Notes for Week 3 of *Noncognitivism*

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(**Revised & Extended Version**)

1 Preamble: Semantic *vs.* Epistemic *Explananda*

I think it will be helpful to begin by stating several *explananda* (or *key questions*) that have been floating around (both in the Schroeder readings and in the Dreier readings). There seem to me to be two *kinds* of *explananda* in play in this literature: semantic and epistemic. I will follow the conventions I've been using in my handouts so far. $\Phi \overset{\text{def}}{=} \phi$ing is wrong; $\Psi \overset{\text{def}}{=} \psi$ing is wrong. To make things concrete, we can (*e.g.*) stipulate that ϕing $\overset{\text{def}}{=}$ lying, and ψing $\overset{\text{def}}{=}$ getting my brother to lie. Now for the explananda.

Three Semantic *Explananda*/Questions.

(S_1) Why are certain sets of statements *inconsistent*? For instance, why is $\{\Phi, \Phi \to \Psi, \neg\Psi\}$ *inconsistent*?

(S_2) Why does Φ (Ψ) have *the same meaning* when it occurs in isolation *vs.* when it appears as part of a complex sentence (*e.g.*, as part of the *conditional* $\Phi \to \Psi$)?

(S_3) What, exactly, *does* Φ (Ψ) *mean* (*i.e.*, what, precisely, *is* the selfsame meaning of Φ (Ψ) when it occurs in isolation *vs.* when it appears as part of a complex sentence)?

Note that each of these three semantic questions is *stronger than its predecessor*. That is, if one can answer (S_3), then (presumably) one will have an answer to (S_2), and if one can answer (S_2), then (presumably) one will have an answer to (S_1). But, the converses of these conditionals do not (generally) hold. Dreier uses the label "Weak" in connection with (S_1), and he uses the label "Strong" in connection with (S_2) and (S_3). His paper is about the prospects of offering "minimalist" answers to these semantic questions with differing strengths. In this handout, I will (largely) set aside those questions. Instead, I would like to discuss some *epistemic explananda*/questions that are also important in this overall dialectic (as we saw in Schroeder).

Two Epistemic *Explananda*/Questions.

(E_1) Why are certain *combinations* of attitudes *incoherent*? For instance, why is it incoherent to accept *both* of the following claims $\{\Phi, \neg(\Phi \vee P)\}$, where P is some simple factual claim?

(E_2) Under what conditions is it *irrational* to accept a *particular* claim, where the claim in question may be normative (*e.g.*, Φ), non-normative/factual (*e.g.*, P), or mixed (*e.g.*, $\Phi \vee P$).

It is important to note that cognitivists can offer *elegant, unified* explanations/answers to both kinds of questions. Here is one such unified cognitivist story. Both normative and non-normative (simple) claims (at least, the simple claims we're talking about in this dialectic) have *truth-conditions*. These truth-conditions — which *just are* what the simple claims *mean* — do not vary, depending on whether the claims occur in isolation or within complex statements. That allows us to give a *compositional* semantics (once we provide the usual semantics for the logical particles, *etc.*). And, in this way, we can provide (unified, truth-conditional) answers to *all three* semantic questions. Moreover, agents can *believe* both simple and complex claims. When one believes a claim p, one is *representing things as being such that* p. If things are *not* such that p, then any agent who believes that p is (thereby) *believing incorrectly/inaccurately*. Rationality does not require having accurate beliefs (*per se*). *But*, it *does* require that one's beliefs *maximize expected accuracy* (from the point of view of one's credence function). This implies that it is irrational for one to believe anything that is *improbable* (from the point of view of one's credence function). In this way, we can provide unified answers to *both* epistemic questions. Our answer to E_1 is that it is it is incoherent to accept all claims in some set S *if there is no probability function that probabilifies all members of* S. And, our answer to E_2 is that it is irrational for an agent to accept p *if* $b(p) < 1/2$, where $b(\cdot)$ is the agent's credence function. To make things simple and concrete, I will adopt this simple, unified story as my "cognitivist account;"

and, I will adopt Gibbard's non-cognitivist story as my "non-cognitivist account." We actually haven't seen Gibbard's non-cognitivist story yet. We've seen Schroeder's Gibbard-*ish* story, which is explicitly designed to be able to answer both the semantic and the epistemic questions in a unified way. In the next section, I'll set out Gibbard's (actual) semantical framework (and then discuss some *epistemic* problems that it raises).

2 Gibbard's Semantic & Epistemic Accounts

The traditional cognitivist may provide a simple *possible-world semantics*. For each p (be it normative, factual, or mixed), there will be some *set of possible worlds* $[\![p]\!]$ *at which* p *is true*. We can give the usual (recursive, compositional, truth-conditional) semantics, as follows. Note: **W** is the appropriate universal set of possible worlds (we assume a common set of possible worlds, for our factual and normative semantics).

Atomic Case. $[\![P]\!] \overset{\text{def}}{=} \left\{w \mid P \text{ is true at } w\right\}$

Negation. $[\![\neg p]\!] \overset{\text{def}}{=} \mathbf{W} - [\![p]\!]$

Disjunction. $[\![p \vee q]\!] \overset{\text{def}}{=} [\![p]\!] \cup [\![q]\!]$

The semantics of the remaining Boolean connectives can be defined in terms $\neg$ and $\vee$ in the usual way.

For Gibbard, the meaning of a *non*-normative (*viz*., *factual*) claim f reduces to the standard, cognitivist semantics (like the naïve one above). But, his definitions are more complex, for both factual and normative claims. His semantics uses *world-norm pairs* rather than worlds alone. Here's how the formal system looks. Each simple/atomic normative claim Φ (*viz*., ϕing is wrong) gets assigned a set $(\!|\Phi|\!)$ of world-norm pairs. Specifically, $(\!|\Phi|\!)$ contains those world-norm pairs $\langle w, N\rangle$ such that N forbids ϕing at w.[1] Then, he gives clauses for the connectives, which *mimic* the clauses from the traditional semantics (where **N** is the appropriate universal set norms, and so $\mathbf{W} \times \mathbf{N}$ will be our universal set of world-norm pairs).

Atomic Case (normative). $(\!|\Phi|\!) \overset{\text{def}}{=} (\!|\phi\text{ing is wrong}|\!) \overset{\text{def}}{=} \left\{\langle w, N\rangle \mid N \text{ forbids } \phi\text{ing at } w\right\}$

Negation (normative). $(\!|\neg p|\!) \overset{\text{def}}{=} (\mathbf{W} \times \mathbf{N}) - (\!|p|\!)$

Disjunction (normative). $(\!|p \vee q|\!) \overset{\text{def}}{=} (\!|p|\!) \cup (\!|q|\!)$

Factual claims are also given extensions in terms of world-norm pairs. But, for factual claims f, the norm dimension is *vacuous* (*i.e*., it's just a dummy variable which does not constrain the semantics of f). Here's how the factual clauses look (they reduce to the simple world clauses above).

Atomic Case (factual). $[\![P]\!] \overset{\text{def}}{=} \left\{\langle w, N\rangle \mid P \text{ is true at } w\right\}$

Negation (factual). $[\![\neg p]\!] \overset{\text{def}}{=} (\mathbf{W} \times \mathbf{N}) - [\![p]\!]$

Disjunction (factual). $[\![p \vee q]\!] \overset{\text{def}}{=} [\![p]\!] \cup [\![q]\!]$

Now, for the general case. Let $P, Q, \ldots$ be atomic factual sentences, and let $\Phi, \Psi, \ldots$ be atomic normative sentences. And, let $\mathsf{Ext}(p)$ assign *extensions* to *arbitrary* statements. Here the general definition of $\mathsf{Ext}(p)$.

Pure Factual Case. $\mathsf{Ext}(f) \overset{\text{def}}{=} [\![f]\!]$, for *pure factual* f.[2]

Pure Normative Case. $\mathsf{Ext}(n) \overset{\text{def}}{=} (\!|n|\!)$, for *pure normative* n.

Mixed Disjunction. $\mathsf{Ext}(n \vee f) = \mathsf{Ext}(f \vee n) \overset{\text{def}}{=} (\!|n|\!) \cup [\![f]\!]$

Mixed Negation. $\mathsf{Ext}(\neg m) \overset{\text{def}}{=} (\mathbf{W} \times \mathbf{N}) - \mathsf{Ext}(m)$, for mixed m.

[1] I don't know exactly what it is for a norm to "forbid an action at a world." I'll just take that to be a *primitive* notion. The key is that each $\langle w, N\rangle$ is *normatively complete* — it determines, for each ϕ, whether ϕing is obligatory, impermissible, or permissible.

[2] A pure factual (normative) statement p it one that is truth-functionally equivalent to some f (n), which contains *only* factual (normative) atoms + connectives. If a statement is neither pure factual nor pure normative, then it is *mixed*.

With these three sets of rules in hand, we can determine the extension $\mathsf{Ext}(p)$ of *any* (truth-functional) claim p (be it pure or mixed). And, the logic determined by $\mathsf{Ext}(\cdot)$ will have a classical (*viz.*, Boolean) structure. Finally, the natural way to define *inconsistency* of an arbitrary set of statements S is as follows.

Inconsistency. S is inconsistent $\overset{\text{def}}{=} \bigcap_{s \in S} \mathsf{Ext}(s) = \varnothing$

It can be shown that the **Inconsistent** sets will correspond (exactly) to the classical logically inconsistent sets. So, Gibbard has offered us *a* way to (generally) answer our first semantic question (S_1) above. Moreover, he has also offered answers to the stronger questions (S_2) and (S_3). The (extensional) meaning of a (simple) normative claim (Φ) will be the set of world-norm pairs $\langle w, N \rangle$ such that N forbids ϕing at w. And, this meaning *will be the same*, whether Φ appears in isolation or as part of a more complex (Boolean) statement. Moreover, Gibbard's semantics has many of the formal virtues of classical truth-conditional semantics (*i.e.*, it's compositional, recursive, *etc.*). So, it would seem that Gibbard's approach is pretty good, from a *semantic* point of view (*i.e.*, with respect to our *semantic* questions).[3] What about the *epistemic* questions/explananda? It seems to me that if Gibbard is going to try to give a story that is analogous to the cognitivist story I sketched above, then he's going to have to complete (*i.e.*, solve for $\mathcal{X}$ in) the following analogy.

$$\frac{\text{truth/accuracy/veridicality}}{\textit{factual}\text{ assertion/belief/thought}} :: \frac{\mathcal{X}}{\textit{normative}\text{ assertion/acceptance/thought}}$$

As it happens, Gibbard himself accepts a "truth norm" (of sorts) for *factual* assertion/belief/thought. That is, he thinks that (factual) belief (in some important sense) *aims at truth*/accuracy/veridicality. What is the aim of *normative* assertion/acceptance/thought? And, how (if at all) does that connect up with Gibbard's story about the *semantics/extensions* of normative *statements*? Recall, I offered a cognitivist story about (ir)rational belief that has to do with *maximizing expected accuracy* of one's beliefs (from the point of view of one's credences). And, this, ultimately, boiled down to (rationality) norms involving *probabilities* of beliefs/statements. It would be nice to be able to say something *analogous* about normative (or mixed) statements and the conditions under which asserting/accepting/thinking them is (ir)rational. For instance, suppose some factual claim P is highly probable (both subjectively and objectively — and one *knows* all of this about P). It shouldn't be irrational to believe P. Furthermore, it would seem (naïvely, intuitively) that it shouldn't be irrational to believe the *mixed* claim $P \vee \Phi$ either. It is interesting how Schroeder cast everything in terms of (sets of) *mental states, disagreement, etc.* Those seem more well suited to answering our *weak* epistemic question (E_1). But, even Schroeder's story doesn't seem to provide a (systematic, general) answer to our *strong* epistemic question (E_2), especially for *mixed* statements/thoughts. His account does imply that "self-contradictory" or "intrapersonally-disagreeing" normative thoughts are irrational. But, it would seem that there are more cases of irrational normative (or mixed) thought than this. For instance, suppose some factual claim P is *highly improbable* (both subjectively and objectively — and I *know* all of this about P). It would seem irrational for me to believe that P, and it would also seem irrational for me to believe the *mixed conjunction* $P \,\&\, \Phi$. It would be nice to be able to explain why that is (or at least why it *seems plausible*).

Prior to giving these sorts of explanations (regarding the rationality of *full* beliefs), the expressivist will have to first explain *why* an agent's degrees of confidence *should be probabilities.* The cognitivist gives various *justifications* of probabilism (the claim that rationality requires an agent's credences to conform to the probability calculus). Some of these justifications are explicitly based on the *accuracy* of credences (*i.e.*, Joyce-style arguments), and some are based on the *pragmatic* consequences of having non-probabilistic credences (*i.e.*, Dutch Books/money pump arguments). But, all of those existing arguments presuppose *factual states* (*i.e.*, states of the world that can be accurately described *via* factual claims that have truth conditions). It is *formally* possible to *define* probability functions $\Pr(\cdot)$ over Gibbardian semantic points of evaluation.[4] But, it is unclear how such $\Pr(\cdot)$'s should be *interpreted.* For *factual* claims f, $\Pr(f)$ can be interpreted in the usual ways (*e.g.*, as an agent's degree of confidence/credence in the proposition *that f is true*). But, for normative or mixed claims p, it is unclear how to interpret $\Pr(p)$. Perhaps we should interpret $\ulcorner \Pr(p) \urcorner$ as $\ulcorner$the degree to which p is *assertible* (for the agent in question).$\urcorner$ In any case, whatever interpretation is chosen, there still remains the problem of *justifying probabilism* (under said interpretation).

[3]Interestingly, Gibbard no longer seems confident that his approach and the traditional cognitivist approach can be clearly distinguished. This relates to the papers on minimalism we're reading. Here, I assume Gibbard's earlier ("no truth value") view.

[4]The relation $\mathsf{Ext}(p) = \mathsf{Ext}(q)$ is an equivalence relation, which can be used to construct a Boolean algebra, over which one can define a probability measure. Another (formally equivalent) way to do this is to assign basic measure to each "state description" in the mixed language, and then define probabilities in the usual way — as sums (and ratios of sums) of these basic measures.