

Haack -- Memo

The two large documents attached are chapters 3 and 6 of a forthcoming book, Defending Science -- Within Reason. Ideally, I would like you to read all of both chapters; but since this may not be feasible, the summary below tells you which sections to concentrate on. Remember as you read my chapters that they are part of a book in philosophy of science, and that my primary concerns are epistemological-metaphysical-methodological.

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Chapter 3 ("Clues to the Puzzle of Scientific Evidence: A More So Story") presents an account of evidence and warrant, and ultimately of the relation of warrant to justification and confirmation. The most important section for your purposes is 1, "Warrant -- the personal conception," which articulates what determines the degree of warrant of a scientific claim for a person at a time, in terms of the quality of the evidence, including experiential evidence and reasons, that the person possesses at the time. See also section 4 for an explanation of relation of the concept of warrant to the concepts of justification and confirmation.

In this chapter you will find an account of the relation of meaning to the warrant (and hence, indirectly, to the justification) of scientific claims, focused on the role of experiential evidence. A person's seeing, hearing, etc., this or that contributes to the warrant of a claim when key terms are learned in part by association with such and such observable circumstances -- the more [less] so, the more [less] the meaning of those terms is exhausted by that association. This relies, not on the old foundationalist distinction of terms into observational and other, and of definitions into ostensive and verbal, but on the foundherentist idea that the meanings of many words are learned in part ostensively and in part by way of inter-verbal connections. (This is quite close to the view Quine suggested in Word and Object, before he backslid.)

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Chapter 6 ("The Same, Only Different: Integrating the Intentional") presents an account of the ways in which the intentional social sciences are like, and the ways in which they are unlike, the natural sciences. The most important section for your purposes is 2, "The Question of Reduction."

In this chapter you will find a sketch of a theory of mind and language, focused specifically on the concept of belief. An acceptable account must be able to acknowledge that beliefs BOTH interact causally with other beliefs in inference, and with desires, intentions, etc., in bringing about actions, AND

have a propositional content. Accommodating the first role pulls us towards neurophysiological reductionism; accommodating the second pulls us away. My view is summed up in the dictum: It's all physical, all right; but it isn't all physics. Briefly and very roughly: what matters is not the person's brain-configuration, simpliciter, but also how it is connected (a) to things and events in the world, and (b) to words referring to those things and events. It's a bit like an explanation of why an alarm clock went off at 7:30 a.m., which requires not only an account of how the cogs/electrical contacts caused the ringing, but also reference to human conventions about time; an explanation of X's doing A because he believed such-and-such and wanted this-or-that upshot, similarly, will have to go through a socio-cultural loop.

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Now for some very brief comments tying this, so far as I am able, to the questions in your course outline (which seem focused more on meaning than on mind, and perhaps -- I am reading between the lines here -- more concerned with a priori than with empirical knowledge). It may be worth saying that I come at all this influenced less by Wittgenstein or by recent analytic philosophy of mind and language than by the account of the interrelations of language, meaning, mind, self, and society developed in the early 20th century by the Pragmatist social-psychologist George Herbert Mead.

(1) It is in the process of language-learning referred to in ch. 3 that initial semiotic -- person-words-world -- connections are set up.

I haven't pursued this, but it strikes me that, as it suggests something like a continuum of more and less observational terms (depending on the extent to which the connection with the observed situation fixes the meaning), my picture of language-learning might also suggest something like a continuum of more and less analytic statements (depending on the extent to which connections with other words fixes the meaning). Possibly, depending on your attitude to the relation of the a priori and the analytic, this in turn might suggest that what we think of as a priori warrant is really (as, if I am right, what we think of as warrant-by-experience is) a simplified limit case.

(2) Intuitively (perhaps naively) I am inclined to say:

X conforms to the relevant rule of language iff his usage of the locution in question is consonant with that of others in his speech community. This is the usual case

for native speakers of a language. X may be unable, even if pressed, to articulate the rule to which his behavior conforms, able to say only that this word-order or that past-tense formation, etc., just sounds wrong. He conforms to the rule because he was trained to do so in the language-learning process.

X is following the rule iff he consciously conforms his behavior to the rule -- which, therefore, he must be able to articulate. (As I did when I first came to live in the US, reminding myself of certain differences between American and British English: e.g. whenever I rode in an elevator (not a lift!), I had to say firmly to myself: "1st floor = ground floor, 2nd floor = 1st floor, 3rd floor = 2nd floor, etc..")

X may be following a rule but not following the rule: think of a beginning speaker of English-as-second-language, consciously forming plurals according to the rule, "add an 's'": "dogs," "cats," "sheeps," "womans," "childs,"... .

(3) Of course, a less simplified and more realistic account would have to recognize: (i) that the individuation of languages is fluid and context-dependent (e.g., for some purposes, British and American English, or Jewish-American English and Deep-South-American English, or lay English and scientific English, might be counted as the same language, for other purposes as different); (ii) that what we call a "language" or a "dialect" is a kind of abstraction based on a congeries of sufficiently similar idiolects; and (iii) that any living language is constantly growing and changing, as new words, new senses of old words, new idioms, new grammatical constructions, etc., catch on and spread.

But this doesn't erase the possibility of saying, correctly, that this individual's linguistic behavior conforms to the linguistic practice of his community, or not. As I argued in my chapter 6, social institutions are independent of what you or I or anybody in particular believes, intends, etc., but not always of the beliefs and intentions of members of the society in question generally. Similarly, English is independent of idiosyncracies of your or my or any individual's linguistic behavior, but not of the linguistic behavior of members of the linguistic community generally.