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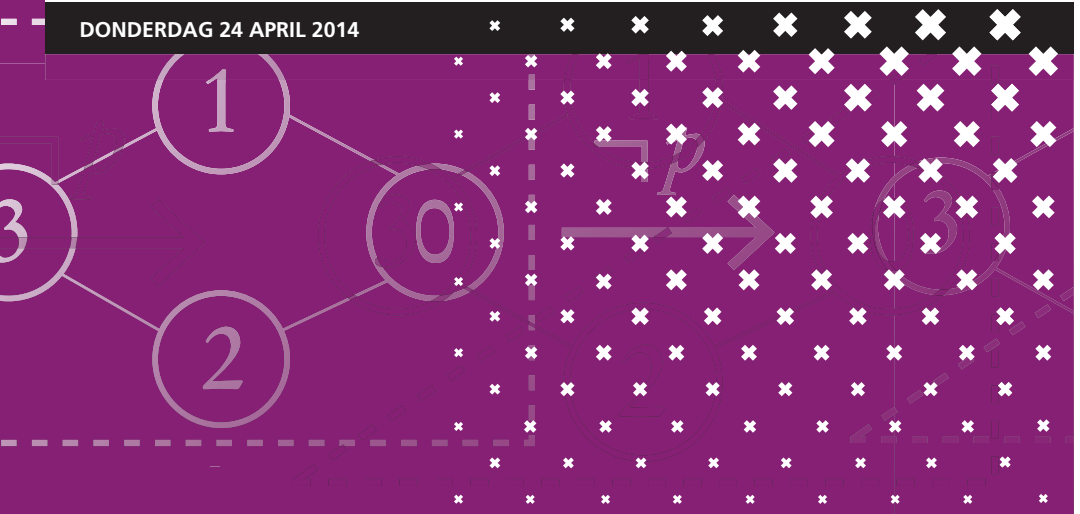


Afscheidscollege

De taal der vooroordelen

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The language of prejudice

Lecture by prof. dr. Frank Veltman delivered at the University of Amsterdam on April 24, 2014 to mark his retirement from the Chair of Logic & Cognitive Science.

In memory of my mother, Tonny van de Vall (1920 - 2007)

*Dear Rector Magnificus,
dear colleagues and students,
dear friends and family,*

1. I don't want to generalise, but ...

On November 3, 2011 I witnessed the following discussion between Dutch TV host Matthijs van Nieuwkerk and Ronald Plasterk, scientist and politician, at the time leader of the social democrats in the Dutch Parliament. The latter was interviewed on the news that the Greek prime minister, Papandreou, had announced that he would consult the Greek people in a referendum about the question whether to accept the European rescue plan for Greece. Outside Greece, many people in the European Community were outraged at so much ingratitude.

At some point this was said:

TV host: This is the *Volkskrant*¹ of early September. It contained an interview with Renée Hirschon, who teaches at Oxford University. You're a scholar yourself, so I don't have to tell you what it means to teach there. She is an anthropologist specialised in Greece. [The headline says:] "For Greeks promise is just intention". The entire article is about the fact that the Greeks are by definition unreliable. They are willing to enter into an agreement, but they cannot be trusted to keep it. That's too much of a burden, they really don't like that.

¹A Dutch newspaper.

Politician: I don't want to generalise about the Greeks; maybe Papandreou has good reasons why it would be convenient to organise a referendum in Greece, but we in Europe cannot have it because we would for months be waiting in uncertainty.

TV host: Yes, but you mentioned the reliability of the Greeks after what happened today, and that's why I said: do you remember this newspaper article of early September, in which somebody investigated the Greeks — Papandreou is a Greek — which is about the unstable character of the Greeks. They promise something, just to be rid of you for a while, but they don't keep their promises, because that is not in their nature.²

Notice the aplomb with which a whole people is proclaimed unreliable. How can anyone think that such a claim lends itself to scientific substantiation? No anthropologist, be it from Oxford or elsewhere, would ever venture such a generalisation.³,

Maybe the TV-host was just playing the devil's advocate, trying to draw the politician out. Even so, he must have thought that what he said carried some persuasive force. But the politician did not take the bait. "I don't want to generalise about the Greeks", he said.

People often say that they do not want to generalise, but then they do so anyway. Just google for '*I do not want to generalise, but*', in any language you like, and you are flooded with examples.

- *I don't want to generalise, but German women snore.*⁴
- *I don't want to generalise, but Russians drive like madmen.*⁵

²If you understand Dutch, you can see and hear the rest of the discussion in the TV-show *De Wereld Draait Door* at <http://dewerelddraaitdoor.vara.nl/media/74907>.

³As everybody can check, Renée Hirschon's original paper,[8], does not contain any such statement about the Greeks. On the contrary, she speaks up for them. De Volkskrant interviews her about this paper, but what she says – or what is put in her mouth — in this interview does not match with what she writes in the paper. And next, referring to the newspaper article, van Nieuwkerk distorts her statements even more.

⁴<http://thedarkmaniel.blogspot.nl/2012/06/london.html>: I don't want to generalise, but german women snore. Loudly. Good thing I brought along some ear plugs.

⁵<http://fr.nomadicboys.com/10-observations-russie/>: Je ne veux pas généraliser mais les Russes conduisent comme des fous! Durant notre séjour en Russie, nous nous sommes faits plusieurs frayeurs en traversant la rue. Pour cette raison malheureusement les accidents de voitures sont plutôt fréquents.



- *I don't want to generalise, there might be some bright minds among them, but all in all, the young French philosophy scene consists of a bunch of gibberish-producing nitwits.* ⁶

And so on. You can find many more examples on the web, and many much more grim than these. People generalise. They generalise about anything and everything.

- *French cars are rust buckets.*
- *Siamese cats are mean.*
- *Dutch tomatoes are so watery that the Dutch themselves refer to them as waterbommen ('water bombs')*

These examples suggest that people are only interested in negative traits, but that is not true. About the Greeks, for example, one can find many positive statements like this:

- *Greeks are warm, temperamental people who know what hospitality is.*

For some reason, these positive statements are never introduced with 'I don't want to generalise'.

2. Stereotyping

The result of all this generalising is a world full of stereotypes — caricatures of Greeks, lesbians, Dutch tomatoes, accountants, French cars, catholic priests, etc. etc. We think in stereotypes. That's in our nature, as the TV host would say.

Stereotyping has been investigated from many angles. It is an important topic within social psychology, where one has studied the psychological mechanisms leading to the image people have about their own group and about other groups. These include in particular matters such as sexual orientation, gender, age, religion and race. To indicate how much work has been done in this field, the bibliography of a well-known textbook, written by David Schneider (See [13]), contains references to more than 3000 articles and books.

⁶http://www.vww.at/E_Scharlatane.pdf: Ich will nicht generalisieren: hie und da mag sich ein heller Kopf finden, aber im Großen und Ganzen sind es Kauderwelschproduzierende Hohlköpfe, die die jüngere Philosophenszene Frankreichs bilden.

Cultural anthropologists, too, have had a lot to say about stereotyping. Here, I would like to mention the work of Joep Leerssen[9], who has made an extensive study of the development of the prejudices that the people of various European countries have of each other.

Some interesting patterns have come to light, like when you go from north to south on the continent — be it within a given country, or from one country to another — the people from the north think of themselves as being more down-to earth, honest and intelligent than what in their eyes are emotional, corruptible, and stupid southerners, while the southerners consider the northerners cold, stingy and arrogant in return.⁷ One wonders if this holds not only for Europe, but for the entire northern hemisphere, and if on the southern hemisphere things work the other way around.

Also cognitive psychologists and linguists have done relevant research. I will mention some of this below. But my main concern will be the logical and methodological aspects of stereotyping. What exactly is it to *think in stereotypes*. What is good about it, what is bad about it? How to fight false stereotypes? Why is it so difficult to talk people out of their prejudices?

3. Bare Plurals

Compare

- (1) *All tigers are orange with black stripes.*
- (2) *Most tigers are orange with black stripes.*
- (3) *Tigers are orange with black stripes.*

In the first and second sentence the plural ‘tigers’ is preceded by what logicians call a quantifier: expressions like ‘all’, ‘most’, ‘many’, ‘twelve’, and ‘no’. In sentence (3) the plural stands alone, hence the term ‘bare plural’.

Note that all examples given above contained such a bare plural. Sentences expressing a prejudice tend to do so.

The first sentence is stronger than the second, logically speaking. If you believe that all tigers are orange with black stripes, you should also believe that most tigers are orange with black stripes. And this applies not only to tigers and the property ‘orange with black stripes’ but in general. Whatever you substitute for *A* and *B*, from *All A’s have property B* it follows logically that *Most A’s have property B*.

⁷This pattern is somewhat disrupted by the fact that there is a similar opposition between urban and rural areas.

The third sentence, too, differs in meaning from the first. If you believe that all A 's have property B , then you will have to give up this belief as soon as you encounter some A that does not have property B . For sentences of the form A 's have property B this does not hold. Encyclopedias of zoology are full of sentences like *Tigers are orange with black stripes*, going from *Aardvarks create burrows in which to live and rear their young* to *Zebu are used as draught oxen and dairy cattle*. Most of these do not universally hold; they are rules with exceptions — there are also white tigers for example — but apparently this is no reason for biologists to rewrite their books.



White tiger in Beijing Zoo

Is there any difference between the second and the third sentence? Or more generally: if most A 's have property B , do you have to accept that A 's have property B ? If you substitute 'tiger' for A , and 'orange with black stripes' for B , it maybe looks like this, but what to think of the following pairs of sentences?

- (a) *Most people are heterosexual.*
People are heterosexual.
- (b) *Most men cannot cook.*
Men cannot cook.

Both in case (a) and in case (b), nothing seems wrong, logically speaking, if you accept the first assertion, and reject the second. Vice versa, the same applies to

- (c) *Malaria mosquitos transmit malaria.*
Most malaria mosquitos transmit malaria.

I assume you accept the first sentence under (c). After all, malaria mosquitos are called so *because* they transmit malaria. And I think you will not change your mind upon hearing that the second sentence is false, because in fact only 5% of these insects carry the parasite responsible for malaria.⁸

Over all time, logicians have attempted to explain the difference at issue by making a distinction between the *kind A* and the *individual A's* belonging to this kind. Sentences starting with ‘most’ or ‘all’ refer to the individual members, sentences starting with a bare plural refer to the kind. That’s why they are called *generic* sentences.

Instead of *Tigers are orange with black stripes*, you can also use a definite article and say *The tiger is orange with black stripes*. Then it is even clearer that you are not referring to individual tigers. Compare:

- (d) *The tiger is as good as extinct.*
Tigers are as good as extinct.
Most tigers are as good as extinct.(??)

To be extinct is not a property of individual animals, but of the kind they belong to. That is why the third sentence sounds so strange.

One of the first courses I took as a master student of philosophy was about generic sentences. It was taught by Else Barth, who had just finished her dissertation[3] about the use of generic sentences by philosophers. Her main conclusion was that philosophers, despite the fact that they profusely use generic sentences, have no clear picture what these sentences mean, at least as far as their logical properties are concerned.

The question what the logical properties of generic sentences are, has interested me ever since. And I am happy that in the years elapsed since I took that course, much progress has been made. A first major step forward was made in the dissertation of the linguist Greg Carlson, *Reference to Kinds in English* from 1977. And the second important step was taken

⁸Here and at some other places in this lecture I am citing myself. I will not mention this each time I do so. It concerns passages from Veltman[14] en Veltman[16]

in the eighties by logicians working in the field of Artificial Intelligence, analysing what they called *Common Sense Reasoning*. It turned out that the validity concept underlying such reasoning is *not monotonic*. That was a revolutionary development. Let me explain what it is about.

4. Rules and Exceptions

What I'm going to say now does not apply to all the sentences of the form *A's have the the property B*, but only to the ones conveying that objects with the property *A* normally have property *B*.⁹ This is true for *Tigers are orange with black stripes*, for example, but not for *Malaria mosquitos transfer malaria*.

In order to avoid confusion, I will often explicitly insert the phrase '*normally*', even though this might get rather tiresome in the long run.

The first important observation is that sentences of the form *A's normally have property B* express a so-called default rule. If you accept such a sentence, each time you encounter an *A*, you will expect that *A* has property *B*, and act accordingly, until maybe at some point it turns out that this expectation cannot be maintained. In other words, the conclusion of the following argument comes naturally, at least as long as one does not know much more about *x* than is mentioned in the second premise.



An abnormal penguin is an abnormal abnormal bird — which is not the same as a normal bird.

⁹Notice that are no syntactic hints enabling us to decide that *A's have the the property B* can be interpreted as *A's normally have the property B*.

premise 1	<i>A's normally have property B.</i>
premise 2	<i>x is an A.</i>
conclusion	<i>Presumably, x has property B.</i>

Concretely,

premise 1	<i>Accountants are normally boring.</i>
premise 2	<i>Henry is an accountant.</i>
conclusion	<i>Presumably, Henry is boring.</i>

One has to add the proviso ‘Presumably’ here, to indicate that the conclusion expresses an expectation. For all we know, given the premises, Henry might turn out to be an exception to the rule, but we do not expect so. Compare:

premise 1	<i>All A's have property B.</i>
premise 2	<i>x is an A.</i>
conclusion	<i>x has property B.</i>

Or, as the classic example goes

premise 1	<i>All human beings are mortal.</i>
premise 2	<i>Socrates is a human being.</i>
conclusion	<i>Socrates is mortal.</i>

In this latter argument, the conclusion expresses more than just an expectation. Anyone who accepts the premises, has to accept the conclusion as an actual fact. No further information can change this. That’s the big difference with the default case.

In the default case, the expectation expressed in the conclusion can be overruled by further information. Like when you meet Henry in person, and discover that he is great fun, not boring at all.

Also, other information than the direct information that *x* is an exception to the rule, may make it doubtful that *x* has property *B*.

premise 1	<i>A's normally have property B.</i>
premise 2	<i>C's normally do not have property B.</i>
premise 3	<i>x is both an A and a C.</i>
conclusion	<i>??</i>

To give a concrete example:

premise 1 *Accountants are normally boring.*
 premise 2 *People who play saxophone are normally not boring.*
 premise 3 *Henry is an account who plays saxophone.*

 ??

Of course, Henry must be an exception to one of the rules, but on the basis of only this information it is not clear which one. The next argument form is more complicated.

premise 1 *A's normally have property B.*
 premise 3 *C's normally do not have property B.*
 premise 2 *C's normally have property A.*
 premise 4 *x has property C.*

 conclusion *Presumably x is an A without property B.*

If a concrete example is wanted:

premise 1 *Adults normally have a job.*
 premise 2 *Students are normally adults.*
 premise 3 *Students normally do not have a job.*
 premise 4 *John is a student.*

 conclusion *Presumably, John is an adult who does not have a job.*

In the context of the first and the second premise, the third premise has the effect of an *exception clause*. A large group of people who are normally adults, is excepted from the rule that adults normally have a job. The rule does not apply to them.

In a case like this we speak of a systematic exception to the rule. The penguins form a systematic exception to the rule that birds can fly, and so do the ostriches. Hyenas and jackals are exceptions to the rule that mammals that eat mammals do not eat mammals that eat mammals.

Systematic exceptions should be distinguished from what we will call accidental exceptions. These are exceptions that are not covered by an exception clause. A crow that broke its wing — by accident — and therefore cannot fly. Or Henry, mentioned above, who is an accountant, *but* happens to be not boring at all. (Of course only people who expect accountants to be boring, will say ‘but’ here, and call Henry an exception.)

If an object is exceptional in one respect, this does not necessarily mean it will be exceptional in other respects, too.

premise 1	<i>Adults normally have a job.</i>
premise 2	<i>Adults normally have a bank account.</i>
premise 3	<i>Students are normally adults.</i>
premise 4	<i>Students normally do not have a job.</i>
premise 5	<i>John is a student.</i>
conclusion	<i>Presumably, John is an adult without a job but with a bankaccount.</i>

Things can get more complicated, but this should suffice to give you an idea of the kind of arguments that generic sentences give rise to. The conclusions of these arguments allow us to expect certain things. But these expectations can be overruled. If more information becomes available, we may have to retract a conclusions that was validly drawn from the limited information available at first.

The notion of validity at stake here differs from the classical notion. It is not monotonic: by adding premises a valid argument can turn into an invalid argument. The classic concept of validity is monotonic. After all, if the conclusion of an argument is true in all possible cases in which the premises are true — which is what the classic validity concept says — then this conclusion is also true in all possible cases where these premises plus a number of other premises are true.

In the non-monotonic case you do not have to consider *all* possible cases in which the premises are true when assessing the validity of an argument. You can limit yourself to *the most normal cases* in which the premises are true. Roughly speaking, these are the cases where the number of exceptions to the rules is as small as possible, given the information at hand.¹⁰ This is not the right occasion to explain in more detail how to determine which cases these are.¹¹

Default reasoning plays an important role in everyday life. It enables us to make decisions in circumstances in which our information is incomplete. In such circumstances, we have to go for what, given the information at hand, we can expect. Example: You make your daily grocery list assuming that every item you put on the list will be available — because normally everything is. (Well, alright, the whole grain bread might be sold out, it sometimes is at this time of the day...)

Another example. Whoever reads Kipling's *Jungle Book*, gets to know the tiger Shere Khan. I am pretty sure that everybody assumes that Shere

¹⁰The (by now classic) paper in which this notion of validity was introduced is McCarthy[11].

¹¹For more detail, see for example Veltman[15], from which the images that adorn the cover of this booklet were taken.)

Khan is orange with black stripes, although nowhere it says so. It could be that Shere Khan has only some hazy grey stripes on a further white fur. Some tigers have that, as I mentioned above. However, if Shere Khan had been one of these, Kipling would have explicitly mentioned this. The fact that he is silent on this point means that things are normal in this respect. More generally: efficient communication is built on the principle that one should not bother one's readers with stuff that would be completely in line with their expectations.

One more example: There are philosophers¹² who claim that the assumption that what you perceive (right now) actually exists, is the conclusion of a default argument. Hallucinations, *fata morganas*, phantom pain experiences, etc. are the exceptions to the rule that in normal circumstances things that look like this or that, really are this or that.

Side remark: Not everybody is equally well-equipped to reason with rules that have exceptions. It has been shown that high-functioning adults with an autistic disorder are equally good as adults without such disorder when it comes to reasoning with strict rules, but they get into trouble when they have to reason with defaults. (See Pijnacker e.a.[12])

In their nature, in their blood, and in their genes

'Prejudice' comes from Latin 'Prae-iudicium', preliminary judgment. In this sense all generic sentences are prejudices. We appeal to them in circumstances in which we do not know exactly what the facts are but have to make a judgment anyway. Does x have property B ? Yes, presumably. We cannot be sure, but x is an A , and A 's normally have property B . Such a judgment can turn out disastrous if the x that is being judged turns out to be an exception to the rule. Disastrous, both for the one who passed the judgment and for x .

Still, that's all in the game. Default rules come with a risk. There is nothing wrong with the assumption that cars normally stop when the traffic light is red, even though this has led to serious accidents. We all keep crossing the street when the pedestrian light is green, trusting that the drivers of approaching cars will notice that their light is red.

In the following, I will use the phrase 'prejudice' only to refer to generic sentences that are untenable. Of these, the ones that interest us most are the ones that are not only untenable but also unfair or harmful to the subject of the sentence. To the Greeks, for example, if the sentence says that they

¹²See for example Bach[1] and [2].

are lazy. Anyone who thinks so will put an application letter of a Greek candidate immediately in the *no*-pile. The applicant does not even get the chance to prove s/he is an exception to the rule.

What do you have to do to convince someone that *Greeks are lazy* is an untenable rule, given that most people who think so are immediately prepared to admit that there are exceptions? — “No doubt there are hard workers among them, but I prefer to play it safe.”¹³

So, bringing up a counterexample is not enough. It will be dismissed as an exception that proves the rule. And usually that is the end of the discussion.

That is not where the discussion should end. Someone who believes that *A*'s normally have property *B* cannot just shrug when confronted with a counterexample. After all, someone who believes *A*'s normally have property *B*, believes more than just that a number of *A*'s happen to have property *B*, while the rest of the *A*'s don't. “Greeks are *by definition* unreliable”, the TV-host said, and later on in the conversation he said that this is *in their nature*.

It is striking how often, when it comes to stereotyping, the nature of things is dragged in.

- *Women. . . It's in their nature to nurture.*
(Stated many times on the internet, not only about women, but also about gardeners, nurses, teachers.)

There are a number of variants of ‘in their nature’.

- *Generosity is in our blood and that's what makes me proud to be Australian.*

(<http://www.federationstory.com/generosity-is-in-our-blood>)

- *Kansas is full of some of the truest red, white and blues you'll find across the country. They don't just like American history, it's in their bones.*

<https://www.movoto.com/guide/ks/kansas-dating/>

Nowadays, characteristic properties are mostly declared part of the subject's genetic makeup.

¹³In this connection, recall Trump on Mexican immigrants: “They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”

- *The Greeks have politics in their DNA. Their experience goes back more than 2500 years.*

De Telegraaf, April 21, 2011.

- *Don't blame men for looking at other women — it's in their genes.*
(Daily Telegraph, England, May 23, 2015.)

This talk about genes and DNA is of course metaphorical. It can be taken literary only when the statement is purely biological, like for example in *Spiders have eight legs*. The metaphor suggests that in a generic statement of the form *A's have property B*, the property *B*, even in non-biological cases, is not just some accidental property. It must be a property that is inherent to being an *A* — it's how the *A's* are created/designed/educated. Hence, if you want to falsify a generic sentence, you have to show that the property *B* in question is not an inherent property of the *A's* in question.

How to do this?

There are two special cases: (1) Sometimes it can be shown that the property *B* in question cannot be inherent in any *A*. (2) Sometimes it can be shown that the *A's* in question form such an inhomogeneous hotchpoch that it does not make sense to look for inherent properties — not at least for inherent properties that are characteristic for the *A's*.

A good example of this latter strategy was the statement '*The Dutchman does not exist*' made by the Dutch queen Maxima herself. She said so in a personal address given on September, 25 2007 at the presentation a report about national identity written by the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy. Her statement caused quite a stir. Of course, it did not stop anyone to cheerfully generalize about the Dutch — about how tolerant they used to be, and how intolerant they are now — (Jee, what happened to their DNA?)

Here is an example of a property *B* which cannot be an inherent property of any kind of *A*. Consider the statement:

- *Italians are tall.*

Fact: The average height of Italian men is 173.2 cm and of Italian women 162 cm.

Is this tall?

I, with my Dutch background, think it is not. But my friend Yanjing, who is used to Chinese sizes, thinks it is. Who is right? Perhaps, if we compare the average lengths of men and women of all nationalities, we can agree on where the line between 'tall' and 'not tall' should be drawn.

Suppose, we come to agree. We find Italians short in comparison to people from other nationalities — for instance. Fine. The point is that this does not mean that being short is an inherent property of Italians. Where Yanjing and I draw the line between tall and not tall is not recorded in their genes. Even if there is only one correct place where to draw this line, then where it has to be drawn depends not only on the average height of Italians, but of the height of people of other nationalities, too.

What has been noted for ‘tall’ is true for many adjectives. It holds for all *gradable* adjectives, i.e. adjectives that can be modified with adverbs like ‘very’ and ‘rather’. Such adjectives are not only vague, and highly context dependent, they are also used *evaluatively*, expressing the speaker’s attitude. “Look, how tall John is!” you can say, thereby expressing your surprise. (“Look how 6 feet 7 inches John is!” does not have the same effect.) “Threehundred dollars is quite expensive for a pair of sneakers.” Why would you give this imprecise characterisation ‘quite expensive’ if you know the price precisely? Surely, to express that the price is a lot higher than you think normal.)

It is these three aspects of their meaning — vagueness, context dependence, and evaluative force — that make gradable adjectives non-intrinsic properties of whatever object they are properties of. For G such an adjective, nothing can be G by nature, or in its blood, bones, or genes.

Let’s now look at the case in which we are dealing with a property B and a kind of objects A for which it makes sense to wonder whether or not B is an inherent property of the A ’s.

Suppose that you believe that A ’s normally have property B , and that I do not. How can I make you change your mind?

Just confronting you with some A that lacks property B is not enough. Because it might be that you can point out to me that this A is not normal, this is a special case. It lacks property B by accident. Literally. This A does not have property B , because some event occurred which *caused* that this A did not get property B . If this event had not taken occurred, this A would have had property B — just like a normal A . Therefore this A poses no real threat to the tenability of the rule that A ’s *normally* have property B .

Here are some examples to illustrate the point.

- (1) You claim that birds can fly, and I do not think so. To prove my point, I confront you with a sparrow with clipped wings. This is not a good counterexample. You can convince me that this sparrow is not a normal

bird. By truncating its wings, somebody made this sparrow an exception to the rule.

- (2) You claim that birds can fly. I disagree, and to prove my point, I confront you with a penguin. This will not do, either. You reply that when it comes to flying, penguins are not normal birds. For, in the course of evolution . . . (what follows is an explanation of how penguins became a (systematic) exception to the rule that birds can fly).
- (3) You claim that spiders normally have six legs. This time you loose, not so much because there are lots of exceptions to this rule, but because you cannot explain how these exceptions came about. For none of the counterexamples you have a story explaining which event in the life of this spider caused it to have eight legs rather than (what according to you is) the normal six. (The other way around would be much easier.)
- (4) You claim that prime numbers are odd.¹⁴ I disagree despite the fact that there is only one exception on infinitely many positive cases. But note that 2 did not become even by accident. The number 2 is even *by definition*.

Exercise 1

Compare:

- (a) *Dutchmen are blond.*
- (b) *Dutchmen are not blond.*

Given the above, it is possible to disagree with both these statements. Explain.

Exercise 2

Think about:

- (a) *Women cannot play chess.*
- (b) *Men cannot play chess.*

6. When ‘normal’ becomes the norm

There is one more issue I want to discuss. Consider the following three sentences:

- *Boys don’t cry.*
- *Friends don’t let friends drive drunk.*

¹⁴This example is taken from [4]

- *Mothers don't jump off buildings.*¹⁵

Somehow these sentences express a norm. Boys should not cry, friends should not let their friends drive drunk, mothers should not jump off buildings. Recently, several philosophers¹⁶ have raised the question how these sentences get this normative force.

Here is part of an explanation. Generic sentences are defaults. They tell us what we can expect. We make our plans accordingly, and if our expectations are not met, we are disappointed.

I repeat all this to make you aware of the analogy between defaults and normative laws. In the case of normative laws expectations play an important role, too: we expect people to live up to them. And in this case, too, we are disappointed if our expectations are failed.

Seen in this light, the step from *Boys don't cry* as a descriptive generalisation to *Boys don't cry* as a normative rule is not that big. If a mother reminds her son, who is on the verge of tears, that boys don't cry, she expects him not to start crying. It hardly matters whether these expectations are induced by a descriptive or a normative rule—in either case she will be equally disappointed if he bursts into tears anyway.

Things get more problematic in the next case.

- *People are normally heterosexual.*

From the observation that most people are heterosexual to the default that people are normally heterosexual is just a small step, and nothing is wrong with it, provided 'normally' is not interpreted normatively.

Unfortunately, it often is interpreted that way. If you are not normal, there must be a reason for it. Something is wrong, something is wrong with you, you are wrong. And this does not only happen in the case above, but much more generally. Statistical normalities get the status of norms, exceptions become offenders.

You should at least try to be normal.

Yeah, well, "Act normally!" is the slogan of the largest political party in the Netherlands.

Things get even more problematic when we compare the *normal A's* with the *real A's*.

¹⁵This is the title of a much-awarded documentary film directed by Elena Lindemans (2014).

¹⁶[10] and [7] were the inspiration for the discussion here.

- *Dutchmen love ice skating.*
Real Dutchmen love ice skating.

What is the difference in meaning between these two sentences? Does the first imply the second?

I really don't know. I fear the word 'real' is used in two ways, one of which is pretty straightforward. Then 'real' just means 'not fake'.

- Mary: *“Dutch people love ice skating.”*
- John: *“Well, I don't.”*
- Mary: *“Yes, but you're not a real Dutchman, you may have a Dutch passport, but you were not born here.”*

Here 'real' has the meaning it has in phrases like 'a real gun' or 'a real Rembrandt'. “This is not a real gun”, is typically said in circumstances where something looks a lot like a gun, but in fact is no gun. It's a fake gun. And similarly for “This is not a real Rembrandt, but a forgery”.

A fake Rembrandt is no Rembrandt, a fake gun is no gun. And, according to Mary, having a Dutch passport, is not enough to count as a Dutchman. Probably, John will not agree, but at least it is clear what the disagreement is about.

The next dialogue is more difficult to understand.

- Mary: *“Dutch people love ice skating.”*
- Peter: *“I was born and raised here, but I hate ice skating.”*
- Mary: *“Then you're not a real Dutchman, real Dutchmen love it.”*

This is different. Apparently, Peter does qualify as a Dutchman, but not as a real Dutchman.

It is hard to see what this could mean. Maybe what is meant is that in Peter's case being Dutch is only an accidental property, and not an essential property — it is not “in his bones”, otherwise he would love ice skating.

The move Mary makes here is often made when a counterexample to a generic claim has to be explained away. Here is another example, taken from the biography of Alfred Tarski by Anita and Solomon Feferman:

[Anne] Preller recalled driving down a narrow winding road while Tarski loudly conceded that women could be good drivers, “but in mathematics they are less gifted than men”. Anne ... argued vehemently that women were discouraged from even becoming interested in the field by cultural attitudes. Challenged to name a top mathematician who was a woman, Preller named

Emmy Noether and was exasperated when Tarski laughed and said, “Look, you know, she was not really a woman”.¹⁷

Feferman&Feferman[[6]]

I don’t think there is a way to make sense of such a move. It presupposes an ontology in which things can be an A without being a real A . That’s hard to understand, even *in abstracto*. But more importantly, how can one make the distinction operational? How can one establish, empirically or otherwise, whether or not a particular A is not a real A . I would not know, not for $A =$ Dutchman, not for $A =$ woman, not for any A . I don’t think anybody knows.

Could we substitute ‘normal’ for ‘real’ in these examples? I don’t think so, but what exactly is the difference? And to complicate things even more, how does a real A and a normal A differ from an average A and an ideal A ? And what about a typical A ?

There are some obvious differences in meaning here. For example, ‘average’ differs from ‘normal’, among other things, in that you can say *The average family has 2.3 children*, but not *A normal family has 2.3 children*¹⁸, that should be *A normal family has two or three children*. There are also obvious differences between ‘ideal’ and ‘real’. An ideal man, for example, is chivalrous, and has a set of perfect white teeth — I suppose that we — each of us for him/herself — can just stipulate what properties a man should have to be ideal. But it is not up to us to decide what properties a *real* man has.

¹⁷[Copied from the biography:] A few years later, Tarski had the grace to acknowledge Prellers point when he presented her with the memoirs of Sofia Kovelevskaya (1850 1891).

¹⁸Cf. [5]



A real man according to a Dutch newspaper (NRC of 28-9-2013).

Still, quite a few people seem to know what these properties are. For example, the science supplement of a Dutch newspaper¹⁹ contained a report of a study among male students about manhood in general, and their own manhood in particular. It turned out that many of them worried a lot about their status as a “real man” — and felt they constantly had to prove their manhood.

As I said, I don’t know much about the meaning of ‘real’, but it seems pretty clear to me that real “real men” never worry about such things.

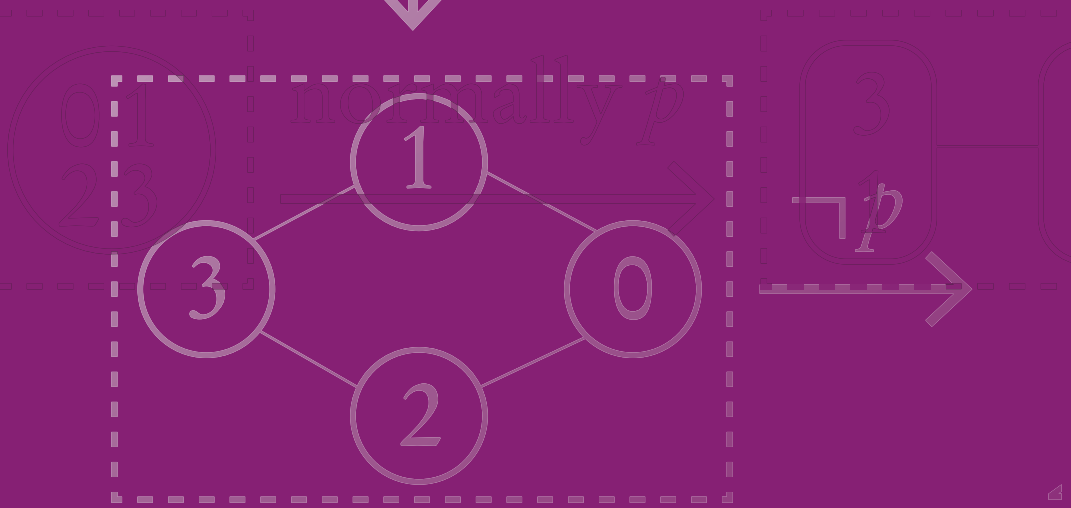
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normally q



$\neg (p \wedge q)$

