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SEMANTIC NORMATIVITY AND NATURALISM

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Abstract
I distinguish among three senses in which meaning may be said to be normative, one trivial, the other two more robust. According to the trivial sense, meaningful expressions have conditions of correct application. According to the first robust sense, these conditions are determined by norms. According to the second robust sense, statements about these conditions have normative implications. Normativity in one or the other of the robust senses, but not in the trivial sense, is commonly thought to pose a threat to naturalism. I argue that, given its trivial normativity, meaning cannot be normative in the first robust sense but it is normative in the sense that statements about the meaning of terms have hypothetical normative implications that are essential to meaning. I further argue that this normativity itself poses no threat to naturalism. Rather, this normativity follows from the fact that the trivial normativity of meaning precludes its naturalization.

1. It has been over twenty-five years since Saul Kripke wrote that the relation of meaning to action is "*normative*, not *descriptive*" (1982, p. 37), thereby changing forever the shape of philosophical debates about the nature of meaning. Kripke's requirement that an adequate theory of meaning account for the normativity of meaning was deemed to threaten a whole range of theories of meaning, from early analytic ones to later reductionist ones. Philosophers felt therefore obliged to take a stand on the issue and to identify themselves as either normativists or non-normativists. Naturalist philosophers, in particular, who think that meaning could be explained in non-semantic or non-intentional terms, felt obliged to show either that normativity is not essential to meaning or that, if it is, this is compatible with reductionism. Given how hard deriving an 'ought' from an 'is' has proven to be in other domains, one has to wonder whether those who maintained that semantic normativity is compatible with reductionism really understood normativity in the same way as those who denied the compatibility. Admittedly,

those were early days. However, as indicated by a new flurry of articles on the topic, it is still far from clear just what philosophers mean when they declare meaning to be, or not to be, normative, and thus it is still far from clear whether meaning is normative and, if it is, whether this precludes it from being naturalized. Matters have in fact become so muddy that an early proponent of semantic normativity, Paul Boghossian (2005), has recently argued that meaning is not normative after all. And no less than Kripke himself has recently been interpreted as, "far from endorsing semantic normativity", firmly rejecting it. (Kusch 2006, p. 50)

I believe that meaning cannot be naturalized and that it is normative. I shall try to establish my claim through the following steps. First I shall distinguish among three senses in which meaning may be said to be normative. The first of these is trivial, hence uncontroversial, and is often alleged to pose no threat to naturalism. The other two are more robust and open to dispute, and they are alleged to pose a threat to naturalism. According to the trivial sense, to say that meaning is normative is simply to say that linguistic expressions have conditions of correct application. According to the first more robust sense, to say that meaning is normative is to say that the meanings of expressions, i.e., the conditions of correctness governing their applications, are determined by norms, rules or conventions. According to the second more robust sense, to say that meaning is normative is to say that statements about the meanings of expressions have normative implications, in that they tell people what to do with the expressions, and that these implications are essential to meaning. The prescriptions implied are either categorical, that is, independent of people's goals in using the expressions, or hypothetical, that is, dependent on their goals. I shall call those who deny that meaning is normative in any robust sense non-normativists.

I shall argue that given the trivial sense in which meaning is normative, specifically, given what it takes for expressions to have conditions of correct application, meaning cannot be normative in the first robust sense but it is normative in the second robust sense. More precisely, though I shall agree with the non-normativists that statements about the meanings of terms cannot have categorical normative implications, I shall argue, against them, that the hypothetical normative implications that follow from those statements are essential to meaning in a way that the hypothetical normative implications that may follow from any fact, including any natural fact, are not essential to those facts. However, against other normativists who believe, as I do, that the hypothetical normativity that belongs to meaning is essential to it, I shall argue that it is not this normativity that poses a threat to naturalism. Rather, this normativity follows from the fact that meaning cannot be naturalized to begin with. It cannot be naturalized because meaningful expressions must have conditions of correct application. In other words, it is

because the normativity of meaning in the trivial sense precludes its naturalization that it is also normative in a more robust sense.

2. The trivial sense in which meaning may be said to be normative takes us back to the source of the ongoing debate on semantic normativity in Wittgenstein's later writings. Wittgenstein is responsible for making us acutely aware of a necessary condition on meaningfulness, viz., that linguistic expressions be governed by conditions of correct application. These conditions describe the semantic relations between terms and features of extra-linguistic reality. They tell us what in the world terms are true of, or warranted by, or what they refer to, stand for or denote. For example, if 'green' means green, then 'green' is applied correctly to all and only green things. If 'Tilburg' means Tilburg, then 'Tilburg' is applied correctly to Tilburg and only to Tilburg. It is important to note that, trivial as this condition on meaningfulness may seem, it is a condition which Wittgenstein, and Kripke in his wake, forcefully argued could not be met by many traditional theories of meaning. This in turn prompted them and other philosophers to examine anew the question what makes it possible for linguistic expressions to have conditions of correct application which, in effect, started the current debate on semantic normativity.

Now no one denies that meaning is normative in the "platitudinous" sense just sketched. (Hattiangadi 2006, p. 222) Indeed non-normativists would rather forgo the label of normativity to describe this aspect of meaning, lest it be confused with the more robust senses of normativity they reject. I suspect, though, that some non-normativists may themselves have been guilty of just this confusion, in that they may have claimed that some philosophers were normativists in a more robust sense when all those philosophers were endorsing was the perfectly innocuous, "intuitive" sense which, as Wittgenstein showed, had turned out to be not so easy to account for.[1] After all, does it not come naturally to think of meaning in terms of norms once it is acknowledged that linguistic applications may be correct or incorrect and thus that they are, at least in this minimal sense, rule-governed?

Non-normativists argue, however, that to say that linguistic applications are rule-governed in this minimal sense is not tantamount to saying that meaning is normative in a more robust, naturalization-threatening sense, for there are two kinds of rule: prescriptive and descriptive. Prescriptive meaning rules tell us how to use our terms, whereas descriptive rules specify our

[1] Thus the following statement of what it is for meaning to be normative is not uncommon. "Meaning, it is again platitudinous to say, is normative: it is because statements have meaning that there is such a thing as correct, or incorrect, use of them." (Wright 1986, p. 256) See also, among many others, Blackburn 1984, pp. 281–82.

terms' conditions of correct use. Take the following rule: (x) (t applies correctly to x iff x is f). This rule, non-normativists maintain, "simply *states* the correctness conditions of an expression; it does not tell me what to *do*." (Hattiangadi 2006, p. 223; cf. Glüer and Pagin 1999) Hence, they continue, such rules are no threat to naturalism. No "ought" is involved here; a fortiori, there is no "ought" to be (per impossibile?) derived from an "is". These remarks strike me as right — as far as they go. As we shall see, there is more to the normative implications of descriptive meaning rules than has been suggested so far. But as long as we think of statements about the conditions of correct application of expressions only as "categorizing, sorting out utterances into true (or justified) and false ones" (Glüer 2001, p. 60), this in itself poses no threat to naturalism.

I remarked above that Wittgenstein and Kripke argued that many traditional theories of meaning could not meet the necessary condition on meaningfulness, that is, that they could not account for the trivial sense in which meaning is normative. This leads to the first more robust sense in which meaning may be said to be normative. For it may be thought that the trivial sense of normativity could be accounted for by appeal to a more robust one.

3. According to one version of this more robust sense, meaning is normative in that the meanings of expressions, i.e., the conditions of correctness governing their applications, are determined by norms or rules provided by things that either exist independently of any language users, such as abstract senses, or somehow pertain to language users, such as mental pictures or dispositions, to name only those that Wittgenstein and Kripke emphasize. Whether or not this would threaten naturalism would depend on which items do constitute the norms or rules. However, as both Wittgenstein and Kripke demonstrated, appealing to entities or states of these kinds is hopeless. None of them can provide conditions of correct application. For, to put it in a nutshell, they need to be taken, interpreted as Wittgenstein would say, in certain ways in order to do so. But no particular interpretation is ever forced on us. So these entities or states can always be interpreted in such ways that the applications they allegedly govern are correct, or incorrect. The lesson here is that, ultimately, nothing, considered in itself, can determine the conditions of correct application of expressions. These can only belong to things that already are meaningful. And it is worth adding that what is true of abstract or internal items is true of external physical items as well. No feature of a speaker's environment, considered in itself, can determine the conditions of correct application of an expression. So meaning cannot be normative in the sense that the conditions of correctness governing the applications of expressions are determined by rules or norms that need to be interpreted before they can do the job. Furthermore, needless to say, if these rules or norms are

to be thought of as already endowed with meaning, and hence as not needing interpretation, the question then is, what determines their meaning?[2]

It is interesting to note here that the above sense of normativity is precisely what Martin Kusch has in mind when he claims that Kripke does not endorse semantic normativity. He is right, neither Wittgenstein nor Kripke are normativists in this sense.[3] But it is also worth considering Kripke's next move. For not being a normativist in this sense means in effect that the question what makes it possible for expressions to have conditions of correct application remains to be answered, which is what Kripke explicitly proceeds to do. And his answer is worth examining, for it might be thought of as introducing another way in which meaning may be determined by norms and so in which it may be said to be normative in the first robust sense.

According to this sense, what govern the application of expressions are *communal* norms, uses or conventions. Specifically, for Kripke, which of an individual's applications of her expressions are correct, and thus what her expressions mean, is determined by comparing her applications to those of her linguistic community. If an individual's applications of an expression consistently agree with those of her community fellows, then what she means by the expression is the same as what they mean by it. I do not think, however, that this account reveals meaning to be more than trivially normative. True, according to this view, any particular individual's applications of her terms are governed by norms, i.e., conditions of correctness, which are not of her own making. But this does not make meaning itself normative in a robust way. For all it does is appeal to communal meanings to account for the meanings of an individual's expressions, but it does not tell us what in turn determines the conditions of correct application of communally used expressions. Thus, in effect, appealing to communal meanings, and leaving it at that, is tantamount to evading the question what provides expressions with conditions of correct application to begin with, thereby evading the question whether meaning is normative in the sense that the conditions of correctness governing the application of expressions are themselves determined by norms. Note further that, if these communal norms are supposed to be thought of as communal uses (as opposed to meanings), then appealing to them is subject to the same problem as appealing to the entities rejected by Wittgenstein and Kripke. These uses too must be taken, interpreted, in certain ways before they can provide some norms rather than others.

[2] This is obviously but a sketch of Wittgenstein's argument, which has been developed at length by numerous philosophers. See Kripke 1982, chapter 2, Thornton 1998, chapter 2, Verheggen 2000 and 2003, Williams 1999, chapter 6, Wilson 1994, Wittgenstein 1958, especially ## 138–55.

[3] See Kusch 2006, chapter 2.

In short, then, I do not think that meaning is normative in the sense that the conditions of correctness governing the applications of expressions are determined by norms or rules, be they individual or communal, and whatever their provenance is. In each case the problem is two-fold: either these norms or rules must be regarded in certain ways before they can provide conditions of correct application, in which case they are doomed to failure, or these norms or rules are already equipped with conditions of correct application, in which case the question is, whence these conditions? As many commentators on Wittgenstein have observed, we have either an indeterminacy problem or an infinite regress problem.[4] To put it succinctly, then, I do not think that there are norms *preceding* meaningfulness. But the more recent debate concerning normativity has focused on what norms, if any, may *follow* from meaningfulness.[5] Thus I turn to the second more robust sense in which meaning may be said to be normative.

4. Meaning may be normative, in this sense, for statements about the meaning of expressions, in effect, about their conditions of correct application, entail prescriptions or obligations about how to use the expressions. The debate here is two-fold. First, there is the question whether the prescriptions entailed are categorical or hypothetical. Categorical prescriptions tell speakers what to do (what they should or may do) with the expressions regardless of the goals speakers want to achieve in using them. Hypothetical prescriptions tell speakers what to do with the expressions depending on their goals in using them. For example, if I want to tell the truth, I should apply 'green' only to green objects (provided, of course, that I mean green by 'green'). Second, there is the question whether, if these prescriptions are merely hypothetical, the normativity that belongs to meaning is of an interesting or genuine variety, that is, a variety that distinguishes it from that which applies to any fact, including any natural fact. And thus there is the question whether hypothetical normativity may pose a threat to naturalism.

All parties agree here that, if meaning is normative in this second more robust sense, this follows from its being normative in the trivial sense, that is, from the uncontroversial claim that meaningful expressions have conditions of correct application. But the non-normativists deny that statements about

[4] See Williams 1999, chapter 6, and Verheggen 2003 for the importance of distinguishing sharply between the two kinds of problem. See Wilson 1994 for an interesting exposition of the indeterminacy problem.

[5] Cf. Glüer 2001, p. 54, and Glüer and Wikforss's distinction between "meaning determining normativity" and "meaning engendered normativity" in 2009b. See Glock 2005 for a current advocate of the first more robust kind of normativity.

the conditions of correct application of expressions have "normative consequences of any sort" (Glüer and Wikforss 2009b, p. 10). Specifically, they deny both that the trivial normativity of meaning has categorical normative implications and that the hypothetical normative implications that undeniably follow from it are essential to meaning. My claim is that hypothetical implications that are essential to meaning do follow from its trivial normativity.

Before I attempt to show this, however, let me note that it may be hard to believe that anyone has ever seriously subscribed to the claim that meaning is categorically normative, where this means that, in order to mean something by an expression, a speaker ought to use it correctly "quite independently of what she wants to do." (Hattiangadi 2006, p. 228; 2009, pp. 54–5). Did Kripke, for one, ever believe that, when asked, "What is 57 + 68?", one should answer "125", no matter what? Could he not imagine circumstances where answering, say, "325" would be called for, e.g., if someone wished to cheat on her trusting and arithmetically challenged grandmother? And of course there would be no question of that individual not meaning plus by '+'; her success in cheating on her grandmother would depend upon her meaning precisely that. I rather suspect myself that Kripke is one of those who have been misunderstood, not only as normativists of the first more robust variety, but also as categorical normativists. Be that as it may, there are philosophers who do seem to have the categorical claim in mind when they contend that meaning is genuinely normative. Kathrin Glüer and Asa Wikforss (2009b, p. 10) maintain that it can be found in the following passage from Boghossian: "The fact that [an] expression means something implies... a whole set of *normative* truths about my behavior with that expression: namely, that my use is correct in application to certain objects and not in application to others" (1989, p. 513). Note, however, that, by itself, this passage does not support the categorical conclusion. It simply says, to repeat, that, given what an expression means, some of its applications will be deemed to be correct and some not. Nevertheless, Boghossian's subsequent writing, in the same article, that "to be told that 'horse' means *horse* implies that a speaker ought to be motivated to apply the expression only to horses" does strongly suggest the categorical reading. (Boghossian 1989, p. 533)[6]

Daniel Whiting is a philosopher who unambiguously advocates categorical normativity, though not in the rather crude sense suggested so far but in a slightly altered sense that makes the idea at least somewhat plausible. According to Whiting, to say that semantic normativity is categorical is to say that we have a *prima facie* obligation to use our terms correctly. Its being

[6] Boghossian has indicated that he never intended to be read in the categorical way, though he admits that talk of normativity in the passage quoted by Glüer and Wikforss was misleading. (2005, pp. 207–8)

prima facie leaves room for its occasionally being overridden by other obligations, "say, ethical, epistemic, or prudential", obligations. (2007, pp. 137–8) Indeed, more recently, Whiting has made clear that prima facie semantic obligations can be overridden not just by other prima facie obligations but also by additional considerations or desires, such as the desire to keep one's dignity or integrity. (2009, p. 547) Now, Whiting maintains that *categorical* normativity follows simply from the fact that meaningful expressions have conditions of correct application. (2007, p. 136) For, according to Whiting, it follows from this that a given use of an expression may meet a certain standard and "this is clearly a normative or evaluative matter" (2007, p. 135). But all that seems immediately to follow from the fact that meaningful expressions have conditions of correct application is that statements about the meaning of terms imply *hypothetical* obligations. Such statements tell speakers how to apply their terms given the desires they have. As Glüer has put it, "*additional* argument is needed to show that semantically correct use at the same time already is prescribed use." (2001, p. 60, my emphasis.) And, as we shall see, no argument Whiting provides to this effect is convincing.[7] But even if no such argument can be found, it does not follow from this that no good argument can be found to show that hypothetical normativity of the genuine variety, that is, a variety different from that which may apply to any fact, does follow from the claim that meaningful expressions have conditions of correct application.

Non-normativists sometimes argue against this by comparing categorizations in the natural realm to categorizations in the semantic realm. Thus Glüer and Wikforss argue that "any categorization can be used to derive normative consequences. . . *if a suitable norm is in force*. Take tables. If a suitable norm is in force, for instance the norm that tables under all circumstances ought to be kicked, normative consequences can be derived from something's being a table. But not directly. Things can be categorized into tables and non-tables without any such norm being in force. The normativity thesis must therefore not be mixed up with the claim that normative consequences can be derived from semantic categorizations." (2009a, pp. 36–7) Granted, but the question is, can linguistic applications be categorized into correct and incorrect without any norm being in place? It seems to me

[7] In his more recent article, Whiting has tried further to defend his initial contention by arguing that the non-normativists have failed to establish their claim that 'correctly', as used in the description of a term's conditions of correct application, is not a normative notion. (2009, pp. 537–44) Though the non-normativists may reply here that this falls short of showing that 'correctly' is in fact a normative notion, I think Whiting has succeeded in putting the ball into the non-normativists's court. However, even if he is right in maintaining that 'correctly', in this context, is a normative notion, it does not follow from this that he is right in maintaining that meaning is categorically normative.

question-begging to say that they can. Of course, nothing follows simply from considering the categorizations, be they semantic or otherwise. One must ask for the source or basis of the categorizations. Linguistic applications may be categorized into correct and incorrect because they are subject to conditions of correctness. So the question is, when conditions of correctness are present, are norms not automatically present as well? I shall try to answer this question by using the favourite analogy some non-normativists appeal to in their attempts to establish that meaning is not genuinely normative, if it is merely hypothetically normative.

Some non-normativists compare hypothetical obligations implied by statements about the meaning of terms with other means/end prescriptive statements such as, to use Whiting's example, "If I want to stay dry, I ought to go outside only if it is not raining". (2007, p. 139) They argue that facts about the weather dictate how I should behave, given my desires, but "this does not imbue these facts with normativity" (Wikforss 2001, p. 205; cf. Kusch 2006, p. 61). This is indeed a complaint non-normativists commonly make about hypothetical normativity: it is uninteresting, for "every fact is normative in that sense." (Boghossian 2005, p. 207) Similarly to the weather case, my obligation to use my terms in certain ways, since it too is contingent on my desires, does not make meaning genuinely normative. Whiting, however, has retorted on behalf of the normativists that there is an important difference between the two types of hypothetical statement. Whereas in the weather case I will not do anything incorrect if my desire changes and I go outside when it rains after all, in the meaning case I will do something incorrect if, e.g., (meaning rich by 'rich') I apply 'rich' to a poor person, even though I do this because I have no desire to tell the truth but rather want to mislead my interlocutor. (Whiting 2007, p. 139) That there is such a disanalogy strikes me as right, but what does it show?

According to Whiting, it shows that I have used the expression *wrongly*, that I have made a semantic mistake. And this in turn is supposed to support the claim that I have at least a prima facie obligation to use my terms correctly and that this obligation may not be overridden by just any desire. (Whiting 2007, p. 139) As noted above, since the obligation is prima facie, it may sometimes be overridden by other prima facie obligations or even desires of a certain sort. However, Whiting continues, unlike the hypothetical prescriptions implied by facts about the weather which may be overridden by *mere* desires, semantic prescriptions may not be so overridden. But why not?

Let us ask first what exactly it is that I have done wrong, when I applied 'rich' to a poor person, and had a prima facie obligation not to do. In what sense have I used the expression wrongly? I certainly have used it to mean rich; otherwise I could not have misled my interlocutor. Thus, assuming I

speak English, I have not used the wrong word. Rather, I have used it, intentionally, to utter a falsehood, I have misapplied it. If the mistake is semantic, it can only be in this sense. So far Whiting has not added anything to the claim that meaningful terms have conditions of correct application and, as a trivial semantic result, applications can be classified as correct or incorrect. No reason has been provided to ground the further claim that I have a prima facie obligation, in effect, to tell the truth. In so far as I have such a prima facie obligation, it is at any rate a moral one, not a semantic one. In fact, at least in his initial article, it looks as if, for Whiting, if my semantic prima facie obligation is overridden by another obligation I have done nothing wrong, because I have done something morally, or perhaps prudentially, or epistemically right. But if my semantic prima facie obligation is overridden by a mere desire, then I have done something wrong because I have done something morally, or prudentially, or epistemically wrong. But the difference between the cases here is semantically irrelevant. In both cases I have done something semantically wrong in that, in both cases, I have applied a word incorrectly.

In his more recent article, Whiting has tried further to argue for the claim that prima facie semantic obligations cannot be overridden by mere desires. However, in the end, his argument seems to rest on his observation that, when one misapplies an expression out of mere desire, it is "not obviously senseless or manifestly unwarranted" to criticize the speaker. (2009, p. 549) But it is hard to think of a case that calls for such a criticism, that is, for a criticism that would be made on purely semantic grounds. All cases of misapplying a term I can think of — lying, misleading, joking, misperceiving, etc. — seem to call for criticisms that are morally, or prudentially, or epistemically, but not semantically, grounded. And even if I did misapply a term out of mere desire, just because I felt like it — if, e.g., pointing at a magnificent English lawn, I uttered the words, "This grass is red" (meaning red by 'red'), I do not see why I should be criticized for this on semantic grounds — after all, I would be doing this precisely because of what I do mean by my words. Thus, to my mind, Whiting still has not succeeded in establishing categorical semantic normativity.

Now, I have said that I nonetheless accept Whiting's contention that there is a disanalogy between hypothetical prescriptions involving the weather and those involving meaning. But the disanalogy needs to be further examined. Though it does not have the significance Whiting finds in it, I think that it is significant in a way that non-normativists have failed to acknowledge. What exactly does the disanalogy consist in?

To begin with, the weather is not constituted by any conditions of correct application that dictate people's behaviour, contingent on their desires. Meaningful expressions are so constituted. However, though conditions of

correct application are constitutive of meaning, again, they do not in themselves dictate, for any particular application of an expression, what it should be like, independently of the speaker's purpose in using it. They only imply which applications will be correct and which incorrect. Thus, again, so far the disanalogy does not indicate that meaning is normative in a genuine sense. But there is more to the disanalogy. Facts about the weather do not always dictate how I should behave, say, when planning to go out; they may become irrelevant, as in the case where I no longer care about staying dry. But facts about linguistic expressions, i.e., their conditions of correct application, always dictate how I should behave when intending to produce a meaningful utterance. Indeed, they dictate my linguistic behaviour regardless of what my specific desire is, that is, not independently of my desire, but regardless of whether my desire calls for a correct application or for an incorrect one. Thus, depending on my desires, I should apply expressions in certain ways, correctly or not, and this is obviously dependent on what their conditions of correct application are to begin with. This still does not make meaning categorically normative since, again, the claim that expressions should be used correctly independently of speakers' desires has not been made. On the contrary, the claim that is being reinforced here is that linguistic prescriptions are always hypothetical, and this tells in favour of non-normativists. But it also brings out the claim that statements about the meaning of terms always imply hypothetical prescriptions that, unlike those implied by statements about the weather, speakers *must* take into account. And this, it seems to me, does bring out a sense according to which meaning may be deemed to be genuinely normative. For, according to this sense, if none of the hypothetical prescriptions that flow from statements about the meaning of my terms has application to me, then I do not mean by them what the statements say they mean; the statements become false. On the other hand, if none of the hypothetical prescriptions that flow from statements about the weather conditions has application to me, this in no way affects the truth-value of those statements. The weather conditions do not change; they just become irrelevant. In other words, my meaning rain by 'rain' always gives me reason to use (commits me to using) the term in certain ways, though the particular ways depend on the particular desires I have. I do not have the option to be indifferent to the fact that I mean rain by 'rain'. But I may be indifferent to the fact that it is raining. Its raining does not always give me reason to behave in certain ways (when going out); whether it does or not depends on the desires I have.

The foregoing remarks suggest that normative implications about how to use terms are essential to meaning; they indeed follow from terms having conditions of correct application. They are part of what it is for terms to mean what they do. As E.H. Gampel, another hypothetical normativist, has put it, meaning facts are "essentially such as to guide action", they have

"a capacity to justify [the use of an expression] that is essential." (1997, p. 229) Other facts which are truly only contingently normative are guides only because we happen to have desires or goals that make them guides. But meaning facts are the facts they are because they guide us in certain ways, because they have normative implications. I realize that this talk of guidance may be misleading — I do not want to suggest that, before I talk, I somehow search in my head for the meanings of my expressions and then act accordingly. All I have in mind is that, given what I mean by an expression, I am committed to using it, and constrained to use it, in certain ways and not others. As Kripke put it, the relation of meaning to action is normative. What remains to be seen is whether this hypothetical normativity poses a threat to naturalism.

5. Gampel thinks that it does. He writes: meaning facts "are essentially such as to justify... it is hard to see how it could be essential to natural items... to have a capacity to justify." (1997, p. 231) This much seems right. As stated above, it is part of what it is for an expression to mean something that it has certain normative implications. But if a fact is only potentially hypothetically normative, then having certain normative implications is not part of what makes it the fact that it is. And natural facts are only potentially hypothetically normative. But does meaning's inescapable hypothetical normativity pose a special threat to naturalism? I do not think so. For this hypothetical normativity is really part and parcel of the fact that meaningful expressions must have conditions of correct application and that these conditions are intrinsic to meaningful expressions. This takes us back to the lesson I noted in section 3. Nothing, considered in itself, can determine the conditions of correct application of expressions. Nothing with which we could associate expressions can do so; a fortiori, no facts of any kind and, most importantly for our present purposes, no natural facts can do so.

That these conditions must be taken into account, conformed to or not depending on speakers' desires, follows immediately from the expressions having meaning. But if the meaning of an expression were to be reduced to something that could provide conditions of correct application only when it is taken in a certain way, then normative implications would not follow immediately from whatever it is that meaning has been reduced to. If conditions of correct application were only contingent, so would be the normative implications of statements about the meaning of expressions. But, again, the conditions of correct application governing expressions cannot be contingent. Contingent conditions of correct application really are no conditions. Thus I do not believe that the hypothetical normativity of meaning poses a threat to naturalism over and above that posed by what I called at the outset its trivial normativity, the uncontroversial fact that meaningful expressions

have conditions of correct application. If these cannot be naturalized, then the hypothetical normativity of meaning is intrinsic to it.

6. To sum up, first, non-normativists are wrong in thinking that the hypothetical normativity of meaning is no more interesting than the hypothetical normativity that potentially belongs to any fact, including any natural fact. There are statements that divide pieces of behaviour into correct and incorrect ones that have normative implications only if those statements have application to us. We might say that those statements are purely descriptive. But statements about the conditions of correctness governing the applications of expressions are not of this kind. If they lose their prescriptive force, they simply become false descriptions. Thus, contra Hattiangadi and other non-normativists, describing conditions of correctness may imply prescriptivity.[8] It does so when the conditions are intrinsic to the fact or object being described. Hence it does so when the conditions apply to meaning, which leads us back to the worry I have with some hypothetical normativists.

Hypothetical normativists are wrong if they think that the hypothetical normativity of meaning poses an additional threat to its naturalization. Rather, its inescapability makes more vivid the fact that meaning cannot be naturalized because meaningful expressions have conditions of correct application. Perhaps it makes us understand that fact better, if not altogether discover it. All of which indicates that Wittgenstein's underscoring this necessary condition on meaningfulness was of greater significance than some have thought — though, again, it may be what many defenders of semantic normativity had in mind all along.[9]

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[8] One may insist here that, since the relevant kind of prescriptivity is not categorical, talk of prescriptive norms really is misleading; what we have are mere constitutive norms. If one prefers to describe the matter in this way, I have no objection. My point, contra the non-normativists, remains that the hypothetical normative implications that follow from statements about meaning are essential to meaning in a way that the hypothetical normative implications that may follow from natural facts are not essential to these facts.

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