinctively human way, or to possess 'conceptual content', is to be governed by a certain kind of inferential rules. However, Brandomian inferentialism can be seen as a culmination of certain trends already latent within both logic and philosophy of language since the outset of modern logic and analytic philosophy.

The rationale for articulating inferentialism as a fully-fledged philosophical position is to emphasize its distinctness from the more traditional *representationalism*. The tradition of basing the explanation of human mind and the semantics of human languages on the idea of representation is long and rich. The basic representationalist picture tells us that we are confronted with things of the world, acquire mental contents representing these things, and by making our words express these contents we make the words stand for the things (individual philosophers have different views, of course, about what is to be understood by *stand for*). Many twentieth-century philosophers took some form of representationalism for granted, seeing no viable alternative basis for semantics; others had more specific reasons for entertaining one or another form of it.

Inferentialism is closely connected with the conviction that any kind of human meaning is essentially, in Sellars's often quoted words, 'fraught with ought'. It follows that when describing phenomena that have to do with meaning (language, mind, etc.) we cannot make do with the language of natural science. This is not because some additional concepts are lacking, but because claims concerning meaning are often not indicative

claims—as Brandom would put it, they do not ascribe properties, but rather establish proprieties. We may tend to compress this view into the slogan *meaning is normative*, but this slogan can mislead, as the point at issue is not that meaning is a specific, normative kind of thing, but rather that meaning is not really a thing at all, for the talk about it is not really a description.

37.2 Inferentialist Trends in Classical Analytic Philosophy

As dawn glimmered for analytic philosophy, Frege (1879, pp. 2–3 in original) gave the following account of conceptual content:

> The contents of two judgments may differ in two ways: either the consequences derivable from the first, when it is combined with certain other judgments, always follow also from the second, when it is combined with these same judgments, [and conversely,] or this is not the case. The two propositions 'The Greeks defeated the Persians at Plataea' and 'The Persians were defeated by the Greeks at Plataea' differ in the first way. Even if one can detect a slight difference in meaning, the agreement outweighs it. Now I call that part of the content that is the same in both the conceptual content.

This means that two judgments A and B share their conceptual content iff for every sequence of judgments $A_1, \ldots, A_{i-1}, A_{i+1}, \ldots A_n, A_{n+1}$ it is the case that $A_1, \ldots, A_{i-1}, A, A_{i+1}, \ldots A_n \vdash A_{n+1}$ if and only if $A_1, \ldots, A_{i-1}, B, A_{i+1}, \ldots A_n \vdash A_{n+1}$. Hence A and B share their conceptual content iff they share their *inferential role*;[1] and it would seem that hence we can identify the content with the inferential role. Thus, this account ties in with the inferentialist *credo* formulated much later by Brandom (1994, p. 144):

> It is only insofar as it is appealed to in explaining the circumstances under which judgments and inferences are properly made and the proper consequences of doing so that something associated by the theorist with interpreted states or expressions qualifies as a *semantic* interpretant, or deserves to be called a theoretical concept of a *content*.

[1] The condition Frege gives states, in effect, that whatever is inferable from A (given some collateral premises) is also inferable from B (given the same collateral premises) and vice versa; and we might think that to reach a true inferential role we need to supplement it by the condition that B is inferable from whatever A is inferable from and vice versa, i.e. that for every sequence of judgments $A_1, \ldots, A_n$ it is the case that $A_1, \ldots, A_n \vdash A$ if and only if $A_1, \ldots, A_n \vdash B$. However, this supplementary condition already follows from Frege's, given the relatively modest assumptions that every judgment is inferable from itself and that the relation of inferability is transitive: then $B \vdash B$, hence according to Frege's condition $A \vdash B$, and hence if $A_1, \ldots, A_n \vdash A$, then $A_1, \ldots, A_n \vdash B$ due to the transitivity of $\vdash$.

However, Frege's characterization of content quoted above is often dismissed as a fruit of his immaturity (even Brandom 2000, Ch. 1, sees the mature Frege as switching from his early inferentialist view of content to a truth-theoretical version): at the time he was writing his *Begriffsschrift*, he did not pay any systematic attention to semantic issues and hence his proclamation cannot be taken too seriously. When Frege (1892a, p. 31 in original) did turn his explicit attention to semantics, he talks differently:

> A proper name (word, sign, combination of signs, expression) *expresses* its sense, *stands for* [*bedeutet*] or designates [*bezeichnet*] its *Bedeutung*. By employing a sign we express its sense and designate its *Bedeutung*.

This seems to be an outline of the representational paradigm of semantics, according to which to *mean something* is *to stand for this something*,[2] which was accepted as almost self-evident and further elaborated by many of his followers. Thus, Russell (1912, p. 91) stresses:

> We must attach some meaning to the words we use, if we are to speak significantly and not utter mere noise; and the meaning we attach to our words must be something with which we are acquainted.

Here the representational picture is straightforward: to make a word meaningful, we have to let it stand for (represent) an entity we are confronted with. The same train of thought prompted Carnap (1942) to isolate semantics as that part of the theory of language which has to do with expressions' denoting objects:

> When we observe an application of language, we observe an organism, usually a human being, producing a sound, mark, gesture, or the like as an expression in order to refer by it to something, e.g. an object. Thus we may distinguish three factors involved: the speaker, the expression and what is referred to, which we shall call the *designatum* of the expression.... If we abstract from the user of the language and analyze only the expressions and their designata, we are in the field of *semantics*.... *Semantics* contains the theory of what is usually called the meaning of expressions ... (pp. 8–10)

However, not *everybody* who was attracted by the representational (or *semiotic*, as I called it elsewhere; 2001a) picture of language took the representationalism entirely for granted. Thus Wittgenstein, whose *Tractatus* (1922) exposed the language–world relationship as congenial to Russell's view, clearly saw that his Tractarian depiction of *names* as standing for *objects* cannot be taken at face value; as he famously claimed, it is rather merely a ladder that must be thrown away, after one has climbed up on it. The

[2] There are, however, objections to taking Frege, even in this later period, as a straightforward representationalist, let alone ascribing to him the Platonist view that our expressions generally *stand for* the senses they express in the way that proper names stand for people who have been allocated their names by baptism. Cf. Mendonça and Stekeler-Weithofer (1987).

trouble Wittgenstein perceived, unlike most of his fellow founding-fathers of analytic philosophy, was that a thing cannot come to stand for something else by being *proclaimed* to stand for it; for this would lead to an infinite regress.[3] Trying explicitly to make something into a representation, according to Wittgenstein, is trying to *say* something that can only be *shown*.[4]

Kenny (1972, p. 36) describes the troubles Wittgenstein had with semantics, using as an example the semantically ill-formed sentence *The class of men is a man*:

> Shall we say that the symbols 'the class of men' and '... is a man' cannot be combined to make a sensible sentence? This seems to offer us a way out, but does not. For if the expressions in quotes refer to the sounds then again we are just expressing a trivial empirical truth. On the other hand, if it refers to the sounds with their meaning, to the symbols with their logical properties, what can we mean by 'combination' when we say that they cannot be combined in a certain way? The most plausible account is: 'the class of men', meaning what it does in English, cannot be the subject of a sentence whose predicate is '... is a man', meaning what that does in English. We may doubt whether this in turn is meaningful, but even if it is, it may well only postpone the evil day. For can we account for the meaning of the fragmentary expressions without giving an account of the sentences in which they can occur? If not, all our earlier problems will meet us again.

Kenny's verdict is that 'Wittgenstein's way out of this difficulty is to lay down that the rules of logic must be entirely syntactical rules, i.e. rules about the manipulation of symbols.' Such a view is quite close to the inferentialist *credo* (though we should be alert to the elusiveness of the term *syntactical* here);[5] and independently of whether Kenny characterizes the position of *Wittgenstein* accurately, there is little doubt that what he puts forward is an accurate characterization of the moral *Carnap* drew from the *Tractatus* and developed in the 1930s.[6]

[3] This created much misunderstanding among those logicians who took logic, in terms of van Heijenoort's (1967) famous distinction, 'as a calculus'. Wittgenstein, who took it 'as a language', did not accept that the assumption that for any language of logic we can have a meta-language, can be taken for granted.

[4] To avoid misunderstanding: of course it *is* possible to make something into a representation by means of an explicit convention. But this presupposes some means of establishing the convention, a language or at least something language-like, hence something that is already meaningful. Therefore, Wittgenstein dismisses this case as uninteresting; his interest is exclusively for the case where this regress comes to an end, i.e. where we establish meaningfulness without presupposing anything already meaningful.

[5] The trouble is that the term is dangerously ambiguous—using the terminology of Carnap (1934), explained below, we can say that in the narrow sense it refers merely to the formation rules of language, whereas in the wide sense it encompasses also the transformation rules.

[6] Thus, Carnap and Wittgenstein, in a sense, moved in opposite directions. Whereas Wittgenstein started to move away from his (tentative) representationalism in the 1930s, later reaching his use-theory of meaning, Carnap, in the 1930s, rejected representationalism with a vengeance, only to embrace it later, under the influence of Tarski. For a discussion of the influence of the *Tractatus* on Carnap's *Logical Syntax* see Awodey and Carus (2009).

In his *Logical Syntax of Language* (1934) Carnap presented a thoroughly inferentialist picture of language. Language is constituted by two kinds of rules, *formation* rules (which constitute syntax in a narrow sense, determining well-formedness), and *transformation* rules (constituting 'logical syntax', being, in effect, rules of inference). Any tractable aspect of language must be a matter of these two kinds of rules. Thus even the concept of consequence (later taken, by Tarski, for a paradigmatically non-syntactic notion), if it is to make any sense at all, must be definable in terms of inference.

In the case of his Language I, one of the two prototype languages Carnap discusses in the book, the difference between consequence and inference was accounted for in terms of the *omega rule* (the rule allowing us to derive the conclusion that all natural numbers have a property P from the infinite number of premises containing the claim $P(n)$ for every natural number n): consequence amounts to derivability by means of the rules of inference plus this infinitist rule. In the case of Language II, the relation becomes more complex and Carnap's resulting definition of consequence comes near to the semantic definition of Tarski (1936) (though Carnap is still convinced that he managed not to leave the level of syntax).[7]

Thus, Carnap's project in this book has a lot to do with inferentialism—he tries to account for all those aspects of a language that may be relevant for *logic* exclusively in terms of his logical syntax, viz. inference. However, it is nothing like the Brandomian general inferentialism, where any kind of *meaning* is a matter of inference. In contrast to Brandom, Carnap claims that even if we settle all logical properties of a language, the language will still be unusable for communication, because it lacks *interpretation* (*Deutung*). (For Carnap, there are just two ways to interpret it: either by translation into another, already interpreted language, or a purely practical way.) However, his book explored many of the paths rediscovered by later inferentialists.

37.3 Proof Theory and Logical Inferentialism

Since the founding fathers of modern logic, the paradigmatic examples of logical constants, such as classical conjunction, were characterized in two ways: in terms of axioms (presented by Frege, Russell, ...) and in terms of truth tables (Post, Wittgenstein, ...). This foreshadowed the later distinction between what is now called *proof theory* and *model theory*. In the 1930s, Tarski argued that only semantic methods could offer an ultimate grip on the concepts of truth and consequence that

[7] See Coffa (1991, Ch. 16) for a thorough discussion.

underlie the whole of logic; he developed formal semantics which later mutated into *model theory.*[8] Tarski (1986) thereafter offered a general semantic theory of logical constants.

Under Tarski's influence, studies of proving, and of axiomatic systems, were relegated increasingly to the sphere of the instrumental—to what logicians must use, given our human predicament, to get an incomplete, though useful grip on concepts that are ultimately accountable for only by means of explicitly semantic methods. Proof theory was first established as an ambitious research program by Hilbert (see Kreisel 1964); but its campaign was soon compromised when faced with the well-known result of Gödel (1931). However, another version of proof theory, based not on the Hilbertian notion of axiomatic system, but on the notion of a system of natural deduction, was developed by Gentzen (1934, 1936).

Gentzen presented, for each usual logical constant of elementary logic, an inferential pattern that he claimed to be constitutive of it. Each such pattern consisted of an *introduction* rule or rules, showing which statements a complex statement built by means of the constant may be inferred from, and *elimination* rules, giving what can be inferred from such a statement. Thus, for example *implication* was characterized by the introduction rule stating that if B is derivable from A, then we can derive $A \rightarrow B$; and the elimination rule amounting to *modus ponens*:

$$\frac{\begin{array}{c}[A] \\ B\end{array}}{A \rightarrow B} \qquad\qquad \frac{A \qquad A \rightarrow B}{B}$$

Moreover, Gentzen claimed that there is a sense in which only the introduction rules are really substantial, that there is a sense in which the elimination rules are already 'contained' in them.[9]

This laid the foundations for an inferentialist account of logical constants. (It is important to realize that this logical kind of inferentialism must be classified as a special case of general inferentialism not just because it is restricted to logical constants, but also because strict constraints are posed on the inferential patterns that can constitute the (meanings of the) logical constants. By contrast, general inferentialism only claims that the meaning of a word is its role vis-à-vis an inferential pattern; there is no claim that each word must have its own constitutive inferential pattern, let alone a claim that this pattern must be of a shape prescribed by Gentzen.)

The idea that the meaning of a logical constant may be a matter of the inferential rules governing it was vigorously attacked by a succinct paper of Prior (1960/1).

[8] Formal semantics was first addressed by Tarski (1939); the establishment of model theory is described by Vaught (1974) and Chang (1974).

[9] See the discussion given by Koslow (1992, Part I).

Prior showed that we may have an inferential pattern, and especially an inferential pattern within the bounds of inferential constraints, that introduces a constant whose very presence in a language makes this language automatically inconsistent. And though it is not clear why the existence of such 'malign' inferential patterns should be seen as deadly to the very idea of inferentialism (which Prior himself takes it to be—see also Prior 1964), it is undoubtedly something an inferentialist should be able to account for.

In particular, the inferentialist should be concerned with distinguishing such malign patterns from the benign ones, which he sees as truly meaning-conferring expedients. One way of doing this can be found in the reply that Belnap (1962) gave to Prior: he argued that the benign patterns are marked by their *conservativity*, i.e. by the property that the new inferential links they institute are restricted to just the sentences containing the new constants. Thus, if $\vdash$ is the relation of inference of a language and $\vdash^*$ the relation of inference of the language extended by some new logical constants, then $A_1, \ldots, A_n \vdash^* A$ if and only if either some of the $A_1, \ldots, A_n, A$ contain the new constants or $A_1, \ldots, A_n \vdash A$ (hence no new links emerge among old sentences). Later logicians characterized the benign patterns in terms of the so-called *harmony* between their introduction and their elimination rules (Dummett 1991), or in terms of the so-called *normalizability* of proofs to which such inferential rules can add up (Prawitz 1965).

A characterization of logical constants couched exclusively in proof-theoretic terms was offered by Hacking (1979) and though this exposition may not be entirely flawless (cf. Sundholm 1981), it clearly showed that there is a viable purely proof-theoretical account of the nature of logic. Dummett (1978) generalized the basic proof-theoretical insights (as they manifest themselves especially within intuitionist logic) beyond the boundaries of logic to general semantics and philosophy of language; and recent reconsiderations of the theories of Gentzen and Prawitz have yielded the widely discussed idea of *proof-theoretic semantics* (see Prawitz 2006; Schroeder-Heister 2006).

It turns out that the logical constants that are most straightforwardly accounted for in proof-theoretical terms are those of intuitionist logic.[10] Constants of classical logic are slightly more problematic: although they can be delimited inferentially in the sense that we have sound and complete axiomatization of classical logic (which, since axioms can be seen as inferences with empty antecedents, can be seen as a collection of inferential rules), already Carnap pointed out that this does *not* mean that the axioms would pin down the semantics of the constants to their classical meanings.[11]

[10] See Peregrin (2008a).

[11] The axioms of classical logic do not exclude cases of disjunction of two false disjuncts being true; just as they do not exclude the negation of a false statement being false. See Carnap (1943).

37.4 Inferentialism as a General Philosophical Project: Sellars and Brandom

To craft inferentialism into a general philosophical project, Brandom (1994), following Sellars (1949, 1953, 1969), did three crucial things:

1. He applied the inferential paradigm to the whole of our vocabulary indiscriminately. This made him face problems absent from purely logical inferentialism, especially the problem of what kind of inferences can confer meaning on *empirical* words and how we account for the obvious *representational* powers of our language.
2. He provided for a 'sociological' reduction of the concept of *inference* to the concepts of *commitment* and *entitlement*. The idea is that our speech acts may, on the one hand, presuppose various kinds of commitments or entitlements, whereas, on the other hand, they may institute new commitments and entitlements. An order, for example, presupposes an entitlement on the part of the orderer and institutes a commitment on the part the orderee; an assertion creates commitment on the part of the assertor (the commitment to justify the assertion if challenged) and offers an entitlement to anybody to reassert it deferring its justification to its original assertor. Viewed from this perspective, linguistic interchange is seen as effectively a traffic of normative statuses and corresponding normative links.[12]

   In this way, he aligns our linguistic practices with other varieties of social practices, accounting for language as just one specific kind of human rule-governed enterprise. Brandom follows Sellars in regarding this specific kind as essentially characteristic of the distinctively human way of coping with the world—in believing that, in Sellars's (1949, p. 311) words, that 'to say that man is a rational animal is to say that man is a creature not of *habits*, but of *rules*'.
3. Thus he embedded the question about the nature of meaning into the broader context of the nature of distinctively human practices and the nature of human reason.

How does language, according to Brandom, work? Just as in the case of logical constants, any word is meaningful in virtue of being governed by a collection of rules. (However, in the case of empirical words, it is not merely inferential rules in the usual

[12] This may even lead to a normative version of the speech act theory, such as outlined by Kukla and Lance (2009).

narrow sense; we must also engage rules somehow 'involving' the extralinguistic world.)[13] Anyway, there is no (human kind of) meaningfulness aside of inferential articulation. The most basic kinds of inferences are *material* ones, inferences that are not logical but rather crucially involving extralogical vocabulary; inferences such as

(1) *This is a dog*
This is an animal

or (an example frequently employed by Sellars)

(2) *Lightning now*
Thunder shortly.

These inferences are, in essence, a matter of preserving normative statuses—especially commitments and entitlements. Hence to say that *This is an animal* is correctly inferable from *This is a dog* may be to say that the commitment instituted by asserting the latter sentence involves the commitment instituted by asserting the former one.[14]

Logic comes into play only later. Thus logical inferences are not something underlying material ones—in the sense that inference (1) would then be only an oblique form of the inference

(1*) *This is a dog*
Every dog is an animal
This is an animal.

Instead, they stand wholly on their own feet. Logical inference is what makes the material ones explicit: the claim *Every dog is an animal* enables us to *say* explicitly what we were previously only able implicitly to *do* by endorsing the inference from *This is a dog* to *This is an animal*. Hence the role of the logical vocabulary is merely *expressive*. (But saying *merely* here might be misleading, for making the inferences explicit is no insignificant achievement. It fosters what Brandom 2000 calls our 'semantic self-consciousness'.)

This view (the roots of which again go back to Sellars 1953) wholly inverts the usual view of the relationship between logical and material inferences. It is often assumed that the only truly valid inferences are logical ones, and that what we call material inferences are only oblique (or, using Aristotle's term, *enthymematic*) forms of logical inferences

[13] Given this, the term *inferentialism* may seem a misnomer. Calling the rule that it is correct to claim *This is a dog* when pointing at a dog an *inference* (perhaps from world to language) appears to be stretching the term beyond reasonable limits. (Admittedly, Sellars would not want to talk about an *inference* here. Sellars, 1954, compares the kind of correctness that is in play here to the correctness of the way pieces are arranged in the starting position of the game.) Maybe, from this viewpoint, *normativism* would be less misleading.

[14] Brandom (2000) claims that considering the fine structure of the interplay between commitments and entitlements yields us three layers in inference: commitment-preservation, entitlement-preservation, and inference induced by incompatibility. However, his grounds for this assertion are somewhat unclear (cf. Peregrin, 2001b).

(hence that (1) can be seen as a valid inference only if we see it as implicitly containing the 'hidden' premise *Every dog is an animal*). But why should this be so?

It is clear that the inference (1*), which is logically valid due to being an instance of the general schema

X is an A
Every A is a B
X is a B,

is valid only assuming that the words *every*, *is*, etc. mean what they do in English. Conversely, these words' meaning what they do suffices to make the inference valid. And similarly it is sufficient that these words, together with the words *dog* and *animal*, mean what they do in English for (1) to be valid. There is no need to add the premise *Every dog is an animal*, for it is involved by the assumption that the words mean what they do.

Not all material inferences are of this kind, though. Take the other one mentioned above, namely (2). From the viewpoint of logic, such an inference can be considered to hold at most *ceteris paribus*. It is certainly not the case that *whenever* I see lightning, I will hear thunder shortly. So inferentialism does not merely turn logic 'upside down', in the sense that it sees logical inferences as being underlaid by material ones rather than vice versa. In addition to this, it challenges also the claim that the most basic kinds of inferences are the deductively valid ones. In our ordinary linguistic practices, we rely on an abundance of inferences that are merely inductive, *ceteris paribus,* or contextually bound.

Hence the inferential structure of language, essentially, rests on *material* inferences; however, the fact that pieces of language, viz. sentences, are caught into the web of these inferential relationships makes these pieces into vertices of a logical space and makes their content acquire the shape we call *propositional*. It is for this reason that it is not generally *normative*, but rather especially *inferential* relationships that are crucial for the semantics of our language.

It is essential to realize that by becoming this general, inferentialism becomes a doctrine no longer restricted to the semantics of logical constants, nor even to semantics—its ambition is to provide for a general theory of the conceptual and hence of the distinctively human reason. This is why Brandom thinks that inferentialism is not merely a matter of language, it is a general theory of what makes us humans special, namely of the trinity reason/language/concepts.

37.5 Meaning and Normativity

The most distinctive characteristic feature of the inferentialist construal of meaning is that it is essentially *normative*—that it is 'fraught with ought'. Thus, meaning is not a thing stood for by an expression (as the representationalists would have it), and nor is

it, in fact, a thing at all—it is rather a *role* the expression assumes vis-à-vis the rules that govern it.[15]

This may be a deeper deviation from usual paradigms than it *prima facie* seems. It is not a mere variation on the older theme of the 'use theory of meaning'.[16] It involves the view that saying an expression means thus and so may sometimes be not claiming that something is the case, but rather urging that something *ought to be* the case.

As Sellars put it in his letter to R. Chisholm:

> My solution is that
> '...' means —
> is the core of a unique mode of discourse which is as distinct from the *description* and *explanation* of empirical fact, as is the language of *prescription* and *justification*. (Chisholm and Sellars, 1958, p. 527)

The situation becomes more perspicuous when we confront language with chess. If, during a chess game, I say 'This is a king!', then what I am likely to be expressing is not (merely) a fact, but (also) an urge—'you cannot move the piece like this, for this would violate the rules this piece is governed by!' Hence the slogan *meaning is normative* (widely discussed these days, appreciated by some philosophers and rejected by others),[17] may be less misleadingly interpreted not as saying that meanings are some peculiar, 'normative' kind of objects, but rather as saying that the talk about meanings is not a talk about any kind of object at all, for it involves subscribing to rules.

This does not mean that we cannot *treat* meanings as objects. Aside of *urging* rules we can also *report* on the fact that a community endorses some rules—i.e. state this *as a fact*. Being governed by a set of rules makes an object, especially a linguistic expression, assume a role vis-à-vis the rules, and we can explicate this role in terms of an object—perhaps a mathematical function.[18] But when we do this, we do not necessarily mean that this object is what the expression *stands for*—it is rather an encapsulation of its role, especially its inferential role.

In this sense, the reality of meanings is 'virtual'—they become real objects only if we disregard semantic discourse being 'fraught with ought' and take it as purely indicative and hence 'fact-reporting'.[19] Indeed, by the same change of visual angle there emerges

[15] See Peregrin (2008b, 2012).

[16] Here we must avoid conflating this normative inferentialism with what is sometimes called 'inferential role semantics' (Boghossian 1993) and which construes meaning as constituted not by *rules* of inference, but rather by inferences as instances of mental processes actually carried out by speakers or thinkers; thus being, unlike normative inferentialism, a subspecies of functionalism well-known from the philosophy of mind.

[17] See Boghossian (2005), Whitting (2008), or Glüer and Wikforss (2009).

[18] It was in this way that Frege (1892b) introduced his 'mathematical' explication of the meanings of predicates. For more about this, see Peregrin (2001a, Ch. 8).

[19] In a sense, their reality can be seen as a kind of Kantian 'transcendental illusion'—we take the project of the human world, that is an essentially *open* and *never finished* project, and in this sense an essential *potentiality*, as a completed *actuality*.

the whole of what Sellars (1962) calls the 'manifest image' of the world—an image which is different from the 'scientific image' because it contains many entities not existing within the causal order (such as meanings, and also persons as something over and above mere organisms, actions and deeds as something over and above mere functioning and behaviour, etc.). These entities are not supernatural or ghostly, but arise from our normative engagement with the world.

Hence the normativity of meaning is carried by the *normative* attitudes of the community of speakers. Some actions of a speaker elicit praise, encouragement, or reward; others meet with disagreement, contempt, or even sanctions and are liable to corrections or rectifications. As Wittgenstein (1953, § 54) points out, our experience of such attitudes is so basic that we might even recognize them when observing speakers of a language we do not understand:

> But how does the observer distinguish in this case between players' mistakes and correct play?—There are characteristic signs of it in the players' behaviour. Think of the behaviour characteristic of correcting a slip of the tongue. It would be possible to recognize that someone was doing so even without knowing his language.

Can we identify these attitudes with mere patterns of behaviour, and hence does this approach lead to a naturalization of meaning? Not really. We cannot say that an utterance is (in)correct if and only if it faces, as a matter of fact, certain normative attitudes—it is (in)correct if these specific normative attitudes towards it are *correct*. But now this might appear to open a *reductio ad absurdum* of the whole normativist approach to meaning, for it seems to lead to a vicious circle, or at least to render correctness as something completely esoteric, wholly unleashed from what speakers of the language in question do.

The point, however, is that what we humans use language for is much more than 'reporting facts'; and that some of the utterances we make, despite having the form of indicative sentences, are not really reports. And what is behind the untranslatability of the normative idiom into the indicative one (and hence the reduction of 'norms' to 'facts') is precisely this. Utterances that I will call *genuine normatives* are, despite appearances, not fact-reporting statements, but (slightly, but importantly) different kinds of speech acts—they are essentially 'fraught with ought'.

Let us return to the case of chess; and let us consider the statement *One should not move a rook diagonally*. This is the kind of statement I will call a *normative*. There are basically two ways of employing a statement of this kind. As we already pointed out, one can state the fact that this kind of rule is in force in some community. This is, as it were, an 'outsider' statement; a statement made by a disengaged observer describing the practices of the community in question. Besides this, one can state this as an 'insider': which does not amount to (or does not amount *only* to) stating a fact, but also to *upholding* the rule, urging its propriety or at least confirming its legitimacy. And *genuine* normatives are normatives posed precisely from this perspective.[20]

[20] The exposition of normativity presented here is close to that of Lance and O'Leary-Hawthorne (1997).

It follows that the talk about the *existence* of rules is better seen as a metaphor: of course they do not exist in the way rocks, trees, or dolphins do. To say that a rule exists is to take genuine normatives for ordinary indicative statements. And though it seems to be our human way to do this, we should not forget that this sense of *existence* differs from the one in which we use the word when we talk about the existence of spatio-temporal particulars and their constellations. Hence we people tend to live, besides the causal world explored by natural science, also in a different kind of world, in the world that Kant termed 'the realm of the concept of freedom' and which Sellars dubbed 'the manifest image'.

But how can correctness as such transcend our overt normative attitudes (expressed explicitly as genuine normatives, or otherwise), so that it is, on the one hand, carried by them, while being, on the other hand, not reducible to them? We must see that any verdict we reach regarding correctness is at best tentative; it belongs to the nature of the concept that the verdict is considered as always amendable by our successors (cf. Gauker 2007). They can discover later that what we held for *correct* is in fact *incorrect*, but unlike in the case of terms such as 'blue', 'fish', or 'iron', whose past apparent misapplication may have been caused either by an error of application, or by a subsequent shift of the term's meaning, in the case of the term 'correct' there is a third possibility: we can subsequently revise our standards of correctness and project them back to the past.

Thus, if future researchers find out that something we hitherto held to be a fish is really a mammal, they will conclude that we applied the concept of fish wrongly, because we were ignorant of some facts that were hitherto extant, but had remained undiscovered. This is what it takes to deal with *objective nature*, independent of us. In contrast to this, if our descendants come to the conclusion that something we currently hold as correct is in fact incorrect (think of the past cases of slavery or of denying women's suffrage), they may take it likewise as a discovery of a kind of objective fact, but not a fact objective in the same sense as a *natural* fact. The difference is that in our current time there is *nothing* in the external world that could make us recognize that we are making an error—indeed from our current perspective we are *not* making an error. The point is that the structure of the concept of correctness is such that if we see *the normative* as a *reality*, then we must conclude that we *make* this kind of reality, we establish standards with which to assess even past generations.

37.6 The Normative Innervation of the Human World

Inferentialism holds that any content cannot but be born from a network of *rules*; and that the propositional content that dominates our language and our reason is born from certain kinds of networks of *inferential* rules. Moreover, it sees networks of rules as the animating nervous system breathing life into the causal world, thus making it into the

'meaningful' kind of world we humans inhabit. It is because of the work of rules that we not only live among *organisms* that *behave* in certain ways, but also among *persons* that *act responsibly*, that *reason*, and that *talk meaningfully*. The nature of our *manifest image* of the world, in contrast to the *scientific image*, is, as Sellars claimed, essentially normative.

It follows that any kind of meaningfulness we want to understand must be traced back to the rules that gave it birth. The meaningfulness of expressions of our languages must be traced back to the inferential rules that govern the words of our language and the ways they are composed together. And the rules must be scrutinized for their role within the kinematics of deontic statuses they constitute, and within the practices they regulate. And as rules are essentially social institutions—indeed they underlie our very sociality—this excavation of the normative innervation of the human world has much to tell us about who we humans really are. At least, this is what the inferentialists believe.[21]

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