Normative Functionalism in the Pittsburgh School
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Abstract

Sellars, Brandom, and McDowell (whom Maher aptly calls the "Pittsburgh School") have tremendous influence on the current shape of the analytic tradition. Despite their differing views on philosophy of language, the philosophy of mind, philosophy of action, and epistemology, their shared application of 'normative functionalism' highlights important similarities in their approaches to the aforementioned disciplines. Normative functionalism *interprets the ability to form judgments, possess concepts, rationally defend or be critical of judgments, and consequently act as an agent, as largely guided by one's responsiveness to norms.* In this article, I argue for two related claims. First, I argue that the Pittsburgh School's normative functionalism has germinated from the seed of Sellars' 'psychological nominalism' and cannot be separated from it. Second, no philosophical question or approach can be free of competing claims as to the manner in which human beings think, communicate, act, and know. As a result, normative functionalism (insofar as it is a natural extension of psychological nominalism) is relevant to many philosophical disciplines, because it opposes nearly all the traditional views concerning how the human intellect comes into being and functionally operates.

Section 1

Sellars, Brandom, and McDowell (whom Maher aptly calls the "Pittsburgh School") have tremendous influence on the current shape of the analytic tradition.[1] Despite their differing views on philosophy of language, the philosophy of mind, philosophy of action, and epistemology, their shared application of 'normative functionalism' highlights important similarities in their approaches to the aforementioned disciplines.[2]

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[1] In *The Pittsburgh School of Philosophy: Sellars, McDowell, Brandom,* Maher explains the Pittsburgh School's influence in the following terms:

> How influential are their views? Some indication is given by the honor they have received. All have presented the prestigious Locke Lecture at Oxford. Sellars gave the John Dewey Lecture and the Paul Carus Lectures. McDowell and Brandom have given the Woodbridge Lectures. Both Brandom and McDowell have recently received the Andrew Mellon Foundation's Distinguished Achievement Award, including a grant of $1.5 million. That grant is one of the largest available to humanities scholars. The Award has been given to three people each year since 2001. Of the thirty recipients, seven have been professors of philosophy, including Brandom and McDowell. (Notes to the "Introduction," Endnote 1)

This quote can be found in the following work: Chauncey Maher, *The Pittsburgh School of Philosophy: Sellars, McDowell, Brandom*, New York: Routledge Publishing, 2012.

[2] I am indebted to Maher's text *The Pittsburgh School* for indicating that 'normative functionalism' is an apt characterization of Sellars', Brandom's, and McDowell's central views concerning the mind and its ability to reason. In this article, I will build on his notion that this term is a productive means to characterize the views of the Pittsburgh School.

As of yet, there is no definite way to refer to 'normative functionalism,' nor can one claim that its use is well established. Nonetheless, normative functionalism indicates a philosophical approach that will continue to have important repercussion in contemporary thought for two distinct reasons. First, via the considerable influences of Sellars, Brandom, and McDowell, the *approach* (if not the term) of normative functionalism is embedded in the most important issues facing one of the historically most prominent trends of the 21st century. Second, the theory of normative functionalism appears to maintain its explanatory power within a wide range of philosophical disciplines.

Normative functionalism characterizes a tendency to *interpret the ability to form judgments, possess concepts, rationally defend or be critical of judgments, and consequently act as an agent, as largely guided by one's responsiveness to norms.* As we shall see, what is most relevant is not this cursory definition, but rather the manner in which the Pittsburgh School argues for the views that comprise it, its divergent applications, and its radical rejection of many traditional views concerning perception, cognition, language, and the advent of reason and agency.

Section 2

In order to understand the Pittsburgh School's approach to what I am calling 'normative functionalism,' we must first understand Sellars' influential claim called 'psychological nominalism'. In this paper, I will focus on the aspects of psychological nominalism that have been praised, defended, and integrated into numerous (and perhaps the most important) works of Brandom and McDowell. In this regard, when I address Sellars' psychological nominalism, I am also addresses all of the Pittsburgh School, as it delineates their strongest tie and greatest point of agreement.

In order to understand psychological nominalism and what is at stake in this claim, we need to first consider two opposing views: 'nominalism' and the specific form of 'realism' it rejects. While these latter two objectives will require a significant detour from a direct discourse on normative functionalism, they provide the rich payoff of explicating the meaning, application, historical relevancy, and pervasiveness (in that it is relevant to many philosophical disciplines) of normative functionalism.

Nominalism is a countermovement against 'realists,' who claim that universals exist independent of the human mind.[3] In opposition to the realists, nominalists argue that universals are *created* and inseparable from the human mind. As we shall see, 'psychological nominalism' is a sophisticated and linguistically centered version of nominalism.

The debate between nominalists and realists is important, because it establishes the source of human understanding. For instance, in the following excerpt, Michael Loux explains the manner in which the activity of sorting, classifying, and grouping entities together requires the functional use of universals. In this regard, universals play an

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[3] The term 'realist' denotes several different and incongruent philosophical views. The aforementioned use is only one possible formulation.

essential role in our rational thoughts and cognitive experiences (i.e., experiences that contain propositional content such as 'that is a car'):

> The object we talk and think about can be classified in all kinds of ways. We sort things by color, and we have red things, yellow things, and blue things. We sort them by shape, and we have triangular things, circular things, and square things. We sort them by kind, and we have elephants, oak trees, and paramecia. The kind of classification at work in these cases is an essential component in our experience of the world. There is little, if anything, that we can think or say, little, if anything, that counts as experience that does not involve groupings of these kinds. (18) [4]

Universals are essential to human experience (insofar as it is cognitive and rational), because they account for how it is possible for differing entities to be "qualified or characterized in some way by virtue of their all standing in relationship" to the same "quality or characteristic" (19).[5] Without the capacity to qualify or characterize an entity, rational thought is not possible, for without such capacities there is no determinate or fixed content to one's thoughts. This outcome has far reaching effects, since without rational thought one cannot *infer* or *understand* what something is, how something should be done, or what one ought to do.

Section 3

Sellars' version of nominalism, as explained in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, is a thoughtful and calculated rejection of the mainstream views concerning universals and their operation in language. Sellars does not merely disagree with previous philosophical traditions, nor does he merely offer some new variation of them. Rather, he provides an entirely new kind of alternative for the analytic tradition as it concerns the debate between nominalists and realists.[6]

Sellars overtly rejects three traditional responses to the debate among realists and nominalists.[7] I will provide a quick overview of each of these views so the reader will be able to historically situate Sellars' claim and appreciate its revolutionary force.

The first view is a version of 'realism,' which for the sake of clarity, I will call 'traditional realism'.[8] Traditional realism asserts (or assumes) that some hidden power of

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[4] Michael Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, USA: Routledge, 2010.

[5] Beginning most notably with Peter Abelard (1079-1142), philosophers have agonized over the debate as to whether universals exist independent of the human mind (i.e., realism) or, as Abelard argued, are constructs formulated by the human mind (i.e., nominalism).

[6] Here, the key term is the 'analytic' tradition, as it can be argued that Hegel anticipated much of Sellars' claim. Such a discourse is beyond the confines of this article.

[7] While Sellars is primarily interested in rejecting traditional empiricism — as it enjoyed a strong influence among analytic thinkers at the time he wrote *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* — his arguments are also intended to disprove traditional formulations of realism and rationalism.

[8] 'Traditional realism' is a fabricated term (i.e., a stipulative definition). Its sole purpose is to designate the type of realism to which I am referring, and as such, keep my readers from confusing it with a variety of other views called 'realism'.

the human soul enables us to 'see' (i.e., non-inferentially and immediately perceived) universals. The idea driving this view is that universal commonalities shared among diverse objects, occurrences, and thoughts exist in a manner that is independent of the human mind. If these universal commonalities exist independent of the human minds that think them, then the standard of truth, objectivity, and knowledge will reside in our ability to observe them. For example, under this view, what makes us aware of someone's 'goodness' is his/her *exhibition* (i.e., something we can sense) of the universal qualities of 'goodness'. In this context, 'goodness' is a universal quality that exists independent of a particular person who is good. When considering the Western tradition as a whole, this view is (as it concerns universals) the most widely held.

The second view is called 'rationalism'. It denies the claim that we somehow 'see' universals via our senses and argues instead that the human intellect is naturally endowed with a functional grasp of universals. As Descartes argues in his famous wax example, it is through the intellect alone (i.e., not the senses) that knowledge concerning determinate qualities and characteristics of the appearing world is obtained. According to most rationalists, the mind can perform this operation, because the 'natural light of reason' is designed by God to perform this function. Rationalists are typically 'realists,' in the sense that they believe the universals implanted in one's mind bear a synonymous relation with outer reality.

The third view is traditional empiricism. It denies both the above views. It claims that, from a sensory particular, the human mind can immediately (i.e., non-inferentially) 'abstract' universal content from sensation. For example, Locke claims that from the sensation of a particular shade and tint of red, the mind can subtract all of its specific or particular qualities. This operation is thought to endow the mind with an immediate (i.e., non-inferential) recognition of *general ideas*, as they concern specific sensations. He claims that the "general and universal belong not to the real existence of things; but are the inventions and creatures of the understanding, made by it for its own use […]" (330). This is a strong version of nominalism.

Under the above version of empiricism, the truth or falseness of an empirical claim is reducible to the *sensory particulars* and not universal qualities. For example, a particular sensation is said to non-inferentially prompt the mind to make general observations. In this vein, the general claim "this is red" (i.e., 'red' is a 'universal' quality) is true when such an observation is prompted by the sensation of a particular shade and tint of what can be subsequently qualified as 'red'.

Sellars believes that all the above views regarding universals (as well as most other views of his time) make the mistake described below:

> This is the fact that when we picture a child […] learning his *first* language, *we*, of course, locate the language learner in a structured logical space in which we are at home. Thus, we conceive of him as a person […] in a world of physical objects, colored, producing sounds, existing in Space and Time. But though it is *we* who are familiar with this logical

space, we run the danger, if we are not careful of picturing the language learner as having *ab initio* [i.e., from the beginning] some degree of awareness — "pre-analytic," limited and fragmentary though it may be — of the same logical space. […] In other words, unless we are careful, we can easily take for granted that the process of teaching a child to use a language is that of teaching it to discriminate elements within a logical space of particulars, universal, facts, etc., of which it is already indiscriminatingly aware, and associated these discriminated elements with verbal symbols. (65)[9]

For Sellars, the tendency to assume children start out with a limited functional use of universals is a 'myth'. This myth presumes that the ability to employee universals, which requires a capacity to command *logical relations*, is inherent to the human intellect, regardless of how universals are initially presented to the mind.

As suggested above, traditional realists, rationalists, and traditional empiricists all fall prey to the assumptions embedded in the above Sellarsian excerpt. This can be illustrated in their various views concerning language. For instance, the most popular views concerning humanity's ability to learn a language have historically been influenced by the aforementioned traditions: 1) we see universals and then merely give them a name established by convention (i.e., traditional realism), 2) our intellects naturally come endowed with an understanding of universals, which are merely given names via convention (i.e., rationalism), or 3) after sensation occurs, one can immediately (i.e., non-inferentially) abstract such content into universal content, which can then be given a name by convention (i.e., traditional empiricism).

In all the above explanations of how language is learned, the pre-linguistic *experience* of universals is merely given a name by convention. Moreover, our capacity to understand the logical relations between different types of universals is taken as a non-problematic and inherent function of the mind (or as something non-inferentially observed, i.e., traditional realism). Thus, according to the above theories, the differences among languages are due to the differences established by the ways universals are referenced according to longstanding conventions.

Traditional realism, rationalism, and traditional empiricism overlook the fact that the meaning of words cannot be reduced to spoken or written symbols for universals or particulars:

> Sorting expressions by their meanings is sorting them by functional classifications. Just as we might sort kitchen utensils by their functions — by the ways in which they are used — so we can sort words by their functions or roles in language. A functionalist account of meaning states that two words (whether in the same or in different languages) have the same meaning iff [i.e., a necessary and sufficient condition] they have roughly the same linguistic function. […] The relevant role played by an

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[9] Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Harvard Press, 1997.

> expression [or a word's function] is multidimensional, for, as he [i.e., Sellars] makes clear in "Some Reflections on Language Games" (1954), the use of the expression in language-entry transitions (e.g., verbal response to perceptual stimuli), language-departure transitions (e.g., actions fulfilling statements of intention), and language-language transitions (e.g., inferences, conversational responses, and implicatures) all count in determining the expression's functional role in a linguistic economy. (deVries and Triplett 65)[10]

According to Sellars, the ability to use a language is not knowing conventional names for things already known, but rather, it is the acquired ability to understand and employ the functional roles words play in a particular language.[11] The roles of words and expressions have multiple functions as suggested above (i.e., language-entry, language-departure, and language-language transitions), and thus their meaning stems from their use and application. The successful employment and understanding of terms and expressions consequently require one's ability to navigate a virtual sea of possibilities that are not present to the linguistically uninitiated.

Sellars illuminates the inaccuracies of traditional views on language by showing that an understanding of the roles between categorical distinctions (such as universal qualities and characteristics) requires a "logical space":

> What does the notion of a "logical space" here amount to? We can think of logical space as determined by the categorical structure that we use to carve up the world conceptually. There are categorical distinctions amongst objects, events, and properties; and within those categories, there are distinctions between physical objects and abstract objects, first-order properties (properties of objects) and higher-order properties (properties of properties). (deVries and Triplett 60)

The ability to use categories or concepts (terms Sellars prefers over that of 'universals') requires the ability to understand why something is considered an event, object, or property. Likewise, the ability to understand why something is a mental entity or physical object requires an understanding of the relationships or differences that these two classifications delineate. Moreover, qualities of qualities require logical distinctions. For instance, "the blue tint" to the "sheen" of "an oil slick," designates a 'quality' of the oil's "sheen." In this example, both the 'blue tint' (i.e., the higher-order property) and 'sheen' designate qualities one can attribute to the oil itself. These differences among the various types of universals belie that their practical applications presuppose an understanding of their logical relations (i.e., a logical space of reasons).

As seen above, the conceptual ability to classify, sort, and group entities together via a logical space of reasons is an essential part of human experience. If this is true, then our

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[10] DeVries and Triplett, *Knowledge, Mind, and the Given*, USA: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000.
[11] Wittgenstein's illustration of this point made him famous in *Philosophical Investigations*.

experience of particulars will be colored by how they relate or fail to relate to the conceptual content that establishes universal relations.

Section 4

Sellars perceives the application of the logical space of reasons as not merely a matter of 'knowing that' but more fundamentally 'knowing how'. 'Know how' concerns our ability to successfully perform some function, while 'knowing that' requires conceptual content (or what some call universals) in the form of "that is a tree," "that is a bad idea," "that is sad," etc. While it is true one may need to 'know that' "this is a tree" and the corresponding reasons why something is a tree, in order to meaningfully state or know that "this is a tree," such abilities are only half the story. One also needs the more fundamental 'know how' of being able to 1) appropriately generate such thoughts in the presence of trees, and 2) form and interpret such statements as "this is a tree".

Sellars shares important similarities with Gilbert Ryle, who argues that "[k]nowing how to apply [reasons or] maxims cannot be reduced to, or derived from the acceptance of those or any other maxims."[12] Sellars applies this Rylean concept to language. The use of language cannot rest on reasons concerning 'knowing that,' which in turn rests on additional acts of reasoning (i.e., 'knowing that') *ad infinitum*. If it did, one would have to undergo an infinite string of reasons to communicate one's observations. Thus, there must be some stop to 'knowing that' and some start to 'knowing how'.

How then can one learn a language, if we as children are not already in possession of universals and the logical relations they share, i.e., the multi-dimensional application of universals to particulars and their variable functions in numerous different settings? In the next section, I will explain Sellars' response to this challenge is psychological nominalism.

Section 5

As noted above, Sellars rejects the claims that human beings can directly see universals, have a natural ability to produce them from sensory particulars, are born with them, and inherently possess a 'space of reasons.' All these views assume one or more aspects of the "myth of the given": 1) humans non-inferentially see universals, 2) a non-inferential command of universals is an inherent attribute of the human mind (i.e., one does not need to make a judgment to discern universal qualities, characteristics, or states), 3) humans non-inferentially create universals, and/or 4) humans passively receive non-inferential and non-conceptual content from sensation, which holds intrinsic epistemic value.[13] If 1, 2, 3, and/or 4 are true, they (or it) could function as a *foundation* for epistemic claims, as they (or it) would ensure 'primitive perceptual' experiences that are distinguishable from

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[12] Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, New York: Penguin Classics, p. 32.

[13] "*The general framework of the givenness consists of the assumption that there are epistemic primitives —beliefs or other mental states that have some positive epistemic status but that are noninferential, conceptually simple, and epistemically independent and efficacious*" (original emphasis, *Knowledge, Mind, and the Given* 7).

the potentially false 'judgments' that occur when one attempts to *infer* what is being perceived.

According to Sellars, one acquires concepts and the ability to 'know how' to apply concepts, and as such, the capacity to recognize common traits by learning a language: "*psychological nominalism* according to which *all* awareness of *sorts, resemblances, facts*, etc., in short, all awareness of abstract entities—indeed, all awareness even of particulars — is a linguistic affair" (original emphasis, 60).[14] How does Sellars claim we learn a language, learn concepts (i.e., mental states that function like universals), and obtain the ability to command concepts by possessing a space of reasons, without falling into some aspect of the 'myth of the given'?

In order to understand how language can provide us concepts, a logical space, and by extension the ability to reason about the world and ourselves, we need to reassess why concepts are interrelated and interdependent. According to Sellars, a person cannot know one or just a few concepts, because the functional operation of any one concept is dependent on a "whole battery" of concepts. For instance, Sellars argues that "the ability to recognize that x looks green presupposes the concept of *being green*" ("Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind", 44). This ability will also require the additional "knowing in what circumstance to view an object to ascertain its color" (44). In turn, this additional ability requires us to notice "that certain objects have perceptual characteristics," one of which is being colored. Hence, the deceptively simple observation "this is green" presupposes the ability to know under which circumstance one can make color designations, what colors are, how to discern colors, as well as an awareness that individual objects can possess properties such as being a specific color.

After arguing that an observation requires many different kinds of abilities, Sellars radicalizes his claim that concepts are interrelated and interdependent:

> [O]ne can have the concept of green only by having a whole battery of concepts of which it is one element. It implies that while the process of acquiring the concept green may — indeed does — involve a long history of acquiring *piecemeal* habits of response to various objects in various circumstances, there is an important sense in which one has *no* concept pertaining to the observable properties of physical objects in Space and Time unless one has them all—and, indeed, as we shall see, a great deal more besides (45).

Sellars believes that concepts have meaning in light of how they relate or fail to relate to other concepts.[15] Thus determinations, which are judgments that assert/attribute conceptual content to some entity, are meaningful only insofar as one understands how

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[14] "This view is nominalist because it denies that cognitive phenomena involve any direct relation to abstracta [or what was above defined as 'universals'] […]; instead, it seeks to substitute a relation to linguistic entities. It is psychological because it is not the ontological doctrine that abstacta do not exist (full stop), but the psychological doctrine that abstacta are not involved directly in psychological, especially cognitive, phenomena as such" (deVries and Triplett 193).

[15] This Sellarsian view holds many parallels to what Hegel calls "determinate negations."

they relate to a whole web of compatible and incompatible concepts. Additionally, "the great deal more" that is needed over and above concepts is 1) a logical space of reasoning, which permits one to functionally navigate a "battery of concepts" and 2) the 'know how' of knowing when and in what manner, one *should* form their observations or claims.

One can quickly see why Sellars wants to emphasize that learning a language, and by extension learning how to make observations, requires a longstanding acquisition of habits.[16] One begins to learn a language via acquiring the right kind of habits that enable one to functionally respond to the observational conditions one is exposed to, as well as the kind of observational claims they permit. Take for instance the kinds of obstructions that may occur when making an empirical observation. These obstructions, whether they are a physical object in one's line of sight, a colored light, dim lighting conditions, atmospheric conditions, etc., change when and how we can make observational claims.

We also need the ability to understand the media in which we are making claims, which is essentially linguistic. Thus, through habits we also acquire the 'know how' to manage language-entry, language-departure, and language-language transitions.

In review, Sellars is a 'conceptual holist,' meaning that he believes concepts are interrelated and cannot be employed in isolation from one another. He also claims that the employment of concepts requires a 'logical space'. He rejects the notion that we obtain concepts "piecemeal" (i.e., one at a time) when we first begin to speak. Instead, he argues that the *use* of many concepts needs to be habitually acquired, until a gestalt-like understanding dawns on the whole. This gestalt-like occurrence does not require one to obtain an instantaneous and reflective understanding of each concept one can use. Rather, Sellars' claim is that one obtains the ability to play the language game, i.e., one appropriately responds to the norms by which one can functionally employ concepts and then assesses (*if* the need arises) whether or not they are properly employed.

Section 6

Up to this point, I have only mentioned norms once. Given that this paper is designed to introduce something called 'normative functionalism,' it may seem questionable that norms have yet to be discussed. I have taken such a circuitous route before mentioning norms, because the importance and pervasiveness of norms in the Pittsburgh School can only be appreciated in light of psychological nominalism. For instance, if one cannot observe particulars or universal content, have a logical space, or know how to make observations (containing propositional or conceptual content) before learning a language, and all these abilities require 'know how' that stems from learning numerous interconnected habits, then what establishes or influences the habits we learn? Well, the people in our learning environment may seem like a potential answer, but what guides their choices concerning the habits they intentionally and unintentionally instill in the members of their community? At last we come to norms. For Sellars (and the rest of the

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[16] This however does not mean that a proficient language user is merely a creature of habit; rather, it means that one obtains the initial ability to successfully employ language via habits.

Pittsburgh School), psychological nominalism, which is a story of how humans come to be rational and make observations, is one that begins and is moderated by a slow and persistent acquisition of habits, shaped by the norms of one's linguistic community.

The above view of norms touches nearly every significant aspect of human thought. First, norms shape the kind of concepts one possesses, because they prompt the kind of habits our community intentionally and unintentionally seeks to instill in us. Remember, for Sellars, Brandom, and McDowell, one acquires concepts via being habituated into a language. Second, norms also shape when and how concepts are employed, by setting overt and implicit standards under which it is proper (or improper) to employ various kinds of concepts (e.g. observational conditions). For instance, Maher writes:

> Crucially, according to philosophers in the Pittsburgh School, the role of assertions [i.e., judgments] [...] must be understood in *normative* terms. To make an assertion is to adopt a *normative status*, a status defined in the terms of what the assertor rationally *may* (or *may* not) and *should* (or *should* not) say or do. That is a manifestation of the normative character of epistemic states or episodes expressed in Sellars's "placing" remark. Assertions must be understood in terms of what they rationally *permit* or *license* or *warrant* and what they *prohibit* or *forbid*. In this way, there are norms or rules that govern the connections between assertions, perceptions, and non-verbal behavior.
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> While someone capable of making an assertion can violate these rules from time to time, one can be an "assertor" only if one is generally in conformity with these rules. If one *never* conforms with these rules, none of one's behavior could count as asserting. […] This type of picture is aptly called "Normative Functionalism." (31)

One's assertions or judgments about what something is, what it appears as, or what ought to be done are shaped by the normative principles that render such judgments possible.

The above view leads to a third important role norms play: since norms help shape our concepts and the ability to judge, they additionally affect the very manner in which we reason. In particular, norms function as the principles that the underlie rationality in the sense that they "*permit* or *license* or *warrant*" and "they *prohibit* or *forbid*". Put another way, since norms influence when and how concepts are employed, they also shape how we form judgments, which is the basis of our ability to reason. Fourth, since norms affect the shape of our concepts and the manner in which we judge and reason, they also shape how we understand empirical content. As a result of this latter view, one can then conclude that norms condition the manner in which we perceive. (If by perception one means what the Pittsburgh School means: a cognitive event by which one judges that something is or appears some way via conceptual content that can be loosely ascribed as positional content).

Section 7

Now that we have a cursory understanding of how norms play a significant role in the Pittsburgh School's view of just about everything from perception to rationality, we now need to address how their views can be considered a form of functionalism. We can then combine our cursory understanding of the Pittsburgh School's application of norms (as it expresses their psychological nominalism) and their version of functionalism (as it concerns their psychological nominalism) in order to establish a cohesive view called 'normative functionalism'.

Functionalism is the "view that mental states are defined by their causes and effects. As a metaphysical thesis about the nature of mental states, functionalism holds that what makes an inner state mental is not an intrinsic property of the state, but rather its *relations* to sensory stimuli (input), to other inner states, and to behavior (output)."[17]

As we saw above, psychological nominalism provides an account of the manner in which one obtains conceptual understanding and reason. It claims that the process of learning a language provides the necessary input to develop habits, in which one obtains an interrelated habituated framework to act as a dispositional response (i.e., output) to various stimuli. This process permits one to develop what can become concepts and the ability to rationally employ them spontaneously or freely. Since concepts and reasons require an interconnected web of relations that determine their functional use (i.e., how we employ them), psychological nominalism is also a description of how mental states relate to one another and prompt behavior. In this regard, it can be considered a form of functionalism.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that psychological nominalism should *not* be confused with the view that there are no mental states before language acquisition. Rather it claims that one's mental states before the acquisition of a language are non-conceptual and non-rational. Similarly, one should not confuse psychological nominalism with the view that all thoughts occur as a form of linguistic imagery (i.e., imagining that one is speaking). Rather it is the claim that learning a language provides the format, structure, or form through which reasoning and understanding occur (i.e., rational thoughts need not be spoken or involve the imagining of spoken words).

Normative functionalism, for the Pittsburgh School, can be seen as an account that characterizes their philosophical views of the mind, agency, rationality, and the capacity to know as stemming from a functionalist account of the mind, which is shaped by norms. For example, the acquisition and employment of concepts are acquired from learning a language, and learning a language and its proper use is initiated and consistently guided by one's responsiveness to norms both behaviorally and mentally (i.e., internally related mental constructs).

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[17] See Baker's "Functionalism" in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* on page 334.

This brief introduction cannot provide a comprehensive defense of normative functionalism. It is a difficult position to defend, not because it is inadequate (though it is not without its problems), but because it involves so many interrelated views from fields that have traditionally remained separate. Moreover, its rejection of numerous traditions makes it an argument that needs to be fought and defended on many fronts. All this makes it implausible for any one work to defend it in its totality.

Section 8

No philosophical question or approach can be truly free of competing claims as to the manner in which human beings think, communicate, act, and know. As a result, normative functionalism is relevant to many philosophical disciplines, because it opposes all the traditional views concerning how the human intellect comes into being and functionally operates. In this context, Kant famously argues that an accurate model of the human mind should be established prior to all epistemic and metaphysical claims. A natural extension of this view is the position that support for any philosophical approach will hinge upon an accurate account or conception of the manner in which we reason, perceive, communicate via a language, and judge. As a result, an account of such content can be seen not only as an attempt to establish the groundwork for what we can claim or hope to know, but also as a necessary step to bring such projects to fruition. As shown above, it is precisely this kind of expanded Kantian view that is implied, though nonetheless at the heart of the Pittsburgh School's normative functionalism.

If it is true that the Pittsburgh School's application of normative functionalism acts as an expression of the Kantian approach described above, it is a view that should be taken seriously, because it significantly touches upon nearly every important issue facing analytic thought. I will close with a brief illustration of this claim.

First, I have argued that the Pittsburgh School's normative functionalism has germinated from the seed of psychological nominalism and cannot be separated from it. As such, the Pittsburgh School's normative functionalism concerns philosophy of language, insofar as it describes what makes language rational and how reference is possible.

Second, psychological nominalism offers an account of the advent of the rational mind and how it functions. Accordingly, the Pittsburgh School's normative functionalism — especially since it invokes the concept of psychological nominalism — attacks traditional views concerning the philosophy of mind.

Third, because normative functionalism and its parent theory psychological nominalism account for how humans come to be rational, these theories also offer an account of agency. In other words, they explain how human beings can be responsible for their actions by explaining the manner in which a person comes to be rational and conceptually aware of him/herself, and as a consequence, endowed with the ability to *deliberate* about the correctness or incorrectness of one's own actions. This is obviously of interest to moral philosophy. Similarly, if rationality is required for personhood in the fullest sense, the ramifications of language learning as a prerequisite for rationally, which in turn

permits agency, has radical moral implications (especially for religious traditions, which claim we are born with a sense of right and wrong).

Fourth, normative functionalism also accounts for how we perceive and conceive of existence. It thus plays an important role in epistemology and metaphysics. According to the normative functionalism of the Pittsburgh School, knowledge is not reducible to non-conceptual states such as sensing or an inborn understanding of universals and particulars. Instead, the Pittsburgh School argues that knowledge requires the capacity to employ concepts and that concepts are acquired via learning a language. Learning a language is largely a process whereby one forms concepts by being habituated into the normative (i.e., accepted) use and practices that render observations communicable. The manner in which something is perceived and how existence is conceived is largely a by-product of one's concepts, as they are shaped by normative influences. This view has significant repercussions concerning not only how knowledge is obtainable, but also our metaphysical views.

These latter views draw into question what kind of *access* the human mind possesses both perceptually and conceptually to mind-independent existence, moral truths, and our ability to know them. Due to the thick layering of normative and conceptual requirements for observational knowledge, there are renewed challenges facing analytic philosophy — challenges which were thought to be resolved. For instance, how can it overcome Humean scepticism, the phenomenalism of Stace, or the epistemic limits set by German idealism, if the following are true: 1) no logical relations are given, 2) no sensory content possesses intrinsic epistemic value, and 3) all knowledge is reducible to concepts, which are mental constructs that represent so called outer reality. Sellars, Brandom, and McDowell have sought to respond to these questions in different ways. Their positions, as they reject Humean scepticism, phenomenalism, and idealism have been left largely unchallenged.

In conclusion, I have argued that Sellars' psychological nominalism is a parent theory to normative functionalism, as it establishes the manner in which norms affect our ability to perceive, think, and become an agent. Additionally, I have argued that this theory is at odds with much of the Western philosophical tradition with respect to how one thinks, possesses knowledge, and learns a language. And finally, I have argued that normative functionalism has far reaching effects in all the major fields most dear to analytic thought, namely philosophy of mind, epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of language.

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