

September 12, 2018

Week 3 Notes

0. Introductory Methodological Remarks

These remarks are about the status of the stories I'm telling working out a normative pragmatics (theory of use) and an inferentialist semantics (theory of content) and a metalinguistic expressivism about logic, modality, normativity, and intentionality.

a) I am not trying to *convince* you of the claims I make. The issue for me is not whether you *believe* them, or even whether they are *true*. As far as philosophical claims are concerned, to a first approximation I don't believe in belief, or in truth. It's not that there is no such thing as belief or truth. But it is appropriate to a different sort of discourse than philosophical discourse. In particular, such idioms apply when *meaning* is not problematic—for instance because it is held in place by stable institutional practices and (so) expectations. (Pippin on Henry James.) For philosophical claims, trying to put in place reasonably stable meanings is the main point of the enterprise. Understanding (meaning and grasp of meaning), not truth or knowledge is the goal. This enterprise is substantially *prior* to assessments of truth. People boggle at this (Tim Williamson, for instance). But I think that is due to the same sort of failure of imagination that some people can have when one professes not only lack of interest in, but even in a deep sense lack of understanding of the attractiveness of species of value that are central to their lives: for instance, glamour, celebrity, or fun.

b) I want you to think of the stories I am telling in terms of 3 levels:

- i. There are a lot of particular concepts, distinctions, considerations, desiderata, and criteria of adequacy of accounts.
- ii. My particular integration of them into a systematic whole: a perspective on the phenomena I address (which are central to who and what *we* are).
- iii. The sort of enterprise (ii) is an example of. A kind of systematic metaconceptual creative nonfiction. Here the role played by (recollective) *history* and (resulting) *system* are critical.

What I am convinced is of value to you is (i) and (iii). The concepts etc. in (i) are valuable in their own right, and are almost wholly detachable from the larger whole they are integrated into. And the genre of the story, (iii) is worth coming to appreciate—even though there are other valuable ways to do philosophy. This is Sellars's, and my teacher Lewis's, and Davidson's, and mine. It is not Dummett's, nor my teacher Rorty, nor McDowell's. The actual story, at level (ii), is valuable as showing off what *might* be done with the considerations etc. at level (i), and as an example of level (iii). In itself, it is valuable primarily as providing binocular, stereoscopic vision when laid alongside the *dispositionalist* (in its (underdeveloped) pragmatics), *representationalist* (in its (fabulously successful) semantics), *formalist* (logic is the form of rationality) (in its (incoherent, see MacFarlane) view of logic) orthodoxy to which it is a worked-out alternative.

1. Historical Run-up:

a) **Descartes** inventing representation (again, ganz kurz).

- b) **Kant**'s persuasive retrospective rational reconstruction (recollection-*Erinnerung*) of the tradition he inherited.
His distinction of *concepts/intuitions* used as key to dividing predecessors into *rationalists* and *empiricists*. Both saw only a continuum with concepts/sensuous intuitions as poles. Rationalists assimilated everything to concepts, empiricists to intuitions. But: sentences and pictures (images) are not poles on a continuum.
- c) Instead divide into *representationalists* and *inferentialists*. Almost co-extensive, but cutting deeper. Descartes himself not a representationalist, in that he did not take representation as *primitive*. He was a *holist* about it. Modeled things on relations between algebra (discursive) and geometry (extensive). Then saw that while individual representing/represented pairs are not intelligible as such, the *systems* containing them are isomorphic. That means that *inferences* can relate them. Implicitly, an *inferential* story about map-type representational relations, modeled on drawing geometrical conclusions from algebraic arguments—and *vice versa*.
- d) **Spinoza** ("order and connection of things is the same as the order and connection of ideas") understands representational properties of ideas in *functionalist* way.
- e) **Leibniz** appeals to *memory* relations to define *apperception*, and *expressive* relations to define representation. *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (emphasize sub-title) tells these stories, plus some of those below.

2. It emerges from thinking about the tradition in these non-Kantian (implicitly Sellarsian) terms that one big issue dividing the camps is whether the order of semantic explanation is **bottom-up** or **top-down**, in terms of the size and structure of the semantically interpreted units. Inferentialists take sentences (or, more radically, implications-consequences) as their basic unit. Representationalists start with 'Fido'-Fido name-bearer relations, or at least expression-set relations.

Representationalists accordingly have to *build up* sentential-propositional representations out of smaller bits.

They accordingly must confront the issue of the *unity of the proposition*.

This comes in at least two flavors:

- i. What makes syntactically smaller units "hang together" into "unities" at all? What is the difference between the way the expressions hang together in "The big friendly dog" and "A two red dog snake" or "ball, dog, snake, big, the"? We can tell a *grammatical* or *syntactic* story, but what is the *semantic* story that goes with it. (Lewis's "General Semantics" offers an answer to this.)

More deeply:

- ii. How is one to understand what is special about sentences and the propositions (judgeables) they express or (more awkwardly) represent?

Here the Bradley regress shows *one* difficulty.

The deeper one is that a bottom-up account has difficulty saying what it is to be a *sayable* or a *thinkable*: a *thought* in Frege's sense.

This **nominalism** (taking the name-bearer model as the *only* semantic model) is the big flaw in *semiotics* (including the Peircian original), and in *structuralism*, focused on sign/signified (continued into *post-structuralism*—the best Derrida can do is to recoil to saying “there are only signs(=signifiers).”).

They are *pre-Kantian*, *pre-Fregean*, and *pre-Wittgensteinian* (early and late):

Judgments as the unit of awareness, as the smallest semantic unit to which pragmatic force (paradigmatically, assertional force) can attach, and sentences as the smallest unit with which one can “make a move in a language-game.”

Neurath's boat-vandal's claim:

It is intelligible that a community only use sentences, and no subsentential expressions.

It is *not* intelligible that they should use only subsentential expressions. (When it looks like they do (“Rabbit!”) what they use are functionally are word-sentences. (LW makes this point.)

3. Inferentialists have an answer to this question, a response to this challenge. What is semantically special about sentences-propositions (propositions as the semantic interpretants of declarative sentences) is to be understood in terms of *pragmatics*. They invoke the iron triangle of discursiveness, which relates declarative sentences (syntax), propositions (semantics, and asserting/judging (pragmatics).

Then they understand *asserting* and *inferring* as coming as a package.

What is assertible is what can stand in inferential relations, playing the role both of premise and of conclusion.

Asserting is putting something forward *as* either a potential premise (giving a reason) or a potential conclusion (response to a request for a reason).

Fundamental claim is that asserting and inferring (coming together as a package) are “downtown” in discursive practice. They are pathognomonic for a practice *being* discursive. (Cf. LW's “Sprachspiele”)

4. Sellars on the distinction between **labeling** (classifying) and **describing**.

How the *classificationist* tradition worked:

Doctrine of concepts, doctrine of judgments, doctrine of consequences (syllogisms) [*Schluss*].

Its theory of judgment as classification=predication.

Kant's argument, made explicit by Frege, that one must separate predicating from judging.

This is the Frege-Geach argument distinguishing force from content.

But it is already in Kant, who needs a notion of synthesis as a force (doing) notion, separate from syntactic combination. (Cf. Friedman's use of Hintikka's idea of synthesis as Skolem functions.)

5. Frege on “begriffliche Inhalt.” Carnap’s version.

6. Inferentialists will then need to be able to *carve up* sentences, and assign *some* kind of semantic interpretant to sub-sentential expressions. (This is the analog for them of the problem of the unity of the proposition for representationalists.) The notion of representation and the name-bearer model for representing *objects* by *singular terms* will have to be underwritten somehow. Functionalism, which has so far been appealed to in explaining role of *sentences*, in getting *semantics* out of *pragmatics*, must be applied again to get subsentential things out of sentential ones, on the semantic side.

Kant is the pioneer here: judgments are the most basic units (in the order of semantic explanation), and terms and predicates are to be understood as “functions of judgment.” Here a key idea is that the objective form of judgment, the “object = X”, explains what one has made oneself responsible *to* in judging. He puts forward a *normative* account of what representation consists in. He understands representation in terms of a distinctive kind of *authority* representeds have over representings, a corresponding distinctive kind of *responsibility* (for assessments of correctness) that representings have to representeds, which count as represented *by* those representings just in virtue of exercising that kind of authority.

Frege operationalizes this idea by introducing a precise notion of *function* and *analysis* of sentences by construing them as the result of applying a function to an argument. Function/argument replaces subject/predicate analysis. Russell understands what is important about this in terms of multiplace relations. But it is really thinking of functions as *carving up* sentences. Not multiplace *simple* predicates (in Dummett’s sense) but the move from *simple* to *complex* predicates is what matters.

Frege does this by radicalizing and systematizing *Bolzano*’s method of *observing invariance under substitution*.

The next four points all go together:

7. Dummett’s inferentialist idea of generalizing introduction and elimination rules for logical vocabulary to *all* vocabulary, under the heading of “circumstances and consequences of application.”

8. “One-sided” theories of meaning: pragmatists and verificationists look only downstream, assertibility theorists only upstream. Truth-conditions assume necessary conditions and sufficient conditions *coincide*. From the point of view suggested by Dummett, this is to assume that language is already ideal, that no further rectification of concepts by explication and alteration of inferential commitments is needed. It assume *ideal* concepts.

9. “Truth and Assertibility” argument about how consequences of application must be distinguished from circumstances, and how that adds *truth* conditions to *assertibility* conditions. “I foresee that I will write a book about Hegel.”

10. “Boche”. Pejoratives remind us of the implications curled up in concepts—even ordinary empirical concepts.

Logic:

11. Could include Harman point about the relations between the *practice* of inference and *relations* of implication.

12. Against the idea that logic is the essence of rationality, that at base, “good reason” means “*logically* good reason.”

13. From semantic inferentialism to logical expressivism.
Logic (from Frege’s *Begriffsschrift*) as the organ of semantic self-consciousness.
Inferentialists think the conditional and negation are LX for every ADP.