

Handout: Flocke on Ontological Expressivism

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1. Motivations for Ontological Expressivism

- Ontological debates do not proceed in the same way as scientific debates.
 - *Anti-metaphysical views*: ontologists of different stripes at best talk past each other and at worst do not even make meaningful utterances.
- However, ontologists do seem to be disagreeing with each other.
 - *Heavyweight Realism*: there is a special, metaphysically loaded sense of the term ‘exists’.
- Anti-metaphysical views cannot account for the genuine agreements among ontologists, while heavyweight realists cannot explain why ontological debates often seem deeply flawed. Ontological Expressivism is supposed to be the accommodation of these two viewpoints.

2. Historical Origins

- Carnap: A certain subclass of external statements are “noncognitive” because they express noncognitive mental states.
- The distinction between *purely external* statements and *pragmatic external* statements.
- Objections to Carnap
 - According to Carnap, purely external statements are simply meaningless.
 - Carnap’s view is incompatible with semantic externalism.

3. The Nature of Noncognitive Dispositions Expressed by Ontological Existence Claims

- An Ontological Existence Claims expresses a noncognitive disposition to assess the truth of propositions in a particular way (which is related to assumptions that speakers make, background beliefs on which they rely, or methodologies and heuristics which they employ).
- Kaplan’s conception of circumstance
 - Two parameters of truth-conditions of sentences
 - context: account for the context sensitivity of certain expressions

- index: model the circumstances of evaluation of a proposition
 - i.e., the circumstances of evaluation of the proposition that Ida was in Berlin on March 10, 2018 are Ida's whereabouts on that day.
 - Index-parameters model the shiftiness of circumstances of evaluation brought about by modal operators
- Flocke vs. Kaplan
 - Circumstances of evaluation are standardly taken to play a purely semantic role, but Flocke thinks that it also plays a certain psychological role.
 - For instance, "numbers exist" expresses a noncognitive disposition to assess the truth of propositions by considering only circumstances of evaluation that contain numbers.
 - Kaplan thought that *what is said* by a declarative sentence is a structured proposition that mirrors the structure of the sentence by which it is expressed. But Flocke thinks that it is a set of worlds.

4. Why "Noncognitive"?

- Flocke rejects the well-accepted view that each proposition has a unique actual circumstance of evaluation that determines its truth-value.
- On the standard view, a speaker who assesses the truth of propositions by considering only worlds that do not contain numbers makes a factual mistake.
- On Flocke's view, multiple worlds are *actualized*.
 - Flocke adopts an *abstractionist* conception of world.
 - Worlds are *abstract* (contra Modal Realism).
 - Worlds *represent* ways things might be.
 - Worlds are *classically complete*. For each way things might be, a world either rules it in or rules it out.
 - The *abstractionist* conception of world makes sense of the idea that no world is uniquely actualized.
 - The metaphysical reading of this idea: things are genuinely indeterminate.
 - The representational reading of this idea: there are multiple representation relations.

- The epistemological reading of this idea: we don't know which world is actualized.

5. Ontological Disagreements

- The distinction between objective propositions and non-objective propositions.
 - A proposition is objective if and only if it is true in all actualized worlds.
 - Non-objective propositions are associated with noncognitive choices.
- Ontological debates concern whether one should accept a certain non-objective proposition.
 - Why ontology matters? Because standpoint-dependent reality matters.
 - Why do we accept or reject a specific non-objective proposition? Because the acceptance of the proposition would make for an overall better standpoint-dependent reality.
 - i.e., acceptable standpoint-dependent reality should contain all and only entities that are required for the truth of our best scientific theories.

6. Objectivity as a Modality

- Objectivity is a form of necessity while non-objectivity is a form of modal contingency.
- A bimodal language:

This rough idea can be made formally precise, as follows. Let \mathcal{L} be a standard first-order language first quantifiers and two modal operators \Box and \blacksquare , and let a *model* be a tuple $\langle W, D, Q, I, R_O, R_M \rangle$, where:

- W is a non-empty set (of worlds),
 - D is a nonempty set (of individuals),
 - Q is a function from the elements of W to subsets of D ,
 - I is a function from sentence letters to subsets of W , and
 - R_O and R_M are binary relations over the elements of W .
- A world w is objectively accessible from a world w' , wR_Ow' , iff w and w' represent the same way things might be equally well.
 - A world w is metaphysically accessible from a world w' , wR_Mw' , iff w and w' represent alternative ways things might be.

- A proposition is *objective* at world w , $\Box p$, iff p is true at all worlds that are objectively accessible from w .
- A proposition is *metaphysically necessary* at world w , $\blacksquare p$, iff p is true at all worlds that are metaphysically accessible from w .

- Further assumptions

NO DOUBLE VISION w is the only world both objectively and metaphysically accessible from w : $(wR_O w' \wedge wR_M w') \rightarrow w = w'$

CONNECTEDNESS For any two worlds w_1 and w_2 , there is a world w_3 objectively accessible from w_1 and metaphysically accessible from w_2 : $\forall w_1 \forall w_2 \exists w_3 (w_1 R_O w_3 \wedge w_2 R_M w_3)$

- An *ontology* is a set of all worlds representing a certain way things might be.
- A context includes a speaker, a location, a time and an ontology.
- Non-relativist postsemantics: A sentence S is true as used at a context c_I iff S is true at c_I, w_{c_I} , where w_{c_I} is the world of c_I .

7. Another Strategy

- The semantic contents of quantified propositions are sets of pairs $\langle w, p \rangle$, where w is a possible world and p is a *hyperplan*.
 - A *hyperplan* is a function from “occasions for action” to sets of actions.
 - The semantic content of any declarative sentence is a set of fact-plan worlds.
 - The semantic contents of descriptive sentences are functions from fact-plan worlds to truth-values where the hyperplan parameter does not matter.
 - Semantic contents of normative sentences contents depend on hyperplan parameters.
 - A world as a “substratum” and a hyperplan as a “carving”.
- However, it is not clear what a world (substratum) minus a domain of quantification is.
 - The case of mereology