October 9, 2019

Week 7 Notes 2: Plan

We will be looking at the interplay between *semantics*, *pragmatics*, *epistemology*, and *ontology*, with the particular example of the concepts deployed and the phenomena addressed by the *philosophy of mind*. It will turn out that these relations turn on crucial issues from the *philosophy of science*, regarding the status of theoretical objects.

Plan:

1. A closer look at how the analysis of 'looks-Φ' works:

    a) A ***semantic*** claim is being used to undercut an ***epistemological*** claim.
    b) Kantian antecedents to such a move, re Cartesian skepticism.
    c) Discuss the method of the 'looks'-talk argument:
       The practices of *using* locutions so as to *mean* what 'looks-Φ'-talk does are pragmatically dependent on the practices of *using* locutions so as to *mean* what 'is-Φ'-talk does.
       This is a model of pragmatically mediated conceptual dependency.
       It is a sense of "more conceptually basic than."
    d) What WS offers a persuasive account of (at the base of his argument) is what one is *doing* in *saying* how things "merely look."
    e) The claim of ***semantic*** dependence is being underwritten by a ***pragmatic*** dependence claim. It would really have to be expressed in a *pragmatic metalanguage*: one that we could use to discuss what we are *doing* when make a 'looks-Φ' statement.
    f) The issue of what one is *saying* in *doing* that (the relation of semantics to pragmatics here) is a deep and difficult one.
       Compare: emotivist or (better) **expressivist** theories of what one is *doing*—what attitude one is expressing—in saying that someone ***ought*** or ought not to do something.
    g) Part of what was at issue in our discussion last time was that one can know very well **what one is *doing*** in saying something: *withholding a commitment* as an alternative way of evincing or manifesting a disposition, or, in another important case, endorsing a rule of inference ("All As are necessarily Bs") expressing a normative assessment ("That is cruel," or "What he did was unjust,"), without having *thereby* settled **what one is *saying*** by *doing* that: the *content* that is expressed by that *act*. ('ing'/'ed').
       These are going to be the kind of accounts he gives of alethic *modal* discourse, and that I think one should give of *logical* discourse such as the conditional and negation, and deontic *normative* discourse.
    h) Q: What is the relation between **what one *says* in a *pragmatic* metavocabulary** (one used to *say* what one is *doing* in *using* an expression in the object language—using it to *say* something in the object language), not only to the **object language expressions**

whose use it addresses, but to **what one *says* in a *semantic* metavocabulary** addressed to the same object language: a language in which one *says* something distinctive about what one is *saying*, the *contents* of utterances, in the object language?

Sellars never really gets clear about this.

For some reason, he abandons his earlier talk of "*pure pragmatic metalanguages*"—which is what I think he needs here (since that is what he is working in with the "looks-Φ" argument).

i) This issue will be to the fore starting next week, as we look at Sellars's treatment of *alethic modality*.

(It will come up again in his nominalism about universals and propositions.)

There he has the good thought that what we are *doing* in asserting something of the form "All As are necessarily Bs," ("Copper melts at 1084 C.") is endorsing a material rule of inference concerning the expressions involved—a rule that supports subjunctive reasoning.

But he ties himself in knots trying to tell what conclusions that entitles him concerning what we are *saying* when we *say* that: what the *content* of the alethic modal claim is (what is claimed, the claimable content), given that that is what we are *doing* when we *make* the claim. His attempt takes the form of a notion of what we "convey", in addition to what we actually *say* (the sayable content said) in that saying.

This is an issue about the relation between the contents of claims in *pragmatic* metalanguages and the contents of claims in *semantic* metalanguages.

I think we know very little about these relations.

(*BSD* is my attempt to develop a framework for discussing these issues.)

j) Q: In general, what must one *do*, as a theorist, to *specify* the *content* of what is *said* (as opposed to what one is *doing* in *saying* it) of some kind of locution?

A: Sellars has an answer, based on the *semantic inferentialism* of "Inference and Meaning": One must specify the *inferential role* of the locution, paradigmatically in the form of rules for language-language moves.

"Grasp of a concept is always mastery of the use of a word."

k) We can say how to do that, in the paradigm case of *logical* vocabulary—say what rules must govern the *inferences* in the vicinity of conditionals and negation.

Consider the rules for conditional (Ramsey test) and negation (codification of incoherence):

l) Other examples where pragmatic dependence shows reductive projects won't work:

- ***de dicto* vs. *de re* ascriptions/beliefs**.

Here the idea is that strong *de re* beliefs form an autonomous stratum: a kind of belief one could have though one had no other. (Dretske, Fodor, Burge)

- **Narrow vs. wide content**. (Twin Earth examples)

Here the idea is that narrow contents form an autonomous stratum. One might have *only* these. Descartes thought that: that our thoughts could have *just* the contents they actually have, even if the world were radically different.

2. Foundationalism:

The passages I am addressing are from §38:

If I reject the framework of traditional empiricism, it is not because I want to say that empirical knowledge has *no* foundation. For to put it this way is to suggest that it is really "empirical knowledge so-called," and to **put it in a box with rumors and hoaxes**.

There is clearly *some* point to the picture of human knowledge as resting on a level of propositions -- observation reports -- which do not rest on other propositions in the same way as other propositions rest on them.

On the other hand, I do wish to insist that the metaphor of "foundation" is misleading in that it keeps us from seeing that **if there is a logical dimension in which other empirical propositions rest on observation reports, there is another logical dimension in which the latter rest on the former.**

BB: The latter dimension is *semantic*.

a) The immediate target of WS's arguments is a certain kind of *epistemological foundationalism*, characteristic of both traditional British abstractionist-associationist empiricism and twentieth century logical empiricism.
That is a response to the Agrippan trilemma, which purports to force a choice between an unproductive infinite regress of justification, attempts at circular justification, and a foundation of ultimately unjustified justifiers.

b) The form of epistemological foundationalism Sellars criticizes is one that requires the *semantic autonomy* of the epistemological base-layer of unjustified justifiers. That is, he criticizes the idea that we could be in a position to *grasp the contents* of the secure epistemological foundation *without* having to do what we need to do to *grasp the contents* of the risky claims about how things really are ("is-Φ" talk).
That is the argument for *semantic* dependence from *pragmatic* dependence, gestured at above in (1).
Cf. Sellars's claim elsewhere [where, exactly?] that "Grasp of a concept is always mastery of the use of a word."
This is **a mediating principle, connecting pragmatic dependencies**—if you can't count as mastering the *use* of expressions of kind K unless one *also* (or, more strongly, *already*) master the *use* of expressions of kind L—**with *conceptual* dependencies**, which are *semantic* in that they concern the *contents* expressed or applied in acts of judging, rather than the *acts* of expressing or applying them by judging.

c) Note that **Sellars**'s critique of ending the potential justificational regress on the side of *premises* by appeal to a sensuous given is paralleled by **Quine**'s critique (in "Two

Dogmas of Empiricism") of ending the potential justificational regress on the side of **inferences** by appeal to the givenness of *meanings*: semantic givenness.

d) Quine, too, offers a *pragmatic* argument for a *semantic* dependence: grasp of meanings (supposedly *a priori)* is pragmatically dependent on grasp of facts (*a posteriori*), because these are two dimensions of *one* indivisible practice: *using* expressions to make risky empirical claims about how things objectively are.

e) Once the idea of a *semantically autonomous* stratum of concepts-and-claimables has been shown to be illusory (by consideration of *pragmatic* dependencies), the way is open to acknowledging a *limited* but genuine *epistemological* foundation of unjustified justifiers. For one can acknowledge the distinctive and essential role played by *noninferential* observation reports.

One must just realize that they are "noninferential" only in *origin*: the *acts* are not the result of processes or exercises of inferential *abilities* or *practices*. This is a matter of **pragmatics**, concering the *acts*. They are *not* "noninferential" **semantically**. That is, they are not the result of exercising abilities one could have apart from or in advance of having the capacity to make *inferences*—to distinguish in practice (respond differentially to) materially good and materially bad inferences.

This is the gravamen of the final passage from §38 quoted above.

Note that McDowell is at least tempted by a different way of picking out observation reports: not aetiologically, in terms of the processes by which they originate or eventuate, but epistemologically, in terms of the way they are retrospectively *justifiable*: by appeal to abilities to *see* (paradigmatically) how things are, in this regard and under this sort of circumstance ("standard conditions" for responsively applying this concept).

Moving into Part II of *EPM*:

3.   Methodological vs. Philosophical (Analytic or Logical) Behaviorism:

a) The distinction:

i.   Philosophical, analytic, or logical behaviorism seeks to reconstruct psychological or mental talk (talk about intentional states or mental episodes such as thoughts and sense impressions) without remainder in the terms of a purely behavioral vocabulary. What cannot be so reconstructed is to be jettisoned as unintelligible or otherwise defective. Behavioral vocabulary is vocabulary that *describes* the publically available performances of discursive practitioners. In the terms I introduce in *BSD*, the *target vocabulary* is psychological or mental talk and the *base vocabulary* is vocabulary used to describe behavior. Ryle, in *The Concept of Mind* (1949), argues that a necessary and sufficient condition for such analysis is appeal to *dispositions*: anger, kindness, cruelty, belief that there are biscuits in the

cupboard, the desire to eat biscuits are all to be understood in terms of dispositions to *do* specifiable things under specifiable circumstances: Being disposed to do A in C.

ii.   Methodological behaviorism sees psychological or mental talk (not the same: cf. Rylean vs. Jonesean items) as standing to behavioral talk as *theoretical* talk and the concepts it expresses and deploys stands to *observational* talk and the concepts it expresses and deploys.

Psychological vocab. : Behavioral vocab :: Theoretical vocab : Observational vocab

b)   Wittgenstein and Ryle reject inner episodes (thoughts and sense-impressions) because they cannot be *defined* in behavioral terms. (Cf. LW on the "beetle in a box," contra privacy or privileged access to mental episodes).

c)   For LW, "philosophy is not one of the natural sciences" (the only sentence that occurs *verbatim* in both *TLP* and *PI*). And he takes an *essential* element of the difference, perhaps *the* essential principle making the difference, to be that philosophy does not postulate unobservable, theoretical entities in its explanations.
To do that *is*, he thinks, to do empirical science, rather than philosophy.
That criterion of demarcation is what motivates his talk about philosophy as consisting entirely of *descriptions* (rather than explanations) of what is on the *surface* of our doings (rather than "hidden" in the "depths" below the public, visible surface).

d)   Compare: *semantics* in relation to *pragmatics*.
Wittgenstein (and following him, Dummett, until quite late in his career) rejects the postulation of *meanings* as theoretical postulates to explain discursive *behavior*—the *use* of the language.
One is to restrict oneself to *descriptions* of the public *use* of language, and not attempt to delve *beneath* that usage to meanings that govern it by providing *rules* for assessing the correctness of those practices.
In fact, for LW, this attitudes is overdetermined. For he *also* thinks that language is a plastic, protean *motley*, which can*not* be codified by postulating uniform meanings that can be deployed according to a finite, surveyable collection of patterns, so that one could systematize in a theory principles that would let one *derive* from the meanings and the context the proprieties governing the use and practical significance of speech acts of applying concepts with those contents.
Where **Wittgenstein was** for this reason **a *nihilist* or *skeptic* about semantics**,
Dummett was a *instrumentalist* about semantics. He insisted that a proper semantics could only deploy concepts derived directly from, and definable in terms of, the behavior of discursive practitioners. So, instead of truth-conditions, assertibility conditions, and instead of reference to objects, recognizability conditions for objects. This semantic instrumentalism was a fundamental orienting principle motivating his semantic anti-realism and his endorsement of intuitionist constructivism over classical logic.

e) Sellars proposes, though, to make inner episodes behavioristically respectable (while not endorsing Cartesian givenness), by understanding them as theoreticallly postulated to explain regularities in observable behavior.

f) Sellars is often credited today, in the philosophy of mind, with having proposed the "*theory theory*" of the mind—as opposed to the "*model model*." (Alvin Goldman's terms. Stich is someone who credits Sellars in this way.)
This is a mistake. For they mean thinking of folk psychology as a behavioral theory, postulating intentional states such as beliefs and desires to explain behavior.
But Sellars takes all these for granted, assuming (at least for the sake of argument) that a Rylean account of them is adequate.
His innovation has to do with *occurrent episodes*, thoughts and sense-impressions, rather than *intentional states*, such as belief, desire, and intention.
These are "Jonesean," rather than "Rylean" items.

g) They are introduced in two stages: thoughts, then sense-impressions.

- Thoughts are introduced to explain intelligent behavior that would make sense in the presence of a running verbal commentary, but that is intelligent even in the absence of such an accompaniment.

- Sense impressions are introduced to explain systematic errors in observation reports.

4. <u>Scientific Realism, vs. Instrumentalism, about theoretical entities</u>:

a) The distinction between observable and theoretical entities is methodological or epistemological, not ontological.
They are not different *kinds of things*, but *things known about in different ways*.

b) WS on the "Platonic principle," that *epistemological* differences signify *ontological* differences.
Plato on *sensuous* vs. *intelligible* things.
Descartes on epistemically transparent subjective things vs. only representationally accessible objective things.
Kant on phenomena and noumena, things our knowledge of is *empirical*, and so sensuously conditioned by and dependent on *intuition* and things we can know about *transcendentally*, by looking just to the conditions of applicability of *concepts*.

c) Pluto as an example of a thing that changed status, from theoretically postulated, hence only inferentially accessible, to observable. It didn't change, only its relation to us did.

d) WS's radical suggestion that thoughts and sense impressions made a similar transition.

e) The crucial "need it have?" rhetorical question. It has different answers depending on whether we read it in an Aristotelian, human-centered way, or a Kantian, all-rational-beings way.

f) It is instructive in this connection to compare Rorty's social normative pragmatist account of incorrigibility in "Incorrigibility the Mark of the Mental" and his eliminative materialism generally.

5.   <u>The Master-Argument Against Phenomenalism:</u>

a) Phenomenalism is the idea that you can reconstruct *objective* OED vocabulary (and the concepts it expresses) of objects and their non-phenomenal properties and relations entirely in terms of *subjective phenomenal* concepts.

b) WS offers an argument against the *semantic autonomy*, not now of the *base* of phenomenalist (re)constructions of objective talk (concepts) in terms of phenomenal talk (concepts), but of the construction itself. This is an argument complementary to the argument of *EPM* against the autonomy of the base.

c) <u>The argument</u>:

    i.   The phenomenalist needs to use subjunctively robust conditionals concerning what one ***would* experience** (what experiences one *would* have) ***if*** various conditions obtain.

    ii.   This is necessary to underwrite (here, make intelligible, as well as justify) the presupposition of objective talk that objects exist when they are not *actually* being perceived, and have parts that are not actually perceived. This is the argument from backsides. (Treating backsides as being of paramount importance is here neither merely a risible quirk nor a perverted obsession).

    iii.   But here we face a choice, neither alternative of which supports the phenomenalist explanatory-definitional project.
The question is what ***vocabulary*** one is allowed to use in specifying the ***antecedents*** of those subjunctive conditionals.
Either:
α) the antecedents of those subjunctive conditionals are couched entirely in *phenomenalist* vocabulary,   or
β) the antecedents of the subjunctive conditionals (specifying the circumstances under which one *would* have a certain experience (seem to see X, have it look to one as though X, be appeared-to X-ly…) are themselves specified in a vocabulary that employs *objective, non-phenomenalist* terms and concepts.

    iv.   The trouble with (α) is that subjunctive conditionals phrased in these restrictive terms just **aren't** *true*. There are no counterfactually robust regularities of this sort. It is not in general true that if I *seem* to turn my head, I will *seem* to see the bookshelf, or that if I *seem* to walk around the table I will *seem* to see the other side. My imagination, fantasy, dreams, hallucinations, and so on are just not constrained like that.

     v.   What *is* true is that if I *actually* turn my head, *actually* walk around the table, I *will* in (under standard conditions) *seem* to see the bookshelf and the backside of the table.

             And notice that the "***standard conditions***" must themselves both be couched in objective vocabulary—what the lighting really is, not just what it *seems* to be—if it is to support the connection between "looks-Φ" and "is-Φ."

             But it is against the rules of the phenomenalist game to appeal to **objective vocabulary** in the phenomenalist construction.

     vi.   Conclusion: So, the phenomenalist project cannot be brought off.

6.   <u>Invidious Eddingtonian Scientific Naturalism as Transcendental Idealism</u>:

a) Eddington's two tables.

b) Invidious Eddingtonian Scientific Realism: only the world described and explained by science is *real*. The world described by ordinary language is merely the *appearance* of that real world.

c) This is a crucial step beyond realism about theoretical entities, as opposed to instrumentalism. Seeing the theoretical/observable distinction as merely epistemological, not ontological leaves observable and theoretical (merely inferentially accessible) items on a par ontologically. This move invokes a privileging, asserts a priority over the results of natural scientific empirical theorizing over the world revealed by the use of ordinary natural language.

d) Sellars proposes this invidious privileging of the results of science, as epitomized in the *scientia mensura*, as a suitable successor-conception to Kant's transcendental idealism, resulting from his Copernican revolution. The world revealed by ordinary language is empirically real but transcendentally ideal. What is transcendentally real is the deliverances of an eventual natural science.

e) This will result (PSIM is *locus classicus*) in denying that persons, norms, and languages, as well as propositions and properties, are to be found in "the world, in the narrow sense." They are not *real* in the sense in which subatomic particles (and their mereological sums?) are.

f) "Phenomenalism":

"On the view I propose, the assertion that the micro-entities of physical theory really exist goes hand in hand with the assertion that *the macro-entities of the perceptible world do not really exist*. This position can be ruled out of court only by showing that the framework of perceptible physical objects in space and time has an authenticity which guarantees a parasitical status for the subtle and sophisticated framework of physical theory. I argue in *EPM* that the very conception of such absolute authenticity is a mistake. And if this contention is correct, the premise to the effect that theoretical entities really exist [i.e. that to have good reason for espousing a theory is *ipso facto* to have good

reason for saying that the entities postulated by the theory really exist], which was used in explaining the status of sense impressions, requires us to go one step further, once its presuppositions are made explicit, and argue that the physical objects, the perception of which they causally (but not epistemically) mediate, are unreal. It commits us, in short, to the view that the perceptual world is phenomenal in something like the Kantian sense, the key difference being that the real or 'noumenal' world which supports the 'world of appearances' is not a *metaphysical* world of unknowable things in themselves, but simply the world as construed by scientific theory."

g) I think this is a *dreadful* idea. But that is a story for another occasion. (I make the case against it in some detail in *FEE*.) This issue will be with us for the rest of the course.