

Moral Anti-Exceptionalism

1 Anti-Exceptionalism

The null hypothesis about the normative is that it is unexceptional. The anti-exceptionalism of normatively is especially obvious when it comes to the semantics of normative languages due to the unity of natural languages.

1.1 The Unity of Natural Languages and Normative Semantics' Anti-Exceptionalism

Any two words of a given natural language can occur together in a well-formed sentence of that language; likewise for complex expressions of corresponding grammatical categories. The expressions of a natural language cannot be partitioned naturally into disjoint classes dedicated to different types of 'discourse'. Any such restriction would compromise the functionality of language. The semantics of natural languages must reflect that unity.

A semantic account of normative expressions must be fully integrated with a semantic account of non-normative expressions in the overall framework of a semantic theory for the whole language. Works on the semantics of deontic modals also confirm this remark.

Such theoretical considerations about semantics also give some support to anti-exceptionalism about both the epistemology of normative knowledge and belief and the metaphysics of normatively expressed states of affairs, properties, and relations. For had the normative differed deeply enough to need exceptional treatment in semantics, it would have been more likely to differ deeply enough to need exceptional treatment in epistemology and metaphysics too. The failure

of exceptionalism in semantics rules out one salient route to exceptionalism in epistemology and metaphysics.

1.2 Anti-Exceptionalism Favours Realism

This central role for truth and falsity in the semantics encourages realism over anti-realism, by implying that any normative expression can occur in a true declarative sentence: if not the sentence you first thought of, then its negation. Of course, one must not read too much into the point. In particular, nothing in the semantic framework requires the truth-value to be mind-independent or to involve a metaphysically heavyweight correspondence theory of truth. Nevertheless, the semantics works more or less as realists hoped it would, whereas anti-realists might have hoped that it would avoid all talk of truth and falsity.

2 The Intensional Frameworks

(Comprehension₀) $\Box \exists P \Box (P \leftrightarrow A)$, where P stands for a variable taking sentence position and ‘ A ’ for any declarative sentence.

Rough paraphrase: necessarily, any sentence (A) modally corresponds to a state of affairs (P).

(Comprehension₁) $\Box \exists Q \Box \forall x (Qx \leftrightarrow B(x))$, where ‘ Q ’ stands for a variable taking one-place predicate position, ‘ x ’ for a variable taking name position, and ‘ $B(x)$ ’ for any declarative sentence.

Rough paraphrase: necessarily, any one-place predicate (abstracted from $B(x)$) modally corresponds to a property (Q).

(Comprehension₂) $\Box \exists R \Box \forall x \forall y (Rxy \leftrightarrow C(x, y))$.

Intensionalism clearly provides a simple *model* of the metaphysics of states of affairs (or propositions), properties, and relations (the intension of a declarative sentence is just a function from possible worlds to truth-values; it models the state of affairs obtaining in just those worlds the intension maps to the true. Similarly, the intension of a one-place predicate models the property an object has in just those worlds the intension maps to a set containing the object).

2.1 Individuation

Given that intensions are functions and the mathematical individuation of functions, intensionalism implies that intensions which necessarily coincide extensionally are identical. Thus, we have the following schemata:

$$\text{(Intensionality}_0\text{)} \quad \Box \forall P \forall P^* (P = P^* \leftrightarrow \Box (P \leftrightarrow P^*))$$

$$\text{(Intensionality}_1\text{)} \quad \Box \forall Q \forall Q^* (Q = Q^* \leftrightarrow \Box \forall x (Qx \leftrightarrow Q^*x))$$

$$\text{(Intensionality}_2\text{)} \quad \Box \forall R \forall R^* (R = R^* \leftrightarrow \Box \forall x \forall y (Rxy \leftrightarrow R^*xy))$$

Given Intensionality₀, Comprehension₀ entails that any sentence modally corresponds to a *unique* state of affairs. Similarly, given Intensionality₁, Comprehension₁ entails that any one-place predicate modally corresponds to a *unique* property.

2.2 No Normative/Natural Distinction?

Suppose, for example, that torturing for fun is necessarily wrong. Then the necessary state of affairs of torturing for fun being wrong necessarily coincides with the equally necessary state of affairs of 7 being prime. Thus, by Intensionality₀, the supposedly normative state of affairs of torturing for fun being wrong just is the supposedly non-normative state of affairs of 7 being prime. Similarly, by Intensionality₂, the supposedly normative relation of wrongly torturing for fun just is the supposedly non-normative relation of torturing for fun.

But these are not reductions of the normative to the non-normative, or of the non-natural to the natural. To describe them so is to fall into the very trap just warned against, of confusing states of affairs, properties, and relations with their linguistic expressions. If a sentence or predicate involving a normative or non-naturalistic term picks out the same state of affairs, property, or relation as a sentence or predicate involving no normative or non-naturalistic term, that no more shows the worldly entity to be really non-normative or naturalistic than it shows it to be really normative or non-naturalistic.

Rather, the proper conclusion to draw is that the distinction between the normative and the non-normative inextricably involves the use of language, not just the non-linguistic reality spoken about.

3 Olson's Argument For Moral Error Theory

(P12) Moral facts entail that there are facts that favour certain courses of behaviour, where the favouring relation is irreducibly normative.

(P13) Irreducibly normative favouring relations are queer.

(C5) Moral facts entail queer relations.

(P4') If moral facts entail queer relations, moral facts are queer.

(C2'') Moral facts are queer.

(Implicit Premise) No facts are queer.

The use of 'moral facts' is already suspicious given the previous discussion. But we might interpret it as states of affairs expressed by true moral sentences, irrespective of whether it is also expressed by a true non-moral sentence

3.1 Against Error Theory

In intensional frameworks, predicates can 'fail' in two main ways:

1. Having no intension
 2. Having empty intension
 - (a) extensionally empty (nothing has the property)
 - (b) intensionally empty (nothing could have the property)
- If a predicate has no intension, its negation also has no intension (semantically, there is nothing to negate).
 - If a predicate has an extensionally empty intension, its negation has an extensionally full intension (everything has that property).
 - If a predicate has an intensionally empty intension, its negation has an intensionally full intension (necessarily everything has that property).

Even predicates whose application to anything entails a wildly false theory have full negations: 'It is not haunted' is true of any house. For a predicate with no

intension, one needs something more like pure gibberish: 'He is not fghkl' is not true of anyone.

Normative predicates are like 'haunted' for error theorists. Then these predicates should have empty intensions, whose negation has the full intensions. But the negation of normative predicates are also normative.

Error theorists might claim that although moral predicates have intensions, ascribing a moral predicate shares a false presupposition or implicature with ascribing its negation. But such discourse effects sit on top of the intensional semantics, rather than working inside it. They leave untouched the dilemma in the previous paragraph. Analogously, even if ascribing the predicate 'haunted' and ascribing its negation share a false presupposition, and 'haunted' has an empty extension, 'not haunted' still has a full extension.

3.2 The Problem of (C2'')

The problem mentioned in the previous section applies to (C2'') (Moral facts are queer): Consider

(i) Torturing for fun is always impermissible.

Assume that (i) is true. By (C2''), the fact stated by (i) is queer and there is thus no such a fact according to (Implicit Premise). So (i) is not true. (ii) would be true instead:

(ii) Torturing for fun is not always impermissible.

Given that (ii) is logical equivalent to (iii), (iii) is also true.

(iii) Torturing for fun is sometimes permissible.

So (iii) states a moral fact. But according to (C2'') and (Implicit Premise), there is no such fact. Contradiction!

The only way-out seems to be committed to the extreme conclusion that moral terms lack intensions, and so are closer to 'fghkl' than to 'haunted'.

Thus, within the intensional framework, Olson faces a dilemma: either his error theory is inconsistent on standard logical principles, or it collapses into a crass dismissal of moral discourse as mere gibberish.

3.3 The Problem of (P12)

(P12) Moral facts entail that there are facts that favour certain courses of behaviour, where the favouring relation is irreducibly normative.

What is an irreducibly normative favouring relation? One might take it to be a relation which can be expressed in normative-favouring terms and cannot be expressed in other terms. But moral realism is not committed to irreducibly favouring relations in that sense:

Assume that torturing for fun is necessarily wrong. There is also a normative (dis)favouring relation (in a correspondingly loose sense), expressed by the normative predicate 'wrongly tortures for fun'. But the relation is not irreducibly normative in the proposed sense, since it can also be expressed by the necessarily equivalent non-normative predicate 'tortures for fun'.

4 Street's Evolutionary Argument Against Realist Theories of Value

Street takes moral realism as 'the view that there are mind-independent evaluative facts or truths' and argues against it. We count a state of affairs as 'evaluative' if and only if it can be expressed by an evaluative sentence.

Suppose that some evaluative sentence expresses the necessary state of affairs. Then the necessary state of affairs counts as evaluative. But the necessary state of affairs holds 'independently of all our evaluative attitudes', indeed independently of all our attitudes. After all, the necessary state of affairs is just the state of affairs of 7 being prime, and that state of affairs holds independently of all our attitudes. Thus an evaluative fact or truth holds independently of all our evaluative attitudes, which means that realism about value in Street's sense is true, contrary to her evolutionary argument.