**Fodorian Metasemantics**

- Meaning of natural language is based on content of mental states
- To believe grass is green is to have a Mentalese sentence that means that grass is green in one’s belief box
  - Functional about mental state types
  - Causal theorist about content

**Terminology**

- CAT = “the” concept of a cat
- Token of CAT = specific instantiation of the concept of a cat

**Naturalism**

- Here, then, are the ground rules. I want a saturated theory of meaning, a theory that articulates, in nonpropositional and nonextensional terms, *all* conditions for one bit of the world to be about (to express, represent, or be true of) another bit. I don’t care—not just now, at least—whether this theory holds for all symbols or for all things that represent.

**Early 1980s**

- The Crude Causal Theory says, in effect, that a symbol expresses a property if it’s non anomalously necessary that all and only instances of the property cause tokens of the symbol. There are problems with the ‘all’ part (since not all horses actually do cause ‘horse’ tokens) and there are problems with the ‘only’ part (some properties cause ‘horse’ tokens, e.g., when they are mistaken for horses).

**Mid 1980s**

- The truth condition of a mentalese sentence is the condition that reliably causes it in epistemically optimal circumstances

**Naturalism**

- "If the semantic and the intentional are real properties of things, it must be in virtue of their identity with (or maybe of their supervenience on?) properties that are themselves neither intentional nor semantic. If aboutness is real it must be really something else. (1987, p97)"

**Naturalism**

- Jerry Fodor
  - Early 1980s
  - The truth condition of a mentalese sentence is the condition that reliably causes it in epistemically optimal circumstances

**Naturalism**

- Jerry Fodor
  - Mid 1980s
  - The truth condition of a mentalese sentence is the condition that reliably causes it in epistemically optimal circumstances

**Disjunction problem**

- Perhaps we should think of Fodor as trying for a theory of perceptual content as part of a 2 stage theory?

To put it vulgarly, I'm committed to: "Rub our nose in the fact that P and (if we can think that P) we'll come to believe that P."
The truth condition of a thought is the condition that reliably causes it in epistemically optimal circumstances.

Thinking about betting on the Kentucky Derby causes HORSEs in epistemically optimal circumstances?

Problem: the epistemically optimal circumstances for beliefs differ according to the contents of the beliefs so there is no specifying epistemically optimal circumstances independently of content.

Optimal conditions for seeing a fly

Optimal conditions for seeing a firefly

Asymmetric Dependence: If this were broken, then this would break, but not conversely.

HORSE-tokens are brain activations that can be reliably caused by intra-cranial brain stimulation even if horses started causing SCHMORSEs instead of HORSEs.

Fodor thinks the closest world in which this is broken So this would be intact

Fodor thinks the closest world in which this is broken

is one in which chemists have learned to distinguish between water and twin water.
Fodor thinks the closest world in which this is broken is one in which chemists have learned to distinguish between water and twin water. So this would be intact. But why isn’t the closest world one in which there is a mental symbol for water other than WATER?

To return to the theme that teleosemantics is the only game in town, let’s now take a look at Fodor’s (1987; 1991) asymmetric-dependency theory. Recall that “teleosemantics” is broadly defined in this book, as applying to any theory that analyzes the norms pertaining to semantic evaluations in terms of functional norms, or in other words in terms of normal-proper functioning. Fodor’s asymmetric-dependency theory counts as teleosemantics, broadly construed, on this definition.” (2017, p.90)

The relevant laws, he says, are ceteris-paribus laws, which are not universal because they permit exceptions due to interfering factors. Ceteris-paribus laws are posited when potential interfering factors cannot be fully specified. However, one type of interfering factor is pathological interference with the normal functioning of individuals. Fodor tells us that his asymmetric-dependency theory specifies the semantic relation in “nonintentional, nonsemantical, nonteleological, and, in general, non-question-begging vocabulary,” but he also admits, “I’ve helped myself to the notion of an intact organism,” and “[t]hat the organism is (relevantly) intact is part of the background idealization of practically all biological theorizing.”

Do your perceptual contents depend on whether your grandparents were swamp-people?

One child each: no differential reproduction. No evolution.

Fodor’s “laws” apply to you to the same extent whether or not you are a grandchild of swamp-people.

Many years later: Causal theories but not teleological theories allow for contents.

Causal and etiological theories agree that Swamp Alfred has none of the intentional contents of Alfred (with some possible exceptions such as some mathematical and ethical contents).

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Dretske’s swamp-Tercel: The gas gauge can’t malfunction because it wasn’t designed to do anything.

Moment of creation: Causal and etiological theories agree that Swamp Alfred has none of the intentional contents of Alfred (with some possible exceptions such as some mathematical and ethical contents).
Causation

Event e₁ → Event e₂
Suppose event e₁ = my favorite event

My favorite event → Event e₂

Causation is extensional

Causation

In virtue of some properties of e₁ but not others
In virtue of some properties of e₂ but not others

In virtue of the pitch and volume, the soprano’s high note causes the glass to break, but it is in virtue of the mass and velocity, not the color of the brick.

The brick thrown through the window causes the window to break but it is in virtue of the mass and velocity, not the color of the brick.

Arguably, causal relevance of properties is extensional too. The brick thrown through the window causes the window to break in virtue of the brick’s possession of a high degree of my favorite property (i.e., mass).

Selection for small size
Selection of redness

The size properties of the ball but not the color are causally efficacious in the ball’s descent.

Suppose constantialed in frog environment:
- SDM: small dark moving thing
- Fly
- Frog food

Adaptation is preserved under coextension: adaptive to snap in SDM condition ↔ adaptive to snap in fly condition ↔ adaptive to snap in frog food condition

Causal relevance of properties is not preserved under coextension in this sense

Even if having a heart and having a kidney are coextensional, having a heart is causally responsible for circulating blood and having a kidney is not

Even for nomologically necessarily coextensional properties

Common Cause

Increase in thermal conductivity but not electrical conductivity causally relevant to and nomologically sufficient for fire (given apparatus)

“A function is, on an etiological theory of the kind I have in mind, what the item with the function was selected to do, or what items of the type were selected to do (depending on the kind of selection involved).”

Selection for
“Claim IV: A system can respond to C-type events in virtue of their C-ness (e.g. by producing R-type events) without responding to Q-type events in virtue of their Q-ness, even if C and Q are locally co-instantiated in the relevant environment.” (158)

“Claim V: A system can be selected for responding to C-type events in virtue of their C-ness without being selected for responding to Q-type events in virtue of their Q-ness, even if C and Q are locally co-instantiated in the relevant environment during the selection.” (159).
Response functions avoid the kimu problem

The mechanism that produces R states in response to red was selected for as part of a complex causal role in which R states induce hill climbing, leading to snorf avoidance.

“CT delivers Pietroski’s interpretation. It entails that R-type states in post-selection kimu have the content there’s red, because M has the function to produce Bs in response to red and not in response to an area being snorf-free.” (163)

R refers to the triggering cause of R as part of the complex role.

Karen Neander

“CT delivers Pietroski’s interpretation. It entails that B-type states in post-selection kimu have the content there’s red, because M has the function to produce Bs in response to red and not in response to an area being snorf-free.” (163)

R refers to the triggering cause of the causal role in which R leads to hill climbing.

Natural selection has no constitutive connection to truth or accuracy: they are merely one means to inclusive fitness.

There can be selection for misrepresentation.

There can be selection for properties that are orthogonal to accuracy.

Ultra-simplified Millikan

The content of a representation is the condition in which it fulfills its function.

The meaning is: I am feeling stupid and unstable.

The condition in which it fulfills its function = his feeling stupid and unstable.

Ultra-simplified Millikan

The content of a representation is the condition in which it fulfills its function.

The condition in which the predator-at-20-feet detector fires is when the predator is 30 feet away, so the content is 30 feet.

Systematically misrepresents, runs away faster, gains selective advantage.

“A sensory-perceptual representation refers to what is supposed to cause it.” (149)

What is supposed to cause it is the 20-foot distance, so Neander allows for misrepresentation.

This example lacks a set of representations that systematically correspond to external world states.

The condition in which the predator-at-20-feet detector fires is when the predator is 30 feet away, so the content is 30 feet.

Systematically misrepresents, runs away faster, gains selective advantage.
The content of a representation is the condition in which it fulfills its function.

There would be a conflict between the assignment of distance content in predator situations as compared to, e.g., mating and foraging situations. Perhaps Millikan would have to say the content is indeterminate.

Swampman has no contents at the moment of creation but does have contents after some learning and persistence. Learning and contribution to persistence are content conferring contents that do not require evolutionary history.

Theories of content based on natural selection, learning, persistence of representations are all trying to define truth conditions pragmatically. But none of these pragmatic functions aim solely at truth.

Horses \[= \text{df} \] HORSEs Lock onto Horses refer to HORSEs

Asymmetrically depends on HORSEs

Swampman has no contents at the moment of creation but dos have contents after some learning and persistence.

Learning and contribution to persistence are content conferring contents that do not require evolutionary history.
Systematically misrepresents, runs away faster, gains selective advantage.