

Philosophy 208
The Language Revolution
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Class 23
Introduction to Davidson and Tarski

Business

- Last topic in meaning: Can we make do with extensions?
 - Today: Austin and Tarski
 - Thursday: Kiyani, Shaq, and Davidson
- Papers due December 9
- Small change in GTAs
- Final exam prep questions
 - This class is just backloaded

Grice's Program

- Reduce intensions to intentions
 - ▶ Construct a meaning theory by using the meanings of individuals who use those sentences.
 - ▶ Step 1: Reduce semantic phenomena to psychological phenomena
 - ▶ Step 2: Reduce the psychological to the physical
- Ultimate goal the reduction of all semantic facts to physical facts.

The Best Gricean Account

- SGB: S meant something by (or in) uttering x iff S uttered x intending thereby to realize a certain state of affairs E which is (intended by S to be) such that the obtainment of E is sufficient for S and a certain audience A mutually knowing* (or believing*) that E obtains and that E is conclusive (very good or good) evidence that S uttered x intending
 - ▶ (1) to produce a certain response r in A ;
 - ▶ (2) A 's recognition of S 's intention (1) to function as at least part of A 's reason for A 's response r ;
 - ▶ (3) to realize E (39).
- SGB blocks all of the earlier counterexamples based on deception to the Gricean account.

Problems with Even the Best Gricean Account

- Ascriptions of infinite beliefs in the definition of mutual knowledge*
- Independence of meaning from audience
 - Philosophical writing
 - Reminding and pointing out
- Genesis and Sean and the Kennst du das Land example
 - The goals of communication cleave from the meanings of our words
 - Grice and pragmatics after break!
- One more problem

IBS and Propositional Attitudes



- The proponent of IBS envisions all semantic facts to be reducible to psychological facts.
 - Sentence-meaning is explained in terms of speaker-meaning.
 - Speaker-meaning is explained in terms of the beliefs of the speaker and audience.
- When we try to explain the mental states of belief and other propositional attitudes, though, we seem to appeal to semantic facts about the propositions that people believe.
 - Izzy believes that a monster named Boris is under the bench.
 - that a monster named Boris is under the bench
- The meaning of (some) sentences both presupposes and is explained by an account of beliefs.
 - circularity
- Schiffer: propositions are not the things to which believers relate.
 - “Certainly, I felt that the project of defining the semantic in terms of the psychological was fairly pointless if one was then going to view propositional attitudes as primitive and inexplicable... What could be the point of trading in facts about *meaning* for facts about the *content of beliefs* if one ends up with nothing to say about the latter?” (Schiffer, *Remnants 2*)

The End of IBS

- Minimalism/Deflationism/Wittgensteinianism?
- Quinean holism/meanings skepticism?
- Embrace the third realm!
 - Katz, “The New Intensionalism”
- Stay extensionalist: Davidson’s Programme

Semantics and Frege

- Tarski's article is called: "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics."
- 'Semantics' covers both sense and reference.
- Frege uses both intensions (sense or meaning) and extensions (reference).
 - ▶ Solves the three puzzles
 - ▶ Synonymies
 - 'snow is white' and 'la nieve es blanca'
 - 'bachelor' and 'unmarried male'
 - ▶ Insufficiency of extensions
 - 'creature with a heart' and 'creature with a kidney'
 - '2+2' and '7-3'
- But Frege's semantics is saddled with an inflated ontology of third-realm entities like propositions, concepts, and senses.

Avoiding Senses I

Logical Empiricism

- The logical empiricists tried to avoid intensions by explaining meaning in terms of observation and verification.
 - ▶ Without an analytic/synthetic distinction, their claim that individual sentences are confirmed and disconfirmed independently of each other, and that they have meanings independent of a broader background theory, seems indefensible.
- Holism killed the logical empiricist's project.
 - ▶ Quine urged that we could maintain meaningfulness without meanings.
 - ▶ Quine's semantic holism seems incompatible with the basic tenets of compositionality.
 - ▶ Moreover, Quine's ontological relativity undermined even the theory of reference.

Avoiding Senses II

IBS

- Grice hoped to explain meaning facts in terms of speaker intentions.
- But IBS ran into the bloated ontology of propositions that saddled Frege's semantics.
- Grice explains sentence meaning in terms of speaker meaning, and speaker meaning in terms of belief states.
- But belief states are best understood as relations between people and propositions.
- The IBS account appears unavoidably circular.
- Schiffer later work despairs of developing semantic theory in any guise.

Avoiding Senses III

Give Up

- (Later) Wittgenstein: abandon all hope of an intensional semantic theory.
- We can try to construct theories of reference and truth, instead, and see if there are any semantic facts left over.
- Davidson's approach: relying on and repurposing Tarski's theory of truth.
- Put aside the thorny questions about theories of meaning and look at theories of truth and reference.
- Tarski did not construct his theory of truth as a semantic theory in Frege's sense.
- But Davidson believes that it can work as one.
- Tarski's theory today and Davidson's use of it on Thursday

Austin on Tarski