Language and Personhood
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The main question

On what base can I take your behaviors (movements and vocalizations) as linguistically meaningful, i.e., having semantic contents?

The main idea

The essence of personhood is rationality which is an attributional property, and this notion of personhood is central to language-usership.

*In this presentation, I will focus on developing the first part of the main idea: the essence of personhood is rationality which is an attributional property.

David Lewis

The social convention account of language

- language as the conventions of truthfulness and trust (in some linguistic structure) to resolve the coordination problems (for information exchange) between (potential) language-users
- a synthesis of formalism and socio-naturalism

Formalism (Carnap-Tarski): language as a function from sounds and marks to meanings, i.e., a set of ordered pairs of sentences and meanings

L: language

s: sentence

$L(s)$: the meaning of s

L: $\{(s_1, L(s_1)), (s_2, L(s_2)), \ldots\}$

w: a possible world

s is true in L at w. $\leftrightarrow$ w belongs to the set of worlds $L(s)$.

s is true in L. $\leftrightarrow$ w_{actual} belongs to $L(s)$.

Domain	Function	Range
Sentences	Language Theory Syntax	Meaning Model Semantics

Socio-naturalism (Grice): language as a regularity (convention) of stimuli and responses within a population which arises from individuals intending to influence one another by bringing about beliefs and desires in others

> *R*: regularity
>
> *C*: convention
>
> *P*: population
>
> *R* is a *C* in *P*. ↔ The following six conditions hold within *P*:
>
> > (1) Everyone conforms to *R*.
> > (2) Everyone believes (or expects) that the others conform to *R*.
> > (3) The belief (or expectation) that the others conform to *R* gives one a good reason to conform to *R*.
> > (4) There is a general preference for general conformity to *R*, which is sustained by the common interest in exerting influences on each other.
> > (5) *R* has at least one alternative, *R′*.
> > (6) The conditions (1) to (5) are matters of common (or mutual) knowledge: they are (potentially) known to everyone, it is (potentially) known to everyone that they are known to everyone, and so on.

Synthesis: language as a formal system used as a convention within a population

- A specific linguistic structure (i.e., a particular set of ordered pairs of sentences and meanings) is used as a convention of trust and truthfulness by the community.
  - The speakers expect others to *trust* what they say according to the rules of *L*.
  - The hearers expect the speakers to speak *truthfully*, i.e., to utter true sentences of *L* (to the best of the speakers' ability).
- The expectations of truth and truthfulness give participants a good reason to conform to the convention, thereby comprising a linguistic community.
- There is a preference in the population for general conformity to the conventions because of the common interest in communication—as information can be exchanged between parties of interest only to extent that each follows the same rules of transaction.

What warrants the expectation that the others will conform to the conventions?

- My expectations are warranted by the belief that everyone else also prefers the others to conform to *L* just as much as I do.
- This belief that everyone else also prefers general conformity is warranted by the fact that others are just as much interested in information exchange as I am.
- The knowledge of this fact that everyone else is just as much interested in information exchange warrants my expectations that the others will conform to *L*.

What kind of knowledge is the knowledge of the fact that everyone else is interested?

- It is not empirical knowledge.
    - In taking certain behaviors as evidence for the possession of the interest, I am already taking the behaviors as interpretable as expressing the interest.
- It must then be analytic knowledge, the knowledge that the behaviors are interpretable as expressing the interest in information exchange.

What is it to interpret the behaviors of others as expressing the interest in communication, i.e., attribute to others certain interests?

- To attribute the interest in communication is to attribute the ability to engage with linguistic activities (i.e., to follow the quasi-formal rules of a specific natural language).
    - The problem of attributing to others an interest (in communication)
    - The problem of radical translation

What is it to attribute the ability to follow linguistic rules (syntax)?

- Language is mapping between two structures: a set of sentences and its interpreting structure.
    - Correspondence between two structures (a theory and its model): a surjective function from sentences to models
- Intentionality: One structure is *about* the other structure.
    - Representationalism is one way of explaining intentionality.
    - Brandom thinks that representationalism fails to explain exactly what it is for x to represent y because it takes the notion of representation as the primitive.
- Two senses of intentionality (Brandom on Brentano): propositional contentfulness (subject-predicate) and object-representing contentfulness
    - the belief that the tie is blue
    - the belief *of* the blue tie
- Propositional contents represent the world in terms of states of affairs, configurations of objects, properties, and relations.
- Intentional contents are paradigmatically propositional (i.e., express states of affairs).
    - Something is represented as an object in being a constituent of a state of affairs (truth-condition) the proposition expresses: objects, properties, and relations. (Adrian Cussins)
    - Propositional contentfulness underwrites object-representing contentfulness.
- What it is for a model to be re-presented by a theory is for the former to be reformulated in propositional terms, i.e., to be organized into the syntactical structure of arguments (subjects) and functions (predicates)
    - By being reformulated in terms of arguments and functions (according to the grammar of the theory), the model phenomenon is rendered into a state of affairs

which identifies the contents of the target phenomenon in terms of objects, properties, and relations.
- To attribute the ability to follow the linguistic rules is to attribute intentional contents, which is to attribute propositional structures to the states or behaviors in question.
    - The problem of radical translation comes down to the question of what it is and when it is appropriate to attribute intentional contents (propositionally structured) to psychological and behavioral states.

The problem of radical translation: What is it (and when is it appropriate) to attribute intentional contents (propositionally structured) to states and behaviors?

- Presuppositions
    - Ontological materialism: Only physical point-sized things exist, and the fundamental relations among these things are spatio-temporal relations.
    - Explanatory materialism ("materialistic working hypothesis"): only physical explanations for physical phenomena
    - The Psychological Identity Theory: Every experience is identical with some physical state.
        - What it is for a state *s* to be an experience (i.e., have intentional content) is for *s* to have a causal role within a system.
- Lewis' solution: apply a theory of persons to an individual as a physical system
    - A theory of persons (folk psychology) defines the theoretical concepts of intentional states: beliefs, desire, and meaning
        - the relations of the individual as a physical system (P), the individual's attitudes as expressed in *our* language (Ao), the individual's attitudes as expressed in his own language (Ak), the individual's meanings: truth conditions of his full sentences (M)
        - A theory of persons is analytic in that its terms (concepts of intentional states) are *implicitly* defined, i.e., terms are meaningful "by being part of characterizing theories."
            - The knowledge of the theory of persons (i.e., the knowledge that others are interested in communication) is therefore analytic.
    - Applying the theory of persons: The theory provides us with true descriptions of the world *if there are things defined by the theory*.
    - Six constraints: Principle of Charity, Rationalization Principle, Principle of Truthfulness, Principle of Generativity, Manifestation Principle, Triangle Principle
- The problem with Lewis' solution
    - If the theory of persons is reducible to physical theory, the theory of persons is redundant. Thus, the theory of persons must have its own explanatory contributions (its own layer of causality in addition to physical causality).

- Something is being added in interpreting the physical system or process in terms of intentional states. The question is what this "something" is.
    - The problem becomes more apparent when considering the case of Martian pain. Given that Martians and humans have different physical constitutions, why should we attribute the same mental state, "pain," (or, more precisely, the same causal-functional role) to different physical states? Since the concept of pain is implicitly defined by the theory of persons, we know what pain is prior to knowing the underlying physical state. If the theory of persons contributes nothing above and beyond the physical theory, it is difficult to understand why we should attribute the same state to Martians and humans (or even among humans).

What is it to apply a theory of persons to an individual as a physical system, i.e., attribute personhood to an entity?

- The distinction between metaphysical and stance approach to personhood
    - Metaphysical approach identifies the necessary and sufficient conditions for personhood.
    - Stance approach determines the reason for considering why certain conditions are necessary and sufficient at all by examining what it is to take something to be a person. (Mark Lance and W. Health White)
        - Stance approach is incompatible with ontological materialism, but rejects explanatory materialism since it does not characterize what kind of substance a person is made of, but only determines under what considerations it is appropriate to attribute personhood based on certain (material) conditions.
        - Stance approach grounds personhood by clarifying its conceptual connection with the material conditions while personhood may be ontologically reducible to those conditions.
        - Lance and White identify two abilities that should be attributed in conceiving an individual as a person: the ability to make indicative and subjunctive inferences.
- To understand what it is to apply a theory of persons, we must employ the stance approach to personhood, i.e., consider what it is to take something to be a person.

Wilfrid Sellars

The distinction of the manifest and the scientific image of the world

- Scientific image: correlational, piecemeal, primary objects—imperceptible postulates
- Manifest image: causal, holistic, primary objects—persons
    - What it is to be a person is to have the capacity to make deliberation, to have intentions, to make choices, etc.

- To take someone as a person, as capable of making deliberations, of having intentional attitudes, is to conceive the individual through the framework of the manifest image.
- The manifest image provides a framework for determining the reason for considering certain material conditions (identified by the scientific image) as necessary and sufficient for personhood.

P. F. Strawson

The distinction of reactive and objective attitudes

- To take reactive attitudes towards someone is to conceive the individual as someone to have inter-personal relationships with, or to have quarrels with.
  - What it is to take an individual as a moral agent (or person in general) is to hold reactive attitudes towards the individual.
  - In other words, to conceive an individual as a person, as a deliberative agent, is to take him as being accountable/responsible for his actions and thoughts.
- To take objective attitudes towards something is to conceive the object as a subject of treatment, as something to manage, train, avoid, etc.

Susan Wolf

Rationality as sanity: the deep-self view

- Accountability/responsibility and incompatibilism, the view that freewill and causation are incompatible
- Causation and freewill are compatible only if the agent is caused to respond to stimuli in a specific way, as to be responsive with sanity: "the minimally sufficient ability cognitively and normatively to recognize and appreciate the world for what it is."
  - (1) One knows what he is doing.
  - (2) One knows what he is doing is right and wrong according to the features of the world.
- What it is to conceive an individual as a person (deliberative, accountable) is to conceive him as a rational agent capable of recognizing the patterns and features of the world and orient oneself in appropriate ways in response to them.
- The causal layer added by the theory of persons is therefore rationality: deliberation, accountability, being able to conduct behaviors in respect to the world (truth). That is, **the essence of personhood is rationality.**

The characteristic of rationality as sanity

- Rationality as sanity is a normative notion.
  - The contents of the psychological and behavioral states (beliefs and actions) of a sane person (rational agent) are subject to assessments as of whether they are correct or incorrect responses to the world.
- In conceiving an individual as sane, one attributes to him the ability to correctly respond to how things are. The difference between the sane and the insane amounts to treating the former as being answerable to the standard of correctness.
  - In perceiving a blue tie, one *must* judge that the tie is blue. It is not a matter of what one actually believes, but what one *ought to* believe.
- In being attributed with rationality, one becomes subject to the rules of the standard for assessing beliefs and actions.

Robert Brandom

Normative statuses are attributed by normative attitudes taken towards the individuals.

- Semantic notions are normative notions: truth, reference, world, fact, etc.
  - What it is for a proposition to be true is to be in correspondence with facts.
  - One *should* pair a sentence with one fact rather than another.
  - The matter is of whether a sentence *ought to be* paired with some fact *regardless of whether it is in fact so paired.*
    - If all there is to truth is a regular association (between two structures), there is nothing for a sentence to get right or wrong bout.
    - Lewis attempts to explain away lawfulness of regular associations by appealing to the notion of natural properties (natural ways of grouping objects). However, although natural properties may provide ontological grounds for lawfulness, they cannot provide epistemic grounds for lawfulness (due to the Myth of the Given).
- Propositions are what they are because of their normative status (being assessable by standards): aboutness, representing, correspondence.
- Propositions have the normative status because of the normative attitude or stance taken towards their contents.
  - Regular associations are not robust enough to render correctness/incorrectness (elite sets of propositions).
  - Semantics presupposes pragmatics.
- Propositional contents are ascribed to psychological and behavioral states in respect to normative attitudes taken towards the states.
  - In being ascribed with propositional contents, states are taken as being subject to normative assessments.
  - The ascription of propositional contents in virtue of which states have the normative status depends on the attitude taken towards them.

- To be rational (to be able to follow rules, to have intentional contents) is to have states attributed with semantic contents (propositionally structured).
- To the extent that the ascription of normative status is attitudinal, i.e., depends on the states being *treated as such* rather than being intrinsically as such, **rationality is an attributional property.**

Inferentiality of rational norms

- The norms by which propositions are assessed (i.e., given scores in terms of truth-values) are inferential.
- Two propositions are inferentially related iff one follows from or is followed by the other.
- Normativity and inferentiality
  - P_1 should be paired with F_1 and not with F_2. $\leftrightarrow$ P_1 cannot be grouped together with, viz., is inconsistent with, propositions (e.g., P_2) that should be paired with F_2 and not with F_1. What it is for P_1 to be subject to norms is that P_1 implies $\neg P_2$.
  - Conversely, P_1 can be grouped together, viz., is consistent with, propositions (e.g., P_3) that should not be paired with F_2.
- Semantic-rational norms consist in (in)compatibility relations among propositions. That is, semantic-rational norms are rules about what propositions follow from or are followed by what other propositions.
- Modality and inferentiality
  - Material inferentiality: contrarieties, or material incompatibilities (Brandom, Locke?): green, blue, circular, triangular, west, east, etc.
  - Logical inferentiality: contradictions, or logical incompatibilities (Tarski?): P, $\neg P$

Being subject to assessments (human) vs. being subject to treatments (thermometer, animal, etc.)

- Thermometers are not attributed with rationality despite being normatively treatable. This is because non-human entities are subject to norms only in a derivate sense, i.e., in respect to rational agents who condition or maintain these entities to be assessable.
  - The structural systems of non-human entities are proxies to the normative status of their human managers.
- The Sellarsian distinction of *ought-to-be* and *ought-to-do*.
  - merely conforming to rules (accidental) vs. obeying rules (intentional, voluntary)
  - The patterns of thermometers and bee-dancing do obey rules, but unintentionally or involuntarily—inference-like processes.
  - The middle ground between merely conforming and voluntarily obeying: non-accidentally conforming to rules.
    - non-accidental conformity (*ought-to-be*) vs. obedience (*ought-to-do*)
- Non-accidental rule-conforming patterns have their normative status in respect to the rule-obeying agents who manage, train, or theorize about the processes.

- o The normative status of non-human entities is derivate, and the normative attitude (which attributes normative statues) is actually being taken towards the rule-obeying agents.
- Rational agents follow the inferential rules and make conclusions from premises *because it is the right way of doing things*. Non-rational agents follow inferential rules *because they are disposed to do so*.
  - o In being treated as a rational agent, one is attributed with the ability to make inferences himself, i.e., make a speech or act *as a rule-following move*.
    - Only rational agents can choose not to act according to rules.
  - o Kant: acting according to rules vs. acting according to conceptions (representations) of rules