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LINYIDAXUE BOSHI JIAOSHOU WENKU

语法语义 研究新视野

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Preface

There is a close connection between human language and philosophy. The structure of language has metaphysical consequences. Thus, language is the language of philosophy and philosophy is the philosophy of language. The study of philosophical semantics is central to the philosophy of language.

More than fifty years ago, perhaps no one would have bothered making this final point, since analytic philosophers then took it for granted that language (and the philosophy of language) would stand at the center of any philosophical endeavor. In subsequent decades the philosophy of language was removed from this central position, sometimes to be replaced by the philosophy of mind and sometimes to be replaced by nothing at all (leaving the various sub-branches of analytic philosophy to spin off in numerous unrelated directions).

Of course, it is not all bad that the philosophy of language lost its place at the center of analytic philosophy. Fortunately, the philosophy of language has returned in a new form. It has been successfully naturalized, in my view, and integrated into the semantics of natural language and linguistic theory. Returning in this form, the philosophy of language does have powerful claims to make about our various philosophical endeavors, not just in the metaphysics of time, but also in the theory of causality, in the theory of action, and in value theory.

The intention to write this book is to clarify how one can study metaphysical questions from a linguistic/semantical perspective. I do hope that it will serve to illustrate just how central the philosophy of language is, and how, effectuated correctly, the philosophy of language deserves to reclaim its place at the very heart of analytic philosophy.

Introduction

The A-Series vs. the B-Series

Metaphysics is, in part, the study of what is real. The layperson often supposes that when philosophers worry about what is real they must worry about whether tables, chairs, and dinner plates are real. Some philosophers do worry about these questions, but there are a number of other metaphysical issues that philosophers worry about, too.

Among the areas of interest is a class of metaphysical questions surrounding the nature of time. For example, is time real? If so, is the future as real as the past? Can we change the future? If yes, why? If not, why not? If time is real, then what exactly is it? Is time, as some have suggested, really just physical change? If so, then how do we make sense of this change apart from its occurring in time? But if change takes place in time, then how can time change? As with other metaphysical questions, questions about the nature of time are notoriously difficult. Certain problems posed by the pre-Socratic philosophers are still debated, and the number of metaphysical puzzles surrounding the nature of time continues to multiply.

This work will focus on just one of the many issues in the philosophy of time. The issue, which in some form was discussed as far back as the third century (by the Neoplatonist Iamblichus), has been at the center of the twentieth-century discussion of the philosophy of time. Briefly, the problem is as follows: Two broad approaches to the philosophy of time can be distinguished. According to one approach, adopted by Russell, Einstein, Reichenbach, and others, time is simply a sequence of unchanging and tenseless events. Future events, past events, and present events are all equally real. McTaggart (1908) called this the *B-series* conception of time; others, including Mellor (1981), have called it the *untensed* conception. According to the *alternative* approach, it is fundamental to the notion of time that events, or perhaps propositions, have genuine temporal sta-

tus. So, for example, there is a fundamental metaphysical distinction between events that are future and those that are present or past. This fundamental difference is supposedly deeper than a simple ordering of events by the earlier-than/later-than relation. McTaggart referred to this as the *A-series* conception of time; others have characterized it as the *tensed* conception.

Following Gale (1967), we might find it useful to distinguish the A-series and the B-series according to the following criteria.

A-series	B-Series
The B-series is reducible to the A-series.	The A-series is reducible to the B-series.
Temporal becoming is intrinsic to all events.	Temporal becoming is psychological.
There are important ontological differences between past and future.	The B-series is objective. All events are equally real.
Change is analyzable solely in terms of A-series relations (past, present, future).	Change is analyzable solely in terms of B-series relations (earlier-than, later-than).

As we will see, these criteria do not provide necessary and sufficient conditions for identifying the A-series and the B-series; indeed, some of the criteria will have to be relaxed if logical conundrums are to be averted. For now, however, they can provide us with a useful way of thinking about the distinction. But what exactly is at stake in this distinction?

Questions like these have been pursued throughout the history of philosophy, not just because of their intrinsic interest but also because metaphysics has often been seen as a point of departure for other philosophical investigations. Questions about the metaphysics of time have been thought to have consequences for the philosophy of language, the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of religion, the philosophy of science, epistemology, and other branches of philosophy.

As we will see in Chapter 10, the decision between the A-theory and the B-theory is rich in consequences. But how does one decide between alternatives like these? One

answer would be that questions about the nature of time are best addressed by physicists. For example, Einstein held a B-series conception of time. He presumably had good physical reasons for doing so. Shouldn't we therefore defer to Einstein, or to whatever current physical theory dictates? Putnam (1967, p. 247) appears to adopt such a view: "I conclude that the problem of reality and the determinateness of future events is now solved. Moreover, it is solved by physics and not by philosophy ... Indeed, I do not believe that there are any longer any *philosophical* problems about Time; there is only the physical problem of determining the exact physical geometry of the four-dimensional continuum that we inhabit."

On the other hand, Sklar (1981, p. 2493), specifically addressing this passage from Putnam, notes that such a position reflects some ignorance of the nature of the scientific enterprise: "I think that such a naive view is as wrong as it can be. Just as a computer is only as good as its programmer ("Garbage in, garbage out") one can extract only so much metaphysics from a physical theory as one puts in. While our total worldview must, of course, be consistent with our best available scientific theories, it is a great mistake to read off a metaphysics superficially from the theory's overt appearance, and an even graver mistake to neglect the fact that metaphysical presuppositions have gone into the formulation of the theory, as it is usually framed, in the first place."

If Sklar is correct, there is still a philosophical investigation to be undertaken, even if it is to be a part of the scientific program of physics. Others have argued that subject matter called "time" in physics really has nothing to do with the metaphysical conception of time but is just an appropriation of the term to discuss certain aspects of light relations within the theory.

Perhaps the most telling problem is that it is not obvious that current physics (as opposed to physicists) actually favors one position over the other. As Sklar (1974, p. 275) has noted, the scientific theory can "change the philosophy and put the dispute [between the A-theory and the B-theory] in a new perspective, but it cannot resolve the dispute in any ultimate sense." Furthermore, Sklar (1981), Stein (1968), Dieks (1988), and Shimony (1993) have argued that non-B-theory interpretations of the special theory of relativity are possible.

In sum, even if philosophers wish to pass the burden of metaphysical inquiry onto the physicist, the physicist simply cannot shoulder the burden. There are still metaphysical questions to be answered, and it is not up to physicists alone to answer them.

But what exactly can philosophy bring to the table? Philosophers, after all, have been debating metaphysical puzzles for more than 2,000 years without much apparent success. Dummett (1991, p. 12) puts the situation as follows: “The moves and counter-moves are already familiar, having been made repeatedly by the philosophers through the centuries. The arguments of one side evoke a response in certain of the spectators of the contest, those of the other side sway others of them; but we have no criterion to decide the victors. No knock-out blow has been delivered. We must award the decision on points; and we do not know how to award points.”

Or, as Voltaire put it (less pugilistically) 200 years earlier, metaphysics is a dance of elegant steps in which we end up back where we started. Is there anything a philosopher can bring to this dance besides pure speculation and elegant steps?

One strategy in philosophy has been to reject the idea of metaphysics as a starting place and to argue for moving from the bottom up—from the theory of thought to metaphysics.

The general idea is broadly Kantian in character. We can never know things as they are “in themselves”, since the mind is actively involved in organizing our experience. The best we can do is elucidate the categories or structure of reason. For example, according to Kant, time is not itself a property of things in themselves; rather, it is imposed upon our experience by the mind. Of course, from this perspective it would be futile to begin an investigation into the nature of time apart from a consideration of the nature of thought or reason. And indeed, after an investigation into the nature of time as a category of human reason has taken place, there would be little left to do in the way of metaphysics, save perhaps to dot the i’s and cross the t’s. Or, to use a metaphor due to Dummett, the philosopher’s task is like that of the optometrist, who cannot tell us what we will see when we look about, but who, by providing us with adequate corrective lenses, can nonetheless help us to see more clearly.

In the twentieth century, a number of analytic philosophers have conceded to Kant

the general view in which an investigation into metaphysics cannot be conducted apart from an investigation into the nature of thought, but have rejected Kant's conception of thought, with its attendant categories of reason. In its place, they have proposed that thought is inherently linguistic in nature. Thus, they have proposed that the proper starting place for investigation should be the language in which we think, and this has generally been taken to be natural language.

Interestingly, the B-theory and A-theory approaches to the philosophy of time parallel two distinct approaches to the semantics of tense in natural language. On the one hand, there are approaches to the semantics of tense (see, e.g., Reichenbach 1947) that appeal to reference events in accounting for complex tenses and temporal anaphora. On the other hand, there are approaches to tense that are more in the spirit of Prior (1967, 1968)—approaches in which “past”, “present”, and “future” are primitive operators, and in which there are no past and future events *per se*.

If one supposes that there is an interesting connection between metaphysics and the semantics of natural language, and if one supposes that the semantics of natural language can help illuminate our metaphysics, then one might hope that the semantics of tense can help illuminate the metaphysics of time. For example, one might suppose that the choice between Reichenbach's theory of tense and Prior's theory of tense might have profound metaphysical consequences (favoring either the B-series or the A-series conception of time).

Here I am not advocating an approach, like that of Dummett (1991), in which we are supposed to reason bottom-up from the theory of meaning to metaphysics. It seems to me that the construction of a theory of meaning without some prior sense of ontology would have us climbing blind. That is, without some sense of the constituent structure of the world we would have no idea of how the theory of meaning is to link up our language with the world. Nor am I advocating the opposite position in which we are to sort out our ontology before we undertake the construction of a theory of meaning. It is only through the theory of meaning that we are able to differentiate the elements of our ontology. For example, even if a priori metaphysics is able to tell us that something in the world has an abstract property *foo*, what in our ontology tells us that *foo* is a *temporal* property—that

it has something to do with the nature of *time*?

Accordingly, I assume that we have partial knowledge of the nature of reality and partial knowledge of the theory of meaning, and that our task is to solve a kind of complex equation involving information from semantics on the one side and metaphysics on the other. What we know about the nature of reality will help shape our semantic theories, but it is also the case that semantic theory will help to shed light on the nature of reality.

Of course, many philosophers will hold that either metaphysics or the theory of meaning must be more fundamental than the other, but to me this has all the makings of a “chicken or egg” argument. There may be some deep truth about whether chickens or eggs are more fundamental, but no serious biologist would engage in such a debate, nor (I hope) would any serious philosopher be exercised by the question. Likewise, in my opinion, philosophers should worry less about whether metaphysics or the theory of meaning is more fundamental and should worry more about the relations that must hold between them in view of what we already know about each.

Roughly, when I say that there is an interesting relation holding between metaphysics and semantics I mean that concrete questions about the nature of reality can be illuminated by what we know about semantic theory, and that important questions in semantic theory may be adjudicated by certain of our metaphysical intuitions about the constitution of reality. Clearly more needs to be said, and Chapter 4 will take up the issue in detail. Of course, this book is intended to serve as an illustration of this general point.

Indeed, the goal of this book is to provide a semantical argument in support of the A-theory conception of time. Or, better, the goal is to argue simultaneously for the A-theory conception of time and for a theory of tense that I will call the A-theory of tense. As will be seen, if the connection between language and the world holds up, then these two doctrines will be mutually reinforcing.

My main argument will be as follows: First, there are certain semantical weaknesses inherent in the B-theory semantical position. Specifically, the B-theorist cannot adequately account for the indexical nature of temporal discourse. Since the B-theory of time cannot be detached from the B-theory semantics, this effectively undermines the B-

theory metaphysics.

On the other side, it has been held that the A-theory semantics has weaknesses of its own. Accordingly, I argue that those weaknesses, to the extent they exist, are easily repaired. The A-theory conception of time thus remains a plausible and undamaged alternative to the B-theory conception.

But I will argue further that independent psycholinguistic evidence supports the thesis that the A-theory semantics is in fact the semantical theory that users of natural language internalize and “know” (in a sense to be spelled out in Chapter 2).

To get a better idea of how this argument will unfold, let us first briefly review the semantical challenges facing both the A-theory and the B-theory.

The Semantical Challenge for the B-Theorist: Temporal

My wedding anniversary is March 12. Suppose that I have memorized this date. Maybe I had it inscribed in my wedding ring. So I know the following: My wedding anniversary is March 12.

Now suppose I am in my office late in the afternoon one day next March. I may say to myself: “My fifth anniversary is March 12. I should think about buying my wife an anniversary present.” I might then wonder how much time I have. I take out a calendar to find today’s date and discover to my horror that it is March 12! I shout “My fifth anniversary is today!”

In this little episode, it is clear that I have two distinct utterances:

(1) My fifth anniversary is March 12.

(2) My fifth anniversary is today.

It is also clear that when I utter (2) I have knowledge that I do not have when I utter (1), and this extra knowledge appears to be reflected in the difference between (1) and (2). Thus, it is arguable that (1) and (2) have different semantical contents. As intuitive as

this may seem, there are some powerful arguments designed to show otherwise—to show that the semantic contents of (1) and (2) are the same.

Indeed, the standard philosophical treatment of indexicals—for example, by Perry (1969, 1977) and Kaplan (1977, 1979, 1990)—has been to argue for a distinction between the content of a demonstrative expression and its *character* or *role*. The content would be the individual or object referred to by the demonstrative, and the character/role would be the additional cognitive significance (sometimes the expression “linguistic meaning” is used to characterize the extra element) supplied by the indexical in cases like (2). Although the literature is sometimes unclear on this point, it appears that these authors are advocating that character/role should not be part of the semantic content (or literal truth conditions) of the utterance.

What does that mean? If the semantics of natural language takes the form of a T-theory, and hence the semantics of a sentence is given by theorems like (3), then the right-hand side of the theorem—the portion following “if and only if”—states the literal truth conditions of the sentence on the left-hand side.

(3) “Snow is white” is true if and only if snow is white.

In this case, the truth conditions are that snow is white. If we assume a framework of this kind (I will explain and argue for it in Chapter 2), then one way of taking the Kaplan-Perry thesis is as saying that character/role does not make it into the right-hand side of a T-theory theorem. For example, the truth conditions of a sentence like “I am hungry” would not be as in (4) but akin to (5).

(4) “I am hungry now” is true if and only if I am hungry now.

(5) An utterance *u*, at time *t*, by speaker *s*, of “I am hungry now” is true if and only if *s* is hungry at *t*.

Here the only things that make it into the truth conditions are the individual *s* and the

time *t*. The extra indexical element found in “I” and “now” must lie somewhere outside the semantics proper.

As we will see in Chapter 3, there are many arguments for keeping the semantics free of character/role. For starters, having it in the semantics leads to headaches in modal constructions. But, as we will also see, these headaches can be ameliorated—there are ways to retain indexicality in the semantics and also cope with technical problems about modality.

Accordingly, I am going to argue that the received treatment of indexicality is mistaken—that indexicality should not be divorced from semantics. Obviously, this is not an argument that can be made carelessly, and a great deal of groundwork concerning the nature of language will have to be laid.

For example, leaving indexicality in the semantics leads to certain analyses that appear shockingly naive. A case in point would be (4) above. This is allegedly naive, since an utterance of “I am hungry” by me to a hearer *H* can hardly be interpreted by *H* using (4)—that would force *H* to conclude that I am saying that *H* is hungry. The advice we are given by Perry and Kaplan, therefore, is to sweep away this naive view of indexicals and retain only the contents within the truth conditions (as in (5)).

The problem with this brief chain of reasoning is that it rests on assumptions about the nature of language that I consider to be fundamentally mistaken. If the function of language is communication, then the objection has some merit. But why should we suppose that language is *for* communication as opposed to, say, representing our thoughts? Indexicals will be discussed at length in Chapter 3, but it is already evident that certain assumptions about the nature of language will have to be laid out first. This will be done in Chapter 1, which will lay the foundations for the discussion of the nature of semantics in Chapter 2 and for the treatment of indexicals in Chapter 3. Later, in Chapter 6, we will see precisely why this problem is insurmountable for the B-theorist.

The Challenges for the A-Theorist

There are two central challenges for the A-theorist. The first is a philosophical chal-

lenge involving an alleged paradox originally discussed by McTaggart. The second challenge—more semantical in nature—is that the A-theorist has no way of accounting for temporal anaphora. These two problems turn out to be related, but we can begin by treating them separately.

The McTaggart Paradox: Is the A-Theory Contradictory?

One of the earliest and most influential critiques of the A-theory is found in McTaggart's (1908, 1927) argument for the unreality of time. McTaggart's argument begins with the observation that certain pairs of properties are such that it would be inconsistent for one object to have both properties. For example, although a table can be both round and red, it cannot be both round and square, for roundness and squareness are inconsistent properties. Likewise, according to McTaggart, it would be inconsistent for certain events (e.g., the death of Queen Anne) to be both past and future. Thus, in such cases, if we affirm (6), we have stated something that is inconsistent if not contradictory.

(6) future (X) & past (X)

But according to McTaggart this is exactly what the A-theory entails, for a given event E will at some point be past, at some point be present, and at some point be future. Thus, we have the following conjunction:

(7) future (E) & past (E) & present (E)

The initial reaction to this part of the argument is often that it is absurd, for surely one is not saying that E is always future and always past and always present, but rather one is asserting (for example) that E is future at a certain time segment t , present at some time t^* , and past at another time segment t' . But according to McTaggart this move is a cheat; it amounts to smuggling in B-theory resources; the A-theorist can't appeal to a sequence of events or times. The B-series time line cannot be introduced here to save the A-theorist.

Let us set this paradox on the back burner for the moment and turn to the problem of temporal anaphora. As we will see, the two problems are linked, and only by solving the problem of temporal anaphora for the A-theorist can we come to grips with the McTaggart argument.

The Problem of Temporal Anaphora

Consider the following example (Partee 1973, 1984):

(8) I turned off the stove.

Clearly (8) does not merely mean that at some time in the past I turned off the stove. Without a doubt there have been many such episodes in my past. According to Partee (1973), (8) is informative because there is an implicit reference to some time or some reference event. I might equally well have uttered “I turned off the stove then” (with “then” serving as a temporal anaphor referring to some segment of time or event in the past).

This problem seems to lie at the heart of another objection to Priorean theories: that they are not able to account for complex tenses. The objection is that, for example, [PAST [PAST [S]]] simply collapses into the simple past. To see this, first consider the case where time is discrete. Let us call the minimum unit of time a “chronon”. Then, at best, [PAST[S]] is true iff S was true at least one chronon ago. But then [PAST [PAST[S]]] is true iff S was true more than one chronon ago. But this doesn’t seem to capture what we intended to say by a past perfect sentence like “I had left”.

One might try to get around this difficulty by talking about degrees of pastness, but even this move is bound to fall short. “I had left” might be about an event at any arbitrary distance in the past. Plus, there is the strong intuition that there really is a reference event here—that one could very well continue “I had left...” with “when Smith arrived”. How is *that* to be cashed out on a Priorean theory if there is no way to avail ourselves of temporal reference?

The Solution

The solution that I will propose to the problem of temporal anaphora is to develop a notion of E-type temporal anaphora—essentially a theory of temporal anaphora that does not involve reference to times or events.

In the case of ordinary E-type pronominal anaphora, as in (9), the idea is that the pronoun “He” does not refer to some salient individual, but rather stands proxy for a definite description, so that the analysis of (9) is something along the lines of (9’).

(9) A man came in the room. He tripped over the chair.

(9’) A man came in the room. The man who came in the room tripped over the chair.

Crucially, “The man who came into the room” is a Russellian description, not a referring expression; hence, the second sentence in (9’) is not about some particular individual but makes a general claim about the world—i.e., that the world contains exactly one man who came into the room, and he tripped over the chair. We can say that the second sentence in (9’) is therefore a general proposition and not a *singular* or *object-dependent* proposition. This difference may not seem like a big deal; however, as we will see, it is very important in certain contexts—for example, within the scope of modals and propositional-attitude verbs. For example, consider (10).

(10) I believe that a unicorn is in the garden and that it is eating my roses.

If the pronoun “it” is a referring expression and I have successfully uttered an object-dependent proposition, then it appears that we are committed to the existence of unicorns. However, if the pronoun stands proxy for a description, as in (10’), then if we treat descriptions à la Russell (1905) we are not forced to admit the existence of unicorns.

(10') I believe that a unicorn is in the garden and that the unicorn in the garden is eating my roses.

A similar strategy can be executed for temporal anaphora. The operative idea is that temporal anaphors like “then” do not refer to times but rather stand proxy for temporal conjunctions like when-clauses. So, for example in (11), the pronoun “then” does not refer to a time, but is a place holder for a when-clause that might be extracted from the text. Thus, (11) might have the gloss given in (12).

(11) Sam addressed Bill. Bill didn't respond then.

(12) Sam addressed Bill. Bill didn't respond when Sam addressed him.

Crucially, on this proposal, the when-clause does not refer to a time, but will express a general proposition (at least general in the sense that the proposition is not dependent upon particular times or events described therein). Furthermore, the general nature of these propositions will be crucial when they are embedded in intensional environments like those created by modals and by propositional-attitude verbs, and also, I shall argue, in the scope of temporal operators like “past” and “future”. In brief, when general propositions are embedded in such environments the results are innocent claims to the effect that states of affairs matching certain descriptions did hold or will hold. Nothing follows about there being past or future events or times.

I realize that so far this is a big promissory note. It certainly sounds incredible that a when-clause need not refer to a time. But, as we will see, the idea can be cashed out handily using only off-the-shelf philosophical resources. These resources (including the distinction between general and singular propositions) will be introduced and incorporated into a full theory of E-type temporal anaphora in Chapter 8.

Of course, in most cases the temporal anaphor is implicit (as in “Bill didn't respond”) and the number and range of temporally anaphoric constructions is vast. I will not be able to chart the entire territory, but I will survey enough of them in Chapter 8 to