

NORMATIVITY

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Intelligence abides in the *meaningful*. This is not to say that it is surrounded by or directed toward the meaningful, as if they were two separate phenomena, somehow related to one another. Rather, intelligence has its very existence in the meaningful as such—in something like the way a nation’s wealth lies in its productive capacity, or a corporation’s strength may consist in its market position. Of course, the meaningful, here, cannot be wholly passive and inert, but must include also activity and process.

Intelligence, then, is nothing other than the overall interactive structure of meaningful behavior and objects. — John Haugeland, *Having Thought*, p. 230

I — Introduction

Normativity becomes a central concern in the philosophy of mind primarily through consideration of the normativity of meaning. Even the formulation of this concern is often contested, however. In the passage above, Haugeland speaks of “intelligence” rather than mind, and of “the meaningful” rather than meaning, in part to avoid initial presumption that minds or meanings are distinctive kinds of entity. The phenomena in question can nevertheless be readily identified despite considerable disagreement about how to describe, explain or assess them. Human capacities for experience, thought, speech, and action are paradigm cases, but their relations to one another and to other phenomena in the same vicinity are often at issue philosophically. These nearby phenomena include the behavior or capacities of (some) non-human animals; the capacities of computers, their stored programs, or their robotic bodies; and the doings of social institutions or groups, including social animals or animal societies. At the limit, the boundaries of this domain are explored by asking how to recognize meaningful thought, utterances or actions in unfamiliar or even alien form, which has generated reflections

on the plight of field linguists (Quine 1960), radical interpreters (Davidson 1984), intentional stance-takers (Dennett 1987), or even field teleologists (Okrent 2007, ch. 2).

An underlying difficulty has been the holism of both the phenomena to be understood and their philosophical characterization. The mindfulness or meaningfulness of various states, events or performances characteristically depends upon their relations to other such states, events, or performances.¹ Their contribution to more extensive, mutually supportive patterns is crucial to their characterization as meaningful, intentional, or normative. More important, the various concepts used to explicate these phenomena philosophically often come as a package: philosophical approaches to mind, understanding, meaning, intentionality, rationality, and action are not readily specifiable one at a time, and different explications of these several concepts typically do not play well together.

The question of whether and how to understand mind and meaning as normative acquires its characteristic philosophical form in efforts to place these phenomena on both sides of a modern scientific conception of nature. The issue is whether they are intelligible *as* natural phenomena, while also recognizing that they are constitutive of scientific comprehension *of* nature. For Plato, as a contrasting example, the tripartite human soul or mind, comprising reason, spirit, and appetite, was thoroughly and unproblematically normative. The soul is directed toward, responsive to, and governed by the Good, because the cosmos in which we find ourselves is normatively ordered, and our place within it is only intelligible in terms of the Good. The emergence of modern natural sciences excised any normative order from predominant

conceptions of the natural world. That excision frames contemporary possibilities for understanding the place of mind in nature, whether as imposing or instituting normative order within anormative nature, or as explicating mind in anormative terms. The philosophical centrality of this issue responds to an implicit threat: a modern scientific understanding of nature may render unintelligible our very capacity to understand the world scientifically.

Care must be taken at the outset to clarify what it would mean to consider mind and meaning as normative. Uses of the term ‘normative’ vary in scope and significance. Some uses imply a contrast between descriptive and prescriptive content, for example. Since part of what is in question in asking about the normativity of mind and meaning is whether the contentfulness of *any* thoughts, utterances, or actions is a normative phenomenon, it would beg the question to presume such a contrast from the outset. Sometimes normativity is identified with specific theoretical conceptions of the normative, for example, as encoded in explicit rules or principles, as marking social differentiation of normality from deviance, or as comprising “values” grounded in actual, presumptive, or default “valuings.” To separate questions of whether mind and meaning are normative from how to understand their normativity, however, we need to hold in abeyance more specific conceptions of what normativity consists in. For our purposes, ‘normativity’ is a covering term for any phenomena for which it makes good sense to understand them as open to assessment, whether in terms of success and failure, correctness and incorrectness, appropriateness and inappropriateness, justification or lack thereof, right or wrong, justice or injustice, and so forth. As Brandom (1979) once noted, the question of which

¹ For the sake of brevity and flow, I hereafter speak of mind and meaning rather than mindedness and meaningfulness, but retain the qualification that we are not thereby ontologically committed

phenomena are normative might then be understood to invoke not a factual difference among them but a normative difference in how to respond to them correctly or appropriately. My suggestion above in asking which phenomena it “makes sense” to understand as open to assessment falls within the scope of Brandom’s proposal, since making sense is itself a normative notion.

Two further clarifications are needed before taking up contemporary conceptions of the normativity of mind and meaning and its possible sociality. The first clarification distinguishes the normativity of meaning and mind from the normativity of epistemic, ethical or political justification, whether of actions, beliefs, or social practices and institutions. Mindedness is the capacity to think thoughts, make meaningful utterances, and undertake actions.² Thoughts, utterances, and actions are open to epistemic, pragmatic, moral, political, and other forms of assessment, but the normativity of meaning and mind concerns their *candidacy* for assessment in these ways, not the *outcome* of those assessments. To assess the truth or falsity of a belief or statement, for example, one must understand what it says. To assess the success or failure or the moral significance of an action, one must grasp what the agent was doing or trying to do. Performances and practices are open to assessment and can fail at this level of candidacy: an utterance may be empty or nonsensical, an event may be a mindless motion or meaningless behavior rather than an action, and a group of agents or performances may not constitute an intelligible practice or institution open to assessment as a whole.

to minds or meanings.

² The place of perception in conceptions of mind is more contested, in significant part because of differences concerning how perceptual awareness is related to conceptual capacities for thought and action.

The second clarification concerns the place of propositional or sentential content within the more general realm of the normativity of mind and meaning. Understanding and expressing sentential or propositional content has been the primary focus of philosophical consideration. That broadly linguistic focus includes thoughts and actions that are not themselves linguistically expressed, but whose content or meaning is expressible in terms of propositional attitudes such as belief or desire. We should acknowledge that the domain of mind and meaning extends beyond the domain of performances with propositional content. There are at least three sets of issues in this vicinity. First, some philosophers (Taylor 1971 or Heidegger 1927 are good examples) regard propositional or sentential content as integral to and dependent upon larger patterns of meaningful interaction that constitute social practices, cultures, or “worlds”. Second, an ongoing debate divides those (e.g., McDowell 1994) who take the discursively articulable conceptual domain as unbounded from those defending some form of non-conceptual content, whether located in qualitative experience or bodily habit or skill. Third, mindful engagement with the world surely extends to the emotional or other affective aspects of experience, thought and action, which likely cannot be adequately characterized solely in terms of affective “attitudes” toward linguistically articulable contents. In what follows, I nevertheless set these issues aside here to attend to the normativity of discursive or conceptual capacities, as these three debates raise too many issues to address. Moreover, the normativity of discursive aspects of mind and meaning plays a central role in any account, regardless of responses to these broader concerns.

Conceptions of mindedness and the meaningful as *normative* phenomena in this broad sense trace back to Kant, like so much else in contemporary philosophy. For Kant, concepts are

rules for organizing experience and its contribution to possible judgments, and for determining action. Thought and action are distinct from movement or behavior in being governed by a law the agent imposes upon herself as a rule or norm, rather than inexorably according to natural law. To think, speak, or act is to answer to what one *ought* to think, say, or do, rather than merely in accord with regular or necessary patterns in nature. The difference concerns the direction of fit between rules and events: should a rule or norm answer to events (as correctly or incorrectly describing or explaining them), or should events answer to the rule (which renders them intelligible or unintelligible, correct or incorrect, moral or immoral, etc., according to whether they “obey” the rule)? Kant sought to situate mind in nature by defending the compatibility of two comprehensive stances. Understood theoretically, everything we say and do is a natural occurrence, correctly describable in accord with inexorable natural law. Understood practically, however, we are obligated to regard ourselves as free to determine our own thoughts and behavior in accord with norms we give to ourselves as rational agents. Despite their apparent conflict, Kant regarded these stances as compatible, because the first correctly grasps these events as objects of possible experience (phenomena), and the second commits to the possibility that “in themselves” (noumena) they involve a causality of freedom not manifest within conceptually organized experience.

This Kantian problematic acquired distinctive reformulation and renewed philosophical salience in the early 20th Century through Frege’s (1984) and Husserl’s (1970) criticisms of psychologism. They objected that empirical scientific descriptions of thought cannot account for how we ought to think. Frege insisted that logic is a normative science; Husserl advocated a phenomenological science of meaning and essence to provide normative grounding for empirical

sciences of fact. They were joined by the early Wittgenstein, neo-Kantians, and logical positivists in seeking to ground the normativity of meaning in transcendentally or logically necessary structures that allowed thoughts to have a definite content open to empirical assessment. Even Carnap's (1956) later, more pragmatic work presented the choice of syntactically structured linguistic frameworks as a domain of freedom, accountable only to norms of clear communication that would allow empirical resolution of disagreements.

Contemporary conceptions of mind and meaning as normative phenomena have been shaped by far-reaching criticisms of these efforts to ground their normativity in essential or necessary structures of thought, and/or an immediately given content not open to further assessment. Among the more influential criticisms were Quine's (1950) challenge to the analytic/synthetic distinction, Wittgenstein's (1952) reflections on rule-following, Sellars's (1997) criticisms of the Myth of the Given, Goodman's (1954) new riddle of induction, Davidson's attack on the very idea of a conceptual scheme, Derrida's (1967) rejection of the metaphysics of presence, and Heidegger's (1927/1963) criticism of "ontic" explanations of meaningful disclosure that appeal to entities such as consciousness, language, or meanings. Earlier accounts of the normativity of meaning mostly appealed to formal, immaterial structures of logic or transcendental consciousness that supposedly provided *necessary* conditions for any meaningful thought. These critics relocated the sources of normative authority and force securely within the spatiotemporal world of nature and history. That shift gave renewed import to the question of how to situate conceptual normativity in relation to a scientific conception of the world.

Responses to that question generally take a Kantian form without accepting Kant's own proposed resolution. Three broad options seem available: we can treat the world as only encountered experientially within a scientific *conception* of nature answerable to rational norms; we can treat the apparent normativity of conceptions of the world as instead scientifically explicable in terms of natural causes or laws; or we can seek other ways to render natural-scientific and normative orientations as both legitimate and mutually compatible. The first, broadly idealist option, has largely fallen from philosophical favor, for reasons that I shall not directly discuss here.³ The other two options share a common concern: how to situate the normativity of mind and meaning intelligibly with respect to nature as scientifically understood. They differ concerning whether satisfying that concern still requires taking its normativity at face value, or instead showing how its only *apparently* normative character arises as a natural phenomenon.

The most characteristic responses have sought to ground the normativity of mind and meaning in some aspect of human *social* life: here we find Wittgenstein's enigmatic appeals to shared forms of life, Sellars's normative functionalism, Quine (1960, ix) on "language as a social art", Heidegger on the anonymous conformity of everyday ways of life, Kuhn's (1970) appeals to scientific communities and their paradigms, or Putnam (1975) on the epistemic division of labor within linguistic communities, among others. The turn to broadly social conceptions of mind and meaning raises two central issues that will occupy the remainder of this essay. The first is to differentiate more clearly the disparate conceptions of language and mind as social

³ In this sense, certain strands of empiricism are idealist in taking our conceptions and judgments to be answerable only to experience, and not to the world experienced.

phenomena embedded in often-vague references to social practices, linguistic communities, or forms of life. The second is to consider whether and how these appeals to the social world can help explicate the (apparent) normativity of mind and meaning with respect to a broadly scientific conception of its encompassing natural world.

Explications of normativity typically must address at least three interrelated issues. The first concerns the determinacy of normative assessment. There must be a difference, and a way to tell the difference, between success and failure, correctness and incorrectness, sense and senselessness, justice and injustice, or any other normative considerations involved. If some phenomenon admits of no difference between correctness and merely seeming to be correct or thinking one is correct, then the notion of correctness has no place there, and similarly for other normative considerations. The second issue concerns the authority or legitimacy of these normative determinations. As Rebecca Kukla once noted,

For [something] to genuinely bind or make a claim, its authority must be legitimate.

There can be no such thing as real yet illegitimate authority, since such 'authority' would not in fact bind us; the closest there could be to such a thing would be coercive force which makes no normative claims upon us. Kukla 2000, 165

The third issue concerns the “force” of normative authority. Neither causal nor coercive force by themselves will account for how normative authority is binding on performances, but there must be some basis for how normative considerations apply, such that the difference between accord and lack of accord with a legitimate normative determination makes a difference. This third issue might instead be construed as addressing how the first two issues fit together, such that the

source of normative authority actually bears on specific thoughts, utterances or actions in a definite way.

In the remainder of the essay, I consider four alternative ways of responding to these issues with *social* conceptions of the normativity of mind and meaning: regulist, regularist, interpretivist, and temporal. These conceptions differ in how they understand normativity, its character as social, and the standpoint from which to explicate it philosophically. I will indicate how such approaches account for the determinacy, authority and force needed to establish the normativity of a social practice, and some of the central issues confronting those conceptions. I also indicate their bearing upon the underlying problem of how to place the (apparent) normativity of mind and meaning with respect to the scientifically intelligible natural world.

II— Regulism

Regulist conceptions identify social practices by the constitutive rules or norms that govern their performers and performances. Games are often regulist models for practices. One can only be a chess player making moves within a game of chess, because those performances answer to the rules of chess. Similarly on regulist conceptions, one can only speak a language, have thoughts with determinate content, or contribute to a scientific research program, if one's performances are governed by and mostly accord with the constitutive rules or norms of those practices. Some errors are tolerable, but some minimal degree of compliance is needed to sustain the applicability of the norms. Strictly speaking, the rules that constitutively govern a social practice do not apply only to participants or their performances. As Haugeland (1998, ch. 13) notes, practices also typically place constraints on the behavior of other components besides the players or participants. Even chess requires a degree of compliance from the pieces and board,

which cannot change relevant positions, shapes or color on their own, and must be visible, discriminable and movable by the players. A language must likewise be learnable, and its expressions articulable and discernible by its speakers.

Some practices make their governing rules explicit, but more commonly, some or all of the rules that govern games, languages, or other social practices are implicit in practitioners' performances and responses to other performances. Linguists have repeatedly proposed rules governing the construction and interpretation of grammatically formed expressions in languages, whose applications are readily recognized and endorsed by most speakers of the language without their needing to formulate, endorse, or even understand the governing rules. To this extent, regulist conceptions of social normativity are formulated from the philosophical stance of an "anthropological" observer, whose codification of governing rules need not be part of the practice itself, although they *can* be incorporated within it, and perhaps evaluated and revised. Regulists ascribe a complex direction of fit for the normativity of meaning. Individual performances and other contributions to a practice are accountable to the norms or rules governing the practice. Those norms are nevertheless often only implicit in the community's practice, including its responses to other performances. Efforts to make the rules explicit must then fit what the community actually does or accepts; if a proposed explication of the governing norms is in conflict with the community's "general telling" (Haugeland 1998, 314-315), the explication is mistaken.⁴

⁴ Haugeland speaks of a community's general telling, in order to distinguish the norm established by the community's acceptance from its own actual performances. As Haugeland summarizes,

The basic “social” relationship invoked by regulist conceptions is between a community of practitioners as a whole, and its individual members. The authority of governing norms comes from their acceptance and application in practice by the community as a whole. For regulists there can be no further basis for assessing whatever the community accepts. One can try to persuade a community to change its norms, and offer reasons for change, but the fact of acceptance does the work, not the reasons, and changes in a community’s practice can occur without generally accepted reasons. Any reasons offered can at best motivate acceptance but not justify it, since there is no higher standard of appeal except to the extent that a practice is itself nested within a larger set of practices with more encompassing governance. Epistemic divisions of labor (Putnam 1975) allow a whole community to defer to expert interpretation or application of its governing norms. A community’s standards can also change over time, rejecting performances that were once accepted and vice versa. Even here, however, the community’s subsequent acceptance is what retroactively transforms the status of an earlier performance from mistake to innovation.

There are two relevant generalities: the usual responses of any given individual, and the common responses of most individuals. It can happen that isolated individuals are consistently out of step with their peers, and it can also happen that, on isolated occasions, all or most members of the community (by an amazing coincidence) happen to misperform in the same way at the same time. What *cannot* happen is that all or most of the community members systematically respond wrongly to a certain class of instituted conditions—for their common systematic responses define the very conditions in question. (1998, 315)

Even when explicit rules are part of the practice, they are subordinated to the community’s implicit practice. Automobile driving practices are exemplary: even where speed limits are legally instituted and posted, the explicit rule bears a more complex relation to the community’s practice. The variance is not just in how fast drivers typically travel, but also what limits police and courts will enforce, and which legal sanctions the community would endorse as fair or legitimate.

Membership in a normative community involves both acceptance by the community and uptake by the members. Membership in a community or participation in a social practice is itself a normative matter, for which community acceptance is authoritative. A community's acceptance of members or their performances nevertheless acquires some of its *normative* authority through participants' uptake and response.⁵ The normative force of participation in a social practice arises through the capacities, achievements and goods enabled or blocked by membership in the community and accord with its norms. Most characteristically, accord with a social practice enables attainment of what Alasdair MacIntyre (1980, ch. 14) described as "goods internal to a practice," that is goods whose significance and worth are only adequately recognized and appreciated from within the practice, according to the recognitive and appreciative capacities it cultivates. As salient examples, games enable forms of excellence most clearly recognizable and appreciable by competent players. Accord with the norms of linguistic or artistic communities similarly enables capacities of articulation, expression, communication and assessment that are partially opaque to those who do not accept the authority of the practice's governing norms and acquire the skills needed to respond to them. As Brandom once noted,

⁵ Communities can ascribe normative statuses to people who do not in turn acknowledge or endorse this status or its significance for others within that community. The responses of others to normative statuses ascribed within the community's practices, and to the performances of those to whom the statuses are ascribed, nevertheless affect what is possible or intelligible for persons to do, even if they do not endorse or accept what is ascribed to them. The concept of power has the expressive role of characterizing how the causal or coercive effects of the actions and dispositions of others affects what it is intelligible for agents to say and do, and what significance those performances can have in context. For more extensive discussion of the normative and expressive role of the concept of power, see Rouse (2002, 259-60; 2003, 108-119).

Without a suitable language there are some beliefs, desires, and intentions that one simply cannot have. Thus we cannot attribute to a dog or a prelinguistic child the desire to prove a certain conjectured theorem, the belief that our international monetary system needs reform, or the intention to surpass Blake as a poet of the imagination. ... Expressive freedom is made possible only by constraint by norms, and is not some way of evading or minimizing that constraint. (1979, 194)

Regulist conceptions of social normativity have encountered several characteristic criticisms. The most basic challenge is that social-regulist conceptions do not actually institute normative authority, but at most a descriptive regularity in social behavior. They can account for the deviance of individual performances from a social pattern (“normality”) but not for their normativity (correctness or incorrectness), unless the community’s performances and general telling were themselves normatively accountable in turn. Any quasi-anthropological description of what a community for the most part does cannot suffice to show that deviant performances are *mistaken* unless the community can in turn exercise its authority correctly or incorrectly. Social-regulist accounts would thus merely export the debilitating inability to distinguish *being* correct from merely *seeming* correct, from individual performances of a social practice to the practice as a whole. In a classic version of this criticism, John McDowell objects to both Wright (1980) and Kripke (1982) that,

If regularities in the verbal behavior of an isolated individual, described in norm-free terms, do not add up to meaning, it is quite obscure how it could somehow make all the difference if there are several individuals with matching regularities. (1984, 350)

Wittgenstein's (1953) own reflections on rule-following posed a different challenge to regulist conceptions of normativity, concerning the determinacy of norms, so conceived, rather than their authority. If normativity is a matter of following rules or norms, interpreting a rule correctly would require a further rule for interpretation. That rule would itself be open to interpretation, however, such that interpretive determinacy could never be achieved: "this was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. ... And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here" (1953, I, par. 201). On Kripke's (1982) controversial reading, this argument uncovers a new sceptical paradox about the very possibility of meaning, which calls for a "sceptical solution" paralleling Hume's reinterpretation of causal relations as instances of regularities. Wittgenstein himself presented this argument as a challenge to regulism: "what this shows is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not an interpretation*" (1953, I, par. 201), i.e., not itself in accord or conflict with a rule.⁶

Perhaps the most sophisticated regulist response to these lines of argument has been John Haugeland's (2002; 1998, ch. 10-13) proposal that intentionality or mindedness requires multiple interdependent *levels* of normativity and critical scrutiny in order to be genuinely intentional, that is, directed toward and accountable to objects.⁷ At the first level, object-directed beliefs, utterances or other performances must be "governed by *communal norms of proper performance*— that is, of proper procedure and technique—in terms of which particular

⁶ Whether Kripke's interpretation of these arguments accords with what Wittgenstein says is an exercise left to the reader.

performances can be critically judged ... [and] self-critical in that [one] carefully scrutinizes actual procedures to ensure that they are in accord with the norms of proper performance” (2002, xx). Absent such applicability of communal norms, there would be no difference between correct performance, and performances that merely seem correct. The move to a second level of self-criticism begins with the recognition that community agreement by itself is not sufficient for accountability to objects themselves. Norms of correct performance make individual performance accountable to the community, but the community’s performances are in turn accountable to the demand that proper performances must also yield compatible outcomes. A second level of normativity thus requires laws or rules that establish what it would be for otherwise proper performances to be incompatible: “[by] imposing constraints on *combinations* of results, [objects as] individual loci of incompatibility can resist or refute particular proper (or improper) performances, ... ruling out the bulk of conceivable combinations, [and binding] the totality of actual results within the narrow bounds of possibility” (1998, 338). The first-level norms govern practitioners’ performances, but the second-level rules (“laws”) constitute objects as loci of possible incompatibility. If performances of the practice yield incompatible results, and the performances themselves stand up to first-level critical scrutiny, then something must be wrong with the community’s standards. Critical scrutiny at this level is directed to the skills and norms of proper performance, oriented toward revision or repair of the community’s skills and standards so as to restore compatibility among the norms of proper performance, and the outcomes those performances produce. A third level of normativity arises at the point at which

⁷ Haugeland uses the term ‘object’ in a strictly formal way, to indicate whatever could serve as authoritative over an intentional directedness. As we see below, he further specifies this

efforts at revision or repair of the community's skills and norms fail to restore compatibility among the outcomes of properly performed skills. Here we find practitioners' *commitment* to uphold the standards at the first two levels: a refusal to accept performances that violate the communal norms, or incompatible results. This commitment has a double edge. It first obligates practitioners to assess and correct improper performance or community skills and standards that produce incompatible results; if those efforts fail, however, it then obligates them to give up on the entire practice, and the beliefs and skills it supposedly generated. Only by being able to hold its entire practice accountable to the collective intelligibility of its performances can a social practice genuinely be intentionally directed toward anything.

The empirical sciences are Haugeland's guiding model for social practices that are genuinely directed toward objects. It is not enough that experiments and calculations be properly performed; these norms of proper performance would be free-floating unless there were also something akin to scientific laws, which specify when various measurements, calculations and predictions are not compatible. The laws in turn would have no force unless the community (or some of its members) could *tell* when the laws were violated, and could refuse to tolerate incompatible outcomes. At the limit, such refusal must extend to the point of giving up the entire practice, out of fidelity to its norms and laws. Not all social practices have the degree of explicit articulation and critical reflection characteristic of sciences, but Haugeland (2013, 229; 1998, ch. 10) sees the same basic structure also at work in other professional skills and even in everyday perception and understanding of one another and the world. The normative authority of our discursive practices thus arises from their exclusion of some combinations of occurrences as

conception of objects in modal terms, as a locus of possibly incompatible commitments.

“impossible”, and their normative force from the *commitment* of practitioners not to tolerate what the practice’s standards exclude. He concludes that,

To perceive things as objects is to insist on their coherent integrity—the constitutive standard for thinghood—just like insisting upon legality in chess, rationality in interpretation, and ordering with precision and scope in empirical science. (1998, 262).

On Haugeland’s version, intentional normativity thus only functions together with a broadly alethic-modal differentiation of what a practice makes possible from what it rules out. The difficulty of sustaining that equilibrium makes the pattern of a practice more than just a descriptive regularity, while the possible impossibility of the practice allows the normative authority of the instituting community itself to be in question. The issue then confronting Haugeland’s multi-faceted regulism is whether the apparent voluntarism of practitioners’ commitment to maintain the practice deprives that commitment of any *authority* over the practitioners’ performances. Is that authority merely akin to that of a monarch in a country in which revolution is legitimate (Kierkegaard 1954, 203), or, as Haugeland suggests, does it gain a distinctive kind of “existential” force because the practice is partially constitutive of who the practitioners are or can be, yet also vulnerable to failure?

Stephen Turner (1994) mounted a different challenge to regulist accounts of norms, rules, presuppositions, paradigms, worldviews, or anything else supposedly shared by participants in a practice that explains or explicates their performances. Turner denies that “social practice” theories can simultaneously account for the determinacy and the force of what is supposedly shared or presupposed by participants. Regulist accounts of social practices fail to account for

the transmission, psychological reality, or causal efficacy of whatever is posited to unify the diverse performances that supposedly comprise a single practice:

The concept of shared practices—the ‘social theory of practices’—requires that practices be transmitted from person to person. But no account of the acquisition of practices that makes sense causally supports the idea that ... the same practice is reproduced in another person. (Turner 1994, 13)

Turner’s criticism reflects a broader naturalistic suspicion of appeals to normative authority to explicate thought, language and action. Those with a more stringent view of naturalistic constraints upon conceptions of mind are often inclined to reject appeals to normative authority, force, or content as mysterious and in need of scientific clarification or replacement. The only relevant “forces” are causal, law-governed, or otherwise explicable scientifically. Such challenges range from Quine’s (1960) arguments for the indeterminacy of translation, to efforts to account for meaning and uptake in social practices in terms of dispositions, habits, or other notions that are supposedly more naturalistically respectable. Regulators tend to accept a more inclusive conception of what naturalistic scruples require. On such liberal naturalistic conceptions, only practitioners’ abilities to learn, express, and respond to the normative significance of performances of a practice must be naturalistically explicable. So long as regulators’ accounts of practitioners’ abilities and performances do not violate scientific understanding of human capacities, however, they need not provide a further account in

scientific terms of norms or meanings instituted by those abilities and performances, or the *normative* authority and force established through the ongoing exercise of those abilities.⁸

III — Regularism

Advocates of more stringently naturalistic accounts of social practices have often been inclined toward regularist rather than regulist conceptions. Regularists also explicate the (apparent) normativity of social practices in terms of relations between individual performances and the overall practice of a community. They differ from regulists in treating social practices as regularities in the performances, habits, or dispositions of communities and their members rather than as an acceptance of rules or norms. Regularists often adopt a methodological or ontological individualism that locates the relevant regularities in individual agents' habits or dispositions (Turner's 1994 appeal to habits in lieu of any "social theory of practices" is exemplary). Perhaps the best-known effort to develop a *social*-regularist account of intentional normativity is Kripke's (1980) "sceptical solution" to the sceptical paradox concerning meaning that he attributes to Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following (Wright 1980 is another prominent example). Regularist accounts of social normativity ascribe broad regularities of performance or assessment to linguistic communities. These regularities are not without exceptions, since people sometimes make mistakes or deliberately deviate from established patterns of practice. The relevant regularities are thus not just a simple sameness of performance in every case, but comprise a more complex pattern of performance that incorporates corrections of deviant performances and training of new participants in the practice.

⁸ De Caro and Macarthur 2004, 2010, bring together an influential collection of such liberal conceptions of naturalism that do not reduce or eliminate normativity.

For Kripke, to *mean* something by the use of a word *is* to commit oneself to a determinate rule for how one ought to use that expression in the future. If in past uses of the word ‘plus’ I meant the plus function, and I intend to use the term in the same way, then I ought to say that 125 is the value of 57 plus 68. The conclusion he draws from Wittgenstein’s remarks on rule-following, however, is that the behavior and psychological states of an individual agent provide no basis for determining what the agent ought to say or do even in continuity with her past practice. In his now-classic example, the psychological states or behavior of an individual agent are not sufficient to determine that she previously meant plus rather than quus by the word ‘plus’, where a quus-like function tracks plus up to some value larger than the agent had previously computed, but has the value ‘5’ for all larger inputs. Kripke then argues that we can only understand the normativity of meaning on the basis of individuals’ conformity or nonconformity with a larger pattern of social practice.

Kripke expresses the paradox he finds in this result by ascribing the indeterminacy of meaning to past uses of a term. He is well aware that it then casts doubt upon the possibility of determinately meaning anything by what one says or does, even in trying to describe this very paradox. He proposes to resolve the paradox at the level of the individual’s participation in a shared form of life. This resolution does not *solve* the paradox, for example by providing necessary and sufficient conditions for the use of expressions with determinate content. Kripke instead proposes a “sceptical solution,” which attends to the contrapositive of the conditional, “If a speaker meant plus by previous uses of ‘plus’, then she ought to give the answer ‘125’ in response to $57 + 68$.” The underlying idea is that conformity with a broad regularity of performance of a larger community provides the (only) justification for attributing a determinate

meaning to an individual's performances. The regularity is broad in the sense that it has sufficient slack to allow for a range of intelligible "mistakes" and corrections, where mistakes simply mean nonconforming performances, correctable by bringing them back into conformity. Nothing justifies attributions of meaning other than the brute fact of broad conformity with a shared form of life that can be sustained over time. If and when there is irresolvable discord over how and when to apply various expressions, then those applications are no longer meaningful, that is, they are no longer part of a sustained, recognizably shared form of life.

Regularist conceptions have also been challenged, with two lines of criticism especially prominent. The first criticism is that regularist accounts, in Kripke's version or others, abolish the normative authority of meaning and mind rather than explicating it. The brute fact of conformity to a communal regularity does not show that anyone ought to conform to what others do, or that such conformity has any significance or meaning beyond that brute fact. A certain utility in such conformity may explain its persistence, but does not justify it. After all, as Kripke (1982, 96) notes, we could instead imagine a different form of life in which participants used an expression in a quus-like pattern, and however bizarre and incomprehensible that would seem to us, it would then be "meaningful" in the same way as our own practice. Social regularities are contingent patterns of actual behavior, which would thereby fail to achieve any *expressive* or *justificatory* significance. Regularists may respond that such contingent conformity is all we are entitled to claim absent deeper grounds for normative attribution. At the least, this response turns on the presumption that no other account of the normativity of meaning and mind is viable. The critic can also respond in turn, however, that what was thereby proposed as a justification of the

regularist account can itself only be a description of what we happen to do, with no normative authority or force beyond the maintenance of de facto conformity.

The second prominent criticism is that regularism does not actually resolve the sceptical paradox, even “sceptically.” While the social practices of adding numbers or using language do have a kind of regularity, they also exhibit many other regularities as well, including quus-like regularities. Nothing in Kripke’s argument picks out one of these regularities as the one that expresses what we mean by our performances, and consequently, he fails to account for the determinacy of norms. To be sure, social practices proceed in a more or less definite way, and do seem to sustain a kind of “agreement”. Such agreement is only a concurrence in what *seems* correct, and cannot sustain a distinction between seeming to be correct and being correct. Regularists typically acknowledge the point while rejecting its supposed critical import. What social-regularist accounts do is to salvage a difference between correctness and the mere appearance of correctness at the level of individual performances, at the cost of denying any such difference applicable to the community as a whole, or any normative significance above and beyond de facto social conformity and its social utility.

IV — Interpretivist Approaches

Two other approaches develop very different conceptions of the social normativity of meaning and mind. Regularists and regularists agree that the *social* relation that explicates that normativity is between individual practitioners and a community. Interpretivist accounts of social normativity instead look to the distributed interactions among individual participants in a practice rather than to any part-whole “I-We” relation (Brandom 1994, 38-39). Instead of describing social

practices from the outside as a quasi-anthropological observer, interpretivists characterize their normativity from the internal standpoint of participants interacting with others. The normativity of these social practices arises from “triangulation” (Davidson, 2001, ch. 6, 8, 9, 13, 14) among the holistic attribution of beliefs, desires, actions and meanings to a speaker, what is thereby attributed, and the partially shared circumstances of interpretation. The systematic, interconnected combinatorial uses of linguistic expressions provide sufficient constraints on interpretation, whether those interconnections are treated as inferential norms or systematic interconnections of beliefs, desires, utterances and actions. Both the attributed contents and the interpreter’s attribution are answerable to norms of rationality and truthfulness. For someone’s overall pattern of behavior and attributed psychological states to be meaningful is for what she says and does to be interpretable as mostly true and mostly rational in context; my interpretation of her is justified if it maximizes the overall attribution of truth and rationality; and for *me* to be a speaker, believer and agent is to be able implicitly to interpret myself as rational in the same way.

The interpretive practices that disclose intentional normativity have been variously characterized as radical translation (Quine 1960), the intentional stance (Dennett 1987), radical interpretation (Davidson 1984) or the game of giving and asking for reasons (Brandom 1994). These accounts split between asymmetric and symmetric versions. In the former case, the force with which interpretive practice is norm-governed is its predictive reliability. By treating some parts of the world as intentional systems that mostly behave rationally, the interpreter enhances her ability to render her environment more reliably and extensively predictable. Some “real patterns” (Dennett 1991) in the world can *only* be manifest from this interpretive point of view.

The rationality attributed is then a substantive property of these intentional systems. Although both Dennett and Quine say that this interpretive stance also applies to the interpreter, it is not clear in what sense we thereby render ourselves more *predictable* to ourselves. To this extent, Quine's or Dennett's approaches might also be understood as a distinctive kind of regularism.

Symmetric versions (Davidson and Brandom are prominent examples) instead treat interpretation as a kind of mutual recognition. We each make sense of ourselves as rational agents and believers by making sense of one another. The rationality involved is not a substantive property ascribed to other parts of the world, but a constitutive norm governing the entire discursive practice. To this extent, Davidson's or Brandom's approaches might also be understood as a distinctive kind of regulism, in which the norm of rationality governing the practice as a whole only does so as embodied in the mutual interactions among speaker-interpreters.

The normative authority of interpretive social practices comes from the worldly circumstances to which interpretations are accountable, and are most commonly expressed in terms of interpretive "objectivity" (Davidson 1984, essay 13; Brandom 1994). The objectivity in question is not the objective correctness of beliefs or utterances, however, but their objective purport as meaningfully about objects and accountable to them. Davidson, as a telling example since he *does* regard truth as the central semantic concept, nevertheless inverts more familiar treatments of the concept, so that the truth of most of a speaker's utterances and beliefs is not an *outcome* of interpretation but a *criterion* of its adequacy. Accountability to worldly circumstances is itself internal to interpretive practice, however. The attributed truth conditions for utterances

and beliefs are typically encountered only as expressible within a language, via a disquotational or prosentential truth predicate. The interpreter can *say* under what circumstances an attributed belief is true or an inference is good, but can only do so in an uninterpreted metalanguage; in the canonical case, we interpret the utterance ‘Schnee ist weiß’ as true if and only if snow is white.

Interpretivist accounts thus diverge in how they situate mind and meaning in the world. Asymmetric accounts treat the interpretation of speakers as part of one’s overall theory of the world, and thus as part of science. The result is a naturalism that incorporates philosophical understanding within science, while providing no further explication or justification of scientific understanding. Scientific theorizing and prediction is not an activity itself held accountable to philosophical assessment, but instead provides the context for philosophical reflection on the normativity of mind and meaning (or of epistemic justification). Symmetric accounts recognize scientific theorizing as itself integral to a holistic interpretation of the world, and hence as accountable to the constitutive norm of rationality, but only from “inside” the interrelated social practices of interpretation. There is no standpoint from which to assess interpretive practices except from within. Brandom thus concludes that,

The symmetry [among interpretive perspectives] ensures that no one perspective is privileged in advance over any other. Sorting out who should be counted as correct, whose claims and applications of concepts should be treated as authoritative, is a messy retail business of assessing the comparative authority of competing evidential and inferential claims. ... That issue is adjudicated differently from different points of view, and although

these are not of equal worth, there is no birds'-eye view above the fray from which those that deserve to prevail can be identified. (1994, 601)

A similar openness extends to the question of who ought to be understood as a speaker, subject only to the demand to extend interpretation as far as possible. The latter demand applies whether it is taken as instrumental, to improve our predictive capacities, or as a constitutive norm of rationality and mutual recognition governing the entire interpretive practice as a “space of reasons” (Sellars 1997, 76).

Interpretivist accounts of the social normativity of mind and meaning also confront some challenging criticisms. Advocates of symmetrical interpretivism object that asymmetric accounts leave the interpreter's own activities out of the account, and are therefore seriously incomplete. They can understand what it is to be an ascribed “intentional system” (predictable by others on that basis), but cannot understand what it is to *take* the intentional stance and ascribe intentional states. Haugeland (1998, 2002) extends this line of argument by claiming that all interpretivist conceptions need the kind of interpretive resilience and integrity that he characterizes as existential commitment, but cannot account for it in their own terms. The rationality that supposedly governs interpretation would thus have no normative force. If interpreters were to conclude from the failure of desultory and uncritical efforts to make sense of others that they are not intentional systems (Dennett 1987), language-speakers (Davidson 1984), or part of the broader interpretive community of those capable of saying ‘we’ (Brandom 1994, 3-4), these interpretivist theories would offer no basis for challenging that conclusion apart from the contingent emergence of a more diligent and responsible interpreter.

Ebbs (2009) argues that interpretivist conceptions make the conjoined mistakes of mischaracterizing both the evidence base and the target for linguistic interpretation. Interpretation supposedly begins with the evidence of what speakers say when, understood in terms of a “token-and-explanatory-use” conception of words as linguistic elements, in order to assign semantic significance to the words as the outcome of interpretation. On such conceptions, “two word tokens are of the same semantic type if and only if they are spelled or pronounced the same way and facts about them determine that they have the same meanings and satisfaction conditions” (Ebbs 2009, 112). Ebbs argues instead that we can only account for how word types and tokens are discriminated perceptually and practically by bringing semantic considerations to bear in the interpretation, as an extension of familiar arguments for the theory-ladenness of perception. We do so from the perspective of participants in a more encompassing linguistic practice whose semantic units are words that we can justifiably take at their semantic “face value,” ascribing semantic divergences only when interpretation breaks down.⁹ It is thus a mistake to think interpreters target a speaker’s idiolect rather than a shared linguistic practice. As a further reason for rejecting idiolectal conceptions of what speakers say and mean, Ebbs argues that the supposedly constitutive norm of charitable interpretation, when applied to individual speakers’ idiolects, constrains the ability to learn from others about shared circumstances. If we are obligated to minimize our disagreement with others whenever possible by offering non-standard

⁹ Ebbs does not extensively discuss language learning, but clearly his account would emphasize getting a holistic grip upon a broader linguistic practice and its interconnected performances as the basis for discriminating its semantically significant bits, rather than first identifying the bits phonemically and orthographically.

interpretations of their words, then we will sometimes fail to recognize occasions when their words ought to incline us to change our own beliefs instead.

Symmetric interpretive theories have also been taken to invoke a debilitating dualism between the causal and the rational, the natural and the normative, or first and second nature, which would undermine any semantic determinacy to our utterances and actions. Davidsonians and Sellarsians argue that merely causal impact or experiential presence cannot be incorporated within rational semantic normativity; to think otherwise would invoke the Myth of the Given or the second or third dogma of empiricism. On the other hand, the interpretive practices that exhibit semantic normativity only do so because they are ultimately objectively accountable to causally efficacious objects. Interpretivists try to secure such accountability in diverse ways, whether by appealing to the token identity of mental and physical events (Davidson 1980), the incorporation of judgments of causal reliability within rational assessments (Brandom 1994), or the entitlement to a conception of rational “second nature” within our law-governed conceptions of ourselves as animals (McDowell 1994). In the canonical criticism of these conceptions, McDowell argues that because Davidson treats perception as a merely causal impact that cannot play a role in the justification of beliefs (“nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief” —Davidson 2001, 141), he cannot account for how such an interconnected system of beliefs could ever be rationally accountable to the world. That inability to ascribe rational significance to perceptual experience renders the entire conceptual realm into a “frictionless spinning in a void” (1994, 66), disconnected from any objective accountability. Haugeland (1998) and Rouse (2002)

further develop this line of argument, extending it explicitly to apply also to Brandom and McDowell himself.

Kukla and Lance (2009) develop a more complex interpretivist conception of the social normativity of mind that seeks to overcome these problematic dualisms, while also highlighting and addressing other problems for interpretivists. Their account of the pragmatics of discursive interaction aims to show how its normativity integrally belongs to our concretely incarnated social world. They diagnose the failure of other interpretivists to account for the worldliness of discursive practices as resulting from the “declarative fallacy” of presuming that semantic content is fully explicable in terms of the functioning of declarative sentences or thoughts. Because these views give philosophical primacy to the third-personal, agent-neutral speech acts of declarative assertions, they overlook the vocative and recognitive aspects of speech through which we call one another, acknowledge and respond to those calls, and bring our capacities for perceptual recognition into public discursive practice. The pragmatics of calling and responding highlight the ineliminably first- and second-personal aspects of discursive practice. Second-person calls and first-person uptake lets us inhabit an incarnate discursive community accountable to a shared, objective, epistemically accessible world. Only thereby can we make assertions accountable to that world and authoritative for anyone in our discursive community.

V — Temporal Conceptions

A fourth way to construe the social normativity of meaning and mind appeals to the temporally extended character of the discursive practices that articulate conceptual understanding. Recent developments of this approach include Ebbs (2009) and Rouse (2002, 2015), although

arguably, the *locus classicus* for temporal conceptions of the normativity of mind is the account of “originary temporality” in Heidegger’s (1927) *Sein und Zeit*. Temporal conceptions of normativity share with interpretivists an understanding of social practices that emphasizes interactions among individual performances rather than relations between individuals and a community. These interactions nevertheless also constitute an encompassing practice that is open to assessment as a whole. What unifies a temporally extended social practice is not some feature that its individual performances have in common, but the mutual responsiveness of those performances over time. For Ebbs, *linguistic* practices are sustained by speakers’ practical identifications of words and practical judgments of sameness of satisfaction. These default practical commitments allow them to treat one another as using the same words and talking about the same things, even when they disagree. These practical commitments can be overridden for particular, local reasons in a given context, but only against the background of other default commitments. Such practical judgments are needed to let us make discoveries about what others are also talking about, rather than just changing the topic or stipulating new uses for old terms. Language thereby involves a division of linguistic labor *over time*.

Rouse’s temporal conception of social practices encompasses more than just language. Practices are composed of mutually interdependent, situated performances. My ability to teach a class, shop for groceries, vote for a political candidate, do a scientific experiment, or utter a sentence depends upon a supportive alignment of other performances and the relevant circumstances. I cannot ordinarily teach a college class, for example, if students do not enroll, show up at different times or places, do not understand the language of instruction, or have not

done the reading, but also if there is no suitable space with appropriate lighting, seating, and absence of interruption, or no supporting institutional arrangements. In the face of various misalignments, performers adjust what they do, re-arrange the circumstances, call for others to adjust, or persevere in the face of incongruity or failure. These ongoing patterns of interaction raise issues wherever adjustments are called for to enable the practice to proceed intelligibly. What is at issue in such ongoing responsiveness is whether and how the practice will continue. What is at stake in the resolution of those issues is what kind of lives the participants can lead, in what circumstances. Participants can be engaged in the same practice without agreeing upon what that practice is, what issues might call for its revision or repair, or what is at stake in how those issues are resolved. These issues and stakes are thus only identifiable anaphorically over time, by reference to what practitioners have been doing and what they can do in response in their circumstances. On this account also, the normativity of social practices cannot be understood from an observer's standpoint that views the performances and circumstances from sideways on, but only from within their ongoing development.¹⁰ The normativity of social practices does not consist in regularities of performance or governance by already-determinate rules or norms, but in the mutual accountability of their constitutive performances to issues and stakes whose definitive resolution is always prospective. The normative accountability of a practice is an interactive

¹⁰ Performers sometimes do stand back and reflect upon the practices they participate in, but these efforts are incorporated within the practice itself; "external" observers are likewise incorporated within an ongoing practice, whether as further performances within the practice, or as part of the circumstances in which it continues.

orientation toward a common future that encompasses present performances within its past.¹¹ That normativity is characteristically two-dimensional, in the sense that the issues raised by any practice involve interplay between *whether* the practice continues at all, and *what* it thereby becomes.

I have not attempted to argue for a temporal conception of the normativity of mind in this essay, but the essay has been constructed in its terms. I have characterized what has been at issue and at stake in recent philosophical efforts to understand the normativity of mind as a social phenomenon. These projects do not agree in their conceptions of normativity, or of what it is for a practice or activity to be social, but regulist, regularist, interpretivist and temporal conceptions of social normativity have been mutually responsive on these issues. Underlying their disagreements is a concern to render a philosophical conception of mindedness intelligible in relation to a broadly scientific understanding of nature. What is at stake in this concern is whether we can intelligibly accommodate our self-understandings both as agents, speakers and thinkers, and as part of scientifically comprehensible nature. This concern is itself still contested by advocates of a temporal conception of social normativity. For Ebbs (1997), a participants' perspective on our actual linguistic interactions is complementary to but independent of a scientific conception of nature. For Rouse (2015), our temporally extended discursive practices, including our capacities for scientific understanding, should be understood naturalistically in evolutionary biological

¹¹ Kukla and Lance (2009) could be read as developing a temporal conception rather than a sophisticated interpretivism. I treat them as interpretivists because they give primary emphasis to the retrospective temporality of discursive normativity through which speakers are retroactively

terms, as a form of behavioral niche construction. The resolution of this issue must nevertheless be left to another occasion.

constituted as participants in discursive practice, but do not in the same way treat the content and force of normativity as prospective.

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