Two-Dimensionalism and Inferentialism

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Agenda

• Aim: Explore the relation between two-dimensional semantics and an inferential-role approach to meaning and content.

• Argue that an (epistemic) 2D view supports an inferentialist view.

• Explore the details of such a view.
Plan

*1. Two-Dimensionalism and Descriptivism

2. Two-Dimensional Inferentialism

3. Problems for Inferentialism

4. Naturalization and Primitive Concepts

5. Inferentialism and Conceptual Analysis
Epistemic Two-Dimensionalism

- Epistemic two-dimensionalism.
  - All expressions associated with
    - 1-intension (scenarios $\rightarrow$ extensions)
    - 2-intension (worlds $\rightarrow$ extensions)
  - S is necessary iff necessary 2-intension.
  - S is a priori iff necessary 1-intension.
Frege Cases

- ‘Hesperus is Phosphorus’ is necessary and a posteriori, so has necessary 2-intension, contingent 1-intension.
- 2-intensions of ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ pick out Venus at all worlds.
- 1-intensions pick out morning star and evening star (respectively) in all scenarios.
2D and Descriptivism

• 2D coheres with a descriptivist approach to meaning/content.

• All names associated a priori with descriptions:
  • e.g. apriori(Hesperus=evening star).

• Descriptions determine 1-intensions.

• Rigidification determines 2-intensions
Conceptual Descriptivism

- Generalized descriptivism: all expressions equivalent to complexes composed from (a few) primitive expressions.
- Conceptual descriptivism: all concepts composed from (a few) primitive concepts.
- Conceptual analysis articulates this structure.
Against Descriptivism

- But: For most expressions, any descriptive analysis is subject to counterexamples.
  - Gettier literature on ‘knowledge’
  - Kripke on names
  - Wierzbicka on everything
- Suggests: most expressions/concepts aren’t equivalent to descriptions/complexes.
Inferentialism

• Idea: Explore inferentialism as a successor to descriptivism here.
Primary intensions

- Primary intension of S
- Mapping from scenarios to truth-values
- True at scenario w iff ‘D → S’ is a priori, where D is canonical specification of w.
- Scenarios = centered worlds or epistemically constructed scenarios.
- Canonical specifications of scenarios: complete specifications in basic vocabulary.
Scrutability Thesis

• Scrutability thesis: There is a compact vocabulary $V$ such that all truths are a priori entailed by a conjunction of $V$-truths.

• E.g. for all truths $M$, apriori($PQTI \rightarrow M$).

• $PQTI =$ scrutability base.
Generalized Scrutability

- There exists a compact vocabulary \( V \) such that if \( S \) is epistemically possible, \( S \) is a priori entailed by some epistemically complete conjunction of \( V \)-sentences.

- \( S \) is e-possible iff \( \sim S \) is not a priori.

- \( S \) is e-complete iff \( S \) is e-possible and there’s no \( T \) such that \( S \& T \) and \( S \& \sim T \) are e-possible.
Basic Vocabulary

• Basic Vocabulary: PQT?I?
  • physics, phenomenal, that’s-all, indexical?
• Refine to
  • phenomenal, nomic, spatiotemporal, logic/math, fundamentality, indexicals, ...?
Inferential Role

• The primary intension of S is defined via its a priori inferential relation to V-truths.
• S’s I-intension true at w iff apriori(D → S).
• Similarly for subsentential expressions.
• Similarly for concepts.
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Inferential Role Semantics

• IRS: An expression’s meaning is given by its entry and exit rules:

• E.g. “and”:
  • A, B ↪ A&B
  • A&B ↪ A
  • A&B ↪ B
2D Inferentialism

- Likewise on 2D account. Meaning (primary intension) of S given by
  - $D_1 \text{ entails } S$
  - $D_2 \text{ entails } \neg S$
  - ...
Entry and Exit Rules

• What about exit rules?
• Entry rules determine exit rules.
  • $S \Rightarrow \sim D_2$
  • $\sim S \Rightarrow \sim D_1$
  • ...
• Harmony, conservativeness guaranteed.
Normative Roles

- On this picture: meaning is constituted by normative inferential role.
- inferences S ideally should enter into, not those it does enter into.
- Relation of normative role to descriptive roles remains to be determined.
Generalizing

• Something similar applies for subsentential expressions
  • individuated by normative entry rules
• And for concepts/thoughts
  • individuated by normative entry rules in thought
Pure and Impure Inferentialism

- Pure inferentialism: the meaning of every expression and content of every concept is determined by inferential role.

- Anchored inferentialism: the meaning of most expressions/concepts is determined by inferential role with respect to basic expressions (anchors). The meaning of anchors is determined some other way.
Anchored Inferentialism

• Epistemic 2D picture
  • Anchors are the primitive concepts/expressions in a generalized scrutability base.
  • All other concepts characterized by inferential role with respect to these.
Theses

• Contents of expressions (tokens? in contexts?) determined by inferential role

• Contents of concepts (qua representations) determined by inferential role.

• Concepts (qua abstract objects) individuated by inferential role?
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1. Inferential Role and Truth-Conditions

• Problem 1 for inferentialism: how does inferential role relate to truth-conditions?

• Answer: Entry rules determine truth-conditions corresponding to primary intension.
2. Narrow and Wide Content

• Problem 2: How does inferential role relate to wide content?

• Answer:
  • Inferential role determines 1-intension;
  • 1-intension plus environment determines extension.
  • extension plus inferential role determines 2-intension
3. Inferential Role and Public Meaning

• Problem 3: Is inferential role subjective meaning rather than public meaning?

• Answer: Yes, to an extent. Different users of a name will have different roles and intensions. But intensions will still be sharable and not entirely holistic.

• Semantic pluralism: There remain other notions of meaning and of content.
4. Defective Roles

- Problem 4: What about defective inferential roles such as
  - A, B \(\lor\) A tonk B \(\lor\) A&B
  - \(x\) is German \(\lor\) \(X\) is boche \(\lor\) \(X\) is cruel
- Answer: meaning determined by entry rules alone. Exit rules will correspond.
5. Coarse-Grained Roles

- Problem 5: Aren’t a priori inferential roles too coarse grained?
- E.g. if a priori (right iff phi), concepts right and phi will have same inferential role
- Math/logic sentences will have same a priori inferential role.
- Answer: Yes. One can invoke less idealized roles, larger basic vocabulary.
Analytic Scrutability

- Analytic Scrutability: There is a compact vocabulary $V$ such that all truths are analytically entailed by a conjunction of $V$-truths.

- Translucency: There is a compact class $V$ of bedrock concepts such that $V$-truths translucently settle all disputes.

- Bases will include previous base plus normative, mathematical, ... concepts?
Fine-Grained Roles

- Fine-grained scenario descriptions:
  - e.g. PQT plus normative plus math...

- Fine-grained roles:
  - e.g. basic inferences from fine-grained descriptions to S.

- Then concepts/contents individuated by fine-grained roles with respect to primitive concepts?
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Naturalizing Content

- So far this is a nonreductive project: characterizing contents while presupposing content.

- Might this be turned into a naturalization project: content determined by inferential role?
Obstacles to Naturalization

- We’ve characterized contents in terms of (1) apriority of inferences/conditionals, (2) contents of primitive concepts.
- A naturalization would need to naturalize (1) and (2).
Obstacle 1: Norms

• Q1: Naturalizing normative inferential role: what is it for inference to be one that one ought to perform?

• A1: Ground in descriptive role?

• A2: Ground in naturalization of rationality?

• A3: Ground in phenomenology?

• A4: Norms as primitive.
Obstacle 2: Primitive Concepts

- Primitive concepts grounded in
  - Causal connections?
  - Acquaintance?
  - Perceptual experience?
  - Structural inferential role?
Carnap vs Russell

• The Carnap/Lewis view of primitives:
  • primitives are structural concepts
  • logic plus fundamental (plus spacetime?)

• The Russell view of primitives
  • primitives are acquaintance concepts
  • sense-data plus universals plus self
Speculation

• My speculation: Primitives include both structural and acquaintance concepts

• Structural concepts: grounded in structural inferential role
  • logic, math, law, fundamental?

• Acquaintance concepts: grounded in acquaintance with referent
  • indexicals, phenomenal, observational?
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Inferentialism and Conceptual Analysis

• This inferentialism is compatible with different models of conceptual analysis

• Corresponding to different conceptions of inferential roles
  • descriptivist
  • particularist
  • defeasible
Descriptivist
Conceptual Analysis

- Descriptivist conceptual analysis: simple descriptive inferential roles
  - $X$ is justified true belief $\rightarrow$ $X$ is knowledge
  - $X$ is knowledge $\rightarrow$ $X$ is justified true belief
Particularist Conceptual Analysis

- Particularist conceptual analysis: scenario-by-scenario inferential roles
  - $x$ is D1 $\Rightarrow$ $x$ is knowledge
  - $x$ is D2 $\Rightarrow$ $x$ is not knowledge
  - ...
Defeasible Conceptual Analysis

- Hierarchical defeasible conceptual roles
  1. \(\neg \text{true}(x) \iff \neg K(x)\)
  2. \(\neg \text{belief}(x) \iff \neg K(x)\)
  3. \(\text{justified}(x) \iff * K(x)\)
  4. \(\text{grounded-in-falsehood}(x) \iff \neg K(x)\)
  5. \(\text{lucky}(x) \iff * \neg K(x)\)
  6. ...

Dynamic Analysis

- Given hierarchical defeasible inferential roles, we should expect conceptual analysis to be a dynamic process
  - conjectures, refutations, refinements
  - a quasi-scientific process yielding increasingly refined approximate analyses
  - results more like biology (defeasible principles) than physics (strict laws).
Optimistic Conclusion

• From the 2D/inferentialist perspective, conceptual analysis is not a failed quest for analyses.

• It’s a successful ongoing attempt to better characterize concepts, their intensions, and their inferential roles.