The Language Revolution
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Class #2
The Ontological Argument
Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Responses

Business

- Presentations
  - ‣ Sign up after class by email
    - – Send me three ranked choices
    - – Check the dates!
    - – By tomorrow morning, please
  - ‣ May be solo or in pairs
    - – If pairs, send emails from both people
  - ‣ Questions?

- Last Thursday: the connection between language and truth

- Today
  - ‣ A bit more on language in philosophy, focusing on precision
  - ‣ A group activity on the ontological argument

Answering Questions by Appealing to Language

Explaining the Meaning of an Obscure Term

- "You seem very clever at explaining words, Sir," said Alice. "Would you kindly tell me the meaning of the poem called 'Jabberwocky'?"

- "Let's hear it," said Humpty Dumpty. "I can explain all the poems that were ever invented - and a good many that haven't been invented just yet."

- This sounded very hopeful, so Alice repeated the first verse:
  - ‣ *Twas brillig, and the slithy toves*
  - ‣ *Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;*
  - ‣ *All mimsy were the borogoves,*
  - ‣ *And the mome raths outgrabe.*

Explaining Jabberwocky

Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

- "That's enough to begin with," Humpty Dumpty interrupted: "there are plenty of hard words there. '*Brillig*' means four o'clock in the afternoon - the time when you begin broiling things for dinner."

- "That'll do very well," said Alice: and '*slithy*'?"

- "Well, '*slithy*' means 'lithe and slimy.' 'Lithe' is the same as 'active.' You see it's like a portmanteau - there are two meanings packed up into one word."

- "I see it now," Alice remarked thoughtfully: "and what are '*toves*'?"

- "Well, '*toves*' are something like badgers - they're something like lizards - and they're something like corkscrews."

- "They must be very curious looking creatures."

- "They are that," said Humpty Dumpty: "also they make their nests under sun-dials - also they live on cheese."

- "And what's to '*gyre*' and to '*gimble*'?"

- "To '*gyre*' is to go round and round like a gyroscope. To '*gimble*' is to make holes like a gimblet."

- "And '*the wabe*' is the grass-plot round a sun-dial, I suppose?" said Alice, surprised at her own ingenuity.

- "Of course it is. It's called '*wabe*,' you know, because it goes a long way before it, and a long way behind it" (Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, p 4).

Gimlet

Assisting Precision

- "So here's a question for you. How old did you say you were?"
- Alice made a short calculation, and said "Seven years and six months."
- "Wrong!" Humpty Dumpty exclaimed triumphantly. "You never said a word like it!"
- "I though you meant 'How old *are* you?'" Alice explained.
- "If I'd meant that, I'd have said it," said Humpty Dumpty.
- Alice didn't want to begin another argument, so she said nothing (Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, p 2).

More on Precision

- "The piece I'm going to repeat," he went on without noticing her remark, "was written entirely for your amusement."

- Alice felt that in that case she really *ought* to listen to it, so she sat down, and said "Thank you" rather sadly.
  - ‣ *"In winter, when the fields are white,*
  - ‣ *I sing this song for your delight -*

- only I don't sing it," he added, as an explanation.

- "I see you don't," said Alice.

- "If you can *see* whether I'm singing or not, you've sharper eyes than most." Humpty Dumpty remarked severely. Alice was silent (Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*).

Still More on Precision

- In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus tells the Cyclops that he is nobody.
  - ‣ The Cyclops takes 'Nobody' for a proper name.
  - ‣ One might think that the Cyclops would have benefitted from a more-precise understanding of language, and how Odysseus was using it.
- Frege's mathematical logic revolutionized philosophy precisely because of its unprecedented precision.
- Still, the question remains whether there are philosophical questions that can be resolved by focusing on language.

Hume on Care with Language

- Certain philosophical terms are meaningless and should be stricken from the language.

- Words whose meanings can be explained in terms of our sense experience (which he calls matters of fact) or our most basic logic or mathematics (which he calls relations of ideas) are acceptable.

- But, other philosophical terms have no legitimate use.
  - "When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume--of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance--let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion."

- The logical empiricists made a similar claim.

Berkeley on Care with Language

- Locke had argued for a common-sense realism about the material world.
- Berkeley accuses Locke of appealing to a doctrine of abstract ideas.
- General terms like 'matter' and 'man' and 'two' are illegitimate, since we have no ideas to correspond to such terms.
  - ▸ "How ready soever I may be to acknowledge the scantiness of my comprehension with regard to the endless variety of spirits and ideas that may possibly exist, yet for any one to pretend to a notion of entity or existence, abstracted from spirit and idea, from perceived and being perceived, is, I suspect, a downright repugnancy and trifling with words" (Berkeley, *Principles* §81).
- But, what are the proper, legitimate uses of language?

What Does Language Do?

Language as Names

- Before Locke, a common view was that words stood for objects.

- Wittgenstein ascribes this view to Augustine (4th-5th century CE).
  - "When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shewn by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires."

- Jonathan Swift, in *Gulliver's Travels*, satirizes this view.
  - If words just serve as signs of objects, we could achieve the same purposes of language without words at all.
  - We could just show the objects for which our words stand.

Locke on Language

words stand for ideas, not for objects

- Locke established the moderns' view of language.
- "[It is] perverting the use of words, and bring[ing] unavoidable obscurity and confusion into their signification, whenever we make them stand for anything but those ideas we have in our own minds" (Locke, *Essay* §III.2.5).

Locke's Argument

words stand for ideas in our minds

LL1. Society depends on our ability to communicate our ideas, so words must be able to stand for ideas.

LL2. Since my ideas precede my communication, words must refer to my ideas before they could refer to anything else.

LL3. If words refer both to my ideas and to something else (e.g. your idea, or an external object), then they would be ambiguous.

LL4. But, words are not ordinarily ambiguous.

LL5. So, words ordinarily do not stand for something other than my ideas.

LLC. So, words stand for my ideas.

Language and the Veil of Ideas

- While names refer to our own ideas, we just suppose them to refer to other people's ideas, or for external objects.
  - "A child having taken notice of nothing in the metal he hears called gold, but the bright shining yellow colour, he applies the word gold only to his own idea of that colour, and nothing else; and therefore calls the same colour in a peacock's tail gold. Another that hath better observed, adds to shining yellow great weight: and then the sound gold, when he uses it, stands for a complex idea of a shining yellow and a very weighty substance. Another adds to those qualities fusibility: and then the word gold signifies to him a body, bright, yellow, fusible, and very heavy. Another adds malleability. Each of these uses equally the word gold, when they have occasion to express the idea which they have applied it to: but it is evident that each can apply it only to his own idea; nor can he make it stand as a sign of such a complex idea as he has not..."

General Terms and Abstract Ideas

- A particular term, like a name, stands for one specific object.
- A general term, in contrast, can stand for more than one thing.
  - ‣ 'Apple' can be used for any of various apples.
  - ‣ 'Green', 'motion', and 'body' are similarly general terms.
  - ‣ They stand not for a particular idea or specific sensation, but for abstract, general ideas.
- There are too many particular things for them all to have particular names.
- Scientific generalizations require general terms.
- We use both particular names, for particular ideas when it is useful.
- And we use general terms for communication and for science.
- Locke claims that general terms stand for abstract ideas.

The Representational Theory

- Locke claims that words (nouns at least) stand for ideas in our minds.
  - ‣ Particular terms stand for particular sensations.
  - ‣ General terms are developed by abstraction and stand for abstract ideas.
- Berkeley and Hume both attack Locke's doctrine of abstract ideas.
  - ‣ But they hold on to the view about particulars.
- Locke, Berkeley, and Hume all hold what might be called the *representational theory of ideas* (RTI).
  - ‣ words stand for internal thoughts
  - ‣ thoughts are representations of an external reality.
- By the end of the 18th century, the theory of ideas reaches its end in Kant's work.
  - ‣ distinction between the noumenal world and the phenomenal world
- Kant sees that RTI blocks any possibility of knowledge.
  - ‣ If we know any claim, it must be true.
  - ‣ If words stand for my ideas, I can never make the connection to the world that truth requires.
  - ‣ We are stuck within our ideas of the world.

The Language Revolution

- The early nineteenth century in philosophy is mostly a wasteland of philosophers trying to come to grips with Kant's insights and slowly learning to see, and then abandon, the theory of ideas (RTI).

- The language revolution begins quietly in 1879.
  ▸ Frege's *Begriffsschrift*

- Frege builds his view in the *Foundations of Arithmetic*.
  ▸ attack's Locke's psychologism
  ▸ defends the **context principle**:
    – **The meaning of a word depends on its use in a sentence**.
    – We'll talk about this in Class #4

- If the context principle is correct, the theories of language of Augustine and Locke and the moderns were all doomed to failure.
  ▸ They thought that the basic unit of language is the word.
  ▸ Frege saw that the basic unit of language is the proposition.

Some Terms

- *Inscription*: a written token of a term, or word.
- *Utterance*: a spoken token of a term.
- *Sentence*: An inscription or utterance used for a speech act.
  - ‣ declarative sentences
  - ‣ Questions and commands and exclamations are also sentences.
  - ‣ One can utter a sentence, or write it down.
- *Sentence type*: An abstract object which can be instantiated by either an utterance or an inscription, or maybe even an idea.
  - ‣ Maisy is a mouse.
  - ‣ Maisy is a mouse.
- *Proposition*: The meaning of a sentence, an abstract object.
  - ‣ that-clauses
  - ‣ 'Maisy es una ratón' and 'Maisy is a mouse'
    - – Different sentence token
    - – Different sentence type
    - – Same proposition
  - ‣ Frege calls propositions thoughts.

More Terms

- *Assertion*, or *statement*: A declarative sentence, used to say something that can be either true or false.

- *Expression*: Usually used to refer to a sub-sentential phrase, either a subject term or a predicate term.

- *Concept*: An abstract object corresponding to sub-sentential-sized linguistic objects.
  - ▸ Different people each have their own ideas, but may share concepts.
  - ▸ Some concepts refer to or stand for objects.

- *Subject-predicate form*: Declarative sentences (and their corresponding propositions, etc.) can be parsed into subject-predicate form.
  - ▸ Predicates express, or stand for, properties, which are abstract objects.
  - ▸ Properties are sometimes called attributes.

- *Name*: A term which picks out a particular object (e.g. 'Maisy').
  - ▸ Most names apply to more than one object, but we imagine that they do not, because we can disambiguate by the context of their use.

- *Definite description*: An expression, usually beginning with 'the', which, like a name, picks out a particular object (e.g. 'the all-time home-run leader').
  - ▸ denoting phrases

- *Singular term*: Expressions referring to a specific thing.
  - ▸ Names and definite descriptions are singular terms.
  - ▸ We might interpret 'whales' as a singular term, referring to the one set of all whales.
  - ▸ It is more natural to think of it as referring to many (all) whales.

Use and Mention

- Ordinary instances of language are uses.

- When we talk about the terms of our language, we sometimes mention them.
  - "[T]here are three hundred and sixty-four days when you might get un-birthday presents -"
  - "Certainly," said Alice.
  - "And only *one* for birthday presents, you know. There's glory for you!"
  - "I don't know what you mean by 'glory'," Alice said.
  - Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't - till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"
  - "But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected.
  - "When *I* use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less" (Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* 3)

- When Alice says that she does not know what Humpty Dumpty means, she mentions the term.

- She puts scare quotes around it to indicate that she is using it, rather than mentioning it.
  - The cat is on the mat.
    - 'cat' is used
  - 'Cat' has three letters.
    - 'cat' is mentioned

Distinguishing Linguistic from Non-Linguistic Approaches to Philosophical Problems

The Ontological Argument: A Case Study

Anselm

Characterizing 'God'

- All perfections, including omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence
- Whatever necessarily exists
- Creator and preserver
- Anselm: something than which nothing greater can be thought

A Note on Characterizing Terms

- The characterizations of 'God' invoked at the beginning of the argument are definitions of a term.

- It remains to be seen whether they actually refer to an object.

- 'Korub' refers to red swans.

- Are there any korubs?

Anselm's Argument

1. I can think of 'God'.

2. If 'God' were just an idea, or term, then I could conceive of something greater than 'God' (i.e. an existing God).

3. But 'God' refers to that than which nothing greater can be conceived.

4. So 'God' can not refer just to an idea; it must refer to an actual object.

So, God exists.

▸ Some corollaries
   1. We can not think of God not to exist.
   2. God must be eternal.
   3. God must be necessary.
   4. God must be everywhere.

Gaunilo

- My idea of the most perfect island does not entail that it exists.

- In fact, it may entail that it does not exist, since a non-existing island would be free of imperfections.

Against Gaunilo

You often picture me as offering this argument: Because what is greater than all other things exists in the understanding, it must also exist in reality or else the being which is greater than all others would not be such. Never in my entire treatise do I say this. For there is a big difference between saying "greater than all other things" and "a being greater than which cannot be thought of." (Anselm, 4)

- The perfection of an island may entail that it does not exist.
- A non-existing island would be free of imperfections.
- Gaunilo alleges that we do not have a sufficient idea of God.
- But, the question of whether we have a sufficient idea of God is not central to the original argument.
- Gaunilo's response is neither linguistic nor sufficient to refute the argument.

Descartes's Ontological Argument

Existence is part of the essence of 'God'

- The essence of an object is all the properties that necessarily belong to that object.
- A chair's essence (approximately): furniture for sitting, has a back, durable material
- Bachelor: unmarried man
- A human person: body and mind
- God: three omnis, and existence
- Descartes's version does not depend on our ability to conceive (of that than which no greater can be conceived).
- "[T]he necessity...lies in the thing itself."

Caterus

- The concept of a necessarily existing lion has existence as part of its essence.
  - ▸ That concept entails no actual lions.
- We must distinguish more carefully between concepts and objects.
- Even if a concept contains existence, it is still just a concept.
- Descartes seems to be begging the question.
- Caterus's response is conceptual, but not linguistic.
  - ▸ He is raising questions about the nature of concepts and their relations to objects.
 - ▸ We might call his response metaphysical.

Hume

"The idea of existence, then, is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent. To reflect on any thing simply, and to reflect on it as existent, are nothing different from each other. That idea, when conjoined with the idea of any object, makes no addition to it. Whatever we conceive, we conceive to be existent. Any idea we please to form is the idea of a being; and the idea of a being is any idea we please to form."

Kant

- Kant, following Hume, claims that existence is not a property in the way that the perfections are properties.

- Existence can not be part of an essence, since it is not a property.

- "100 real thalers do not contain the least coin more than a hundred possible thalers."
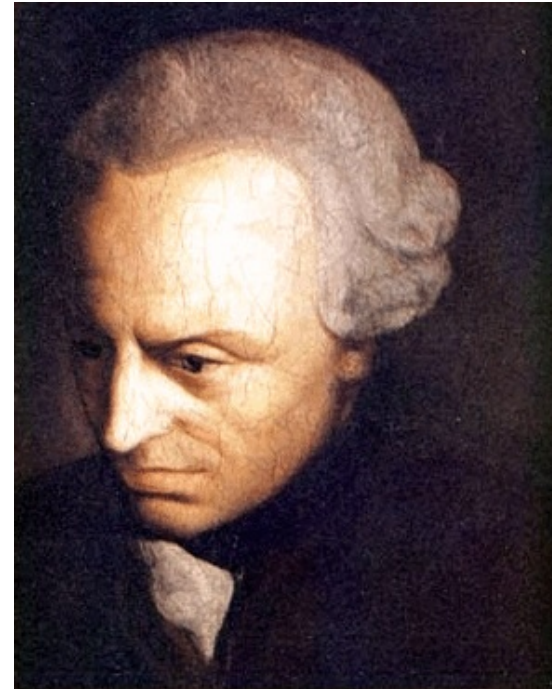
Real Predicates and Logical Predicates

- A logical predicate serves as a predicate in grammar.
- Any property can be predicated of any object, grammatically.
  - ▸ The Statue of Liberty exists.
  - ▸ Seventeen loves its mother.
- A real predicate tells us something substantive about an object.
  - ▸ The Statue of Liberty is over 150 feet tall.
- One can not do metaphysics through grammar alone.
  - ▸ Existence is a grammatical predicate, but not a real predicate.
  - ▸ Grammatical form is not the same as logical form.

Existence is a grammatical predicate, but not a real predicate.
Grammatical form is not a sure guide to logical form.

Is Existence a Predicate?

- Kant: existence is too thin to be a real predicate.

- We do not add anything to a concept by claiming that it exists.

- The real and possible thalers must have the same number of thalers in order that the concept match its object.

- So, we do not add thalers when we mention that the thalers exist.

- But, do we add something?

Debates About Existence

- The tooth fairy
- Black holes
- We seem to consider an object and wonder whether it has the property of existing.
- We thus may have to consider objects which may or may not exist.
- E.g. James Brown, Tony Soprano.

Meinongian Subsistence

- Meinong attributes subsistence to fictional objects and dead folks.

- James Brown has the property of subsisting, without having the property of existing.

- Kant's claim that existence is not a real predicate, while influential, may not solve the problem.

The Fregean (Linguistic) Argument for Kant's Solution

- First-order logic makes a distinction between predication and quantification.

- In our most austere language, existence is not a predicate.

- '(∃x)Gx' or '(∃x) x=g'

- Note the distinction between the concept (represented by the predicate or object) and existence (represented by the quantifier).

Kant and First-Order Logic

- First-order logic was developed a full century after Kant's work
- But, it uses the distinction he made between existence and predication.
- The quantifiers deal with existence and quantity
- The predicates deal with real properties, like being a god, or a person, or being mortal or vain.
- First-order logic is supposed to be our most austere, canonical language, the *Begriffsschrift*'s microscope.
- But, is first-order logic really the best framework for metaphysics?

Summary

- Gaunilo doesn't get the argument.

- Caturus's distinction between concept and object is good, but it is not a linguistic solution.

- Hume's language is still on the level of ideas, and not on the level of language.

- Kant is talking about ideas, too.

- He mentions logic, but for Kant, logic is psychological, governing thought.

- Frege turns Kant's solution into a linguistic solution.

- Frege makes the logic objective, rather than psychological.