THESIS

ON THE NORMATIVITY OF SEMANTIC NORMS AND INTENTIONS

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ABSTRACT

ON THE NORMATIVITY OF SEMANTIC NORMS AND INTENTIONS

This thesis clarifies the assumption that meaning is normative and defends this assumption from recent criticism by Anandi Hattiangadi and Akeel Bilgrami. Against Hattiangadi, I argue that the paradigmatic examples of moral and semantic obligations are strictly-speaking more like 'limit' hypotheticals in that having an obligation is contingent on some conditions, but these conditions are quite different than that those of the typical examples of means-end hypotheticals. I argue that the conditions relevant to limit hypotheticals are widely-satisfied by constitutive facts about beings with certain rational and linguistic competence like us. The 'limitation' is that being this kind of thing isn't something one chooses, but is a constitutive for what one is. Against Bilgrami, I argue that a meaning intention is a normative state of commitment. Having a meaning intention means that one is prepared to speak and being prepared to speak is something one must live up to by having and maintaining a plan. I argue that part of this plan is to make some minimal effort to be interpretable to others.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The widely-accepted assumption that meaning is normative can be traced back to Ludwig Wittgenstein's rule-following analogy in the *Philosophical Investigations*. In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein claims that language is a kind of rule-governed activity like playing a game.[1] Games involve rules which dictate what actions or moves are permitted and similarly, language involves rules that dictate the ways in which words are to be used. For example, to understand what "fox" means is in part to recognize that one ought to apply "fox" only to foxes. Subsequently, if one means fox by "fox" now, then one ought to mean fox by "fox" tomorrow. The analogy assumes that meaning is normative in the sense that meaning confers reasons for what a speaker ought to say. If meaning is not normative in this requisite sense, then the analogy breaks down.

Chapter 1 explains the sense in which meaning is normative by focusing on how Saul Kripke's argument for meaning skepticism in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* Kripke (1982) depends on the assumption that meaning is normative. Thereafter, I motivate Hattiangadi and Bilgrami's arguments against the supposition that meaning is normative. Hattiangadi and Bilgrami share the general claim that meaning is only normative in the 'norm-relative' sense that meaning is constituted by norms for correct meaning ascription, which prescribe no reasons to a speaker that would govern his future behavior. The meaning of a word is merely constituted by its standards for correct application. A standard does not in-itself tell one what to do and as such, meaning need not be intrinsically normative in the way Wittgenstein and Kripke assume. Semantic judgments are hypothetical then in the sense that an agent's having a

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[1] See *Investigations* §1-7, 23, 65-66.

reason to use words in specific ways is contingent on that agent's desire to tell the truth or to speak meaningfully.

Hattiangadi argues that meaning could not be normative in strong sense that Kripke supposes because we could not reasonably have semantic obligations. Hattiangadi claims that such obligations could be neither uniquely semantic nor categorical (thus constitute real obligations). Therefore, the normativity relevant to meaning is only relevant and follows from other non-semantic sources, such as one's desire to tell the truth and not deceive others.

Bilgrami rebuts the claim that semantic normativity is imparted by meaning intentions, i.e. a speaker's intent to mean something by his words. He argues that semantic intentions are not intentions proper and therefore that no real normativity follows from such intentions. Bilgrami argues that real intentions are both norm-relative and involve commitments, and meaning intentions are neither norm-relative nor involve commitments, therefore meaning intentions cannot be normative in any interesting sense.

Chapter 2 rebuts Hattiangadi's arguments against semantic normativity as constituted by semantic obligations. My primary insight is that there is an important distinction between kinds of hypotheticals and the conditions they depend on that Hattiangadi fails to realize. Hattiangadi conflates 'thin' means/end hypotheticals with what I call 'thick' or 'limit' hypotheticals. The former depend on narrow conditions like the desire to stay dry, whereas the latter depend on wider conditions that reference constitutive facts about the kind of being we are. I claim semantic normativity is constituted by 'limit' hypotheticals that prescribe reasons to comply with semantic standards. I explain that the paradigmatic examples of moral obligations are strictly-speaking more like limit hypotheticals and draw an analog of this form for semantic obligations. I situate this argument for semantic normativity with two similar arguments by Daniel Whiting and

Hannah Ginsborg.

In Chapter 3, I respond to Bilgrami's argument that meaning intentions are not normative in any sense. I clarify Bilgrami's meaning intention by contrasting it with his construal of intentions proper as normative states distinct from dispositions. I claim that Bilgrami muddles the distinction between normativity and norm-relativity and carries this confusion into "Why Meaning Intentions Are Degenerate." I show that the meaning intention that is the target of Bilgrami's argument is ambiguous in an important way, but charitably interpret that Bilgrami must have the weakest meaning intention specified in mind. I find that, though apparently degenerate in that such an intention fails to be neither norm-relative nor normative in the sense that it comes with some commitments, I develop two alternate approaches to secure normativity for this intention. I defend the strongest of these arguments, which states that a meaning intention is itself a kind of commitment or plan for future action. A commitment is a kind of goal-oriented state that requires one to do some things and one can fail to meet a commitment. Therefore having a meaning intention is a normative state. I further argue that part of a speaker's commitment in having a meaning intention is to be interpretable.

CHAPTER 1

"Is Meaning Normative?"

The purpose of this chapter is to (1) clarify the claim that meaning is normative by focusing on how Saul Kripke's meaning skepticism in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* is grounded by the assumption that meaning is normative, and (2) motivate two criticism of this assumption by Anandi Hattiangadi and Akeel Bilgrami.

The Skeptical Paradox

In *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Saul Kripke relies on the notion that meaning is normative to defend a skepticism about the content of meaning. He develops this skepticism in a mathematical example: Consider the word "plus" or the symbol "+" as it denotes the function of addition. The function or rule of addition dictates the unique sum I ought to answer for any computation. Though I have performed only a finite number of addition computations, the rule of addition dictates how I ought to respond given any future problem. Imagine that I have never performed the operation '68 + 57'. The finitude of addition operations that I have performed ensures that there is such an example. I am a finite being and I could not have performed every addition operation conceivable. When I perform the operation '68 + 57', I do as I always do, check my work, and report "125" as the correct answer (7).

Suppose that a bizarre skeptic approaches me and questions my use of the word "plus." He suggests that given my past usage of "plus", I should have answered "5" when asked for the sum of '68 + 57'. Further, he suggests that I surely did not give myself explicit instructions for this particular instance. I employed no instruction that dictated that I answer "125" when prompted with "68 + 57" *specifically*. What I did do was apply the addition function as I always

have in the past, as it applies to any possible computation, and this function determined my answer, "125." But suppose that the finite computations I have performed in the past only involved numbers smaller than 57. It would then be compatible with my past usage that I actually meant a deviant function *quus* rather than plus whenever I used "plus" or "+", where the quus function is:

$$x \text{ quus } y = x + y, \text{ if } x, y \text{ are less than 57}$$

$$= 5 \quad \text{otherwise.}$$

The skeptic claims that when I claim to mean plus now, I misinterpret my past usage. In the past I always meant quus, not plus, and right now I must be on some drug (8).

The skeptic's bizarre charge is no doubt false, and "if it is false, then there must be some fact about my past usage that can be cited to refute it. For although the hypothesis is wild, it does not seem to be a priori impossible" (9). Surely I can point to something that would justify that I did mean plus. When I answer the query "68 + 57", I make no "leap in the dark." I follow my past instruction that uniquely determines the answer "125" in this new instance (10).[2]

The Normativity Requirement

An adequate response to the skeptic must satisfy two conditions:

1. It must offer a candidate fact that would *constitute* my meaning plus, not quus.

2. It must show how that fact *justifies* my answer "125" to the query "68 + 57" in virtue of 'directions' contained in that candidate fact (which determine what I ought to do in each instance) (11).

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[2] The skeptic challenges whatever could constitute my meaning plus and not quus by "plus." Specifically, he claims there could be no fact whatsoever that could constitute and thereby justify my meaning one rather than the other. It is important to not be misled by the words "skeptic" and "justify." The problem is metaphysical, not epistemological. Kripke's dramatic way of showing this is the claim that even God, with his unlimited epistemological access, could not know what I mean because there is no such fact to access in the first place. The paradox "purports to show that nothing in my mental history of past behavior—not even what an omniscient God would know—could establish whether I mean plus or quus" (21).

On (2), any candidate semantic fact must be essentially *normative*. An adequate fact must justify or "show that only '125', not '5' is the answer I *ought* to give" (11). According to Kripke, no candidate fact captures this normative element, therefore we are led to semantic non-factualism. Kripke finds that even the strongest objection to this claim, in terms of a dispositional semantic fact, ultimately misses the normative scope required by (2).

A dispositionalist claims that my disposition to respond in certain ways constitutes what I mean by my words. My having a disposition to respond with the unique and appropriate sum for any given query constitutes the fact that I meant plus by "plus" in the past:

"To mean addition by '+' is to be disposed, when asked for any sum '$x + y$' to give the sum of x and y as the answer (in particular, to say '125' when queried about '68 + 57')" (22).

This dispositionalist response looks promising—it appears to satisfy skeptical conditions (1) and (2) above. First, a disposition constitutes something that could justify my meaning. The skeptic's metaphysical challenge can be met by the fact that I am disposed to respond with "125" and not "5" to the query "68 + 57." Second, a disposition seems to capture the normativity in (2) insofar as that disposition accounts for what I will do in the future—I am disposed to answer "125" in future cases.

Kripke's strongest objection against dispositionalism is the normativity objection. (24) This objection states that the dispositional analysis misses a "significant aspect of the skeptical problem," namely that, "I had no *justification* for answering '125' rather than '5'" (37). The dispositionalist can adequately account for what I *will* do in describing my disposition to answer '125', but cannot adequately account for what I *ought* to do, i.e. answer '125' not '5':

"Suppose I do mean addition by '+'. What is the relation of that supposition to the question of how I will respond to the problem '68 + 57'? The dispositionalist gives a

6

descriptive account of this relation: if '+' meant addition, then I will answer '125'. But this is not the proper account of the relation, which is normative, not descriptive. The point is *not* that, if I meant addition by '+' I *will* answer '125', but that I *should* answer '125'. Computational error, finiteness of my capacity, and other disturbing factors may lead me not to be *disposed* to respond as I *should*, but if so, I have not acted in accordance with my intentions. The relation of meaning and intention to future action is normative and not descriptive" (37).

The dispositionalist can account for performance, but not competence. He cannot pick out my mistakes because he cannot distinguish between what I will do and what I ought to do. The dispositional analysis precludes the possibility of a standard for correctness that distinguishes between what I actually do and what I should do. I can be disposed to make mistakes after all; I could take a quaddition pill that disposes me to answer '5' and not '125'.

The ready reply to this challenge is that it is in virtue of an *optimal* disposition, not any disposition whatsoever, that I will respond correctly. For instance, I might be said to have an optimal disposition insofar as my mind is not compromised by the quaddition pill. So long as I am not under the effects of the quaddition pill, I am disposed to answer '125', not '5'. The problem with this added qualification is that it misses the scope of the normative requirement. No matter how optimal my disposition is, it cannot make sense of what I should do as distinct from what I will do. Whatever is correct for me simply is whatever I am disposed to do. That is, whatever seems right is right. The very concept of disposition rules out the possibility of mistakes.[3]

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[3] Paul Boghossian tried to work around this problem by supposing that there could be an optimal disposition that always specifies an extensional (natural or otherwise) meaning property, but conceded that the conditions for such an optimal disposition could not both preclude the possibility of error and be specified in purely naturalistic terms. See Miller and Wright *Rule-Following and Meaning,* p.175. Hannah Ginsborg claims that a kind of primitive normativity or second-order disposition is adequate to the skeptical challenge, but Kripke anticipates this reply. See Ginsborg "Primitive normativity" and Kripke, p.40.

Norm-Relativity, not Normativity

In *Oughts and Thoughts*, Anandi Hattiangadi argues that Kripke's skeptic relies on the intuitive but untenable assumption that meaning is normative. His basic mistake is to conflate two kinds of normativity: norm-relativity and normativity. Hattiangadi claims that meaning requires only norm-relativity, where norm-relativity is the platitude or 'anodyne' thesis that there are standards for correct and incorrect meaning ascriptions (7). Meaning is constituted by standards for the correct application of words, where "correct" expresses no prescriptive content or force, i.e. "correctly" means only that some application gets the value 'correct' and says nothing about what to do. Norm-relativity is only evaluative (not prescriptive) in the sense that words or sentences are evaluated against standards for correct application. Meaning ascriptions are weighed against standards for application like a knife is weighed against standards for quality. A good knife is one that meets certain standards—for sharpness, durability, ergonomics, and so on. The fact that a knife is good does not entail that one should use it or own similar ones. Similarly, in the semantic case, a correct meaning ascription is one that complies with some antecedent standards that fix appropriateness for that particular ascription, i.e. if "wolf" means wolf, then the meaning ascription "That is a wolf" gets the value 'true' if there is in fact a wolf present when uttered.

Normativity *proper* is the stronger thesis that semantic judgments issue categorical reasons to comply with semantic standards, independently of agent desires:

> "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" (6).

Hattiangadi claims that Kripke relies on this kind of normativity to maintain the skeptical paradox and force us toward semantic non-factualism (7). If Kripke demands normativity, dispositionalism fails. If meaning is only norm-relative, dispositionalism is an adequate response to the skeptical challenge and non-factualism does not follow. Dispositionalism specifies a semantic fact as one constituted by my disposition (under ideal conditions) to respond in ways that either accord or fail to accord with pre-existing correctness conditions. Correctness conditions are sufficient for norm-relativity and the skeptic's normative demand is incoherent, therefore dispositionalism succeeds.

Semantic Realism

Hattiangadi's purpose in rejecting the normativity thesis is to sustain semantic realism as a straight solution to the skeptical paradox. She defines semantic realism as the thesis that "to understand the meaning of a word . . . is to know its correctness conditions, and that to understand the meaning of a sentence is to know its truth-conditions" (5). It is crucial that the relevant truth-conditions are substantial and not merely disquotational. Disquotational truth-conditions assert nothing above and beyond whatever statement gets the truth-predicate 'true'. So "'S' is true" is not more informative than "S", and so "'S' is true just in case S" is a tautology or trivial truth that holds of any sentence whatsoever. The unhappy consequence for Hattiangadi and semantic realism is that disquotational truth-conditions are compatible with semantic anti-realism. Therefore semantic realism must be committed to *substantial* truth-conditions. However, semantic realism need not assume that meaning is normative to avoid the skeptical paradox.

Hattiangadi attributes the mistake to assume that meaning is normative to Wittgenstein's rule-following analogy (51). Semantic realism does not draw this analogy and does not suppose

9

that meaning is intrinsically action-guiding. Semantic realism depends only on the norm-relativity platitude that meaning consists in correctness conditions for words and truth-conditions for sentences.

Against Semantic Obligations

Hattiangadi argues that meaning could not be normative in virtue of uniquely semantic obligations. The normativist accepts something like, " . . . it is constitutive of my meaning something by an expression that I ought to use the expression in certain determinate ways . . . that meaning imposes specifically semantic obligations, and a speaker *must* have the relevant obligations if she is to mean something by her words" (181). Hattiangadi argues that this argument for the normativity of meaning 'smuggles' the normativity in. She claims that semantic obligations could not be both (1) uniquely semantic and (2) categorically prescriptive.

Hattiangadi's first argument against semantic obligations is that such obligations could not be uniquely semantic: "*Normativity** should not be confused with the idea that sometimes we are obliged to use language in certain ways for *moral*, *prudential*, *legal* or other reasons" (181). Any candidate for a uniquely semantic obligation must not be merely *relevant* to but follow from meaning itself. There are certainly *relevant* obligations that influence meaning, but it is unclear whether any obligations could follow *ipso facto* from the fact that a word means what it does.

If someone asks "Is it raining outside?" I ought to say "It is raining" if and only if it is raining. What obliges me to do so is not semantic but epistemic and moral. I ought to say "It is raining" because (all things equal) I should tell the truth and not deceive others. A semantic fact amounts to a standard of correctness and a standard issues no intrinsic reason for action. The fact that "rain" means rain does not commit me to any course of action.

Hattiangadi's second argument states that,

P1   Real obligations are categorical.

P2   Semantic obligations are only hypothetical.

C   Therefore, there are no genuine semantic obligations.

Hypothetical imperatives prescribe what one is to do in order to satisfy one's desires. In other words, hypothetical imperatives are only instrumentally prescriptive (182). Imagine it is raining and your friend says to you, "If you want to stay dry, then take your umbrella." The command "Take your umbrella!" is hypothetically prescriptive in the sense that it prescribes a reason for you to do something only if you desire to stay dry. If you have no desire to stay dry, you have no reason to take an umbrella. The reason-giving force of the imperative is contingent on your having the relevant desire. In contrast, a categorical imperative dictates what you ought to do regardless of your desires, wishes, or ends. For example, "the fact that it is morally good to give to charity gives me a categorical reason to give to charity—I have a reason to give to charity even if that is not what I want to do" (183).

Hattiangadi argues that semantic judgments issue only hypothetical reasons for action. That is, I have a reason to do A or refrain from doing A, where 'A' is an action, only insofar as that reason accords with my background desires. A judgment only gives me a reason to do something when that reason links *up* with my desires (see fig. 1).
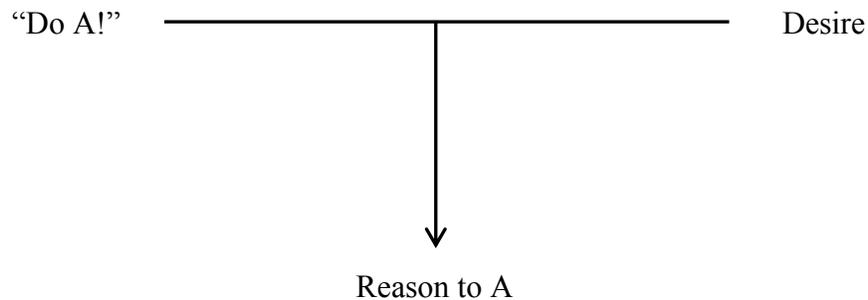
Figure 1: The hypothetical imperative construed in terms of desire

11

Semantic judgments could not be categorical because it is reasonable to say that if I have no desire to communicate or to tell the truth, then I have no reason to say "It is raining" only if it is raining. Even a putative semantic obligation to speak meaningfully is only instrumental because "we do not think that a speaker who lacks the desire to speak meaningfully nevertheless ought to do so" (184). If I have no desire to be understood, I have no reason to mean plus by "plus" or rain by "rain."

Intuitively, semantic obligations are parasitic on other obligations. There are instances where the deviant applications of words is permitted, just as there are instances where lying is permitted. If an axe-murderer comes to my door asking for my roommate, whatever semantic obligation I have to complete my sentences or use words correctly is trumped by my moral obligation to preserve my roommate's life. The semantic obligation has decidedly little bearing on what I should do because semantic obligations are relatively trivial in comparison to most moral obligations. "Complete your sentences!" carries *less* force than "Save your friend's life!"

If meaning is normative and this normativity amounts to the existence of categorical semantic obligations, then Kripke's skeptic has access to the analogous arguments against semantic realism that hold against moral realism[4]:

> ." . . it is this link between what a rational agent judges and her motivation that gives rise to Moore's and Mackie's arguments against reductive and anti-reductive accounts of normativity. This sort of problem does not arise, however, for facts that are normatively inert" (183).

In "The Argument From Queerness," Alexander Miller reiterates this argument against semantic obligations in his defense of semantic realism. Miller defends semantic realism from an analog of the argument from queerness against moral realism. He claims that semantic reasons could only be hypothetical:

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[4] See Kripke, p.53.

It would be utterly implausible to claim that if facts about the meaning of "magpie" are facts about reasons for action, then they must be facts about categorical reasons for action. 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. Semantic reasons are at most only hypothetical reasons for action (111).

Hattiangadi and Miller reject the skeptical paradox on the grounds that we could not have categorical semantic obligations. The skeptic assumes that we could have uniquely semantic obligations and that such obligations would be categorically prescriptive. According to Hattiangadi and Miller, semantic normativity could only be hypothetically prescriptive.

One promising avenue that has yet to be considered is how intentions are relevant to meaning. I intend to mean things by my words, and therefore it seems that my intentions are relevant to meaning. Intending seems sufficient for norm-relativity in that my intentions carry conditions for their fulfillment. I want my audience to understand me in specific ways. Therefore, we can speak of accord and discord here in virtue of how my audience reacts to my utterances—whether they do what I intended or not. Akeel Bilgrami argues that meaning intentions fail to be even norm-relative.

Intentions and Mistakes

Akeel Bilgrami (2012) argues that the normativity relevant to meaning is a weak or 'degenerate' kind of normativity that is imparted by a speaker's intent for his words to have certain meanings.

Bilgrami understands a speaker's intention to be a state like expecting in that his intention comes with conditions for its fulfillment. For example, if I intend Bilgrami to come for tea, this expectation is fulfilled only when Bilgrami comes for tea. What I intend to happen is that Bilgrami shows up. My intention carries a standard of correctness insofar as Bilgrami either

comes to tea or he doesn't. My intention is fulfilled when Bilgrami does this and failed when he doesn't. Because we can speak of fulfillment or accord with reference to a standard, intentions are minimally normative in Hattiangadi's norm-relative sense. Having a standard of correctness is sufficient for norm-relativity and intentions have standards of correctness, so intentions are norm-relative. Bilgrami assumes that meaning is normative in the norm-relative sense and that such normativity comes out of the concept of intention:

"the very idea of intention is such that it generates an ideal or norm of correctness, something by the light of which one can assess one's actions for being correct or wrong, depending on whether they are or fail to be in accord with the intention" (2).

Actions are 'right' when they accord with, and 'wrong' when they fail to accord with, an intention. Norm-relativity is therefore "constitutive of intentional states" and a platitude of intention talk (3). If meaning intentions are at norm-relative, then it seems that a speaker's intent for his words to have certain meanings and not others might impart norm-relativity to meaning. Bilgrami, importantly, assumes that normativity amounts to norm-relativity. As such, in what follows I say "normativity" for consistence with Bilgrami, though Bilgrami ultimately means norm-relativity.

Speaker Meaning and Sentence Meaning

Paul Grice links intention with meaning in terms of a speaker's intending to mean something by his words. He points out that "when we say things we have certain nested intentions to have some effect on hearers" (Bilgrami 4). An analysis of meaning begins with the analysis of a *speaker's meaning* in terms of what he intended when he uttered an expression—of what purpose he had for speaking his words. When I utter my words I intend to produce a certain effect in my listener. My intent in saying "It is raining" to my friend is to get him to adopt the

14

belief that it is raining outside. In this way, my expression carried an intention. Recall that Kripke says: "The point is not that, if I meant addition by "+", I will answer "125", but rather that, *if I intend to accord with my past meaning of "+"*, I should answer "125"" (Kripke 37). My meaning plus by "plus" now is contingent on my intent to accord with my past history of meaning plus by "plus." An analysis of my meaning makes necessary reference to my intention, e.g. that I intend to accord with my past meaning.

The analysis of 'speaker meaning' must be distinguished from that of 'sentence meaning*'*, where sentence meaning is the "meaning of the words that the speaker takes his words to have—in Grice's rhetoric—'timelessly'" (4). Consider the indirect meaning I intend by "It is raining cats and dogs out there!" Surely I do not mean that tabbies, pugs, and huskies are falling from the sky. What I mean is that it is raining *heavily*. Notice the difference between literal and metaphorical meaning here. Literal meaning is equivalent to sentence meaning while metaphorical meaning is equivalent to speaker meaning. The intentional analysis of speaker meaning does not carry over to sentence meaning. The intentional analysis only gets us what a speaker *meant* to convey by an expression on a given occasion:

> " . . . when a speaker says something, the sentence meaning is something (relatively) independent of the intentions he has which are emphasized in Grice's initial analysis, because the initial analysis is only of speaker's meaning, of what he means on that occasion" (7).

Bilgrami claims that there must be more to meaning than a speaker's intending his words to have certain meanings. He claims that sentences seem to carry 'timeless' sentence meaning and this meaning must be cashed out in non-intentional terms. The Gricean analysis of speaker meaning is essentially intentional, so an analysis of sentence meaning cannot be built out of it.

Bilgrami argues that truth-conditions are adequate for sentence meaning, though assertability conditions would also work (7). On Bilgrami's truth-conditional approach, sentence meaning coincides with speaker meaning in virtue of a particular kind of meaning intention—one that makes reference to an expression's truth-conditions. If sentence meaning is truth-conditional and if we can make sense of accord and discord in virtue of whether an expression's truth-conditions are met or not (i.e. discern mistakes from successes), then such an analysis might impart norm-relativity to meaning.

The Degenerate Meaning Intention

One must be careful to distinguish between two intentions:

1.   I say 'snake' with the intent to apply 'snake' only to snakes.

2.   I say 'snake' with the intent to say something which is true iff there is a snake (10).

Bilgrami argues that Wittgenstein, Grice, and others misidentify the normativity of meaning as imparted by intentions like (1), i.e. that I intend to mean things by my utterances (Bilgrami 9). Such intentions are normative, but ultimately not uniquely semantic. Like Hatttiangadi, Bilgrami argues that the normativity (norm-relativity) of meaning follows from the fact that the meaning of a word or sentence amounts to the standards for its application and that these standards can be failed (8). Bilgrami argues that, accordingly, intention (1) is norm-relative and intention (2) is not. Mistakes are possible on intention (1) and thus, intention (1) is norm-relative. If I say "snake" in the presence of rope, I fail intention (1). Though promising, intention (1) is compatible with clearly non-semantic cases and therefore is not uniquely semantic. For example, intention (1) is compatible with my intention to carry an umbrella in order to stay dry. Intention (1) does not necessarily target my words.

If semantic mistakes are mistakes in the application of terms, then intention (2) is uniquely semantic insofar as it targets whether my expressions meet the truth-conditions for those expressions: "the intention *relevant* to meaning targets the truth conditions of one's words" (Bilgrami 13). Unfortunately, such an intention fails to be norm-relative. There is no sense to be made of mistakes with regard to intentions like (2). Truth-conditions can make sense of mistakes, but the relevant mistakes are ultimately non-semantic. For example, even if I say "snake" in the presence of rope (perhaps it is dark or I am on some drug), I make no mistake on my intent to say something under certain conditions. My mistake is on the truth-condition for my expression. If I say "snake" in the presence of rope, my failure is to say something that is false, i.e. where "snake" is true iff snake (not rope or cable, etc.).[5] A speaker's intention is incorrigibly fulfilled because that speaker cannot mistake the meaning he takes his words to express. If a speaker's meaning intention precludes his being mistaken on that meaning intention, then meaning intentions cannot be norm-relative. Even if a speaker applies the word "snake" to ropes, that speaker does not fail his intent to apply "snake" only to snakes:

> "Even if a rope rather than a snake is present, one's intention to say something with certain truth-conditions (something which is true if and only if there is a snake there) is an intention that is impeccably met in these circumstances. The fact that there is a rope and not a snake, which is present in the vicinity, does not affect in the slightest the aptness of that intention about meaning" (11).

If one misspeaks and says "snape" in the presence of a snake or misperceives and says "snake" in the presence of rope, there is no mistake on that speaker's intent to mean snake by his words. Saying "snake" in the presence of rope is a mistake on the truth-condition, "snake" iff snake. Such mistakes are not uniquely semantic and thus are "beside the point as far as meaning

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[5] Assertability conditions, like truth-conditions, can also make sense of mistakes and would be adequate here (Bilgrami 10).

intentions are concerned" (12). Application mistakes are epistemic, not semantic. The relevant

normativity is relevant, but not intrinsic to meaning.

Though intentions (1) and (2) both look promising in that (1) is normative (norm-relative)

and (2) is semantic, neither is both normative and uniquely semantic. Meaning intentions must be

of the kind in (2) according to Bilgrami: "The intention relevant to meaning is best formulated by

saying that a speaker intends with an (assertoric) utterance to say *something* which has particular

truth conditions" (29). But such intentions could only be a degenerate or limiting case of

normativity in that they cannot be mistaken. If I say "I am going towndown", I still intend to

mean something with determinate truth-conditions, i.e. that I am going downtown if and only if I

am going downtown (30). I could be wrong about what the truth-conditions are or whether they

are satisfied, but there is no sense to be made of being mistaken about my intending whatever

meaning I do, even if the truth-conditions are idiosyncratic ("snape" iff snake) or not satisfied

(""snake"" iff snake" is false if there is in fact a rope and not a snake).

Bilgrami does not argue that "meaning is not normative in any interesting sense," (33)

only that meaning intentions are not a source of this normativity: "meaning is not normative

because, despite its intimate link with intention, it does not inherit the normativity that *intentions*

possess . . . the normativity that intentions possess *lapse* when intentions target meanings" (33).

Meaning could be normative in another sense, but meaning intentions are not normative.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion demonstrated that Kripke relied upon the construal of semantic

normativity as action-guiding normativity to defend a skepticism about meaning facts. I

explained how this construal of normativity was criticized by Hattiangadi and Bilgrami.

Hattiangadi claimed that meaning is normative insofar as there exist correctness conditions for

words and truth-conditions for sentences. Hattiangadi argued that this norm-relativity is sufficient for meaning. She further argued that we could not have semantic obligations because such obligations could be neither categorically prescriptive nor uniquely semantic. Hattiangadi argued (and Miller agreed) that semantic obligations could only be hypothetically prescriptive and that the action-guidingness relevant to meaning follows not from meaning itself but from moral, epistemic, prudential and other considerations. Bilgrami considered whether a speaker's intention to mean something by his words could impart the normativity of meaning, but found that such meaning intentions fail to even be norm-relative. Whatever normativity is relevant to meaning is only relative, not intrinsic to meaning.

In what follows I reject Hattiangadi and Bilgrami's arguments against semantic normativity. Chapter 2 considers some arguments for semantic normativity as action-guiding normativity and focuses on rebutting Hattiangadi's arguments against the notion of semantic obligation. I argue that semantic normativity follows from hypothetical obligations that are nonetheless action-guiding. Chapter 3 argues that meaning intentions are normative in a way Bilgrami fails to realize.

Normativity and Action-Guidingness

This chapter argues that the normativity of meaning follows from semantic norms or obligations that are hypothetical, but action-guiding for speakers. I explain that the paradigmatic examples of categorical moral obligations are strictly-speaking more like 'thick' or 'limit' hypotheticals and draw a parallel with semantic obligations. I understand semantic hypotheticals to be prescriptive in the sense that a speaker's having a reason to say some things and not others is relatively independent of that speaker's desires. This is to say that such norms are action-guiding. I rebut Hattiangadi's arguments outlined in Chapter 1 and thereafter consider Daniel Whiting's claim that the normativity of meaning follows from *prima facie* semantic obligations and norms in force. I defend these arguments from Hattiangadi and Miller.

I understand a norm to be (intrinsically) action-guiding if it prescribes a course of action by providing a justifying reason to pursue that course of action, relatively independent of one's desires.[6] A norm is action-guiding in the sense that its reason-giving force is largely independent of an agent's possessing certain antecedent desires.[7] Such a norm is action-guiding not because of its form but because of its prescriptive force for a relevant domain. Whether one says "Keep your promises!" or "If you are a moral agent, then keep your promises!" is irrelevant to the

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[6] I say "justifying reason" and not "motivating reason" because I do not assume that an action-guiding norm must successfully motivate me in order for that norm to be action-guiding. I make the more modest claim that an action-guiding norm provides a justifying reason to do something. I do not depend on reasons as motivating and so need not speak of motivational internalism/externalism. Moreover, I do not assume reason internalism or externalism is true. For a thorough discussion of justifying/motivating reasons and an argument for reason externalism, see David Brink, *Moral Realism And the Foundations of Ethics*. For a more recent argument for reason internalism, see Alan Goldman, "Reason Internalism."

[7] Not all norms are in fact action-guiding. If relevant conditions are not met, a norm ceases to be action-guiding. For example, take "If P, then do A" to be a conditional that expresses a norm. If P is not the case, then one has no (justificatory) reason to do A, though that conditional *would* give such a reason if the antecedent *were* true. That conditional would in-principle be action-guiding, but this potential is not actualized in this case.

prescriptive force they share. Both expressions share the prescription "Keep your promises!" regardless of how it is uttered—whether hypothetically or categorically. The question of whether meaning is normative focuses not on the form of semantic judgments, but on the prescriptive force that semantic judgments carry. Hattiangadi argues that semantic norms are analogous to means-end hypotheticals. I argue that semantic norms are hypothetical, but in a quite different way than the typical examples of means-end hypotheticals.

Semantic Obligations as Limit Hypotheticals

I argue that semantic normativity is constituted by semantic norms that are both hypothetical and action-guiding in virtue of the commands they express. I argue that the paradigmatic cases of semantic norms like "If you are a speaker, then say what you mean and mean what you say" are action-guiding in virtue of the fact that being a speaker is not a matter of desire. Hattiangadi mistakenly assumes that semantic hypotheticals are analogous to means-end hypotheticals like "If you want to stay dry, then bring your umbrella." I tease apart two kinds of hypotheticals: The first I call 'thick' or 'limit' hypotheticals, exemplified by basic moral and semantic obligations; the second are 'thin' or means-end hypotheticals that are contingent on agent desires or ends, e.g. "If you want to ride a bicycle, then you should wear a helmet." I argue that, when teased apart, it is clear that we have semantic obligations that oblige beings like us.

There is an interesting parallel between semantic obligations and moral obligations. It is that like semantic obligations, moral obligations are not strictly speaking just categorical. The apparent categorical nature of the judgment "Keep your promises!" is misleading. The standard view of morality takes human beings with a certain sophisticated level of rationality as the subject of moral judgments. As such, "Keep your promises!" carries the implicit clause, "If you are a moral agent." When we say "Keep your promises!" there is no need to for the antecedent

"If you are a moral agent." The standard view of morality takes moral agents as the subject of moral judgments. Moral judgments apply to beings like us who possess a certain sophisticated level of agency and rationality. We say "Keep your promises!" without the qualification "If you are a moral agent" because moral agents are the only target of such judgments. Moral judgments are hypothetical, but nonetheless action-guiding for the relevant domain of rational beings.[8]

The distinction I capitalize on is not that categoricals and hypotheticals are different in form, but rather are contingent on different kinds of conditions. A proper understanding of categorical judgments reveals that though such judgments *prima facie* appear unrestricted, they are restricted to a certain domain of rational beings. This restriction is usually implicit, but it can be made explicit with a conditional, where this conditional is "For any x, if x is a rational being, then x ought to A." The hypotheticals I am concerned with take the form "If P, then S ought to A!" where 'S' is an agent, 'A' is an action, and 'P' is the set of conditions that must be met for S to have a justifying reason to do A, including some relevant desires and purposes that S has. If P is met, then S has a reason to do A. If P is not met, S has no reason to do A.[9] My central point focuses on the difference between the kinds of conditions expressed by obligations and those expressed in the paradigmatic examples of means-end hypotheticals that Hattiangadi capitalizes on. Ultimately, semantic prescriptions share the same normative dimension as moral prescriptions because they share conditions that are not contingent on agent desires.

Notice the difference between "If you are a human being, then keep your promises!" and "If you want to stay dry, then bring your umbrella!" The difference is that, though each is

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[8] I do not explain what constitutes being a rational being in any depth as this would digress too much from the primary insight I want to explain. Being a rational being might come with some desires, as I explain on p.26. My argument is perfectly compatible with a construal of some desires as constitutive for moral agents or speakers.
[9] Some suppose that a hypothetical is action-guiding if it takes the form 'S ought to (If P, then do A)'. I think this formulation is incoherent because commands are action-guiding, not hypotheticals. What one ought to do is an action, not a hypothetical. Hypotheticals are about what one ought to do under certain conditions, not what conditional ought to obtain. See Kant, *Groundwork* 4:415, p.28.

hypothetically prescriptive, they depend on conditions with dramatically different scope. The latter is a 'thin' hypothetical in the sense that it is contingent on my having a relevant desire. It prescribes a reason for me to do something only if the antecedent "If you want to stay dry" is met by my having the desire to stay dry. Consequently, having a reason to bring an umbrella hinges on whether I desire to stay dry or not: If I have a desire to stay dry, then I have a reason to bring an umbrella. If I have no desire to stay dry, I have no reason to bring an umbrella. The fact that I have no desire to stay dry discharges the command "Bring your umbrella!" The former judgment, "If you are a moral agent, then keep your promises!" is a kind of 'thick' or 'limit' hypothetical in that the condition expressed by the antecedent "If you are a moral agent" cannot be discharged by mere desire. The limitation is that being a human being and moral agent is, in an important and inescapable way, constitutive of what I am. I am a human being and moral agent regardless of whatever desire I have to be otherwise. I can desire to be a lion, but I could hardly become one. A moral limit hypothetical can be expressed this way:

M1   For any moral agent, do A!

M2   S is a moral agent.

M3   S, do A!

Hypotheticals of this kind are action-guiding because they issue commands (M3) that are not contingent on mere desires, but on being a certain kind of thing (M2). I argue semantic obligations are of an analogous kind.

Semantic obligations are limit hypotheticals in virtue of the fact that the reason-giving force of such obligations is contingent only on my being a speaker. I cannot escape being a speaker of language like I cannot escape being a moral agent and as such, obligations of this kind are action-guiding for me. The analog of the moral hypothetical for the semantic case is:

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S1 For any speaker, do A!

S2 S is a speaker.

S3 S, do A!

On Being a Speaker

Being a speaker is ambiguous in a way I now qualify. Either (1) being a speaker amounts

to the *performance* of a specific speech act, which is something I can choose not to do, or (2)

being a speaker amounts to being the kind of thing that has the *competence* to speak, i.e. being

human comes with the faculty of speaking or at the very least has acquired a language.[10] Let's

call the former the weak claim and the latter the strong claim.

The weak claim (1) is more like a hypothetical. The command expressed in "If you are

going to speak or are speaking, then be interpretable!" is not necessarily action-guiding for me. I

can choose not to speak or to stop speaking, so "Be interpretable!" need not be a command for

me. Having a reason to comply with the command "Be interpretable!" is contingent on having a

desire to speak and actually speaking on occasion. I can neglect whatever reason to do A in "If

you speak, then do A!" if I choose not to speak. I need not recognize "do A" as a reason *for me*. I

could certainly do A, but "do A!" is not categorical for me. It does not override whatever desires

I have. I have a reason to do A only if I have a desire to do A. "If you speak, then do A" is then a

'thin' hypothetical, like "If you want to stay dry, then bring your umbrella!", because the scope

of the condition "If you speak" is relatively narrow. Speaking on most occasions is something I

can easily avoid doing and I could hardly have semantic obligations if I do not speak on some

occasion. If speaking is not an end for me, I have no reason to be interpretable. Thus if being a

speaker is understood in the weak sense, semantic obligations are hypothetically prescriptive like

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[10] I distinguish competence from performance with respect to Noam Chomsky's distinction (*Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* 4).

the typical means-end examples of hypothetical imperatives, where the relevant conditions are that I desire to speak and do in fact speak on occasion. Only when those conditions are met, do I have a reason to do A, whatever A is.[11]

The strong claim (2) is more like a categorical imperative in that the command is categorically prescriptive for a relevant domain, i.e. "If you are a speaking being, then be interpretable!" The relevant domain is the set of all speakers of language. I am a speaker, so I am left with the command "Be interpretable!" My argument depends on this account of being a speaker and motivates this account in terms of primitive facts about speaking beings.

If moral obligations are hypothetically prescriptive in the way I have argued and if we grant (with Hattiangadi) that these cases are action-guiding, it follows that certain kinds of hypothetical imperatives are likewise action-guiding. The paradigmatic examples of categorical imperatives are actually limit hypotheticals wherein the antecedent is true in virtue of our being a kind of being. The hypothetical "If you are a moral agent, then don't murder!" expresses the command "Don't murder!" where this command is not contingent on my desires. Semantic obligations are hypothetical, but hypothetical in the same way.

Semantic obligations are relative to speakers like moral obligations are relative to moral agents. Speaking is a capacity that comes with being a human being and is something I come to

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[11] I do not accept this construal, but there is at least one promising avenue for accepting it and maintaining the thesis that meaning is normative: As a linguistic being, there are occasions when one must speak regardless of his desires. Speaking is sometimes unavoidable and in those conditions, one is subject to the general semantic norm of interpretability. In other words, one must speak on occasion and on that occasion, "Be interpretable!" is regulative. For example, if we grant that moral imperatives are categorical, then one instance of the general moral imperative "Don't murder!" might be "Don't shoot Peter!", where I am present, Peter is at gunpoint, and an armed thief is deliberating whether to kill Peter or not for witnessing a burglary. On this occasion, whether I speak importantly weighs on whether the thief elects to kill Tommy or not. Given the categorical moral imperative, I must say something. Moreover, I must say something that the thief understands if my utterance is to successfully dissuade the thief from shooting Tommy. The imperative to speak on this occasion does not hinge on my desire to keep Tommy alive or to speak at all, but on a general moral obligation. In this sense, meaning is normative in virtue of the fact that one is required to speak on some occasions whether one wants to or not, and in these cases, one must at minimum exercise some effort toward being interpretable.

exercise very early in my development.[12] Semantic obligations that target this capacity are

obligations for me. For example, consider the semantic norm "If you are a speaker, then say what

you mean and mean what you say." The fact that I am a speaker makes the antecedent true.

Given the command in the consequent, I have a necessary reason to say what I mean and mean

what I say.

I do not argue that moral and semantic obligations do not mention desires whatsoever,

but more modestly that such obligations do not mention the relatively narrow-scope agent desires

that means-end hypotheticals are contingent on. Limit hypotheticals are contingent on some

desires, but these desires have the same primitive status as facts that enable rational and

linguistic competence for beings like us. This can be clarified by simply revising the

hypotheticals I already distinguished to explicitly reference desires. We can restate "If you are a

moral agent, then keep your promises!" as "If you want to be a moral agent, then keep your

promises!" If I do not want to be a moral agent, I am still a moral agent, so "Keep your

promises!" is still a command for me. Consider also: "If you want to be rational, then say "125"

whenever asked for the sum of 68 + 57." I can desire to be irrational and say "5", but having the

desire to be rational or not is a quite different kind of desire than the desire to stay dry or ride a

bicycle. In this case, my desire to be irrational and say "5" hardly discharges the fact that I am

rational. I say "5" to be irrational, but I am still am rationally competent, even if I choose never

to exercise that competence. Likewise, "If you want to be a moral agent, then don't steal!" yields

the command "Don't steal!" whether I desire to be a moral agent or not. I can choose to be an

amoralist and ignore moral imperatives, but moral imperatives are still imperatives for me. I at

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[12] Steven Pinker claims that "people know how to talk in more or less the sense that spiders know how to spin webs" (18).

least minimally recognize moral imperatives as imperatives at all. The semantic imperatives that I focus on share the same kind of reason-giving force.

Particular semantic obligations are not parasitic on non-semantic ones, but on uniquely semantic and super-prescriptive language rules like "Be interpretable!" A modest semantic obligation that governs the use of the word "red" is this: "If you have used 'red' to refer to red, keep using 'red' to refer to red." If I am a speaker, then I have reason to communicate in ways conducive to being understood.[13] Using my words consistently is one subsidiary commitment I adopt to satisfy this general end. If I refer to an object with a specific word, I continue to use that word in that way when speaking with someone unless I signal that I am changing meanings. If I use "not" to express negation when speaking to a person on an occasion, I adopt an implicit commitment to continue to use it that way while speaking on that occasion. This commitment does not collapse to moral, epistemic, prudential or other considerations, but derives from the language rule "Be interpretable!" The moral treatment of other persons is surely *relevant* to my accordance with particular semantic rules, but such accordance is not for moral reasons but for linguistic ones. I have a reason to accord with linguistic rules because language demands it, not because other persons do.

Semantic obligations are like moral obligations in virtue of the fact that the conditions they depend on are quite different than typical examples of hypothetical imperatives like "If you want dry feet, then wear boots." Wanting dry feet is a local and occasional condition, whereas being a speaker is a near-universal and persistent condition. Semantic norms depend on the much wider and more inclusive condition (for normally functional human beings) and as such, they cannot be easily discharged and oblige us. This picture of inclusiveness grants the intuition from Chapter 1 that moral obligations trump semantic obligations. Moral obligations are more widely

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[13] See *The Essential Davidson*, p.250.

inclusive than semantic obligations in that being a moral agent is more fundamental than being a speaker. Some moral agents are not speakers and being a speaker is relatively avoidable compared to being a moral agent. Being a human being with moral and rational sensibilities is a more easily satisfied condition than being a speaker because I am a human being and moral agent before I am a speaker. Thus, the intuition that saving my roommate from an axe-murderer supersedes using words appropriately is one that derives from the kinds of conditions relevant to those obligations. In this case, the moral trumps the semantic, but the semantic obligation is still a *prima facie* obligation even if it folds to other obligations.

The upshot of the preceding argument is that being a speaker is like being a moral agent in that it is a nearly equally basic fact about the kind of thing I am. In conjunction with this fact about me, the rules that constitute language are reason-giving for me. I ought to comply with them because I am a linguistic being. Simply put, if I am a speaker, then I have semantic obligations.

I now turn to Daniel Whiting's argument for semantic normativity as imparted by norms 'in force' and *prima facie* obligations.

Norm-Relativity Revisited

In "The Normativity of Meaning Defended," Daniel Whiting concedes to Hattiangadi and Miller that semantic normativity is partly constituted by the platitude that meaning is norm-relative (that words have correctness conditions and sentences have truth-conditions) but argues that meaning is also normative in the more interesting and stronger sense that it is action-guiding. Whiting argues that the normativity of meaning derives from the fact that the meaning of an expression either is or implies "a statement about what we ought (not) to or may (not) do with

that expression" (134). In contrast, recall Hattiangadi's argument that meaning is merely norm-relative.

Hattiangadi's *Norm-Relativity* principle states:

Norm-Relativity: S means F by $t \rightarrow (a)(S$ applies x 'correctly' to $a) \leftrightarrow a$ is f

Norm-Relativity takes the meaning of an expression to be that expression's conditions for correct application, where "correct" indicates no action-guiding component. Statements of *Norm-Relativity* evaluate whether an expression meets a standard, not whether that standard ought to be met:

> ." . . to say that something is right does not imply a prescription; rather, it is to say that it meets a certain standard... To say that some use of a term is "correct" is thus merely to describe it in a certain way—in light of the norm or standard set by the meaning of the term" ("Is Meaning Normative?" 223-225).

Hattiangadi offers an example to support this thesis:

> ." . . think of theme park rides where there is a minimum height requirement for some of the more dangerous rides. This is a standard children must meet if they are to go on the ride. But however happy [a child] may be to meet the standard, whether or not she does is a straightforwardly non-normative, natural fact" (224).

No one would deny that "correct" is descriptive in the sense Hattiangadi claims; we have already taken this to be a platitude of meaning in general. The question is whether "correct" is prescriptive. Whiting forwards two arguments to this conclusion. He claims that meaning is a normative matter in virtue of *prima facie* obligations and norms 'in force'.

Prima Facie and Categorical Obligations

Whiting argues that semantic imperatives are not only hypothetical. The key difference between the paradigmatic examples of hypothetical imperatives and semantic imperatives is that semantic imperatives are categorically prescriptive. As I have argued, semantic imperatives are contingent on conditions that (when fulfilled) prescribe categorically. To demonstrate this point,

recall the familiar means-end hypothetical "If it is raining, then take your umbrella." If I desire to stay dry, then I should take my umbrella. Having a reason to take my umbrella is contingent on my having the relevant desire (to stay dry). If I do not have this desire, I do nothing wrong or incorrect when I do not take my umbrella. Now consider this semantic example: "Apply 'rich' only to rich persons." According to Whiting, I ought to apply "rich" only to rich persons even if I desire to do otherwise. The normative 'ought' follows from the very meaning of "rich." If take pleasure in misleading others and elect to apply "rich" to poor persons, I do something wrong because "rich" still means rich and ought to be applied as such:

> ." . . given what 'rich' means, that I ought to apply the term to a person only if she is rich does not seem contingent upon (say) my desire to speak truthfully. If that desire changes, and I apply the term to a poor person, it remains the case that I am not applying it as it should be applied, but rather incorrectly. Here, it seems one is properly entitled and it makes full sense to judge that, desire notwithstanding, I am using the expression wrongly. (Of course, I could excuse my behaviour by citing the relevant desire, but that is not the same as overriding the norm.)" (139).

In this way, the meaning of an expression implies a *prima facie* obligation to use that expression in certain ways, where "*prima facie*" means that such obligations are assumed to be in force and trumped only by other obligations.

Other obligations can override semantic obligations, but mere desires cannot. Whiting claims that "unlike the case where an ethical obligation overrides the semantic obligation to employ an expression in a given way, it does not appear that a mere desire can do so" (139). Whiting then can accommodate the familiar intuition that moral obligations trumps semantic ones. Semantic obligations are still obligations, even if they fold to more pressing ones. Semantic obligations cannot be overridden by mere desires and therefore are not hypothetically prescriptive like the paradigmatic examples considered.

Norms 'in force'

Whiting argues that "correct" has normative implications in *Norm-Relativity* and that

similarly, the height requirement in Hattiangadi's example is a norm 'in force'. He claims the

fact that the requirement is enforced by sanctions implies that going on the park ride is a

normative matter (135). Because the norm is 'in force', it immediately implies what is permitted

for a child in the park who wants to go on the ride. The norm is not 'in force' for the ride

operator or passersby who do not desire to go on the ride. This is because the norm has a clause

like the kind of moral and semantic hypotheticals already considered. In this case, the

hypothetical runs "If your child wants to go on the ride, then she should be taller than this sign"

where "she should be taller this sign" only has implications for your future actions if your child

has the relevant desire to go on the ride. The rule "If your child wants to go on the ride, then she

should be taller than this sign" is constitutive but not regulative.[14] First, it is constitutive in that it

defines an important aspect of the ride, i.e. that it is only safe for persons of such and such

height. It is not regulative in that you (as parent) have no reason to do anything given *only* the

rule and no consideration of whether your child is in the park and wants to go on the ride or not.

The important shift is that a norm becomes 'in force' or *regulative* when your child is in the park

and wants to go on the ride. Once these conditions are met, the rule regulates or tells you what to

do and there are consequences for doing otherwise. The height requirement is hypothetically

prescriptive in the sense that it is contingent on an agent's being under relevant circumstances,

but yields a categorical reason for action if those circumstances are met:

> " . . . given that the standard is in force, that the child does as a matter of fact meet it (or
> fails to) certainly has implications for whether or not she may (or should not) go on the
> ride. If she were to do so incorrectly, with the norm in place, sanctions or criticism of one
> form or another would be appropriate. Hence, the norm is action-guiding, and to say that

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[14] See Searle, *Speech Acts*, p.33-42.

there are correctness-conditions for a child's going on a ride is to say that going on that ride is a normative matter" (Whiting 136).

If your child plans to go on the ride, then there are consequences for what you and your child do at this point: If she meets the height standard, then you (or she) should not be reprimanded when she goes on the ride. If she does not meet the height standard and goes on the ride anyway, you (or she) should be reprimanded.

In the following, I motivate Hattiangadi and Miller's critiques of semantic obligations as constituted by *prima facie* obligations or obligations 'in force'. I reply to these arguments and thereafter situate Hannah Ginsborg's argument for a kind of primitive semantic normativity with regard to my own.

Against Prima Facie Obligations

In *Oughts and Thoughts*, Hattiangadi claims that semantic obligations could not be *prima facie* obligations because such obligations would be too easily overridable. A *prima facie* obligation to use words correctly would be overridden by the desire to lie or mislead. For example, "my obligation to use 'horse' correctly is overridden merely by my desire not to do so" (189). Therefore, Hattiangadi says, "it seems more plausible to explain the intuition that a speaker ought to use her words correctly by appeal to a hypothetical obligation contingent on her desire to speak truthfully" (190).

The difference between moral and semantic obligations according to Hattiangadi is that moral obligations are categorical and semantic obligations are hypothetical. Hattiangadi says that "even though we might think that an agent who lacks the desire to be rational still ought to act rationally, we do not think that a speaker who lacks the desire to speak meaningfully nevertheless ought to do so" (184). It would be absurd for us to have such obligations, because then "kindergarten teachers who frequently sing nonsense rhymes would violate categorical

semantic prescriptions" (184). Hattiangadi's intuition is that we do not think kindergarten teachers violate such prescriptions, so such prescriptions could not be categorical. The teacher has no desire to conform to semantic norms in singing the rhyme, so it is absurd to think she is obliged to do so regardless of her circumstances.

Against Norms 'in force'

Alexander Miller argues in "The Argument From Queerness" that Whiting helps himself to the claim that semantic normativity follows from the fact that expressions have correctness conditions, i.e. the very fact that semantic norms are 'in force' implies that meaning is normative (118). Miller claims that no such normativity follows from correctness. Like Hattiangadi, Miller says, "to say that something meets a particular standard isn't by itself to endorse (or condemn) that standard: what is said is purely descriptive or value-neutral" (116). Miller draws this point from Hattiangadi:

> "If for a rule to be 'in force' is for it to be accepted and enforced by sanctions, then even if [that rule] is in force it does not follow that there must be a further prescriptive rule governing behavior. The fact that [a rule] is accepted and enforced by sanctions does not make it the case that I ought to comply with [that rule], quite independently of any of my desires, such as the desire to avoid punishment." (*Oughts and Thoughts* 55-56)

And similarly in Hattiangadi, "Some more thoughts":

> "[Whiting makes] the question-begging assumption that correctness conditions must be specified in normative terms. Yet, the relevant standard need not specify conditions under which a child may or may not ride. In contrast, suppose that the standard in force at the fairground is this:
>
> S2 : Ride X is safe for S if and only if S is more than one meter tall.[15]
>
> From S2 and the fact that Vikram is more than one meter tall, it only follows that ride X is safe for Vikram, not that he may ride, nor that he ought to. The fact that Vikram meets this safety standard does not imply anything about what he ought (not) or may (not) do.

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[15] Notice that this is not quite the park rule--the park rule is a prescription or command, i.e. "No one under one meter is allowed to ride," where Hattiangadi's rule merely states the standard. This discrepancy is worth pointing out, though I do not capitalize on it here.

Hence, the mere fact that something meets a standard does not in itself imply anything normative" ("Some more thoughts" 56).

As Miller notes, Hattiangadi and Whiting are left at a question-begging stand-off over the normativity of principles like S2.[16] Hattiangadi insists "safe" isn't normative for S2 and Whiting would insist otherwise. Whiting would surely claim that "safe" is normative because it implies whether S should go on the ride or not, given that he does in fact want to go on the ride. If S wants to go on the ride, then the rule dictates whether he is permitted or not permitted to do so. Miller expands on Hattiangadi's point and draws a *reductio ad absurdum* against the notion of a norm 'in force' as imparting strong normativity.

Miller draws an absurd version of Hattiangadi's park ride example to argue that a norm's being 'in force' does not impart normativity to that norm:

> "We can bring this out by thinking of a bizarre fairground in which children are allowed to go on the rides so long as they have eaten cornflakes for breakfast on at least one Tuesday in the preceding year. So at the bizarre fairground we have:
>
> > (N*) Ax (x is the correct height to go on a fairground ride iff x has eaten cornflakes for breakfast on a Tuesday sometime in the past year)[17]
>
> Suppose that Annabelle has eaten cornflakes on a Tuesday in the past year but that Rosa has not. Does it follow that Rosa ought not to go on a ride and that Annabelle may go on a ride? Clearly not: it would be crazy to ban Rosa from the rides simply on the grounds that she has not had cornflakes for breakfast on some Tuesday in the past year and equally crazy to allow Annabelle on the rides simply because she has had cornflakes for breakfast on some such Tuesday" (118).

The fact that (N*) is in place is perfectly non-normative. Principle (N*) could only be normative if it expressed a norm that is 'deemed appropriate' or ought to be subscribed to. The fact that (N*) is in place (is 'appropriate') and the fact that Rosa goes on the ride together do not entail

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[16] See Miller (2010), p.115, footnote 14.
[17] Miller's formulation mixes height and cornflakes. More simply, (N*) states "x is permitted to ride iff x has eaten cornflakes."

that she ought to be criticized, but that those who subscribe to (N*) would deem such criticism appropriate (Miller 119).

In what follows, I counter Hattiangadi and Miller's critiques. First, I argue that *prima facie* obligations are not easily overridable as Hattiangadi assumes. Second, I argue the fact that a semantic norm is 'in force' does in fact confer normativity to that norm.

Prima Facie Obligations are not Easily Overridden

Hattiangadi's first argument against semantic obligations as *prima facie* obligations fundamentally misunderstands Whiting. She argues that *prima facie* semantic obligations would be easily overridable because they collapse to mere desires, but it is clear that Whiting does not take such obligations as easily overridable. He claims that obligations are constituted by categorical reasons that cannot be overridden by agent desires. A *prima facie* obligation is (minimally) an obligation that is not easily overridable. A *prima facie* obligation is an obligation that holds unless there is another obligation that trumps it. Semantic obligations are *prima facie* obligations in the sense that they are only trumped by other obligations, such as a putative moral obligation to preserve my roommate's life from an axe-murderer.[18]

Hattiangadi's second argument re-states the familiar claim that semantic reasons are only hypothetical. Toward this point, Hattiangadi draws a *reductio ad absurdum* in the kindergarten example that ultimately falls flat. I have argued that speakers should speak meaningfully even if they have no desire to do so. If you are a speaker, then speak meaningfully, i.e. "Be interpretable!" The fact that we do not reprimand kindergarten teachers for singing nonsense rhymes *does not* compromise the fact that we have semantic obligations. Hattiangadi's argument is a straw argument because she focuses on norms that are not in force in the kindergarten case.

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[18] Likewise, weak moral obligations might be trumped by semantic obligations, e.g. rules of etiquette are relatively trivial.

Semantic obligations do not demand that kindergarten teachers always speak the truth or use words in purely descriptive ways because these are not rules that govern the game that the teacher and students play. We do many queer things in language—we sometimes speak nonsense and say things with idiosyncratic or indeterminate truth-conditions. In the classroom, we say fantastical things and play nonsensical games with children. For example, one says "spaceship" in the presence of a pillow fort. But despite the appearance of semantic chaos, no one violates a semantic obligation. The teacher and students still abide by the general language rule "Be interpretable!" We understand perfectly what is meant by "spaceship" even if the truth-condition is idiosyncratic, i.e. "Say "spaceship" iff pillow fort." The fact that we have semantic obligations is perfectly compatible with the fact that we sing nonsense rhymes and play nonsense games.

Hannah Ginsborg takes a promising approach to accounting for the action-guidingness of obligations like "Be interpretable!" by supposing that this action-guidingness is antecedent or more primitive than the explicit standards that express it.

Primitive Normativity

Hannah Ginsborg argues in her review of Hattiangadi's *Oughts and Thoughts* that Hattiangadi neglects to consider one approach available to the normativist, namely that "facts about meaning are, at least in part, constituted by facts about correct use, or relatedly, that the thought of an expression's having a correct use is prior to the thought of its having a meaning" ("Oughts and Thoughts" 1183). Ginsborg claims the notion of 'correctness' assumes that standards are weighed against one another in terms of relevant background assumptions:

> "To say that an instance of behaviour is correct would seem to imply that it conforms to a standard, and our attributions of correctness seem to depend on our measuring the behaviour against one standard rather than another, When you add vermouth to the gin, or stir the eggs in the pan, or play an E-flat major triad over F and B in the bass, what you do may be correct, but it is not correct *tout court*. It is correct only on the assumption that you are mixing a martini, making scrambled eggs, or voicing a G7alt upper structure, and

not on the assumption that you are, say, trying to mix a gin fizz, make an omelette, or voice a root position F7 with a flattened ninth. Our assumption about what you are doing, or intending to do, sets the standard against which your behaviour qualifies, or does not qualify, as correct" (1183).

There is an essential non-descriptive element that seems to depend on the prior assumption of an applicable standard (1184).

Ginsborg deflates Miller's distinction between 'appropriate' and 'deemed appropriate' by claiming that a standard of appropriateness is coherent only in terms of an antecedent account of what warrants that standard of appropriateness. Therefore, 'appropriateness' is parasitic on 'deemed appropriate'. If appropriateness makes necessary reference to agent intentions, aims, or goals, then standards are normative and not merely norm-relative. This can be brought out in an example: Imagine that you are making an omelette. The difference between an omelette and a scramble amounts to whether you stir the eggs or not. Whether you stir the eggs depends on whether you *plan* or *intend* to make one or the other. If you want to make an omelette, then don't stir the eggs. In this way, making an omelette entails a modest plan for future action. Making an omelette is a trivial kind of plan, but it still obliges me if I plan to do it as the recipe calls for. Planning and intending involve reasons to do things in future and as such are action-guiding and normative.[19]

Ginsborg's alternative approach to a kind of antecedent correctness supposes a 'primitive correctness' or 'correctness simpliciter' might fix the correctness conditions for expressions. Primitive correctness or correctness simpliciter could fix the correctness of responses without reference to further antecedently acknowledged rules for correctness (1184). Ginsborg borrows an example from Wittgenstein to demonstrate this. Ginsborg says that Wittgenstein's example in *Investigations* §185 shows there is a kind of primitive correctness for how the act of pointing

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[19] I elaborate on normative notions of planning, intending, and warrant in response to Bilgrami in Chapter 3.

with the hand is to be understood. We follow one's point by imagining a line extending from elbow to fingertip and beyond (and not vice versa from fingertip to elbow, behind our pointer). When Frank extends his arm and finger toward an open doorway, I understand him to say something about that doorway—whether he says "The door is open" or "It's nice out." Either way, the relevant object of his action is beyond his finger, not behind his elbow. Understanding Frank's pointing depends on no explicit rule, but on an antecedent standard of correctness based in basic facts about the way we are configured and our membership in a community with certain customs and practices. Similarly, when Frank shows a red paint card to the clerk at the hardware store, the clerk knows to fetch red paint. Even if Frank hands the clerk a red rose, the clerk knows what to do—he matches the color and mixes the appropriate paint. The clerk looks to no explicit rule set for possible objects and subsequent paint mix responses.

Ginsborg's first case for primitive normativity is not promising because it does not fix any action-guidingness and thus no real normativity. The examples that Ginsborg offers do not constitute real obligations. Ginsborg's examples are much like the paradigmatic examples of hypothetical imperatives that Hattiangadi and Miller forward in support of norm-relativity. The antecedents that Ginsborg mentions, "If you are making an omelette" and "If you are making a martini", are same in kind as "If you want to go on the park ride" and "If you want to stay dry." As Hattiangadi, Miller, and I agree, such imperatives do not oblige us in any substantial way that does not depend on agent desires. Whether I actually want to make an omelette or go on a park ride govern whatever reasons for action follow the antecedents mentioned. If I feel like having an omelette rather a scramble, there is nothing *wrong* or *incorrect* in my failure to stir the eggs even if I originally intended to make a scramble. I make no substantial commitment to making a scramble. If semantic obligations are like these examples, then they are hardly obligations at all.

Only the frailest normativity follows from such cases and thus will not suffice to grant normativity to meaning.

Ginsborg's second case looks promising and shares an affinity with the kind of normativity I have been concerned with. This approach construes obligations in terms of antecedent facts about correct use. The correctness of understanding a pointing hand in one way rather than another is more primitive than any explicitly acknowledged standard of correctness. So though there is no determinate rule for reading a pointing hand, there is a primitive fact that accounts for the content of such a rule. Thereby, there is a basic fact about how interpretation ought to proceed that makes the activity of reading that gesture a normative matter.[20] I have argued similarly that normativity follows from obligations that depend only on being a certain kind of being. I am a moral agent and a speaker, so obligations that are only contingent on these facts are action-guiding for me.

Constitutive and Regulative Rules

Hattiangadi and Miller capitalize on Whiting's failure to distinguish between constitutive and regulative rules. Whiting assumes that all constitutive rules are regulative or 'in force', but it is clear that this is not true. Most constitutive rules are regulative for a relatively small population. The height rule is only regulative or enforced for people in a specific park who want to go on a specific ride. Similarly, chess rules are only regulative for chess players. Park ride and chess rules do not oblige persons who have no interest in riding roller coasters or playing chess games. Such rules oblige only persons with relevant desires under relevant circumstances. Hattiangadi and Miller are right in the intuition that these rules are not binding for *persons in*

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[20] Ginsborg ultimately admits this normativity is only norm-relativity in her subsequent publication on the topic. See Ginsborg (2011): "there is nothing more to the idea of a rule than that of a description which your behavior in a given instance might or might not satisfy . . . Meaning stands in a normative relation to use not because your meaning something by a term now creates a commitment with respect to future use, but because it makes it intelligible to characterize your uses of the term as correct or incorrect" ("Primitive normativity" 243-244).

general, but are wrong to assume that they are not binding in the more narrow sense that they bind park riders and chess players. This point is elucidated by carefully considering how rules are binding for such persons.

Being a speaker is in an important way like being a chess player. When you want to play chess, you accept a set of rules that constitute the game. These rules dictate how the game is to proceed. The game pieces are placed in a particular fashion at the outset, different pieces are permitted to move in specific ways, there are conditions for winning and losing, and so on. When we play chess, we accept that these rules cannot be revised for the duration of the game. Thereby I cannot in the course of the game decide that the king can move more than one space, no matter how much I desire to win. If I do so, you are right to reprimand me, accuse me of cheating, etc. In this way, the rules that constitute the game become *regulative* when playing it. The rules now determine what actions are permitted for the duration of the game. When not playing, we could agree to a deviant king rule, but when playing, this is not an option. Language rules are regulative for speakers like chess rules are regulative for chess players, though there is an important disanalogy.

Chess rules are only action-guiding for chess players, and thus do not have the action-guiding scope that moral and semantic reasons do. I choose to be a chess player, but I do *not* choose to be a person or a speaker. Chess rules only oblige chess players and being a chess player is a kind of trivial decision, so chess rules are obliging only in the most trivial way. There is nothing deeply irrational in breaking the rules of chess, but there is in breaking moral and semantic rules. I break no substantial obligations if I choose to ignore the rules of chess. On the other hand, I do break a substantial obligation if I choose to ignore moral and semantic rules. This is because speakerhood comes with some regulations that govern speaker behavior. Being a

40

speaker is more like being a person than being a chess player. Semantic rules are regulative because being a speaker is something quite independent of agent desires in the narrow sense that Hattiangadi assumes.

My construal of semantic normativity strikes a middling path in the stand-off between Hattiangadi and Whiting. Hattiangadi, Miller, and Whiting agree that categorical prescriptivity constitutes real normativity.[21] I argue that semantic obligations are hypothetical, yet action-guiding for a certain domain of rational beings. Semantic obligations are hypothetical, but this hypothetical depends on conditions that cannot be discharged for members of the relevant domain. We have semantic obligations because such obligations depend only on bedrock facts that constitute the kind of thing we are. It is in virtue of these obligations that meaning is normative.

Conclusion

This chapter sketched out the normativity of meaning as imparted by semantic norms and rebutted Hattiangadi and Miller's arguments against the existence of such norms. I found that the paradigmatic examples of moral and semantic obligations are hypothetically prescriptive in the sense that their reason-giving force is contingent on some wide conditions about the domain they target. I argued that moral and semantic 'limit' hypotheticals are dramatically different in scope that the typical examples of means-end hypotheticals like "If you want to ride a bicycle, then wear your helmet!" Hattiangadi and Miller neglect this distinction and assume that semantic rules are like means-end hypotheticals. Given this assumption, it is no surprise that Hattiangadi and Miller conclude that meaning is not normative. The paradigmatic examples of the means-end hypotheticals constitute rules for staying dry, playing chess, and the like, whereas limit

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[21] Even Bilgrami agrees that the 'interesting' kind of normativity is categorical, not hypothetical, and that such categorical prescriptivity would impart normativity for meaning intentions. See Bilgrami, p.52.

hypotheticals constitute moral and semantic rules. The action-guidingness of the latter is contingent on relatively narrow conditions about a particular agent's desires and circumstances. The action-guidingness of the former is contingent on conditions that are fulfilled by basic constitutive facts about beings like us. These hypotheticals share the same form, but not the same scope.

The chapter to follow returns to Bilgrami's argument that meaning intentions fail to be normative. I clarify Bilgrami's argument by explaining how real intentions are normative in virtue of the commitments they entail. I argue that meaning intentions are still normative in that they are themselves a kind of commitment.

CHAPTER 3

Intentions and Interpretation

This chapter rebuts Akeel Bilgrami's claim that meaning intentions fail to be normative in any interesting sense. I first explain how real intentions for Bilgrami are normative in virtue of the commitments they entail and address an ambiguity in Bilgrami's degenerate meaning intention. I specify the relevant intention to be degenerate in that it *prima facie* comes with no commitments but argue that this intention is still normative in another more basic sense. I argue that semantic intentions are normative because a speaker's intention to mean something by his words is itself a normative state. I further argue that a speaker's meaning intention entails (minimally) a plan to say something that is interpretable to others.

Real Intentions and Commitments

In "Intentionality and Norms," Bilgrami claims that intentions *proper* are normative in virtue of the fact that they come with commitments that require living up to. Bilgrami states that "there is an ineliminable reference to commitments in the analysis of intentional states" (141). He says that an intention state is therefore itself a kind of "internal ought or commitment, as distinct from a disposition" (148). Bilgrami construes the more 'crucial normative element' of a commitment in terms of action-guidingness, as entailing some future actions that live up to that commitment:

> "To have a commitment, one *must* be prepared to have certain reactive attitudes, minimally to be self-critical or to be accepting of criticism from another, if one fails to live up to the commitment or if one lacks the disposition to do what it takes to live up to it; and one must be prepared to do better by way to trying to live up to it or cultivating the disposition to live up to it" ("Intentionality and Norms" 138).

A commitment is normative in virtue of the analytic fact, according to Bilgrami, that having a commitment requires one to exercise a second-order state of 'preparedness' to cultivate and defend a disposition to fulfill a commitment by being self-critical and accepting the criticism of others. To have a commitment is to respect, abide by, or respect a reason *to do somethin*g in the future, so having a commitment is essentially action-guiding. If I have a commitment to give to charity, then I should adopt a disposition to do so and maintain that disposition by meeting criticism from myself and others (138). Having a commitment is then equivalent to having an obligation in that each amount to a reason to do something in the future, where cultivating a disposition is one such example. The normative element of a commitment is brought out "by stressing the idea of criticism of failures" (138), presumably as opposed to failures themselves. The important normative component then is not the norm-relative platitude that I (in-principle or in-practice) can or do in fact fail a commitment, but the fact that I must at the second-order be critical of and regulate my behavior in order to do *right* by that commitment. This, Bilgrami explains, is what Kripke takes as the central problem for Wittgenstein and in particular, for a dispositionalist response to the skeptic:

> "the important problem for Wittgenstein is that my present mental state does not determine what I *ought* to do in the future . . . The fundamental problem is . . . whether my actual dispositions are "right" or not, is there anything that mandates what they *ought* to be" ("Intentionality and Norms" 125).

The problem with the dispositionalist solution to the skeptical challenge is that it offers a *descriptive* answer to a *normative* problem. Bilgrami's argument is that intentional states share this same unique normative character. Even if I have a first-order disposition to always fulfill a commitment, I can always fail to do right by that commitment by failing to actively maintain the relevant disposition to fulfill it, by ignoring criticism, being lazy, and so on. So even if I always in fact do accord with what a commitment demands of me, I still should exercise a preparedness

to ask, for example, "Am I doing it right?" or "Am I doing what is best to meet my commitment?" Bilgrami cashes out this normative character for intentional states by explaining the source of this normativity and by pressing this character, as distinct from the strictly descriptive character of a disposition, against Davidson.

Having Intentionality and Not Being a Maple Tree

Bilgrami claims that the normative character of intentions is unique to a certain domain of rational beings. His point is that Donald Davidson's principle of 'necessary' charity boils down to the intuition that intentional states are specific to human beings with a sophisticated level of rationality. Bilgrami takes this as the valuable take from Davidson's principle of 'necessary' charity:

> "If we formulate the principle of necessary charity as follows, it does not deserve the notoriety it has fetched: we cannot be creatures who are massively irrational without ceasing to be thought of as creatures with a sophisticated level of intentionality. If this principle were not true, one would be hard put to say why the maple tree in front of my window does not have all the sophisticated form of intentionality that I have, hard put to say why it does not have all of this intentionality but simply sits stationary in the park outside because it is massively irrational, massively weak-willed, say. Being weak-willed, it lacks all the dispositions that would allow it to live up to all these commitments that comprise its intentionality. We could not rule out this absurd hypothesis that the tree is an intentional creature without admitting to the minimal claim of his principle. The impossibility of massive irrationality that the principle of necessary charity demands is what allows us to rule out the hypothesis we find absurd. The principle, therefore, has a point" (147-148).

Though Bilgrami thinks Davidson ends up with the wrong principle, Davidson does realize the important point that being a rational being comes with a unique competence for having sophisticated intentional states. It is this normative competence—for having goals, commitments, plans, and willing—that comprises our intentionality, which Bilgrami takes to be something 'quite particular' to human beings, and not to maples trees, for instance: "in specifying intentional states we are specifying elements of a sort of *goal directedness* that is quite particular

to human beings" (151). The attribution of intentional (normative) states is only relevant to beings with sophisticated rationality. A maple tree can surely be (causally) *disposed* to shed its leaves in Fall, but it does not *regulate* its disposition to do so. In contrast, if I know that I have a disposition to eat donuts, drink soda, and otherwise make poor nutritional choices, I can mitigate the ill-effects of this by not purchasing or avoid being around those foods. In this way, I choose to do better by abiding a general commitment to be healthy. According to Bilgrami, Davidson does not have access to the vocabulary to make this kind of distinction and as such, Davidson would not be able to, for instance, adequately distinguish between a maple tree, a thing with only dispositions, and Bilgrami, a thing with the rational competence to regulate those dispositions.

The Kripke Problem

Bilgrami claims that Davidson's mistake is to draw the principle of charity as defining intentional states rather than *beings with intentional states* ("Intentionality and Norms" 148). Bilgrami takes this to lead Davidson to the subsequent flawed position that invariably runs together a descriptive question with a normative one:

Q1   "Why did someone do what she did?"

Q2   "Did her doing it live up to her commitment?" (148)

Following Kripke, Bilgrami thinks that (Q2) requires a quite different, normative kind of answer. To the contrary, Bilgrami understands Davidson to claim that "our very idea of an intentional state is the idea of a state where the dispositional element and the normative element tend to converge," so Davidson sees no reason to distinguish between the two: "The idea of an intentional state being an internal ought or commitment, as distinct from a disposition, therefore never so much occurs to [Davidson]" (148). Davidson can only specify a disposition for (Q1) and (Q2) and thereby misses the normative scope of (Q2). As Kripke argued and Bilgrami

46

expanded on, the very concept of a disposition precludes an adequate answer to a question like (Q2) since a disposition cannot specify why something counts as doing right or wrong by a commitment. A second-order disposition doesn't get any further since the problem runs "all the way up," much as Kripke argues.

If an intentional state of 'preparedness' amounts to a second-order disposition, that intentional state is likewise inadequate to (Q2). The skeptical challenge can be run against any second-order disposition, any third-order disposition, and so on. If an intention is a second-order disposition to regulate first-order dispositions, that disposition still only *describes* what one is disposed to do and says nothing about what one *ought* to do at any point. A third-order disposition can be specified to justify that second-order disposition, but the challenge can be run again at third level and upward *ad infinitum*.

Norm-Relativity is Relatively Uninteresting

In the concluding remarks of "Intentionality and Norms," Bilgrami retreats from his normativity charge against Davidson to defend the weaker claim that commitments are norm-relative. Bilgrami claims that because an intention consists in having some commitments and (unlike a disposition) we can always fail a commitment, we can speak of success and failure:

> " . . . there is in fact always enough failure on the part of such a subject to live up to his commitments, to see the distinction between disposition and commitment as having a deep theoretical point and place" (148).

> ."..it is always possible that we fail to live up to our commitments" (303 n26).

Both are descriptive claims and confer norm-relativity, not normativity proper. The first claim is about a subject's (in-practice) failures on occasion and the second claim is about the very possibility (in-principle) of such failure. It is underwhelming that Bilgrami digresses to this point, given the normativity he builds for intentions in following Kripke.

Finally, Bilgrami (ironically) admits that 'preparedness' amounts to a second-order disposition: "our commitments cause us to try and live up to them" and "commitments are minimally defined in terms of second-order dispositions that we specify in a way that necessarily mentions those very commitments" (150). In this case, Bilgrami does no better than Davidson with respect to the skeptical challenge that can be run against any candidate answer to (Q2). Bilgrami does not (like Davidson) properly distinguish between commitments and dispositions if a commitment boils down to a second-order disposition. Bilgrami does qualify that commitments defined in terms of second-order dispositions are "after all specifications of forms of preparedness to do what is needed by way of living up to them," (150) but this ultimately waffles on the distinction between a disposition and a commitment. Bilgrami does not make clear the sense in which having a commitment can both be a second-order disposition and a uniquely normative state adequate to (Q2). He carries this unclarity into his argument against the normativity of meaning intentions.

In "Why Meaning Intentions are Degenerate," Bilgrami follows suit with the contemporary critics of semantic normativity and assumes that normativity (for any domain) amounts to norm-relativity. Bilgrami's familiar first and relatively uninteresting point is that a meaning intention cannot be norm-relative, i.e. a speaker cannot fail his intention to mean something by his words. A speaker's expression can be mistaken, but only on account of the non-semantic truth-conditions for that expression, not on the meaning that speaker takes his words to have. If a speaker means to say "Snake!" only in the presence of snakes, then even if there is a rope and he misperceives and says "Snake!", that speaker's mistake is with regard to the truth-condition ""Snake!" is true iff there is a snake," not his meaning intention. Even if a

speaker misspeaks and says "Snape!" when he sees a snake, he still meant to say "Snake!" In this respect, his meaning intention is incorrigible.

"More Like One Thing than Two"

Bilgrami's second and more interesting point is that the relevant meaning intention is degenerate because there can be no distinction between a speaker's intent to mean something by his utterances and his living up to that intention:

> "intentions regarding meanings are a degenerate species of intentions and the deepest reasons for this . . . have to do with the fact that meaning something is a rather unique kind of thing in that *intending* a meaning and *living up to* that intention are—to put it flamboyantly and perhaps a little perversely—more like one thing rather than two, and so failures are not really possible" (32).

This is a decidedly 'perverse' reference to Bilgrami's point that real intentions are normative and dispositions are not. Bilgrami wants (but fails) to argue that a meaning intention cannot be normative because 'intending' and 'living up to' both amount to a disposition and as such are "more like one thing rather than two." Specifically, 'intending a meaning' is a speaker's disposition to intend to mean something by his words, and 'living up to that intention' is a second-order disposition to have that meaning intention. Bilgrami neglects to explain why "living up to that intention" fails to be normative like real intentions but instead depends on an ambiguity in the meaning intention he targets. I charitably interpret Bilgrami's target intention and ultimately show this intention to be normative in a way that Bilgrami fails to recognize.

Which Meaning Intention is it?

The degenerate meaning intention that Bilgrami targets hides a temporal ambiguity. The intention, "I say "snake" with the intent to say something which is true iff there is a snake," can be read in at one of two ways:

1.   I intend that my current utterance "That is a snake" is true iff there is a snake.

2. I intend that my current and future utterances of "That is a snake" are true iff there

  is a snake.

Intention (2) is about having an intent to say something *now and in the future*, and intention (1)

is more narrowly about saying something *now*. Intention (2) involves some commitments and

intention (1) does not.

  Intention (2) entails one of two commitments; it commits me to follow one of two rules:

either (A) a rule regarding future utterances of "That is a snake", or more modestly, to (B) a rule

that requires that I use the words "That is a snake" with the very same intention (to say

something that is true iff there is a snake) in future cases. Simply put, (A) tells me when I should

utter "That is a snake" and (B) is a constancy rule that says continue to use those words with that

intention. Rule (B) directly conflicts with intentions construed as type (1) since such intentions

are construed only in terms of the present. A constancy rule for meaning intentions assumes that

such intentions can be analyzed in terms of past, present, and future usage. Intentions like (1) are

only about particular present meaning intentions. If intentions are (2B), then this is at least a

minimal step up from (1) in that we at least have a reason to be consistent in what we say with

certain intentions. Rule (A) is yet stronger in that it governs under what conditions I say "That is

a snake" where these conditions are not limited to having a certain intention, e.g. of saying "That

is a snake" only in the presence of snakes. If meaning intentions are like (2A), then for example,

one might adopt a commitment to say "That is a snake" iff in the presence of a snake that is

alive, poisonous, within one meter, etc. Such a commitment is one that I can fail at and as such,

is clearly norm-relative. Moreover, meaning intentions like (2) express a normative dimension

that can be clarified in the sense that such intentions involve warrant, planning, and goal-

directedness. Allan Gibbard makes this claim about the concept 'meaning'.

Allan Gibbard argues that the normativity of meaning is a kind of analytic truth because the concept 'meaning' is defined in normative terms ("Concepts of Concepts as Normative" 6). 'Meaning' is defined in terms of plans for the future or in terms of what actions are *warranted*. Kripke's primary insight, according to Gibbard, is the realization that the meaning of a word must be construed in terms of 'ought' or warrant (2). For example, "if I say that an action is admirable, I'm saying that admiring it is warranted. If I say that a claim is credible, I am saying that believing it is warranted" (2). Meaning is normative because the concept 'meaning' is tied to 'warrant', which in turn is defined in terms of justifying reasons for future action. Specifically, Gibbard says that the meaning of a word is constituted by the beliefs or sentences that one is warranted to accept in accordance with that meaning:

> "The meaning of a word in a person's language, then, is a matter of what sentences with that word the person ought to accept. And what sentences the person ought to accept is a matter of what sentences to accept if one is that person. Ought beliefs are something like plans for what to accept given the evidence and proclivities of that person" (3).

Gibbard says that 'ought beliefs' amount to plans and "epistemic ought beliefs—beliefs as to what one ought to believe—amount to plans for belief" (7). If the concept 'meaning' is normative, then "beliefs about meanings likewise amount to plans, along with restrictions on plans, restrictions on restrictions, and the like" (7).

Intention (2) is then explicitly normative in that having such an intention involves a basic plan for what I am warranted to say under certain conditions in the future. Both (2A) and (2B) involve a plan to say something in the future, whether that is to say something under certain conditions or to say the same thing with the same intention. An intention (2A) to say "That is a snake" only in the presence of a snake *now and in the future* cannot be degenerate because I can fail to do so. Thereby, intention (2A) is norm-relative. Moreover, intention (2A) is normative in that it requires that I exercise some effort to perform that speech act under those conditions, be

prepared to do so in the future, recognize failures, modify my behavior when I do fail and so on. Similarly, an intention (2B) to say "That is a snake" only with the same intention to say that is a snake restricts my plans for the future such that they, for example, do not include saying "That is a snake" with the intention to say something that is true iff some apples are green.

Intention (1) seems to come with no commitments, so the best we can do for Bilgrami is suppose that intention (1) is his target. If my intention to mean something by my words amounts to an intention like (1), then my intent to mean something *now* by a specific utterance does *not* commit me to any constancy of use *in the future*. That is, I do not commit to saying the same thing in the future when I have the same intention as I do now. For example, imagine that I currently say "Some apples are green" with the intention to say something which is true if and only if some apples are green. If I elect to express this apple intention in the future, I have no substantive commitment to say "Some apples are green" rather than "Barracudas live in the sea" to express that something that is true if and only if some apples are in fact green. If I desire to say "Barracudas live in the sea" to say something about apples and if a meaning intention amounts to that of (1), then I break no commitment in doing so. In this way, meaning intentions like (1) are degenerate in the sense that they cannot be failed and moreover do not prescribe even a minimal commitment for a speaker to be consistent with regard to his intention. In other words, intention (1) fails to be normative in any interesting sense for Bilgrami because it fails (at least *prima facie*) to come with a commitment.

I argue this meaning intention might nonetheless be normative in two other ways. The first focuses on a meaning intention as partly constituted by beliefs; the second focuses on a meaning intention as being a commitment or preparedness to say something. Beliefs and commitments are normative states according to Bilgrami, so both might impart normativity to a

52

meaning intention. I motivate each argument in the following and conclude by specifying the stronger of the two.

Intending is Believing

Having a meaning intention requires a speaker to have some beliefs that partly constitute that meaning intention. Beliefs are a kind of normative state according to Bilgrami (Gibbard and Davidson agree), so if some beliefs are contained by a meaning intention, that intention is normative. Formally speaking, we can call this argument 'A':

A1   A meaning intention is constituted by some beliefs.

A2   Having a belief is a normative state.

A3   Therefore, a meaning intention is normative.

Bilgrami accepts (A2). He explains in "Intentionality and Norms" that beliefs are internal "oughts":

> "to believe something, is to think that one ought to do or think various things, those things that are entailed by those desires and beliefs by the light of certain normative principles . . . It is not to be disposed to do or think those things, it is to think one ought to do and think them" (128).

Furthermore, a belief is defined in terms of "commitments to think various things and to do various things" (128). For example, Bilgrami says: "If I believe something, say, that there is a table in front of me, then I am committed to believing various other things, such as (to take just one of them) that there is something in front of me" (128). Gibbard makes a similar claim about meaning: "The meaning of a word, I'll say, is a matter of what beliefs to have as couched with that word" ("Concepts of Concepts as Normative" 3). I argue that we should accept (A1) because meaning intentions are partly constituted by semantic beliefs that one ought to accept as 'couched' that intention.

(A1) is true because a meaning intention is in part constituted by a speaker's having some beliefs relevant to that intention. For example, if I have the intention that my present utterance "That's a fox" is true iff it is the case that there is a fox, that intention is partly constituted by the (semantic) belief that "fox" means fox, that my expression will be understood by my audience when I utter it, and so on. Given (A1), having a belief is a normative activity because it requires some attention and effort on behalf of the agent to maintain it. Thereby, if having a meaning intention is constituted by some basic semantic beliefs, then normativity is imparted to that meaning intention (A3).

Being Prepared

The second argument I consider is that a speaker's having a meaning intention is itself a kind of commitment or *preparedness* to speak, even if that speaker does not speak on occasion. Formally then, let's call this argument 'B':

B1   To have a meaning intention is to have a commitment.

B2   A commitment is a normative state.

B3   Therefore, to have a meaning intention is a normative state.

I have made clear in the preceding discussion that Bilgrami construes a commitment as a normative state that entails being prepared to do some things in the future to live up to that commitment, such as cultivating a disposition. Bilgrami would then accept (B2).

We should accept (B1) on the basis that having a meaning intention is minimally defined in terms of a commitment or preparation to speak. A meaning intention is essentially a plan; one is poised to say something, even if one does not succeed in actually doing so. In this way, having a meaning intention requires some minimal effort on behalf of the speaker to maintain that plan, to make sure it goes right. Importantly, this normative state is perfectly compatible with the

minimal intention exhibited by intention (1), an intention that is only about a speaker's intent to mean something by his words *presently*: If I have the intention to presently say "That is a snake" is true only if there is a snake present, I have a plan to say "That is a snake" rather than "That is a shake" on the occasion that I do speak. My meaning intention is hypothetical in that if I *were* to speak, I *would* say "That is a snake" and not "That is a shake." Whether I actually speak or not comes *after* the relevant state of being prepared to do so. In this state, I commit to do something under certain conditions, regardless of what those conditions are. For example, if I intend to presently say "Barracudas live in the sea" is true iff some apples are blue, I still commit have a plan to say something with that truth-condition on occasion. If I get the truth-condition wrong (there are no blue apples) or fail to speak, I still had a plan to do something and lived up to this plan by maintaining it and carrying it out.[22] On the other hand, if I intend to say "Snake!" is true iff snake and subsequently lapse into akrasia, I fail to live up to that intention. The relevant failure is not that I say the wrong thing given that intention or given that there is in fact no snake (let's assume), but that I fail my plan to regulate my being disposed to accord with what I had the intent to say.

On (B1) and (B2) then, to have a meaning intention is a kind of normative, goal-directed state (B3). Consequently, a meaning intention is more like an intention proper than Bilgrami recognizes.

The Verdict

Argument 'A' looks promising, but (A2) is open to the objection that the relevant beliefs are not constitutive but only relevant to a particular meaning intention. I do not aim to justify the constitutive nature of such beliefs, but instead move to argument 'B', which suffers no such problem. Argument 'B' claims that a meaning intention is *itself* a commitment. Like Gibbard, I

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[22]Gibbard offers a recent defense of the claim that plans are normative. See *Meaning and Normativity*, p.169-192.

argued that it is an analytic truth that the crucial premise (B1) holds, given that a meaning intention is defined in this way. A meaning intention is a commitment because the very concept of a meaning intention is something goal-directed that requires a speaker to be prepared and exercise his willpower to maintain. Having a meaning intention is both norm-relative and normative in that having such an intention is a commitment. As Bilgrami argued, a commitment is always something one can fail at and is something that requires living up to. One must do better by making sure that commitment is met. More specifically, if one has a commitment, one has a reason to do what is required to meet that commitment. It is because a meaning intention is a commitment or plan that a speaker ought to be ready to do what is required by that intention. A minimal component of that speaker's plan is to comply with the semantic norm I built on in Chapter 2, "Be interpretable!"

"Be Interpretable!"

By having a meaning intention, part of a speaker's intention is the plan to say something interpretable, i.e. "If you intend to say something, then say something that can be understood." In other words, a speaker's having a meaning intention comes with a reason to help his audience understand what he intends his words to mean. For example, Davidson explains, a speaker should be interpretable by annunciating, applying words consistently, and checking that his audience properly understands his meaning:

> "The best the speaker can do is to be interpretable, that is, to use a finite supply of distinguishable sounds applied consistently to objects and situations he believes are apparent to his hearer. Obviously the speaker may fail in this project from time to time" (Davidson 250).

Likewise, a speaker has reason to complete his sentences, speak audibly, and otherwise make an effort to be understandable. Even if a speaker never speaks, he should be prepared to do so and this preparedness is a normative matter. In this way, being a speaker is at least minimally

involves being a sort of volunteer firefighter. One is poised to do something, even if one is never

in fact called upon or forced to do so. By the very fact that the speaker is what he is and

possesses a certain competency, he has must respect a general semantic duty to be interpretable.

The point I have built up to is that we can elevate Davidson's principle of charity to the

semantic injunction "Be interpretable!", an injunction that is action-guiding for persons with

linguistic competence—a competence that is in a basic way constitutive of what we are. In this

way, what I have been after is precisely this norm Bilgrami points out:

> "The norm or imperative "Do x if you want to be easily understood" does not have the
> same philosophical interest (though it may have a lot of practical interest) as "Do x if you
> want to be understood." Because 'being understood' (as opposed to being understood
> easily) has internal dialectical links with meaning itself, the norm is more intrinsic and
> categorical, rather than conditional" ("Meaning Intentions" 52n18).

The normativity of meaning, whether issued by norms or intentions, ultimately boils down to the

fact that a speaker has a linguistic competence that he must be prepared to exercise by having a

general plan to abide semantic norms and be interpretable to his audience.

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