

A third conception of the normativity of meaning

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According to a first conception of the normativity of meaning, statements about the meaning of an expression directly entail statements about how the expression ought to be used. An effective objection against this conception is that the normative entailments are at most instrumental norms. According to a second conception of the normativity of meaning, normative rules of use are constitutive of the meaning of an expression. . Meanings so explicated might be supposed to play several theoretical roles, but above all they are supposed to figure in a certain theory of linguistic communication. Unfortunately, meanings so conceived cannot perform the work thus assigned to them. Even once we have abandoned the conception of meanings as fundamental theoretical entities in the theory of language, we may take an interest in the specific role that terms such as “means” play in interpersonal cooperation. Here there is room for a third conception of the normativity of meaning. Statements about meanings may be viewed as proposals concerning the uses of words, the acceptance of which will have normative consequences.