

Helsinki

*Von Wright's Struggle with Deontic Logic*

Eugenio Bulygin

*Abstract.* The publication of Georg Henrik von Wright's paper "Deontic Logic" in 1951 was the starting point of a systematic investigation into the logic of normative concepts. Its influence was very strong during subsequent years, but, it also gave rise to some problems, whose solution took considerable time and effort, especially for its author.

The main problem was the treatment of deontic sentences, like  $Op$  or  $Pq$ , as expressing norms and at the same time as being true or false. It concerns the very possibility of a logic of norms, due to the widespread idea (shared by von Wright) that many norms, especially those that are prescriptions, as for instance legal norms, are neither true, nor false. But as traditionally, the main logical notions (contradiction and entailment) are defined in terms of truth, it seemed highly questionable that norms can enter into logical relations. In 1957 von Wright recognized that his position in 1951 was "philosophically unsatisfactory", but insisted in the possibility of a genuine logic of norms, because "logic has a wider reach than truth", but without elaborating this very important idea.

In subsequent years, von Wright's position changed several times: first, he introduced the distinction between norms and norm propositions and developed a deontic calculus in which the deontic formulae " $Op$ " or " $Pp$ " can be interpreted prescriptively (giving rise to norms).or descriptively, expressing norm propositions. (*Norm and Action*, 1963). This was not a satisfactory solution either. Later he took a skeptical view: the logic of norms is impossible and deontic logic can only be a logic of norm propositions, i.e. true or false propositions about (the existence of) norms.

The next step was to return to the idea of a logic of genuine norms, but founded on the idea of rationality of norm-giving activity (legislation). The laws of this new logic were regarded as "cuasi-logical" (1981). And finally, von Wright returned (1991) to his original position, regarding these rules of rational norm-giving activity as genuinely logical. As he puts it: "In the end, it seems , I have gone full circle back to my original position. But I think the journey was worth making." This paper tries to justify this view.