Peacocke on Conceptual Role and Truth Conditions

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Concept Possession

- Peacocke 1992: a conceptual-role account of concept possession
  - AND is the unique concept C such that the canonical inferences are primitively compelling

- Peacocke 2008: a truth-conditional account of concept possession
  - AND is the concept such that you know (A-AND-B is true iff both A and B are true)
Questions About Each

• 1. How close is this to a conceptual-role account of intentionality?
• 2. What explains truth-conditions?
• 3. What are the prospects for grounding intentionality in non-intentional terms?
Peacocke 1992

- Possession conditions: C is the unique concept such that such-and-such inferences are primitively compelling (compelling not in virtue of other premises/inferences being compelling).

- Determination theory: the semantic value of C is the semantic value that makes the constitutive inferences truth-preserving.
Conceptual-Role Theory

• This looks like a conceptual-role account of concept possession.

• normative or descriptive? depends on how we understand “compelling”.

• Also a conceptual-role account of conceptual content (reference, semantic value): to have a content C is to have a concept with an inferential role that determines C.
What Explains Truth-Conditions?

• Prima facie, truth-conditions are explained in terms of semantic values which are explained in terms of (normative or descriptive?) conceptual roles.
Grounding Intentionality

• Descriptive version: Intentionality is grounded in dispositional inferential roles (which are grounded in what?)

• Normative version: Intentionality is grounded in normative inferential roles (which are grounded in what?).

• N.B. A two-tier theory, since spatial content of perception is presupposed and not grounded in inferential role.
Question

- Was Peacocke 1992 open to this two-tier picture of grounding intentionality in non-intentional terms?
- Conceptual content is grounded in dispositional (non-normative) inferential role, along with nonconceptual content?
- Dispositional inferential role and nonconceptual content are grounded in…
To possess a concept is to have tacit knowledge of its fundamental reference rule.

Someone is the referent of a thinking of I iff they are the thinker.

Something is the referent of perceptual demonstrative *that cup* (under way W) iff is is the cup perceived in way W.
Change from 1992

• Norms of inferences and other aspects of use are themselves grounded in tacit knowledge of fundamental reference-rules.

• Cf. Euthyphro: contents in virtue of norms/inferences or norms/inferences in virtue of contents?

• Conceptual-role possession conditions aren’t fundamental to a concept, reference-rules are.
Conceptual-Role

- Question: Is the 1992 conceptual-role account of possession conditions still extensionally correct, i.e. one possesses a concept C iff one has a concept for which certain inferences are compelling?
- If extensionally incorrect: counterexamples?
- If extensionally correct: so what matters is the more fundamental explanatory role of reference?
Dispositional Conceptual Role

• Also, Peacocke 2008 argues that normative roles are grounded in truth-conditional content, but what about dispositional roles?

• Is there still an opening for grounding content in dispositional roles?
What Explains Truth-Conditions

• The 2008 account takes the notion of a fundamental reference-rule as basic. Can this be grounded?

• E.g. is there any grounding explanation of what it is to tacitly know a fundamental reference rule?
Horwich

- Horwich: Tacit knowledge is a matter of use, so tacitly knowing a reference rule is grounded in use. Conceptual role strikes back!

- Peacocke: No! Reference is explanatorily prior to use.
A Step Back?

• In 1992, Peacocke had an explanation of reference and truth-conditions, but not of inferential dispositions/norms.

• In 2008, he has an explanation of inferential norms, but not of reference and truth-conditions?
Explanatorily Primitive

• 1. Is reference explanatorily primitive? I.e. can reference be explained only in terms of reference?
• If no: what might explain it?
• If yes: is it then metaphysically primitive?
What Grounds Intentionality?

• If reference is not metaphysically primitive, what grounds it?

• Sense? Inferences? Causal connections?

• Do reference rules themselves give grounds of reference?

• If it is metaphysically primitive — then a fundamental property of reality?
Grounding Explanation?

• Could it be that: to have reference C is grounded in non-reference facts D — but you need irreducible appeal to reference to explain why D grounds C?

• Then reference might be conceptually primitive without being metaphysically primitive?
Question Summary

• Peacocke 1992: Two-tier conceptual-role account of content? Inferential role plus non conceptual content explains truth-conditions? Normative or descriptive role?