August 18, 2020

Handout for Week 1:

Representation, Representationalism, and Two Varieties of Antirepresentationalism

'Representation' exhibits "the notorious 'ing'/'ed' ambiguity." We should distinguish representings, representeds, and relations of representation between them.

From understanding relations between appearance and reality, mind and world, in terms of *resemblance* to understanding them in terms of *representation*. Required by the New Science. Copernicus, Galileo, and Descartes's conceptual invention.

Spinoza on the *holistic* lesson of Descartes's analytic geometry for understanding representation.

Two Cartesian regresses:
1. On representings of representings: If anything is known representationally, something (some representings) must be known *non*representationally (immediately).
2. On representings of representational relations. Epistemological skepticism threatens unless there is a *structural* (e.g. divine) guarantee of general isomorphism.

Understanding the Enlightenment divide between Rationalist and Empiricist philosophers in terms representation:
- Kant on two species of representation: sentence-like thoughts and picture-like sensations. Rationalists take concepts as primary, treat sensations as defective concepts. Empiricists take sensations as primary, treat concepts as abstract, indefinite sensations.
- Holism/Atomism: Spinoza and Leibniz are holists about representation, Locke and Hume are atomists.
- Order of explanation: Empiricists treat *representation* as primitive, and explain *reasons* (inference) in terms of it (badly). Rationalists treat *reasons* (inferential relations) as primitive, and explain *representational relations* in terms of it (obscurely).
- Sellars: Mistaken commitment common to both rationalists and empiricists is that if ideas don't represent something, they are defective. Empiricists start with a narrow notion of representation, and Procrusteanly exclude a whole lot of ideas as defective, because not representational in that narrow sense. Rationalists take a broad view of what ideas are essential, and extravagantly postulate things (universals, values…) for them to represent.

Some lessons from Enlightenment treatments of representation:
- It is an essentially *holistic* notion: a matter of *global* isomorphism between representings and representeds.
- It has an *alethic modal* character. Knowledge requires subjunctively robust relations between representeds and representings: if the representeds *were* or *had been* different,

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the representings *would be* or *have been* different. (*Tractatus*: "projection", Fodor "one-way counterfactual dependence of 'horses' on horses).

- It has an essential *normative* dimension. Kant's discovery.

From Representation to Representationalism and Antirepresentationalism

'Representationalism' refers to a semantic *ideology*.
It is, roughly, the idea that the meaning or contentfulness of thought and talk should be understood principally or exclusively in terms of the *representational* relations thinkings and sayings stand in to what they (purport to) represent.

Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* is an arch-representationalist (except, crucially, about *logical* vocabulary).
Wittgenstein in the *Investigations* is an arch-antirepresentationalist (and semantic nihilist?).

The long philosophical twentieth century is home to two traditions of thought about language and meaning:
- A *logistical* tradition runs from Frege and Russell through the *Tractatus*, Carnap, and Tarski, Quine, to Kripke and David Lewis. It focuses on artificial languages and formal calculi, aimed in the first instance at understanding mathematics and logic.
- An *anthropological* tradition focuses on natural languages, thought of as a kind of social practice central to and characteristic of the natural history of biological creatures like us. The classical American Pragmatists, culminating in Dewey are exponents of this tradition, which embraces not only the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* but the Heidegger of *Being and Time*.

Extensionally, these line up with representationalist and antirepresentationalist methodological-cum-ideological commitments, respectively. Need they have? (Cf. Huw Price on object naturalism vs. subject naturalism.)

Sellars on representationalism as *descriptivism*:
It is "responsible for the the prevalence in the empiricist tradition of 'nothing-but-ism' in its various forms (emotivism, philosophical behaviorism, phenomenalism)." [*CDCM* §103]
[O]nce the tautology 'The world is described by descriptive concepts' is freed from the idea that the business of all non-logical concepts is to describe, the way is clear to an *ungrudging* recognition that many expressions which empiricists have relegated to second-class citizenship in discourse are not *inferior,* just *different.* [CDCM §79]
The idea that the world can, in principle, be so described that the description contains no modal expressions is of a piece with the idea that the world can, in principle, be so described that the description contains no prescriptive expressions. [CDCM §80]
For not all *knowing* is knowing how to describe something. We *know* what we *ought to do* as well as what the circumstances *are.* [§107]

Strictly speaking "descriptivism" is too narrow a term for the representationalism Sellars means to oppose. For indexical, demonstratives (which are *not* a kind of indexical) and proper names (and possibly other kinds of expression, such as natural-kind terms) are not *descriptive* terms. We should always use "descriptivism" in a broad enough sense to include these other, nondescriptive ways of picking out, specifying, or referring to what one is talking *about* (representing).

A complementary danger: *declarativism*. This is the view that wherever vocabulary can be used in declarative sentences, it should be understood representationally, as purportedly fact-stating because truth-evaluable.
Declarativism aims to secure global representationalism on the cheap.

Metaethical *expressivism* rejects global representationalism (descriptivism construed broadly). Dorit Bar-On characterizes the underlying idea like this:
'Expressivism' designates a family of philosophical views. Very roughly, these views maintain that claims in the relevant area of discourse are 'in the business' of giving expression to sentiments, commitments, or other non-cognitive (or non-representational) mental states or attitudes, rather than describing or reporting a range of facts. ["Varieties of Expressivism" *Philosophy Compass* (8/8) 2013, pp. 699-713.]

The Geach-Frege argument from embedding (Geach "Ascriptivism") challenged expressivism, by making an essentially *declarativist* objection to it.
Explicitly acknowledging the obligation to respond to and rebut this objection is what distinguishes contemporary second-wave expressivism (Blackburn, Gibbard) from its more naïve earlier forms (Ayer, Stevenson).

As the representationalist generally is committed to extending the semantic model appropriate to the use of ordinary empirical descriptive (OED) vocabulary, as in claims such as "the frog is on the log," to claims such as understanding "triangularity is a property," "patience is a virtue," "laws of nature are exceptionless," "the stock market is rising," "freedom is better than slavery," and "cows look goofy"—or to denying the coherence or intelligibility of such claims, so the declarativist must think that besides facts about where the frog is, there are also
    i)   *Logical* facts, such as *negative*, *conditional*, and negative *existential* facts.
    ii)   *Modal* facts, about what is *possible* and what is *necessary*.
    iii)   *Probabilistic* facts, about what is probable and improbable—and *how* probable/improbable it is.
    iv)   *Semantic* facts, about what expressions *mean* or *represent*, about which claims are *true*.
    v)   *Intentional* facts, about possibly non-existent objects of thought (golden mountains, round squares, fictions, fantasies, and contradictions).
    vi)   *Normative* facts, about how things *ought* to be, or what people are *obliged* or *permitted* to do.

vii)   *Abstract* facts, about abstracta such as universals, propositions, sets, groups, and categories.

Antirepresentationalists such as Rorty and Price think that at this point something has gone badly wrong. These are the two principal figures we consider in the course.

Rorty claims:

- The ideology of representationalism that has grown up around the Enlightenment concept of <u>representation</u> *defined* central philosophical sub-disciplines including epistemology, philosophy of mind, and later, philosophy of language, and continues to do so right through into present-day analytic philosophy.
- The ideology of representationalism *essentially* involves various fundamental philosophical pathologies.
- The toxic ideology of representationalism should accordingly be rejected, *holus bolus*.
- Even more radically, he claims that the weed that is that pathological ideology has become so intertwined with the concept of <u>representation</u> that there is no longer any reasonable prospect of separating them, pruning the weed to leave a healthy plant.
  His radical suggestion is accordingly that this toxic ideology shows that the concept of <u>representation</u> with which it is inextricably bound up should *also* be given up. The very idea of us as "mirrors of nature" has had its day and outlived its usefulness. It is best not reformed or restricted, but simply jettisoned.
- Rorty's constructive alternative is a version of *pragmatism*.
- But his further, still more radical, claim is that *since* representation has defined modern philosophy, jettisoning it is jettisoning *philosophy*, since he sees philosophy since Kant as just "whatever Kant did." If we can't do *that* anymore (since we can't have the concept of <u>representation</u>) then we will just have moved to a new sort of discipline.
- The radical character of his diagnosis (<u>representation</u> is the defining concept and Great Bad of modern philosophy) and proposed remedy ("Écrasez l'infame") made these the great topics of outraged discussion. His specific criticisms and proposed alternative have been less critically examined. But they have had an honorable subsequent career.

Rorty's many critics have mostly focused on what they take to be the objectionable consequences of the later moves in this train of thought. His antirepresentationalist arguments for the early stages have not attracted much attention. But they are of the most philosophical interest. I think there are three different kinds of antirepresentationalist argument that he offered at different stages of his career:

- First, the argument in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, that representationalism in *semantics* leads to an unproductive oscillation in *epistemology* between skepticism and foundationalism.
- Second, an argument from the *normative* character of representational relations and his *pragmatism* about *norms*, and

- Third, an *antiauthoritarian* argument concerning what is required to complete the emancipatory project of the Enlightenment.

That is, he deploys an *epistemological* argument, a *pragmatist* argument, and an essentially *political* argument. Each is worth considering in detail—and so we shall.

Cheryl Misak is the most important philosophical scholar of pragmatism of her generation, and has transformed our understanding of it along two dimensions: distinguishing the Peirce, C.I.Lewis, Sellars-Quine line of pragmatism from the James-Dewey-Rorty one, and broadening the tradition by including Frank Ramsey and Wittgensteing under the heading of "Cambridge pragmatism." She sharply contests Rorty's pragmatist narrative, both historically and philosophically. She sees Price, rather than Rorty, as the authentic heir of pragmatism.

Huw Price performs two astonishing metaconceptual syntheses by introducing two new powerful and important arguments:
  a) He unifies the two strands of *expressivism*,
      i.   The original German expressivism, beginning with Herder, which offers expressivism as a global alternative to and critique of Enlightenment representationalism,
      ii.   Second-wave metaethical and 3M (morals, modals, and mathematics) *local* expressivism as developed by Blackburn and Gibbard.
      The argument that drives this is Price's pointing out that any *local* expressivism relies on a *bifurcation thesis* that requires a principled distinction between vocabularies that should be given representational analyses and those that should not. He maintains that the only arguments for representational analysis of some bits of discourse are in the end declarativist arguments, that cut against the bifurcation thesis.
  b) He brings the resulting *global expressivism* together with a reconceived *pragmatism* of Rorty's sort by offering a new understanding of that pragmatism, inspired principally by a powerful new reading of the later Wittgenstein.
      The argument that drives this is Price's distinction between (bad) traditional *object naturalism* and (good) pragmatist *subject naturalism.*