

August 29, 2018

Philosophy and Language

This is a course in the philosophy of language.

Why does language matter for philosophy?

- I. Ian Hacking suggests we think of the history of modern philosophy in terms of the sequence:
 - The heyday of ideas.
 - The heyday of concepts.
 - The heyday of sentences.

Ideas in this sense were invented by **Descartes**, bringing together *reasoning* and *perceiving* in ways that would have been unintelligible to his Scholastic predecessors.

He did so on the basis of two tightly intertwined moves:

a *semantic* innovation and an *epistemological* innovation.

The semantic one was the invention of the genus of *representation*, which could be thought to have species whose contents were *picture-like* and *judgment-like*.

The epistemological one was the division of the world into things that could only be known mediately, by being represented, and the *representings* that we know about immediately, that is, nonrepresentationally, just by *having* them. That immediacy, he thought, meant that our knowledge of those things is *incorrigible* and *transparent*, that is, admits neither *error* nor *ignorance*, both of which are features of representational knowledge.

Concepts, in the sense in which they matter for Hacking's periodization, are introduced by **Kant**, as the hallmark of discursive understanding. They are the subject of neo-Kantian philosophizing, including Frege, and remain central on into analytic philosophy.

In the late '40s, **Sellars** is inundated by the wave of what he called "the new way of words," which he associated with **Carnap**. He formulated the connection between concepts and distinctively linguistic items in the slogan: "**Grasp of a concept is always mastery of the use of a word.**"

Certainly the first 125 years of analytic philosophy, beginning with Frege, were focused on language.

And for Continental, no less than analytic philosophy, **the twentieth century was the century of language**—that is, where language played an absolutely central role. This is true of the two bifurcated giants of these traditions: Wittgenstein, early and late, and Heidegger, of *Sein und Zeit* and post-Kehre, both. (SZ properly characterized by slogan "The meaning of Being is the being of meaning." Late MH: Language as the "house of Being," followed up by Derrida's suggestion that philosophy should "dance around the house of Being.")

If one starts with that topic, I think the over-arching issue in Anglophone philosophy of language is how to reconcile two traditions in the philosophy of language:

- i) **Logistical:** Frege, Russell, Tractatus, Carnap, Tarski. This tradition looks above all to a metalanguage for mathematics. It studies *artificial* languages. It is *monological*, understanding language as a kind of *calculus*. It's triumph has been *formal semantics*: first Tarskian model-theory (though I would urge that we not forget Gentzen's proof-theory) and then its development, in the second wave of the modal revolution, into the full-blooded intensional semantics of possible worlds.
- ii) **Anthropological:** language as a striking feature of the natural history of a certain kind of being. (Then: Aristotelian/Kantian). This tradition looks to ordinary language, the language that shapes us into the cultural beings we are. It studies *natural* languages. It is essentially *dialogical*, understanding language as a kind of *social practice*. The classical American pragmatists (especially Dewey), the early Heidegger, and the later Wittgenstein are the great figures here.

Some figures do go both ways: Wittgenstein himself (sequentially), Quine, David Lewis ("Languages and Language"), and Davidson.

The great task here is to synthesize these traditions, raising them above their one-sidedness while keeping what is insightful and right about each—at the least to bring them into contact and dialog with one another.

But this task rationale derives from the history and sociology of our professional discipline. The prior question is why language should be understood to be a central philosophical topic. While it has always been *a* topic of philosophy (but, for instance, more so for Aristotle than Plato, more so for Hegel than Kant), what justifies thinking of it as *central*? As something like *the* topic?

In the limit, what reasons are there for thinking of

"philosophy of language as *first* philosophy,"

as Dummett puts it? He sees it as the *core* of philosophy, of which philosophy of mind, epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics are suburbs. Why might one think that?

[For what it's worth (in the interests of full disclosure), my answers would start from the following thoughts:

Philosophy of mind: Insofar as it is sapience we care about, rather than sentience, we will have to approach the contentfulness of propositional attitudes in terms of language.

Epistemology: Since Kant we have known (I think) that the soft underbelly of epistemology is its implicit semantic commitments. Kant and Wittgenstein agree that if one takes care of the semantics, the epistemology will take care of itself. I don't think that there are *no* distinctively epistemic issues left over, but what there is is squeezed between philosophy of language and philosophy of science.

Metaphysics: In effect, I think philosophy of language is the metaphysics of *us*. (See the discussion below of the Aristotelian/Kantian divide over what this means.) There are many other phenomena whose metaphysics is challenging—but the most interesting concern us. And meta-metaphysics is a subfield of philosophy of language.

Ethics: In *some* sense ("value theory"), of the first importance for understanding *us*. But the *overall* topic of interest, I would claim, is *normativity* in general, specifically, *discursive* normativity (if that is indeed merely one

species). One can be (I am inclined to be) a natural kind skeptic about the ethical. That is, while I don't doubt that moral reasons are reasons, I do doubt whether they have a common root or enough in common to deserve to be classed together as "moral" or "ethical." Insofar as this is not so, I take it that is because what distinguishes this natural kinds is that ethical or moral concepts articulate commitments that are implicit in discursivity (perhaps especially practical discursivity) in general.]

I think there are two general answers, one expressing an important *insight* and the other a dispensable *conceit*. Hardly anyone subscribes to the conceit anymore, but there is a danger that in moving on beyond that historically conditioned enthusiasm we will lose sight of the underlying insight.

The **conceit** is what Rorty called "the linguistic turn," (the title of his influential edited collection of classic essays). This is the idea that philosophical problems are all really at base problems with the use and misuse of language. Whether arising in the philosophy of mind (think Ryle), epistemology (Austin, Bouwsma), metaphysics (Carnap), or ethics (Ayer, Stevenson), philosophical problems are to be resolved by reformulation in a suitable perspicuous language, whether that is understood as a regimented formal artificial "ideal" language, as in the logistical tradition, or by appropriate sensitivity to the use of natural "ordinary" language. (These were the two traditions that Rorty compared and contrasted, but above all in which he discerned a common commitment to "the linguistic turn.") To a good first approximation, *no-one* believes this or is committed to this program any more. From a sociological point of view, I think it was swept away by the three waves of the modal revolution: Kripke's complete semantics for modal logic, the elaboration of possible world semantics into an intensional semantics for *non*logical expressions generally, by Montague, Kaplan, Lewis, and Stalnaker, and then the modal metaphysics of Lewis and Kripke's "Naming and Necessity."

The **insight** is that *language is the medium of discursive understanding* (sapience), and that discursive (that is, conceptually articulated) understanding is what distinguishes *us* from our fellow creatures (not to mention the inanimate world). Kant introduces the idea of the discursive, as meaning "of or pertaining to concept use." Hegel says: "Die Sprache ist das Dasein des Geistes." [PG 666] Language is the concrete actual existence of Spirit. Though they thought of themselves as followers of Kant rather than Hegel, all the prominent German neo-Kantians focused on language as the locus of discursive understanding. (Cohen and Natorp in Marburg, Windelband and Rickert in the Southwest, Rickert's students Heidegger and Bruno Bauer, who was Frege's friend and colleague, and into the last generation, of Cassirer and—I would claim—Carnap.)

Philosophers need to care about language because it is above all what distinguishes *us*.

But even a nearly platitudinous statement like this conceals important distinctions.

The first one has to do with the "us" in that claim.

II. Aristotelian vs. Kantian pictures of the role of discursivity (rationality) in understanding *us*.

Alexander Pope: “The proper study of mankind is man.”

Today we *might* allow “mankind,” but never “man.” But, at the loss of scansion, should we accept the modified slogan:

“The proper study of humankind is humankind”?

I would propose “The proper study of humankind is *us*.”

We would not want to say:

“The proper study of us is us,” or even, grammatically,

“Our proper study is us.”

For the worry would be that the paired first-person plural can be read too narrowly: we writers, we philosophers, we pragmatists, Hegelians, Wittgensteinians... we professors, we twenty-first century folks, we Pittsburghers, we Americans....

But we can ask whether the second first-person plural pronoun is too narrow.

At least, we can ask whether the proper study of we philosophers [note how much I have limited the first pronoun] should be limited to us as *humans*.

I will eventually argue that what we should study is us as *normative, rational* beings, glossing the latter as beings who give and ask for reasons.

Aristotle would not take issue with this claim. Our distinctive form of animal is *rational* animal, and one doesn’t have to try too hard to see characterizing us as “zoon politikon” as invoking the normative social dimension of our distinctive form of being.

But humans are also a particular kind of biological being.

Maybe we don’t want to identify humanity with the species *homo sapiens sapiens*. Maybe doing so is chauvinism towards other hominins: Neanderthals or Denisovans, or maybe even to *homo habilis*. And that worry about chauvinism points us in the kantian direction.

But there is a colorable argument for something like human chauvinism. It is the thought behind Wittgenstein’s remark that “If a lion could speak, we could not understand him.” It is behind the conviction by neo-Aristotelians like Michael Thompson that ethics is about fundamental aspects of us as distinctively human beings. That we have and can have no idea whatsoever of what ethics might be for creatures biologically very different from us.

The kantian idea is that it is us *as* normative, reason-mongering creatures that is the “proper” object of specifically *philosophical* study.

Perhaps no other sort of normative rational being is so much as possible. That would be surprising, but it would be worth understanding *why* it is true, if it *is* true.

Aristotelians think that kantians’ topic is a granfalloon. (Kurt Vonnegut’s guru Bokonon in *Cat’s Cradle* introduces the concept of this sort of illusory item: “If you want to study a granfalloon, just peel the skin off a toy balloon.”)

The kantian is obliged to ask question that are not obligatory for the Aristotelian, such as these:

- Can there be normative creatures that are not rational?
- Can there be rational (concept-using, discursive) creatures that are not linguistic?

(Cf. Sellars: grasp of a concept is mastery of the use of a word.)

MIE answers these questions “Yes” and “No,” respectively.

And its broadly kantian point of view prompts us to ask a whole host of similarly-shaped questions (all of which come with an implicit: “And if not, why not?”):

- Can there be *rational* creatures who are not *logical* creatures? (*MIE*: Yes)
- Can there be autonomous discursive practices (ADPs)—language games played though their practitioners play no others—in which no speech acts have the significance of claims or assertions? (*MIE*: No)
- Can there be discursive creatures who use only sentences, but no sub-sentential expressions? (*MIE*: Yes, but...)
- Could they use singular terms, but not predicates, or *vice versa*? (*MIE*: No)
- Can there be discursive creatures who cannot use propositional attitude-ascribing locutions: analogs of “claims that” or “believes that”? (*MIE*: Yes, but...)
- Could there be creatures who *did* use propositional-attitude ascribing locutions and did *not* distinguish between ascriptions *de dicto* and ascriptions *de re*? (*MIE*: Probably No)
- Are there ADPs that include the use of *demonstrative* expressions (and other token-reflexives) but not anaphoric pronouns? (*MIE*: No)
- Could one have an ADP that did not introduce theoretical objects and properties? What about one that did not introduce objects, properties, and relations by abstraction? (*MIE*: Yes and Yes)

Jim Bogen has with some justice described the method of *MIE* as “vandalizing Neurath’s boat.” The aim is to see how much of discursive practice one can cut off and throw overboard without sinking the boat, in the sense of no longer having an ADP: a practice in which it is possible to claim that empirical things are thus-and-so.

III. Orienting distinctions.

Here there are four big distinctions:

0. Sentience vs. Sapience
- i. Practical vs. Discursive Intentionality
- ii. Act/Content (Pragmatics/Semantics, “ing”/“ed”), within discursive intentionality
- iii. Propositional contentfulness vs. object-directedness, “that”/“of” intentionality on side of content.

1. Put *discursive intentionality* at the center. “Discursive,” in Kant’s use (Sellars’s “traditional language”), means “of or pertaining to *concept* use.” Discursive intentionality is a kind of *understanding*: specifically *conceptual* understanding, understanding that is essentially articulated by concepts, understanding that consists in the application of concepts.

2. We can focus on it by considering it as surrounded by contrasting terms:

a) Sapience vs. sentience. Apperception vs. perception

There are issues about the relation of *sentience* (thought of as an essentially *organic* achievement of biological organisms) to discursive intentionality as sapience. Searle’s Chinese Room thought experiment pumps intuitions that there is no sapience without sentience. Aristotelian views about “*us*” come down hard on this claim.

b) Discursive intentionality vs. practical intentionality (paradigm: skillful comportment of predators). Rationality vs. intelligence.

The relationship between (a) and (b) is complicated: practical intentionality does not line up with sentience entirely. Sentient consciousness (can feel pain, there is something it is like to be that thing) and intelligence in the pursuit of a goal (which includes object-directedness (“being onto things”) in the sense that the Chomsky-Dennett argument against behaviorism appeals to, are not co-extensive (Harmanian robot target-seeking missiles), though they are correlated.

c) Self-consciousness vs. consciousness [This might be meant to comprise (a) and (b).

When German Idealists hoist their banner, “No *consciousness* without *self-consciousness*,” they are gesturing at the central thesis of an account of what makes the high end of the distinctions in (a) and (b) distinctive.]

3. We can ask whether to emphasize what is *special* about discursive intentionality, or the *continuity* between this capacity and that of less capable creatures: *discrimination* or *assimilation*?

Of course, in the end, we want to do justice to both: definition *per genus et differentiam*.

For if we slight the continuities between discursive and non- or pre-discursive practices and abilities, we risk making unintelligible the *advent* of the discursive, the fact of its arising out of nondiscursive practical comportments, *phylogenetically* through evolution and *ontogenetically* as each individual human child *acquires* the capacity to reason explicitly and *comes into* language. (Chomskyan talk of *learning* language begs all sorts of important questions. Linguists today prefer the more neutral image and phrase of young ones “coming into” language—becoming participants in our linguistic practices.)

Wittgenstein and the classical American pragmatists (Peirce possibly excepted) insist on continuity and the absence of a bright line separating discursive practice from other sorts of skillful doing.

I will find such a bright line: what qualifies a practice as a *discursive* practice is its according some performances the practical significance of *assertions* or *claimings*. These are performances that can both *serve as* and *stand in need of reasons*. Hence *asserting* and *inferring* are two sides of one coin: any practice that exhibits one of them must exhibit the other. Contra LW, asserting-

inferring is “downtown” in the city of language. By this criteria, his “Sprachspiele” are *vocal*, but not genuinely *verbal* games.

4. Is there an explanatory priority between practical and discursive intentionality, or are they, in Heidegger’s phrase, “equiprimordial”?

These are Ryle’s skillful “**knowing how**” and conceptually explicit “**knowing that**” (Heidegger’s “thematizing understanding”).

On a natural reading, these are Heidegger’s “**Zuhandenheit**” and “**Vorhandenheit**” (Zuhandensein und Vorhandensein). For a qualification, see my “Dasein, the Being that Thematizes,” where an argument is forwarded that actually Zuhandensein presupposes Vorhandensein. Both are characteristic “Existentialia” of Dasein.

(We’ll see that these correspond to norms implicit in practice and norms explicit in principles.)

Dewey speaks for Heidegger in arguing that the whole tradition has been *platonist* (small ‘p’ for the generic tradition, rather than the particular philosopher who initiated it and after whom it is named), in seeing a bit of knowing that, something explicit in the form of a principle, behind every bit of skillful knowing-how. (The Forms that explain the skillful practice of the cobbler and the doctor.) Dewey also calls this “intellectualism,” and sometimes (I’d rather avoid this usage) “rationalism.”

The converse view, endorsed by Dewey, the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit*, and the later Wittgenstein, sees knowing *that* as a particular kind of knowing *how*.

What kind, in particular? What are the differentiae? Thereon hangs a tale. Or rather: a basic philosophical task consists in telling this tale.

Understanding *discursive* intentionality as a kind of *practical* intentionality, the converse of the *platonist* explanatory strategy, is the *pragmatist* explanatory strategy, in its most general form. This is what I call “*fundamental* pragmatism.”

In the American Pragmatists and the later Wittgenstein, fundamental pragmatism is allied with an assimilationist strategy, which de-emphasizes the specific differences between *discursive* practices and other (implicitly normative) practices exhibiting skill and intelligence.

This is a natural alliance. But it is not an inevitable one. One can be a pragmatist and take *language* to transform our practice qualitatively, and not just quantitatively. (As Sellars once remarked, it is one of the perils of reductive materialism in its Marxist form that it is committed to turning quantity into quality.)

I would argue that Hegel is a *rationalist* pragmatist, and that the fundamental pragmatism Heidegger develops in Division One of *Sein und Zeit* draws a bright line between Dasein and even the most capable of nonlinguistic animals.

And it is a *discriminating*, rather than *assimilating*, specifically *linguistic* pragmatism that I endorse and pursue in *MIE*.

Focusing on discursive intentionality, sapience, apperceptive awareness, conceptually articulated rationality, we have these issues:

5. **Language** vs. **mind** (thought as thinking) as the original locus of discursive rationality.
 - a) Tradition at least until Hegel: thought is prior, language is a means for the expression or communication of thought. As such, language is a late-coming, secondary, superstructural, parasitic, and in the end optional elaboration and development of thought, which can be understood antecedently to and (at least largely) independently of its linguistic expression. (It might be conceded that *some* thought-contents only become available after one is initiated into the “conventions” of language. But these are not essential to thought as such.)
 - b) Linguistic primacy as in **Dummett**: assertion is not the exterior expression of interior acts of judgment. Judgment is the interiorization of exterior acts of assertion.
Sellars: “Grasp of a concept is mastery of the use of a word.”
 - c) **Davidson**’s relational view: language and sapient mindedness are equiprimordial; they arise together and each presupposes the other.

Recall the “linguistic turn.” Rorty invented this phrase, in the title of his 1967 collection of essays. There it is identified with the methodological (metaphilosophical) thesis that

“All philosophical questions are questions of language.”

The division was between those analytic philosophers who thought that as a result, to address its problems, philosophy should be conducted in *ideal* languages, and those who thought that it should be conducted in *ordinary* language. I don’t know whether *anyone* still believes the underlying claim here. Tim Williamson speaks for many contemporary philosophers who see such views as hopelessly outdated. Philosophers can address phenomena directly: mental phenomena such as consciousness, metaphysical phenomena such as modality.... It *might* be useful to consult our language, e.g. in thinking about epistemic modality, but that is at most a tool for getting at the phenomena themselves.

I think two good thoughts are in danger of going missing as the pendulum swings back here.

- i) First, that language is what makes us the sort of beings we are: *rational, discursive* beings. To understand *us*, one must understand what we are *doing* in talking (making something explicit: saying or thinking it, understanding it in that distinctive way, namely by bringing it under concepts). And the epistemological project, construed in the broadest possible way, is to *understand this sort of understanding*: explicit, discursive, conceptual understanding.

Note that there are Kantian and Aristotelian ways of taking this point.

The Kantian says we are the beings who understand this way: *any* beings who understand this way are included among *us*. That the only discursive beings we know of are biologically human is a contingent restriction. Our topic is all rational beings.

The Aristotelian says we are *human* beings, and the most important distinguishing characteristic of us as of that biological kind is discursive understanding. Discursive understanding is accordingly a feature of the natural history of a certain kind of being: human beings. To study that sort of understanding, study human beings.

Cf. Description of methodology of *MIE* as “vandalizing Neurath’s boat.”

- Finding *necessary* conditions of being a talker and assembling them into a set of *sufficient* conditions, for creatures quite unlike us, in the Aristotelian sense.
- ii) Second, Kant's idea of the categories: the idea that in addition to concepts whose principal expressive task is to describe and explain empirical goings-on there are concepts whose principal expressive task is to articulate (make explicit) the *framework* that makes it possible to describe and explain empirical goings-on. *Some* of the concepts that have been of most interest to philosophers are among those. (There need be no commitment here to the idea that *only* these categorial concepts are properly of interest to philosophers.) Sellars developed this idea in connection with what he learned from Carnap, and took it that these categorial concepts are one and all *metalinguistic* concepts—in a distinctive sense of “metalinguistic.” (He never gave a satisfactory account of that sense. But he gave us some important clues. See *FEE*.) Among these categorial concepts are *modal* concepts (on the side of semantics) and *normative* concepts (on the side of pragmatics). (Cf. what in *BSD* I call “the modal Kant-Sellars thesis” and “the normative Kant-Sellars thesis.”) The deep connection between them (which I tease below) is accordingly an issue of the relation between the distinctive *metalinguistic expressive roles* these two sorts of vocabulary play.

From my point of view, the importance of philosophy of language to philosophy more generally stems from these two ideas.

- Developing the second, two great themes of the course will be:
 - a) the role of *normativity* on the side of *pragmatics* (the theory of the *use* of linguistic expressions, and so of the *application* of concepts), and
 - b) the role of *modality* on the side of *semantics* (the theory of the *meaning* of linguistic expressions, and so of the *content* of concepts).
- One of the big ideas of the course will be the deep and unobvious *connection* between these phenomena. This is the idea Sellars puts darkly by saying “The language of modality is a transposed language of norms.” It is the idea that tantalizes Paul Grice in his Locke lectures book (unfinished, published posthumously) *Aspects of Reason* about the common roots of normative and modal uses of “must” and “should.” Articulating this idea precisely is one of the principal goals of *Between Saying and Doing*, addressed in the final chapter. In *ASoT* what I claim is Hegel's view of the relations between the *modal* sense of “material incompatibility and consequence” (his “determinate negation” and “mediation”) and the *normative* sense of those terms is in two parts, denominated “conceptual realism” and “objective idealism.”

6. If language is at least a *necessary* condition of discursive rationality—if having the general capacity to *say that* things are thus-and-so is a globally necessary condition of having the capacity to *think, judge, or believe that* things are thus-and-so (even though it might not be so locally, that is, in the case of every particular claimable, thinkable, judgeable, believable content)—then participation in specifically *linguistic* practices marks a boundary between the discursive

and the practical. And there are reasons to think of this as bright line. (But keep in mind that the later Wittgenstein does not agree.)

Chomsky initiated modern linguistics 60 years ago with the observation (which could have been made by the Greeks, or any time since) that almost every sentence uttered by an adult native speaker is radically novel—in the sense not only that that speaker has never uttered or heard that sentence before, but in the *much* stronger sense that *no-one* ever has used exactly that sequence of words before. (Consider the sentences in this note. There is overwhelming empirical and combinatorial evidence for this Chomskyan claim.) But we can, often enough, understand these novel sentences, because we are familiar with the words that make them up, and can semantically project that familiarity into the ability to understand new sentences made up of those words.

This means that language gives us the capacity to formulate an indefinite number of novel candidates for belief, desire, and intention.

It is why you can, and your dog cannot, wonder whether the international monetary system needs to be reformed, whether the melting point of chromium is higher than that of aluminum, and whether anyone has ever eaten cheese made from the milk of Siberian beavers.

For this reason, it is a fundamental mistake to think of language as essentially a tool. One cannot, in principle, understand language as an instrument for doing something—though of course it has instrumental uses. For the instrumental form of intelligibility presupposes a distinction between ends and means such that the ends must be specifiable antecedently to and independently of the means considered as candidates for pursuing those ends. (We can understand the task of firmly attaching two pieces of wood in advance of thinking about nails, screws, or glue as means to that end.) But the end of formulating and expressing an indefinite number of novel possible ends is not itself an end that we can make sense of in abstraction from the only possible means of securing it: language. For this reason, Dewey is wrong to think of language even as a “tool of tools,” in the sense of a tool for making other tools—though I take it he was trying to make something like the point I am after.

Focusing on this Chomskyan point brings into relief important features of the transformative power of language, the difference coming into language makes to sentient, intelligent beings capable of practical intentionality, the way it transforms them. This is the thought that is behind McDowell’s rejection (articulated and amplified by Matt Boyle) of “additive” conceptions of human perception. It is not the case that we have the sort of perceptual awareness that other mammals do, *plus* conceptual capacities. The conceptual capacity totally transform that sentient awareness. *All* we have in common with their perception is specifiable at the level of physiology. This is also what is behind Sellars’s remark that “We could always, of course, simply *not speak*. But only at the cost of having nothing to say.”

7. Within discursive intentionality, we can ask about the relations between discursive *acts* and their *contents*. Sellars: “**the notorious ‘ing’/‘ed’ ambiguity.**” Thought as act or episodes of thinking and what is thinkable, and in that sense, sometimes *thought*. Assertion or judgement as

act of asserting or judging vs. what is asserted or judged, the assertibles and judgeable contents of those acts. Claimings and claimables. Applications of concepts, in the sense of acts of applying them (in asserting, claiming and judging) and the conceptual *contents* that are applied. This is to ask about the relations between Fregean “force,” [Kraft] the practical significance of a speech act, paradigmatically assertion, and Fregean “content” [begriffliche Inhalt].

In a suitably broad sense, we can call the study of the *acts*, which are the *use* of linguistic expressions, “*pragmatics*,” and the study of the conceptual *contents* those acts express or apply “*semantics*.”

Here, too, we can ask about the relative explanatory priority of these aspects of discursiveness. In this case, by contrast to the language/mind case, such a question cannot take the form: could there be X without Y? (Mind without language, language without mind.) That is the question to which a relational view responds. The question is rather: can we make antecedent, independent sense of X before Y, and then explain Y in terms of X? It is a question about sense-dependence (of a distinctive kind: not *must* understand one in order to understand the other, but *can* understand the second in terms of a prior understanding of the other), not reference-dependence. This is a question about the explanatory priority of *meaning* and *use*. Related: the langue/parole distinction, (language vs. speaking).

Recall here the opposition between two philosophical traditions concerning language that have not generally been in conversation with one another.

- i) On the semantic side of meaning: A monological model of formal languages that takes its point of departure from the languages of mathematics and logic. Among its avatars are Frege, Russell, the early Wittgenstein, Carnap, Tarski, Lewis.
- ii) On the pragmatic side of use: An anthropological, social-practical model of natural languages, as something we *do*, a feature of the natural history of certain creatures. Among its avatars are the American Pragmatists (especially Dewey), the early Heidegger, and the later Wittgenstein and McDowell.

Among those who flirt with both strands of thought are Quine, Davidson, and Dummett.

An important difference in the vicinity is the difference is between those who start with a semantic theory, a theory of meaning or conceptual content and then seek to bolt onto it an account of what does with expressions that are meaningful in that sense, and those who start with an account of what one is doing in saying something and tries to understand what is said in terms of those speech acts.

I’ll call the order of explanation that starts with a notion of content that is explicated and motivated independently of its relation to acts, abilities, or practices *semanticist*.

So, for instance, Frege says that *asserting or judging is taking-true*. That principle can be exploited in two directions. One can start with a story about truth, and then say what it is to take or treat something *as true*, to put it forward as true (as having that property). Or one could start

with a story about asserting or judging and understand truth as what one is putting something forward as, the property one is taking a content to have by endorsing it in asserting or judging it.

- a) What I call “**semantic pragmatism**” is the claim that the *point* of postulating meanings or conceptual contents associated with linguistic expressions is to explain or codify (proprieties or implicit norms governing) their *use*.
- b) What I call “**methodological pragmatism**” is the claim that all there is to establish the association between linguistic expressions and semantic interpretants (contents, meanings, truth conditions, referents, extensions...) for expressions of *natural* language is the use that is made of them.

By contrast, for *artificial* languages semantic interpretants are typically associated with linguistic expressions by *stipulation*, in an expressively more powerful explicit metalanguage.

These are two ways of filling in the claim that “semantics answers to pragmatics.”

Q: What are the relations between these kinds of pragmatism and *fundamental* pragmatism?

A: These are specifications of fundamental pragmatism, in the sense of being ways of pursuing the fundamental pragmatist project of explaining discursive intentionality as a kind of practical intentionality, without necessarily succumbing to an assimilationism that fails to do justice to the transformative power of language.

Focusing within the study of discursive intentionality on the topic of *semantics* (meaning, content), these issues arise:

8. Within the semantic side of discursive intentionality. Intentional contentfulness comes in two flavors: what I will call “**‘that’-intentionality**” and what I will call “**‘of’-intentionality**.” Brentano characterized intentionality in terms of “reference to a content, a direction upon an object.”¹ John Searle offers this pre-theoretical summary of the subject-matter of his book *Intentionality*:

...if a state S is Intentional then there must be an answer to such questions as:

What is S about? What is S of? What is it an S that?²

Pretheoretically, these correspond to what one is *saying* or *thinking* and what one is talking or thinking *about*.

- a) Intentionality manifests itself in *propositional contentfulness*, marked by sententially complemented ‘that’ clauses.

I’ll call this the *conceptual* dimension of intentional contentfulness.

¹ Franz Brentano, “Psychology from the Empirical Standpoint,” trans. D.B.Terrell, quoted on pp. 119-20 in H. Morick (ed.) *Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind: Readings from Descartes to Strawson* [Scott, Foresman; Glenview, Ill. 1970].

² John Searle, *Intentionality* [Cambridge University Press, 1983].

- b) And it manifests itself in *object-directedness* or *aboutness*, paradigmatically marked by uses of singular terms. I'll call this the **representational** dimension of intentional contentfulness.

I think this distinction within the literature on intentionality runs together two distinctions, in a way pioneered by Kant and adopted by Russell.

- i) On the one hand, we have the syntactic-categorial contrast between the semantic roles played by
 - i-1) declarative sentences, and
 - i-2) singular terms.
- ii) On the other hand, these dimensions of intentional contentfulness might be lined up with Frege's distinction between
 - ii-1) *Sinn* or sense and
 - ii-2) *Bedeutung*, sense and referent.

The subdivisions within (i) and (ii) do not line up with each other.

Furthermore, the distinctions in (i) and (ii) are orthogonal for Frege, since both sentences and singular terms have both sense and reference. (This was actually controversial in the '60s—see the essays in the Klemke collection. But the publication of Frege's *Nachlass* settled the issue definitively.)

However, as Tugendhat and Dummett point out, Frege's "Bedeutung" seems to answer to two quite different models:

α) semantic role (above all, in inference), sameness of *Bedeutung* is sameness of content as intersubstitutability *salva veritate* or *salva consequentiae* (*Bedeutung* as intersubstitutional invariant) and

β) the name-bearer relation: sameness of *Bedeutung* as extensional identity of referent.

These can come apart, as Frege himself came to realize. Not all contexts in which one might substitute expressions are extensional in Quine's sense.

And as Putnam and others have emphasized, Frege's "Sinn" plays two quite different roles:

γ) as what is grasped by one who understands an expression and

δ) as what determines reference.

These, too, can come apart ("meanings ain't in the head," semantic externalism, the distinction between "narrow content" and "wide content" enforced by Twin Earth examples).

So asking about the explanatory priority of (a) and (b) is a complex affair, reflecting this fine structure.

With respect to (i), the syntactic-categorial version of the distinction between the conceptual and the representational dimension of intentional content, the choice is between top-down and bottom-up directions of explanation. (Of course, we might settle for explicating the relations between them, without finding an explanatory asymmetry.)

9. There are versions of propositional and object-directed intentionality ((8a) and (8b) above) for *practical* intentionality, too. For we do adopt the intentional stance to nonlinguistic

animals, making sense of their behavior by attributing beliefs, desires, and intentions and sample bits of practical reasoning relating them. And nonlinguistic animals, too, engage in object-directed behavior, pursuing prey and avoiding obstacles. Their beliefs, desires, and intentions, too, are *about* things. (Chomsky-Dennett argument against behaviorism applies here, too.) I think these uses of intentional vocabulary for nonlinguistic creatures are essentially parasitic on our use of that vocabulary for things that can talk. (In fact I endorse a version of Davidson's argument in "Thought and Talk," to the effect that to be a believer in the full and paradigmatic sense one must be an interpreter of the speech of others. For only so can one have the *concept* of belief. This is argued in *MIE*.) This "parasitism" is a kind of sense-dependence. It is "as if" animals had beliefs, etc..

10. We can ask about the explanatory priority, if any, of propositional "that"-intentionality and representational "of"-intentionality.

The extensional Tarskian tradition begins representationally, with extensions, and builds up to things that can take truth-values. In the possible world extension of Tarskian model theory, we eventually get to propositions as sets of possible worlds. I am going to object to this order of explanation on grounds of what I call "the Kant-Sellars thesis about modality," or "the modal Kant-Sellars thesis." The alternative I will pursue is:

- a) For **discursive** intentionality, explain the *representational* dimension of intentional content in terms of the *propositional* dimension.

One measure of the importance of making all the distinctions above is that taking this line is compatible with:

- b) For **practical** intentionality, explain the *propositional* dimension of intentional content in terms of the *representational* dimension.

11. In fact, will explain *propositional* content in terms of *inference*, rather than in terms of *truth*.

This explanatory strategy, together with that in (10a), results in the preference for *inferentialism* over *representationalism* in semantic theory.

12. **Intensionality** as the mark of intentionality:

In heyday of linguistic philosophy, Roderick Chisholm (founder of the Brown department) thought about intentionality in terms of intentional *vocabulary*. He wanted a criterion of demarcation for intentionality-expressing vocabulary. He thought he had found one: intentional contexts are not extensional. You cannot freely intersubstitute co-referential (more generally, co-extensive) expressions, saving true (or inference potential). This is true, for sapience-attributing locutions. He thought the key thing is that intensional contexts depend not just on *what* you are talking or thinking about, but also about *how* you are talking or thinking about it: what concepts you are bringing it under in order to pick it out. Intensional contexts are description-relative (he says), or concept-relative (we might say).

Even if the inventor of bifocals is the first Postmaster General, I might believe that the inventor of bifocals was an inventor and not believe that the first Postmaster General was an inventor. My belief depends on how I describe the individual, what concepts I apply to him, not just on who the description picks out. Propositional attitude ascriptions generally are intensional contexts.

Following Brentano, Chisholm was also impressed that although one cannot kick someone who does not exist (say, the present King of France), one can think about him. The non-existence of the object does not preclude standing in intentional relations to it. (Brentano called this “intentional inexistence” and said these objects of thought merely “subsist.”) Here, too, the claim is that what matters is the *concept* one is applying, the *sense* rather than the *referent*: “the present King of France.” I can fear a bear even though there is no bear. My intentional states somehow have to do most directly with the sense or content, and only via that with an individual (or not).

Chisholm’s attempt to use this feature (intensionality) to define intentional locutions failed. It failed because there are other sorts of intensional context.

Prime among them are *modal* contexts.

9 is the number of the planets, and the number 9 is necessarily odd, but the number of the planets is not necessarily odd. There could have been just 8—in fact, we’ve decided now that there are only 8. And if my quick action avoided a car crash, there is no actual car crash that I avoided: only a possible one. One can stand in modal relations to non-actual things.

The fact that modal contexts are intensional, as well as intentional contexts, was a problem for Chisholm. But it has been seen as an explanatory opportunity by others. For it raises the possibility of explaining the intensionality of intentionality by appeal to the intensionality of modality. Information-theoretic semantics (e.g. Dretske) and teleosemantics (Millikan, and Sterelny, Papineau) take this route. In particular, they appeal to *selectional subjunctives* to get intensional behavior. Even if the class of small marbles is co-extensive with the class of white marbles, so that the sieve *selects* not only all and only the small marbles but all and only the white marbles, it selects *for* the size, not the color, in the sense that if there *were* a small black marble, it *would* be selected.

But it is not only *modal* contexts that are intensional. *Normative* contexts can also be intentional. I can *promise* you, or *owe* you, a cow even if there is no cow. Even if what I borrowed from you is a weapon, it can be that I ought to return to you what I borrowed even if you are angry and not the case that I ought to give you a weapon if you are angry.

Millikan doubles down and proposes to explain these normative contexts in modal terms, and then the intentional in terms of the normative.

[My thought is to use this bit of relatively ancient history (Chisholming of the definition of intentionality in terms of intensionality is late ‘60s, so 50 years ago) to introduce the surprisingly

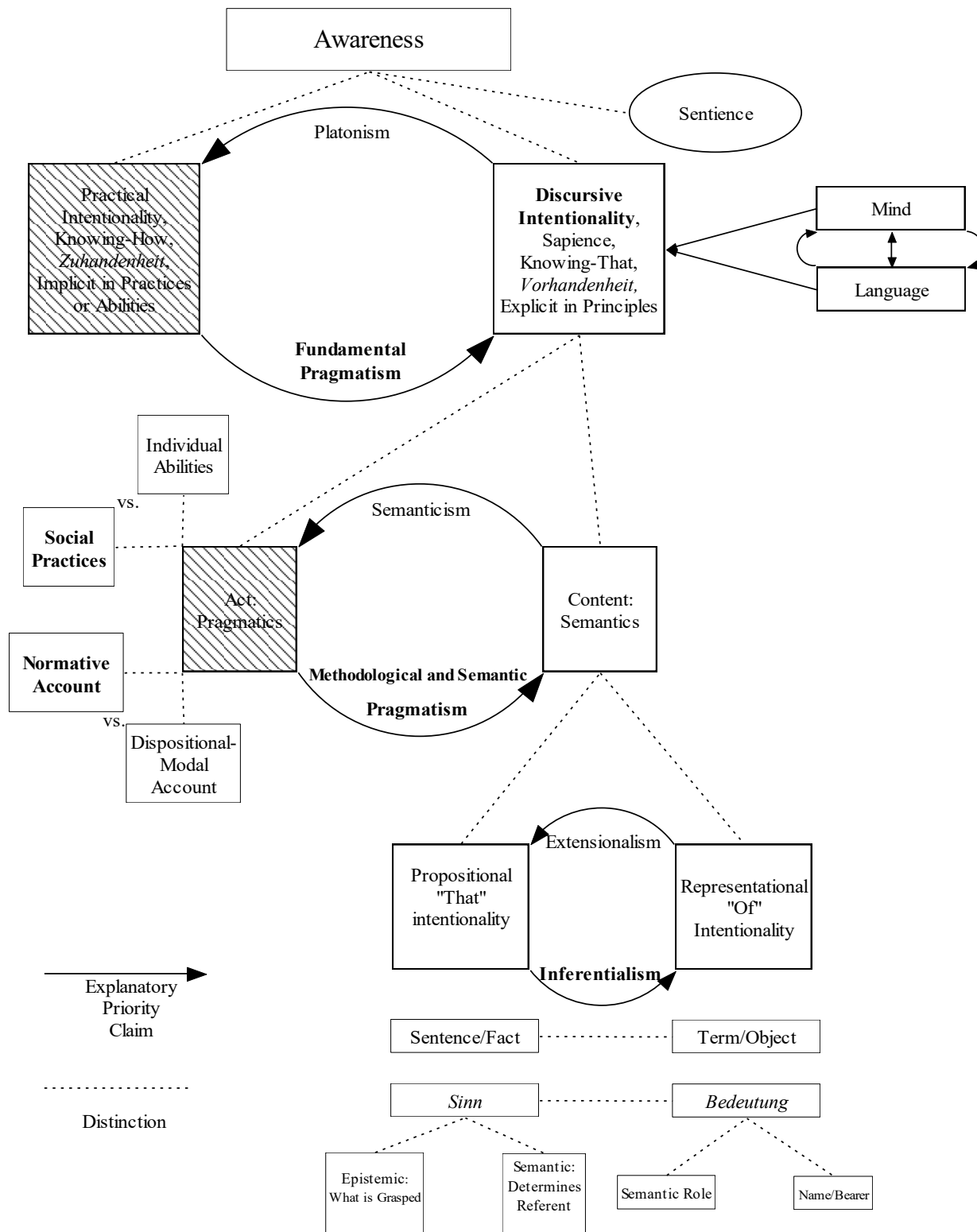
tight and intimate connections between modal, normative, and intentional vocabularies that is one of the deep lessons to emerge by the end of the course.]

Focusing within the study of discursive intentionality on the topic of pragmatics (use, discursive practices, speech acts), these issues arise:

13. Individual capacities and abilities (accounts of *grasp* of concepts) vs. social practices.

14. Normative vs. dispositional accounts of concept application. Deontic vs. alethic modality. Both as underwriting intensionality. Teleosemantics (especially Millikan), as mixing them: explaining deontic normative by alethic modal, via pragmatist emphasis on the selectional mechanisms common to phylogenetic evolution and individual learning.

Normative pragmatics of intentionality is the topic of next week (Week 2).



IV. Normative Pragmatics, Semantic Inferentialism, and Metalinguistic Expressivism

A. Normative Pragmatics, and Pragmatism about Normativity

1. Kant I: Normative Turn, Normativity of Intentionality (LW)
2. Pragmatism vs. Platonism about norms, practice vs. principles, Knowing-how vs. knowing-that (Fundamental pragmatism).
3. One-sorted vs. two-sorted normativity (statuses)
4. Statuses vs. Attitudes (status-dependence of attitudes vs. attitude-dependence of statuses, including institution of statuses by attitudes).
5. Two normative attitudes, difference of social perspective between attributing and acknowledging.

B. Semantic Inferentialism (ISA)

1. Inferentialism vs. Representationalism. Frege's principle relating truth and goodness of inference, (good inferences preserve truth), 2 directions in which it can be exploited.
2. Labeling vs. describing: the difference is situation in a space of implications. Sellars.
3. Circumstances and consequences of application. Conceptual content as inferential role. Then subdivided by commitment and entitlement.
4. Subjunctively robust implications and incompatibilities. Kant-Sellars thesis about modality.
5. Down to subsentential conceptual content by *substitution*. (Fregean decomposition to functions.)
6. Down to tokening level by *anaphora*. ISA.

C. Metalinguistic Expressivism (including Logical Expressivism)

1. Kant II: Categories.
Kant has the idea that besides concepts whose expressive job it is to describe and explain empirical goings-on, there are concepts whose distinctive expressive job it is to make explicit otherwise implicit features of the practical *framework* of abilities within which it is possible to describe and explain.
2. Carnap (according to Sellars): a *metalinguistic* version of Kant's insight about categorial concepts.
3. Sellars: (if we look at what he does rather than what he says) *pragmatic* metavocabularies. Already know how to do everything you need to know how to do to master concept (use of the word).
4. Brandom: a class of concepts that are LX for every ADP.
5. This as the genus of *logical* vocabulary.
6. But also (as already in Kant), or *modal* vocabulary.
7. And (as already in Kant, these being the two species of "necessity": natural and practical), also *normative* vocabulary.

8. Hegel already has the idea that Sellars will later put in the slogan that “**the language of modality is a transposed language of norms.**” And Hegel further has the idea that to understand the relation between what is expressed by these two vocabularies is to understand the intentional nexus. This is the deepest idea of *BSD*, and the punchline with which it concludes.