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What is it for an assertion to be normal? *

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General aim:

- to examine the possibility of explaining the normative aspect of assertion in naturalistically acceptable terms,
  i.e., by using the theoretical framework of Ruth G. Millikan's (1984; 2004; 2005) biological model of language.

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Contents:

1. Introduction
2. An outline of Ruth G. Millikan's theoretical framework
3. A critical analysis of Brian Ball's derivation of the knowledge rule
4. A naturalistic derivation of the belief rule

1. Introduction

Particular aims:

- to critically examine Brian Ball's (2014a, 2014b) naturalistic derivation of the knowledge rule (Williamson 1996):

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  (BR) One must: assert that *p* only if one believes that *p*.

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Worth stressing:

- like Ball, in what follows I use Millikan's theoretical framework (→ *proper function*, *Normal conditions*, *cooperative intentional signs*).

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Worth stressing:

- like Ball, in what follows I use Millikan's theoretical framework (→ *proper function*, *Normal conditions*, *cooperative intentional signs*).

Claim:

- in his derivation, Ball equivocates between two senses of 'normally': *Normally* and *properly*;

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(N) Speakers always have (some, possibly overridden) reason to do what is *normal*.

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Central question:

- What is it for an assertion to be *normal*?

2. An outline of Ruth G. Millikan's theoretical framework

Proper function:

> a function *F* of item *A* is its **proper function** or **proper purpose** if "*A o*riginated as a 'reproduction' (to give one example, as a copy of a copy) of some prior item or items that, due in part to possession of the properties reproduced, have actually performed *F* in the past, and *A* exists because (causally historically because) of this or these performances."
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A hammer that is used:

- as a paperweight,
- as a temporary rest for a projector,
- for driving nails.

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Millikan:

- we can ascribe univocally proper functions to such items as:
  - genes,
  - organs,
  - behavioural dispositions,
  - tools and technologies,
  - words, constructions, speech acts, conventions, and so on.

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- a rabbit's disposition to flee in response to any noise;

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  PF = to flee in response to a noise;

  NC = the noise to which the rabbit reacts is *produced by* or *correlated with* the presence of a predator;

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- this disposition is advantageous to the rabbit only in a predatory environment.

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- this mechanism is advantageous to these organisms only in the environment in which the NC is met.

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Cooperative intentional signs:

> "are produced by systems designed to make natural signs for use by cooperating interpreting systems. That is, the sign-maker system and the sign-using system must have evolved or been designed to function symbiotically. Cooperating intentional sign-makers must be designed to cooperate with interpreting systems that have been designed, in turn, to cooperate with them."
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Consider:

- a rabbit's *perceptual system* (→ PS) and its *executive system* (→ ES);

PF of PS = to produce a percept that is 'true' in accordance with a preferred correspondence rule;

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  PF of ES = to translate the percept into a preferred behaviour;

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  PS & ES cooperate in accordance with a pattern that is 'built into' the structure of the rabbit's cognitive system.

3. A critical analysis of Brian Ball's derivation of the knowledge rule

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Ball's aim:

- to explain in naturalistically acceptable terms "why it should be that we engage in a practice – namely, assertion – which is subject to the knowledge rule" (2014a: 16);
- to "understand what it is for an assertion to be normal in naturalistic terms." (*ibid*)

3. A critical analysis of Brian Ball's derivation of the knowledge rule

(P1) *normally*, speakers assert only if they intend$_R$ to induce belief;

(P2) *normally*, speakers intend$_R$ to induce belief
only if hearers come to belief;

(P3) *normally*, hearers come to belief only if thereby come to know;

(P4) *normally*, hearers come to know only if speakers know;

therefore:

(C) *normally*, speakers assert only if they know.

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> "The conclusion then follows from the premisses, by the transitivity of 'only if', together with the fact that 'normally' serves as a universal quantifier over the same set of normal cases of assertion" (Ball 2014a: 18).

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> "The conclusion then follows from the premisses, by the transitivity of 'only if', together with the fact that 'normally' serves as a universal quantifier over the same set of normal cases of assertion" (Ball 2014a: 18).

Aim:

- consider what supports the above-mentioned premises.

3. A critical analysis of Brian Ball's derivation of the knowledge rule

Ball:

> "Roughly speaking, on Millikan's view, a token of a device type functions *normally* (or *properly*) if, and only if, it does what tokens of that type did in past cases in which they contributed to the evolutionary success of the organism type possessing or employing the device, thus serving to explain the persistence of the organism type, and of the device type."
>
> (Ball 2014b: 344)

> "(…) Millikan thinks that a device type functions normally (or properly) if, and only if, it does what past tokens of it did which caused them to be copied, thereby causally explaining the fact that current tokens of the type exists."
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> (Ball 2014a: 17).

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Millikan:

- proper functioning / Normal functioning.

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(P1) *normally*, speakers assert only if they intend$_R$ to induce belief;

Note that:

- Ball assumes the Gricean notion of assertion, according to which to assert that *p* is (*a*) to utter a sentence that means that *p* (*b*) intending$_R$ to get one's hearer to believe that *p*;
- according to this reading, therefore, the (represented) PF of one's assertion that *p* is to induce in one's hearer the belief that *p*;

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- according to this reading, therefore, the (represented) PF of one's assertion that *p* is to induce in one's hearer the belief that *p*;
- intentions$_R$ are *aspects* or *structural components* of Gricean assertions rather than their effects;
- therefore, one's intending$_R$ that *p* is not the PF, but a NC of one's act of asserting hat *p*.

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(P1) *normally*, speakers assert only if they intend$_R$ to induce belief;

What supports (P1):

- *S* would not assert that *p* in uttering '*p*'
  if she didn't intend to induce in the hearer the belief that *p*;
- in short, the Gricean model describes Normal cases of assertions.

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  if she didn't intend to induce in the hearer the belief that *p*;
- in short, the Gricean model describes Normal cases of assertions.

Quantifier in (P1):

- in all *Normally* functioning acts of (making an) assertion …

3. A critical analysis of Brian Ball's derivation of the knowledge rule

(P2) *normally*, speakers intend$_R$ to induce belief
only if hearers come to belief;

Note that:

- according to Ball, "(…) speakers would not continue to assert if hearers didn't believe what they are told" (2014a: 17);
- in particular, they would not continue to intend$_R$ to induce beliefs in their hearers if the hearers didn't believe what they are told;

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(P2) *normally*, speakers intend$_R$ to induce belief
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Note that:

- according to Ball, "(…) speakers would not continue to assert if hearers didn't believe what they are told" (2014a: 17);
- in particular, they would not continue to intend$_R$ to induce beliefs in their hearers if the hearers didn't believe what they are told;
- "(P2) is supported by the thought that it is (…) advantageous to speakers to utter something intending to induce belief in a proposition only if hearers accept that proposition" (2014b: 345);
- in other words, it is advantageous to them to assert a proposition only if hearers accept that proposition.

3. A critical analysis of Brian Ball's derivation of the knowledge rule

(P2) *normally*, speakers intend$_R$ to induce belief
only if hearers come to belief;

In short:

- a NC for proper functioning of the practice of making assertions is the existence of trustful hearers.

Quantifier in (P2):

- in all *Normally* functioning acts of making an assertion …

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(P3) *normally*, hearers come to belief only if thereby come to know;

Note that:

- hearers wouldn't come to belief what they are told
  if they didn't *thereby* come to know;
- it is advantageous to the hearers to come to belief what they are told
  only if they *thereby* come to know;

3. A critical analysis of Brian Ball's derivation of the knowledge rule

(P3) *normally*, hearers come to belief only if thereby come to know;

Note that:

- hearers wouldn't come to belief what they are told if they didn't *thereby* come to know;
- it is advantageous to the hearers to come to belief what they are told only if they *thereby* come to know;
- therefore, a (further) proper effect of one's coming to believe what one is told is one's coming to know;
- in other words, the PF of the practice of interpreting assertion is acquiring knowledge.

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(P3) *normally*, hearers come to belief only if thereby come to know;

Note that:

- hearers wouldn't come to belief what they are told if they didn't *thereby* come to know;
- it is advantageous to the hearers to come to belief what they are told only if they *thereby* come to know;
- therefore, a (further) proper effect of one's coming to believe what one is told is one's coming to know;
- in other words, the PF of the practice of interpreting assertion is acquiring knowledge.

The quantifier in (P3):

- in all *properly* functioning acts of interpreting an assertion …

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(P4) *normally*, hearers come to know only if speakers know.

Note that:

- according to Ball, (P4) "is made plausible by reflecting on the fact that knowledge requires safety" (2014a: 18);
- in other words, hearers wouldn't come to know *by accepting speakers' assertions* if speakers didn't know;

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(P4) *normally*, hearers come to know only if speakers know.

Note that:

- according to Ball, (P4) "is made plausible by reflecting on the fact that knowledge requires safety" (2014a: 18);
- in other words, hearers wouldn't come to know *by accepting speakers' assertions* if speakers didn't know;
- therefore, a NC for proper functioning of the practice of interpreting assertions is that speakers know.

The quantifier in (P4):

- in all *Normally* functioning acts of interpreting an assertion …

3. A critical analysis of Brian Ball's derivation of the knowledge rule

In sum:

(P1) In *Normally* functioning acts of **making** an assertion, speakers assert only if they intend$_R$ to induce belief;

(P2) In *Normally* functioning acts of **making** an assertion, speakers intend$_R$ to induce belief only if hearers come to belief;

(P3) In *properly* functioning acts of **interpreting** an assertion, hearers come to belief only if thereby come to know;

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(P4) In *Normally* functioning acts of **interpreting** an assertion, hearers come to know only if speakers know;

> "term 'normal' should be read normatively, historically, and **relative to specific function**." (Millikan 1989, p. 284, my emphasis – M.W.)

4. A naturalistic derivation of the belief rule

Key ideas:

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- *A-M* & *A-C* jointly reproduce a **pattern of cooperative interaction**, which is **conventional** (see Millikan 1998 and 2005);

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- *A-M* & *A-C* jointly reproduce a **pattern of cooperative interaction**, which is **conventional** (see Millikan 1998 and 2005);

- recall a rabbit's PS and its ES; these two systems cooperate in accordance with a **pattern of cooperative interaction** that is 'built into' the structure of the rabbit's cognitive system and has been *selected for* its ability to ensure a preferred correspondence *between* what the rabbit perceives *and* how it behaves;

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- *A-M* & *A-C* jointly reproduce a **pattern of cooperative interaction**, which is **conventional** (see Millikan 1998 and 2005);
- *by analogy*, the **conventional pattern** reproduced by *A-M* & *A-C* has been selected for its ability to ensure **mental coordination**;

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- i.e., for the role it plays in keeping the beliefs of *S* and the beliefs of *H* **sufficiently aligned**;

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- *A-M* & *A-C* jointly reproduce a **pattern of cooperative interaction**, which is **conventional** (see Millikan 1998 and 2005);
- *by analogy*, the **conventional pattern** reproduced by *A-M* & *A-C* has been selected for its ability to ensure **mental coordination**;
- i.e., for the role it plays in keeping the beliefs of *S* and the beliefs of *H* **sufficiently aligned**;
- *roughly*, such an **alignment** is advantageous to both *S* & *H*; it serves as a basis for their coordinated actions (Witek *forthcoming*).

4. A naturalistic derivation of the belief rule

Distinguish:

(i) the *coordinative* PF of a conventional *S*-*H* pattern;

(ii) the PF of *A*-*M*;

(iii) the PF of *A*-*C*;

(iv) the PF of an assertion construed of as a CIS.

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Key idea:

- functions (iii) & (iv) coincide in content.

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Claim:

- a NC for proper functioning of an assertion is its sincerity;

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(iv) the PF of an assertion construed of as a CIS.

Key idea:

- functions (iii) & (iv) coincide in content.

Claim:

- a NC for proper functioning of an assertion is its sincerity;
- i.e., normal assertions are assertions that obey the belief rule:

(BR) One must: assert that *p* only if one believes that *p*.

4. A naturalistic derivation of the belief rule

In sum:

- the PF of assertions, *qua* assertions, is to get hearers to believe what they are told and *thereby* to contribute to what I call *mental coordination*, i.e., to keeping the interlocutors' individual belief systems sufficiently aligned;
- the NC under which assertions can function properly is their sincerity; in other words, normal assertions are speech acts that are governed by the belief rule (BR).

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