

August 31, 2019

## Passages from “Pure Pragmatics and Epistemology”

[Bolding added by BB.]

**§1: The attempt to draw a clear distinction between philosophy and the empirical sciences** can almost be taken as the defining trait of the analytic movement in contemporary philosophical thought.

Characteristic, then, of analytic philosophy has been the rejection of what it terms **psychologism**,

The analytic movement in philosophy has gradually moved towards the conclusion that the defining characteristic of philosophical concepts is that they are **formal** concepts relating to the formation and transformation **rules** of symbol structures called languages. **Philosophy**, in other words, tends to be conceived of as the **formal theory of languages**.

**§2** The analytic philosopher establishes his right to attack **psychologism** with respect to a given concept if he is able to show that it is capable of treatment as a concept the nature and function of which is constituted by its role in **rules** definitive of a broader or narrower set of calculi.

These **rules** constitute a logic of **implication** and deducibility. In this stage of the battle against psychologism, an apparently clear-cut distinction arose between *symbol-behavior* and *formal system*, a distinction sometimes summed up as that between *inference as fact* and *deducibility as norm*.

**§3:** As a result, **factualism** and **psychologism** are flourishing in analytic philosophy, and by no means on the fringes only. The invasion stems in part from **a carry-over from the psychologism that characterized much of the controversy over sense-perception in the 'teens and 'twenties**; but in part also, and this is indeed the decisive factor, to the incompleteness of semantics (at least as at present constituted) as a foundation from which to launch a decisive attack against these **enemies of philosophy**.

**§4:** I am now in a position to define the topic of this paper. **If an analytic philosopher wishes to attack psychologism in epistemology**, what fundamental concepts should he claim to be mistakenly treated as **psychological** or, in general, **factual** concepts? In other words, from the standpoint of analytic philosophy, which concepts of those traditionally classified as epistemological properly belong to philosophy? This we have interpreted to mean, *which of the concepts traditionally classified as epistemological can be interpreted as concepts of which the function and essence is to serve in rules definitive of a type of object calculus?*

**§7:** The use of the ‘**pragmatics**’ in connection with verification, confirmation, and **meaningfulness** is now an established one, though these items are but a small part of what is now included under this heading. Shall we as philosophers extend the term ‘semantics’ or narrow the term ‘pragmatics’? In any case, **it is only if there is a pragmatics that is not an empirical science of sign-behavior, a pragmatics which is a branch of the formal theory of language, that the term is rescued for philosophy**. And it is only if there is such a new dimension of

calculus structure, whether its analysis be called ‘Pure Pragmatics’ or ‘Pure Semantics’ that the **analytic philosopher** can hope to give a **nonpsychologistic** account of the key concepts of traditional **epistemology**.

§8: ..two purposes, that of introducing a key concept in linguistic analysis, and that of weakening the grip of **naive realism**.

Syntactical predicates (for example) have as their domain expressions in a calculus which is a model or **norm** for symbol-behavior. (The terms ‘model’ and ‘norm’ are here used to suggest a problem, rather than indicate a solution).

We should point out that the decidability of syntactical predicates with respect to these expressions, and, in general, the properties to which the calculus **owes its status as a norm for symbol behavior**, are due to the fact that **it is constituted by formation and transformation rules**. We should recognize that it is nonsense to say that human symbol behavior is constituted by syntactical formation and transformation rules.

§9: ...drawing a distinction between language *as behavior* (that is, as the subject matter of empirical psychology), and language behavior *to the extent that it conforms, and as conforming, to the criteria of language as norm*; or, in the terminology we shall adopt, between language behavior *qua behavioral fact*, and **language behavior qua tokens of language as type**.

§10: To recapitulate: the solution of our dilemma appears to require a three-fold distinction between (1) **language as norm or type**, (2) language as behavioral **fact**, and (3) items in the second class which token, and as tokening, items in the first class. In doing this, **it requires that the language-behavior of (3) belongs to both the domain of fact, and the domain of language as norm**. This is only possible if the domain of fact, and the domain of language as norm turn out to be the same. But language as norm is such as being posited by metalinguistic rules. We have consequently been led from a problem to a paradox.

§11: the clarification of the status of formal systems is the culminating task of a philosophy of language, *and must be treated as such*. If the question is put too soon, the answer will inevitably be **empirical in a bad sense, in a word, scientism**. If it is asked, Are you consistent in calling your position a form of Logical Empiricism? How can philosophy, which on your interpretation is a purely formal science, give an *empirical* answer to the above or any other question?”, it may suffice for the moment to point out that **an empiricist answer need not be an empirical (as being factual) answer**...the thesis of empiricism is a *formal* rather than a *factual* truth.

§12: ‘Token’ is a metalinguistic predicate, and it is used properly when it is said that the *designatum* of one expression in a language is a token of another (perhaps the same) expression in the language. The formal significance of this concept is the role it plays in the following **rule**: *If ‘p’ designates p, and p is a token of ‘q,’ then all the metalinguistic predicates that apply to ‘q’ apply also to p.*

§14: *all the expressions in a semantic sentence belong to the semantic metalanguage*. Thus, if p is a token of ‘q,’ and accordingly it can be said that p designates q, the latter ‘p’ and ‘q’ must not be confused with object-language expressions.

It will be convenient to introduce the term ‘type’ as follows, if  $p$  is a token of ‘ $q$ ,’ we shall say that ‘ $q$ ’ is **the** [BB: Guaranteed to be unique?] type of which  $p$  is a token.

This will enable us to distinguish between metalinguistic sentences in which metalinguistic predicates are associated with expressions ultimately belonging on the left hand side of designation sentences, from those in which they are associated with expressions ultimately belonging on the right hand side of **designation sentences**. We shall say that the former attribute metalinguistic predicates to language expressions as types, and the latter attribute these predicates to language expressions as tokens.

§15: Pure semantics is indifferent to the presence or the absence of P-lawfulness in object-language structures. In this respect, pure pragmatics will differ from pure semantics.

§17: The concepts of linguistic token and P-lawfulness are essential to pure pragmatics, but do not suffice to distinguish it from semantics.

§18: the fundamental concept of pure pragmatics is that of a certain *formal* restriction on the calculi to the expressions of which pragmatic predicates are assignable. If we were putting the matter in a non-technical way, we would say that *the minimum formal requirement which a formal system must fill in order to be a candidate for the position of empirically meaningful language is that it be capable of being ‘about’ a world in which it is used*.

§21: Now the pragmatic concept of a P-lawful system turns out, on examination, to have a negative and a positive phase. The former consists in a certain type of restriction on the predicates of the calculus in which such a system can be formulated; in Leibnitzian terms, a *principle of compossibility*; while the positive phase may, perhaps, be compared to his *principle of plenitude*. ...

The purpose of the present paper will be amply fulfilled if it provides a general framework in terms of which specific problems of formulation and argument in epistemology can be discriminated from questions relating to matters of fact, and their status as capable of definitive solution clarified.

§26: Consider, however, the predicates we have defined above, namely, ‘verified-in- $S$ ’ and ‘confirmed-in- $S$ .’ *These predicates are decidable on formal grounds.* Sentences assigning these predicates to expressions in an object-language are either analytic or self-contradictory. It is for this reason, and this reason alone, that these concepts, *and the family of concepts that are definable in terms of them*, are **philosophical** concepts.

Ftn 4: the predicates of a calculus have **determinate meaning (in a non-psychological sense)** **only by virtue of the conformation combining rules relating to them**. But an empirical language must be determinate in meaning not only with respect to its predicates but also with respect to its individual constants. This determinate meaning involves the functioning of these constants in one story. Thus we shall define an empirical language as an empirical language form, the formal status (and hence the ‘meanings’) of the individual constants of which is fixed in relation to one of the world stories formulable in it.

Perhaps it will temporarily soften the paradox if we say that philosophical concepts must be in principle decidable on formal grounds. **The expression ‘in principle’ has proved soothing on other occasions.**

§27: We are using the terms ‘**verified**’ and ‘**confirmed**’ to clear up the epistemological contrast between “sentences checked against the facts they assert” (verified sentences) and “sentences checked only **indirectly**” (confirmed but not verified sentences)...

t§28: The concepts of **language** and **story**, as we are defining them, are in some sense ideal frames of reference, in terms of which our choice of a “language” can be criticized

§28: A sentence that is verified-in-S is one that has an empirical tie in S, whereas a sentence that is confirmed-in-S need not have an empirical tie in S, its being confirmed-in-S consisting merely in the fact that it occurs in S, that is to say, in a complete text with a verification base.

§30: We shall now introduce two additional concepts which belong to **the foundations of pure pragmatics**. The first underlies the clarification of the family of pragmatic terms relating to **meaningfulness**.

§31: The Lockean principle that simple ideas are formed by abstraction from particulars with which we are acquainted, and that all other ideas are compounded from them, was a distinct gain for empiricism in so far as it was an attack on innate ideas; but the gain consisted in **replacing one form of psychologism by a less obnoxious form**. **The Lockean principle lingers on in current empiricism under the guise of a ‘principle of acquaintance.’ In our terminology, this principle amounts to giving verified primitive predicates a privileged status with respect to primary meaningfulness.**

§32: **The closest that pure pragmatics comes to a principle of acquaintance is in its requirement that a story have a verification base. It is this requirement that constitutes empiricism as a proposition in philosophy.**

§33: The second fundamental concept to be introduced is that of existence as a pragmatic concept.

Our concern in this paper is with the most general topics that arise at the very **foundations of pure pragmatics**, that is to say, with **the formal features common to all languages** the expressions of which qualify for characterization by pragmatic predicates.

§34: all the sentences of a **story** must have the logical characteristics of sentences “**about** individual states of affairs...

In a language proper, general statements are equivalent to explicit and specified conjunctions or disjunctions of statements that do not involve individual-variables.

...language schemata and statements within language schemata are intelligible only with reference to model languages proper, and statements within model languages proper.

§36: In a language proper, then, pragmatic predicates are decidable with respect to sentences involving definite descriptions by virtue of their relation to a **story**, a structure for which **P-indiscernibility entails semantic identity**. (In this respect a **story** can be compared to a Leibnitzian **world**.)

§37: We are tempted to say that **the formation, transformation, and conformation rules governing the language schema** which is the model of our empirical language behavior are such in so far as they belong to the same class as **do rules which relate to the construction of a story in a language proper**. But such a statement, though of great clarificatory value, is misleading. It suggests that to criticize the empirical language is to confront it with a language proper. But it is quite obvious that we are not in a position to construct a miniature language proper to the expressions of which pragmatic predicates are applicable.

§39: Returning, then, to formal considerations (even though from the standpoint of behavioral science we are talking schematically), we must come to a final reckoning with **naive realism**. This reckoning will consist in a clarification of the relation between an object-language and “the world it is **about**.” The usual temptation has been to argue that if a language is meaningful, then its expressions mean items and classes of items in the world; while if the language is meaningless, then there is no problem as to what its expressions mean. Reasoning of this type is a perfect illustration of the way in which a **factualistic interpretation of ‘meaningful’** inevitably leads to **factualism in semantics**, for it implies that all semantic statements are false except those relating to “the empirically meaningful language.”

§40: any statement concerning the relation of a language as formal system to “the world” must be a metalinguistic statement...

“How can a statement have as its subject-matter two such disparate areas as (1) a language as formal system, and (2) the world?” It would appear that it can have either but not both, and that if its subject-matter falls in (1) it is in the meta-language; while if the subject-matter belongs in (2) the statement is in the object-language.

§41: There is thus no sense to the notion of one privileged language or group of languages “really designating” whereas other (“meaningless”) languages somehow “merely go through the motions.”

From the standpoint of pragmatics, as many designated **worlds** as there are designating **stories**.

§42: epistemological predicates, even ‘verified’ and ‘confirmed,’ have no intrinsic tie with any single world, with “THE” world. They are purely formal predicates, and do not discriminate among formal systems (stories) provided that all the systems alike conform to the *rules which make these predicates applicable*. This **principle of indifference** could be discarded only if something analogous to the ontological argument could be formulated in pure pragmatics.

§43: We are now in a position to characterize **the pragmatic concept of a story** in a way which brings out the status of this concept as a **regulative idea**. ... The requirement that a story contain a verification base amounts to the requirement that the world designated by the story include items which are tokens of sentences in the story, which tokens are co-experienced with the items

designated by the sentences they token, which latter items they themselves also designate as being tokens of these sentences. These tokens are the clarified equivalent of the *Konstatierungen* or *Protokolsaetze* of that stage of Logical Positivism which came as close as can any theory of psychological *evidenz* to the view that epistemological predicates have the same type of decidability as do those of pure mathematics.

§44: The **constituting of a story**, *S*, thus involves (a) the story as type; (b) the world designated by the story (**no naive realism, please!**); and (c) items in (b) which token the sentences *verified-in-S*. Consequently, the **constituting** (by what from the behavioral standpoint is schematic symbol behavior) of a *story-cum-world*, is the constituting of a *story-cum-world-in-which-the-verification-bases-of-the-story-are tokened*. This means that we have made some progress in our attempt to formalize the notion of a *language* as the sort of thing that is about the world in which it is used. ...What concerns us now is the fact that in the case of certain sentences in a story it is an analytic proposition that such and such items in the world designated by the story are tokens of them, and as such qualify for the same syntactical, semantical, and pragmatic predicates as do the types of which they are tokens. (Note that **a type expression is not a class of token expressions**; the difference in status between type and token goes back to the difference between the left hand and the right hand sides of **the designation sentences involved in constituting the story**.)

§45: ...clarify the notion of one fact in a world being **about** another fact in the same world, **in a formal as opposed to psychological factual sense of ‘about.’**

§46: We are led to distinguish between **stories-cum-worlds** belonging to higher and lower constitutive levels, for the above notion turns out to be that of a world which includes not only items which are tokens of first-level sentences, but also items which are tokens of pragmatic meta-sentences constituted in a pragmatic meta-language. **It must be constituted in a meta-meta language which pictures both a pragmatic meta-language and its first-level language, just as a pragmatic meta-language contains the picture of a first-level language.**

**The concept of a *story-cum-world* as constituted in such a meta-meta-language is the schematic (from the psychological standpoint) concept of a *story-cum-world-containing-at-least one-confirmed- of-the-story*, that is to say, of a story about a world *containing an omniscient knower of the world designated by the story*.** It is in terms of such a structure that the “attribution of metalinguistic predicates to language as fact”... is to be clarified. Notice, again, that what can be clarified is the notion of one item in a world being in a formal sense **about** another item in the *same* world, which in turn has some direct or indirect relation to the *same* world. It is a matter of *the same world as*, and not of *the world tout court*.

Fnt 12: As a first approximation, **the notion of a world which includes a confirmor of the designating story** (which, of course, has no theological implications) can be characterized as a **set of co-experiences which token (1) all sentences of the story, as well as (2) the meta-sentences which assign pragmatic predicates to the type sentences making up the story.**

§48: If **philosophical propositions are propositions in the pure theory of languages (the pure syntax of pragmatic meta-languages)**, in what sense is there a philosophical criticism of “the empirical language?”

The philosopher is one who, like the mathematician, has developed a highly integrated system of **formation and transformation habits**, habits which stand over and against the habits which are the various strata of the empirical language.

Notice that we are now talking about **habits and behavior**, rather than about **rules, types and tokens**.

§48: “Are you not saying that, after all, the **pragmatist** has the last word? In a sense this is true. But the pragmatist must take the bitter along with the sweet; for the “last word” is not a philosophical proposition. **Philosophy is pure formalism; pure theory of language. The recommendation of formalisms for their utility is not philosophy.**