ProtoSociology

An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research

Compositionality, Concepts and Representations I:
New Problems in Cognitive Science

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On Contemporary Philosophy and Sociology

Descriptive Atomism and Foundational Holism: Semantics between the Old Testament and the New

Henry Jackman

Abstract
While holism and atomism are often treated as mutually exclusive approaches to semantic theory, the apparent tension between the two usually results from running together distinct levels of semantic explanation. In particular, there is no reason why one can't combine an atomistic conception of what the semantic values of our words are (one's "descriptive semantics"), with a holistic explanation of why they have those values (one's "foundational semantics"). Most objections to holism can be shown to apply only to holistic versions of descriptive semantics, and do not tell against any sorts of holistic foundational semantics. As Davidson's work will be used to illustrate, by clearly distinguishing foundational and descriptive semantics, one can capture the most appealing features of both holism and atomism.

Semantic holism and semantic atomism are typically viewed as mutually exclusive options when thinking about the nature of concepts and semantic content. Nevertheless, the apparent tension between atomistic and holistic theories often results from running together distinct levels of semantic explanation. For instance, in what follows, it will be argued that Davidson can justly be characterized as *both* an atomist and a holist about meaning. There is no contradiction in Davidson's position because he combines an atomistic story about *what* the semantic values of our words are, with a holistic explanation of *why* they have those values. When discussing how our individual words hook on to the world, he presents a holistic theory, and when explaining how we understand sentences and complex expressions in terms of their parts, he gives an atomistic theory. The problems of intentionality and productivity are distinct, and different sorts of theories can be used to respond to them. Many assume that if you are a holist or atomist at one level, you must be so at both, but as Davidson's work illustrates, one can easily combine these perspectives that might otherwise seem incompatible.

The Surprise Argument for Truth-Conditional Semantics

Claire Horisk

Abstract
Davidson's Surprise argument promises to resolve a dispute that has arisen in contemporary formal semantics over the proper semantic value for a semantic theory. At issue are doubts that Pietroski raises about the compositionality of truth-conditions, and thereby about truth-conditional semantics, which treats a truth value as the semantic value for a sentence. The dispute is recalcitrant because, as I show, Pietroski's evidence that truth-conditions are not compositional can be explained away with attention to Cappelen and Lepore's distinction between the truth of what is semantically expressed by an utterance and the truth of its speech act content. While the Surprise argument would, if it worked, support truth-conditional semantics, I demonstrate that it fails; in fact, it is peculiarly vulnerable to Pietroski's concerns.

Donald Davidson offered only one direct argument in favor of truth-conditional semantics. This argument – the Surprise argument – is of immediate interest in light of the recent work of Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore (1997a, 1997b, 1998, 2005a, 2005b) and Paul Pietroski (2003, forthcoming), who defend sharply opposed positions despite substantial common ground. Both parties admit only very limited sources of semantic context-sensitivity, thus rejecting the contextualist idea that semantic content can be determined only in context, if at all. Further, both have come to believe that some properties of utterances, while perfectly familiar to ordinary everyday speakers, do not belong in semantic theories because they are theoretically intractable. But Cappelen & Lepore retain the Davsonian idea that meaning determines truth conditions and are sanguine about the prospects of truth-conditional semantics, while Pietroski argues that meaning does not determine truth conditions and rejects truth-conditional semantics. In fact, he argues, truth conditions are among the theoretically intractable properties of utterances. Cappelen & Lepore and Pietroski's differences are striking given their common ground, and with their shared theses in mind, Pietroski issues a challenge to truth-conditional semantics: he writes that "once one accepts this point [of agreement with Cappelen & Lepore], I don't see any theoretical motivation for retaining the idea that theories of meaning are theories of truth" (forthcoming, 289). In this paper, I consider whether Davidson's Surprise argument answers

Compositionality up to Parameters

Alberto Peruzzi

Abstract

The principle of compositionality (PC) claims that the meaning of a compound expression is determined by the meanings of its constituent expressions and the way they compose. Is it true or false? Does it apply to both natural and formalised languages? In order to answer, we must examine various formal versions of PC, the notion of meaning and the patterns of composition. Moreover, further principles are called for to determine its import and, in particular, its relationships with the Context Principle, which seems to be inconsistent with PC. The paper deals with some aspects of the issues involved, by considering both empirical and model-theoretic results on compositionality obtained in recent years. The main thesis is that only if the parametric form of PC is acknowledged, the above questions can receive a definite answer. To this aim, the paper makes the conditions for the consistency of PC with context-dependence explicit. Such conditions allow for the stability of a schematic conceptual/epistemic core, in contrast with the slippery slope leading to holistic pragmatism.

1. Forgettable Preliminaries?

Basic logical and mathematical principles are often made explicit long after coming into use. Ordering axioms in geometry, the axiom of choice in set theory, and the conditions for substitutivity in logic are examples. Making such principles explicit involves not just the once-and-for-all capture of their intuitive content through formalisation, but also the recognition of possible variations which had gone undetected in their naïve use and which pose the demand for more rigorous and discriminating analysis. Variational strategies can point in different directions. They may lead to the projection of a principle from a specific theoretical context to any possible system of knowledge, thus elevating it to an a priori status; or they may weaken our confidence in its universality. Such divergence is welcome. Arguments in support of the indispensability or even the intelligibility of the principle get more carefully examined, while objections have to make clear which specific version of the principle is their target. It is usually held that "indispensability arguments" are a posteriori and "intelligibility arguments" a priori and that such arguments, if sound, transfer this status to the corresponding principle. From a naturalistic perspective both suppositions are problematic – the notions of a priori and a

On the Problem of Unspeakable Content

Pauli Brattico

Abstract
There is compelling linguistic evidence that many words (e.g., boil$_{tr}$) are derived from phrasal sources (e.g., cause to boil). Among causation, typical semantic primitives composing word meanings are becoming, having and getting. While linguists have argued that word meanings contain semantic knowledge that we can grasp but cannot express linguistically, Fodor and his colleagues maintain that words express primitive, semantically unanalysable concepts. Under this view, putative linguistic semantic decompositions express nonsemantic metaphysical regularities. After reviewing the debate, it is suggested in this article that semantic features that are linguistically salient and unspeakable emerge neither from the analytical connections between words, nor from the metaphysical structure of the world, but from the logical syntax of the grammar.

I

The best grammatical theory currently available suggests that many words are derived from phrasal sources, yet there is evidence that these phrasal sources alone do not suffice to capture the meanings of those words. For instance, even if the best theory of word formation purports that transitive verbs such as *open*$_{tr}$ are derived from phrasal sources such as 'cause to open$_{intr}$,' this phrase is not sufficient, even if it seems to be necessary, to capture the meaning of the former.

Before reviewing various solutions concerning the problem, it is useful to make explicit certain assumptions concerning grammar. Semantics, as I understand the term here, is a study of the semantic knowledge possessed by the human mind/brain. We might call it "narrow semantics," to exclude, but not to dispute, semantic facts inaccessible to a cognitive agent. I also assume here that a theory of internal semantic representations is part of a theory of concepts: whatever else concepts are, they must be the primary mental bearers of the semantic content in the human mind/brain. Thus, notions such as "word meanings" and "lexical concepts" are understood as being synonymous.

Contexts Crossed Over

Daniel Blair

Abstract
The recent interest in some of the phenomena traditionally associated with the context dependence of quantificational expressions (QPs) has centered around the idea that some constituents of a sentence might serve as the locus of domain restriction for QPs might be present but lack for overt manifestation. In this essay, one such argument – due to Stanley (2000) – is critically examined. Specifically, I will present a number of different kinds of constructions where the predictions of a theory based upon syntactically represented context variables are not confirmed.

Introduction

There is perhaps no kind of expression within natural language that does not exhibit some sort of variability with respect to its interpretation. Cases where the nature of this variability is more or less rigidly predictable come from the domain of indexicals and demonstratives like 'I' and 'that,' but there are other plausible examples. In particular, quantificational expressions ('QPs') seem to exhibit at least some of the same general traits that other contextually variable expressions do. Stated informally, the exact denotation of a quantifier like 'the tallest student' seems to vary from one context of utterance to another. "The tallest student" can be understood in one context to denote the tallest student within, say, a small class of university students, understood on still other occasions to denote the tallest student within a given school district. For many uses of quantificational expressions, the domain of the quantifier is understood as restricted just to certain sets of objects, even though no explicit restriction need appear alongside them.

How the facts regarding the context sensitivity of quantificational expressions are to be captured within a semantic theory is a matter of some contention. There are at least two options. Perhaps the inexplicitness of the restrictions holds no semantic or syntactic secrets. Rather, domain restriction is a pragmatic process that essentially *supplements,* in one way or another, our understanding of what a particular utterance is intended to convey without necessarily telling us anything about what the sentence itself means. On the other hand, perhaps

Constructing Attitudes

Marc A. Moffett

Abstract
The singular term theory maintains that that-clauses are complex singular terms which designate propositions. Though extremely well-supported, the theory is endangered by the existence of oblique that-clauses; that is, that-clauses occurring in what appear to be non-argument positions (e.g., 'Lola was upset that Slick Willy had all the fun'). In this paper I argue that the best solution to the problem consistent with the singular term theory, invokes a construction-based grammatical theory. Such an approach challenges traditional views of semantic compositionality by rejecting a central dogma of semantics, namely, that linguistic constructions contribute only trivial logical or quasi-logical information to semantic interpretation (e.g., function-application relations).

The received view in the philosophy of language is that finite clausal complements (paradigmatically, *that*-clauses) are sentential nominals which designate the semantic value of the embedded sentence.[1] Although the linguistic role of the complementizer *that* in such constructions is unsettled (see, e.g., Bolinger 1972), I will follow tradition and use the linguistically parochial idiom "*that*-clause" to refer to the relevant class of syntactic entities. Moreover, in the interest of brevity, I will call the semantic values of sentences *propositions*.[2]

With these terminological niceties in place, we can say that the *that*-clauses in (1.a, b) below are complex singular terms both of which designate the proposition indicated in (1.c), associating to the left:[3]

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1   I will put nonfinite clausal complements to one side for the sake of manageability. I use the technical term "designate" to side-step the, in my view, peripheral question of whether or not any complex syntactic expression can properly be said to refer (see Neale 1993; Recanati 2000).

2   On the understanding that, if the general ontological category to which sentence meanings belong contains other entities – for example, entities that are not expressible by any sentence of English – then they too will be counted as propositions. This terminological choice leaves open just what type of entity propositions are: they could be abstract Platonic entities, mind-dependent mental constructs, or even the sentences themselves (or sentences in the language-of-thought). Which of these possibilities is correct is not an issue that we will need to settle.

3   An occurrence of the lexeme *t* in a sentence *S* is a singular term iff (i) *t* is the syntactic argument of some other linguistic unit τ of *S* and no syntactic unit τ* of *S* is a syntactic argument

Is Horwich's Deflationary Account of Meaning an Alternative to Truth-Theoretic Semantics?

Josep Macià

Abstract

In recent writings Paul Horwich has pursued two related aims: (i) To show "how small a constraint is provided by compositionality" (Horwich 1998, chapter 7, p. 183). "The compositionality of meaning imposes no constraint at all on how the meaning properties of words are constituted" (p. 154). (ii) To present a deflationary alternative to the "Davidsonian truth-theoretic perspective" (Horwich 2001) The paper has three sections: in section 1 I make some comments on compositionality, in section 2 I argue that Horwich does not succeed in achieving aim (i), and in section 3 I argue that he does not succeed either in achieving aim (ii).

1. Compositionality

Paul Horwich's *Meaning* (Horwich 1998) describes and defends a deflationary account of meaning. On the basis of this deflationary account of meaning, Horwich has pursued two related aims:

(i) To show "how small a constraint is provided by compositionality" (Horwich 1998, chapter 7, p. 183). "The compositionality of meaning imposes no constraint at all on how the meaning properties of *words* are constituted" (p. 154).

(ii) To present a deflationary alternative to the "Davidsonian truth-theoretic perspective" (Horwich 2001)

The main purpose of this paper is to argue that Horwich deflationary account of meaning is not an alternative to truth theoretic semantics. This paper has three sections: in this section 1 I make some general comments on compositionality which I hope will help clarify the issues to be discussed in latter sections; I argue, using results by Janssen (1997), that no language (understood as a set of sentences or strings of words) is compositional or not by itself, but

Are Names Ambiguous?

Tim Kenyon

Abstract
It is widely held that proper names are ambiguous in some sense, a view commonly associated with the theory that names are, when suitably idealized, semantically "rigid designators". In this brief paper I suggest that, while some refinement of the concept of a name is surely appropriate, proper names do not very clearly meet the standards normally used to determine ambiguity. There is reason to regard shared names as semantically univocal, including some evidence from development linguistics to regard a grasp of names as having a metalinguistic descriptive aspect.

I.

> Did I ever tell you of Mrs. McCave
> Who had twenty-three sons and named them all Dave?
>
> 'Too Many Daves', Dr Seuss

Are proper names ambiguous? Lots of people think so. In general they think this based on a theory and a datum: the datum is that many individuals are named using a single expression-type – the expression 'Dave' serves to name many, many people – and the theory is that a name is individuated by a unique referent. For every different person (or cat, or parakeet, or yacht) named 'Dave', then , there must be a different name 'Dave'. So the name or the expression 'Dave' is ambiguous.

The line of thought that insists on uniquely referring names is variously labeled Millian, Russellian, and Kripkean. Certainly Saul Kripke is the most influential recent expounder of the view, in the form of his now generally accepted thesis that names are semantically *rigid designators* – terms that pick out the same referents in every possible world (in which the referents exist). This leads quite directly to the view that names are ambiguous. Kripke, considering the objection that a name like 'Aristotle' cannot be a rigid designator since it picks out more than one object in the actual world, ponders a stipulative individuation of names by referents.

The Transformations of the Religious Dimension in the Constitution of Contemporary Modernities

Shmuel N. Eisenstadt

Abstract
This paper analyzes different aspects of the far-reaching resurgence or reconstruction of religions is taking place in the contemporary world. This resurgence is manifest among others in the rise of new religious, especially fundamentalist and communal-national movements, in the crystallization of new diasporas with strong religious identities, as well as far-reaching transformations of the major religious components in the constitution of contemporary collective identities and public arenas.

The central focus of such reconstruction or reconstitution of the religious dimension in the classical model of the nation and revolutionary states was delegated or confined, is the transposition thereof from private or secondary public spheres, into the various political and cultural arenas and in the central frameworks of collective identities of many societies, thus greatly transforming the basic premises of the classical nation and revolutionary state. This resurgence of religion does not entail a simple return of some traditional forms of religion, but rather a far-reaching reconstitution of the religious component in new modern settings which transcends the vision of the "classical" cultural and political program of modernity and of the model of the modern nation state.

I

A far-reaching resurgence or reconstruction of religions is taking place in the contemporary world. This resurgence is manifest among others in the rise of new religious, especially fundamentalist and communal-national movements, in the crystallization of new diasporas with strong religious identities, as well as far-reaching transformations within the major religious components in the constitution of contemporary collective identities and public arenas.

The central focus of such reconstruction or reconstitution of the religious dimension, which was delegated or confined in the classical model of the nation and revolutionary states, is the transposition thereof from private or secondary public spheres, into the various political and cultural arenas and in the central frameworks of collective identities of many societies, thus greatly transforming

Why Rational Deontological Action Optimizes Subjective Value

Julian Nida-Rümelin

Abstract

In present day philosophy there are two competing views regarding practical rationality: (1) Decision and game theory and economic theory have developed a theory of rational decision which has proven to be fruitful in many areas of social science. Practical philosophy should work with that paradigm (2) Economic theory and decision theory do not have an adequate account of practical rationality. The homo oeconomicus model is – at best – one perspective which competes inter alia with philosophical accounts of practical reason.

In this article I try to show that these two seemingly opposing views are in fact compatible. I argue that consequentialism is an inadequate account of rationality because rational action is deontological in character. Nevertheless the decision theoretic conceptual frame should not be given up. Deontology and decision theory can be made compatible via comprehensive description of action. The conceptual frame of decision theory should be interpreted as coherentist, not consequentialist. With this intertretation deontological action, if rational, maximizes subjective value.

I. Introduction

Does rational deontological action optimize subjective value? Can one be a deontologist and at the same time adhere to decision theory as an all-embracing theory of practical rationality? I think the answer to both of these questions is *yes*. The reasons for it are given in this article.

There are two basic intuitions which frame the bigger part of practical philosophy and which seem to be incompatible. One intuition is *teleological* or more specifically *consequentialist* according to which rational action optimizes its consequences. The other intuition is *deontological* or *rule-oriented* according to which rational action is guided by certain rules. I am a deontologist, I think that consequentialism is an inadequate theory of ethics and rationality alike, but at the same time I am convinced that rational action maximizes subjective value.

The reader probably thinks that the following two assumptions cannot be true simultaneously

Reframing the Issues: On Donald Davidson's Sea-change in Philosophical Thinking

Louise Röska-Hardy

Abstract
In his philosophy Donald Davidson developed original proposals, suggested innovative applications and moved philosophical debate forward by reframing key issues in analytic philosophy. In doing so, he attempted to bring about a profound transformation of the problems of modern philosophy by reframing philosophical issues. It is argued that essays in the collection, Donald Davidson*, edited by Kirk Ludwig, show that the profound consequences of Davidson's way of reframing issues about meaning, agency and mind have yet to be fully appreciated.*

Donald Davidson is considered by many to be one of the most creative and systematic English-speaking philosophers of the second half of the twentieth century. He revived the idea of meaning as given by truth conditions and proposed an influential approach to the semantics of natural languages. In action theory he reinstated the view that reasons explanations are a form of causal explanation. In the philosophy of mind he put forward a novel argument for the irreducibility of the mental to the physical and teased out the implications of the epistemological tradition running from Descartes to Kant to W.V. Quine, arguing that 'epistemic intermediaries', 'the dualism of scheme and content' and 'the myth of the subjective' should be abandoned. Over the course of forty years in some 137 essays Davidson developed original proposals, suggested innovative applications and moved philosophical debate forward by reframing key issues in analytic philosophy. In doing so, he worked to bring about a sea-change in philosophical thinking, while demonstrating the relevance of ostensibly technical issues to broader philosophical questions about meaning, agency and the place of mind in nature.

The profound transformation of the problems of modern philosophy which would be effected by reframing philosophical issues the way Davidson proposed has not yet been sufficiently appreciated. This is partly due to the breadth and diversity of his writings and, until recently, their relative inac-