

Philosophy 208
The Language Revolution
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Class 23
Introduction to Davidson and Tarski

Semantics and Frege

- Tarski's article: "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics."
- 'Semantics' covers both sense and reference.
- Frege we need both intensions (sense or meaning) and extensions (reference).
 - ▶ the problem of cognitive content
 - ▶ the problem of empty reference
 - ▶ the problem of opaque contexts
 - ▶ Synonymies
 - 'snow is white' and 'la nieve es blanca'
 - 'bachelor' and 'unmarried male'
 - ▶ Intensions and extensions
 - 'creature with a heart' and 'creature with a kidney'
 - '2+2' and '7-3'
- But Frege's semantics is saddled with an inflated ontology of third-realm entities like propositions, concepts, and senses.

Avoiding Senses I

Logical Empiricism

- The logical empiricists tried to avoid intensions by explaining meaning in terms of observation and verification.
 - ▶ Without an analytic/synthetic distinction, their claim that individual sentences are confirmed and disconfirmed independently of each other, and that they have meanings independent of a broader background theory, seems indefensible.
- Holism killed the logical empiricist's project.
 - ▶ Quine urged that we could maintain meaningfulness without meanings.
 - ▶ Quine's semantic holism seems incompatible with the basic tenets of compositionality.
 - ▶ Moreover, Quine's ontological relativity undermined even the theory of reference.

Avoiding Senses II

IBS

- Grice hoped to explain meaning facts in terms of speaker intentions.
- But IBS ran into the bloated ontology of propositions that saddled Frege's semantics.
- Grice explains sentence meaning in terms of speaker meaning, and speaker meaning in terms of belief states.
- But belief states are best understood as relations between people and propositions.
- The IBS account appears unavoidably circular.
- Schiffer later work despairs of developing semantic theory in any guise.

Avoiding Senses III

Give Up

- (Later) Wittgenstein: abandon all hope of an intensional semantic theory.
- We can try to construct theories of reference and truth, instead, and see if there are any semantic facts left over.
- Davidson's approach, relying on, and repurposing, Tarski's theory of truth.
- Put aside the thorny questions about theories of meaning and look at theories of truth and reference.
- Tarski did not construct his theory of truth as a semantic theory in Frege's sense.
- But Davidson believes that it can work as one.
- Tarski's theory today and Davidson's use of it on Thursday

Sam on Tarski