

## The Relation between Norms and Patterns of Behavioral Dispositions

An important variant of pragmatist accounts of linguistic meaning assumes the existence of implicit norms. An attractive way of accounting for these norms is in terms of communally shared dispositions to act and to positively or negatively sanction the behavior of others. Thus, Hauge-land assumes that humans are censorious beings, which is to say that they tend to act like others in certain situations, to suppress variation, and that they are receptive to the suppressing behavior of con-specifics. Because of these biological facts about humans, capturable in a physicalistic vocabulary of behavioral dispositions to act, certain communally shared and mutually enforced forms of behavior emerge.

Obviously, such a theory could not account for moral norms because moral correctness seems largely independent of what most persons would do and expect others to do. However, even if the range of this theory is restricted to norms the community has the authority to determine (norms of etiquette and, on some views, norms of language), the problem remains that it seems to ignore the gap between 'is' and 'ought', and thus to commit a naturalistic fallacy.

In my paper, I will not try bridge this gap, but only to shed some light on its nature. More specifically, I want to explore the relation between the fact that a norm obtains in a community and the fact that its members exhibit certain behavioral dispositions. I will point to three characteristics of this relation and then draw a conclusion about the metaphysics of normative facts.

The first characteristic I have in mind is that a certain pattern of behavioral dispositions corresponds to the existence of the norm 'Do  $a$  in situation  $s$ '. To explain this, it has to be assumed that the action  $a$  prescribed by this norm is underlain by a physical event  $e$ . Then, the physical disposition that the event  $e$  occurs in situation  $s$  belongs to the pattern of behavioral dispositions corresponding to the above norm. However, this pattern contains further elements because the normative claim that one should do  $a$  in  $s$  implies that it is in order to sanction those who fail to do  $a$  in  $s$ . Since a sanction is again an action with a physical aspect, we arrive at a second behavioral disposition belonging to the pattern of dispositions corresponding to the norm, namely the disposition that the physical event underlying a sanction occurs if the physical event underlying the action  $a$  does not occur in situation  $s$ .

This reasoning can be iterated infinitely because the claim that sanctions are *in order*, which was implied by the original normative claim 'Do  $a$  in  $s$ ', is itself a normative claim which in turn implies further normative claims, and so on, leading to a pattern of infinitely many normative claims. Since in each case there are physical events underlying the actions mentioned in the normative claim, we get an infinitely complex pattern of physical dispositions corresponding to the normative fact that one should do  $a$  in  $s$ .

This consideration shows that the normative and the physical vocabulary are incommensurable in the sense that a normative claim 'One should do  $a$  in situation  $s$ ' can never be reconstructed adequately in terms of behavioral dispositions because the meaning of the normative claim can only be approximated asymptotically in terms of behavioral dispositions.

In my view, however, this incommensurability is only part of the reason why normative claims cannot be reduced to claims couched in terms of behavioral dispositions. The main reason for

the existence of a gap between 'is' and 'ought' consists in the prescriptivity of normative vocabulary as opposed to the descriptivity of the physical vocabulary. Prescriptivity and descriptivity can be characterized in terms of different directions of fit, but I think it is more in line with a broadly pragmatist account of language to characterize this difference in terms of the appropriate reactions to perceived discrepancies:

A speaker who endorses a normative claim thereby commits herself to normatively expect certain actions of others. If these actions are not forthcoming, this does not necessarily constitute a reason to consider the normative claim as mistaken and thus to give up the claim. Rather, this provides a reason for the speaker to apply sanctions to the deviating agent. On the other hand, a speaker who claims that a pattern of behavioral dispositions obtains in a group of organisms, e.g., one approximately corresponding to a normative claim, does not commit herself to apply sanctions if the organisms she is talking about do not behave accordingly. Instead, such a discrepancy is a good reason for the speaker to modify her claims.

The difference between descriptivity and prescriptivity should be understood as a difference of illocutionary force, for the following reason: I take it that the linguistic meaning of speech acts consists of two components, illocutionary force and propositional content, which (within limits) can vary independently. It is part of the meaning of normative claims that the speaker conditionally commits herself to apply sanctions, while it is also part of the meaning of naturalistic claims that the speaker conditionally commits herself to modify her claim. Since these aspects of the meaning of these claims have nothing to do with their content, they should be taken to partly constitute the illocutionary force of these speech acts.

In my view, this difference in illocutionary force is the main reason for the irreducibility of 'ought'-claims to 'is'-claims. Descriptive claims about patterns of behavioral dispositions in a group of organisms can never capture the prescriptivity of the corresponding normative claim, no matter how complex these patterns are. Moreover, increasing the complexity of the pattern of behavioral dispositions can yield a better approximation only of the content of the normative claim, but not of its illocutionary force.

In sum, I think the relation between the normative and physicalistic vocabulary can be characterized as follows: (1) There is a correspondence between a normative claim and a physicalistic claim about a pattern of behavioral dispositions, where (2) the corresponding pattern of dispositions is infinitely complex. (3) The illocutionary forces of normative and physicalistic claims are different.

Obviously, such an account of the relation between two vocabularies cannot explain how communal patterns of behavior, including (negatively) reinforcing reactions to other's behavior, can institute norms. But there is a metaphysical conclusion that can be drawn from these considerations: In virtue of the difference in force and the approximate correspondence in content it seems natural to conclude that by endorsing a normative claim, we speak about physical facts, only that infinitely many of them implied, and that we speak about them in a special, prescriptive way. It is not the case that normative claims are directed at some special realm of being, different from the physical world.