

Normativity and Concepts

Hannah Ginsborg, U.C. Berkeley

Published in Daniel Star, (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Reasons and Normativity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 989-1014.

Abstract and keywords

A number of philosophers, including Kant, Kripke, Boghossian, Gibbard and Brandom, can be read as endorsing the view that concepts are normative. I distinguish two versions of that view: a strong, non-naturalistic version which identifies concepts with norms or rules (Kant, Kripke), and a weaker version, compatible with naturalism, on which the normativity of concepts amounts only to their application's being governed by norms or rules (Boghossian, Gibbard, Brandom). I consider a problem for the strong version: grasp of a rule seems to require grasp of the concepts which constitute the content of that rule, so how can we explain concept acquisition without falling into regress? I offer a Kantian response, on which grasp of a rule does not require antecedent grasp of concepts, but still involves the recognition of normativity in one's rule-governed behavior. I distinguish the normativity of concepts, so understood, from the normativity associated with truth or warrant.

Keywords: concepts, normativity, rules, Kant, Kripke, Boghossian, Gibbard, Brandom

1. Introduction

Is there something distinctively normative about concepts? A first step in addressing this question is to get clear about what we mean by “concept,” since the term is used by philosophers in many ways, and there is considerable debate about how it should be understood.¹ For the purposes of this discussion, I will operate with a very rough-and-ready distinction between two general ways of thinking about concepts, one on which concepts are distinctive of human beings

¹ For a survey of the debate, see Margolis and Laurence 2007, 2011 and Laurence and Margolis 2012. Laurence and Margolis regard the question as a substantive one about the nature of concepts (2007, 589n10; 2011 §1.4) although it is often regarded as terminological or a matter of stipulation (Peacocke 1992, 3; McDowell 2009, 129 and 132).

as opposed to non-human animals (henceforth “animals” *tout court*), the other on which they are the kind of thing which can in principle be ascribed to animals. On the first way of thinking, the possession of concepts is closely associated with, and perhaps depends on, the possession of capacities for language and for rational thought, whereas the second allows the ascription of concepts in connection with a broader range of intelligent behaviour, perhaps involving simple beliefs and desires, but not the complex propositional attitudes characteristic of creatures with language.²

Kant is probably the most influential example of the first of these ways. For him, a concept is a representation of a general property, and the possession of concepts is confined to creatures with understanding (more specifically, the human rather than the divine form of understanding, which Kant calls “discursive” rather than “intuitive”): that is to say, creatures who are capable not merely of being affected by individual objects presented to the senses, but of grasping what those objects have in common. Kant’s association of concepts with the representation of generality is taken over by Frege, who identifies concepts as the references of predicative expressions. Many philosophers have followed Frege and Kant in associating concept-possession with the capacity to represent generality or universality, although, since Frege, concepts are typically viewed as belonging to the realm of sense rather than reference, and it is often allowed that the senses of singular as well as of predicative expressions can qualify as concepts.³ Moreover, and arguably taking a step beyond Frege and Kant, concept-possession in

² The distinction might be challenged on the grounds that some animals too exhibit capacities for language and rational thought, but I am here assuming a demanding construal of these capacities on which they are restricted to human beings.

³ For the identification of concepts with Fregean senses, see for example McDowell 1987/1998, 87; Dummett 1987, 256; Peacocke 1992, 2-3 and Wedgwood 2007, 59. (Dummett offers a qualification to this identification at 1993, 135.) The strict connection between concepts and

this sense is often seen as requiring rationality in the sense of a capacity to recognize reasons.⁴ The second and more inclusive way of thinking about concepts is more common in cognitive psychology, where concepts are often seen as items in the mind or brain -- “mental representations” -- which play a causal role in accounting for human or animal behaviour. The most prominent philosophical defender of this view of concepts is Jerry Fodor. Fodor himself associates concepts with the capacity to think – having the concept *dog* is “being able to think about dogs as such” (2004, 106) – so that it might seem that he endorses the first kind of view rather than the second. But concepts as Fodor conceives them are the kinds of things which can in principle be possessed by animals.⁵ What makes something the concept *dog* for Fodor is, very roughly, that its tokenings stand in a certain kind of lawlike relation to the presence of the property of being a dog, a relation which could hold just as well for animal as for human minds – so it makes sense to think of Fodor’s view as representing the second rather than the first way of thinking about concepts.

generality is preserved by Evans, who restricts the term “concept” to ways of thinking about general properties as opposed to objects (1982, 104).

⁴ As, for example, in Sellars’s view that “in characterizing an episode or state as that of knowing...we are placing it in the logical space of reasons” (1956, 298-299) (a view which, as argued in McDowell 1998/2009, 209, can be seen as bearing not just on knowings but on conceptual episodes more generally); in Davidson’s view of concept-ascription as subject to the “constitutive ideal of rationality” (Davidson 1970/2001, 222-223); in Dummett’s view of language as “the primary manifestation of our rationality” (1993, 104); in McDowell’s view of “the space of concepts as at least part of... the space of reasons” (1994, 5); and in Brandom’s view of concepts as norms of rational inference (see §5 of this article). For a very clear statement of the view, see McDowell 2009, especially 128-130. McDowell would not regard this as a step beyond Kant, since he takes the “spontaneity” which Kant ascribes to understanding as already implying the possession of rationality (see e.g. 1994, 11-12 and 40). This might be questioned, in particular on the basis of the considerations suggested in §6, but I will not pursue the point further in this article.

⁵ Although he does give an argument for denying that very simple organisms like paramecia can have concepts (1986).

The idea that there is something normative about concepts is much more natural on the first view of concepts than on the second. The capacities for rational thought and language are often thought of as bound up with the capacity both to recognize and to conform to normative rules determining what one ought to think and say, so to the extent that thought and language are seen as essential to the use of concepts, it would seem that using concepts too must be a matter of recognizing and conforming to normative constraints. On the second view, however, there seems to be no reason to think of concept-possession as having anything to do with grasp of, or conformity to, norms: it is a matter, simply, of the natural psychological laws governing the relation between the mind and its environment. For this reason, the question of whether concepts are normative might be posed as a way of asking which of these two views we should prefer. This is how I understand, at least in part, Fodor's challenge to the view – seen by him as part of the “concept pragmatism” which he takes to dominate twentieth-century philosophy -- that “claims about concept possession are inherently normative” (2004, 30). Fodor objects to the idea that, say, “having the concept of a partridge... involves generally getting it right about such matters as whether partridges are birds and whether *this* bird is a partridge” (2004, 30). Part of what Fodor is objecting to here is the idea that possession of a concept requires that we have the kinds of rational capacities needed to acquire knowledge about the objects falling under the extension of the concept, as opposed to merely having “mental structures which contrive to resonate” to the corresponding property (1998, 76). Where one stands on this disagreement may simply be a function of how one thinks the term “concept” should be understood: as picking out a kind of thing whose possession and use involves distinctively human capacities for thought and (perhaps) reasoning, or as picking out a kind of thing which can be invoked in psychological explanations of human and animal behaviour alike.

Suppose, though, that this question is resolved, and suppose, for the sake of argument, that it is resolved in favour of the first view of concepts. Can we now say, without further ado, that there is something distinctively normative about concepts? No, because, as we shall see, it is not at all clear what it means to say that concepts are normative. Some philosophers, such as Kant and Brandom, appear to hold that concepts are normative in the sense of being, themselves, norms or rules (see §2 and §5). Others, like Peacocke, hold that concepts have an “essentially normative” character (1992, 125), but without identifying them as norms: rather their normative character is seen as coming down to the fact that the beliefs in which they figure can be correct or incorrect, or that we can have, or fail to have, good reasons for those beliefs (Peacocke 1992, 125-126). Moreover, while the normativity of concepts as such has not been an explicit focus of debate, there has recently been much discussion of the related question whether meaning and content are normative, and many of the criticisms of the normativity of meaning and content raised in that discussion carry over directly to concepts, even when it is granted that concept-possession is to be understood as tied to human thought and language. These criticisms challenge the intelligibility of identifying concepts with rules, and they also cast doubt on the possibility of inferring, from the fact that beliefs are governed by normative standards, that concepts themselves are essentially normative. So even if we focus exclusively on concepts as understood on the first of the two views I described, there is still a lot of room for debate over whether, and in what sense, they have a distinctively normative character.

In this article, I shall continue to focus on concepts as understood on the first view, aiming to clarify further the question of whether – and in what sense – concepts, so understood, are normative. I will draw to a considerable extent on discussions of the normativity of meaning and content, since these are immediately relevant to the question of the normativity of concepts

(a quick way to see the relevance is to note that concepts are often regarded as constituents of thought-content or as the meanings of linguistic expressions). But I will set the stage with a discussion of Kant's view of concepts, which will serve as a point of reference for the subsequent discussion.

2. Kant on concepts as rules for synthesis

Kant's theory of cognition in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is built around a contrast between two fundamental kinds of representation: intuitions, which are singular, and concepts, which are general or universal, that is, which represent what is common to various objects.⁶ In the case of human beings (as opposed to a hypothetical divine being possessed of an "intuitive" rather than a "discursive" understanding) these representations correspond respectively to two distinct faculties of the mind: sensibility, which Kant describes as receptive, and understanding, which he describes as spontaneous. While Kant emphasizes the distinction between these two faculties, and their corresponding representations, he also holds that they are both involved in any cognition. Famously, "thoughts without content [sc. intuitive content] are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (A51/B75).⁷ His view of concepts as rules for synthesis is intended to capture how these two faculties are related; that is, how it is that particulars which affect our sensibility can be recognized by us, through the understanding, as having properties in common. The account depends on appeal to the faculty of imagination which "synthesizes" sensory representations into contentful perceptual images: images which represent their objects as having

⁶ For more details of the account of Kant's view of concepts sketched in this section, see section II of Ginsborg 1997.

⁷ References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* use the standard pagination where "A" designates the first (1781) edition and "B" the second (1787) edition.

this or that feature. While the details are controversial, one plausible understanding of the process, suggested by Strawson and by Sellars,⁸ is that the imagination works by calling to mind previous perceptions of objects similar to the one presently perceived, and – to use Kant’s term from A100ff – “reproducing” elements of those previous perceptions in the present perception. I perceive Lassie as a dog, that is, as falling under the concept *dog*, because, on seeing the individual Lassie on some particular occasion, I call to mind previous perceptions of dogs. This allows me to incorporate into my perceptual image elements drawn from those previous perceptions, enabling me, say, to represent Lassie as a potential barker and tail-wagger even though I do not now see Lassie herself barking or wagging her tail. And that is a way of representing her as having features in common with the objects which figured in the previous perceptions I called to mind: that is, of representing her not just as the particular individual she is, but as a dog.

Now according to Kant, the concept *dog* can be identified as a rule governing this imaginative process,⁹ so that my recognition that Lassie is a dog amounts to recognition of the rule with which I accord when I reproduce previous representations of dogs. But what motivates this view of concepts? The answer has to do with Kant’s attempt to do justice to what, following many philosophers, he sees as a qualitative distinction between human cognitive processing on the one hand and that of animals on the other. (It could be put more abstractly as the contrast between responding to the world in a way which amounts to making judgments about it and responding to the world in a way which merely registers its features, but the contrast between humans and animals makes it more vivid, and Kant himself often recurs to it in

⁸ Strawson 1970, Sellars 1978. The example I use is drawn from Strawson.

⁹See especially *Critique of Pure Reason* A106-A108. I discuss the identification of concepts with rules in my 1997, 49ff.

explaining the more abstract contrast, so I will keep here to the more concrete formulation.) Kant, following a tradition exemplified, for example, by Descartes, takes understanding to be distinctive of humans as opposed to animals. But on the other hand, following Hume, he recognizes a continuity between humans and animals in so far as animals as well as humans possess a capacity of imagination through which they associate representations. A cat who sees Lassie will, like a human being, imaginatively call to mind previous perceptions of dogs and will associate features represented in those previous perceptions – for example, attack behaviour -- with its present perception. It will thus, so to speak, register Lassie’s potential to attack, and behave accordingly, for example by running away.

However, unlike the human being, the cat who sees Lassie does not, in so doing, represent her as having a general feature in common with previously perceived dogs. The cat does not represent Lassie *as* a potential attacker, at least not in the way – in our example – I represent Lassie as a potential barker and tail-wagger. The difference here is that, in the case of animals, the imaginative activity is carried out “blindly”, without any consciousness of the appropriateness of the representations which are called to mind. An animal has no awareness of its imaginative processing as normatively governed: the character of its activity is exhausted by saying that it is subject to natural psychological laws, of the kind identified by Hume under the head of laws of association. By contrast, a human being who engages in this imaginative activity recognizes what she is doing is as normatively governed. When a human being sees Lassie, and, in so doing, sees her as a potential barker and tail-wagger, this is not merely because of the operation of psychological laws which lead to her associating the perception of the present dog with those of past dogs, and hence of her calling to mind representations of barking and tail-wagging. Her seeing Lassie as a barker and tail-wagger involves in addition

recognition of those representations as appropriate in connection with her present perception, and correspondingly of her imaginative activity as conforming to a rule determining how it ought to be. Kant's claim that concepts are rules for the synthesis of imagination is a way of bringing out this normative character, which is missing in the case of animals. On seeing Lassie, I do not merely call to mind a certain set of previous perceptions, but do so in a way which involves the recognition of the appropriateness of those previous perceptions to my present perception, hence in a way which involves the recognition of a rule governing my associations.

I have tried to present Kant and's view of concepts as rules in a way which gives it some initial plausibility, and which makes clear its motivation. However, the view is, on the face of it, subject to a serious problem. Kant wants to explain the conceptual character of our representations – that I can, say, recognize Lassie as a dog, as opposed to merely registering her dog-like character – by characterizing them as the outcome of a process of imaginative synthesis which I recognize to be governed by rules. And it would seem on the face of it that the rules must play a guiding role with respect to my synthesis: that they must tell me how I ought to synthesize. If the concept *dog* is such a rule, then, it must be something which I grasp antecedently to the imaginative activity prompted by seeing Lassie, something which tells me that I ought to call to mind previous representations of dogs rather than, say, previous representations of cows. How, otherwise, could I recognize the appropriateness of representing Lassie as a barker rather than a moo-er? But the view, so understood, leads to regress. For I cannot grasp a rule telling me to call to mind previous representations of dogs – in effect, to sort Lassie with the dogs – without already grasping the concept *dog*. We might try to avoid the problem by supposing that, rather than saying anything about dogs, the rule tells me directly to reproduce representations of barking and tail-wagging. But then we have to explain how I can

be in a position to grasp concepts like *barking* and *tail-wagging*, so the problem has only been postponed.

I will suggest later in this article (§6) that this problem can be avoided. Before that, however, I will consider other versions of the idea that concepts are normative. I turn now to a recent source of that idea which is independent of Kant, namely Kripke's remarks, in his interpretation of Wittgenstein on rule-following, about the normative relation between meaning and language-use.

3. Kripke on the normativity of meaning

The background of Kripke's view about the normativity of meaning and content is his development of a skeptical paradox about meaning which he ascribes to Wittgenstein, the upshot of which is supposed to be that there can be "no such thing as meaning anything by any word" (1982, 55) and, by extension, no such thing as being in a state with intentional content.¹⁰ Kripke sets up the paradox in terms of the following skeptical scenario. I have never before added numbers larger than 57 and am now asked 'what is $68+57$?'. I answer '125', but a skeptic challenges my answer, on the grounds that, by my past uses of the "+" sign, I meant not addition

¹⁰The extension to intentional content is at least strongly implied by the sentence following the passage quoted, where Kripke says that "any present intention could be interpreted so as to accord with anything we may choose to do" (1982, 55). Kripke also describes the skeptical paradox as applying not just to language but to concept formation (1982, 62). I refer to "Kripke's" (rather than, say, "Kripkenstein's") view that meaning is normative because I read Kripke himself as endorsing the normativity constraint on accounts of meaning, even if he does not himself believe that a skeptical paradox results. (For a hint of this, see 1982, 66.) Those who disagree may read "Kripkenstein" for "Kripke" throughout.

but *quaddition*, whose value is the sum for pairs of integers less than 57, and otherwise 5. If I am to accord with how I used the term in the past, he says, I ought to say not ‘125’ but ‘5’. To respond to the skeptic, I must show that my answer is justified by citing a fact in which my meaning addition rather than quaddition consisted. The claim that meaning is normative is invoked by Kripke as a constraint on candidates for such a fact. My having meant addition by “+” must be something which now puts me in a position to justify my present use of the expression. The “basic point” of the normativity constraint Kripke says, is that, when I respond to ‘68+57’ with ‘125,’ “I do not simply make an unjustified leap in the dark. I follow directions I previously gave myself that uniquely determine that in this new instance I should say “125” (1982, 10). Any candidate for the fact of my having meant plus must then, as Kripke puts it, “show how I am justified in giving the answer '125' to '68+57'. The 'directions' that determine what I should do in each instance, must somehow be 'contained' in any candidate for the fact as to what I meant” (1982, 11). Although Kripke is not always explicit about the point, his reference to “directions” and “instructions” makes clear that the justification has an internalist character. It is not merely that my meaning addition must make it the case, in a way assessable from the point of view of an external observer, that I am correct in responding to subsequent ‘+’ questions with the sum. Rather, my meaning what I do must involve my being in a position – qua language-user -- to recognize the correctness of such responses in the future .¹¹

¹¹ I am here understanding Kripke's skeptical argument, and his normativity thesis, as having a temporal dimension. The issue raised by the skeptic is not whether, in saying ‘125’, I am making a claim which is true or warranted, or saying something which accords with what I now mean by ‘+’. Rather, the issue is whether I am according with my previous usage of ‘+’. To say that my utterance of ‘125’ is correct, then, is to say that I am using ‘+’ as I ought in the light of my previous answers to ‘+’ questions, and the fact of my having meant addition by ‘+’ is normative in the sense that it is supposed to justify me in my present claim to be according with my past use. This temporal aspect of the interpretation is controversial and requires further defense. However, it is not essential to the further discussion of Kripke in this article that it be accepted.

This constraint on candidates for the fact of meaning something by an expression is invoked by Kripke as part of an argument against a reductive dispositionalist view of meaning, on which the fact of my meaning addition by “+” consists in my being disposed to respond to “+” queries by giving the sum. Such a view fails, according to Kripke, because the mere having of a disposition to respond with ‘125’ does not constitute the required justification of ‘125’ as the correct response. In particular, even if I know that I am so disposed, the constraint is not satisfied, since the fact that I am disposed to say “125” does not “indicate that... ‘125’ was an answer *justified* in terms of instructions I gave myself, rather than a mere jack-in-the-box unjustified and arbitrary response” (1982, 23). The dispositional account, then, “fails to satisfy the basic condition on... a candidate [for a fact which determines what I mean]... that it should *tell* me what I ought to do in each new instance” (1982, 24). Kripke summarizes the point in the following passage, frequently taken as the *locus classicus* for the thesis that meaning and content are normative: “Suppose I do mean addition by ‘+’. What is the relation of this supposition to the question how I will respond to the problem ‘68+ 57’? The dispositionalist gives a 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, if I intend to accord with my past meaning of ‘+’, I should answer ‘125’.... The relation of meaning and intention to future action is *normative, not descriptive*” (1982, 37).

Many discussions of the normativity of meaning and content , including those considered below in §§4-5, disregard the internalist character of the justification which, according to Kripke,

For the purposes of this article, what is important is the internalist character of the justification, which can be maintained without taking a firm position on the kind of correctness whose justification is at issue.

meaning facts have to provide.¹² But if we take account of it, then we can see a parallel between Kripke's conception of meaning as normative and Kant's view of concepts as rules. Kripke, like Kant, is concerned to do justice to the contrast between responding to one's circumstances "blindly," as (according to Kant) animals do, and responding in a way which involves the recognition of one's response as conforming to a normative constraint. We can make the parallel clearer by considering a simpler example of a dispositional view of meaning: the view that the fact of my meaning *dog* by "dog" consists in my being disposed to utter "dog" (perhaps given suitable prompting) when a dog is at the focus of my attention. Such a view is inadequate, by Kripke's lights, because the mere having of this disposition does not account for my consciousness, in uttering "dog" when I see Lassie, that what I say is "justified...rather than... a mere jack-in-the-box response" (1982, 23). The point can be rephrased in terms of concepts. A mere disposition to respond to dogs by producing some discriminative response (say, uttering the word "dog") cannot amount to possession of the concept *dog*, since it does not account for a feature which discriminative behaviour has to satisfy in order to manifest possession of a concept, namely that the subject recognize her discriminative response as meeting a normative constraint. While there is a difference from Kant's view regarding the nature of the discriminative response – an item of overt behaviour of a certain kind (saying "dog"), as opposed to a purely psychological response (reproducing previous representations caused by dogs) – the guiding intuition, that grasp of concepts consists in the appreciation of normative constraints governing one's responses, is the same.

As one might anticipate, though, the account of meaning and concepts which Kripke articulates under the head of the "normativity of meaning" is subject to the same kind of regress

¹² For exceptions see note ***14 below.

problem which we identified in connection with Kant's view. According to this account, the fact of my meaning *dog* by "dog" (or, equivalently, of my use of "dog" manifesting my possession of the concept *dog*) is supposed to be constituted by my having internalized instructions for the use of "dog" in the light of which I can recognize particular utterances of "dog" – say, those made when Lassie is prominently in view – as correct. But the idea of my internalizing instructions presupposes that I am capable of grasping the content of those instructions, hence that I grasp the concepts which enter into that content. So my grasp of the rule seems to depend on my already having acquired the very capacity – the capacity to use, and a fortiori understand, an expression meaning *dog* – which my grasp of the rule was supposed to have explained. And if we suppose that the instructions do not need to use the concept *dog* but are instead framed in terms of concepts like *barking* and *tail-wagging*, then the difficulty is simply pushed back to those concepts in turn. This problem is recognized by Kripke, but not as casting any doubt on the intuition that meaning is normative. Rather, it is part of the argument which leads Kripke's skeptic to the conclusion – based on the supposed impossibility of doing justice to that intuition - - that there can be no such thing as meaning or, more broadly, conceptual content.

4.1 Normativity following Kripke (1): Boghossian on normativity in terms of truth

I have emphasized, in my discussion of Kripke, the internalist character of his view that meaning and content are normative. To be a candidate for my meaning something by an expression, a fact must involve my being in a position to recognize myself as justified in my use of the expression. But, as I noted, much of the debate following Kripke disregards this aspect of his view, taking it to be sufficient for the normativity of meaning that facts about meaning imply

facts about how the expression ought to be used, whether or not the language-user must herself, qua language-user, recognize the relevant *oughts*. This is the case in particular for Paul Boghossian's influential 1989 interpretation of Kripke's normativity thesis. "Suppose the expression 'green' means *green*. It follows immediately that the expression 'green' applies *correctly* only to *these* things (the green ones) and not to *those* (the non-greens). The fact that the expression means something implies, that is, a whole set of *normative* truths about my behaviour with that expression: namely, that my use of it is correct in application to certain objects and not in application to others... The normativity of meaning turns out to be, in other words, simply a new name for the familiar fact that, regardless of whether one thinks of meaning in truth-theoretic or assertion-theoretic terms, meaningful expressions possess conditions of *correct use*. (On the one construal, correctness consists in *true* use, on the other, in *warranted* use)" (1989, 513).¹³ Boghossian's interpretation leaves out the idea – apparently essential to Kripke's own conception of the normativity of meaning – that meaning something by an expression involves having internalized instructions for the use of the expression, so that use of the expression is recognized as appropriate in the light of those instructions.¹⁴ For the claim that a meaningful

¹³ A similar view is expressed in Blackburn 1984, although without the reference to warrant: "The topic [of Kripke's discussion] is that there is such a thing as the correct or incorrect application of a term, and to say that there is such a thing is no more than to say that there is truth and falsity" (1984, 281). In this section I consider only the understanding of correctness in terms of truth; the warrant option will be considered in 4.2 and 5.

¹⁴ Kripke's normativity thesis is often understood in this way: see e.g. Fodor 1990, 135n35; Gibbard 1994, 100 and 2012, 10-11; Horwich 1998, 185-187 and 2005, 107-108; Wikforss 2001, 203; Hattiangadi 2006, 221-222 and 2007, 2-3; Speaks 2009, 408; Whiting 2007, 134-135 and 2013, 3-4; Wedgwood 2009, §3.1; Liebesman, this volume. (Wikforss acknowledges Kripke's characterization of meaning as playing a guiding role (2001, 216-217) but rejects it as unmotivated). For a vigorous challenge to Boghossian on this point, see Kusch 2006, 62-64. Other commentators who differ from Boghossian in taking seriously Kripke's view of meaning as playing a guiding or justificatory role include Gampel 1997, Zalabardo 1997, Miller 2000, Ahmed 2007 (ch. 4), Verheggen 2011, Bridges 2014, and Jones 2015 (although Miller and Zalabardo hold that the relevant notion of justification could be externalist rather than internalist,

expression must possess conditions of correct use does not imply that the speaker herself must adopt a normative attitude to her use of the expression in order for her use of it to count as meaningful, but only that her use of the expression must be subject to normative assessment as correct or otherwise.

It might seem that the normativity thesis, so understood, should be relatively uncontroversial. And in fact it has been generally seen as uncontroversial that “meaningful expressions possess conditions of correct use” and – to state the parallel thesis regarding content – that concepts have conditions of correct application. What has aroused controversy, however, is the question whether this “familiar fact” deserves to be labelled as the thesis that “meaning is normative,” and similarly, *mutatis mutandis*, for content. According to one line of criticism, there is nothing normative about the claim that expressions or concepts have conditions of correct use or application, since this just amounts to the claim that the assertions or beliefs in which they figure have truth-conditions, and truth is a descriptive, not a normative, property.¹⁵ The thesis that meaning and content are normative, it is claimed, requires something more demanding, namely that expressions and concepts impose the kinds of normative constraints on speakers and thinkers which can be framed in terms of an agential “ought”: for example that we ought to apply the concept *green* to green things, where the “ought” is understood as capturing what we have reason to do and not just what qualifies as correct.¹⁶ And it can be argued, first that we are not subject to such constraints, and, second, that – if indeed we are subject to such constraints -- their source does not lie in the nature of concepts as such. Regarding the first

and it is Kripke’s internalism which I want to emphasize here). In more recent work, Boghossian himself acknowledges the internalist justificatory role ascribed by Kripke to meaning (Boghossian forthcoming).

¹⁵ See e.g. Wikforss 2001, 205ff; Hattiangadi 2007, 52; Glüer and Wikforss 2009, 36. For the non-normative character of truth, see Horwich 1998, 184ff and Papineau 1999.

¹⁶ See e.g. Hattiangadi 2007, ch. 7.

point, it seems highly implausible to suppose that we ought to apply the concept *green* to all and only green things, since the “all” part would mean that we were obliged to form an infinite number of beliefs. At most we could be rationally required to see to it that we apply the concept *only* to green things, or perhaps to apply it to green things in those cases where we have consciously considered the question whether or not they are green.¹⁷ Regarding the second point, it would seem that the requirement to apply the concept *green* (only) to green things is conditional on our being required to have (only) true beliefs. And while it might seem plausible that we ought to have, or at least to aim at having (only) true beliefs, this does not seem to entail that there is anything specifically normative about the concepts which figure in the contents of those beliefs. In other words, it does not seem to imply that calling something a concept is making a normative claim about it, as opposed merely to saying something from which a normative claim might follow (as when, to use a standard example, I say that it is raining, from which it might follow that I ought to take my umbrella). In particular, it might be that the normative requirement to believe (only) what is true stems from pragmatic reasons having to do with the usefulness of true belief and the disutility of false belief, rather than reflecting anything intrinsically normative about the concepts which figure in belief content.¹⁸ Saying that we ought to apply the concept *green* (only) to green things, according to this line of thought, would be like saying that we ought to use antibiotics (only) if we have a bacterial infection. The mere fact that there are pragmatic norms bearing on the use of antibiotics does not give grounds for saying that there is anything normative about antibiotics themselves, i.e., that calling something an antibiotic is making a normative claim about it. Similarly, the fact that there are pragmatic norms for

¹⁷ The second of these is suggested in Wedgwood 2002, 273; for criticism see Bykvist and Hattiangadi 2007.

¹⁸ See e.g. Fodor 1990, 129; Horwich 1998, 190-192.

belief, and hence for the application of concepts, does not imply that there is anything normative about the concept *green* as such, or about concepts more generally.¹⁹

Much recent debate about the normativity of meaning and content has focussed on this kind of challenge. I will describe here two lines of response which have been made to it. One line is to argue that the starting assumption of the challenge – that the normativity in question has to be a matter of what we “ought” to do, as opposed to what counts as “correct” – is too demanding. As Gideon Rosen has pointed out, correctness is, on the face of it, a normative notion: even if the feature which makes the application of a concept correct (the “correct-making feature”) is a descriptive property, it does not mean that the claim of correctness is not itself normative (2001, 619-620). Another response, suggested in Boghossian’s later work on the normativity of content, accepts that the normativity of content needs to be framed in terms of agential “oughts,” but rejects the view that the requirement to believe (only) what is true is merely pragmatic, holding instead that belief essentially aims at the truth. That we ought to apply *green* (only) to green things reflects, not a pragmatic norm, but one which is intrinsic to concept-application as such (Boghossian 2003, 40; 2005, 212).

¹⁹In considering whether there is “something normative about the concept *green*” I do not mean to be considering whether the concept *green* should be assimilated to paradigmatically normative concepts like *good* or *correct*. The question of the normativity of concepts is not the question whether all concepts are normative concepts in the sense that *good* is a normative concept, but, rather, whether thinking of something as a concept, or as some concept in particular (e.g. the concept *green*) is thinking of it in normative terms. Gibbard puts the analogous point about meaning by saying that the slogan “meaning is normative” concerns “not meaning itself but the *concept* of meaning” (2012, 6) and he describes his own view by saying that “the concept MEANING is normative – and so is the concept CONCEPT” (2012, 21). However, I will continue to frame the discussion in terms of whether meaning and concepts are normative, or have a distinctively normative character, with the understanding that this does not imply that they are normative in the special sense in which the meaning of “good” or the concept *good* are normative.

However, both of these lines of response are open to the objection that the relevant normativity – whether it be a matter of mere correctness or of agential “oughts” – belongs not to concepts as such, but to the attitude of belief.²⁰ (In discussing this objection I focus on the stronger, “ought” version of the view defended by Boghossian, although the objection would apply also to the arguably less demanding version in terms of correctness.) The idea that we ought to apply the concept *green* to green things is plausible only if “applying” the concept *green* to something is a matter of believing that it is green. That normative constraint does not apply to other uses of the concept *green*, say when we desire that something be green, or fantasize that it is green; nor, relatedly, does it apply to cases of predicating *green* of something in the antecedent of a conditional or within the scope of negation. So it might again seem that there is nothing normative about the concept *green* in its own right, and that the seeming normativity reflects only normative constraints on belief, albeit constraints which are internal to belief rather than pragmatic. Boghossian recognizes that the view is open to an objection along these lines and replies by invoking a conceptual dependence of the notion of content – and, correspondingly concepts – on that of belief. The very idea of content, he argues, depends on the idea of belief, in that we understand what content is only in terms of its role in propositional attitudes, and we understand that role in turn only by way of an understanding of the role of content in belief (2003, 40-41; 2005, 213). So although the relevant normativity does indeed belong in the first instance to belief, it can be ascribed to content, and therefore to concepts, by virtue of their privileged relation to the notion of belief.²¹

²⁰ The objection is spelled out in Speaks 2009.

²¹ I refer to the view just described as Boghossian’s, although it is not clear to what extent he endorses it, as opposed to merely proposing it as the best option for the normativist once the normativity of meaning (as opposed to content) has been shown to be untenable.

This defence of the normativity of concepts is open to challenge. Kathrin Glüer and Åsa Wikforss, for example, raise objections both to the claim that the concept of content depends on that of belief (2009, 40), and to the claim that belief is normative in the sense of essentially aiming at truth (2009, 41-45; for a fuller discussion of the second point see their contribution to this volume).²² But let us suppose that these objections can be met. It remains the case that – corresponding to Boghossian’s “deflated” reading of Kripke²³ -- the sense in which concepts are normative is different from, and at least along one dimension less demanding than, the sense in which concepts are normative for Kant or in which meaning is normative for Kripke. For it does not require, as a condition of concept use, that the concept-user herself adopt a normative attitude to what she is doing in applying the concept. It can be the case, at least on the face of it, that concepts are intrinsically such that we ought to apply them in certain determinate ways, that is, that certain norms of belief apply with respect to them, without its being the case that grasp of a concept involves the capacity to recognize oneself to be applying the concept as one ought. So whereas concepts for Kant and meanings for Kripke are essentially normative in the sense of *just being* rules – items whose grasp amounts to grasp of what one ought, or what is correct, to do – concepts for Boghossian are essentially normative only in the weaker sense that we can understand them as concepts only by understanding their use as governed by rules.

While this is not an objection to Boghossian’s argument *per se*, it does suggest that his account of the normativity of content leaves the door open for the defender of a naturalistic dispositionalist account of concept-possession.²⁴ For all Boghossian’s argument shows, a

²² For the second point, see also Horwich 2005, 119.

²³ I borrow the expression from Kusch 1996, 62.

²⁴ Boghossian himself makes this quite clear in his (2005), when he argues that the philosopher with the most reason to endorse the normativity of content as he conceives it is the naturalist about mental content, and that this shows the thesis to be “uninteresting” in the context of the

person might satisfy the condition for possessing the concept *green* simply in virtue of having a naturalistically describable disposition to respond discriminatively to green things by saying “this is green”, without there being any recognition on her part of a normative constraint to which her behaviour was subject. It is true that we could not conceive of her as a concept-possessor without conceiving her as responding or failing to respond correctly, or as she ought, so that in order to think of her utterances of “this is green” as applications of the concept *green* we would need to conceive of them as subject to normative constraints. However, the dispositionalist might argue, this does not preclude our identifying the fact of her possessing the concept *green* with the fact of her having a naturalistically describable disposition, any more than our ordinary conception of water as the transparent stuff in lakes and streams precludes our identifying the fact of something’s being water with the fact of its being H₂O. And, as we will see in the next section, Allan Gibbard exploits this point to argue explicitly that his own account of the normativity of concepts is compatible with the kind of naturalistic dispositional view of meaning and concepts which Kripke rejects.

4.2 Normativity following Kripke (2): Gibbard on normativity in terms of warrant

As noted in §4.1, Boghossian identifies the normativity of meaning with “the familiar fact that... meaningful expressions possess conditions of *correct use*”, and the example he gives there – the correctness of applying “green” to green things – suggests that the relevant correctness is that associated with truth. But he also allows that there might be an alternative construal of correctness, suitable to an assertion-theoretic rather than a truth-theoretic conception

dispute with the naturalist, since the thesis cannot be used to argue against naturalistic theories of content (2005, 216-217).

of meaning: on this construal, correctness consists not in true use, but in warranted use. This opens up the possibility of a different conception of the normativity of concepts, illustrated by the idea that it is essential to the concept *green*, not that we ought to apply it (only) to green things, but that we ought to apply it (only) where its application is warranted in the light of our beliefs and/or experiential states, for example our belief that it is a cucumber, our belief that it looks green, or the experiential state of its looking green to us. A version of this conception is defended by Gibbard, who marks its difference from views like Boghossian's by describing the relevant oughts as subjective rather than objective.²⁵ The kinds of cases he takes as most persuasive for his view include concepts of logical constants and concepts which allow of easy analysis (like *bachelor*), although he does try to explain how the view can be extended to concepts of other kinds, such as concepts of natural kinds and colour concepts (2012, 128ff). It is essential to the concept *nothing* being the concept that it is that one "ought not to believe both that snow is white and that nothing is white" (2012, 13): such oughts "comprise the logic of the word 'nothing'" (2012, 15) and hence of the concept *nothing* expressed by the word. Otherwise put, to think of a constituent of someone's thought as the concept *nothing* is to think of it in normative terms, in terms of the oughts by which its application is constrained.

²⁵ Gibbard himself would not describe the ought of warrant as a kind of correctness, since he identifies the correctness of a belief with its truth (2012, 75). Note also that Gibbard presents his view as being about meaning and content, rather than about concepts as such. However, since he explicitly identifies the meaning of an expression with the concept that it expresses (or, as he puts it, "voices") (2012, 27), his view can be recast throughout in terms of concepts. Gibbard's view can be classified as a form of normative inferential role semantics; Brandom's view, discussed in the next section, also falls under this heading, as do the views of content presented in Greenberg 2001 and Wedgwood 2007 and 2009. Such accounts are open both to standard objections to inferential role semantics, in particular regarding the difficulty of generalizing them from examples like those of the logical constants to (say) natural kind concepts, and to the objection, specific to the normative version, that they cannot accommodate the causal role of content properties. For both objections as applied to Gibbard, see Boghossian 2003, 33-35.

On the face of it, this view is vulnerable to a line of objection parallel to that described in the previous section. To begin with, might it not be simply a pragmatic matter that one ought not to believe both that snow is white and that nothing is white? Gibbard responds by appealing to a “primitive” or “basic normative” sense of “ought,” which he derives from A.C. Ewing, according to which “one ought always to disbelieve contradictions, and in matters *a posteriori*, one ought always to believe in accord with the evidence” (2012, 14). Oughts of this kind, which he sometimes also calls “oughts of warrant” (1994, 104; 2012, 204) or “exceptionless oughts of rationality” (2012, 114), are distinct from pragmatic oughts in that we can recognize that they hold even when holding a contradictory set of beliefs would be desirable (2012, 13). But, granted that there are such basic oughts, we might still ask why they should be regarded as essential to meaning and concepts, rather than to belief. Given that the concept *nothing* is the concept that it is, it indeed follows that we ought not to have a belief with the content *nothing is white* while also believing that snow is white, but, it might be argued, this reflects a normative constraint on belief rather than anything normative about the concept *nothing* as such.²⁶

Gibbard acknowledges this objection and responds by pointing out a theoretical advantage to viewing the normativity as characteristic of meaning, content or concepts rather than of belief.²⁷ The advantage is that doing so helps us both to explain why the notion of

²⁶ There is a further worry about whether the basic oughts can be invoked to explain not just the normativity of concepts but also that of linguistic meaning. While it might be granted that there is a basic sense of “ought” in which I ought not to believe contradictions, it is not so clear that this ought carries over to the case of uttering contradictory sentences, or, more specifically, asserting or assenting to them. But since we are concerned here with the normativity of concepts, I will leave this worry aside.

²⁷ In his discussion of the objection, Gibbard gives the impression that the alternatives are mutually exclusive: “[the finding that] it is the entire package *believing that* $58 + 67 = 125$ to which the ought applies... leaves us free to attribute the normativity in question either to belief or to meaning, to the concept BELIEVES or to such matters as the claim that ‘+’ means PLUS” (2012, 17). But I think this is misleading, since the basic oughts of warrant or rationality which,

meaning has seemed mysterious to philosophers – in particular, to explain why it leads to the apparent paradox attributed to Wittgenstein by Kripke – and to see our way to resolving the seeming mystery (2012, 11-12). If meaning can be fully characterized in normative terms, then it is possible that “the normativity of meaning exhausts what had been elusive in the concept of meaning,” and, while this hypothesis “leaves the normative to be accounted for in general,” it “at least unifies two mysteries into one” (2012, 12). That mystery in turn, Gibbard goes on to argue, can be solved by an expressivist account of the oughts in terms of which, on his view, the notions of meaning and content are to be understood (2012, ch. 8). It might be responded, however, that this justification does not sit well with Kripke’s view of the normativity of meaning as a pretheoretical constraint on accounts of meaning, rather than as a conclusion that we arrive at on the basis of philosophical considerations about how best to make sense of the notion of meaning.²⁸ An alternative and less theoretically motivated justification for taking “basic normativity” to be characteristic of meaning or content rather than (merely) of belief would be to argue, along the lines suggested by Boghossian (see §4.1) that the notion of content depends on that of belief, so that the need to characterize content in terms of the oughts of rational warrant is an immediate consequence of our need to appeal to those oughts in making sense of belief.²⁹

on his view, determine what it is for ‘+’ to mean *plus* are themselves oughts of belief. Relatedly, Gibbard reads Boghossian (2003) as “arguing against the normativity of content and in favor of the normativity of belief” (2012, 17n32), claiming that his own attempt to defend the normativity of meaning goes by a different route which Boghossian does not consider. However, I think that Boghossian and Gibbard share the same general strategy of grounding the normativity of content (or in Gibbard’s case meaning) on that of belief.

²⁸ This is similar to Boghossian’s point that the pretheoretical character of the normativity thesis precludes our defending it on the basis of an appeal to the plausibility of inferential role semantics (2003, 35).

²⁹ Although Boghossian takes this kind of approach to work only for mental content, and not for linguistic meaning (2003, 39; 2005, 2012).

We saw in §4.1 that Boghossian's conception of the normativity of concepts must be distinguished from the more demanding, internalist conception which we found in Kant and in Kripke. Is the same true of Gibbard's? Some readers have taken Gibbard to hold a view on which the meaningful use of expressions, and thus the entertaining of mental content, requires not merely that our thinking be subject to norms, but that we ourselves grasp those norms. Gibbard himself invites this kind of internalist interpretation when he remarks at one point that "what I am thinking is a matter of the rules I am following in my thinking" (2003, 86), and Boghossian, accordingly, glosses Gibbard's view as one on which "we come to grasp concepts by adopting rules, of permission or of obligation, for the conditional acceptance of contents involving them" (2003, 34). Rather than characterizing the difference between his own view and Gibbard's in the terms he offered in his (1989), that is, as turning on whether the correctness conditions relevant to the normativity of content should be understood in terms of "objective" or "subjective" correctness, Boghossian identifies the difference as corresponding to "two strategies of arguing that content attributions constitutively involve oughts: one based on the connection between the notions of content and correctness, and the other on the connection between content and rules" (2003, 34). This characterization is in turn taken up by Glüer and Wikforss as marking a fundamental divide between approaches to the normativity of content (2009, 33), and their criticism of Gibbard assumes that he is committed to viewing content as constituted by rule-following, on a notion of rule-following which, at least intuitively, requires that the rule-follower herself "take...a certain attitude" to the rule (2009, 55).

But I think that it is a mistake to put too much weight on Gibbard's characterization, in the passage quoted, of thinking as "following rules."³⁰ On Gibbard's considered view, as I understand it, it is essential to the idea of thought's having content that we (as theorists about thinking) conceive of it as governed by normative constraints, but there is no requirement that thinking as such requires the recognition of these constraints, or that (as thinkers) we must regard our thinking as justified in the light of them. To put the point in terms of concepts rather than content: it is essential to the notion of a concept that a concept be something whose application is governed by rules or norms, but grasping a concept is not itself a matter of grasping a norm, nor, more generally, of taking up a normative attitude to one's own thinking. It is compatible with Gibbard's view, then, as with Boghossian's, that an individual's state of meaning something by an expression, or of grasping a concept, can be identified with her possession of a non-normative disposition for the use of an expression. even though our understanding her as a concept-user depends on our thinking of her use of the expression as subject to normative constraints.³¹ In fact, Gibbard is explicit on this point, which he registers by distinguishing the *concept* of meaning (and correlatively, of content and of concepts) from the *property* of meaning something by an expression, and saying that even though the former is normative, the latter is natural, and indeed "may well be entirely a matter of dispositions, for all the arguments Kripke offers tell us" (2012, 25). When I ascribe to a thinker the property of meaning *green* by her use of the

³⁰ It is worth noting that the formulation in terms of following rules does not appear in the more comprehensive treatment in Gibbard 2012. Moreover, shortly after introducing that formulation in Gibbard 2003, he goes on to suggest that "what rules I am following...isn't a matter of what I will do next, but what I ought to do next" (2003, 86), indicating that his understanding of "rule-following" is compatible with the subject's lacking any any grasp of the rule which she "follows".

³¹ The same is true of Wedgwood's account of concepts as normative: although we cannot specify what it is to possess a concept except by mentioning normative properties, it is left open that concept-possession consists in the possession of a disposition which could be specified without using normative terms (2007, 172; 2009, §4).

expression “green”, I am making a claim about her which is normative because I am claiming that her acceptance of sentences including the word “green” is governed by certain oughts, for example that, all other things being equal, that she ought to accept “this is green” in situations where the thing looks green to her. But I am not ruling out that the fact of her meaning *green* by “green” might consist solely in her possession of a naturalistically describable disposition to (among other things) accept “this is green” in situations where the thing looks green to her. It is quite clear, then, that Gibbard does not intend to be asserting the normativity of meaning or concepts in the internalist sense which I have ascribed to Kant and to Kripke.³²

5. Brandom on concepts as inferential norms

We have seen that the two views discussed in §4.1 and §4.2 respectively are both vulnerable to the worry that the normativity they ascribe to concepts belongs properly not to concepts as such, but rather to the attitude of belief. We have also seen that the relevant normativity lacks the internalist or first-personal character of the corresponding normativity in Kant and Kripke, a point that can also be put by saying that concepts on these views are not themselves norms or rules but rather items whose use – more specifically, use in the context of belief-formation – is governed by norms. The situation might seem to be different, however, with respect to Brandom’s version of the view that concepts are normative, since, unlike

³² Because Gibbard himself, like Boghossian, adopts the deflated reading of Kripke’s normativity thesis (1994, 100; 2012, 10-11), he takes himself to assert the normativity of meaning in the same sense that Kripke does. It is because he thinks that he and Kripke are in agreement on the sense in which meaning is normative that he finds it “gratuitous” on Kripke’s part to suppose that naturalistic dispositional properties cannot have the normative import required for meaning and content (2012, 62). On my reading of Kripke, by contrast, it is precisely because of Kripke’s more demanding conception of the required normative import that he rejects the naturalistic dispositionalist conception of meaning properties.

Boghossian and Gibbard, Brandom claims a specifically Kantian inspiration for his account. Following Kant, he motivates his view in terms of the distinction between human cognitive activity and that of animals (in Brandom's terms, between "sapience" and "sentience"), seeing the use of concepts as what demarcates creatures like ourselves, who can respond to the world by making perceptual judgments, from mere "irritable organisms" who may have reliable dispositions to respond to the world in systematic ways, but who are not capable of judgment (1994, 8; see also 1994, 85-88 and 2000, 157-158). And although he does not endorse Kant's own identification of concepts with rules, for reasons related to the problem I described for the Kantian view (1994, 30), he is at least sometimes willing to identify them as norms (for example 2000, 25 and 29; 2009, 120), the difference being that, while rules are explicit, the notion of a norm is broader in that norms can be implicit in our linguistic practice (1994, 18ff).³³

The complexity of Brandom's view makes it difficult to summarize, but we can begin by noting that his view is like Gibbard's in taking the normativity of meaning, content and concepts to be a matter, in the first instance at least, of warrant rather than truth. In Brandom's terms, the normativity relevant to concepts governs what he calls inferential relations among claims or their contents, relations determining how claims serve as reasons for one another, and what claims can be endorsed compatibly with what other claims. The conceptual norm associated with the concept *red*, for example, is a norm determining the correctness of believing that something is red when one also believes that it is scarlet or that it is a ripe strawberry. One feature differentiating Brandom's view from Gibbard's, however, is its holistic character. What

³³ More often, Brandom uses the somewhat ambiguous expression "conceptual norms" which leaves open that the norms he has in mind govern the application of concepts rather than being identifiable with them. But other ways he has of speaking of concepts, for example in endorsing what he takes to be Kant's idea that we should be concerned not with "the grip we have on concepts" but with "the grip concepts have on us" (1994, 636; see also e.g. 1994, 9; 2000, 80), suggest that he follows Kant in identifying concepts with norms or (to put it Kant's way) rules.

Brandom calls conceptual norms – the norms identified with, or implicit in, or associated with, concepts – govern not just the “analytic” inferences and those associated with the logical constants, but all inferences, including those which we intuitively think of as legitimate in virtue of contingent facts about the world. Another point of difference is that Brandom’s view has a social dimension which is absent from Gibbard’s. Conceptual norms are instituted by normative attitudes which we adopt to one another’s behaviour, specifically linguistic behaviour (for this aspect of Brandom’s view, see especially 1994, ch. 3). What makes it the case that there are such norms is that we take one another to be, or treat one another as, governed by the norms. We might, for example, take someone who asserts that something is a ripe strawberry as “committed to” the claim that it is red, where this involves the ascription of a normative status: the content of the attitude we adopt in our treatment of that person is that, under circumstances, she *ought* to assert that it is red. Or, to invoke a different kind of normative status, we might treat the person who asserts that the strawberry is red as entitled to that assertion, which is at least in part a matter of refraining from adopting the attitude that she *ought not* to make the assertion. In adopting these attitudes we take on the role of “scorekeepers” on one another, keeping track of one another’s commitments and entitlements in something like the way a scorekeeper in a game keeps track of the state of play (in the simplest case, of how many points have been scored on each side). Saying that the scorekeeping attitudes institute the norms is not to say that conformity to (or violation of) a norm is a matter of the actual attitudes adopted by scorekeepers, since a scorekeeper’s attitudes can be wrong -- that is to say, wrong from the standpoint of other scorekeepers. But it is still the case that the norms are to be understood as “creatures of ours” (1994, 626 and 642), and, more specifically, as creatures of our scorekeeping practices and the attitudes they embody.

Is Brandom's view any less vulnerable than Boghossian's or Gibbard's to the difficulty that the supposed normativity belongs not to concepts as such, but rather to belief or its linguistic correlate, assertion? Since the conceptual norms Brandom describes govern exclusively belief as opposed to other propositional attitudes (or, correlatively, assertion as opposed to other speech acts), the answer would seem to be no. Brandom does claim at one point that "what sets off the intentional is its liability to assessments of correctness" (1994, 9),³⁴ implying that it is intentional (that is conceptual) content as such which is subject to norms. But our scorekeeping practices, on his account, are concerned only with the content of beliefs, not with intentional content as such, so it is hard to see how he could regard the use of concepts outside belief contexts as subject to norms. Brandom might here defend the normativity of concepts along the lines taken by Boghossian in his defence of the normativity of content, by invoking a privileged relation between concepts and belief. In fact, this would be consistent with Brandom's claim, following Kant's characterization of concepts as "predicates of possible judgments," that "any discussion of content must start with the content of judgments, since anything else only has content insofar as it contributes to the contents of judgments" (2004, 80). Concepts would thus be normative in the sense that it is essential to the notion of a concept that it be something which determines the correctness or incorrectness of the judgments or beliefs in which it figures.

However, as in the case of Boghossian and Gibbard, the normativity of concepts in this sense is compatible with a non-normative account of what the possession and use of concepts consists in. To put it in terms of Gibbard's distinction between concepts and properties, Brandom's approach allows us to ascribe normativity to the *concepts* of meaning and content, but it does not justify the claim that there is anything normative about the *property* of meaning

³⁴ The claim is criticized by Speaks (2009, 410); Gibbard describes it as a "false start" (2010, 27).

something by an expression or grasping a concept.³⁵ So there is nothing in Brandom's conception of the normativity of concepts to rule out identifying the possession of a concept with a naturalistically describable disposition to use a word. Relatedly, in spite of the seemingly Kantian motivation of Brandom's view, the relevant normativity is no closer to Kant's (or Kripke's) than the normativity invoked by Boghossian or Gibbard. The crucial point of difference from Kant is that the application of a concept, for Brandom, does not require that the subject herself take a normative attitude to what she is doing. The main point which Brandom sees Kant as making is that we are "distinctively *normative*, or rule-governed, creatures": for Kant, the "key to the conceptual is to be found... by investigating the special sort of *authority* one becomes subject to in applying concepts – the way in which conceptually articulated acts are liable to assessments of correctness and incorrectness" (1994, 9). But, as we saw in §2, being governed by, or subject to, constraints is only part of the story for Kant. The other part, which is arguably more important in capturing the intuitive distinction between sapience and sentience, is that concept-application requires the subject's own consciousness of her activity as governed by norms.³⁶ That part is missing from Brandom's own view: he thinks that it is sufficient, in order for behaviour to count as conceptual, that the subject behave in a way which makes it appropriate

³⁵ Or, as Lionel Shapiro puts it, Brandom is entitled to his "normative version of *attributorial* pragmatism" but not to the "constitutive thesis that something's possession of a meaning consists in its use or occurrence being governed by certain norms" (2004, 143).

³⁶ Brandom seems to acknowledge this aspect of Kant's view when he describes Kant as holding that "we act according to our *grasp* or *understanding* of rules" (1994, 31), that a rule's "grip on us depends on our recognition or acknowledgment of it as binding" (1994, 31), and that "we are not merely *subject* to norms but *sensitive* to them" (1994, 33). However he claims to have "taken over" this aspect of Kant's view by holding that "we are characterized not only by normative *statuses* but by normative *attitudes*" (1994, 33), so that not only do our performances count as correct or incorrect, we also treat them as correct or incorrect. This is not enough to do justice to Kant's idea, since it does not require that each individual adopt a normative attitude to her own performances, only that individuals in a community adopt normative attitudes to one another's performances.

for other subjects to regard her as governed by norms. If a subject has a reliable disposition to respond discriminatively to dogs – say, by producing the utterance “this is a dog” – she can count as believing that what is presented to her is a dog, and so as applying the concept *dog*, even if she herself thinks that she is making a blind guess.³⁷ Similarly, she counts as inferring one claim from another even if she does not herself recognize the second claim as grounded in, or appropriate to, the first.³⁸ Whether a subject counts from a scorekeeper’s perspective as having the normative status of being committed or entitled to conceptual contents, and more generally whether her activity counts as conceptual at all, is independent of whether she adopts normative attitudes to her own behaviour. So the crucial element in Kant’s identification of concepts as rules – that grasping concepts involves self-conscious awareness of one’s activity as governed by normative constraints – is absent from Brandom’s own identification of concepts as norms. And in fact, that identification is unmotivated: without the idea that the use of concepts involves the subject’s own grasp of norms, there is no reason to identify concepts with norms as opposed to simply saying that the application of concepts is governed by norms.

6. Kant and Kripke revisited

I have distinguished two broad senses in which concepts might be thought to be normative: one, associated with Kant and Kripke, in which a subject’s grasp of concepts can be identified with her grasp of normative constraints, and the other in which the normativity of concepts is a matter of their application being governed by normative constraints, without any requirement that the concept-user herself recognize those constraints. The thesis that concepts

³⁷ See Brandom’s discussion of super-blindsighters at 2000, 104-105. This aspect of Brandom’s view has been criticized by McDowell (1995, 292-298 and 1998, 407-409).

³⁸ John MacFarlane raises this as a problem for Brandom (2010, 88).

are normative in the first sense appears to be untenable given the threat of regress described at the end of §2 and §3 respectively. The thesis that concepts are normative in the second sense is more defensible, but weaker and less interesting. For it is not clear that it comes down to anything more than the idea that belief is subject to norms of truth and/or justification, combined with the thought that the primary role of concepts is that of figuring in belief. Relatedly, as we have seen, it does not rule out naturalistic – for example dispositional -- accounts of what it is to possess a concept.

I now want to suggest, however, that the stronger and more interesting conception of the normativity of concepts, on which concepts are themselves norms, can be defended against the regress problem. Let us go back to Kant's view that, in imaginatively sorting Lassie with the dogs rather than the cows – as manifested in the reproduction of barking rather than mooing – I recognize my imaginative activity as conforming to a normative rule, a rule which Kant wants to identify as the concept *dog*. I noted that, on the face of it, this requires that the rule play a guiding role with respect to my imaginative activity, and thus that I grasp it antecedently to that activity. It is that apparent requirement which generates the regress. But in his discussion of aesthetic experience in the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant describes the activity of imagination in a way which suggests that there is no such requirement. In the experience of an object as beautiful -- which consists in the so-called “free play of imagination and understanding” in the perception of the object – I am conscious of the normative lawfulness or rule-governedness of my imaginative activity without having antecedently grasped a rule which tells me how my imagination ought to be functioning. I respond imaginatively to the object in a way which involves the consciousness of that very response as appropriate, but where this consciousness of

appropriateness does not presuppose grasp of any general feature of the object which serves as a criterion determining that I am responding as I ought.

Kant's official concern in the *Critique of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*) is with what he calls the "faculty of judgment" (*Urteilskraft*) which, as the "faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal" (1902-, 5:179), is paradigmatically exercised in bringing objects under concepts. So it is reasonable to see his view of imagination in aesthetic experience as bearing on his view of concepts as rules for synthesis. The upshot is a view on which I can adopt a normative attitude to my imaginative activity in cases like my perception of Lassie – so that my imaginative activity in calling to mind previous representations of dogs counts as conceptual rather than as the actualization of a mere discriminative disposition – without having to be guided by an antecedently grasped rule. Rather than supposing that awareness of my activity as normatively constrained is to be explained in terms of my having grasped a rule which determines how the activity ought to be performed, we can reverse the relation between the awareness of normativity and grasp of a rule, holding that grasp of a rule is to be explained in terms of the consciousness of one's activity as conforming to, and a fortiori governed by, normative constraints. This makes room for a view on which my grasp of the concept *dog* is something which is made possible by, rather than having to precede, my disposition to respond imaginatively to given dogs as I do – briefly, by sorting them with other dogs as opposed to, say, cows. I grasp the concept *dog* in virtue of being disposed to respond to (say) Lassie by sorting her with the dogs rather than with the cows, and thus by reproducing representations of barking and tail-wagging rather than mooing, but with the important proviso that, in reproducing those representations, I am disposed to recognize their appropriateness to my present perception. That the concept I grasp is the concept *dog*, as opposed to say *dow* (where something is a dow if it is

either a dog observed at or after the moment of sighting Lassie, or a cow observed before my sighting of Lassie) is determined by the psychological fact that I am in fact disposed to sort Lassie with the dogs rather than the cows. But that I grasp a concept at all, as opposed to merely having a discriminative disposition, is determined by the fact that my sorting response is not “blind” as it would be in an animal, but at least potentially involves the consciousness that I am responding to Lassie appropriately when, in reproducing barking rather than mooing listen is correct, I sort her as I do.³⁹

The same approach can be applied in defence of Kripke’s view that the state of meaning something by an expression, and correspondingly of grasping a concept associated with the expression, must involve the subject’s own consciousness that she is using the expression appropriately. As Kripke himself sees it, this consciousness of appropriateness – which he construes as the recognition that one is justified in one’s use of the expression -- requires the subject to have grasped instructions that tell her how she should use the expression, leading immediately to the regress problem. If this requirement is rejected, though, we can accommodate Kripke’s internalist insight without threat of regress. We can follow Kripke in identifying a subject’s grasp of the meaning of “dog,” and hence her grasp of the concept *dog*, with her grasp of a rule determining, for example, the appropriateness of responding to questions about what Lassie is with the expression “dog” rather than “cow” (which comes down, as in the case of the reproduction of barking rather than mooing, to the appropriateness of sorting Lassie with the dogs and not with the cows). But rather than construing her grasp of the rule as a matter of her having internalized instructions for the use of the expression “dog”, we can understand it as consisting in her actual disposition to use the expression “dog” with the attitude,

³⁹ For this reading of Kant, see Ginsborg 1997.

on each occasion of use, that she is using it appropriately in the light of her previous uses. That disposition amounts to a disposition to sort (for example) Lassie with previously perceived dogs as opposed to previous perceived cows, and because of that we can identify it with her grasp of *dog* as opposed to *dow*. However that identification depends also on our being able to ascribe to her grasp of a rule *überhaupt*, as opposed to a mere discriminative disposition, and what makes that possible is the normative attitude she takes towards her own sorting behaviour.⁴⁰

It is important, for understanding this view, to see that the normativity involved is not that of truth or warrant. For it applies, not to belief or judgment, but to something more primitive, namely the imaginative responsiveness to the world which is manifested in what I have called our sorting activity. The view depends on the intuition that, when I call to mind past representations of dogs on seeing Lassie, or “go on” in my use of the word “dog” to apply it to Lassie after having applied it to dogs in the past, I am not *eo ipso* judging that Lassie is a dog. What I am doing is exercising a more basic capacity for discriminating or sorting, a capacity of a kind which – but for one crucial difference – can just as well be ascribed to animals. The crucial difference is that, when I exercise the capacity in any one case, I recognize what I am doing to be appropriate in the light of previous exercises of the capacity: for example, I respond to Lassie by calling to mind a representation of barking, or by uttering the word “dog”, with the recognition that this response is appropriate to Lassie given how I have responded on previous occasions to Fido, Rover and Spot. It is in virtue of this recognition of my present response as appropriate to my previous responses that my behaviour in responding is constituted as conceptual rather than merely discriminative, or as the utterance of a meaningful expression rather than a mere sound. Now these responses can, under the right circumstances, express the belief or judgment that

⁴⁰ If this approach is workable, then it offers a “straight solution” to Kripke's skeptical paradox about meaning.

Lassie is a dog. Normally, if I am reliable in the exercise of my sorting capacity, and if that exercise involves the recognition of each sorting response as appropriate to my previous sorting responses, then my calling to mind the representation of barking is a way of taking Lassie to be a dog, or my utterance of “dog” is a way of asserting that Lassie is a dog. And, given that, it is possible for me or anyone else to evaluate my response according to norms of truth and warrant. But the normative attitude in virtue of which my response is conceptual cannot itself be an ascription of truth or warrant, but must instead express a more primitive attitude to the appropriateness of sorting Lassie one way rather than another.⁴¹

In this section I have offered a partial defence of Kant’s identification of concepts with rules, by showing how it can be understood in a way which avoids the threat of regress. If that identification is correct, then concepts are normative in a strong sense which captures the internalist aspect of Kripke’s normativity thesis and which is independent of considerations about the normativity of belief, in particular the idea that belief is governed by norms of truth or warrant. Otherwise, the thesis that concepts are normative is defensible only as the weaker thesis that the application of concepts in judgment or belief is governed by norms. And, as we have seen, even that weaker thesis can be called into question either by challenging the normativity of belief or by challenging the central role of the notion of belief in our understanding of what concepts are.⁴²

⁴¹ I discuss this view further in Ginsborg 2011 and 2012.

⁴² I am very grateful to Nick French, Paul Horwich, Jeff Kaplan, Mike Martin, Florian Steinberger and Daniel Warren for comments and discussion.

References

- Ahmed, Arif (2007). Saul Kripke. Continuum, London.
- Blackburn, Simon (1984). 'The Individual Strikes Back'. *Synthese*, 58, 281-301.
- Boghossian, Paul (1989). 'The Rule-Following Considerations'. *Mind*, 98, 507-549.
- Boghossian, Paul. (2003). 'The Normativity of Content'. *Philosophical Issues*, 13, Philosophy of Mind, 31-45.
- Boghossian, Paul. (2005). 'Is Meaning Normative?'. In *Philosophy - Science - Scientific Philosophy: Fifth International Congress of the Society for Analytical Philosophy*, edited by C. Nimtz & A. Beckermann, 205-218.
- Boghossian, Paul. (forthcoming). 'The Normativity of Meaning Revisited'. To appear in a festschrift for Allan Gibbard, edited by Billy Dunaway and David Plunkett.
- Brandom, Robert (1994). *Making it Explicit*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- Brandom, Robert (2000). *Articulating Reasons*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- Brandom, Robert (2009). *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- Bridges, Jason (2014). Rule-following Skepticism, Properly So Called. *Varieties of Skepticism*. J. Conant and A. Kern (eds.). Berlin, De Gruyter: 249-288.
- Bykvist, Krister and Anandi Hattiangadi (2007). "Does Thought Imply Ought?" *Analysis* 67(4): 277-285.
- Davidson, Donald (1970/2001). *Mental Events. Essays on Actions and Events*. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 207-227.
- Dummett, Michael (1987). Reply to John McDowell. *Michael Dummett: Contributions to Philosophy*. B. Taylor (ed.). Dordrecht, Martinus Nijhoff: 253-268.
- Evans, Gareth (1982). *The Varieties of Reference*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Fodor, Jerry (1983). "Why Paramecia Don't Have Mental Representations." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy X: Studies in the Philosophy of Mind*: 3-24.
- Fodor, Jerry (1998). *Concepts*. Cambridge Mass., MIT Press.

- Fodor, Jerry (2004). "Having Concepts: A Brief Refutation of the Twentieth Century." *Mind and Language* 19(1): 29-47.
- Fodor, Jerry A. (1990). A Theory of Content, II. *A Theory of Content and Other Essays*. Cambridge, M.I.T Press: 89-136.
- Gampel, E. H. (1997). "The Normativity of Meaning." *Philosophical Studies* 86: 221-242.
- Gibbard, Allan (1994). "Meaning and Normativity." *Philosophical Issues* 5, Truth and Rationality: 95-115.
- Gibbard, Allan (2003). "Thoughts and Norms." *Philosophical Issues* 13, Philosophy of Mind: 83-98.
- Gibbard, Allan (2010). Thoughts, Norms, and Discursive Practice. *Reading Brandom: On Making It Explicit*. B. Weiss and J. Wanderer (eds.). London and New York, Routledge: 15-31.
- Gibbard, Allan (2012). *Meaning and Normativity*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Ginsborg, Hannah (1997). "Lawfulness Without a Law." *Philosophical Topics* 25(1): 37-81. Reprinted in *The Normativity of Nature: Essays on Kant's Critique of Judgement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Ginsborg, Hannah (2011). "Primitive Normativity and Skepticism about Rules." *Journal of Philosophy* 108(5): 227-254
- Ginsborg, Hannah. 2011. 'Inside and Outside Language: Stroud's Nonreductionism About Meaning'. In *The Possibility of Philosophical Understanding*, edited by Jason Bridges, Niko Kolodny & Wai-Hung Wong, 147-181. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Glüer, Kathrin and Åsa Wikforss (2009). "Against Content Normativity." *Mind* 118(469): 31-70.
- Greenberg, Mark (2001). *Thoughts Without Masters: Incomplete Understanding and the Content of Mind*, University of Oxford. D. Phil.
- Hattiangadi, Anandi. (2006). 'Is Meaning Normative?'. *Mind and Language*, 21, 220-240.
- Hattiangadi, Anandi (2007). *Oughts and Thoughts*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Horwich, Paul (1998). *Meaning*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Horwich, Paul (2005). *Reflections on Meaning*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Jones, Matthew (2015). "The Normativity of Meaning: Guidance and Justification." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 23(3), 425–443

Kant, Immanuel (1781). *Critique of Pure Reason*. Riga: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch. Second edition published 1787.

Kant, Immanuel (1902-). *Critique of Judgment*. Originally published in 1790. In Kant's *Gesammelte Schriften*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Kripke, Saul (1982). *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

Kusch, Martin (2006). *A Sceptical Guide to Meaning and Rules: Defending Kripke's Wittgenstein*. Chesham, Bucks., Acumen.

Laurence, Stephen and Eric Margolis (2012). The Scope of the Conceptual. *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Cognitive Science*. E. Margolis, R. Samuels and S. P. Stich. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

MacFarlane (2010). Pragmatism and Inferentialism. *Reading Brandom: On Making It Explicit*. B. Weiss and J. Wanderer. London and New York, Routledge: 81-95.

Margolis, Eric and Stephen Laurence (2007). The Ontology of Concepts -- Abstract Objects or Mental Representations? *Noûs* 41(4): 561-593.

Margolis, Eric and Stephen Laurence (2011). Concepts. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.). URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/concepts/>.

McDowell, John (1987/1998). "In Defence of Modesty." *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press: 87-107.

McDowell, John (1995). Reply to Gibson, Byrne and Brandom. *Perception (Philosophical Issues, 7)*. E. Villanueva. Atascadero, Ridgeview Press: 283-300.

McDowell, John (1998/2009). The Constitutive Ideal of Rationality: Davidson and Sellars. *Having the World in View*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press: 207-220.

McDowell, John (2009). Conceptual Capacities in Perception. *Having the World in View*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press: 127-144.

McGinn, Colin (1984). *Wittgenstein on Meaning*. Oxford, Blackwell.

Miller, Alexander (2000). Horwich, Meaning and Kripke's Wittgenstein. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 50(199): 161-174.

Papineau, David (1999). Normativity and Judgment. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 73: 17-43.

- Peacocke, Christopher (1992). *A Study of Concepts*. Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.
- Rosen, Gideon (2001). "Brandom on Modality, Normativity and Intentionality." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63(3): 611-623.
- Sellars, Wilfrid (1956). *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Vol. 1*. H. Feigl and M. Scriven. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- Sellars, Wilfrid (1978). "The Role of the Imagination in Kant's Theory of Experience." *Categories: A Colloquium*. J. Henry W. Johnstone, Department of Philosophy, The Pennsylvania State University.
- Shapiro, Lionel (2004). "Brandom on the Normativity of Meaning." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 68(1): 141-160.
- Strawson, P.F. (1970). "Imagination and Perception." *Experience and Theory*. L. Foster and J. W. Swanson. Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press: 31-54.
- Verheggen, Claudine (2011). "Semantic Normativity And Naturalism." *Logique et Analyse* 216(553-567).
- Wedgwood, Ralph (2007). *The Nature of Normativity*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Wedgwood, Ralph. (2009). 'The Normativity of the Intentional'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*, edited by Ansgar Beckermann, Brian P. McLaughlin & Sven Walter. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Whiting, Daniel. (2007). 'The Normativity of Meaning Defended'. *Analysis*, 67, 133-140.
- Whiting, Daniel (2013). "What is the Normativity of Meaning?" *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*: 1-20.
- Wikforss, Åsa Maria (2001). "Semantic Normativity." *Philosophical Studies* 102: 203-226.
- Zalabardo, José L. (1997). "Kripke's Normativity Argument." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 27(4): 467-488.