THE TACIT AND THE EXPLICIT
A reply to José A. Noguera, Jesús Zamora-Bonilla, and Antonio Gaitán-Torres

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To provide a baseline for this discussion, let me quote a simple definition of norms that is *not* normativist.

> A norm . . . is the propensity to feel shame and to anticipate sanctions by others at the thought of behaving in a certain, forbidden way. As explained earlier, this propensity becomes a social norm when and to the extent that it is shared with other people. As will be explained, the social character of the norm is also manifest in the existence of higher-order norms that enjoin us to punish violators of the first-order norm. To repeat, this conception of a network of shared beliefs and common emotional reactions does not commit us to thinking of norms as supraindividual entities that somehow exist independently of their supports. (Elster 1989: 105)

These reactions are psychological in character: there is no trace here of the notion of validity, and the facts about attitudes are individual rather than collective, as Elster makes clear. What makes the pattern a norm rather than, say, a product of market choices, is the character of the feelings: shame, guilt, and anxiety. Normativism insists on something quite different: that there is something to norms more than a pattern sustained by common individual psychological propensities to react in certain ways, and the something more is collective, shared, or intrinsic, and has some sort of force.

The argument of *Explaining the Normative* (2010) did not depend on Elster's account of norms, but *was* concerned with the various forms of "something more" claims by normativists. And the critical commentary on the book has mostly been concerned to argue that there *is* some sort of "more" to norms, or that some of the normative things discussed by normativists cannot be reduced to the normal facts of science, cause, or social science explanation.

A number of issues intersect here, which makes this a particularly tangled set of issues. I cannot untangle them all, but I will try to explain the tangle itself. We can cut though many of these issues by narrowing down the problem. Laws, the rules of games, and so forth are explicit norms. They are the sorts of things about which one can have beliefs, make claims, and so forth in an unambiguous way. They can be derived from other norms —authorized, deduced, or warranted by other norms. Their normativity is

derivative from other norms, or some norm-making process, unless they are *ur*-norms of some kind that are self-authorizing or just true. They don't claim any intrinsic validity or special causal powers. These cases are not at issue here.

Tacit norms, however, are different. Their normativity cannot be derived. The cases we are interested in are those which are self-authorizing or have power as rules. Normally these rules are made explicit only retrospectively or on the basis of observation, such as rules of etiquette in etiquette books, which derive their authority from their claim to describe what the right kind of people do. Consequently, claims about the existence and content of tacit norms are closer to empirical claims: they depend on what people do and what "error" is and what reaction it produces. Often, for example in the case of the norms described in etiquette books, they take the form of advice that seems to be largely pragmatic. And this raises the question of what sort of correctness and thus normativity is at stake.

There is correctness and there is correctness: correctness in accordance with some sort of normative fact or property, the correctness of the normativist, and pragmatic and pragmatic social or interactional correctness, that is to say, what works and what is accepted as correct. In my view, intelligibility also falls into this category: it is pragmatic success in understanding and making oneself understood. If the "normative fact" is merely the reaction of shame felt by others and oneself on the occasion of one's failure to act correctly in the socially pragmatic sense of "correct," there is still no "more". Normativism says there is more.

In my view there is nothing more than pragmatic or socially pragmatic correctness at the tacit level. The illusion that there is something more comes from the fact that tacit norms can be normativized by explicit beliefs about them, such as the belief, in the case of the etiquette books, that the patterns being described are "social obligations," or that conformity to them is evidence of some sort of goodness, or any other belief that replaces mere pragmatic correctness with normative correctness.

There is a parallel here with a question that is often answered in the opposite way: is tacit knowledge really "knowledge?" Many philosophers say it is not. There can be no "justification" for tacit knowledge; by definition it is not a claim, and it otherwise fails to resemble real knowledge. Similar problems vex the idea of tacit truth. It is odd to say that tacit "beliefs" are true or even that they are beliefs. The only sense in which tacit knowledge is belief is that we attribute "beliefs" or their equivalent to ourselves and others because they repair enthymemes, i.e., they are suppressed premises for some sort of inference that we are explaining. But there is always a question of whether these beliefs were there, prior to their attribution, or whether as a matter of psychology the person was simply making the inference which another person took to be enthymematic. Here the inaccessibility of the tacit becomes relevant: we simply don't have a way of making the tacit explicit, at least in the sense of actually saying what the tacit mental contents of a mind are (cf. Turner 2012).

These issues carry over to the problem of tacit norms. One can ask whether there can even be such a thing as a tacit norm. Nevertheless, for historical reasons associated

with Wittgenstein, we are very familiar with some usages that obscure the peculiarities of tacitness. The notion of rule, which Jeroslav Peregrin raises in his discussion of social normativity, is a case in point. "Rule" has a primary non-tacit sense —it is an explicit rule, authorized, and "normative" because it is authorized. It has an analogical sense, of a rule-like thing that does such things as distinguish correct and incorrect uses of terms. But if the normativity of an actual rule comes from its source, where does the normativity of a tacit rule come from?

That this is a good question is shown by the fact that normativists have tried to give answers to it. In *ETN* I discussed Sellars's idea that it came from collective intentions that back it: this is the point of his famous example of the sentence "we disapprove of women smoking, but I don't" which is intelligible because the first part is a report of a collective intention. Searle had a similar argument, at one point, and even invented supposed mental states of we-intending to go along with it. Brandom invoked societal reactions: a kind of collective fact. Kantians like Korsgaard wanted to make normative reason into its own psychological force. Others, such as Boghossian, wished to swallow enormities.

I think these answers show that the problem is misconceived. There can be no normativity for tacit rules other than the pragmatic sense of correctness if it is taken to include pragmatic success in social interactions, which involve making oneself understood. Learning the norms, after all, is a pragmatic, empathic process —nothing non-natural happens. Normative correctness has no place in the tacit. It seems to appear where facts are described in a certain way. But the descriptions invariably sneak in something "normative" (such as "mutual accountability," see Rouse 2007: 669) that can be given an empirically adequate description in non-normative terms.

José Antonio Noguera quotes Weber to the effect that "The rational, in the sense of the logical or teleological 'consistency' of an intellectual-theoretical or practical-ethical stand, exerts and has always exerted power over men"; and points out that he even called this "the effect of *ratio*." Noguera claims that this is meant in a normative sense of reason. But the natural interpretation of this text is that there is a psychological fact of a drive of some sort to logical or practical consistency, not a normative force. For Weber, normative rationality does have a role, but as an ideal-type which is especially intelligible. We can use it as a way into the understanding of actual action, which typically deviates from it.

Nothing in the book excludes evolutionary explanations, or ideas about the psychological differential attractiveness of ideas. These are facts about psychology, not normative validity. And of course nothing in the book would prevent Weber from using these terms 'rational' and 'irrational' in their psychological and pragmatic sense, and in terms of idealtypical (meaning specifically non-normative or "ideal") notions of rationality. None of this would have anything to do with rational validity in the normative sense, and Weber stressed that the "ideal" in ideal-type was not meant in a normative sense.

This is the normal explanatory situation for such things as decision theory: there is a real psychological process of decision making, which deviates from decision theory, and which we can theorize about in terms of biases in the fashion of Daniel Kahneman. Since Milton Friedman's *Essays in Positive Economics* (1953), people have distinguished nor-

mative uses of these kinds of concepts from empirical ones, and defended the use of what are obviously simplifications of actual psychological processes on the grounds that they work as predictions on a mass level. None of these people are normativists, in the sense discussed in the book. The only rationality operating as a cause in any of these cases is psychological and "natural."

Noguera also argues that normative reason enters into contemporary social science explanations in another way, through the notion of falsity as it appears in explanations of false belief and ignorance. This argument is, I think, misdirected. There is no need, in the examples of explanations he gives, to appeal to normative truth and falsity. It is sufficient to have an asymmetry in which one would prefer an alternative to one's beliefs if one had more information. It is quite sufficient in such cases to refer to things taken to be true and things that would be taken to be true by the people in question —actual "normative" truth is irrelevant. Similarly for feedback: pragmatic correctness is enough.

Jesús Zamora-Bonilla's comment raises the question of whether I am an eliminativist who wants to get rid of meanings and oughts. I don't see this as a problem of reductionism, but as another aspect of the problem of tacitness. When the rule, norm, etc. are tacit, we can comment on them, as patterns, say something about "correctness" based on our observational knowledge or self-knowledge, and so forth. But the determining thing itself is still tacit. "Meanings" and "oughts," similarly, can only be theories of what is going on in the tacit: there is always still a question of whether they do so accurately. Explicit laws and rules are a different matter: their oughts and meanings can be matters of explicit definition. They aren't controlled by tacit facts. But their apparent "normativity" does depend on them being laws, or correct definitions. In contrast, tacit rules have to "consist," in Zamora-Bonilla's sense, in what people actually do. The issue, in short, is whether there is a shadow world of oughts and meanings that relates somehow to what actually happens, and makes it normative. This I do wish to eliminate.

Davidson's discussion of rationality, I have argued elsewhere, is careful to formulate these issues in terms of "beliefs," rather than "inferential" terms, such as "concepts." I think he would have said that my following your reasoning includes following your mistaken but intelligible reasoning, but that the test of mistakenness is not to be found in the reasoning, but in the falsity of the beliefs. If your reasoning is intelligible to me, it is reasoning. If the result is something that I cannot believe, it is not the reasoning that is at fault, but something in the web of belief. The example I gave is inferences involving contagion. We understand them, even if we do not believe in contagion; the person making the inferences does believe something we do not. This is why Davidson claims to have a "rudimentary" notion of rationality and a "flexible" notion of reasonable belief, and says "The issue is not whether we all agree on exactly what the norms of rationality are; the point is that we all have such norms and we cannot recognize as thought phenomenon that are too far out of line" (quoted in Turner 2011: 366). I disagree with Davidson to this extent: I think the use of "norms" is gratuitous here. The point can be naturalized as follows: the limits of intelligibility are the limits of our empathic capacities in following reasoning.

Antonio Gaitán-Torres makes an interesting attempt to find the meta-ethics in *ETN* or one that fits with it. I tried, as he sees, to avoid committing to any meta-ethical account. He suggests that the book fits with expressivism, though he notes that some expressivisms, such as Brandom's, do not fit. I would draw the line a little differently. The main distinction I would make here again would be between the tacit and the explicit. Expressivism makes sense as an attempt to articulate the tacit. This fits, very roughly, with Gibbard's (former) argument that what one is expressing is some set of norms (Gibbard 1990: 46), which presumably are tacit. I would also assimilate most appeals to intuition to the articulation of the tacit: even Korsgaard makes some sense in these terms, as promoting reflection on tacit norms that explicitly justifies them. Velleman's "kinda-Kantianism" identified a tropism toward intelligibility as the backing force (which comes very close to naturalization by way of empathy, as it is developed in *ETN*). But I do not need to be committed to any of these.

The explicit itself I would treat differently. My appeal to Friedman's notion of a normative lens fits with Dworkin's idea of the independence of questions of morality and value and his insistence that only moral arguments can produce moral conclusions. And I am sympathetic to Parfit's idea that explicit normative statements are factual but have no explanatory psychological force. Neither of them is a normativist, in my sense. Some explicit moral theory is clearly fiction, or what I called Good Bad Theory, in the sense of Joyce. Tabu is a Good Bad Theory that powerfully organizes moral experience and life where it is accepted. Joyce is one of the few philosophers to discuss it, and his fictionalism fits it nicely. My reluctance to choose between these meta-ethical theories reflects my sense that the objects that fall into the category of the moral or ethical, especially as used cross-culturally, are too variegated, and the category itself too diffuse and ill-structured, to yield to any "analysis".

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