

August 31, 2019

Some Passages from  
“Epistemology and the New Way of Words”

§1: The general perspective of the present paper can best be indicated by saying that the author is a **rationalistic realist** who has deserted to the camp of **logical empiricism**...

This change of allegiance has been made possible by the development of **the semantic phase of the pure theory of languages**; for only with the achievements of pure semantics did **the formal linguistic approach to epistemological and metaphysical issues** begin to appear relevant, let alone adequate.

§2: Today it is generally recognized that the tools of **the syntactical phase of logical empiricism** were not up to the task of dealing with all genuinely philosophical issues. That the situation has been improved by the addition of the **semantic dimension** to the pure theory of languages, is clear...

Philosophy is properly conceived as the **pure theory of empirically meaningful languages**, and pure semantics, as it now exists, is but a fragment of such a theory.

§3: Even more unfortunate is the fact that because the felt need for a *philosophical* supplementation of semantic categories is thus finding expression along empirical-psychological lines, there is occurring a **psychologistic infection** of these semantic categories themselves. The result is **a blurring of the sharp distinction between philosophical and factual propositions which was a primary value of the syntactical phase of logical empiricism**, whatever its shortcomings in other directions. It is by the proper supplementation of contemporary semantic categories that this **infection** is to be overcome. This supplementation, then, must serve two functions: (1) It must make possible the development of a system of concepts in terms of which **all genuinely philosophical questions can be given an adequate formulation**. (2) It must lead to a clarification of the very **distinction between philosophical and empirical concepts**, so that we can understand what it means to say that questions involving philosophical concepts are answered on *a priori* rather than empirical grounds.

§4: Classical **rationalism**, insofar as it was concerned with genuinely philosophical issues, made explicit the grammar of epistemological and metaphysical predicates, but—owing to certain confusions, particularly with respect to meaning and existence—came to the mistaken conclusion that **philosophical statements were factual statements**, albeit of a peculiar kind. Classical **empiricism**, on the other hand, argued that these statements were common or garden variety **factual** statements, and usually put them in the psychological species.

Rationalism gave the grammar, but contaminated it with **platonizing factualism**.

Classical empiricism threw out the **platonizing**, but continued to **factualize**, and confused the grammar of philosophical predicates by attempting to identify them with **psychological** predicates. In many cases the grammar was so seriously confused that certain of the more classical empiricists can hardly be called philosophers.

§5: It is now time to realize that classical **rationalism** was essentially sound as a naive syntax of philosophical predicates, and not only can but **must be absorbed into the empiricist camp if the latter is to be a philosophy**. As a matter of fact, such a process of absorption has been going on for some time, and is proceeding, according to all indications, at an accelerated rate. **The essential task is to rob rationalism of the illusion that it is making factual statements**. But in order to do this, empiricism must first recognize that a certain group of concepts which, when they are recognized at all to fall within the province of the philosopher, are hurled into **the psychologicistic dump known as pragmatics**, are as **genuinely philosophical and nonfactual** as those of pure syntax. **Empiricism, too, has its factualistic illusions to lose**.

Thus the conflict between rationalism and empiricism is a conflict of illusions, and must cease when these **factualistic** illusions are dispelled.

*An empiricism which recognizes that empiricism is not an empirical thesis will be identical with a rationalism which recognizes that rationalism is not a factual thesis.*

§6: The central thesis of this paper can be put by saying that the system of predicates involved in **the pure theory of empirically meaningful languages** is inadequate so long as it fails to include a family of predicates among the elder members of which are “verified,” “confirmed,” “type,” “token,” “meaningful,” “world-story.” Our aim will be to sketch a grammar which throws new light on these terms by explicating their relation to one another and to the predicates explored in recent semantic and syntactical studies.

§11: Let us define a *verified* sentence as *a sentence a token of which is co-experienced with its designatum*. We can then suggest that the notion of the justifiability of the selection of certain sentences in a language as constituting the story of the world rests on the notion that certain sentences in the language are verified sentences. But since *ex hypothesi* not all the true sentences of the language are verified sentences, *the notion of such justifiability presupposes the notion that there is a rational connection between the verified sentences and the other true sentences making up the Jonesean world-story such that the verified character of the former entails the truth of the latter*.

Ftnt 6: We must also recognize **a use of “meaning” which is distinct from that of empirical psychology**, even if in some sense it is a “reconstruction” of it. This is the sense which is relevant to **the semantic analysis of epistemological predicates**. It is the recognition of this sense which leads only too often to **Platonism**. The contention that **it is nonsense to speak of meanings in this sense as data** constitutes the essential difference between an **empiricism**

which reformulates the insights of Platonism, and Platonism itself. The characteristic tenets of Platonism, as opposed to **a sound logical or epistemological realism with respect to universals and propositions**, spring from **the nonsense of speaking of apprehending universals and propositions**.

§14: How can it be an analytic proposition that certain synthetic universal propositions are true of the world? Here is where **empiricism must abandon its naïve realism**. The first step consists in examining the role of the definite article in the expression “*the world*.” Since the very function of the definite article is to imply a set of entities from which one is distinguished, must we not say that the distinction between *the* world and the other worlds is a **descriptive** one? “But surely,” it will be said, “the others don’t exist!” Here is the germ of **the ontological fallacy**. It is now time to realize that **every world-story means a world**; that the basic grammar of the term “world” is brought out by the statement, “**A world-story in a language means a world**.” It is in terms of this matrix that the expression “the world” is to be understood: “the world meant by...”. Thus, to understand the notion of *different worlds*, we must understand those of *different stories* and *different languages*.

But it is best to begin with the simpler question, “In virtue of what are two predicates of one and the same language different?” Clearly, the difference has to do with a difference of meaning. At this point the danger is **psychologism, the confusion of the epistemological predicate “means” with the predicate “means” which belongs to the vocabulary of empirical psychology**.

The conclusion at which we are arriving is that from the standpoint of **epistemological analysis**, the predicates of a language are differentiated from one another in terms of the **formal roles** they play in the language. Using the term “syntax” in a broader sense than is current, we could say “different syntax, different predicate; same syntax, same predicate.” We shall prefer to say that **predicates are differentiated only by the conformation rules which specify their combining properties**.

We have here **a coherence theory of meaning** characterized in purely syntactical terms... . It is in terms of such **conformation rules** that predicate families are formally specified (determinates under common determinables) and different predicate families are distinguished and related.

Thus, the formal concept of *designation* is essentially bound up with that of *conformation rule*.

§15: Yet empirical classes belong to a world; and, as we have seen, the concept of a **world** is the correlate of the concept of **a language semantically interpreted**. For this reason, the concept of a language cannot be identified with the concept of empirical classes as bearers of the designation relation. Empirical classes must be conceived as designators in a derivative sense. The notion of such derivative designators is an essential ingredient in the concept of an

**empirically meaningful language** as one that is **used in the world** it is **about**. We must thus distinguish between (1) types, (2) token-classes, and (3) tokens. The metalinguistic predicates “type” and “token” presuppose “designates,” and can be explicated as follows:

The predicate “token” 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 the concept of token is brought out by the following: If “*p*” designates *p*, and *p* is a token of “*q*,” then all the metalinguistic predicates which apply to “*q*” apply also to *p*; thus, ““*q*” is true” entails “*p* is true.” In other words, we have here a grammar according to which metalinguistic predicates can be associated in specifiable circumstances with the expressions belonging on either side of the predicate “designates.” If *p* is a token of “*q*,” then “*q*” is said to be the *type* of which *p* is a token.

§17: We have argued that the **meanings** of the (primitive) predicates of a language are formally specified in terms of **conformation rules** which discriminate between them in terms of the **structures of relational sentences** (involving the “skeletal” or basic ordering relations of the language) in which individual constants must function in order for these predicates to be properly applied to them. What are we to say about the meanings of the individual constants of a language? *Once again the rejection of psychologism forces us to say that the difference in meaning of individual constants must rest on syntactically characterizable differences in their roles in the language.*

*The meaning-base of the individual constants of an empirically meaningful language must be a complete world-story formulated in that language, rather than a pure structure of skeletal relations.*

§18: We can explicate the concept of such a world-story as follows:

**A confirmed world-story** is a set of sentences which, **given the conformation rules which specify the meanings of the predicates of the language in which it is formulated**, and given a semantically determinate battery of individual constants, contains a sub-set of sentences (1) which can be built into only this one complete story, (2) the *designata* of which sub-set constitute a set of items mutually related by the relation *coex*, (3) which sub-set consists of sentences *verified in the story*...

Each sub-set of verified sentences as characterized above will be called a *verification base* of the story *S*.

Ftnt 21: This root sense of “confirmed” is not one that admits of degrees. Its function is to clarify the contrast between sentences “checked against the facts they assert” (**verified** sentences) and sentences “checked only indirectly” (**confirmed** but not verified sentences).

§20: A calculus (with specified conformation rules) which permits the formulation of expressions which conform to the defining requirements of **a confirmed world-story**, will be called an **empirical language form**. The notion here is that as far as the predicates of a language are concerned, there can be a family of world-stories involving those predicates (a family of worlds involving the same qualities-laws, but different “initial” conditions).

An empirical language form pinned down to one of these world-stories, and hence for which the formal status (and hence the meanings) of its individual constants is fixed, will be called an **empirical (or empirically meaningful) language**.

The world-story which fixes the individual constants will be called **the meaning-base of the language**.

The individual constants and (primitive) predicates of empirical language L will be said to be **meaningful expressions of L**, as will (atomic) sentences constructed of them.

The designata of meaningful individual constants and predicates will be said to **exist in the world of the language...**

A meaningful sentence of L which belongs to the story S which is the meaning-base of L will be said to be **confirmed in S**, and to be **a confirmed sentence of L**.

A meaningful sentence of L which belongs to a verification base of S, will be called **a verified sentence of L**.

A predicate which appears in at least one verified sentence of L will be called a **datum-predicate of L**.

A meaningful predicate of L which appears only in confirmed sentences of L, will be called a **non-datum predicate of L**.

The notion that the primitive predicates of an empirically meaningful language must be datum-predicates, and that its basic sentences must be verified sentences, is **psychologism** pure and simple, and not even good psychologism at that. The psychologism which is classical **pragmatism** (Dewey) has sounder instincts than the **sensationalistic** pragmatisms which have listened to Hume, Mach, and some of the earlier tales from the Vienna Woods.

It is, however, an analytic truth that an empirically meaningful language is empirically meaningful as resting on a verification base, a set of verified sentences which uniquely determine the language in the complicated way we have indicated.

§19: The references to *designata* in these definitions make it necessary to come...a final reckoning with **naïve realism**. We have already pointed out that the expression “**the world**” must be interpreted in such a way as to avoid **the ontological fallacy**. We suggested that the expression contains an implicit reference to a language, and **has the sense of “the world meant by ... a given language.”** Are we saying that the **rejection of the ontological fallacy** involves the notion that there are many *real* worlds? Indeed not! The **final abandonment of naïve realism** comes with the realization that “talking about the *designata* of sentences” is an essential ingredient in “characterizing these sentences in terms of **epistemological predicates**.” The “right-hand side” of designation sentences together with the predicate “designates” and the

quotation marks on the “left-hand side” are all alike formal devices belonging to the grammar of epistemological predicates; their function is the purely formal one of hooking up with the **rules** relating to the assignment of such predicates as “true sentence of (language) *L*,” “verified sentence of *L*,” etc. **If we introduce the term “world” as a collective term for the designata of a world-story, then it is a purely formal truth that every world-story in every empirically meaningful language designates a world.** The pure theory of empirically meaningful languages as formally defined systems which are about worlds in which they are used, has no place for *the* world, but only for the world designated by the story which is the meaning base of a given language.

§21: That the world designated by the story which is the meaning-base of *L* includes (or fails to include) state of affairs *p* is a matter of logical truth (or falsity). Just as the notion of the world is a mistake, so is the notion of the set of true sentences. To see that “(factually) true” as well as “designates” is in principle formally decidable, is to take the final step away from both **naïve realism** and **psychologism**.

§25: As formal scientists we must say that the use of epistemological predicates presupposes a **complete world-story in a perfect language**, while yet recognizing the blundering status of the human animal.