

September 19, 2018

Week 4 Notes

1. Recap: Speech act theory, in Austin and Searle, failed to make sense of the principle (for me, discourse-defining) speech act: assertion. It thereby condemned itself to being essentially parochial and peripheral, dealing only with minor, parasitic speech acts. “How to do things with words” should revolve around the principle thing one does: say something. But the account of “locutionary” force is minimal and unhelpful.

2. Strategy: Use a notion of the kind of commitment undertaken by asserting, to understand propositions (and sentences) and truth, by understanding what taking-true is, in other terms.

This is exploiting the iron triangle of discursiveness, by starting with the pragmatic instead of the semantic vertex.

3. Must understand a “commitment to the effect that p,” or to the “truth of p” (expressive role of truth as letting one generalize: Quinean “semantic ascent”) in other terms.

Idea: Understand this kind of propositional commitment in terms of some kind of task-responsibility: the responsibility to do something.

I think (though I did not yet when I wrote MIE) that this is the form of Kant’s theory of judgment. What one must do, the task responsibility one undertakes in judging, is to integrate (“synthesize”) one’s commitment into a constellation of collateral commitments exhibiting the rational unity characteristic of apperception. That overarching rational task responsibility has three parts:

- i) The *justificatory* responsibility to have reasons for the commitments in one’s repertoire.
- ii) The *ampliative* responsibility to acknowledge commitment to the consequences of the commitments in one’s repertoire, i.e. to those one’s other commitments provide reasons for.
- iii) The *critical* responsibility to reject and extrude commitments that are incompatible with one’s other commitments, that is, that those other commitments provide decisive reasons against.

4. Idea: Use practices of giving and asking for reasons as (social) context for understanding the kind of commitment one undertakes in asserting.

Supplementary material: “Asserting.” Original formulation in terms of authority and responsibility to do something.

To work this out, need to go interpersonal. Look to practices of giving and asking for reasons. Asserting is putting something forward as true in the sense of “fit to use as a premise in inferences.”

Commitments whose entitlements are always potentially at issue. (A version of Kant's idea: commitments whose rational credentials are at issue, commitments one is obliged to have reasons for.)

"Assertibility" theories (Dewey, Sellars, Dummett) are about *entitlement*. But they don't explicitly keep separate track of *commitments*. In effect, they are *normatively single-sorted*. They just use an OK/not-OK, appropriate/inappropriate division—instead of a true/false one.

The idea for a *two-sorted* account can be traced back to [be thought of as inspired by?] Kant. He has a normative theory of judging, as undertaking a certain kind of responsibility—responsibility to synthesize—which I render in terms of “commitment,” and then distinguishes which of those commitments are OK, in that one can fulfill that responsibility.

We'll see that accounts that invoke *two normative statuses* instead of just one are expressively much more powerful pragmatic metavocabularies for discursive practice. The most powerful demonstration of this is the “*objectivity proofs*” in Chapter 8. They show that in scorekeeping terms claiming that things are thus-and-so is not *pragmatically* (and so not semantically) equivalent to any claims about who is committed or entitled to what.

5. Working up to the idea of scorekeeping (bookkeeping):

Understanding speech acts is knowing what the speaker is committing herself to, what would entitle her to it, and what other commitments it rules out (also a matter of entitlement). We keep track of each other's “position in a normative space of commitments and entitlements.”

The way an assertion (or more generally, a speech act) alters one's standing or position in that normative space of commitments and entitlements is its *pragmatic significance* (Fregean “force”).

One important sort of *understanding* consists in practically grasping the pragmatic (normative) significance of speech acts—so: being able to keep score on them, to know how they alter the score.

Semantic content will be a theoretical notion. The idea is to associate some kind of semantic content with utterance kinds, so that there is a uniform function from normative space to normative space that codifies the pragmatic significance of asserting that content in the argument context, resulting in the value context.

Semantic nihilists, such as Wittgenstein, deny that there are such uniform functions—at least for speech acts generally.

6. Look to inheritance of entitlement, by

- a) Intracontent, interpersonal, inference-and-assertion license (inheritance of entitlement).
- b) Intercontent, intrapersonal inheritance (vindication) of entitlement by justification relations among contents.

7. Defining three sorts of implication relation from two normative varieties.

- i. Commitment-preserving

- ii. Entitlement-preserving (only *prima facie*, since entitlement can always be lost by having incompatible collateral commitments).
- iii. Incompatibility and incompatibility entailments.

Note: I used to think of these as monotonic and as modally necessitating.

I now think of incompatibility as nonmonotonic, and necessity as relativized to “ranges of subjunctive robustness” both for relations of material implication-consequence and material incompatibility.

The differential strengths of these implication relations (from CCDP).

8. Three global normative models for discourse;

- i) *Game-theoretic semantics* (Hintikka, Erlangen school): There is an overarching imperative or goal of getting others to assent or agree with one. Normatively *compelling* assent is *winning* the game.
- ii) *Co-ordination, co-operation, or consensus* is the overarching goal. (Lewis, Habermas). Lewis (*Convention*), too, is thinking game-theoretically, but about when *everyone* is better off (by their own lights) if we co-ordinate or co-operate, and hence everyone has a self-regarding reason to do so. For Habermas, I claim this is where he sneaks in the rabbit that he then pulls out of the hat of his communicative theory of action as a foundation for liberal political theory.
- iii) My third way assumes neither motivation to compel assent to one’s own view, nor motivation to achieve consensus. The goal is simply *understanding* one another. This is, to be sure, a prerequisite of extracting information from the remarks of others, persuading others, and of achieving consensus. But neither goal is assumed. Re Habermas: Do not need to assume co-operativeness, or evolutionary need for co-ordination.

Describe the importance assigned to this feature by the Bremen group of political scientists (Tanya Pritzlaff). They code actual interactions in small-group committees. They were looking at competing models: speech acts aimed at persuading others of one’s own view vs. speech acts aimed at arriving at consensus (on, e.g., government policy committee or corporate management committee). Could not understand what was going on. When, inspired by *MIE*, Pritzlaff had them add coding for trying to understand each others’ position, they achieved a breakthrough. Well-functioning committees mostly do that.

We humans probably do have the motivations assigned by the first two models, and perhaps would not talk if we did not. But for what we are doing to be *talking*, no such assumption is required. (“vandalizing Neurath’s boat”)

9. This minimal normative assumption should be compared with the “Queen’s shilling” normativity model from Ch. 1. (Since I didn’t talk about this in Week 2, I should do so now.) On this model, having a normative status is a third-personal matter of a social status accorded one by others. No self-consciousness on the part of the subject of the normative status is required. (Contra Rödl etc.) I am trying to understand how to get to that. Self-consciousness is also not required by the others who attribute the status by practically taking or treating the

subject in various ways. This seems behavioristic, but it makes sure we are playing fair, and is good Popperian methodology.

10. Testimony as a non-evidential form of entitlement inheritance.

11. Default-and-challenge epistemology. (*Inter alia*, a response to skepticism.) I think of this as just making explicit a Wittgensteinian thought. $\forall\exists$, not $\exists\forall$. For every chain of justifications there is a place where it ends (“my spade is turned”), but there is not a foundational stratum such that every chain of justifications ends there.

12. Not just two sorts of normative status, but also two sorts of normative *attitude*. They differ in social perspective.

Two social-perspective attitudes to statuses: attributing and acknowledging.
This is the basis of I-thou sociality, rather than I-we sociality.

Scorekeeping account of *knowledge attributions*.

Better account of relations between truth and justification than Rortyan pragmatists or assertibility theorists, or Peirceans, who take it that “true” just means “justified.”

Again the “objectivity proofs” (retailed also in *AR* 6) will show that an analog of truth conditions emerges from interaction of commitment and entitlement, attribution and acknowledgement.

Fun fact: in *A Spirit of Trust*, I translate Hegel’s

“in itself/for consciousness” into normative status/normative attitude,
“independence/dependence” into “authority/responsibility” and his

What one is “for oneself/for others” into acknowledged and attributed statuses.

13. Compare to Erlangen constructivism:

probative vs dispositive (proof)

reason as inference, not construction

social (not as competitive game).

14. Boghossian’s (and others’) complaint about scorekeeping: surely that itself is already a form of intentionality. Response: the aim is to exhibit it as a kind of *practical* intentionality, not yet *discursive* intentionality.

How is this supposed to work?

Examining it takes us to the discussion of pragmatist AI:

Part Two: Pragmatist Version of Artificial Intelligence

15. Two standard views (leading to two standard criticisms) of GoFAI (Good, Old-Fashioned Artificial Intelligence):

- a) AI is essentially, and not just accidentally, a thesis about *symbol manipulation*. It is the view that thought or reasoning *is* manipulating symbols according to definite rules. Cf.

Hobbes: “reasoning is but reckoning.” If a machine can do that, it can think. This is the computational theory of the mind:

mind:brain :: software:hardware.

But symbols are signs + meanings.

The paradox of mechanical rationality:

Cannot be thinking or reasoning if one does not pay attention to meanings. But mechanical (physical) systems respond only to physical forces, not meanings.

Response (Newell and Simon, CMU):

Set up a suitable isomorphism and

“Take care of the syntax (mechanically manipulate the signs) and the semantics will take care of itself.”

This thought is behind Fodor’s LoT (language of thought) hypothesis.

Against this:

- i. Radical line: Vehiclelessness of thought (Davidson, Lynne Rudder Baker, McDowell). Beliefs and thoughts need have, and *in principle cannot* have, non-intentional descriptions.
- ii. Moderate line: PDP (parallel distributed processing) models don’t have or manipulate symbols. Perception seems to work like this. Why couldn’t cognition generally?
- b) Dreyfus: GoFAI requires that all cognitively skillful, intelligent knowing how can be resolved without remainder into explicit knowing that, since we must formulate it in terms of explicit rules. This is implausible.
- c) (I won’t address Searle’s Chinese Room example, which just pumps the intuition that sapience presupposes sentience.)

16. Immune to Dreyfus intellectualist problems about decomposing knowing-how into knowing-that. Those are real, but this one turns on difficulties from pragmatist side: decomposing knowing-that into knowing-how.

17. Formulate thesis of pragmatic AI.

It is that there is a set of *nondiscursive* practices (abilities) that can be algorithmically elaborated into an ADP (autonomous discursive practice) or the ability to engage in one.

Here “*nondiscursive*” means “ability that can be exhibited by creatures that do *not* engage in any ADP.”

This way of understanding the challenge of AI turns Dreyfus on his head.

For it understands AI to be about understanding knowing *that* (discursive practice) in terms of knowing *how* (nondiscursive practice), rather than the other way around.

18. Challenge to pragmatist AI:

Frame problem: how to ignore what is irrelevant.

Fodor said that “the Frame Problem is just [the problem when to stop thinking] from an engineer’s perspective” (Fodor, “Modules, frames, fridgeons, sleeping dogs, & the music of spheres”, *The robot’s dilemma*, pp.139-149, Ablex Publishing, 1987.) Then again, Pat Hayes claimed that “Fodor doesn’t know the Frame Problem from a bunch of bananas” (Hayes, “What the Frame Problem is and Isn’t”, *The robot’s dilemma*, pp.123-138, Ablex Publishing, 1987).

Cambridge properties and Cambridge changes (McTaggart). Fridgeons. Provo eye-color.

19. This is really a problem about *updating* (of which scorekeeping is an instance):
What is special about updating:

- a) Massively multipremise implications. Mention here Sellars challenge on perceptual rather than conceptual side.
- b) Nonmonotonic
- c) Harman problem of going from implication relations to inferential practices.

The key is the mastery of ranges of subjunctive robustness for nonmonotonic relations of implication-incompatibility.

The challenge is:

How can *those* abilities be algorithmically decomposed into *nondiscursive* capacities?

20. Still, we do it, and not by magic. How can that be?

Algorithmic elaboration vs. *pedagogic* elaboration. LW.

Completely solved pedagogic problems.

The political issues raised by sorting students relative to fixed training regimens, if it is not the case that there exists a regimen that is successful for all students, but for all students there exists a successful training regimen.