

## Handout for Week 4

### Conceptual Realism and a Representational Semantic Metavocabulary for Reason Relations

William James: “The trail of the human serpent is over all.”

G. W. F. Hegel: “On he who looks on the world rationally, the world looks rationally back.”

#### Recap:

1. A minimal model of discursive practice includes:
  - Speech acts of *assertion* and *denial* by uttering declarative sentences, which express
  - Practical attitudes of *accepting* and *rejecting*, which are
  - Doxastic *commitments*, *entitlement* to which can be
  - *Challenged* and *defended* by further claims.
  - Reason relations of *implication* (consequence) and *incompatibility*, determining which claimables are reasons *for* and reasons *against* other claimables, and so which are suitable as defenses and challenges.
2. Gilbert Harman: “There is no such thing as deductive inference.” We must distinguish *relations* of implication from inferential *practices*. (1984) “Logic and reasoning.” *Synthese*, 60(1):107–127.
3. Greg Restall’s and David Ripley’s bilateral normative pragmatics for the sequent calculus defines reason relations:
  - $\Gamma$  *implies* A iff the position of being committed to *accept* all of  $\Gamma$  and to *reject* A is “out of bounds”: a constellation of commitments to which one cannot be entitled.
  - $\Gamma$  is *incompatible* with A iff the position of being committed to *accept* all of  $\Gamma$  and to *accept* A is “out of bounds”: a constellation of commitments to which one cannot be entitled.

#### Representational, Model-Theoretic Semantics:

4. Kit Fine’s truth-maker semantics:
  - A universe of states,
  - Divided into possible and impossible states. (*Modal* structure)
  - States can be fused with others to form new states as wholes, of which they are parts. (*Mereological* structure)

- A semantic interpretation function assigns declarative sentences to pairs of sets of states, understood as the truth-makers and falsity-makers (verifiers and falsifiers) of those sentences, subject to the condition of
- Exclusivity: every fusion of truth-makers of a sentence with any falsity-maker of that sentence is an impossible state.
- Consequence as Entailment:  $\Gamma$  entails A iff every verifier of all of  $\Gamma$  is a verifier of A.
- Consequence as Containment: A contains  $\Gamma$  iff every verifier of A includes as a part a verifier of all of  $\Gamma$  and every verifier of all of  $\Gamma$  is a part of a verifier of A.
- There are many more propositions (=df. pairs of sets of states satisfying Exclusivity) than can be expressed by the sentences of any particular language.

5. Key Suggestion:

Define Consequence as *Implication* in the truth-maker framework by analogy to Exclusivity.

Definition:  $\Gamma$  implies A iff every fusion of any truth-maker of all of  $\Gamma$  with any falsity-maker of A is an impossible state.

This definition of consequence uses both the modal and the mereological structure of TM.

6. Hlobil isomorphism of bilateral normative pragmatic definition of reason relations and truth-maker semantic definition:

- Pragmatic consequence:  $\Gamma$  implies A iff any position that includes accepting all of  $\Gamma$  and rejecting A is normatively incoherent or “out of bounds”: one cannot be entitled to such a constellation of commitments.
- Semantic consequence:  $\Gamma$  implies A iff any fusion of a state that verifies all the members of  $\Gamma$  with a state that falsifies A is an impossible state.
- Pragmatic incompatibility:  $\Gamma$  is incompatible with A  $\Leftrightarrow$  the position resulting from concomitant commitment to *accept* all of  $\Gamma$  and to *accept* A is normatively *incoherent* (“out of bounds”): a constellation of commitments to which one *cannot* be entitled.
- Semantic incompatibility:  $\Gamma$  is incompatible with A  $\Leftrightarrow$  the state resulting from *fusion* of any *verifiers* of all the members of  $\Gamma$  with any *verifier* of A is an *impossible* state.

Representation and Conceptual Realism

7. A key element of early modern philosophers’ response to the rise of the new science was to move from thinking of appearance in terms of its *resemblance to* reality to thinking of it in terms of its *representation of* reality.

8. Looking at Descartes’ algebraic representation of geometrical properties, Spinoza understood the new notion of representation in *holistic* terms of a *global* isomorphism: “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.” (*Ethics* II, Prop 7.)

9. Kant took a further step away from the original *perceptual* paradigm of the appearance/reality distinction by focusing on specifically *conceptual* appearances.
10. “Kant was on the right track when he insisted that just as concepts are essentially (and not accidentally) items which can occur in judgments, so judgments (and, therefore, indirectly concepts) are essentially (and not accidentally) items which can occur in reasonings or arguments.” Wilfrid Sellars (“Inference and Meaning” [I-4].)
11. Kant’s generic term for the rational, norm-governed discursive activities that confer conceptual form is ‘synthesis.’ In the first instance, what is synthesized is a constellation of commitments having the kind of rational unity characteristic of apperception. The conceptual contents of judgments, the most basic kind of conceptual representation, are their potentials for being integrated into wholes having that sort of synthetic unity. In judging one undertakes critical, ampliative, and justificatory rational task-responsibilities.
12. Construed as the product of discursive activities, conceptual form is restricted to representings, and to what is represented only *as* represented. This is *conceptual phenomenalism*: the picture of conceptual appearances of an ultimately nonconceptual reality. Kant’s form is his transcendental idealism.
13. There is a worry (not further explored here) that if reality is understood as natively nonconceptual, then conceptual appearances must fundamentally misrepresent it. McDowell’s *Mind and World* is an extended investigation of the pathology of understanding the conceptual as having an “outer boundary” that restricts it to our thoughts. Hegel had raised this issue about Kant’s conceptual phenomenalism in the opening paragraph of the Introduction to his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, objecting to a conception of the conceptual as marking a  
...strict line of demarcation separating knowledge and the absolute. For if knowledge is the instrument to take hold of the absolute essence, one is immediately reminded that the application of an instrument to a thing does not leave the thing as it is, but brings about a shaping and alteration of it. Or, if knowledge is not an instrument for our activity, but a more or less passive medium through which the light of truth reaches us, then again we do not receive this truth as it is in itself, but as it is in and through this medium. In both cases we employ a means which immediately brings about the opposite of its own end....
14. Kant properly rejects the heroic strategy for securing conceptual realism that treats represented reality as itself consisting entirely of representings—both in the form of Berkeley’s single divine world-representer and in Leibniz’s pluralistic monadological version.

15. They said “You have a blue guitar,  
You do not play things as they are.”  
The man replied: “Things as they are  
Are changed upon the blue guitar.”  
And they said then: “But play you must, a tune beyond us, yet ourselves,  
A tune upon the blue guitar, of things *exactly* as they are.”

Wallace Stevens, “The Blue Guitar.”

Conclusion: Bimodal Conceptual Realism

16. The challenge is to specify a conception of the conceptual that underwrites a *conceptual realism* according to which not only our representings, on the subjective side of the intentional, representational nexus between linguistic appearance and reality, but also what is there to be represented on the objective side, are understood to be in conceptual shape.

17. The key to conceptual realism is understanding conceptual form as role with respect to reason *relations*, rather than reasoning: the Harman distinction. For relations of a kind of *inclusion* (consequence, implication) and *exclusion* (inconsistency, incompatibility) characterize both discursive thought and the world thought about. We understand these as *reason* relations (so as functionally defining specifically *conceptual* form) because of the role they play *pragmatically* as norms governing what claimables are properly treated as reasons for and against what other claimables. But it turns out that we can then see relations articulating the world that is there to be represented semantically as *isomorphic* to those that articulate discursive practice.

18. Reason relations are modally robust. The modality is different on the subjective side of appearance than on the objective side of reality. The modality characteristic of consequence and incompatibility on the pragmatic side of reason relations implicit in practices of rationally defending and challenging (giving reasons for and against) claimings is a *deontic normative* matter of what constellations of *commitments* one can be or is precluded from being *entitled* to. The modality characteristic of consequence and incompatibility on the side of the metaphysics of representational semantics is an *alethic modal* matter of what combinations of states are *possible* or *impossible*. This is *bimodal* conceptual realism.

19. Exercise: Read what Hegel calls “idealism” in his *Phenomenology* as conceptual realism in this specifically bimodal sense. (Cheat sheet: *A Spirit of Trust*.)