

October 3, 2018

Week Six Notes

Intro:

Topic is *modality*.

Question

1. Pragmatists, especially Peirce and C.I. Lewis, but also Dewey, had worried about the modal features of things, their lawfulness. But Russell and Ayer and Austin did not. Quine is openly skeptical, and figures such as Davidson, Dummett, and Fodor have nothing to say on the topic, not so much out of skepticism as because it did not show up as a major topic for them. Sellars is unique among the mid-century giants in taking it seriously.

The expressive impoverishment of first-order extensional logic was not a problem for Frege. As Macbeth has taught us, he thought his notation captured lawfulness. That is because his sign for generality—paradigmatically allied to the conditional—was to capture not the relations between extensions, as in post-Russell versions, but relations among *concepts*. Those relations, he understood, are subjunctively robust. But until Macbeth, no-one understood this feature of Frege's logic.

And the Continental tradition, focusing on literature and art rather than science, was not at all concerned with the lawfulness of the non-human empirical world.

Philosophers of science did worry about modality, which is at issue between the empiricist and naturalist wings of the Vienna Circle.

Here the collision was between the impoverished expressive power of the extensional logics available and the demands of philosophy of science. For naturalist, or naturalizing epistemologists (cf. Quine's "Epistemology Naturalized"), what holds for philosophy of science holds for epistemology generally. And epistemology in general was (and is) broadly empiricist and Humean (which includes its Bayesian species) in approach.

2. For at least 50 years, from the '20s through the '60s, alethic modal concepts were counted among the most puzzling and problematic for Anglophone philosophers. For the subsequent 50 years, they have been what we appeal to in explaining other concepts taken to be puzzling and problematic: semantic and intentional, normative....

3. The three waves of the modal revolution:

- i) Kripke's semantics for modal logic.

- ii) Extension of this apparatus to provide an intensional semantics for nonlogical vocabulary, by Montague, Kaplan, Lewis, Stalnaker, et.al..
- iii) Metaphysical turn with Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*.

First move of this is in philosophy of language: appeal to modally rigid designation as a model to explain certain features of proper name use that had been puzzling.

But notice that it is not "causal theories" of reference *generally* that were introduced.

Descriptivists has always had "causal" theories of *predicate* reference, and predicates were always treated as referring rigidly.

Move to metaphysical reading of this philosophy of language result (nearly 50 years ago now) came from separation of *a prioricity* (epistemically) from *necessity* going with rigidity. [Look forward to anaphoric analysis of modal rigidity.]

4. But none of this offered a responsive answer to Hume's and Quine's empiricist worries about modality. Those were epistemological and semantic worries about our contact with and knowledge of modal phenomena. (Quine on the possible fat man stuck in the doorway.)

It is true that people gave up empiricism (following Quine and Sellars), because its foundationalism and the supposed autonomy (semantic and epistemic) of its foundations came into question.

But why did we think we *understood* modal vocabulary and what it expresses better?

SK just invokes modal primitives.

One possible story is that of the two founding programs of analytic philosophy, empiricism and naturalism, we gave up empiricism and hewed to naturalism.

But if empiricism has been given up, what has replaced it?

It is not so much that empiricism has been given up, as that foundationalism has been. (Though not by what Jackson and Chalmers want to do with two-dimensional modal semantics.)

At least Bayesian epistemology gives up the atomism that is the common failing of both. But the rational choice theory it is typically embedded in is empiricist rather than kantian in conception (understanding reasons for action in motivationally internalist terms), and still tends to take its *semantics* for granted in advance of thinking about reasons and justification.

5. Autobiographical notes:

- a) Rorty's response to the shift at Princeton (full, exclusively, of Harvard Quine students) from modal skepticism to modal enthusiasm. As he perceived it, from Kripke's 1970 NN lectures.
- b) Me: coming into semantics from possible worlds semantics in Lewis's "General Semantics" form. Adverb story (again!).
- c) At this point, not appreciating either Kant or Sellars, following Kant. (And C.I.Lewis, following Kant, already for pragmatists.)

Proposed Answer to the Challenge of *Justifying* the Shift in Attitude toward Modality:

1. Hume:

Thought he understood knowledge of what *is*. (But did he?)

Asked two questions:

- i. How does that settle how things *must* be?
Proper use of alethic *modal* vocabulary of “possibility” and “necessity.”
- ii. How does that settle how things *ought* to be?
Proper use of (deontic) *normative* vocabulary.

Blackburn reads him as offering broadly *expressivist* accounts of “modals and morals.”

He thinks they express, not features of the world we are thinking about and acting in, but features of our thought about it.

The pragmatists will elaborate this thought in terms of our *habits* of thought.

2. Kant:

Assimilated these two issues under the heading of “necessity” [Notwendigkeit].

It has two species: *natural* necessity and *practical* necessity.

He agrees that *in a certain sense* these are features of our thought rather than what our thought is about.

But he understands them as *ineluctable, unavoidable, structural* features of our thought.

In fact he thinks they articulate *the* structure thought *must* exhibit in order to be *about* the objective empirical world.

His big idea is that in addition to concepts whose distinctive expressive job it is to make explicit features of the objective empirical goings-on around us (call these “ordinary empirical descriptive” or OED vocabulary), there are concepts whose distinctive expressive job it is to **make explicit structural features of the framework within which alone it is possible to make explicit features of the objective empirical world.**

The OED vocabulary is used to *describe* and *explain* empirical phenomena (which is not just observable stuff, but theoretical stuff, too). It will turn out to be an important feature of this view that describing and explaining are two sides of one coin, that the idea of vocabulary that *is* apt for *describing* but not apt for *explaining* is incoherent. Explaining involves alethic modal force, subjunctive robustness of the kind that first becomes visible in the form of laws of nature.

Though it is important that *laws* are just *one* form—in fact, a very *rare* form—that subjunctive robustness (the basic species of alethic modality) can take.

These are Kant’s “pure categories of the understanding” or *categories*.

They are accessible to us *a priori* (always an adverb, for Kant).

[Say what this comes to. Eventually: Modal K-S thesis.]

Methodology:

I claim Kant's two biggest ideas are

- a) normativity of intentionality and
- b) Idea of categories.

Next would be his account of judging (following out (a)) and idea of deriving moral commitments from what is implicit in knowing and agency.

Hegel's biggest ideas are

- a) social account of normative statuses as instituted by normative attitudes when they take the form of reciprocal recognition, as opposed to individualistic account of it in terms of autonomy.
- b) Non-psychological theory of the conceptual, opening up to bimodal hylomorphic conceptual realism.
- c) Historical account of constraint of attitudes by statuses.

You can see asking these questions (about ultimate Big Ideas) as reductive.

But by "Big Ideas" I mean one's that were all of i) central to the figure's thought ii) original and transformative, and iii) useful to use today.

If you *don't* ask these questions, why are you reading the mighty dead?

They aren't the *end* of the story, but asking them orients what one bears down on and the further questions one asks the texts.

3. Carnap would not have thought of himself as carrying on this Kantian tradition. In fact, his teacher (and Frege's friend and colleague) Bruno Bauer was a student of Heinrich Rickert, who with Windelband led the Southwest (Freiburg, rather than Marburg) neo-Kantians. Sellars could see what Carnap could not: Carnap's strategy of understanding fraught or problematic philosophical concepts as *metalinguistic* (he thought of them to begin with as "syntactic") is actually a version of the Kantian line on categorial concepts. It was seeing this aspect of the "New Way of Words" that made the scales fall from Sellars's eyes and launched him into his distinctive philosophical project.

4. Kant-Sellars claim about modality is the proper *reason* for comfort with modality.

In an autobiographical sketch, Sellars tells us that he was to begin with concerned to understand the sort of content expressed by concepts of the "logical, causal, and deontological modalities." (Here only what he calls the "causal" modalities are at issue.) His big idea, he tells us, was that "...what was needed was a functional theory of concepts which would make their role in reasoning, rather than supposed origin in experience, their primary feature."

In *Action, Knowledge, and Reality*, H. N. Castaneda (ed.) [Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1975] p 285.

The idea he got from Kant was that the "role in reasoning" distinctive of a key class of alethic modal concepts is to articulate the "role in reasoning" of ordinary empirical descriptive concepts.

Contra descriptivism:

[O]nce the tautology ‘The world is described by descriptive concepts’ is freed from the idea that the business of all non-logical concepts is to describe, the way is clear to an *ungrudging* recognition that many expressions which empiricists have relegated to second-class citizenship in discourse are not *inferior*, just *different*. [Sellers “Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and the Causal Modalities” (CDCM) §79]

Focal passage:

Although describing and explaining (predicting, retrodicting, understanding) are *distinguishable*, they are also, in an important sense, *inseparable*. It is only because the expressions in terms of which we describe objects, even such basic expressions as words for perceptible characteristics of molar objects, locate these objects in a space of implications, that they describe at all, rather than merely label. The descriptive and explanatory resources of language advance hand in hand. [Sellers CDCM §108]

Argument:

4 steps:

- i) Description requires “location in a space of implications,”
- ii) Those are subjunctively robust implications, which support explanation
- iii) They are defeasible.
- iv) Modal vocabulary is *in some sense* metalinguistic for OED vocabulary in that it *in some sense* expresses those inferential commitments.

1. “It is only because the expressions in terms of which we describe objects... locate these objects in a space of implications, that they describe at all, rather than merely label.”

This is weak inferentialism: no description without inferential articulation. Descriptive concepts must stand to one another in relations of material implication and incompatibility.

2. It is an essential feature of the inferential relations in which, according to claim (1), descriptive concepts must stand, that they can be appealed to in *explanations* and *justifications* of further descriptions.

3. So: “although describing and explaining (predicting, retrodicting, understanding) are *distinguishable*, they are also, in an important sense, *inseparable*... The descriptive and explanatory resources of language advance hand in hand...”

4. Explanations and justifications require *subjunctively robust* relations of consequence and incompatibility: ones that articulate what *would happen if* and what *could not* happen.

5. The expressive role distinctive of modal vocabulary is to make explicit these explanatory and justificatory relations:

“To make first hand use of these [modal] expressions is to be about the business of explaining a state of affairs, or justifying an assertion.” [CDCM § 80]

What the modal vocabulary expresses is the element of *generality* that Ryle had insisted was present in all endorsements of inferences:

...some kind of openness, variableness, or satisfiability characterizes all hypothetical statements alike, whether they are recognized “variable hypotheticals” like “For all x , if x is a man, x is mortal” or are highly determinate hypotheticals like “If today is Monday, tomorrow is Tuesday. [Gilbert Ryle “‘If’, ‘So’, and ‘Because’”, pp. 302-318 in Black, Max (ed.) *Philosophical Analysis* [Prentice Hall, 1950], p. 311.]

That element of generality would naturally be made explicit in this last example by applying a necessity operator to the conditional.

6. Sellars (and in this he follows Kant) thinks that behind every bit of subjunctive robustness there is a *law*, a relation that is necessary, in a sense that entails exceptionlessness. But cf. Nancy Cartwright: *How the Laws of Physics Lie*, or Mark Wilson’s *Wandering Significance*. The view that sees laws behind subjunctive robustness is an artifact of the same line of thought that issued in the *Deductive-Nomological theory of explanation*. And we have moved beyond that.

(Not Sellars) Explanatory and justificatory relations are in general *defeasible*. That is to say that the relations of material implication and incompatibility that articulate ordinary empirical descriptive (OED) vocabulary are *nonmonotonic*.

They are not made monotonic by *ceteris paribus* clauses, whose expressive function is rather to acknowledge explicitly the nonmonotonicity (defeasibility) of the implication relations being appealed to.

We should not expect to find exceptionless, universal *laws* behind all cases of subjunctive robustness.

The defeasibility=nonmonotonicity of these broadly inferential relations means they have associated with them non-empty (4 above), non-universal (need not be underwritten by laws) *ranges of subjunctive robustness*.

What would it be like if there were *no* range of subjunctive robustness for an implication?

This would be for it to be maximally *fragile*.

There are actually different things that might mean.

i) Though $\Gamma \vdash A$, if *any* further premises are added to Γ , the implication of A is defeated.

This is perhaps the *maximal* construal of subjunctive fragility of an implication. Indeed, it is hard to say what it means to say that A follows from Γ if this condition holds. For let the additional premise be something that is *true*. If we add any *true* background hypothesis to the explicit premises Γ , the implication is defeated? Then in what sense does it actually follow? It might be that there is a special case where everything that is true is already in Γ --but that is hardly a *finite* set.

This consideration prompts a different notion of subjunctive fragility:

ii) $\Gamma \vdash A$ and the addition of any auxiliary premise X that is *not true* defeats the implication of A .

Here there is no *subjunctive* robustness. A follows so long as things are just as they actually are. But *any* change would infirm the implication: if it were Tuesday instead of Wednesday, if somewhere outside our light-cone a photon had a slightly different trajectory, if the cars parked on a particular street in Shanghai had a different sequence of distances between their bumpers.... I think this is not an *implication*—it is a *coincidence*.

Like detectives, I don't believe in coincidences.

What is at issue is the “generality” Ryle diagnoses as necessary for implications.

That “generality” is *some* modicum of subjunctive robustness.

- iii) By contrast: The condition of *rational sustainability* of an implication $\Gamma \vdash A$ requires that for every possible auxiliary premise X, either $\Gamma, X \vdash A$ or $\Gamma, \neg X \vdash A$.

In particular, the material (non- because pre-logical) implications (and incompatibilities) that according to (even weak) inferentialists articulate the conceptual contents of empirical concepts (theoretical as well as observational) *all* have ranges of subjunctive robustness.

It follows that they have subjunctive *consequences* of application, and *so* subjunctive *circumstances* (necessary conditions) of appropriate application.

Note a radical consequence: *There are no modally insulated empirical properties* (whether observational or theoretical)—that is, properties whose applicability to an object in a world depends *only* on what is true at *that* world.

Modal insulation was thought of as a feature of *extensionality*. For, it was thought, *extensionality*, defined substitutionally, contrasts with *intensionality*, paradigmatically modal contexts. So, the thought was, we can specify possible worlds by extensional properties, the ones Leibniz's Law applies to, and these will be properties whose applicability does not depend on what happens at other worlds. But the K-S thesis claims that *all* empirical properties have *subjunctive* necessary conditions of application.

The second wave of the modal revolution (the important one, the intensional semantics for nonlogical expressions) was a reflection of this fact. For it let us specify the *intensions* of properties: the functions from possible worlds to extensions. But now we must *not* think of the extensions as *properties* that are modally insulated.

The metalinguistic move:

So Sellars is working with Kant's idea that the expressive role distinctive of alethic modal vocabulary is to make explicit something that is implicit already in the use of ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary. He picks up Frege's hint that what matters is the specifically *inferential* articulation essential to the conceptual contentfulness of descriptive vocabulary. (This is the “role in reasoning” he refers to in the autobiographical sketch.)

He develops those thoughts by adding the idea, which he learned from Carnap, that that expressive role is in some broad but noncanonical sense metalinguistic—a matter of the role such vocabulary plays in endorsing rules of inference governing descriptive vocabulary.

And equally importantly, though without remarking explicitly on this move, he focuses our attention on the *pragmatic* dimension of that expressive role. That is, he counsels us to look to what we are *doing* when we endorse a modal claim. (Compare: expressivism about normative vocabulary—paradigmatically deontic vocabulary.)

“I shall be interpreting our judgments to the effect that A causally necessitates B as the expression of a rule governing our use of the terms 'A' and 'B'.”

[Sellars, "Language, Rules, and Behavior"]

“Shall we say that modal expressions are metalinguistic? Neither a simple ‘yes’ nor a simple ‘no’ will do.” [CDCM §82]

We can see that modal claims are not metalinguistic in the semantic sense of Tarski and Carnap because i) semantically: they *say* nothing about any linguistic expressions, and ii) counterfactually: they *would* be true even if there had never been any languages or language-users.

“It is sometimes thought that modal statements do not describe states of affairs in the world, because they are *really* metalinguistic. This won’t do at all if it is meant that instead of describing states of affairs in the world, they describe linguistic habits. It is more plausible if it is meant that statements involving modal terms have the force of *prescriptive* statements about the use of certain expressions in the object language. Yet there is more than one way of to ‘*have the force of*’ a statement, and failure to distinguish between them may snowball into a serious confusion as wider implications are drawn.” [CDCM §81]

We must here, as elsewhere, draw a distinction between what we are committed to concerning the world by virtue of the fact that we have reason to make a certain assertion, and the force, in a narrower sense, of the assertion itself. [CDCM §101]

Elsewhere Sellars had put what I think is recognizably the same point in terms of a distinction between what one *says* by making a statement and what (else) one *conveys* by doing so. [“Inference and Meaning”] There his example is that in asserting “The weather is fine today,” I *say* that the weather is fine today, but *convey* that I *believe* that it is fine.

Here is where we get the second move: to thinking of what is expressed by modal vocabulary in terms of the *force*, rather than the *content* of modal claims—that is, as a *pragmatic* rather than a *semantic* feature of them.

For the distinction between what follows from “having reason to make an assertion” and the content of the assertion itself just is the distinction between *pragmatic* and *semantic* consequences.

If John says the light has turned red I can infer that traffic is obliged to stop and that John believes that the light has turned red. The first follows from what he has *said*, the content, and the second from his *saying* of it, the speech-act he performed.

We can tell them apart by the Frege-Geach embedding test, considering their different behavior as antecedents of conditionals. For such embedding strips off the pragmatic force of the speech act (since one is not asserting the antecedent), leaving only the content to affect the consequences.

C1) If the light has turned red then traffic is obliged to stop.

C2) If John believes the light has turned red, then traffic is obliged to stop.

Or even

C3) If the light has turned red, then the light has turned red.

C4) If John believes the light has turned red, then the light has turned red.

(C2) and (C4) codify *much* less certain implications than (C1) and (C3). Their truth depends on how reliable John is.

In fact, notice that what (C4) codifies just *is* what I called the “reliability inference.”

That there are circumstances in which it *is* a good inference is just the “default and challenge” structure of entitlement inheritance, as applied to *observation*. As such it is *not* an optional feature of discursive practices that include the making of empirical claims.

Conjecture:

Sellars is not telling us what one is *saying* in making a modal claim, but what one is *doing* by making a modal claim. One is, *inter alia*, endorsing determinately subjunctively robust implications/incompatibilities (“rules of reasoning”). Sellars’s claim is in a *pragmatic metavocabulary* for modal discourse, rather than a *semantic* metavocabulary for modal discourse.

Problem:

Modal claims do embed as antecedents of conditionals.

In what sense is Sellars entitled to count as non-descriptivist about modal concepts?

Not on declarativist criteria of demarcation of description, for those include “location in a space of implications.”

Modal claims, too, can be both premises and conclusions of inferences/implications.

Sellars does not confront the challenge that second-wave metaethical expressivists (paradigmatically Gibbard and Blackburn) do, namely responding to the Frege-Geach challenge concerning embeddability (cf. Geach's "Ascriptivism").

Challenge:

Say how free-standing assertions of modal claims having the expressive role (force) they do confers descriptive content on them that permits embedding and explains embedding behavior.

This is a particular, motivating instance of the general question of how what is said about a vocabulary-in-use in a *pragmatic* metavocabulary relates to what is said about it in a *semantic* metavocabulary.

That is how an account of what one is *doing* in making primary use of the expressions in question relates to what one should *thereby* be understood as *saying*.

We need an account of this *first* for OED acts of asserting and propositional contents (hence, by the iron triangle of discursiveness, declarative sentences—cf. the broad declarativist criterion of *description*)

Then we need to extend that to a broader account of vocabulary whose *principal* expressive role is *not* descriptive in a *narrow* sense, paradigmatically modal vocabulary.

Compatibility Claim:

That claim about what one is *doing* in making modal claims is compatible with the claim that what one is *saying* in making modal claims (a matter of content rather than force) is *that* certain relations of material consequence and incompatibility hold objectively between empirical properties or states of affairs.

The Kant-Sellars thesis about modality:

In knowing how to use ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary, one already knows how to do everything one needs to know how to do in order to be able (in principle) to use alethic modal vocabulary. (This is the "L" of "LX-ness.")

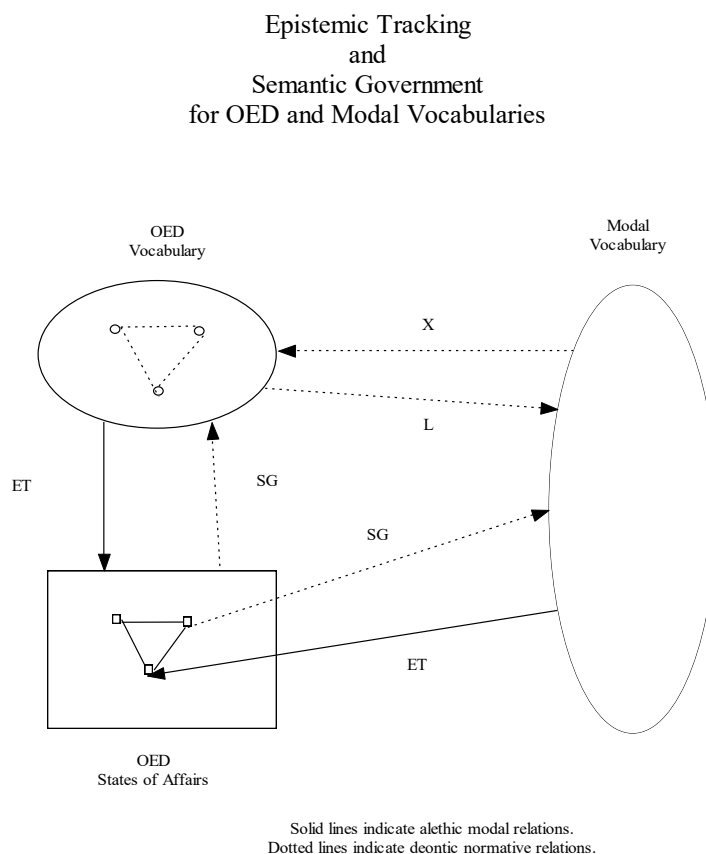
According to this thesis, one cannot be in the semantic predicament that empiricists such as Hume and Quine envisaged: understanding ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary perfectly well, but having thereby no grip at all on what is expressed by modal vocabulary.

Two senses of "description":

1. There is a *wide* sense of "description" defined by *inferentialist declarativism*: being assertible in the sense of being fit to serve both as a premise and as a conclusion of inferences.

This sense is distinguished already from mere labeling=classifying, precisely by being situated in a space of implications. Otherwise, by the iron triangle of discursiveness, one is not using declarative sentences, or asserting. But this is not enough.

2. There is a *narrower* sense of “description” defined by claims standing in relations both of epistemic tracking of and semantic government by what the claims thereby count as describing.



Epistemic tracking (ET) is an *alethic modal* matter of subjunctive sensitivity: Y epistemically tracks X just in case if X *were* different (in some specified regards), Y *would* be different (in some specified regards).

Semantic government (SG) is a *deontic normative* matter: X semantically governs Y iff X serves as a standard for normative assessment of correctness of Y—how it is with X (in some specified regards) determines the correctness of Y (in some specified regards).

Vocabulary V_2 is *elaborated from* (L) and *explicative of* (X) V_1 just in case the correct use of V_1 determines the correct use of V_2 (L) and correct uses of V_2 *say* how it is correct to use V_1 (in some specified regards).

The idea of the diagram above is that from the fact that modal vocabulary is

- i) elaborated from (L) the use of OED vocabulary that both epistemically tracks and is semantically governed by ordinary empirical states of affairs, which stand to one another in subjunctively robust (prelogical, material) relations of consequence and incompatibility, and
- ii) is explicative of (X) the *normative* relations of consequence and incompatibility that articulate the concepts expressed by OED vocabulary, which epistemically track and are

semantically governed by the subjunctive relations of consequence and incompatibility between empirical states of affairs, in virtue of which they are determinate.

it follows that

modal vocabulary *describes*, in the *narrow* sense defined by epistemic tracking and semantic government, objective, subjunctively robust relations of consequence and incompatibility of ordinary empirical properties and states of affairs.

According to this account, the most basic alethic modal vocabulary is subjunctive conditionals, codifying implication relations, along with a corresponding intensional negation, which allows codification of material incompatibilities.

What you are doing in making modal claims is endorsing inferences (normative). Those inferences, and the concepts they articulate, track and are normatively governed by alethic modal relations of consequence and incompatibility. And it is those that, by composition, one is describing—a matter of what one is saying, rather than doing.

Modal vocab use is elaborated from normative concept use. But it is explicative of what that use is about. The X part falls through the normative vocabulary to its topic.

What it is describing (rabbits, not rabbit flies) is determined by how distal one goes in the causal chain of reliably covarying events.

That is determined by inferential role. (As with rabbits/flies.)

Here we look at evidence for realism, and in particular, the counterfactuals about norm-governed language users: there wd still be modal facts, even if there were no normative ones.

Those subjunctive conditionals articulate the conceptual role and descriptive content of modal vocab.

Because deontic normative relations of consequence and incompatibility epistemically track and are semantically governed by alethic modal relations of consequence and incompatibility, there is a chain of reliably covarying events anchored in the alethic facts about consequence and incompatibility, running through normative broadly inferential connections of implication and incompatibility relating OED vocabulary, and then to the use of modal vocabulary, where modal assertions have the primary force of endorsements of broadly inferential commitments regarding the use of OED vocabulary. What determines that the use of modal vocabulary is *talking about* modal relations between empirical states of affairs, and not normative relations of vocabulary-use, is the very same counterfactual subjunctives that raised problems for a straightforward metalinguistic account: that there would still be modal relations even if there were no normative ones.

The analogy here is that someone might report a rabbit, exercising an RDRD by which the rabbit is visible only in the form of reliably associated rabbit-flies. That she is nonetheless reporting a rabbit, and not the flies, is a consequence of her endorsing claims such as that the “gavagai” can

fly and cannot be eaten. The counterfactuals concerning what would be true if there had never been language-users correspond, for the case of modal vocabulary, to these endorsements of subjunctive conditionals by the rabbit-reporter.

It remains to acknowledge that it does not seem right to express this understanding of things by saying (as I do in *BSD*) that modal vocabulary is LX for normative vocabulary. Cf. Sellars's gnomic remark that "the language of modality is a transposed language of norms." What he says is OK on the reading I am offering, but the LX-ness claim is not quite right. For it seems a claim about what a vocabulary *explicates* must be a claim about what it *says*, not about what saying it *does*. But is that right even for the paradigmatic *logical* vocabulary: the conditional and negation operators?