Philosophy of Language: Living Philosophy in Contemporary Times

AM I UNDERSTANDING YOU CORRECTLY?

12 April 2020

After considering what it is to be thrown into the world of reason and passion, as we are, there is immediate awareness of how such thinking, and feeling, is shaped by the words I spoke, and the words you spoke. Are we really communicating?

THE ESSAY

(The works listed are not a complete coverage of the contemporary field but to provide the best known and most significant in contemporary discussions. Apologies if anything important has been missed)

****

To be able to understand contemporary discourse in the philosophy of language, there is no passing over Ludwig Wittgenstein, who stands as the main transition in analytic philosophy from the logical turn to the linguistic turn. This was made in two steps in publication, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosphicus* and *Philosophical Investigations*.

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosphicus* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1922) was rooted in the work of logicians, Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead. Although a work on logic, Wittgenstein was already thinking about language and communication. As Russell stated in the 'Introduction', the key principles were showing the problems in traditional philosophy (and indeed, one could say, traditional worldviews) from the lessons in symbolism and the misuse of language [7]. Wittgenstein kept to the latter in his whole life, and it was the basis of what is known as 'ordinary language philosophy'. The former developed in another direction, as we seen in the last session of The Philosophy Café. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosphicus* Wittgenstein aimed at a logically perfect language, a goal that he would abandon as impossible in the latter years. Whereas for Russell the "essential business of language is to *assert* or *deny* facts" [8], for Wittgenstein is was a matter of only that the same structure of the sentence and fact are *shown* [8]. This, in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosphicus* is the beginning of Wittgenstein's 'picture' theory of language [9]. Here there was a movement into atomism [10]:

> The symbol for the whole will be a "complex," containing the symbols for the parts. In speaking of a "complex" we are, as will appear later, sinning against the rules of

philosophical grammar, but this is unavoidable at the outset. "Most propositions and questions that have been written about philosophical matters are not false but senseless. We cannot, therefore, answer questions of this kind at all, but only state their senselessness. Most questions and propositions of the philosophers result from the fact that we do not understand the logic of our language. They are of the same kind as the question whether the Good is more or less identical than the Beautiful" (4.003). What is complex in the world is a fact. Facts which are not compounded of other facts are what Mr Wittgenstein calls *Sachverhalte*, whereas a fact which may consist of two or more facts is called a *Tatsache*: thus, for example, "Socrates is wise" is a *Sachverhalt*, as well as a *Tatsache*, whereas "Socrates is wise and Plato is his pupil" is a *Tatsache* but not a *Sachverhalt*. [8]

This fundamentally changes the project of Philosophy: "The object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a theory but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations." This so because, "Every philosophical proposition is bad grammar, and the best that we can hope to achieve by philosophical discussion is to lead people to see that philosophical discussion is a mistake."[Russell 10] Much of Russell's 'Introduction' is developed by Wittgenstein in the first few pages of the *Tractatus*, and he then proceeds into highly technical logic. In the last two pages Wittgenstein goes to make conclusions on ethics which is highly problematic for most ethicists:

6.4. All propositions are of equal value.

6.41. The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is and happens as it does happen. *In* it there is no value—and if there were, it would be of no value. [87]

If there is a value which is of value, it must lie outside all happening and being-so. For all happening and being-so is accidental. [88]

What makes it non-accidental cannot lie in the world, for otherwise this would again be accidental.

It must lie outside the world.

6.42. Hence also there can be no ethical propositions.

Propositions cannot express anything higher.

6.421. It is clear that ethics cannot be expressed.

Ethics are transcendental.

(Ethics and æsthetics are one.) [88]

Where Wittgenstein goes wrong here is that he see ethics in logical form, as a law of 'thou shalt' [and he immediately stated this, 88]. Wittgenstein, here, stands before the 'existential' turn; it is a situation where ethics is reformulated into internal reasoning, and not as objective. Here Wittgenstein is only half right. It is true, that "If good or bad willing changes the world, it can only change the limits of the world, not the facts;…" but wrong to conclude, "…not the things that can be expressed in language." [6.43, 88] That something is wrong in Wittgenstein's logic here is revealed in his immediately following thought that, "The world of the happy is quite another than that of the unhappy." But surely there is only one world where the happy and the unhappy coincide. We have here the very reason why Wittgenstein would latter turn to language games that are separate worlds. However, that creates a very unethical non-communication in the one shared world. Much of what Wittgenstein is saying at the end of the *Tractatus* is his turn to mysticism. In fact, in the next period of his life he joined into a religious community and engaged in religious literature (i.e. Fyodor Dostoyevsky). This is the very conclusion of the *Tractatus*:

6.54. My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)

He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly.

7. Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent. [90]

But is Wittgenstein is right? If semantics is such a logical structure, only reference and not sense [Frege], then Wittgenstein is correct in his views, and in his communication. However, as Wittgenstein points out, all philosophical propositions are shown to be mistaken, and Wittgenstein's marked off his mysticism as a language game untouched by the criticisms of other worlds. Mysticism as 'religion' is not silent, however, and does speak about the way the world is. It is a sleight of hand to then isolate the mystic's worldview by pretending that adherents can throw away the ladder. Ethics are not transcendental if there is a real world we all share.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (Commemorative edition, Blackwell Publishing, 2001; originally 1953) was his final attempt to systematically bring his project together, framed by the concept/picture of language games. It is worth noting that it happened right near the end of his life. Propositions 3 and 7 first introduces the thought:

3. Augustine, we might say, does describe a system of communication; only not everything that we call language is this system. And one has to say this in many cases where the question arises "Is this an appropriate description or not?" The answer is: "Yes, it is appropriate, but only for this narrowly circumscribed region, not for the whole of what you were claiming to describe."

It is as if someone were to say: "A game consists in moving objects about on a surface according to certain rules . . ."—and we replied: You seem to be thinking of board games, but there are others. You can make your definition correct by expressly restricting it to those games.

7. In the practice of the use of language (2) ['That philosophical concept of meaning has its place in a primitive idea of the way language functions'] one party calls out the words, the other acts on them. In instruction in the language the following process will occur: the learner names the objects; that is, he utters the word when the teacher points to the stone.—And there will be this still simpler exercise: the pupil repeats the words after the teacher——both of these being processes resembling language.

We can also think of the whole process of using words in (2) as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games "language-games" and will sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game.

And the processes of naming the stones and of repeating words after someone might also be called language-games. Think of much of the use of words in games like ring-a-ring-a-roses.

I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the "language-game".

This is straightforward as a matter of communication, where it gets difficult is the alignment of the sentence (communication) and fact (reality), and here Wittgenstein sees language as imagining life-form:

18. [Symbolism] …for these are, so to speak, suburbs of our language. (And how many houses or streets does it take before a town begins to be a town?) Our

language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.

19. It is easy to imagine a language consisting only of orders and reports in battle.— Or a language consisting only of questions and expressions for answering yes and no. And innumerable others.—— And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life. …

The problematic truth that Wittgenstein appears to be expressing is that if you cannot imagine the life-form there is no communication. In his discussion on colour, he stated:

57. … For suppose you cannot remember the colour any more?—When we forget which colour this is the name of, it loses its meaning for us; that is, we are no longer able to play a particular language-game with it. And the situation then is comparable with that in which we have lost a paradigm which was an instrument of our language,

There is a way out of the problem for Wittgenstein in his conceptual discussion on naming:

59. "A name signifies only what is an element of reality. What cannot be destroyed; what remains the same in all changes."—But what is that?—Why, it swam before our minds as we said the sentence! This was the very expression of a quite particular image: of a particular picture which we want to use. For certainly experience does not shew us these elements. We see component parts of something composite (of a chair, for instance). We say that the back is part of the chair, but is in turn itself composed of several bits of wood; while a leg is a simple component part. We also see a whole which changes (is destroyed) while its component parts remain unchanged. These are the materials from which we construct that picture of reality.

That is fine in one kind of act in naming, but Wittgenstein realizes it hits upon a problem in an internal reasoning on matters such as 'pain'. Here the imagination can wonder beyond what is real, towards an object, but in such a case something is amiss:

283. What gives us *so much as the idea* that living beings, things, can feel?

Is it that my education has led me to it by drawing my attention to feelings in myself, and now I transfer the idea to objects outside myself? That I recognize that there is something there (in me) which I can call "pain" without getting into conflict with the way other people use this word?—I do not transfer my idea to stones, plants, etc.

Couldn't I imagine having frightful pains and turning to stone while they lasted? Well, how do I know, if I shut my eyes, whether I have not turned into a stone? And if that has happened, in what sense will *the stone* have the pains? In what sense will they be ascribable to the stone? And why need the pain have a bearer at all here?!

And can one say of the stone *that* it has a soul and that is what has the pain? What has a soul, or pain, to do with a stone?

Only of what behaves like a human being can one say that it has pains.

For one has to say it of a body, or, if you like of a soul which some body has. And how can a body have a soul?

Where this leads, for Wittgenstein, is the way 'descriptions' work between language games, where there is something 'misleading' in the imagination, and can only be shown:

291. What we call "*descriptions*" are instruments for particular uses. Think of a machine-drawing, a cross-section, an elevation with measurements, which an engineer has before him. Thinking of a description as a word-picture of the facts has something misleading about it: one tends to think only of such pictures as hang on our walls: which seem simply to portray how a thing looks, what it is like. (These pictures are as it were idle.)

295. … Suppose everyone does say about himself that he knows what pain is only from his own pain.—Not that people really say that, or are even prepared to say it. But //everybody said it——it might be a kind of exclamation. And even if it gives no information, still it is a picture, and why should we not want to call up such a picture? Imagine an allegorical painting take the place of those words.

When we look into ourselves as we do philosophy, we often get to see just such a picture. A full-blown pictorial representation of our grammar. Not facts; but as it were illustrated turns of speech.

296. "Yes, but there is something there all the same accompanying my cry of pain. And it is on account of that that I utter it. And this something is what is important—and frightful."—Only whom are we informing of this? And on what occasion?

300. It is—we should like to say—not merely the picture of the behaviour that plays a part in the language-game with the words "he is in pain", but also the picture of the pain. Or, not merely the paradigm of the behaviour, but also that of the pain.—It is a misunderstanding to say "The picture of pain enters into the language-game with the word 'pain'." The image of pain is not a picture and this image is not replaceable in the language-game by anything that we should call a picture.—The image of pain certainly enters into the language game in a sense; only not as a picture.

301. An image is not a picture, but a picture can correspond to it.

For most readers of Wittgenstein, these statements look unclear, and somewhat confusing. Image is not a Picture, and vice versa? Wittgenstein also had a terrible habit racing between analogies and metaphors, which makes matters worse. However, Wittgenstein moves onto questions in the philosophy of mind, further on in the *Philosophical Investigations*, and the ideas of the language-games became clearer (or at least it does to me):

355 . The point here is not that our sense-impressions can lie, but that we understand their language. (And this language like any other is founded on convention.)

358. But isn't it our meaning it that gives sense to the sentence? (And here, of course, belongs the fact that one cannot mean a senseless series of words.) And 'meaning it' is something in the sphere of the mind. But it is also something private! It is the intangible something; only comparable to consciousness itself. How could this seem ludicrous? It is, as it were, a dream of our language.

359. Could a machine think?——Could it be in pain?—Well, is the human body to be called such a machine? It surely comes as close as possible to being such a machine.

360. But a machine surely cannot think!—Is that an empirical statement? No. We only say of a human being and what is like one that it thinks. We also say it of dolls and no doubt of spirits too. Look at the word "to think" as a tool.

361. The chair is thinking to itself: .... .

WHERE? In one of its parts? Or outside its body; in the air around it? Or not anywhere at all? But then what is the difference between this chair's saying

something to itself and another one's doing so, next to it?—But then how is it with man: where does he say things to himself? How does it come about that this question seems senseless; and that no specification of a place is necessary except just that this man is saying something to himself? Whereas the question where the chair talks to itself seems to demand an answer.—The reason is: we want to know how the chair is supposed to be like a human being; whether, for instance, the head is at the top of the back and so on.

What is it like to say something to oneself; what happens here?— How am I to explain it? Well, only as you might teach someone the meaning of the expression "to say something to oneself". And certainly we learn the meaning of that as children.— Only no one is going to say that the person who teaches it to us tells us 'what takes place'.

The important difference that Wittgenstein that appears to be drawing out is an instrumental approach (external reasoning in 'use') and consciousness (internal reasoning in 'imagining' or 'perception'):

426. A picture is conjured up which seems to fix the sense unambiguously. The actual use, compared with that suggested by the picture, seems like something muddied. Here again we get the same thing as in set theory: the form of expression we use seems to have been designed for a god, who knows what we cannot know; he sees the whole of each of those infinite series and he sees into human consciousness. For us, of course, these forms of expression are like pontificals which we may put on, but cannot do much with, since we lack the effective power that would give these vestments meaning and purpose. In the actual use of expressions we make detours, we go by sideroads. We see the straight highway before us, but of course we cannot use it, because it is permanently closed.

427. "While I was speaking to him I did not know what was going on in his head." In saying this, one is not thinking of brain-processes, but of thought-processes. The picture should be taken seriously. We should really like to see into his head. And yet we only mean what elsewhere we should mean by saying: we should like to know what he is thinking. I want to say: we have this vivid picture—and that use, apparently contradicting the picture, which expresses the psychical.

Wittgenstein then moves to a greater clarity between language and the reality of the life-form:

431. "There is a gulf between an order and its execution. It has to be filled by the act of understanding."

"Only in the act of understanding is it meant that we are to do THIS. The order——why, that is nothing but sounds, ink-marks.—"

432. Every sign by itself seems dead. What gives it life?—In use it is alive. Is life breathed into it there?—Or is the use its life?

It is here that we see what is meant between a 'dead language' and a language that expresses (in the 'use') *life*.

*****

The lengthy exploration of Wittgenstein has been necessary before considering (other) contemporary discourse in the philosophy of language. I have not mentioned Wittgenstein's principle of there being no 'private language'; language being thoroughly social. That thought will be important in the discussion of the contemporary philosophy. It might seem that Wittgenstein said all that could be said on language, but contemporary philosophy has, in fact, taken the understanding of language in different directions. This was particularly achieved by seven philosophers: Hilary Putnam (1926 - 2016), Noam Chomsky (1928 -), John Searle (1932 -), Jacques Bouveresse (1940 -), Saul Kripke (1940 -), Tyler Burge (1946 -), and Robert Brandom (1950 -). Each either focuses on either the logical or semantic form, as discussed above. Although this is only a convenient matter in categorisation, the main focus of each philosopher helps to articulate the new directions; bearing in mind that discussions of logical or semantic forms are not silos in language games – they can be referenced in the same sentence from any philosopher. Those who line up more as the logicians are Bouveresse, Kripke, and Brandom as a special case. Those who line up more as the semanticists are Burge, Putnam, Chomsky, and Searle. With the exception of Burge, the latter are the older generation, and the former the younger. Brandom, the youngest of this set, is special because, like Wittgenstein, he is a logician who articulates greater 'expressivist' semantics.

LANGUAGE AND LOGIC

Jacques Bouveresse's *La philosophie des sciences, du positivisme logique in Histoire de la philosophie* (1969), and his L*angage, perception et réalité, tome 2, Physique, phénoménologie et grammaire* (2004) stands as the exception to the English dominance in the field on the question of language and logic. French philosophy has tended to operate separately to the Anglo-American analytic discussion, and so it might be good to start with someone who is more a 'traditionalist' in the broader analytical tradition, but an outsider as far as the Anglo-American dominance. Bouveresse's philosophy is a continuation of the intellectual and philosophical tradition of central Europe (Brentano, Boltzmann, Helmholtz, Frege, the Vienna Circle, Kurt Gödel). Unlike the late-period Wittgenstein, the outlook is positivistic. This puts Expressivism[1] or Descriptivism[2] in the frame as a problem when the semantic analysis is based on a logical misunderstanding. Bouveresse denounced the literary distortion drawn from the incompleteness theorems of Kurt Gödel. According to Bouveresse, the incompleteness of a formal system which applies to *certain* mathematical systems in no way implies the incompleteness of sociology, which is not a formal system; thus securing the language of positivistic sociology.

The attack on Descriptivism (see footnote below) was led by causal theorists[3], such as Kripke and Putnam. In Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* (1972) several questions are considered:

- How do names refer to things in the world? (the problem of intensionality)
- Are all statements that can be known *a priori* necessarily true, and are all statements that are known a posteriori contingently true?
- Do objects (including people) have any essential properties?
- What is the nature of identity?
- How do natural kind terms refer and what do they mean?

The book began as a series of lectures in linguistic logic to criticise the descriptivist theory of naming and then to produce a 'noncircularity condition' to produce his causal theory. An edited version appeared thus:

---

[1] **Expressivism**: The primary function of moral sentences is not to assert any matter of fact, but rather to express an evaluative attitude toward an object of evaluation.

[2] **Descriptivism**: The view that the meaning or semantic content of a proper name is identical to the descriptions associated with it by speakers, while their referents are determined to be the objects that satisfy these descriptions.

[3] A **causal theory** of reference is a theory of how terms acquire specific referents based on evidence.

1. To every name or designating expression 'X', there corresponds a cluster of properties, namely the family of those properties ф such that A believes 'фX'.
2. One of the properties, or some conjointly, are believed by A to pick out some individual uniquely.
3. If most, or a weighted most, of the ф's are satisfied by one unique object y, then y is the referent of 'X'.
4. If the vote yields no unique object, 'X' does not refer.
5. The statement, 'If X exists, then X has most of the ф's' is known a priori by the speaker.
6. The statement, 'If X exists, then X has most of the ф's' expresses a necessary truth (in the idiolect[4] of the speaker).

(C) For any successful theory, the account must not be circular. The properties which are used in the vote must not themselves involve the notion of reference in such a way that it is ultimately impossible to eliminate.

Sections of the book also dealt with the questions in the philosophy of mind, which can be considered at the forthcoming session in The Philosophy Café. Kripke is seen as a major interpreter of Wittgenstein.

LANGUAGE AND REALISM

Tyler Burge's paper 'Individualism and Self-Knowledge' (1988), and his *Origins of Objectivity* (2010), represents a crossing-over of the hard logicians' focus into the semantics of realism. The school of thought here is 'Anti-individualism' and also known as *content* externalism. The labels are terribly confusing. The view is really not 'anti-individual' but argues that what *seems* to be internal to the individual is to some degree dependent on the social environment, thus self-knowledge, intentions, reasoning and moral value may variously be seen as being determined by factors outside the person. Burge had set out to argue for a *limited* agreement with the Cartesian model of self-cognition. The position was not denying self-cognition (individual) but rather offering a statement of realism: that, the cogito does **not** give us knowledge of the individuation conditions of our thoughts which enables us to 'shut off' their *individuation conditions* from the physical environment. This is a *content*

---

[4] **Idiolect** is an individual's distinctive and unique use of language, including speech. An idiolect is the variety of language unique to an individual. This differs from a dialect, a common set of linguistic characteristics shared among some group of people.

externalism, not an epistemic externalism which places reasoning externally to assume internalised judgments. However, within the school of thought, there are debates on the consequences of accepting content externalism. Michael McKinsey, for example, argues that there is no warrant to an epistemic narrow state of mind (i.e. privileged access) and that there is only a wide state of mind as influenced by the conditions of individuation of thought. The idea of not having privileged access appears to align with Wittgenstein's 'no private language' principle but it then it makes the 'individuation of thought' non-cognitive, without reason. What is the 'individuation of thought' if it is not the *reasoning* 'wide state of mind'? Pushing the anti-individualist position would absurdly lead to denying a person having authoritative knowledge of their own thought contents. Burge, however, has argued that anti-individualism is compatible with knowledge of our own mental states. Conversely, he has also argued that it presents no problems for our understanding of causation.

This direction is pushing matters beyond linguistics or language into epistemology and philosophy of mind. The direction, though, is inescapable, in the representational theory of language where there is some kind of relations between a thought expressed and a corresponding 'reality'. What kind of relations are at work are famously explored in Hilary Putnam's *Representation and Reality* (1988), his *Realism with a Human Face (*1990), and *Naturalism, Realism, and Normativity* (2016). Putnam is another causal theorist who believes the descriptivist theory is insufficient. Putnam's approach to the problem was to attempted middle paths between the projects of functionalism[5] and of identity theories[6] that reveal Coherentism[7]. Throughout his life Putnam proposed different positions only to abandon them for a different reformulation, particularly on versions of realism. On language, though, Putnam put the view that that 'meaning just ain't in the head'; a position articulated as Semantic Externalism, where one can claim without contradiction that two speakers could be in exactly the same brain state at the time of an utterance, and yet mean different things by that utterance, that is, the term picks out a different extension. Putnam's

---

[5] **Functionalism**: states that mental states (beliefs, desires, being in pain, etc.) are constituted solely by their functional role, which means, their causal relations with other mental states, sensory inputs and behavioural outputs

[6] Identity theory of mind asserts that mental events can be grouped into types, and can then be correlated with types of physical events in the brain. One type of mental event, such as 'mental pains' will, presumably, turn out to be describing one type of physical event (like C-fiber firings). This can be contrasts with another type, token identity where mental events are unlikely to have "steady" or categorical biological correlates. The type–token distinction is the difference between naming a class (type) of objects and naming the individual instances (tokens) of that class. Since each type may be represented by multiple tokens, there are generally more tokens than types of an object. For example, two persons having the same "type" of car need not mean that they share a "token", a single vehicle.

[7] **Coherentism** is a view about the structure and system of knowledge, or else justified belief. In this view epistemic justification is a property of a belief only if that belief is a member of a coherent set. What distinguishes coherentism from other theories of justification is that the set is the primary bearer of justification.

'Twin Earth' thought experiment is often used, where 'H2O' on one earth and 'XYZ' on another are externality for its meaning.

That was Putnam's contribution in the semantic or 'sense' side of the logic. In terms of 'reference' Putnam stated that objects referred to by natural kind terms—such as lion, water, and tree—are the principal elements of the meaning of such terms, but there is a further linguistic division of labour So, for example, the reference of the term 'lion' is fixed by the community of zoologists, the reference of the term 'elm tree' is fixed by the community of botanists, and the reference of the term 'table salt' is fixed as "NaCl" by chemists. These are referents and are considered rigid designators in the Kripkean sense.

From this point Putnam develops a type of Semantic Holism[8]. Putnam specifies a finite sequence of elements (a vector) for the description of the meaning of every term in the language. Such a vector consists of four components:

1. the object to which the term refers, e.g., the object individuated by the chemical formula H2O;
2. a set of typical descriptions of the term, referred to as 'the stereotype', e.g., 'transparent', 'colourless', and 'hydrating';
3. the semantic indicators that place the object into a general category, e.g., 'natural kind' and "liquid";
4. the syntactic indicators, e.g., 'concrete noun' and 'mass noun'.

Such a 'meaning-vector' provides a description of the reference and use of an expression within a particular linguistic community. It provides the conditions for its correct usage and makes it possible to judge whether a single speaker attributes the appropriate meaning to that expression or whether its use has changed enough to cause a difference in its meaning.

---

[8] **Semantic Holism** is a theory which gives effect that a certain part of language, be it a term or a complete sentence, can only be understood through its relations to a (previously understood) larger segment of language. There is substantial controversy, however, as to exactly what the larger segment of language in question consists of.

LANGUAGE AND SCIENCE

John Searle and Noam Chomsky pushed the different directions in the philosophy of language much more into questions of the applied sciences. Both figures have contentiously engaged in the political sphere. John Searle's *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (1969) and his famous essay, "Minds, Brains, and Programs" (1980) are particularly important. A speech act is something expressed by an individual that not only presents information, but performs an action as well. Much of the theory had been seen in J. L. Austin's development of performative utterances[9] and his theory of locutionary[10], illocutionary[11], and perlocutionary acts[12]. Searle's role was to synthesize these ideas, as well as those from many other colleagues – Wittgenstein and G.C.J. Midgley, R. M. Hare, P. F. Strawson, John Rawls and William Alston. The concepts presented in the book are the distinction between the 'illocutionary force' and the 'propositional content' of an utterance. According to Searle, the sentences...

1. Sam smokes habitually.
2. Does Sam smoke habitually?
3. Sam, smoke habitually!
4. Would that Sam smoked habitually!

...each indicate the same propositional content (Sam smoking habitually) but differ in the illocutionary force indicated (respectively, a statement, a question, a command and an expression of desire). Searle brings together two important ideas here. Illocutionary acts are characterised by their having 'conditions of satisfaction' (an idea adopted from Strawson's 1971 paper 'Meaning and Truth') and a Direction of Fit[13] (an idea adopted from Austin and

---

[9] **Performative Utterances or Speech Acts** are sentences which not only describe a given reality, but also change the social reality they are describing.

[10] A **Locutionary Act** is the performance of an utterance, and hence of a speech act.

[11] The concept of an **Illocutionary Act** is central to the concept of a speech act, however, there are several scholarly opinions as to how to define 'illocutionary acts'. The closest idea might be from Austen who pointed to 'by saying something, we do something', as when someone issues an order to someone to go by saying 'Go!', or when a minister joins two people in marriage saying, 'I now pronounce you husband and wife.'

[12] **Perlocutionary Acts** always have a 'perlocutionary effect' which is the effect a speech act has on a listener. This could affect the listener's thoughts, emotions or even their physical actions. While illocutionary acts relate more to the speaker, perlocutionary acts are centred on the listener.

[13] **Direction of Fit** is used to describe the distinctions that are offered by two related sets of opposing terms:

- The more general set of mind-to-world (i.e., mind-to-fit-world, not from-mind-to-world) vs. world-to-mind (i.e., world-to-fit-mind) and
- The narrower, more specific set, word-to-world (i.e., word-to-fit-world) vs. world-to-word (i.e., world-to-fit-word).

Elizabeth Anscombe). Searle also had much to say about 'intentionality'[14] which moved the discussion more into the philosophy of mind.

Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* (1957) and 'The Responsibility of Intellectuals' (1967) was another revolutionary movement in the philosophy of language. The basis of Chomsky's linguistic theory lies in biolinguistics, the linguistic school that holds that the principles underpinning the structure of language are biologically pre-set in the human mind and hence genetically inherited. In Chomsky's view, humans share the same underlying linguistic structure, irrespective of sociocultural differences, and thus produce great political inference into the large and radical democratic project. Furthermore, there is in Chomsky's nativist[15], internalist view of language a great rejection of B. F. Skinner's radical behaviorism[16]. Chomsky's theory of universal grammar proposes that if human beings are brought up under normal conditions (not those of extreme sensory deprivation), then they will always develop language with certain properties (e.g., distinguishing nouns from verbs, or distinguishing function words from content words). The theory proposes that there is an innate, genetically determined language faculty that knows these rules, making it easier and faster for children to learn to speak than it otherwise would be. Chomsky reasoned that the primary linguistic data must be supplemented by an innate linguistic capacity. This can be explained by seeing a human baby and a kitten as both capable of inductive reasoning. If they are exposed to exactly the same linguistic data, the human will always acquire the ability to understand and produce language, while the kitten will never acquire either ability. Chomsky labelled whatever relevant capacity the human has that the cat lacks the language acquisition device, and suggested that one of linguists' tasks should be to determine what that device is and what constraints it imposes on the range of possible human languages. The universal features that result from these constraints would constitute 'universal grammar'.

---

[14] **Intentionality** is exclusively mental, being the power of minds to represent or symbolize over, things, properties and states of affairs in the external world.

[15] **Nativism** is the view that certain skills or abilities are 'native' or hard-wired into the brain at birth.

[16] **Radical Behaviourism** is the view that behaviours (including talking and thinking) are a completely learned product of the interactions between organisms and their environments.

BRINGING IT TOGETHER

Starting with Wittgenstein, it is appropriate to conclude with Robert Brandom. Robert Brandom's *Making it Explicit* (1994) and his *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* (2009) brings the pragmatism of Richard Rorty and the nominalism of David Lewis to bear in possibly the largest of reach. It is said that Brandom's work is the first fully systematic and technically rigorous attempt to explain the meaning of linguistic items in terms of their socially norm-governed use (Wittgenstein's 'meaning as use'). Brandom provides a non-representationalist[17] account of the intentionality of thought and the rationality of action. In opposing Representationalism[18] Brandom draws out Inferentialism[19] and its relationship to Logical Expressivism[20]. Brandom is particularly important in drawing together one of largest sway of ideas in philosophy of language, alongside from those mentioned, Wilfrid Sellars, Michael Dummett, John McDowell, and way back to the works of Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, Gottlob Frege, and (of course) Ludwig Wittgenstein.

****

---

[17] **Anti-Representationalism** or **Non-Representationalism** is the view according to which perception is not a process of constructing internal representations. It aligns with direct or naïve realism.

[18] **Representationalism** relates the tradition of basing semantics on the concept of representation, and aligns with indirect or representational realism. It is the position that our conscious experience is not of the real world itself but of an internal representation, a miniature virtual-reality replica of the world. In psychology, that is the view of the world as interpretations of sensory input derived from an external world that is real.

[19] **Inferentialism** is the conviction for an expression to be meaningful is to be governed by a certain kind of inferential rules.

[20] **Logical Expressivism** is the conviction that logic is expressive in the sense that it makes explicit or codifies certain aspects of the inferential structure of our discursive practice.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bouveresse, Jacques. *La philosophie des sciences, du positivisme logique in Histoire de la philosophie*, François Châtelet, 1969-1971.

Bouveresse, Jacques. *Langage, perception et réalité, tome 2, Physique, phénoménologie et grammaire*, Jacqueline Chambon, 2004.

Brandom, Robert. *Making it Explicit*, Harvard University Press, 1994.

Brandom, Robert. *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas*, Harvard University Press, 2009.

Burge, Tyler. 'Individualism and Self-Knowledge', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1988, 85: 649-663.

Burge, Tyler. *Origins of Objectivity*, Oxford University Press, 2010.

Chomsky, Noam. *Syntactic Structures*, Walter de Gruyter, 1957.

Chomsky, Noam. 'The Responsibility of Intellectuals', *The New York Review of Books*, 23 February 1967.

Kripke, Saul. *Naming and Necessity*, Harvard University Press, 1972.

Mckinsey, Michael. 'Anti-Individualism and Privileged Access', *Analysis*, 1991, 51 (1): 9-16.

Putnam, Hilary. *Representation and Reality*, MIT Press, 1988.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Putnam, Hilary. *Realism with a Human Face,* Harvard University Press, 1990.

Putnam, Hilary. *Naturalism, Realism, and Normativity*, Harvard University Press, 2016.

Searle, John. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge University Press, 1969.

Searle, John. 'Minds, Brains, and Programs', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 1980, 3 (3): 417-457.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosphicus*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1922.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, Commemorative edition, Blackwell Publishing, 2001 (originally 1953).

*****