

Normative Science

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Margolis on normativity

“[N]ormativity is thoroughly *sittlich*; it cannot convincingly provide any privileged sources by which to validate our claims or legitimate our validative practices. Something of the sort holds true as well of truth and knowledge in general—though I remind you that that need not spell disaster. It does, however, confirm that the analysis of science and normativity is systematically intertwined. (I find a distinct argumentative advantage there.)”

Problem of normativity

Contemporary philosophers:

- A denial of “first philosophy” as circular, regressive or dogmatic
- A view of normative questions as not scientifically scrutable (or science as limited to the “descriptive”, not “prescriptive”)

The project

(1) Normativity received (as a capacity)

- Intention/purpose as a part of human nature as developed
- Irreducible, reductive attempts misguided
- Compare: Margolis's *sittlich* and "Darwinian effect"

(2) Normative views can be revised critically

- Analogy to any (other) science
- Fallibilism instead of circularity or regress
- The notion of reality can be invoked here (Peirce's Darwinian lesson)

Four challenges

(1) Philosophical naturalism

– Unless reduced to something non-normative, normative “facts” would be non-natural, hence not scientifically scrutable

(2) Moral semantics

– Or normative claims cannot be true in the “descriptive” sense

(3) Practical vs. theoretical reasoning

– Theoretical reasoning (or scientific inquiry) differs in kind from practical reasoning (formation of normative opinion)

(4) Empiricism

– What could serve as the evidence “of the senses” for e.g. ethics?

1. Naturalism

Ontological naturalism: what there *is*, is studied by science

- But what is *science*?
- Circular: the study of the *natural* world

⇒ What (ontological) naturalism is and what it implies depends crucially on the form of scientific realism assumed

Forms of scientific realism

A-SR: things are (approximately) as our best scientific and common sense theories claim (Devitt)

C-SR: scientific theories are our best but fallible guides to what there is (Niiniluoto)

H-SR: science is underwritten by the hypothesis that there is a reality independent of our views (Peirce, Rydenfelt 2014)

- Science is defined as the attempt to find out how things are
- *Rather* than reality argued to be that which science delivers
- No “first philosophy” required (Rydenfelt 2011)

Hypothetical realism and normative science

- ⇒ There is no principled barrier to normative as science
- Don't block the way of inquiry (Denial as *scepticism*)

E.g in ethics:

- Naturalism without reductionism, or
- Anti-reductionism without non-naturalism

But of course, this merely gives us conceptual room for thinking of any inquiry as potentially scientific

2. Normative semantics?

Challenge: the assumption that “it is the case that p” and “it ought to be the case that p” are categorically different

- Moral expressivism (Blackburn, Gibbard): moral claims do not describe reality (whereas scientific claims do)

Global expressivism (Huw Price) or anti-representationalism (Rorty)

- No difference between normative/scientific in semantic terms
- Functional differences
- Compatible with H-SR (Rydenfelt 2014)

Challenges the idea of different *directions of fit* (mind-world, world-mind) (Michael Smith)

3. Practical vs. theoretical reasoning

- Theoretical reasons = reasons for belief = justification/evidence for belief that p
- Practical reasons = reasons for action (desire, intention), alternatives:
 - Given by the features of the object that the action would promote (Parfit, Scanlon)
 - Depend on our desires (Williams, Schroeder)
 - Derive from practical Reason (Korsgaard)

Reasons for belief/desire

- E.g. distinguishing reasons for believing that p and reasons for desiring that p
 - Gives the appearance of a categorical difference (of fit, purpose, evidence)
- The problem dissolves if we view them as reasons for “thinking” that
 - *it is the case that p*
 - *it ought to be the case that p*

Instrumentalism vs. inferentialism

Consider (9') formulated as a normative proposition:
"I ought to relieve..."

Brandom (2000):

Rather (2) and (9) analogous
= (9) is the *major* premise

(2): p is a *reason* to think that q

Table 5.1

Transitions among Psychological States	Relations between Propositions
(1) I believe that p	(1') p
(2) I believe that if p then q	(2') If p then q
So (3) I believe that q	Therefore (3') q

Table 5.4

Transitions among Psychological States	Relations between Propositions
(9) I desire that I relieve the itch in my finger	(9') ???
(10) I believe that I can relieve the itch in my finger by scratching it	(10') I can relieve the itch in my finger by scratching it
So (11) I desire that I scratch my finger	Therefore (11') ???

4. Evidence and empiricism

Challenge: surely normative science cannot be an *empirical* science

- E.g. ethical non-naturalists mostly rely on *a priori* intuition

But much recent work on emotions views them as analogous (or a form of) perception

- Spontaneous, non-inferential
- Conceptually “laden”
- Non-inferentially justifying
 - Peirce: emotional interpretants

The causal question

But is e.g. the feeling of disapprobation (etc.) *caused* by the wrongness of an action?

- Just a case of the *problem of perception*: how do we know, *in general*, if our perception of some quantity/quality (e.g. roundness, redness) is caused by the appropriate property of the object?
- No way of distinguishing from the immediate, subjective point of view
- Objectivity nevertheless achievable (induction)

Conclusions

1. Hypothetical realism; science understood in terms of reality
 - ⇒ Wider naturalism, no conceptual barriers to normative science
2. Global criticism of robust representationalism
 - ⇒ No different directions of fit, different semantic loads
3. Theoretical and practical reasoning species of the same genus
 - ⇒ Both normative, neither more or less “instrumental”
4. Emotions may serve as the evidence of the senses for normative science
 - ⇒ Analogy with perception, no principled difference in causation