Meaning and Normativity, by Allan Gibbard. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

In analogy with Moore's founding question to metaethics, the central problem of a metatheory of meaning is the meaning of 'meaning'. In answering the latter question, Gibbard's *Meaning and Normativity* retains far-reaching Moorean ambitions about the main semantic concept: it applies classical metaethical arguments, strategies and distinctions to reach inviting, non-naturalistic conclusions about the concept of meaning.

At the outset, Gibbard interprets the normativity of meaning in two senses. On the *weak* reading, 'means' implies 'ought', understood in a Moorean, non-naturalistic sense. On the *strong* reading, however, any 'means' entails 'ought' and the concept of meaning can be fully defined in normative and naturalistic terms. After the introductory chapter, outlining the main concepts and aims of the project, Chapters 2 and 3 go on to discuss the weak normativity thesis. The starting point is Kripke's classic work on Wittgenstein, which is interpreted as defending the thesis. As often discussed in the literature, in arriving at his non-naturalistic conclusion, Kripke attacks a rather weak dispositional account. However, if Gibbard is right, Kripke could have taken a different route by both keeping the weak normativity thesis *and* retaining a naturalistic, dispositional account of meaning. To this extent, Gibbard proposes more refined dispositional theories of the solipsistic and communitarian type: the former claims that meaning is entirely in the head, whereas the latter contends that it is in part inherent in the community.

The key to reconciling dispositional accounts and the weak normativity thesis is to distinguish between properties and concepts. Like Moore, Gibbard locates normative dimension in the latter: while both the brain property and the community property are natural, the concept of meaning is normative. No contradiction arises, for the former tells us something about the world, the latter about our thinking about the world.

The two dispositional views are substantive theories of meaning and disagree about the correct naturalistic rendering of the meaning

property. Is such a disagreement itself naturalistic? Gibbard indicates it might be, invoking Kripke's famous example with 'quaddition', the function that delivers the 'quum' 5 for the numbers larger than 50. According to the thought experiment, imaginary Quermans generally reply with a 'quum' when using the '+' sign. While the meaning solipsist would hold that Quursula, an ordinary Querman, means plus by '+', the meaning communitarian would be prone to say she means quus. The two may disagree whether Quursula ought to accept '68 + 57 = 5' or not, but in doing so both accept that 'means' entails 'ought' and so agree in their metatheory of meaning.

In Chapter 4, Gibbard introduces the crucial distinction between the subjective and objective senses of 'ought'. While the former is a matter of what one should do or believe given the available evidence, the latter concerns the facts, regardless of whether one can know them or not. The chapter centers on the concept of belief in the light of this distinction. By way of example, imagine I toss a coin which lands heads, unbeknownst to you. Subjectively, you ought to believe there are equal chances the coin landed heads or tails. Objectively, however, you ought to believe it landed heads. The latter sense of ought follows analytically from the facts and thus cannot ground a philosophically interesting normative thesis.

To argue for the normativity of meaning, then, we need to pinpoint an 'ought' that does not follow from a naturalistic *is*. In relation to this, Gibbard introduces Ewing's notion of primitive ought and posits it as the basic normative concept. According to this 'exceptionless ought of rationality', one 'ought always to disbelieve contradictions and in matters *a posteriori*, one ought always to believe in accord with the evidence' (p. 14).

The argument for the weak normativity thesis locates Ewing's ought in the relation of entailment, more specifically the existential generalization (I leave aside the examination of the inconsistency relation) and considers the following 'normative conditional':

> If I accept 'Snow is white' and am warranted in doing so, then I ought immediately to infer 'Something is white' (p. 116).

While the antecedent of the conditional is explained in naturalistic terms, the 'ought of inference' in the consequent occurs in the primitive sense and contributes to the meaning of 'something' (p.

115). The meaning of 'something', then, entails Ewing-like ought, with such an ought being, in turn, 'built into characterizing the very meaning' of this word.

In assessing the argument, a naturalist may urge that the 'ought' in our example is also an objective ought of correctness, analytically entailed by the facts. Objectively, one ought to do what one would do subjectively if one had all the information (p. 82). But once we accept that 'Snow is white', we don't need any new information to come up with the conclusion that 'Something is white'. Had one 'learned everything that is the case', one would still make the same inferences. Unfortunately, if the ought of inference can be used in the objective sense, the overall conclusion would be normative only in a degenerate way.

Gibbard's answer may well be to point to how the existential generalization can be tied to our actions. It is conceptually contradictory to both accept 'Snow is white' and yet reject that 'Something is white'. If such a rejection could be related to the way we ordinarily act, only a normative explanation would do, since naturalistic thoughts lack similar ties to actions.

The argument is further developed in Chapter 6 with the proposal to use the concept SOMETHING in characterizing other concepts 'more informatively'. On the face of it, the phrase in quotes may seem to suggest that the concept SOMETHING adds new information to the concept being characterized. This is misleading, however, as Gibbard uses the phrase only to capture the possibility of designating a concept in a theoretically interesting way. Given this, one would be wrong to insist that the concept DOG, say, cannot be rendered more informative by means of the concept SOMETHING because everyone who possesses the former also possesses the latter concept.

The concept SOMETHING gives us a new, theoretically interesting device to identify our concepts, Gibbard writes, as opposed to Horwich's alternative approach in designating the concept DOG 'as the meaning of my word 'dog'' (p. 113). However, Horwich also has other means of identifying the concepts: the same concept could be characterized by the following description: 'The property that 'THAT IS A ____' is accepted with attention focused on a prominent dog'. (p. 96) This said, Gibbard's intention here is rather to underline the normative dimension of such characterization, as Ewing's primitive

ought is shown to follow invariably from the concept SOMETHING.

Gibbard's point can presumably be extended to proper names. Thus, starting from 'Socrates is Greek' we may infer that 'Someone is Greek'. The motivation we had for the concept SOMETHING now carries over to the concept SOMEONE: its meaning is tied to existential generalization (under the appropriate interpretation of the quantifier by the model theory), we ought to make similar inferences immediately, and it entails Ewing's primitive ought which is built into characterizing its meaning. Proper names, it seems, can likewise be described by pursuing the normative strategy. To see whether such extension will work, I suggested, we need to make sure that the ought of inference cannot be understood in the objective sense.

The second main reason for going normativist, in addition to the argument just discussed, is the seeming failure of the alternative, naturalistic proposals. Gibbard discusses in length Horwich's use theory of meaning. The argument he gives against this view resembles the strategy we encountered earlier when dealing with Kripke's meaning skepticism, on the line of the Moorean 'What's at issue?' argument. First, we take the meaning property to be naturalistic (Gibbard is a naturalist about all properties) and then show that there may be two opposing views disagreeing about the claim couched in naturalistic terms. Secondly, we explain that the disagreement itself may be normative.

Horwich's theory of meaning insists on there being a single ideal law governing our use of words (the basic acceptance property of a word, that is). Gibbard contrasts this feature with Quine's indeterminacy of meaning from *Word and Object* and opts for the latter. To illustrate the possibility of 'many alternatives' playing the meaning role, Gibbard takes a stock example from physics, the concept of mass. The evolution of the concept, the story goes, went from its single meaning in classic Newtonian physics to four distinct senses ascribed to it in the original version of the special theory of relativity. I will assume it is clear how Quine's moral would apply to the picture. And once we establish that there can be more than one model determining the meaning of 'mass', we make room for disagreement about claims involving this concept. While you may take a Newtonian physicist to mean something true by '$p = mv$', I may understand her as saying something false. Our disagreement, Gibbard suggests,

does not have to be about facts (much less about our conceptual inco-
herence), but normative as 'the questions in dispute will be ones of
how to use our words' (p. 116).

I find Gibbard's argument illuminating and convincing. It is
worth examining, however, whether the Moorean strategy may be
extended to cover non-theoretical concepts. If this proves a difficult
task, as I am more inclined to think, it would be interesting to see
the implications for Moorean argument and the naturalistic take on
its success.

Chapter 7 presents the problems of reference and truth, with
greater emphasis on the former. The normative dimension of refer-
ence is linked to the question of how one ought to rely on the beliefs
of others. Taking Ada's assertion 'I am sad' as a model (Gibbard ex-
amines the personal pronoun 'I' along with some other indexicals),
we may rephrase the question as asking what the audience should be-
lieve given Ada's statement. Clearly, there's no *one* specific belief we
may attribute across the board. (Perhaps a 'What's at issue?' argu-
ment could be invoked once again, addressing the normativity of be-
lief). The audience may treat Ada's expression of belief as (i) a 'sheer
reliable indicator'; (ii) a thought which Ada ought to have and thus
the basis for a thought the audience ought to have; as well as (iii) an
expression of a belief arising in a misleading epistemic circumstance.

In the first two cases, Ada's warrant 'transforms' into our war-
rant. The explanation of how this proceeds may have been pointed to
already with the distinction between subjective and objective 'ought'.
The issue concerns our evidence and the way we act on the basis of
it. Regardless of believing or disbelieving Ada's statement, we ought
to do so subjectively. A more general moral about reference and the
ought of communication applies in a similar way: it is not important
what a concept *actually* denotes, but rather what the audience takes
it to be denoting. Once again, the 'ought' in question is used in the
subjective and thus normative sense.

Up to this point, much of the book is devoted to explaining mean-
ing in terms of Ewing's ought. Chapter 8 brings in metanormative
considerations, explaining Ewing's ought in expressivistic terms.
The account is far from being straightforward: it amounts to describ-
ing the state of mind one is in when meaning the concept 'ought': the
state of *planning*. Gibbard's central notion of plan is somewhat meta-

phorical and departs from the ordinary concept in being directed towards hypothetical scenarios and in excluding the evidence of the person making plans as irrelevant.

The strong normativity thesis, in which meaning is fully defined in normative and naturalistic vocabulary, is carried out in terms of dispositions plus plans. By way of example, consider the meaning claim whereby Pierre *means* mass by 'masse'. Accepting this claim would amount to having a plan for a hypothetical case of being Pierre with his linguistic dispositions. To see how the plan will develop, we may think of cases when we accept sentences containing the word 'mass' in English. Our plan to accept sentences with the word 'masse' in French, for the appropriate epistemic circumstances and given Pierre's linguistic dispositions, is spelt out in a quite similar way. If you think what this plan amounts to is obvious, this is how it should be, at least in most cases. Chapter 9 offers a variety of such examples and tests of the hypothesis. One may worry if the expressivistic account is all that can be offered. Nonetheless, the solution seems cogent and, perhaps, the nature of the problem restricts how explicit one may be in addressing it.

In the expressivistic account, to accept a meaning claim (e.g. 'masse' means 'mass') amounts to having a certain plan, as noted above. But accepting this claim engages us in adopting a further plan, and so on. Gibbard shows that this kind of regress is not peculiar to expressivism, but inherent to any metatheory of meaning: we need to answer not only what the meaning of 'meaning' is, but also what the meaning of this very question is (p. 199).

The advantages of expressivism are most readily seen in its ability to explain ties to actions. The account neatly captures how normative thoughts are conceptually equivalent to planning thoughts, as one cannot both have a normative belief and yet reject the corresponding plan, on pain of conceptual incoherence. One cannot believe she ought to leave the burning building and decides to stay (p. 224). This is one of the upshots of Chapter 10. The expressivistic plans explain how 'ought', taken in the primitive and fully normative sense, entails 'do!' (p. 231). This is the final twist as expressivism, otherwise opposed to non–naturalism, is now taken as normative. Two views defended in the book, expressivism and non–naturalism, end up coinciding under Gibbard's refinements.

Meaning and Normativity is a stimulating reading. The strategies it pursues are controversial but well defended and both refreshing and insightful. The book is written clearly, although its arguments are not always expounded systematically. This may reflect the structure of the book, which grows in complexity, leaving the arguments to be addressed at various points, depending on the development of the metatheory. Those familiar with Gibbard's work will find particularly interesting the expressivistic talk of plans, which dates back to Gibbard's *Thinking How to Live* (2003), now applied to issues of meaning. The book is a great contribution to the ongoing debate between normativists and naturalistically minded theorists of meaning and presents a novel and clear-headed way to understand what is at issue.[1]

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