

The 'Ought's Of Use: Contextualist Considerations for Normativists

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I, Edward Philip Nettel, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

The thesis argues that considerations that concern contextualists in the philosophy of language can allow for a conception of language use in which meaning is to be properly regarded as intrinsically normative. I first introduce the idea that meaning is intrinsically normative and set out just what kind of features the posited norms would have to have. I then introduce an initial problem that exploits an incompatibility between the idea that the requirements laid down by the norms of meaning are to be understood in terms of hypothetical imperatives and meaning being intrinsically normative. I then discuss a reason for thinking that semantic correctness is an instrumental value, but contend that this is consistent with meaning being intrinsically normative, and present a framework in which semantic correctness can be so thought of. This framework conceives of language use as a practice. I go on to look to arguments by Daniel Whiting in favour of the Normativity Thesis, but find his presentation unable to answer the incompatibility argument. The reason for that is that Whiting accepts the idea that meaningful expressions must have conditions for correct application. I propose that there is space for a notion of conditions for semantic correctness that should not be understood in terms of correct application. Finally, I discuss some traditional semantic contextualist concerns, and show that interpreting them in a specific way, following, to various degrees of success, insights by P. F. Strawson and J. L. Austin (and, in turn Charles Travis) such a conception of semantic correctness, in contrast to the understanding of it in terms of the correct application of terms, is understood as derivative of the rules governing the practice of language use as understood in Chapter 1. Such an understanding, I argue, is one in which meaning is intrinsically

normative.

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Introduction

This thesis began life as a project on the later philosophy of Wittgenstein. As it has come out, there is now but one explicit reference to his work, and only a few other introductory remarks on Kripke's idiosyncratic reading of a few passages in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Instead, it is now an essay that concerns a current debate that took root as a result of the work of the later Wittgenstein, and so, I suppose, in that respect at least, it is what I intended it to be. The debate of concern is whether meaning is intrinsically normative – whether the facts of meaning have normative content. I think there is a way of thinking about language that suggests it does. It is a way of thinking about language that, I think, is not without value.

This essay is split up into three chapters: the first deals with understanding what the claim that meaning is intrinsically normative amounts to; the second discusses some problems that face those who have held it to be true; the third proposes a kind of Normativism that is unaffected by many of the arguments discussed in Chapter 2 and elsewhere.

More specifically, Chapter 1 seeks to answer to question of what is it for something, in this case meaning, to be intrinsically normative. For, any such claim, if true, is going to cause trouble for the naturalistically inclined. For familiar Humean reasons, one cannot infer from some description of how the world *is*, that anything *ought* to be the case. There are, though, some 'ought's that are not naturalistically problematic. These are the 'ought's that feature in hypothetical imperatives – claims (roughly) of the form, if you want to α , you ought to β . Such 'ought' claims can plausibly be construed as little more than descriptions of how some contingent end can be achieved (i.e. as 'is' claims). Thus, if it can be shown that any 'ought' that features in claims as to what terms mean is the sort of 'ought' that features in

hypothetical imperatives, then the naturalist can breath easy, with respect to meaning at least. And, if these are the only kinds of 'ought's in the offing, that would be inconsistent with the idea that meaning is *intrinsically* normative. Claims that are intrinsically normative feature normative language that is not equivalent to that which features in hypothetical imperatives. Thus, a naturalist would find it convivial if the 'ought's that can be derived from claims about what words and sentences mean had to be such that they were dependent on the ends of agents in the same way as the 'ought's that feature hypothetical imperatives. And, it turns out, there seems reason for thinking that meaning is dependent on at least some very broad desires of those who mean anything with the language that they use. Alexander Miller, for example, tells us that we must at least have the desire to communicate if any kind of normativity associated with meaning is going to have some force. Thus, it may be taken that in virtue of such instrumentality, the 'ought's governing meaning must be instrumental, and thereby (though this is the move I intend to question) only akin to those that feature in hypothetical imperatives.

I take the argument just presented to be too quick, and endeavour to show that there is a way of thinking about language that can accommodate Miller's thought, but nonetheless conceive of meaning as intrinsically normative. The chapter ends with a proposal for a framework in which this understanding of intrinsic normativity might bear on language – it is a framework that conceives of language, primarily, as a practice. I am not, though, the originator of this thought. Far from it. Something similar can be read into the *Philosophical Investigations*. In matters of present concern, Alan Millar (as opposed to Alexander Miller) has suggested such an understanding of language. Thus it may appear that I am offering arguments in support of Millar's peculiar form of Normativism; it is true that what I say here is in agreement with Millar on many points. But I do not endorse his Normativism. As to why, will become clear in Chapters 2 and, in particular, 3.

Much of the role that Chapter 2 plays is clearing ground for Chapter 3; it shows how non-Normativists have successfully argued against certain forms of Normativism. However, the arguments they present are dependent on the acceptance of a 'meaning platitude' (that is indeed accepted by the forms of Normativism they argue against) which I feel to be detrimental to the Normativist cause, and, in any case, not

a platitude about meaning. In particular, the formulation on offer – that takes it, plitudinously, that meaningful expressions possess conditions for correct application – allows for meaning to be thus understood of instrumental value to the end of expressing (something like) truth. But, the end of expressing truth is a contingent one – if meaning's job is only to aid that end, then the normative implications of such a claim only go so far as to describe how such an end could be fulfilled. Thus, the 'ought's that feature in the equivalent formulations of the 'platitude' are only indicative of some hypothetical imperatives that would hold for those wanting to express truth.

I take it, though, that this 'platitude' could not feature as such in a conception of language as a practice as sketched at the end of Chapter 1. Instead, I suggest, the best we can come up with is that meaningful expressions possess conditions for correct *use*. How this contrasts with the former formulation of the platitude is set out in more detail in Chapter 3, but the central point is that the 'platitude', as it is set out in the literature, has a focus that is ill-placed.

So I finally come to Chapter 3, which attempts to fill in some of the blanks. It does so, though, only given certain controversial premises – particularly regarding the nature of truth. I do not, here, want to endorse or reject any of these premises. Instead, I just try to show that, from the point of view of Normativists, such conceptions can help in combating the objections that they have been subject to. So, I want to say that Normativism can hold given the acceptance of certain premises about the nature of truth, but leave it open whether such premises, ultimately, are plausible. I will admit, though, I do think that many of these points, upon which I build such Normativism, are not only plausible but true.

So, I invoke the historic debate between J. L. Austin and P F. Strawson on what it is that is the fundamental bearer of truth. By taking note of some of the distinctions that each make, particularly between 'sentences' and 'statements', I derive an understanding in which one can see questions of meaning falling under the remit of the former and any other 'norms' (especially the sort of 'norms' that are normative requirements of hypothetical imperatives that populate our particular uses of language) will be those that govern the *making* of statements.

I then discuss at more length Alan Millar's version of Normativism, showing how it is distinct from the conception that I examined in Chapter 2. I find a lot that is promising in Millar's proposal – after all, it is from him that one can specifically trace the idea that Normativism best makes sense in the context of thinking of language use as a practice. However, I find a couple of short-comings with his specific formulation of the position. In particular, his understanding of the criterion for semantic correctness in terms of the conditions for the correct applications of terms runs against the arguments of the second chapter. In addition, I also look at some other anti-Normativist arguments by Hattiangadi that invoke (semantic) contextualist manoeuvres. I find that a slight adjustment of Millar's position given considerations from the Austin/Strawson debate can neutralise these problems but it remains unclear whether even the altered position has the necessary means to be able to answer a further non-Normativist worry; one that questions whether such a position is genuinely *normativist*. I therefore finish by invoking Austin's conception of the relationship between truth and meaning to give an alternative criterion for semantic correctness that does not rely upon the idea that it be understood in terms of the correct applications of terms. Instead, I offer a sketch of how such a notion can be understood in terms of the constitutive rules of the practice of language use, and show how the adjusted meaning platitude presented in Chapter 2 supports that thought. This last proposal is, I contend, genuinely Normativist, but note that it entails substantial and controversial assumptions that themselves may turn out to be implausible.

Chapter 1: Intrinsic Normativity and Hypothetical Imperatives

In this chapter, I first introduce the idea that meaning is intrinsically normative and set out just what features the posited norms will have to have. I then introduce an initial problem that exploits an apparent incompatibility between the notion that semantic correctness is instrumental in value and the thesis that meaning is intrinsically normative. I will show that it is true that such intrinsic normativity cannot be understood in terms of the instrumental value of semantic correctness, if it is indicative of the kind of instrumental value that features in hypothetical imperatives. However, I will question whether it has been shown that the requirements laid down by the norms of meaning are to be understood in terms of hypothetical imperatives, and hence to be seen as resting on desires, or other such psychological states, in the way that instrumental value is typically taken to. I then propose a framework (one that conceives of language as a practice, and language users as participants in that practice) in which the conception of the norms of meaning as indicative of nothing more than hypothetical imperatives is false (though I leave the issue of how language use can be so thought of until Chapter 3).

An Assumption Questioned

Saul Kripke can be credited with bringing the claim that meaning is (intrinsically) normative most forcibly into philosophical prominence (though he was not the first to make it). The claim appears as a crucial step in at least one of his (in)famous arguments in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* for a sceptical conclusion about the facts of meaning. In essence, the problem for Kripke is that for any facts there are – be they physical or mental – that we could rely on to specify what given terms mean, such facts are, in principle, incapable of justifying any claims as to how

one ought to use the terms in question. In particular, the conception that the meaning of terms is identified with a speaker's dispositions to use such terms is incapable of providing the requisite justification for how terms ought to be used. And since it is constitutive of the facts of meaning that they are able to so justify how terms ought to be used, there are no facts of meaning. Boghossian (2005) summarises Kripke's thought by saying,

One could ... not identify meaning facts with dispositional facts because at bottom the relation between meaning and future use is *normative*, whereas the dispositionalist construes it descriptively (p. 205)

I will not here explore in much depth the well-worn ground as to the success of Kripke's arguments for his sceptical conclusion, but investigate that key claim that plays such a central role in it – namely, the claim that the facts of meaning must be (intrinsically) normative. That thesis might be thought to be at work¹ when Kripke says,

The point is *not* that, if I meant addition by "+", I *will* answer "125," but that, if I intend to accord with my past meaning of "+", I *should* answer "125". (Kripke 1982, p. 37)

There is an important distinction to keep in mind in Kripke's discussion (See Miller 1998, p. 155). When we say that "125" is the correct answer to the question "68 + 57 = ?", it is so according to two factors that, though distinct, work in tandem. There is the factual sense in which it is the correct answer in virtue of the arithmetic fact that 125 is the sum of 68 and 57, and there is what he calls the "metalinguistic" sense in which the "+" sign as here used, really is used to mean the addition function. What is of specific concern to Kripke is whether what we mean when we use the "+" sign can really be thought to pick out that arithmetic function. Now, in the above quotation, Kripke suggests that one *should* answer "125" to the question; we *ought* to answer like that, presumably, because of the way the world is – that 125 is the sum of 68 and 57 – and because of what our words mean. It is the way the world is that determines whether our use of "+" is the correct one. The problem, according to Kripke, is that

¹ At least, this is what the quotation is commonly thought to be invoking. There may be reason to doubt that Kripke really had *intrinsic* normativity in mind because of the conditional "if I intent to ...", which could suggest that he was thinking in terms of hypothetical imperatives. Much more on this shortly, but for the time being I only introduce Kripke as a way of introducing the broad topic of the thesis, and leave outstanding questions as to *his* views on the normativity of meaning to one side.

there is nothing in our past usage, or our dispositions to use terms in a certain way (there are no facts about the way the world *is*), that could allow us to justify the claim that of how the term in question *ought* to be used.²

The quotation above suggests that the thrust of Kripke's argument is to question the certainty of whether, given the novelty of the question, my use of the sign was really in accord with what it meant. Hence, implicit in this sceptical challenge is the thought that there has to be a sense in which we can assess any such use for correctness or incorrectness, and furthermore, that assessment is demonstrative of the inherent normativity of signs meaning what they do. Thus, a correct use of "+" would be to use it in accordance with what that sign means, and therefore it is the meaning of the sign that grounds how we ought to use it. Thus, there is a tacit move in Kripke's argument from the notion of correctness to talk of obligations and permissions which is dependent on the assumption that correctness itself is a normative notion. We shall see in due course that this move is controversial, but the idea behind the move is that, given the obvious fact that uses of words are apt to be assessed as correct or incorrect, facts as to what they mean must be able to justify how the term in question *should* or *could* be used in the future – so as to be used in accordance with what it means, not just what it *has been* used to say, or what we may be inclined to use it to say.

However, the thought that we are obliged to use words in accordance with their meaning is but one way in which the claim that meaning is intrinsically normative can be understood. Gibbard offers a reading of Kripke that is less specific as to how the (putative) normativity of meaning is to be thought of:

The crux of the slogan that meaning is normative ... might be another slogan: that *means* implies *ought*. To use roughly Kripke's example, from statements saying what I mean by the plus sign and other arithmetic terms and constructions, it will follow that I *ought* to answer '7' when asked 'What's 5 + 2?' (Gibbard 1994, p. 100, cf. Millar 2004, pp. 159 - 160)

² It is worth mentioning, of course, that Kripke's thought here is inspired, at least to some extent, by a more traditional discussion of normativity in (meta)ethics. The problem resembles Hume's diagnosis that 'ought' does not imply 'is', as well as, of course Moore's open-question argument against the possibility of naturalising (genuinely) normative claims. However, it should be noted that the manner in which Kripke invokes this thought is distinct in a number of important ways to the arguments as presented in Hume and Moore (see for more detail Zalabardo 1997).

This leaves it open whether the normativity involved is to be understood in terms of obligations (or perhaps permissions) to use words in accordance with their meaning, or whether there is some other sense in which we ought to (or may) use terms – there are other standards that meaning imposes on use. Correlative to this way of thinking of the normativity of meaning, Daniel Whiting (2009) tells us that the Normativity Thesis says the following:

Meaning is intrinsically normative, ... facts about meaning ... are inherently action-guiding or prescriptive; specifically, they have implications for what a subject *may* or *should* (not) do. (p. 536)

Whiting's formulation can seem quite natural, but it is a formulation that makes use of a specific notion of normativity; one of a couple that the general notion of normativity can encompass. As Jonathan Dancy says,

It is often said that normativity is the characteristic common to everything that appears on the "ought" side of the distinction between what is and what ought to be. (Dancy, 2000 p. vii)

But, this "ought" has a wider sense than is obvious from common usage because,

Normativity is a feature common to both sides of the evaluative/deontic distinction. (Ibid)

The simplest way to understand this distinction is in terms of how one ought to be (what something ought to be like), and what one ought to do (how something ought to act). This distinction may turn out to be important in what follows. In any case, it is generally taken, and this is how Whiting and his critics seem to take it, that the normativity of meaning is to be understood as having implications for what one ought to do (how one ought to use one's terms), given the relevant notion of normativity for them is one that is action-guiding, rather than a.... After all, if a claim about meaning is normative, it would seem natural to construe it as having implications for what one ought (not) to, or may (not), *do* – namely, how one ought (not), or may (not), use the terms in question. As such, one can assess whether an action the norm was meant to be guiding – in this case, the use of some specific fragment of language – satisfies the conditions it has set down for correct action; if some *F* is normative in this way, then there are conditions for correct action according to *F*. As such, one has either acted correctly or incorrectly, if one has acted

so as to be governed by norms of this kind. However, it is worth noting, that a common contention of opponents to Normativism is that it does not follow that given there are conditions for correctness, it need be the case that there are norms that are specifically associated with, or intrinsic to, *that* particular thing that can be so assessed. Indeed, for some it is not obvious that 'correct', at least in this context, is a normative notion at all. This is a controversy that was not always recognised in the vast body of literature that followed the publication of Kripke's arguments:

Our topic is the fact that terms of a language are governed by rules that determine what constitutes correct and incorrect application of them. (Blackburn 1984, p. 28)

And Paul Boghossian, at one point, seemed to take it as read that some form of the Normativity Thesis is true:

The normativity of meaning turns out to be ... simply a new name for the familiar fact that ... meaningful expressions possess conditions of correct use (1989, p. 148).

Indeed, Crispin Wright went so far as to say, that it could be viewed as a 'harmless platitude' that meaning is intrinsically normative, given the need for meaningful expressions to possess 'correctness conditions' (Wright 1993 p. 247). But the thought is a substantive one, for not only is the move from correctness to talk of 'ought' and 'may' not obviously interchangeable as these claims would suggest, but, additionally, Normativism can take a number of forms, some more specific than others. From Gibbard, there is the idea that 'means' implies 'ought'; from Kripke, such 'ought's are derived from using language in accordance with its meaning. Others, such as Horwich (1998, p. 184), have concentrated on the constraints that the normative aspects of language are going to put on one's theory of meaning. Though, despite these differences, what is common in all these conceptions of the Normativity Thesis is that the facts of meaning have normative content.

But recently the assumption has come under some considerable scrutiny, and, for many though not for all, has been found wanting. The scrutiny has come about, more or less, because of recent interest in defending more sophisticated forms of dispositional accounts of meaning (such as recent forms of informational semantics and inferential role semantics) in the face of the arguments that Kripke lodged

against them. And, given the central role that it plays in his arguments, this has led to the need to address the (apparent) normative consequences of language use. For, if meaning is *intrinsically* normative, then dispositional accounts may be in trouble. Intrinsic normativity, at least as far as Kripke is concerned, requires that the facts of meaning have a justificatory role to play in answering questions as to how words and sentences ought to be used. Since dispositions, at best, tell us how words and sentences *are* used, they cannot be used by way of justifying answers to such questions. At least, so far as Kripke is concerned.

But, why should we think that the normative consequences of language use are *intrinsic* to meaning? One need not deny that there are normative consequences of language use *tout court* in denying *that* claim. Instead, one could simply allow for such consequences from other sources. In which case, so the thought goes, dispositions might be able to have the requisite powers of justification – for, say, judgements about how terms ought to be used, given what they were used *for*. Such a manoeuvre is common amongst non-Normativists; it is to claim that semantic correctness is an instrumental value (of a specific sort). It is a move that need not deny that there are normative considerations regarding language use, only that these are normative considerations that do not result in virtue of words meaning what they do. As a consequence, the claim that meaning is intrinsically normative is in opposition to this manoeuvre. Hence, if meaning *is* intrinsically normative, then the dispositionalist cannot sidestep the issue of normativity in the way just outlined. What, then, is it to make such a claim? What kind of normativity is at work in the Normativity Thesis?

What Kind Of Normativity?

As Whiting well notes,

If the relevant normative implications for how a subject is to employ an expression result from anything other than facts about what the relevant expression means, then such normative import would seem not to belong to the nature of meaning as such. (Whiting 2009, pp. 536 - 7)

It is often supposed, then, that the Normativist will have to take the norms of meaning, to awkwardly use Kantian terminology, to be *categorical* imperatives. As I

am using the phrase, I take the normative force of categorical imperatives not to be derived from the satisfaction of some specific (contingent) ends that someone has. Categorical imperatives at least take into account other reasons to act, other than the desired end, such that even if ∂ 'ing is the best way to achieve one's end of β , there may be reason not to β , thus one ought not to ∂ . In such a case, at least one necessary condition has been satisfied for there being some categorical imperative governing such an act of ∂ 'ing (in this case, a categorical imperative that appears to forbid it).³

For this reason, it is widely, but not universally, accepted that the norms governing our ethical practice are paradigmatic of categorical imperatives. The thought is this: if, for example, whilst one is on the way to the pub, one comes across an elderly person who has badly injured themselves, one should stop and help the elderly person, even if one wants to get drunk – if there is some situation in which some ethical principle applies, then, the thought is, it applies in spite of whatever desires one may have (if one is a moral agent). That is, whether one's specific end is satisfied by helping, or failing to help, such an end isn't meant to enter into a consideration as to whether one ought to so act. The point being that, if the meaning is intrinsically normative, then it is assumed that this is how the norms of meaning will operate (even if it turns out this is not the way that the norms of ethics, in fact, operate).

Thus, if that is so, whatever ends one has in speaking as one does (or perhaps even speaking at all – I'll return to this), will not be that upon which the relevant normative implications are based. Hence, if the normative implications for how a subject should use terms result only from what an expression means, the 'ought's (or 'may's etc.) that govern semantics must thus be constitutive of the facts of meaning. Accordingly, these 'ought's ('may's) will hold regardless of the specific ends a language user has in using the fragments of the language that they did. Rather, they will have to hold just in virtue of them using the language.

The 'ought's that feature in these kinds of normative constraints are in contrast to

³ That is, of course, if it is not the case that one has some more important or overriding end, the fulfilment of which would be jeopardised in the event of ∂ 'ing. If that were so, then we would have just another case of a hypothetical imperative.

those that feature in *hypothetical* imperatives. The value ascribed to the satisfaction of the 'ought' as it features in an hypothetical imperative will therefore at least be instrumental in the sense given the end that one has, one ought to ∂ , given that ∂ 'ing is (at least) one way in which one will be able to (perhaps partially) achieve that end. Importantly, the 'ought's that can be derived from hypothetical imperatives say nothing as to whether the end one has, for which one pursues the means one does, is itself constrained by any norms; whether that is an end one ought to, or may, pursue. Anthony Price (2004, pp. 60 - 1) gives the example that if one wants to get drunk every night, then one ought to work in a pub. That 'ought' is meant to signify that working in a pub is at least one way in which one can satisfy one's desire or intention to get drunk every night. However, it is open whether one should get drunk every night. Perhaps one shouldn't. Thus, the kind of normativity at work in this example is nothing over and above that which applies to hypothetical imperatives.

Note that, in such cases, it is entirely implausible to say that the 'ought' as it features in such hypothetical imperatives is intrinsic to the 'getting drunk'. The 'ought' as it there features is simply indicative of a way that some end can be satisfied. This is why Hattiangadi thinks that,

To say that meaning is normative in this strong sense is to say that what a speaker means determines which uses of an expression she ought to make, where this 'ought' is understood to be 'categorical' in that it is not contingent on the agent's desires or ends (Hattiangadi 2007, p. 6)

And so,

If semantic correctness is merely instrumental, then meaning is not intrinsically normative in any interesting sense (Hattiangadi 2010, p. 93).

Hattiangadi (2010, pp. 93 - 4) thus argues that if semantic correctness is understood as instrumental, then it follows that the norms governing the use of language are not intrinsic to the meanings of the terms used. Thus, if it is correct for one to use x in a certain way, but it is correct because it fulfils some further end, it cannot be the case that one ought to use x in that way because of some fact as to what x means, but rather whether it furthers the achievement of some other, non-semantic aim the

subject has. As such, according to Hattiangadi, if it can be shown that semantic correctness must be instrumental in value, then the Normativity Thesis has been shown to be false.

But, crucially, according to Hattiangadi, the norms involved that are indicative of the kind of instrumental value that is inconsistent with intrinsic normativity must take the form of what John Broome calls a 'normative requirement', which he distinguishes from two other normative notions: 'ought' and 'a reason'. Formally, Broome takes 'NR' to capture this relation:

$$\text{NR: } O(p \rightarrow q)$$

Where 'O' is a normative operator, something like (but not exactly) 'you ought to see to it that', that takes wide scope over the conditional that is meant to express that doing q is instrumentally valuable for achieving p , and the ' \rightarrow ' is the material conditional.⁴ What is important about normative requirements as Broome sets them out is that the normativity involved cannot be 'detached', because the normative import attaches to the conditional rather than either its antecedent or its consequent. That simply means that one thing can be in this 'normatively require' relation with another thing, though the first thing obtaining does not thereby mean that the second is demanded (normatively). And we have seen that that is true of hypothetical imperatives – just because acting in one way is a means to achieving some further end, it does not mean that one should pursue that end in the first place. Returning to Price's example, one cannot detach the consequent of "if one wants to get drunk every night, then one ought to work in a pub". That is, one cannot infer that one ought to work in a pub (considering the conditional in isolation) in any other way than it being instrumental, in the relevant respects, to achieving the end of getting drunk every night. Semi-formally, according to Broome's notation, that conditional can be construed as,

⁴ Broome is well aware that such formalisations don't translate easily into English, and it is unclear that as they would ordinarily be taken, they would mean the same as the sort of claims they are meant to be formalisations of. Broome insists, however, that they should be taken as such – the uneasiness of the natural language translations is simply due to the need for his logical apparatus to range over propositions, which is how he formalizes normative talk that doesn't translate easily into sentences with 'that' clauses.

O ((one wants to get drunk every night) → (work in a pub))

The 'ought' ranges over the whole conditional, but can be thought to range over neither its antecedent nor its consequent. And it is this relation that, for Hattiangadi, captures the normativity that is at work when things are of instrumental value in the way that she takes meaning to be.

As to whether Hattiangadi is correct in this, we shall have to see, but even if she is, why is it important for the non-Normativist that the relevant normativity be properly captured by this relation? Well, according to Hattiangadi there is no way such a result can be thought to be compatible with the normativity involved being intrinsic to the activity with which it is associated – that is, normative requirements are not intrinsic to the things that we may think of as requiring them – namely the (desiring of) the ends one has (the right hand side of the conditional). We can see why that is so once we recognise that intrinsic normativity must allow for detachment in a way that normative requirements do not allow for – if something is intrinsically normative, the normativity must go everywhere. To return to Price's example, we have the hypothetical imperative that if one intends to get drunk every evening then one should work in a pub. However, it may not be the case that one ought to get drunk every evening in the first place. Nonetheless, let's say that one intends to get drunk every evening. In such a case, Broome contends, it is *not* the case that one ought to work in a pub. Thus, the kind of normativity at work in such cases does not allow for the 'detachment' of the ought of the consequent, even if the antecedent is satisfied. It is for that reason that hypothetical imperatives only exert normative requirements upon those for whom the hypothetical imperative applies, which leaves it open whether one really should act so as to satisfy it.

The consequence of this, according to Hattiangadi, is that,

The general, wide scope requirement that one ought to take the necessary means to satisfy one's intentions is a rule of *practical rationality*, not semantics. Facts about meaning ... can [...] be relevant to what you ought to do if you are to satisfy your intentions, and such facts can be relevant to what constitutes satisfying requirements of practical rationality. (Hattiangadi 2010, p. 94)

Hattiangadi takes it that the way in which normativity is manifest in hypothetical

imperatives, it patently is not in the remit of *semantics* but rather of *practical rationality*. That, I take it, is just because the manner in which one is to achieve the ends one has is not the remit of semantics but, apparently, practical rationality. In any case, the negative point is surely right, so it will be enough for Hattiangadi, in order to undermine the normativity thesis, to establish that the 'ought's that feature in the normative equivalent of statements about meaning have to be of the kind that feature in such statements of hypothetical imperatives.

Thus, if the norms that govern meaning can be shown to be merely normative requirements in (something close to) Broome's sense, then the Normativity Thesis will thereby be shown to be false. In sum:

- P1: If meaning is intrinsically normative, then it is not the case that the only norms governing meaning are normative requirements of hypothetical imperatives
- P2: The only norms governing meaning are normative requirements of hypothetical imperatives.
- C: Meaning is not intrinsically normative.

If the argument is sound, then the Normativity Thesis is false. Hence, if the Normativity Thesis is to be defended, then this argument needs to be answered. It can be so, as with all such arguments, by denying its validity, or rejecting one of the premises. I take it that the argument is valid, so one of the premises must be false if the Normativity Thesis is true.

I take it that P1 is true. The reasons for this we have already seen. However, the implicit assumption in P1 that the normative force of hypothetical imperatives is fully captured by Broome's notion of a 'normative requirement' is more controversial.⁵ But let's grant this much: it may not matter just what formulation of

⁵ One issue that should just be earmarked is that it isn't given that there are even any such things as normative requirements as Broome sets them out. Their invocation is meant to be a solution to a problem – that is how we are to formally account for the kinds of conditionals that feature in hypothetical imperatives. People are divided as to the best way to do that. Jonathan Dancy, for

this kind of normativity we settle on, but just that there is a kind of normativity that cannot be detached in the way that demands and reasons can be, and that is the kind of normativity that is at work in the claim that meaning is normative. Thus, I will here, following Broome, call that kind of normativity 'normative requirement', but leave it open whether Broome has fully and correctly captured that notion in his formal characterization of it. Indeed, as we shall see, I can leave it open as to whether there are *any* instances of normative requirements, because I will argue, at least, that meaning normativity need not be thought of as of this form, and that is all that is of present concern.

The Crux: Are The Norms of Meaning 'Normative Requirements'?⁶

So, this is the question: are the norms of meaning only ever instances of normative requirements? In support of a positive answer, the non-Normativist will typically say that there is always some further end to which language use is a means so as to establish the claim that semantic correctness is instrumental in value. Alexander Miller says this:

The most that can be said is that if Neil means magpie by "magpie" then *given that he has a desire to communicate, or perhaps a desire to think the truth, or a desire to conform to his prior semantic intentions*, he has a reason to apply "magpie" to an object if and only if it is a magpie (Miller 2006, p. 109).

And Miller seems to be right in this. One must at least be in the game of communicating to be governed by any norms that contribute to communication. If one has no interest in communicating, then it seems implausible to say that one ought to act so as to communicate. It thus appears that the idea of the normativity of meaning is, at least in this very broad sense, dependent on certain psychological states of subjects that are capable of conveying it.

example, is unconvinced that the best way to represent the kind of phenomena that Broome is trying to capture formally with his 'normative requirements' is via a relation. The point is that 'normative requirements' are meant to play a specific role. It is that which plays that role (i.e. the 'ought's of hypothetical imperatives) which is important, and for the present purposes, normative requirements as set out by Broome capture them adequately.

⁶ By way of warning, the two main protagonists in this section are Alexander Miller and Alan Millar. The similarity of the names cannot be helped, so the reader, I'm afraid, needs to be careful about who is whom.

So Miller seems to have given us reason to think that semantic correctness must be thought of as an instrumental value due to the fact there are at least some common, broad ends upon which engagement in language use is dependent – such as the end of communicating. Thus, it may seem that Miller's contention invalidates the Normativity Thesis. For if Hattiangadi is right that semantic correctness is derivative from the satisfaction of some hypothetical imperative then the sort of normativity at work cannot be intrinsic to meaning. The problem is that it isn't clear that in virtue of semantic correctness being instrumental in value – in particular, in the way that Miller identifies – that it follows that such correctness only gets its normative force in virtue of its ability to specify how some contingent end could be achieved. For that to be so, it must be the case that the contingency of language use on the desire to communicate ensures that the relevant norms of meaning must be nothing more than normative requirements of hypothetical imperatives.

The hallmark of some act being of instrumental value is that it is performed in order to achieve, or partially realise, some further end. Thus, one acts in that way only if it will (or seems as though it will) further or realise such an end. The action a hypothetical imperative recommends will be instrumental in this sense, but will additionally have to be such that it is left open whether the end for which the hypothetical imperative recommends a means is itself worth pursuing. That is just to say that the consequent of the conditional that makes up the hypothetical imperative cannot be detached, even if the antecedent is satisfied. And the argument above only showed that these normative requirements are inconsistent with intrinsic normativity. Thus, the non-Normativist must show that semantic correctness being an instrumental value in the way Miller specifies is the sort of instrumental value that features in the satisfaction of hypothetical imperatives.

Hence, the question now is: can there be any such cases in which the relevant notion of correctness is instrumental, but in a way that the 'ought' of the consequent *can* be detached? And, if there were such a notion of correctness, can it capture the relevant notion of *semantic* correctness? And if it did, would it be able to support the idea that there are *intrinsic* norms of meaning? One way in which this might be achieved is if the norms of meaning can be thought of, not as means to a further end, but *constitutive* of the end itself. For if the norms of meaning could be so thought of,

then it would be the case that semantic correctness remains instrumentally valuable while, at the same time, detachment of the consequent of the relevant conditional would still be possible.

Here's a thought as to how that can seem plausible. When it comes to language use, it is the case that one's particular ends in so using it are not what induces the sort of normativity that is peculiar to *meaning*. Nonetheless, the value attached to meaning so-and-so is instrumental in the sense that it contributes to the broad end of communicating, but not to the ends one has *in* communicating. Thus meaning, so conceived, isn't a self-standing end of intrinsic value. But, that does not falsify the claim that meaning itself is intrinsically *normative*. Meaning can, plausibly, only come about in a context in which there are those communicating. If it can be shown that there is a coherent idea of what it would be for meaning to have *that* role, then meaning, within that broad context of communicators, would have to be understood as intrinsically normative *for communicators*. The result of that being that there being any meaning at all – for there to be facts of meaning – there must be those who communicate (or are capable of communication).

Importantly, however, though semantic correctness will be instrumentally valuable (at least in some very broad sense), it will not be such, so as to make it the case that what is semantically correct is merely 'normatively required' in the presently relevant sense. That is demonstrated by the fact that the consequent of the conditional that demonstrates its instrumental value *can* be detached when the antecedent is satisfied, if we think of things in the following way: if one is a participant in the practice of communication, or language use, one is thereby under obligation to act in a way that is in accord with the rules of that practice, where a practice is understood as a system of rules.

So, the shape of the proposal is that we think of meaning in terms of the norms (or rules) governing a *practice*. For the present concerns, the proposal is that we think about language use in terms of the participation in a practice. Such a thought, so far as it goes, is not a new one. It can be traced back to passages in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and is a thought that is relied upon, in varying degrees, for many since. One such is Alan Millar. Millar will have his part to play yet, but for

the time being, it is worth seeing what he says with regards to practices that may help the Normativist accommodate Alexander Miller's claim as to the necessary contingency of language use on certain desires, without invalidating the claim to intrinsic normativity:

Participating in the practice makes one subject to that rule although, as with other practices, like playing a game of soccer, one may participate in the practice and also flout the rules ... [but] participating in a practice incurs a commitment to following its governing rules and therefore to doing what the rules prescribe. (Millar 2004, p. 168)

In this light, one may insist that Miller's challenge is, effectively, saying that one may not be a participant in the practice of using language (by having no intention to communicate). In which case, one is not obliged to do anything that so participating would normatively commit one to. But that does not undermine the idea that, for participants of that practice, there are norms intrinsic to it that govern them, or so is the present line of thought. If meaning is thought of in this way – such that it is constitutive of the practice that words mean what they do – then, *given one is in that practice*, in virtue of words meaning what they do, one ought to use them in certain ways. Another way to put this is that there are certain things (namely, that which communication enables) that only participating in the practice of using a language will allow (call this the 'L-practice'); just those sorts of things that can only be done with language.

If that is right, then the thought seems to be that once one *is* a participant in the practice, one is thereby obliged to *act* in certain ways. So, something needs to be said about what makes one a participant, and how such a status can be gained and lost. For, if that status can be lost just in virtue of the dropping of certain desires, it may appear that the relevant normative constraints cannot support the claim that in favour of *intrinsic* normativity. For, the proposal says that part of what it is for some agent to be a participant in the practice of language use (the L-practice) is for them to have certain desires or intentions – such as the intention to communicate. Thus, we appear to have the conditional 'if one wants to communicate, then one ought to act in accordance with the rules of the L-practice'. In order for the 'ought' there to be indicative of intrinsic normativity it may seem that it must be able to be detached. But, it seems as though it cannot be detached – i.e. it is not true that one ought to act

in accordance with these putative rules, once that desire is lost.

But that conditional is misleading; communicating just *is* participating in the L-practice. Thus, dropping the intention to communicate means that one ceases to be a participant in the L-practice. But the L-practice enables certain types of actions, the L-practice is the practice in which meaning occurs. So, failing to be a participant in the L-practice results in one failing to have the means to achieve certain ends; the sorts of desires that Miller specifies are the kinds of desires required to *be* a participant in the L-practice. That is, to be such as to be able to *mean* anything at all. The L-practice itself is conceived of as a system of rules which any such participant of the practice is governed by. Once one chooses to be meaningful (i.e. communicate), one thereby is under certain obligations. One can act in conflict with the rules that constitute meaningfulness and so act in a way one ought not to, but only given that status as a participant in the L-practice. If, for example, a participant had the desire to describe something in a circumstance, then there are certain things they would have to do that only participating allows – like use the sorts of predicates that could be satisfied by the object described. Those constraints are not specifically tied to the making of the description *per se*, so the thought goes, but are set according to the practice in which one has placed oneself; once one enters into that practice, there are certain obligations that one is under as a participant – that is, within the practice, there are certain actions one should perform (given certain circumstances that one finds oneself, as a participant, in). Once one is in that practice (a participant), any subsequent desires, that the acting upon which would contravene its rules, cannot discharge one from having the normative commitments that come with so participating. The norms hold as norms, only, one may have no reason to follow them.

So the proposal is that L-practice should be regarded as a set of the vast, perhaps indefinite, activities that language use enables. (Such activities can be thought of, if one is so inclined as language games). Each, in their circumstances, has rules for the ways one can achieve certain ends. But, so participating, so the thought goes, is the only way in which many such ends could be achieved. Those kinds of ends that one thus has (those sorts of ends that can be put under the broad category of communication) are constituted by certain norms, or rules, governing this vast array

of activities that come under the broad label of the L-practice; it is constitutive of the end of, say, describing the colour of some leaves that one obeys the rules which govern description (in the circumstances in which the description is made). The thought is that something like a description of those leaves in a circumstance, as well as other kinds of speech acts in other circumstances, are constitutive of the L-practice, and itself to be understood in terms of the rules that govern the achievement of such an end in individual circumstances. Importantly, though, there are at least some such norms that are not tied to the desires to perform any given speech act, only that *in order to* perform such speech acts, one must act in accordance with one or other rule of the L-practice. The key is that, the normative force of the rules governing the L-practice cannot be lost by dropping desires that one may have *as* a participant in the practice. Meaning, such is the suggestion, sets the conditions under which such ends can be achieved. If that is the case then, the sorts of hypothetical imperatives that non-Normatives typically rely upon are not norms of meaning *per se*, but, rather norms that are dependent upon what meaning thus allows.

Remember, the normativity thesis takes it that the facts of meaning have normative content. The thought here is that the facts of meaning are rules governing uses of expressions in particular circumstances. It is true that, on this suggestion, one's acts will only be governed by such rules if one participates in the practice that they govern. And thought it would be true that the uses of expressions over for which such rules govern are used to fulfil certain aims, these are aims that can only be achieved by way of following these rules. The facts of meaning, then, just are the facts as to what those rules require. And the rules, in general terms, are thought of as requiring that certain conditions are met so as to perform certain kinds of acts.

Of course, the non-Normativist may well reject the idea that there are intrinsic norms of practices – that is, they may well insist that any such norms that govern a participant are still contingent on certain desires to, say, win in that practice or simply achieve some other end. Though *that* point has not been established by the considerations above. What counts as normative, and in particular *intrinsically* normative, has not been fully captured by the concentration of non-Normativists on just what obligations one has, and the different ways they have identified that one

can be obliged. That is instrumentality does not obviously rule out intrinsicity. For there is reason to think that there are rules that are governing one in virtue of one entering into a practice, and, so the present thought goes, we have entered such a practice when we are using a language.

That framework is consistent with the thought that one can incur obligations in virtue of words meaning what they do, given that one is a participant in the practice of language use – the practice within which words *have* meaning. So, if the claim that meaning is intrinsically normative is to be understood as a claim as to in virtue of what one is obliged to act in certain ways, for the present case, it was in virtue of words meaning what they do, within the practice of language use, that one incurs such obligations. Correlatively, then, we have the idea that in virtue of one being a language user, one is obliged to act in certain ways. The thought is that the very notion of words having a meaning can only be made sense of within the context of there being a practice of language use. And so, *as language users*, we are thereby under obligation to use words in certain ways, given the meaning of those words as constitutive of the practice in which they participate.

Perhaps a useful comparison to illustrate this thought is Philippa Foot's discussion of the norms of etiquette in *Morality As A System of Hypothetical Imperatives* (1972, pp. 308-9). Here Foot argues (though has subsequently come to change her position) that etiquette can be regarded as a system of rules. This is the current proposal as to how to regard language use. Why this can be important is that perhaps language can be thought of like Foot (here) thinks of etiquette. If that is somewhere near the correct model of language use, the relevant normative relation that speakers have to it would not be means-ends in the way that Hattiangadi suggests, for, in that case, speakers would have to be related to language use in such a way that the only relevant norms are normative requirements of hypothetical imperatives. The point being, that our engagement with such norms, though not of the hypothetical imperative form, can be conditional on our desires – such as the broad desire to communicate. But being so conditional does not invalidate the claim that the norms governing the practice are norms nonetheless – and indeed can be made consistent with the claim that the norms are intrinsic to meaning if the associated rules are constitutive of the practice of language use. In any case, it seems entirely

implausible that these could be reduced simply to norms of practical rationality that, if true, P2 (see p. 24) would suggest.

The Problem With Normativists

A recent defence of Normativism by Daniel Whiting (2007, 2009) does not take this route. He attempts to derive normative truths from apparently uncontroversial claims about the correct applications of words and sentences. I will argue that this route to the Normativity Thesis is blocked by the fact that the applications of words and sentences, as understood by Whiting, *are* governed by normative requirements of hypothetical imperatives. However, I will show that the Normativist can accept the contingency on intention that is rife in such cases. As such, the Normativist can accept the simple argument against them in so far as it shows that certain *specific* cases of language use – i.e. using a language to do *that*, in *this* circumstance – can be subject to the normative requirements of hypothetical imperatives. That is hardly surprising – speakers use language to achieve all sorts of ends that are so contingent on their desires. That, though, is not enough to show that *meaning* is not intrinsically normative.

In what follows, therefore, I will show how Whiting's focus is mistaken, and show how non-Normativists can successfully undermine his form of Normativism. In so doing, I will highlight the ways in which Normativism will have to diverge from Whiting in its formulation so as to avoid the problems that Whiting is confronted with. This will involve not denying what non-Normativists have said in response to Whiting, but instead *accommodating* the instrumental value (even as it features in hypothetical imperatives) associated within specific uses of language within a framework of meaning understood as intrinsically normative. In the third chapter I will give reasons for thinking that there is such a framework, given certain assumptions about when what we say is true, and argue that is unaffected by recent non-Normativist arguments.

So, Chapter 3 will be a development of the proposal of thinking of language use as a practice in light of objections to recent forms of Normativism that are discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: The Hypothetical Imperatives in Use

This chapter begins by assessing some positive arguments for Normativism. One in particular – Whiting's – argues that given an accepted platitude about meaning, Normativism follows. I will argue that non-Normativists are correct in arguing that it does not. However, I maintain that this 'platitude', as it appears in the literature, is not such – in any case, it is not a platitude about *meaning*. In order to do so, I will introduce a distinction between the notions of correct application and correct use, such that if it is taken to be a platitude about meaning that meaningful expressions possess conditions for correct application then it is true that Normativism does not follow from such a 'platitude'. In chapter 3 I will make precise just what it would be to satisfy a condition for correct use, and offer a framework in which it would be correct to think that meaningful expressions are subject to such conditions – conditions that hold in virtue of normative truths that are constitutive of facts of meaning.

Hence, the aim of this chapter is little more than ground clearing for Chapter 3. I will argue that if, as Daniel Whiting does, one understands the conditions for correctness as they feature in the 'platitude' in terms of correct *applications* of terms, the non-Normativists can successfully argue that such correctness should be conceived as instrumental in achieving some further end of language users, in such a way as to be demonstrative of a hypothetical imperative that will be at work, and nothing more. I argue, given the formulation some non-Normativists use invokes the notion of correct application, it is only a platitude for statements that purport to express truth. Such statements are, plausibly, governed by norms that are to be understood as hypothetical imperatives, in so far as the value upon which semantic correctness is judged is *truth*. That is why the non-Normativist arguments are difficult to rebut once this formulation of the 'platitude' is accepted.

Yet, for all that, I take it as spurious to call such a formulation a 'meaning platitude'; non-Normativists (and, of course, some Normativists) are mistaken in thinking that this is a platitude of *meaning*. Accordingly, I motivate the another understanding of the meaning platitude, and thus one can formulate the idea of conditions for correct use in such a way that does not tie the idea of semantic correctness too closely to the contingent end of expressing truth.

Meaning and Correctness

Now, both sides of the debate want to hold onto the idea that language users can be said to be correct or incorrect in using the expressions that they do. In fact, both agree that this *must* be the case for the expression to count as meaningful; that is, on the grounds that it is a platitude that uses of meaningful expressions must be so apt for assessment. Hattiangadi offers one common way of justifying the thought as platitudinous:

It hardly seems open to us to deny that in order to have meaning, terms must have correctness conditions. This is what distinguishes the use of language from the making of mere noise (Hattiangadi 2006, p. 222)

The divergence comes with regards to in virtue of what language users are to be so deemed to have acted correctly or incorrectly. The non-Normativist will deny that it follows from the platitude that meaning is intrinsically normative; for Whiting, on the other hand, it *immediately* follows – it is the normative constraints on language that distinguish it from mere noise. The substance of the debate is thus over what follows from the platitude: Whiting sees the platitude extending to encompass the Normativity Thesis, his opponents deny this. Accordingly, it is taken to be the case that, either it is merely platitudinous that ascriptions of meaning are normative statements, or else *meaning* normativity, at any rate, has nothing to do with such aptness of assessment (Glüer 2009, Hattiangadi 2006, Boghossian 2005). If we take the later, non-Normativist option, it has to be the case that ascriptions of meaning are descriptive statements that can feature, in so far as any descriptive statement can, in normative requirements of hypothetical imperatives. If the norms of meaning are so understood, the sense in which it is correct or incorrect to use a certain term

will turn on precisely the goals one set out to achieve in using the terms as one did. If so, then 'correctness' as it features in the 'platitude' is nothing more than indicative of the manner in which some contingent end can be satisfied.

Hence, if the non-Normativist is to establish that the norms of meaning are normative requirements of hypothetical imperatives, part of her project will have to be to successfully argue that such assessments of correctness as they feature in the platitude, at the very least, are not made true by facts of meaning, but rather according to whether so speaking is, indeed, a means to some contingent end the speaker has in that circumstance.

But what, in fact, does this putative 'platitude' say? One informal construal of the platitude is expressed by Whiting as follows:

From the fact that an expression has a particular meaning it follows that certain uses of it are *correct* and *incorrect*. (Whiting 2009, p. 537)

This idea has been given a distinctive gloss and specification in the literature – one that has been advocated as a platitude by Normativists and non-Normativists alike (See Glüer 2009; Hattiangadi, 2006 p. 222; Whiting, 2009 p. 537):

(C) w means $F \rightarrow (x)(S \text{ correctly applies } w \text{ to } x \leftrightarrow x \text{ is } f)$

Where, w is some word, F gives its meaning and f is the feature in virtue of which w applies. Hattiangadi says this of (C):

The expression 'applies correctly' is a place-holder for various semantic relations a term can have to the world: ' t applies correctly to x ' stands for ' t refers to x ', ' t denotes x ', ' t is true of x '. (2006, p. 222)

Take one of her particular cases: the case of naming. It is clear that Hattiangadi regards the notion of applying names correctly just to be referring. Hence, if w is a name, then its meaning F will just be to say that it refers to some x , as long as that x is an f . I am happy to assent to this idea of what correct application amounts to – namely, that the correct application of a word or sentence is tantamount to using it truly. What Hattiangadi then goes on to argue is that with correctness so

understood, there is no reason to think that any associated normativity – if there is indeed any – need be understood as resulting from what the terms in question mean. To see how, however, we need to get clear two things: first what Whiting's positive argument is and then, from this, get clear on the state of the dialectic.

From Correctness To Normativity: Whiting's Argument

Given, as we have seen, Whiting takes normative truths to immediately follow from (C), statements of such truths will be equivalent to (C), and thus, themselves platitudes. So, Whiting (2009, p. 544 – 5) has (eventually) arrived at what he takes to be the normative equivalent to (C) to be⁷:

(P') w means $F \rightarrow (x)(S \text{ ought not to (apply } w \text{ to } x) \leftrightarrow x \text{ is not } f)$

Which is, in turn, equivalent to:

(P'') w means $F \rightarrow (x)(S \text{ may (apply } w \text{ to } x) \leftrightarrow x \text{ is } f)$

Given the nature of Whiting's partisanship in favour of Normativism, it is unsurprising that he takes it to be the non-Normativist's task to prove that (C) does not imply both (P') and (P''). As a consequence, charges of question begging are tossed about liberally from both sides of the debate (of course, non-Normativists take the burden of proof to be borne by the Normativist). We shall see in due course whether any such charges are warranted. Let's, though, start with Whiting's side of the story.

Whiting begins with the presumption that 'correctness' just is a normative notion. Indeed, pre-philosophically, that hardly seems deplorable – most people would accept that one should do what it is correct to do. As such, Whiting feels that there is pressure already on the non-Normativist to show that correctness is not a normative notion, and, perhaps more importantly, that correctness isn't normative as it appears in (C).

⁷These are not the first formulations that Whiting came up with. Previous attempts have been acknowledged by Whiting to have been successfully rebutted by some arguments by Hattiangadi 2006. See below for further detail.

Boghossian (2005) has a stab at this – promoting a position which could plausibly be taken to be in opposition to his previous commitments in print. In his (1989), remember, he said:

The normativity of meaning turns out to be ... simply a new name for the familiar fact that ... meaningful expressions possess conditions of correct use (1989, p. 148).

That can, at least, be construed as a statement of Whiting's idea that it simply follows from meaningful expressions having conditions for correct use that meaning is intrinsically normative.⁸ However, now Boghossian (2005) thinks that that there are conditions of correctness that do govern meaningful expressions that need not be indicative of any normative truths inherent in the notion of meaning. For, in contrast to Whiting, he takes it that only *sometimes* is the application 'correct' indicative of normativity, and, as it happens, when applied in these kinds of ways to linguistic expression, it turns out not to be:

It is not clear that, at least as it is being used here, 'correct' expresses a normative notion, for it may just mean true. (Boghossian 2005, p. 207)

The thought being that correctness with regards to how we use the expressions that we do can often just refer to whether what we said was true or not. That is especially true, I note, when the relevant notion of correctness is to be understood as correct *application*. The question is, is it *only* when we speak truth that we can deem someone to have spoken correctly – in the sense that it is *semantically* correct for one to do so. I take it that semantic correctness is meant to result in meaningfulness, given we accept some form of the platitude. The non-Normativist, presumably, will be happy to say that there are other cases – cases in which a truth has not been expressed – that will be 'correct'. But, just as expressing truth is of contingent instrumental value, so will anything else; speaking truth is only the correct thing to do if one aimed to speak truth, and so the 'ought' at work here can easily be construed as being nothing more than an 'ought' as it would feature in a hypothetical

⁸ Though Boghossian is a little more cautious as to what his previous thought really was. He, indeed, in his 1989 does not translate 'correctness' statements into 'ought' statements, but instead simply assumes that 'correct' is itself a normative notion.

imperative.

For example, it may be the case that if one wants to truly describe someone's haircut as looking like a loaf of bread, then one should use words to that effect. But, it may be the case that one should not describe anyone's hair as looking like a loaf of bread because of the offence it will cause. Thus, in the unproblematic way in which 'ought's feature in hypothetical imperatives, if one wants to express truth (and thereby offend), and it is true that the person in question has hair that looks remarkably like a loaf of bread, then that is how one ought to describe it. But, if one wants to compliment the person as to their new hair style, it might be the case that one ought to lie – or, at least, one ought not to so describe their hair. But, in what sense, in such a situation, would it be 'correct' to describe the person's hair as looking like a loaf of bread? Boghossian's point is that it is only correct, if correct here means 'is true'. But, in this situation, it is far from clear that there is any normative conclusion to be drawn from the fact that it is 'correct' (in this sense) to so describe that person's hair. That is just to say that truth is not itself normative in this context because the consequent of the sort of hypothetical imperative at work here cannot be detached.

If so, then we have a notion of correctness with regards to the words that we use that is understood in terms of truth, that is not an intrinsically normative notion. Hence, one may conclude, the platitude that meaningful expressions have conditions for correct application *may* just be such a case in which correctness is understood not as intrinsically normative, and so we can say that meaningful expressions *can* have correctness conditions without there being any normative implications for *meaning*. In which case, meaning is not intrinsically normative; the Normativity Thesis is false.

Hattiangadi expands on the sort of thought that Boghossian expresses by locating a crucial equivocation at the heart of claims about how meaning is normative. In one sense of 'normative', meaning is normative, but unproblematically so (in so far as it is not a distinctive kind normativity that philosophers already recognise). There is another sense of 'normative' that is equivalent to 'prescriptive' which would be problematic but for the fact that this notion has no place within how we should think of meaning (Hattiangadi 2006, p. 221). As far as Hattiangadi is concerned, (C), as it

stands says nothing that can plausibly be thought to be equivalently construed as some prescriptive statement, so (C) is normative in the sense that is naturalistically unproblematic. Specifically, the equivocation that Hattiangadi locates is one that can be shown by a distinction between 'norm-relativity' and 'normativity' (2007, p. 180). If meaning is merely norm-relative, then it is unproblematic (for the non-Normativist), but if it were normative, it would be. Something is merely norm-relative when there is some norm at work for which so acting would be in line – like, say, the truth norm. But that does not show that that thing is normative. For the present case, that is just because a judgement of something being correct (in the 'genuine normativity' sense) is meant to motivate one to act ipso facto, whereas, if it is merely norm-relative, there is an additional question to be asked as to whether the norm to which it is relative is one that one is under. It is 'correct' to speak truly in this sense, only if one is concerned about truth. But one may not, thus the only 'ought' to found is one that features in a hypothetical imperative.

Whiting, however, is unconvinced:

Even if one agrees with the anti-Normativist that truth is a non-normative notion and that claims concerning correctness can be straightforwardly transformed into claims about truth, this does nothing to show that claims concerning correctness are non-normative. (2009, p. 539)

Whiting is insisting that even though Boghossian may indeed be right in saying that, in some circumstances, 'correct' and 'is true' can be substituted for one another in such cases, the Normativist has the necessary tools to accommodate this. For it does not follow, according to Whiting, that correctness is a non-normative notion from the conjunction of the ideas that truth can be construed as a non-normative notion and claims of correctness *can* be translated into claims about truth. His reason being, following Rosen, that he takes Boghossian here to be confusing two related, but importantly distinct notions. The notion of primary concern here is the notion of *correctness*. But that is to be distinguished from the *correct-making-feature*, taken to be 'the property the performance must manifest in order to count as correct' (Rosen 2001, p. 619; cf. Whiting 2009, p. 540).

Whiting concludes that,

Even if one agrees with the anti-Normativist that the pertinent 'word-world relation' is not normative, this does not undermine the view that the property of correctness – possessed in this instance in virtue of the obtaining of the 'word-world relation' – is normative (Ibid)

We have a contrast between the notion of correctness, understood as normative, and the notion of a correct-making-feature, understood as descriptive (non-normative). So, for Whiting, for the sorts of the cases that Boghossian raises, truth is the *correct-making* feature, it virtue of which some utterance is correct. But the fact that it *is* correct is indicative of the *normative* notion of correctness that is at work – i.e. that one ought to do that which it correct.

Note, though, that such a 'correct making feature' must be indicative of some norm that requires one to speak truth. But that, surely, doesn't really affect the central point of present concern. For even if truth is the 'correct-making feature' in some instance, the fact that the token utterance is correct in virtue of it being true can nonetheless be 'correct' in the sense that we have a background concern for truth. That is, in virtue of the correct-making feature *being* truth, we may have reason to suspect that the sort of norm for which it is such a feature is one derived from an intention to speak truth. And by the present line of argument, that would appear to be enough to make obligation one that is as features in hypothetical imperatives. In other words, the 'normativity' involved here is still predicated on some end a language user may have, and thus is only indicative of how such a desire may be fulfilled.

So, in order to rule out the thought that such 'correctness' is normative only in so far as it represents the manner in which some contingent end could be fulfilled, it needs to be shown that there is, of necessity in using a language, a background concern for truth. In which case, the truth norm will *always* be at work, even in cases in which we intuitively think that it is correct to express a non-truth, or correct to not speak a truth. So, the thought is that the sort of conditions for correctness spoken of, if to support the Normativity Thesis, must not be as a result of the achievement of some contingent end, for which applying *w* to some *x* is a means to achieving, at least in part. The non-Normativist, we have seen, has tried to demonstrate this by the fact that when the conditions have failed to be fulfilled, it appears disingenuous to insist that one has not spoken as one ought to, when, intuitively, it is reasonable and, above

all, meaningful to have done so.

The Normativist has to have something to say to this. If Normativism is to fit with the facts, it must allow for such everyday assessments of correctness with regards to our use of language to be accounted for. Thus, Whiting has sought to neutralise such a problem by invoking the notion of *prima facie* norms. *Prima facie* norms are norms, unlike the 'ought's that feature in hypothetical imperatives, that can only be overridden (that is, their normative force can be counteracted) if there is some other, contextually more pertinent norm at work that there applies. What Whiting therefore allows for is that the norms of meaning can be overridden, but only by other norms, such as those governing morals, or prudence. Of course, that meaning norms are *prima facie* norms is consistent with the Normativity Thesis because these norms, however weak they may be, hold in virtue of facts about meaning. This is how Whiting can escape the incompatibility challenge – if he is able to show that, though the norms of meaning can be overridden, they can only be overridden by other norms. That would allow him to locate such norms in the realm of semantics, as opposed to, say, practical reason, while still allowing for the permissibility, in certain circumstances, of speaking falsely.

Such consistency, however, comes at a price. Take a case of decent deception. If it is, in a circumstance, morally preferable to lie, one may say that, in that situation, one should lie. If so, then, *all things considered* one should say that, for example, *x* is *G*, when *x* is, in fact, *F*. Under Whiting's analysis, then, it is correct to lie, given the overriding moral norms in play, *but there is still a sense in which it was incorrect to say that x is G*:

I might not follow the norm for the use of an expression simply because I do not feel like doing so. But that alone does not show that there is no norm in force; my use of the expression should still be judged *incorrect*. (Whiting 2007, p.139)

That is simply because there are still norms of meaning at work even in such cases. Take, once again, the case of the bread-like hair. A reason why it may not be correct to describe the hair of the person in question as looking like a loaf of bread is that there may be a moral norm in force that forbids one from causing unnecessary offence. Thus, the correct thing to do, in this circumstance, is not to say, what the

hair, in fact, looks like, but to either lie or say nothing as to the look of the hair. But according to Whiting's analysis, one is still (semantically) blameworthy for lying. But one what grounds? Why is truth favoured over falsity so far as the facts of meaning are concerned? To insist that it is looks, at best, ad hoc. In any case, in so insisting, Whiting provokes accusations of question-begging. For the non-Normativist, Whiting is, against all the evidence, insisting that there are norms that are always in play because they are intrinsic to meaning, even in cases where no such norms seem to be present. This should be a last resort, and I don't think that the Normativist need be in such a desperate situation yet.⁹

I suggest that to avoid these kinds of problems satisfactorily, the Normativist should abandon dependence on the meaning 'platitude' which relies on the notion of the correct application of terms, because this stacks the deck in favour of truth when there is no reason why it should. And once *truth* is not at issue, then there will be no grounds upon which to deem semantic correctness as an instrumental value in achieving the contingent end of truth. It may turn out, of course, that once truth is out of the picture, then there is no notion of semantic correctness to be found at all. But, I don't think that is true. I will say why presently.

The Normative Implications of Conditions for Correct Application

First, though, I want to look briefly at Whiting's construals of the normative equivalents to (C). He has come up against objections over what they imply, and has dealt with these. However, I want to show that despite the alterations, there is still preoccupation for truth, which the adjusted principles engender, that leaves untouched the point that these equivalents are indicative of normative requirements of hypothetical imperatives. That is simply because of what they are felt to be equivalent *to*.

Whiting's original construal of the normative equivalent of (C) was in terms of how words and sentences *ought to be* applied. However, given pressure from non-Normativists, he has altered this to what we now have in (P') and (P'') – namely construals of (C) in terms of how words and sentences ought *not* to be applied, and

⁹ Hattiangadi (2006, pp. 231-2) also has a rejoinder to Whiting's appeal to prima facie semantic norms.

how they *may* be applied. For, the problem with construing the normative equivalent of the platitude in terms of positive 'ought's is that it contravenes the principle that 'ought' implies 'can'. That is, if we take (C) to imply,

(P) w means $F \rightarrow (x) (S \text{ ought to (apply } w \text{ to } x) \leftrightarrow x \text{ is } f)$

then, as Hattiangadi (2006, p. 227) rightly points out, we would be obliged to, say, apply 'dog' to all dogs. That, we cannot do, simply because it is possible, indeed highly probable, that we won't ever come across or think of all the dogs that there are, and so cannot apply 'dog' to each and every instance in which it is true to do so. As a consequence, Whiting (2007, p.137) promoted the following principle that he has now withdrawn:

(P*) w means $F \rightarrow (x) (S \text{ ought to (apply } w \text{ to } x) \rightarrow x \text{ is } f)$

The problem with this being that this fails to adequately capture what the Normativist wants to say about cases in which x is *not* f . For, wrongly, (P*) recommends that it is not the case that we ought to use w of those things that are f , instead of recommending that we ought not to use w of those things that are f . Thus, according to (P*) it is not the case that one ought to apply 'cat' to a dog. But, it does not say, as it should, that we ought not to apply 'cat' to a dog. Whiting (2009, p. 544) acknowledges this as a significant defect of (P*).

Thus, Whiting has alighted on the two principles ((P') and (P'')) that we have already seen. Yet, despite such tweaking, there still seems to be a problem with just *what* such principles deem to be normatively correct and incorrect. Such principles still seem to tell us that we *ought not* or *may* express truth. And even with their weakened form, it simply does not seem to hold true that meaning requires us to do *that*. For, if it is true, say that if 'dog' means *dog* we ought not to *apply* 'dog' to those things that are not dogs, then just because of what a word means, we are normatively obliged to use it so as not to express a falsehood. But, to reiterate, just by talking falsely, or maybe even metaphorically, it seems extreme to say that we have talked improperly. We have seen how Whiting's insistence that the norms of meaning are *prima facie* norms was meant to neutralise this intuition, but I found

that move, nonetheless, at best unsatisfactory.

So, it seems to me that the stumbling block for the Normativist is the formation of the meaning 'platitude' which is accepted; it is from the acceptance of (C) that these problems arise. For, though I find nothing wrong with the formulations that Whiting has come up with, I find it compelling to think that they are statements that must only feature in hypothetical imperatives. That is because they are statements as to how to further the end of speaking truth. That is, for all Whiting's insistence about 'correct' being a normative notion, he has not settled to the question as to whether it is normative with regards to meaning; for all he has said, there is nothing that speaks against the idea that 'correct' and 'is true' cannot always be substituted for one another. Thus, the right hand sided of the bi-conditionals as they feature (P') and (P'') hold when *w* is used to speak truth instead of just by *w* meaning what it does.

The Ambiguities of 'Correct Use'

To recap, we have the idea that there are correctness conditions for meaningful expressions. Such correctness conditions govern applications of terms. Applications of terms are hence deemed to be correct or incorrect. For Whiting, such applications, so deemed, are equivalent to the satisfaction of certain normative constraints on the application of those terms – that is, normative constraints that hold in virtue of the term's meaning. In applying a term correctly, one has done what one ought to; in incorrectly applying a term one has done as one ought not to etc. The Normativist and the non-Normativist, need not be in total disagreement. But, what they do disagree about is where these norms come from – that is, in virtue of what, ought an agent do what they ought to in applying the terms in the way that they do. But, as we have seen, one of the problems with Whiting's arguments is that he tries to make a formulation of the meaning platitude ((C)) entail normative truths, despite the apparent contingency of the normative force on a contingent end of speaking. Despite his efforts, then, normative truths that can be extracted from (C) are still best construed as being means to contingent ends, which are only normatively constrained in the manner in which any other hypothetical imperatives normatively constrain. Thus, such correctness, if indicative of whether such ends have been achieved by such means, cannot be thought to be indicative of the intrinsic

normativity of *meaning*.

So, given that semantic correctness as set out (C) is tied to truth, and that is inherently problematic for the Normativist, perhaps they should seek to find another understanding of the conditions for correctness of expressions that allows them to be meaningful. Here is a formulation that seems to me to be neutral on the point of just what the criterion for semantic correctness really consists in:

$$(C') \quad w \text{ means } F \rightarrow (x)(S \text{ uses } w \text{ correctly in } c \leftrightarrow w \text{ can be used to } f \text{ (in } c))$$

Where w is a word (or indeed, in all likelihood, a sentence), S is a participant in the L-practice and f is an action for which w can be used to perform (in the relevant context, c). In order to get intrinsic normativity into the picture with regards to *meaning*, then, it appears that ' f 's will have to be the sort of actions that only language use (participating in the L-practice) can enable one to perform; one can only f in the L-practice. That further proviso is required if the normativity thesis is to be retained because without it the normativity couldn't be associated with meaning itself. Thus, (C') will allow for that possibility because it allows that there are certain ends enabled by being a participant, and, as such, *in order to* do what one is thus enabled to do, one ought to act in certain ways – specifically, act according to the rules of the individual circumstances in which the L-practice is active.¹⁰

I take it that (C') can be understood, *prima facie*, as weaker than (C). At the very least, it seems to be able to encompass many more types of utterances than just those that purport to be true. That is just because not all meaningful terms can be 'applied' in the senses that Hattiangadi specifies, though they are, nonetheless, meaningful. After all, one should expect a platitude about *meaning* to be able to encompass all meaningful expressions, rather than a subset of them.¹¹ That is

¹⁰One may think, therefore, that the normativity in question here is now of a kind that is dependent on certain contingent aims, and thus means that the only relevant 'oughts' that can be derived from meaning claims are of the kind that feature in hypothetical imperatives. But, as I indicated in chapter 1 (pp. 23 – 30), though the norms have instrumental value, they are nonetheless intrinsic to the L-practice, because they can be derived from the rules that govern it, and these rules can be regarded as the facts of meaning.

¹¹Given the wider scope of (C'), if one satisfies (C), then one has satisfied (C'). However, as I intend it to be understood, it is left open whether it is the case that in satisfying (C'), one has satisfied (C). I recognise that there is indeed a sense in which 'using w correctly to f ' just is the same as 'correctly

because (C') crucially leaves it open just what the role of truth is in language. We saw that the justification given by Hattiangadi (with which Whiting agrees (2007, p. 134)) for thinking that (C) is true is that it allows for mere noise to be distinguished from genuine linguistic (meaningful) expression. But, it is not clear that (C) is really constitutive of this distinction. For, as I have suggested, it would appear that (C) really is only a condition on meaningful *assertion*, or, perhaps, utterances that purport to be true.

So, it should be noted that f in (C'), in order to be neutral, cannot be understood to be that feature in virtue of which w applies. If it is a feature in virtue of which w applies, then it can plausibly be thought to be a feature in virtue of which w is true. But, I say, such a feature is not obviously constitutive of *all* meaningful terms and expressions. Instead perhaps we can take f to be that feature in virtue of which it is correct to use w in that circumstance. That may, in the end, be the same as the feature in virtue of which w applies, if it turns out that the normative implications of word's meanings turn on issues like whether they are used truly. But (C') also allows for the variation necessary for different kinds of uses speakers can make of terms according to context, which (C) does not. Thus, performatives such as 'sorry' can be accommodated, such that if 'sorry' means sorry, then one correctly uses 'sorry' for apologising in a circumstance iff 'sorry' can be used to apologise in that context (and, apologising in that way can only be achieved by using language, i.e. participating in the L-practice). Likewise, terms such as 'hurrah' – that is, purely expressive words – can be equally well treated ('hurrah' used in a context to express approval, for example), as well as the sorts of applications of terms (predicates, names) in declarative expressions that were the concern of (C) ('green' used in a context to describe the colour of, say, leaves).¹²

So, the dialectical situation is that the non-Normativist is trying to cast doubt on the claim that the notion of semantic correctness has immediate and intrinsic normative implications. Thus, the idea that there is a platitude about meaning that one can fail to satisfy and still succeed in meaning something – indeed even meaning what one

applying w to x' – that appears to be the sort of understanding of 'use' that Boghossian picked up on – yet, it seems intuitively plausible that one can use a term correctly while failing to apply it correctly. More detail on this follows.

¹²For more detail see pp.70 – 6

said – is not in opposition to that non-Normativist claim. It may therefore seem that stressing the questionable nature of the platitude backs that point. On the other hand, given that a separation can be made between success according to the platitude and success in meaning should indicate that the platitude is not a platitude of *meaning*, whatever else it might be. As a result, there is logical space available for the thought that success in meaning (use) can be contrasted to success in application. Such a contrast would be indicative of the way things are if it could be shown that there is a notion of correctness that applies to expressions that do not succeed in expressing truth. If such a notion of correctness is not on offer, then the conclusion quickly follows that there is nothing intrinsically normative to meaning, since success in meaning can be dependent on the contingent aim of, for example, saying something true. I take it, though, that there is such a distinct notion to be found.

More specifically, on one understanding of what correctness conditions are meant to be, one can see why Hattiangadi takes the platitude to express something about the truth (or something very close to truth) of our linguistic expressions. Though, just because correct application can plausibly be thought to be instrumental in value in such a way as to be indicative of the mere governance of a hypothetical imperative, it does not follow that the Normativity Thesis is thereby refuted. The idea of 'correct use' is one that is, at best, ambiguous. Alan Millar identifies one such ambiguity:

With use understood to be application, correct use, naturally, is taken to be true or warranted application. But this is not the only way to characterize correct use. Another way is to say that a use of an expression is correct if and only if it is in accordance with ... the meaning of the expression. (Millar 2002, p. 59)

There is certainly something in Millar's distinction. I will, later, show how the Normativist can take up what Millar says here, but perhaps not in the way that Millar does. The distinction I have been stressing is between the notions of correct application and correct use. Millar notes that there is, additionally, the related idea of there being rules governing use. Taking up this idea, the conditions for correct use can be understood just as those requirements as set out by the rules governing use; if one has followed such a rule, one has satisfied at least one condition for correct use. And thus, at least in one respect, one has used the term correctly.

As it turns out, what the rules of use require, for Millar, is satisfaction of the conditions for correct *application*. This I reject, and in due course I will say why, but there are more immediate issues that press Millar's thought. One such is expressed by Hattiangadi:

The only clear cases in which an utterance is correct in every respect are those in which all the words in sentence are used correctly, i.e., when the sentence is true (Hattiangadi 2010, p. 92)

Hattiangadi is surely right here. It is a point that echoes one that was raised by Boghossian that 'correct' in certain contexts can just be seen to stand in for 'is true'. For it is surely right that 'correct' and 'is true', for some specific uses of language, cannot be separated – namely those uses for which it matters that one says something that is true. And, of course, it is according to *why* it so matters that non-Normativists derive the hypothetical norms that they seek. Hence, if there is to be a legitimate sense in which there is *semantic* correctness, as here understood, that is not tied to truth (which, in any case, would not seem to be specifically semantic), then there must be a way of understanding the rules governing use can be satisfied which is not just that some truth has been expressed. I have argued, at least, that that cannot be done using the notion of the correct *applications* of terms.

Thus, the challenge now is to offer a more fine grained description of what constitutes correct use in contrast to the correct application of terms. And even in what Hattiangadi says, there is room for manoeuvre. For, nothing in the quotation from Hattiangadi suggests that utterances can be correct if they are not true – only that true utterances can often be thought to be *clearly* correct. But there are a number of elements that will make that so. Simply relying on truth as the relevant standard would be imprudent – especially for the Normativist. This is *why*: remember that the platitude, minimally, said that meaningful expressions possess conditions for correct application. It was deemed to be a platitude on the basis of the idea that without any conditions for correct application, the sounds we make would not be an instance of language *use*. But, an expression can fail to satisfy such conditions and still be meaningful. Indeed, much of the non-Normativist argument relies on this. So, that should only go to show that it is

questionable whether (C) really does capture a platitude about meaning.

But, on the other hand, it is only on the basis of this formulation that the non-Normativist is able to deny that there is intrinsic meaning normativity, because it is only on the basis of the stronger formulation that the the contingent instrumentally distinctive of hypothetical norms appears to be *constitutive* of expression's meaning. So, I agree with the non-Normativist that this formulation, if it were true, would not lead to intrinsic meaning normativity. However, I will argue that that formulation is false – at least it is not a platitude about *meaning*.

Instead, I suggest, that any platitude about meaning which invokes the notion of conditions for correctness must just imply that the satisfaction of such conditions results in *meaningfulness*. Thus, just in virtue of some expression being meaningful, some conditions for correctness have been satisfied. And, on one understanding of what the conditions for correct use are, such conditions will be just those that result in meaningfulness and can be taken as indicative of intrinsic normativity. As such, the stronger formulation of the platitude ((C)) is not a condition on meaning. It is rather a condition on what we can do with something with meaning – or better yet, a condition on the sort of action enabled by participating in the L-practice, namely assertion or perhaps description.

In other words, conditions for correct application are satisfied for specific uses of terms, by which time the conditions of correct use of those terms can be thought to have been antecedently satisfied. (C) would only *be* a platitude according to a presupposition that we have a concern with truth every time we talk. But, clearly, such a presupposition is false as the non-Normativist arguments show. As such, the platitude, so construed does *not* have the immediate normative consequences that Whiting reads into it. However, that says nothing as to whether the platitude construed, as I think it should be, using the notion of the correct *use* of terms understood as acting as in accord with the rules that govern use.

So, the ground has been cleared such that there *may* be a distinct notion of correct use as opposed to correct application. I have not, as yet, though, specified just how this is to be understood other than with reference to some unspecified 'rules of use'

that are going to set such conditions. In the next Chapter, then, I'll try and fill that ground according to the idea that language use is a practice, and the rules of use are the constitutive rules of that practice. Thus, the facts of meaning will be understood as just the requirements of such rules and as such can be thought to have normative content. If such a picture of language use is plausible, then we will have a picture of language for which it is true that meaning is intrinsically normative.

Chapter 3: The Rules of Use

This chapter expands on the proposal sketched at the end of Chapter 1 and shows how it is able to avoid the problems for Normativism that were raised in Chapter 2, as well as some further problems that are raised here.

I first discuss a construal of the criterion for semantic correctness that ties (semantic) success to speaking truth, and shows how this is a natural formulation given the assumption that meaningful expressions must have conditions for correct application. We saw in chapter 2 that this idea, so far as the Normativist is concerned, is unsatisfactory, and so any such notion of semantic correctness that is dependent on it will be flawed. I then set out some independent reasons for thinking that semantic correctness should not be understood in terms of speaking truth, and demonstrate the ideas' inability to successfully account for 'Travis' examples in which the truth-value of utterances of the same sentence is said to vary across contexts.

I then introduce, in more detail, Alan Millar's version of Normativism which itself relies on the idea, discussed in Chapter 1, that language use can be understood primarily as a practice. I discuss some problems for the view – particularly those raised recently by Hattiangadi (2010). However, I think that Normativism can hold fast against such objections, though not as it stands according to Millar. I take the lessons from areas that have been traditional concern of debates surrounding semantic contextualism – particularly with regard to accommodating Travis examples – to show how a couple of variations on Millar's Normativism can, to a greater or lesser level of success, deal with the objections lodged against Millar's own version, and the version of Normativism that's discussed in Chapter 2.

Truth as an Instrumental Value

The route to the Normativity Thesis that we have seen thus far in Whiting is to have taken as a platitude the idea that meaningful expressions have conditions for correct application, and attempt to derive meaning norms from an understanding of the correctness conditions that meaningful expressions are said to possess. One problem with this approach is that we are forced to look at correctness conditions for *particular types of utterances*. Namely, those kinds of utterance that purport to express truth. For, given the importance afforded to the notion of correct *application*, I have argued, such contingency takes the form of a desire or intention to speak truth – that is, truth is the notion that semantic correctness is reduced to. Indeed, we have already seen that Hattiangadi takes the Normativist to be committed to this. After all, 'the only clear cases in which an utterance is correct in every respect ... [are those in which] ... the sentence is true.' (Hattiangadi 2010, p. 92). As a consequence, she takes the Normativist to be committed to N as a criterion for semantic correctness:

N: *u* of *s* is correct if and only if *s* is true

Where '*u*' is a token utterance and '*s*' is some sentence. If N really is the criterion for semantic correctness that the Normativist is committed to, then the non-Normativist insistence that the only normative commitments of language users are those that are normative requirements of hypothetical imperatives seems plausible. That is just because speaking truth is itself a contingent goal of language users, so semantic correctness, so understood, will be simply instrumental in achieving that goal.

It should be clear, though, that the Normativist need be committed to no such thing. Indeed, Hattiangadi's justification for the Normativist holding N in the first place is hardly going to be one that the Normativist will want to hold. For even though true utterances may, in some circumstances, be clear cases of being correct in the relevant senses, that by no means warrants the idea that the logical relation between true utterances and semantically correct utterances is bi-conditional as indicated in N. In fairness, Hattiangadi's report of Normativist commitments to N (and there are

those who are so committed) is qualified. She is aware that Normativists don't want there to be an identity relation between 'semantically correct' and 'true' (see Whiting's use of Rosen's distinction between 'correctness' and 'correct-making features' as discussed in Chapter 2), but rather that N indicates that uttering a true statement *makes* it correct (Hattiangadi 2010, p. 92). In any case, we have seen that Hattiangadi takes it that semantic correctness is, and must be, of merely instrumental value to achieving some contingent goal. That goal is expressing truth, which is not a necessary condition for being meaningful. Normativists signing up to N is consistent with that claim. However, I contend that that is but one way the Normativist can go. Indeed, there is reason for thinking that this is not the way that they should.

Contextualist Considerations 1: Austin and Strawson On Truth

Now, given the problems it causes for the Normativist, one should think that they would be inclined not to see truth and semantic correctness as so linked. However, Hattiangadi (2010) aligns them with semantic minimalists, who take meaning of words and sentences just to be the conditions under which they are true. More on this later, but given the dependence of meaning norms on truth seems to lead to the conclusion that semantic correctness is instrumentally valuable to the fulfilment of the desire to speak truth, perhaps the Normativist would be better to look at the options as to separate the notion of meaning from truth (with regards to semantic correctness, at least). For, if meaning were so understood, it would appear unavoidable that semantic correctness be, in turn, understood in such terms. That is just because meaning will set the standards for semantic correctness – what a term means will be defined by its conditions for semantic correctness (that is just another way of expressing thought behind the meaning platitude discussed in the last chapter).

So, if it can be argued that truth is not the fundamental notion through which meaning is understood, one can allow speaking truth to be instrumentally valuable in the relevant sense, but insist that that fact, of itself, says nothing as to the normative implications of words and sentences *meaning* what they do. And there is some precedent for this. In his *Sense and Sensibilia* J. L. Austin (by no means

uncontroversially) puts forward the idea that,

The question of truth and falsehood does not turn only on what a sentence *is*, nor yet on what it *means*, but on, speaking very broadly, the circumstances in which it is uttered. Sentences are not *as such* either true or false (Austin 1962, pp. 110–11)

There is some terminology to introduce from Austin that will prove useful. On the one hand we have sentences and on the other we have statements. Austin tells us that,

Statements are made, sentences or words are used. (Austin 1950, p. 114)

Thus sentences are used to make statements; sentences are thought of as the vehicles through which things can be said to be one way or another, though sentences themselves, as they stand, say nothing to be any way. It is, therefore, *statements* that are deemed to be able to be true or false. That is just because it is only with statements that anything can really be thought to be said to be some way – and something has to be said to be some way before it can be deemed true (or false) that things are the way as said. That is to say that statements are the grammatical subjects of "true" (Strawson 1950, p. 129), and, as such, we can regard a sentence as that with which a speaker makes a statement. With that distinction in view, Austin elaborates:

A statement is made and its making is an historic event, the utterance by a certain speaker or writer of certain words (a sentence) to an audience with reference to an historic situation, event or whatnot. (Austin 1950, pp. 119–20)

Famously, it was on the subject of truth that Austin talked in a symposium in 1950, and there found an adversary in P. F. Strawson. For the purposes of the present, it is in particular with what Austin takes as truth-bearer that Strawson takes especial exception – the idea that is manifest in Austin's contention that statements are 'historic events' (and *thus* able to be true or false).

Strawson contends that, whenever one talks about *meaning* (i.e. when one says something like *x means y*) one is talking about sentences (Strawson 1949, p. 84).

Taking that idea seriously, a consequence of it may be that in talking about meaning, one therefore says something about the sentence – that is one's subject – not just about what one would be talking about in *using* that sentence. In the second instance, we have something different to deal with – what Austin and Strawson called (though with different bite) *statements*. The point being that this distinction can give substance to the claim that the relevant ends that can plausibly be thought to feature in nothing more than hypothetical imperatives (such as those governing belief aiming at truth) may well apply to statements but not sentences. Now, Strawson accepts the stipulation that 'statements' are the grammatical subjects of 'true'. But, given he disagrees with Austin as to what it is that can be true, the question therefore becomes, what *are* 'statements' (that is, what is the nature of these grammatical subjects of 'true')?

He sees Austin as saying that it is only 'speech episodes' that can be true, given that this is Austin's understanding (at least in part) of the notion of a statement, and it is statements that are the grammatical subjects of 'true'. Strawson, however, points out that though Austin is right that the same sentence can be used to make different statements,¹³ the converse also holds – the same statement can surely be made with different sentences, on different occasions, as in the case with sentences that feature indexicals (which even have a different meaning, so far as Strawson is concerned). But if that is so, how are we to make sense of the idea that the statement *made* is a true one, but also that any token statement is tied to one particular speech episode?

Strawson thus is proposing that we take this part of English grammar seriously, and take statements to be, more or less, what we may currently want to call propositions. He allows that same sentence can express different propositions on different occasions, and that the same proposition can be expressed by different sentences on different occasions. This is precisely the picture Austin rejects, thus the debate is essentially over what we should take to be the fundamental truth bearers in language (Travis 2008, p. 5).

¹³This gives an indication of what kind of normativity will eventually be tied intrinsically to meaning. The facts of meaning will set what the possibilities are for performing different speech-acts with different words and sentences. The making of different statements with the same sentence is a special case of acting in accord with the rules that require only certain things be expressed by uses of sentences on different occasions. For more detail see pp. 69 – 76.

As to whether Austin or Strawson is right (if, indeed, either are), I won't venture to comment. The point of introducing this debate is simply that these considerations about when something would be true, it seems to me, offers an alternative to N for what we may think a criterion for semantic correctness is going to be. More specifically, I contend, it will give the Normativist a way of combating non-Normativist arguments. Of course, though, this combat will be predicated on some significantly controversial claims about the nature of truth. Such controversy aside, here, in brief, is the thought (more detail will be forthcoming): when talking of meaning, one is at least talking of sentences. When one appeals to truth as a standard of correctness, or success, one is, in addition, taking of statements. But there is reason for thinking that, in this kind of framework, the norms governing sentences and the norms governing statements are distinct. Thus *semantic correctness* in isolation is going to be a notion that will only apply to *sentences*.

I will try and presently draw this out further by invoking examples that Travis has often relied upon in which it is, supposedly, fixed what the meaning of a single sentence is, and what is being talked about (the world), but given a change in context, the truth-value of two utterances of that sentence can vary. If that is so, then we have reason for thinking that truth may not be the measure of semantic success. I then go on to offer a way of thinking about the role that *meaning* has to play in such examples that can give support to the idea that there are certain norms governing it that are additional to any that may be governing expressions of truth, and, furthermore, that these are intrinsic to meaning.

Contextualist Considerations 2: Travis Examples

The debate between Austin and Strawson, and Travis' subsequent interpretation, indicates a different way of viewing what the 'normativity of meaning' amounts to. According to that debate, one may come up with different ways in which such normativity is manifest – one 'Strawsonian', one 'Austinian'. For what its worth, my sympathies lie with the 'Austinian' route. But that notwithstanding, I will attempt to show that as a proposal, such a route is able to allow for that which Normativism would have to. To get us going as to how, first take this from Travis, which is an elaboration, as he sees it, on the Austinian thought that truth and falsity does not

turn on the meaning of sentences:

What words mean plays a role in fixing when they would be true; but not an exhaustive one. Meaning leaves room for variation in truth conditions from one speaking to another. What that non-exhaustive role is depends on what it is to have said what is true. (Travis 1996, p.94)

The first idea of note is that meaning 'plays a role in fixing when [words] would be true; but not an exhaustive one.' We have seen that there is a fundamental difference between what Strawson and Austin take to be the bearers of truth. That difference has the following consequence: on one understanding of what Strawson is up to, the ultimate notion of semantic correctness *is* one to do with truth; from what Austin's perspective there is a distinct notion of correct use that is independent of any concerns about truth. These different conceptions of truth bearers can therefore be taken to say different things as to the normative implications of facts of meaning – of how, given what they mean, we can understand the idea that we should use terms in the ways we ought to.

I will now offer some independent reason for thinking that the Austinian conception of the relation between truth and meaning is worth consideration (that is, independent of the current debate over meaning's normativity), by showing, following Travis, that there are certain cases of when things are true and false for which the Austinian framework is best suited. And given that what something means sets the standards for semantic correctness, if meaning is not to be thought of as truth conditions, as the 'Austinian' picture would suggest, then semantic correctness too cannot be understood in terms of truth. Thus, under this kind of 'Austinian' framework, we can think that the norms governing some of our uses of language that can rightly be thought to be indicative of how certain contingent ends may be satisfied, such as those, perhaps, of informing or lying, are thus understood as acting upon those who make statements, *in* their so making of them. Furthermore, such a framework can accept that the sorts of norms that so govern such acts are normative requirements of hypothetical imperatives for the sorts of reasons cited by the non-Normativist. That is because such a picture can allow for the appropriate kind of instrumental value in correctness if the domain is restricted to the conditions for correctness in *making statements*. However, if this kind of system is going to be consistent with Normativism, it will have to be the case that

nonetheless there are meaning norms *in addition* to the kinds just cited which are taken to govern the making of statements. I think that a natural way to do this is to think that there are distinctive norms governing *sentences*, as well as those governing uses we make of them. As to what about sentences these norms can be thought to govern, I will elaborate on in time.

So, to take this option, the Normativist will have to give reason for thinking that there are norms over and above those that govern statements as here understood. Once that that is shown, it will then be required that it be shown that these additional norms are such that they can legitimately be thought to be intrinsic to meaning. This is what I will attempt. To do so, though, first let's return to the meaning platitude. The platitude was meant to specify a condition on expressions for their meaningfulness. Therefore, if the distinction as made above between what is to be thought of as applying to meaning, and so sentences, and what is to apply to (something like) truth and so to statements too, the stronger formulation of the platitude will at least be dealing with properties of statements rather than those of sentences alone. Given the present concerns, one thought is that the stronger formulation ((C) – see p. 34) cannot be said to be a condition on *meaning* alone because it relates to statements as opposed to sentences. Thus, the weaker formulation must speak to, or rather about, sentences *alone*, if it is to be incontrovertibly about meaning. It must allow for that which (only) meaning and sentences allow for. What that is can be demonstrated by way of appeal to so-called Travis examples:

Pia's Japanese maple is full of russet leaves. Believing that green is the colour of leaves, she paints them. Returning, she reports, 'That's better. The leaves are green now.' She speaks truth. A botanist friend then phones, seeking green leaves for a study of green-leaf chemistry. 'The leaves (on my tree) are green,' Pia says. 'You can have those.' But now Pia speaks falsehood. (Travis 1997, p.111)

The thrust of the Travis example is a point about truth. It has a bearing on the idea of the correctness of language use at least in so far as it offers us reason to think that the notion of correctness is not fixed to truth, or indeed, anything like it.¹⁴ For, in so far as the *semantics* are concerned, it may, *prima facie*, seem odd to say Pia has done

¹⁴As I hope to show, that is not all that I think that the Travis examples can show in the present context. On what more the Travis can provide, see pp. 69 – 76.

something wrong with her second utterance. After all, moments before, she used the same sentence and she spoke truly about the colour of the leaves – as the example stipulates, neither the semantics (the meaning) of the sentence uttered, nor the world has changed.¹⁵ She just spoke falsely – she said that the leaves were green in a context in which they didn't count as green. She only did something wrong if it matters whether she spoke truth. But it may not. In any case, she spoke *meaningfully*. The point being that the meaning of 'green', plausibly, stayed the same (as did what she spoke about), while the truth-values varied. That goes to show that we may have reason to doubt the claim that the only norm in the vicinity of meaning in such cases is one that concerns *truth*. So, that *may* give us reason to think that it might not be truth that is the standard of correctness that meaning latches onto.

Bringing this back to the issues of present interest, remember that the non-Normativist wants to show that the Normativist cannot rely on truth as an intrinsic normative constraint on meaning as it is not always the standard against which any meaningful expression should be judged to be correct or incorrect. Travis examples, therefore, can be taken to back up that point. But, just because truth may not be the relevant notion, it does not follow that there isn't a notion of semantic correctness at all – and importantly, it does not follow that the relevant notion is not indicative of the intrinsic normativity of meaning. If these kinds of examples can allow for that, then they may offer us reason for thinking that the reductive agenda of identifying semantic correctness as dependent on contingent desires of language users fails. To do so, Normativists must provide a reason for thinking that we should not, therefore, understand semantic correctness in terms of truth – that is, this is reason to think that there is a notion of semantic correctness that is not so tied to the notion of truth; that semantic correctness is at work regardless of whether any given utterance of an sentence is true. If that is so, it matters not when, for example, Boghossian tells us that sometimes 'correct' can just mean 'true', because that is not the relevant notion of *semantic* correctness. That's just because it need not be the case that once the value of truth is ruled out of supporting the Normativity Thesis,

¹⁵The reason for thinking that the semantics has not changed can be demonstrated if we think of the following example. Take it that Pia's botanist and photographer friends come to see her at the same time, both asking for green leaves. She then steps into the adjoining room, paints her leaves and utters, "The leaves are green. You can have those." For one of her friends it is still true that the leaves are green, for the other it is not. But, Pia only produced one utterance. Thus, it appears odd how the semantics can change within the same utterance of the same sentence.

there is not some other semantic standard that does support it.

Semantic Correctness: If not Truth, then what?

The problem now facing us is that if, for the sake of argument, it was accepted that truth isn't the appropriate grounding for the notion of semantic correctness (for the reasons that Austin and Travis give), what *could* be such a ground so as to still be consistent with the central tenants of Normativism?

Travis seems to give us a clue as to how that might be answered:

Meaning fixes something words would do (and say) wherever spoken meaning what they do; something they are for, so also something about what they *ought* to do. ...Roughly, [the words 'is round'] are for describing round things ... that is what they *ought* to be used for. (Travis 1996, p. 96; my emphasis)

And again,

What words mean imposes a condition on their saying, on a speaking, what is so. Different occasions impose different standards for satisfying that condition. Something about what truth is makes occasions matter to such standards. (Ibid, pp. 102 - 3)

What Travis says here indicates one way in which one *can* take the notion of correctness with regards to our particular utterances to appear to have nothing to do with specific meaning norms (though, I hasten to add, I attribute no such move to Travis himself). For *once it is fixed* as to just what terms speak of according to the occasion in which they are spoken, it is truth that becomes of primary concern. But, before it is fixed, before the statement is made, there is a question as to *what can be used to make it*. The thought is that there is something about *meaning* that tells us what it is that *may* (or *ought* (not) to) be used to make it. Thus, this is one way in which one can regard meaning as having a role to play in constraining what could *count* as saying something truly on a given occasion. And how things so count can be taken to have significant normative implications.

So far as Travis is concerned, meaning's role in truth, though important, is in need of supplement; meaning on its own cannot get to truth (one cannot say, for example,

what statement (description) has been made, by looking to the meaning of some sentence alone). Thus, the norms governing *meaning* will not be as demanding as some Normativists may have supposed. At the very least, they won't demand that anything be *true*, because meaning cannot get us that far. Hence, the idea that we can still speak correctly even if we speak falsely (in the case of deliberate deception, say) can be accommodated for – it would be a position which would allow for correctly speaking falsely, but we will also be in a position to hold on to the idea that meaning is intrinsically normative. We, therefore, need some idea as to how conditions for correct use could apply to a false statement – that is, have some conception of what it would be to use words correctly regardless of whether one spoke truth, *and* that such correctness is indicative of normative truths about meaning. If that is to be achieved, then any 'ought's that populate distinctively semantic vocabulary cannot be understood in the same kind of way that Whiting's should be. In other words, correctness and truth must be viewed as entirely separable, and the correctness that is to be properly attributed to *meaning* can be seen to have direct normative implications.

It should be noted at this point that I do not pretend to be expounding Travis' own view. Instead, I am taking some of Travis' conclusions and arguments about the nature of truth, and transferring them into the debate at hand. I think that these observations can best be seen to support a form of Normativism if they are incorporated into some aspects of Alan Millar's position that can also be called 'Normativist'. But as will become clear, this will not be entirely faithful to Millar's position either. Thus the Normativism that I propose as unaffected by the non-Normativist arguments here discussed is not a position that I attribute to either protagonist.

Use In Accordance With Meaning: Alan Millar's Normativism

As we have seen in previous chapters, many aspects of the sort of Normativism that I have been propounding are not without precedent. Alan Millar has presented similar thoughts. However, the view I will here be offering for consideration differs in some important respects. These will be drawn out in Hattiangadi's response to Millar's arguments that meaning is intrinsically normative.

In contrast to Whiting's attempt to derive normative truths from claims about the correct application of terms, Millar favours a formulation that makes use of a notion of semantic correctness in terms of using words in accord with their meaning. That is an idea we have already seen – it is arguably the idea that Kripke first put forward, and then deemed impossible to satisfy. The idea is this: we can get normative truths out of claims about meaning if, instead of concentrating on just what the language user *does* with their expressions, we concentrate on the idea that language use is a practice.

This is an idea that I discussed at the end of Chapter 1. There, recall, I said that the contingency of language use on broad desires to communicate may not lead unavoidably to the conclusion that any norms of meaning must be instrumental in the way that the 'ought's that feature in hypothetical imperatives are. Such a consequence can be avoided if we regard language use or communication as a practice. Thus, with the right notion of practice at work, and language use understood as a practice, then normative truths can plausibly be thought to follow from facts about meaning – so long as they are understood as the requirements of the rules that govern (constitute) such a practice. Of course, the everyday notion of a practice is not precise enough to stand as a notion on its own in the present context. As I mentioned in the first chapter, I am happy to follow Alan Millar when he says that a practice is an *essentially* rule-governed activity. (Millar 2004, p. 85) That means that normativity is part and parcel of the notion of a practice – one can't be participating in a practice if there is nothing one ought (not) or may (not) do:

To participate in a practice is to incur a commitment to following its governing rules because the activity in which one engages, in virtue of participating, is the activity of doing the things the rules prescribe. (Ibid, pp. 85 - 6)

Now, Millar takes the objection that Boghossian articulated against Normativists with the thought that, in certain contexts, 'correct' could just mean 'true', to be identifying the use of terms with their (true) application (Ibid, p. 160). He thinks, though, that instead of understanding the notion of correctness in terms of true application, that we should understand semantic correctness in terms of the satisfaction of the *conditions* for true application. What is the difference? What

Millar wants to allow for is not only the idea that (in some circumstances) an utterance of a falsehood can be deemed correct, but conversely that, regardless of whether the thing said is true, the utterance can be a case of *misuse*. A misuse is understood as an utterance that fails to satisfy the conditions for correct application of the term. Millar offers the following example:

If I thought 'arcane' meant *ancient* then I would be liable to use the word as if that is what it meant. In so doing I would fail to respect the conditions for true application of the term; that is, I would be using the term as if its conditions for true application were other than they are. (Miller 2004, p. 162)

Notice that there may be cases where one misuses a term, but says something true. Millar shows this by offering an example in which one was to describe a ritual as 'arcane', when we intended to express the proposition *that the ritual is ancient*. Nonetheless, the ritual may, indeed, be arcane. Thus, if that is so, when I utter, "the ritual is arcane", have not expressed a falsehood, but I am semantically culpable for not expressing what I intended to express. In which case the relevant manner of comparison is between what proposition I *intended* to express, and what proposition was, in fact, expressed by my token utterance.

It seems that there is a sense in which a misuse, as Millar conceives of it, is semantically incorrect in virtue of facts about meaning – whatever one's intention, in order to express something, there is now a standard against which it can be judged correct or incorrect for each expression. For, it is by way of the standards set by the conditions for correct application, so the thought goes, that we can grasp what it is for language use (and, I suppose, meaning) to be intrinsically normative. But because he formulates the issues in terms of the *conditions* for correct application, rather than writing in correct (i.e. true) application itself into his understanding of the criterion for correctness of meaning, the issue of whether truth *is* expressed is supposed to be orthogonal to the issue of whether the expression is *semantically* correct. Accordingly, misuses (i.e. cases of semantic incorrectness) are cases in which, in using a term, one treats it as having conditions of true application that are not fixed by the meaning of that term (Ibid, p. 163). So a misuse is when one flouts the rules of the practice, and what those rules require is that one respects the conditions for correct application of the terms involved. With this in mind, Hattiangadi translates Millar's conception of the criterion for semantic correctness

into the following claim:

N**: An utterance, *u*, of *s* is correct if and only if *s* literally means that *p*, and the speaker intends to express *p* by uttering *s*. (Hattiangadi 2010, p. 103)

The reference to 'literal meaning' that Hattiangadi makes arises because of the guiding slogan of Millar's Normativism: that we ought to 'use terms in accordance with their meaning'. The way she understands such claims is that there is some proposition that sentences are able to literally express, and to use in accordance with its meaning, we simply must intend to express the proposition the sentence does, in fact, express. As such the 'literal meaning' sets the standards that speakers must live up to – it is that which we use words in accordance or in conflict with. Thus, Hattiangadi aligns Millar with semantic minimalists. One of their guiding principles is the following:

The semantic content of a sentence *S* is the content that all utterances of *S* share. (Cappelen and Lepore 2005, p. 143)

Where such semantic content is understood as the 'literal meaning' of the sentence uttered, and literal meaning is understood as the truth conditions of the proposition literally expressed.

Now, given the preceding discussion of Travis examples, it is not obvious that such a reference of 'literal meaning' is going to be satisfactory.¹⁶ On the other hand, it is consistent with all that has been said with regard to such examples that we can still make sense of the use of words as in accordance with their meaning – it simply is not determinate, independent of context, just when a sentence with such a meaning would be true. That is, there is *no* proposition (understood as a priorly determined truth bearer) that a sentence can literally express if we take occasion-sensitivity seriously. For, under that proposal *truth-conditions* (the minimalists' understanding of what meaning is) are only determined in some context on some occasion, and not

¹⁶ Of course, minimalists think they can accommodate Travis examples within their framework of literal meaning. That being so or not, what I want to explore is whether *Travis'* solution can help Normativism, for, it turns out, one that relies on semantic minimalism is flawed.

before.

But it is unclear, under Millar's present proposal, that conditions for correct application can be understood as distinct from truth conditions. Take, again, Millar's example of the misuse of 'arcane'. Millar understands the conditions for correct application of the term 'arcane' to differ from those of 'ancient'. In what respect can they be seen to differ? Given that Millar's concern is with the application of terms, it would just seem to be those conditions under which these terms could be used truly of something. If so, the contribution that 'arcane' and 'ancient' can make to the truth conditions of sentences in which they can appear to differ. It just so happens that in the particular case that Millar discusses, it is true that the the ritual in question that is the subject of the adjective(s) in question, is both arcane and ancient. The misuse can be, perhaps, explained, by the inferences one could make on the back of such claims, such that one would be able to infer different claims *with different truth conditions* on the back of the first. Thus, having different conditions for correct application will be understood just as having different truth conditions.

If this is right, then, as it stands, Millar's 'Normativism' is still consistent with the idea that the norms governing meaning, if understood in the way Millar proposes, are indicative of nothing more than how to achieve some contingent end – namely whatever end a speaker has in speaking truth on an occasion, or whether truths can be inferred from what was said. For, semantic correctness will have to be that which contributes to expressing truth – truth will *still* have to be of antecedent concern. It is a concern, as we have seen, that one need not have in order to be meaningful.

On the other hand, this is but one way in which Millar's underlying thought can be developed. Instead, contra Hattiangadi, I propose that the sorts of ideas of semantic normativity that Millar puts forward can best be made stable and robust once it is made compatible with certain semantic contextualist commitments. In order to do so, I propose, we need to understand the criterion of semantic correctness differently, such that it is wedded closer to the notion of the rules governing (that is, constituting) practices. For the connection to literal meaning that Hattiangadi identifies is a hangover from the fact that Millar takes the best way to understand the conditions of correct use to be indicative of semantic normativity is in terms of uses

respecting conditions of correct application. And this cannot be the understanding of correct use that plays a part in the modified meaning platitude that I discussed in chapter 2 (see p. 44).

Before discussing this proposal at more length, I want to offer reason for thinking that even within the framework of understanding sentences as able to express propositions in the sense that they capture 'literal meaning', not all of Hattiangadi's objections to Millar's Normativism hold water.

A 'Strawsonian' Version of Millar's Normativism

Hattiangadi takes Millar's proposal to have counter-intuitive consequences. In particular, she feels that his version of Normativism (hereafter 'MN') is incapable of adequately dealing with data that contextualists often rely on to undermine the idea sentences possess a literal meaning understood in terms of truth conditions. I will not here assess the success of contextualist attempts to do *that*. However, I propose that there are at least two ways in which (at least some central aspects of) MN can accommodate some of the intuitions that contextualists invoke with such examples that Hattiangadi feels bears on issues of *semantic correctness*, of which she takes it that MN cannot give a satisfactory account. I will presently outline the first way, and show that it can accommodate that which Hattiangadi feels MN cannot, but comes up against its own problems – some of which I will briefly indicate, but chiefly that this version still turns out only bogusly to have a claim to be Normativist. This version I will call, though without pretending that it has such pedigree as the name suggests, the 'Strawsonian' version of MN. The reason why will become clear shortly.

Take the following sentences that are two examples of a number of types of sentences contextualists have used to throw down the gauntlet to minimalists and other non-contextualists:

- (1) Every bottle is empty (Stanley and Szabó 2000, pp. 219 - 20)

- (2) It is raining

Hattiangadi appeals to these in turn to demonstrate what she feels to be the counter-intuitive consequences of MN. (1) is used in what are called 'Context Shifting Arguments' and (2) is often said to be (semantically) incomplete (with context being invoked by contextualists to do the completing). Again, I won't go into too many of the details here. The point being that, according to Hattiangadi, our intuitions as to what these sentences say, or what they are used to say, and what they mean, differ from what MN will have to deem to be semantically correct:

Suppose I utter (1) with the intention of expressing the proposition that *every bottle of alcoholic drink in the house is empty*. This is not what (1) literally means. Hence, my utterance of (1) is incorrect, by Millar's rights. (Hattiangadi 2010, p. 103)

According to Hattiangadi, (1), as it literally means, contains an unrestricted quantifier, but as used in her example it is restricted. That is, as it stands, (1) predicates 'being empty' of every bottle in existence. In some situation, say the end of a party, when all available alcohol has been drunk, however, (1) would (intuitively correctly) be used to express the proposition, as Hattiangadi suggests, that *every bottle of alcoholic drink in the house is empty*. Thus, with such a use of (1) the word 'every' has been misused, because it has not been used in accordance with its meaning. Similarly for (2). If I said (2), on an occasion in which I am standing in a downpour, it intuitively is used to say that *it is raining here and now* (Ibid, p. 104). But, once again, under the minimalist analysis, that is not what (2) literally means, despite it being the intuitively *correct* thing to say in that circumstance. It is therefore in the face of our intuitions as to when it is correct to utter such sentences, that MN says that such a use is a misuse, and thus incorrect.

But, why must (1) and (2) be thought to have but one 'meaning' that any given use can be thought to be in accordance or in conflict with? Take the 'Strawsonian' (scare quotes) thought that was introduced earlier. Perhaps one can say that sentences like (1) are such that there is a set of statements to be made (correctly) in using them. If so, then the literal meaning of such sentences is not some single proposition, but a set of propositions that the sentence can express, given the right circumstances. Hence, given the right relation between circumstance and sentence, some given token statement, that expresses one of the propositions of that set, can be said to be the correct use of that sentence. Thus, one can say that (1) has been used in

accordance with its meaning because, given the circumstance, that proposition expressed by the use of that sentence, is a correct statement to make.

On such a picture, instead of N**, we can have something like the following:

N': An utterance, u , of s is correct if and only if s can be used to express that $\{p, q, r, \dots\}$ in $c_{\{1, 2, 3, \dots\}}$, and the speaker intends to express that ∂ with s and s can be used to express ∂ in c_n

Where u is an utterance, s is the sentence that can be used to express one (or more) of the set of propositions, $\{p, q, r, \dots\}$ and $c_{\{1, 2, 3, \dots\}}$ is the set of contexts in which one can use s to express any given member of that set. Thus, ∂ is some member of that set and c_n is the context in which a u of s expresses just that member of the set.

According to the criterion of semantic correctness as specified by N', contexts play the role of disambiguation. For example, the criterion of semantic correctness according to N' for the sentence "every bottle is empty" might be the following:

N'*every bottle is empty*: An utterance of "every bottle is empty" is correct iff "every bottle is empty" can be used to say, *{that every bottle in the house is empty, that every bottle in the universe is empty, that every bottle in the satchel is empty, ...}* in a context *{at a house party, at the end of the universe, in a desert, ...}*, and the speaker intends to express [for example] *that every bottle in the house is empty* with "every bottle is empty" and "every bottle is empty" can be used to express *that every bottle in the house is empty* in the context *at a house party*.

So, according to this proposal, Hattiangadi's analysis, if her reading is accurate, isn't entirely incorrect, it just underestimates the mechanisms that are at the disposal of MN. That is, by invoking contexts and the possibility of *multiple*, so-called, 'literal meanings', many of the counter-intuitive consequences that Hattiangadi identifies can be removed. For, the objection that MN cannot account for the intuitions we have about what sentences are the correct ones to use in different situations can be accommodated for if the propositions that are expressed in those situations can be properly thought of as members of the set of propositions the sentence can express

(and the particular context of utterance is the one in which that member of the set is expressed). The standard against which any given expression can be judged is simply more complex than Hattiangadi took it to be with her original objection.

As a result, for example, we can say that the propositions *that it is raining here and now* is a member of the set of propositions that (2) is able to express. It does so in the context in which it is uttered when it is raining where and when the utterer is. Thus, it is semantically correct to utter (2) in such a context.

But N', and consequently such a version of MN, has its own problems. I shall indicate just a couple of them. First, there is an explanatory gap in this kind of theory that is akin to challenge Travis raises (2008 pp. 5-6) as to just how such statements are to be individuated according to Strawson's view of truth-bearers. The challenge arises according to the theory's locating, in effect, an ambiguity in the expressive power of sentences that must allow for, in principle, disambiguation. More formally, in principle, there will be some way of theoretically pairing up propositions to contexts such that we will be able to specify just what proposition will be true (or correct) in just which context. The theory should be comprised of theorems to the effect that an utterance of *s* in c_1 will express proposition *p*; and utterance of *s* in c_2 will express proposition *q*, etc. That is something that a proponent of such MN will, in principle, be able to provide *in advance of speaking*, and in absence of it, the proposal is weakened. I will not attempt here to prove that the provision of such theorems is not possible, though I suspect it probably is not.

But, most significantly for the nonce, it isn't clear that such a way of understanding semantic correctness can answer Hattiangadi's further, and perhaps more fundamental, challenge to Millar's Normativism. We saw that it is questionable whether Millar's version of Normativism really is a version of Normativism at all; in other words, this kind of claim offers no help in blocking the argument I first presented in chapter one:

The correctness of an utterance .. appears to be merely instrumental – uttering a sentence that means the proposition that I intend to express by making the utterance is nothing more than a sufficient means by which I can satisfy my communicative intention. (Hattiangadi 2010, p. 103)

The sort of correctness indicated by N' correctness *for* a speaker's ends in communicating what she intended to; the thought is that it is contingent what ends I have *in* communicating is such a way as to be the sort of end that could feature as the antecedent of a hypothetical imperative. Now, for Millar, semantic correctness (using words a one ought to) requires that a speaker would adjust how they act once they recognise that there is a discrepancy between their use of some expression and the how that expression behaves within the relevant practice (the standard against which the expression is to be judged). The way in which that end (my 'communicative intention') can be satisfied would fit in as the consequent. And the normative commitment to that consequent could not be detached even if the antecedent were satisfied – even if I did achieve what I set out to in communicating as I did, it is not the case that I thereby ought to have spoken as to satisfy my desire to so communicate. In other words, if I wanted to express such and such, then if I found out that the expression I used does not behave in such a way as to express *that* in the practice, then I ought to change my behaviour. But, my changing of behaviour is still dependent on my desire to express what I wanted to. Without that, I have no obligations.

Notice that this is not the same thought as we saw from Alexander Miller in Chapter 1 about the intention to communicate *tout court*, but the intention to communicate *whatever it is that one has communicated* – and subsequently what one has intended to communicate just that, *for*. That is because of the reference to intention. The relevant intentions are not just the general intention to say something meaningful – engage in communicating in general – but that my saying something achieves some further end – whatever end I had in communicating what I did. The proliferation of the propositions a sentence is able to literally express will plainly say nothing to *that* point, because propositions are just understood as that which the sentence *is used to say*. I will now offer expand on the proposal introduced at the end of chapter 1 to show how it may circumvent the kinds of problems just raised.

An 'Austinian' Version of Millar's Normativism

What seems accommodating about the 'Strawsonian' MN for Millar is, not only can

the central role of correctness understood as alignment of intended meaning and literal meaning be preserved, but also that his idea that semantic correctness should be best understood as a satisfaction of the conditions for correct application. However, I have suggested that such a conception is inadequate, and may well end up playing into the hands of the non-Normativist who insists that the norms of meaning are nothing more than hypothetical imperatives. Thus, if the notion of correct application is to be purged from the Normativist ranks, then a modified version of MN is needed. I suggest that one interpretation – Travis' – of Austin's position in contrast to Strawson can give us a clue as to how to do that.

According to this 'Austinian' conception, however, the notion of semantic correctness cannot take the same form as either Hattiangadi's description of MN, or the 'Strawsonian' MN. For it seems, under this proposal, inappropriate to talk of *semantic* correctness with regard to particular statements, so will be in a position to reject the idea that semantic correctness should be understood in terms of the conditions for correct application. Semantic correctness is meant to be indicative of norms governing meaning. Such norms, since they govern *meaning*, will be norms governing only sentences, rather than statements (or, for that matter any particular kinds of speech acts *qua* the speech acts that they are). In particular, they will be norms governing which sentences one can use to make some speech act in a context. But, the idea of understanding such norms in terms of the conditions for *application* invokes the specific uses that are to be made with sentences – specifically, those uses that aim at truth. But any norms so understood will invariably be the norms that govern the making of statements, which will be dependent on the specific ends the speaker sought to achieve in making it. Such norms cannot therefore be regarded as governing (only) what the sentences in question *can* be used to say.

This is, at least, one way of interpreting (some aspects of) Travis in the present context. For, meaning, according to Travis, is to be understood as that which confers a semantics. Semantics is understood as those properties words have which are dependent on what words (can) say (Travis 1997, p. 110–11). How we understand what 'words can say' indicates here must be done with care, for a central point of 'occasion-sensitivity', as Travis sees it, is well-summed up when he says,

So what [a sentence] says on a speaking, of [for example] given leaves, etc., is not determined by what it, or its parts, mean. (Travis 1997, p. 113)

Thus, the norms I am positing, if consistent with this thought, will be such that what they require will not result in sentences saying things to be a way such that what they could be true. Indeed, that is required to avoid the problems that beset Millar's own MN and the Strawsonian version. Nonetheless, obviously, there must *be* identifiable norms if they are to be intrinsic to meaning so understood.

With that in mind, I propose that the notion of the conditions for correct use that feature in (C') should be understood as the conditions for participating in the practice of language use. By way of a reminder, the reformulated platitude that I proposed in chapter 2 was this:

$$(C') \quad w \text{ means } F \rightarrow (x)(S \text{ uses } w \text{ correctly in } c \leftrightarrow w \text{ can be used to } f \text{ (in } c))$$

With this gloss on correctness as relating to meaning, it can be filled out by an altered criterion for semantic correctness that will say that to use a word correctly of something is to follow a rule that governs the L-practice (language use). One way to get a grip on how the rules of such a practice should be understood is if we look to how Travis conceives of meaning as conferring what sentences can be used to make given speech acts. For that is the way in which *applications* of words and sentences (an action enabled by participating in the L-practice) can be thought to be a special case of the kinds of rules governing speech acts, thus semantic correctness for applications of this sort will amount to what the rules that govern those kinds of speech acts require.

What the Travis type cases show is, firstly, that (at least under one explanation of what is going on in such cases), semantic correctness of these kinds of speech acts cannot be thought of solely in terms of truth. But, if that is all they show, that says nothing as to whether whatever the relevant notion for correctness of some speech act is, is one that is indicative of intrinsic normativity of *meaning*. But, in the present context, that is *not* all they show. For, the manner in which Travis identifies the divergence of correctness from truth, we have a notion of what role circumstance

can have in fixing just what is at stake where semantic correctness is concerned – just what it is that correctness in our speaking depends. The proposal is that the norms that are intrinsic to meaning need to be derived from the sorts of actions (the ends one seeks to achieve) that one is performing in using the language in a circumstance. The rules governing the use of some sentence, for example, will be tied to whether it can be used to perform some kind of task for which language is a necessary tool.

Thus the criterion for semantic correctness – that which Millar calls 'using in accordance with meaning' – will be understood in terms of using an expression in accordance with the rules governing its use – what those rules require. How are such rules to be understood? In terms of what is a permissible 'move' in the L-practice. What counts as a move in the L-practice? Well, just the kind of act that allows for the achievement of ends that only language use can enable. It is the meaning of words and sentences that sets what the possibilities are for different types of such moves (for achievement of different types of (L-practice enabled) ends). Just what such possibilities they allow for has normative import. They are possibilities that can be specified by way of the rules that govern how these acts are to be performed in different circumstances—what moves can be made.

So thinking of them will allow space for the idea that it is by following such rules that *enables* certain ends that communicators have *in* communicating to be fulfilled (this kind of move was already indicated in the reformulation of the meaning platitude). What counts as a permissible move will just be that which can be done in the L-practice that will fulfil those specialised ends of the language user as a language user. As noted, though, indispensable to the achievement of those ends – ends such as speaking truth (describing/asserting), expressing approval in a particular way, apologising, baptising (broadly construed), etc. – is that one be a participant of the practice in which such ends are made possible.

In other words, so as to be able to *have* certain ends – ends that are (only) achieved via using language, or can only be achieved by participants in the L-practice – there are certain requirements that need to be met – namely those requirements that are necessary for one to respect in order to engage in communication. Flouting those

requirements will therefore not even allow one to be in a position to express, for example, *either* truth or falsehood; flouting the requirements does not allow statements (or for that matter, any other kind of speech-act) to be made at all.

This is importantly distinct from the idea that we should use terms in accordance with their conditions for correct application. Most obviously, there is no reference to 'literal meaning'. That is because the proposal does not take there to be a set of propositions, and posit a function from members of that set to circumstance such that the correct proposition in context can be specified. Instead, room has been made for antecedent conditions to be satisfied so that correct application can happen at all – conditions of *meaningfulness*. We should use terms, under this proposal in accordance with what the rules that govern the sorts of actions that use of them in circumstances require.

So how might a criterion of semantic correctness thus be formulated along the proposed lines? Here is one proposal:

(N''): It is correct to use w to f in c iff there is some rule, R , that is constitutive of the L-practice, that requires (allows), in c , that w is used to perform act f .

Where w is a word or sentence, f is an action (of a sort to be specified presently), c is a context of utterance of that word or sentence and R is the fact of meaning (the rule governing its use) that can be derived from the putative reformulated meaning platitude—(C').

To illustrate how this might work in practice, it will be useful to see how (N'') might *fail* to be satisfied, such that some use of the language is incorrect. It is worth noting that such concerns need not have any bearing on truth other than the idea that certain ways of expressing truth (certain ' f 's) are possible (that is, such an action is enabled) only if (N'') is antecedently satisfied.

To do so, here is an example of one such ' R ' as derived (a specific instance of) (C'). Let's return to 'sorry'. The criterion for semantic correctness for 'sorry' will be

something like,

(N''_{sorry}): It is correct to use 'sorry' to apologise in *c* iff there is some rule, $R_{\text{sorry in } c}$, that is constitutive of the L-practice, that allows, in *c*, for 'sorry' to be used to apologise.

$R_{\text{sorry in } c}$ will be the rule that specifies the conditions under which sorry can be correctly used in context (on an occasion). That, in effect, will simply be the consequent of (C') (for the specific case of 'sorry'): one correctly uses 'sorry' for apologising in a circumstance iff 'sorry' can be used to apologise in that context (and, apologising in that way can only be achieved by using language, i.e. participating in the L-practice). Just how that fills out will be dependent on the context in which the term (or sentence) is used.

Turning to the Travis examples, we can thus see how they can be accommodated while, at the same time, preserving some notion of the intrinsic normativity of meaning (specifically the kind of intrinsic normativity outlined at the end of chapter 1). In the context in which we have the botanist asking if the leaves are green, we (approximately) have the following criterion for semantic correctness of 'green':

(N''_{green}): It is correct to use 'green' to describe the colour of leaves in C_{botanist} iff there is some rule, $R_{\text{(green in } c \text{ (botanist))}}$, that is constitutive of the L-practice, that allows, in C_{botanist} for 'green' to be used to describe the colour of leaves.

Thus the reason that it is incorrect to use green in this context is that it does not describe the colour of leaves, but, perhaps the colour of the paint on the surface of the leaves. It differs from the thought that semantic correctness is to be understood in terms of truth because, even though they come to the same verdict as to whether it is correct to use green to describe the colour of the leaves, it is the rule that has set the conditions according to the circumstance – the same goes for 'sorry', i.e. if the circumstance is such that the rule does not allow for 'sorry' to be used to apologise, then using that term, in those circumstances, to do that will be incorrect (one ought not to use the term in that way). What it is for a term like 'sorry' to mean what it

does is what plays a constitutive role in determining the conditions for such correctness. In other words, the normative constraints range over, more generally, whether one can achieve what one sought to, in using some fragment of the language in the way that one did, in the circumstances in question.

Thus, what the Travis examples can help us understand, and thus the kind of 'contextualism' that is required, is that the correctness of, for example, the description of the leaves as green is dependent on what matters about how the leaves are described. There are rules, under the current proposal, that must be followed if that is to be achieved, and what these rules require is, in part, constituted by what the relevant terms mean. That is why truth cannot play the role of correctness across the board, because the same goes for the kinds of speech acts that do not aim at truth (such as the 'sorry' or 'hurrah' cases). If it were only *truth*, or upon whatever the correctness of the occurrence of some other speech acts depends, then the relevant normative force would be correctly analysed in terms of hypothetical imperatives.

But, we can now make a distinction between the satisfaction of the criterion as set out in N" and the hypothetical imperatives which might govern what the practice of language use, in general, can be employed for – the ends that such a practice may serve. The kinds of hypothetical imperatives that the non-Normativist will appeal to will never tell the full story. That is to say that the criterion of correctness for *particular* utterances – of, for example, the statements made with a sentence – will be that correctness that is relevant to the satisfaction of some hypothetical imperative which is in play with regards to the reasons for which the statement was made in that context. The point can be made in terms of detachability – or rather, why considerations about detachability fail to capture the issue at hand. Remember, it was crucial for the non-Normativist arguments that that normative force involved in claims about meaning not allow for the consequent of the conditional as it features in a hypothetical imperative to be detached, even if the antecedent were satisfied. If it could, then the normative force would not be dependent on the psychological state of the language user in the way it would need to be to falsify the Normativity Thesis.

But that argument, under this proposal, forgets the main point of the claim that meaning is normative: one may have no reason to *f* (say, describe the colour of the leaves), but, so describing them is constituted by following the rules of describing in the circumstance. There are certain actions that can be performed by way of the use of some words or sentence in a circumstance, and there are certain actions that cannot. What the claim that meaning is intrinsically normative comes to here is that meaning sets the conditions under which those kinds of actions can be performed in the various circumstances. That is *intrinsic* normativity because what semantic constructions ought to be used to achieve what ends is constrained by the facts of meaning (what the rules governing the use of those constructions require). That is why the kinds of hypothetical imperatives that Hattiangadi et al. appeal to are not norms of *meaning*, but norms that can only be derived given the normative constraints in play according to what meaning allows (what the facts of meaning are). These kinds of hypothetical imperatives are thus *dependent on* the intrinsic norms of meaning.

In sum, the 'facts of meaning' will be thus understood with reference to the role words play in the L-practice; a 'fact of meaning' is just what a rule that is constitutive of that practice requires. The Normativity Thesis insisted that facts of meaning were (at least in part) normative facts. Thus, a claim about a fact of meaning should immediately imply some normative claim. Considered as the rules governing a practice, this is easily achieved. For if a 'fact of meaning' is nothing more than just what a constitutive rule of the practice of language use requires, then, *ex hypothesi* a fact of meaning has normative import.¹⁷

The idea, then, is that if we understand the facts of meaning as the rules governing use that are constitutive of the practice of language use, then the claim about 'using an expression in accordance with its meaning' translates to using an expression in accordance with the rules governing the use of an expression. Such rules were understood as specifying the conditions for correct application under Millar's

¹⁷ It should also be clear that Hattiangadi's original objection to MN that it was unable to account for certain intuitions extracted from specific examples of language use cannot be brought against the 'Austinian' MN, because this allows for variation in what words are able to say on occasions so long as such uses are legitimate moves in the practice of language use.

proposal. I reject that in favour of the conditions for correct use as here understood, so as to ensure that the norms so associated with such correctness cannot be felt to be only normative requirements and thus supporting the non-Normativist claim that the norms of meaning are hypothetical imperatives (thereby not intrinsic to meaning). Accordingly, the global instrumental value of semantic correctness can be made compatible with the claim that they are intrinsic to meaning. For, though it is instrumental, it is so in the sense that the satisfaction of any constitutive norms of a practice is instrumental to what end the practice is engaged in in the first place. But that does not make the norms of meaning hypothetical imperatives in the sense that falsifies the claim of the intrinsic normativity of meaning.

Conclusion

What I have outlined above is a proposal. It is a proposal that is predicated on some very substantive and controversial conceptions of, in particular, the nature of truth. One may, for example, want to reject it on the grounds that one is convinced by Strawson's argument against what he feels to be Austin's version of the correspondence theory, and given the proposal assumes it, it is faulty. Maybe, maybe not. In any case, I suggest that it is not on non-*Normativist* grounds that the proposal can be rejected. It is one way that one may go in order to sidestep such issues they raise, and retain at least some semblance of the Normativity Thesis.

Chiefly, I was concerned to make it the case that the accusation that the only kind of normative commitments that we are under when we use language are those of the kind that are the normative requirements of hypothetical imperatives could not be brought to bear against the proposal. I take it that I have achieved that. For, though it allows for semantic correctness to be instrumental in so far as the global practice of language use is, within that practice, semantic correctness is of intrinsic value to the practice being carried out at all – indeed, to there *being any such practice*. Any such hypothetical imperatives are thus dependent on these norms being satisfied. So understood, meaning is intrinsically normative.

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