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ENS, June 2006

Seminar: Relative Truth and the Language of Value

Week 3: More on relative truth, something on values, emotions

1. shifting the context of assessment

Case 1:

(1) Alethe tastes good. (mother to child)

Case 2:

(2) John took another spoon of the honey because it tasted so good. (E/H/W)

Case 3:

(3) Is walking all day fun?

How can this shift be accounted for on relativist theories?

MacFarlane:

Context of truthvalue evaluation is always the context of the assessor ('context of assessment')

E/H/W:

The context of evaluation can be the context of the person the assessor *pretends* to be.

Lasersohn:

The speaker can choose an endocentric or exocentric perspective, or no perspective at all.

2. The treatment of attitude reports

MacFarlane:

context of assessment of embedded sentence always context of assessment of entire sentence

possibility for treatment of belief: two-place relation between agent and truthconditionally

incomplete proposition

problem: truth as the aim of belief

E/H/W:

Belief relation is two-place relation between agent and (truthconditionally incomplete) proposition

$B(a, p)$ in w : a believes p true relative to a

Or: a believes p true relative to the person a pretends to be.

problem: the *de se* problem:

A cannot believe p to be true relative to a, which a fails to identify as himself

better: a believes p by self-ascribing p to himself

Lasersohn:

With embedded sentences involving relative truth, belief-relation is three-place relation between agent, context of evaluation (which depends on the perspective the agent chooses) and truth conditionally incomplete proposition

believe(a, c, p): a believes p relative to the chosen perspective c

problem: it seems we need the same belief relation for embedded sentences involving relative truth and embedded sentences involving absolute truth

- (4) a. Mary disagrees with everything John believes, that white chocolate tastes good, that ophthalmologists are eye doctors etc.
 b. Everything John believes is true.
 c. What did you say John believes? (must chose 'neutral' belief-relation)

3. Schiffer 'Meaning and Value'

point of departure:

Schiffer's pleonastic conception of propositions:

That S is true – the proposition that S is true

You get propositions for free – there are propositions!

Thus *eating animals is wrong* expresses a proposition.

Schiffer's point:

moral predicates have no application conditions (there are no interpersonal criteria for their application), but they have meaning, and interpersonally shared meaning

Agents may widely differ in their criteria / moral considerations for applying moral predicates, yet they share the meaning of moral predicates

moral sentences have no truth conditions

No moral truths (but still moral sentences are useful...)

linguistic facts:

(5) A believes that X is good

B believes that doing X is good, but for very different reasons.

A and B believe the same thing (but for very different reasons)

(6) a. A believes what B believes

b. This is what A and B believe.

Schiffer's criteria:

- even if two agents have different moral principles, their concepts of good and wrong are the same given the roles of those concepts in determining how the agents want the world to be
- same kinds of emotional responses the use of moral predicates trigger,
- same relations of moral concepts to related ones (*ought, just*)
- the same process of moral training (of punishment and reward) in the acquisition of moral concepts
- same common 'point' in use of moral predicates, in getting people to behave in a certain way.

4. Other functions of sentences than contributing to truth conditions

expressivist views:

Noncognitive meaning, not to be understood in terms of truth conditions but in terms of relations to noncognitive attitudes that motivate actions and relate to norms and values.

but also belief and knowledge can be understood normatively:

cognitive discourse equally driven by normative considerations as to what one should believe

4.1. Practical reasoning

essential first-person ascription

Perry: sentences with and without essential indexical (*de se* pronoun) play different role in explaining actions, associated with different mental states playing different causal roles

Value descriptions can naturally act as arguments of practical syllogism

(7) a. I intend to do E.

I think that unless he does (I do) X, he cannot (I cannot) bring about E.

I do X.

(7) b. I am / what I intend to do is nice / good / admirable

It is nice / good / admirable to do E.

I think that unless I do X, I cannot bring about E.

I do X.

first-person directed genericity (Moltmann to appear):

P holds for anyone as if it does for myself

P predicated of anyone x as if x was myself

What is evaluated: actions / possible actions

Use of infinitives:

(8) a. It is nice / good / bad / admirable PRO(arb) to do X.

b. It is nice / good / admirable for John PRO to do X.

PRO: necessarily self-ascription

(9) a. John expects PRO to become a hero. *de se*

b. John expects that he will become a hero. *de se* or *de re*

generic ('normative') statements about actions

evaluation from the inside: *nice, good*

from the outside: *admirable, good*

4. 2. Emotions

emotion and sensation: qualitative feel

emotion: intentional object / object of emotion (object, proposition, action)

(10) a. I fear dogs / that dog.

b. I fear that the dog was killed.

c. I am afraid to walk alone.

sensation: not necessarily intentional object

Cause of emotion vs intentional object

(11) John was angry that Mary was there (because he was drunk)

cognitivist approaches to emotions:

1. Emotions to be understood in terms of propositional attitudes of some sort, especially desire and belief
2. Emotions as perception
Perception of objective value
(world-word direction of fit)

Emotions as dispositions (persisting states of the mind) and as occurring events:

I fear dogs. My occurrent fear of that dog.

Appropriateness conditions for occurrent emotions, depending on whether they relate to relevant features of the intentional object

e.g. frightening physical features of (certain) dogs

Appropriate emotion is intelligible (given the disposition), inappropriate emotion is not.

Emotion and value

Emotion simply perception / emotional knowledge of value?

Mulligan:

Emotion does not reveal value, *feeling* does

emotions: *fear, admire, love*

feeling: *feel, prefer*

(12) a. A feels the injustice of the situation / the race of that movement.

b. A prefers justice to injustice.

(13) a. * A admires admirability.

b.* A regrets that p is regrettable.

Emotion has polar opposites (gradual transition from one to the other), feeling does not

Emotion is a reaction, feeling is not.

emotional reaction vs feeling aesthetic value

Feeling is a case of knowledge, takes values as its objects

Felt values are what we react to emotionally and act on

