

ProtoSociology

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Meaning and Publicity

Edited by Richard N. Manning

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Meaning and Publicity: Two Traditions 5

Richard N. Manning

PART I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Speaking Your Mind: Expression in Locke's Theory of Language 15

Lewis Powell

Meaning, Communication, and the Mental 31

Patrick Rysiew

Intentionality and Publicity 44

Madeleine L. Arseneault

PART II

MEANING AND INTERPRETATION

Quine, Publicity, and Pre-Established Harmony 59

Gary Kemp

Reflections on Davidsonian Semantic Publicity 73

Richard N. Manning

Meaning, Publicity and Knowledge 98

Marija Jankovic and Greg Ray

PART III
CONTEMPORARY CRITICISMS AND DEVELOPMENTS

A Puzzle about Context and Communicative Acts	119
<i>Daniel W. Harris</i>	
The Publicity of Meaning and the Perceptual Approach to Speech Comprehension	144
<i>Berit Brogaard</i>	
Local Meaning, Public Offense.....	163
<i>Robert Shanklin</i>	

ON CONTEMPORARY
LINGUISTICS AND SOCIOLOGY

Analyses on Arbitrariness of Chinese Characters from the Perspective of Morphology	181
<i>Feng Li</i>	
Formal Semantics of English Sentences with Tense and Aspect.....	197
<i>Wenyan Zhang</i>	
The Axial Age and Modernity: From Max Weber to Karl Jaspers and Shmuel Eisenstadt	217
<i>Vittorio Cotesta</i>	
Contributors	241
Impressum	242
On ProtoSociology.....	243
Ordering	244
Published Volumes	245
Bookpublications of the Project	251

SPEAKING YOUR MIND: EXPRESSION IN LOCKE'S THEORY OF LANGUAGE

Lewis Powell

Abstract

There is a tension between John Locke's awareness of the fundamental importance of a shared public language and the manner in which his theorizing appears limited to offering a psychologistic account of the idiolects of individual speakers. I argue that a correct understanding of Locke's central notion of signification can resolve this tension. I start by examining a long standing objection to Locke's view, according to which his theory of meaning systematically gets the subject matter of our discourse wrong, by making our ideas the meanings of our words. By examining Locke's definition of "truth", I show that Lockean signification is an expression relation, rather than a descriptive or referential relation. Consequently, the sense in which our words signify our ideas is roughly that our utterances advertise our otherwise undisclosed mental lives to each other. While this resolves one aspect of the public/private tension, I close with a brief discussion of the remaining tension, and the role for normative constraints on signification to play in generating a genuinely shared public language.

Introduction

John Locke opens book three of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* by highlighting the social role of language. It is because we are social creatures, Locke tells us, that we require language. At the same time, the actual account of the workings of language that he offers is hyper-individualized and based in the psychologies of particular speakers. Locke explains the importance to humans of having a shared language, but, in essence, offers a theory on which each speaker has their own idiolect. So, there is a prima facie tension between Locke's view of language's fundamentally social *purpose* and his account of its fundamentally individualistic *mechanisms*. In this paper, I show how Locke resolves this tension between the social purpose of language and its individualistic mechanisms.

One of the most common concerns about Locke's theory, from his own day forward, was the objection that his individualistic, psychologistic account of the meaning of language winds up getting the subject matter of our discourse wrong. Locke has long been accused of incorrectly maintaining that when we

MEANING, COMMUNICATION, AND THE MENTAL

Patrick Rysiew

Abstract

Thomas Reid (1710–1796) rejected ‘the theory of ideas’ in favor of perceptual direct realism and a fallibilist foundationalism. According to Reid, contact with the common and public extra-mental world is as much a part of our natural psychological and epistemological starting point as whatever special type of relation we have to the contents of our own minds. Like the general perceptual and epistemological views Reid was countering, an individualistic, idea-centered approach to language and communication continues to have a grip on theorists. But Reid’s heterodox counter to the latter is much less well known than his response to the former, even though it marks a complementary and equally clear departure from the views of his contemporaries. Reid holds that while mental phenomena are indeed implicated in language, the meaning of a term is the typically public object to which it directly refers. Further, Reid argues that for linguistic communication to be possible, we must already have some measure of access to others’ intentional states. While we each might enjoy a special kind of access to our thoughts, they are not ‘private’ in any epistemologically troubling sense: the fact that we have language shows that we already have communicative abilities and an epistemological toehold with regard to others’ mental states.

I. Introduction

Thomas Reid (1710–1796) is perhaps best known for his rejection of ‘the theory of ideas’. According to this theory, one is directly acquainted only with one’s own ideas; from there, the task is (for the individual) to recover and (for the theorist) to explain engagement with the familiar public world of things and persons. As to language, on this approach meaning is ideational, with language enabling us to communicate thoughts, to which others would otherwise have no access. As Locke states the view, “words, in their primary or immediate signification, stand for nothing but *the ideas in the mind of him that uses them*”; and we invent language so as to have some “external sensible signs, whereof those invisible ideas ... might be made known to others” (1690/1959 III.2.2; Vol. 2, 8–9).

Much of the recent interest in Reid centers on the alternative he offers to the theory of ideas and its implications. Reid defends perceptual direct realism and a fallibilist foundationalism, according to which our contact with the common and public extra-mental world is as much a part of our

INTENTIONALITY AND PUBLICITY

Madeleine L. Arseneault

Abstract

This paper analyzes the central relation between publicity, linguistic meaning, and the mental in the light of philosophical issues concerning intentionality. The concept of intentionality provides a way to articulate how the determinants of linguistic meaning are both public and private. A strength of this approach is that it accommodates desiderata of explaining compositionality and successful communication that initially seemed at odds with each other. A further benefit is that thinking about the case of linguistic meaning can help re-focus our understanding of the metaphysical status of the intentional objects of our thoughts.

Introduction

Is linguistic meaning determined by external conditions (environment, conventions) or internal ones (relations among beliefs and other mental representations, biological faculties)? Something makes my utterance of “Hastings is not very good at catching mice” a meaningful expression of English. It may not be the *same* thing that explains the meaningfulness of each part: the semantics for proper names like “Hastings” may be different from the semantics for logical constants like “not.” But in any case, are the determinants of linguistic meaning public or private? This paper will be concerned with the central relation between publicity, linguistic meaning, and the mental. My general aim is to analyze this central relation in the light of philosophical issues concerning intentionality. My specific goals are to argue that the concept of intentionality can help clarify some debates about whether determinants of linguistic meaning are public or private, and that thinking about the case of linguistic meaning helps us reexamine a debate about the status of the intentional objects of our thoughts.

There are some generally agreed upon desiderata for any account of linguistic meaning: the account must accommodate semantic compositionality, must explain how successful communication is possible (which seems to require that words uttered by different speakers can the same meaning), and must accommodate context-sensitivity (for at least indexical and demonstrative expressions, if not for an even larger class of expressions that arguably to depend on

both internal and external: it is a bridge between the thinking mind and the external world, and so the very notion of representational content requires both public and private characterization. One cannot analyze representational content without the concept of the object represented (though one can analyze “object” without the concept of representational content). If one cannot analyze intentional object without the concept of intentional inexistence, then one cannot analyze intentional object without the concept of representational content. The public and the private each find their foothold: insofar as our intentional states can be about publicly available objects, and insofar as intentional states contain representations and representatives.

The point of considering the history of the concept of intentionality, of considering alternative understandings of ‘intentional inexistence’ and the metaphysical status of intentional objects, is to show that these topics are not merely a quaint issue relegated to those interested in the Scholastic spin of Medieval Philosophy. Interest in intentionality is alive and well in contemporary cognitive science.⁸ More specifically for our inquiry, thinking about intentionality and ‘intentional inexistence’ helps us get at the issue of whether the public ‘goes private’ into thought or whether instead intentional content ‘goes public’ in determining the object our thought is about. What we see is that the issue, so described, may be improperly setting-up these options as exclusive and independent. Some of the classic worry about how the content of a representation can be determined by its object when the object does not exist may be dissolved rather than resolved, insofar as the worry is generated by notions of object and content more akin to those described at the start of our historical tour of ‘intentionality.’ The answer proposed here is that we revise our thinking about intentionality, directedness and intentional inexistence, as the projectionality of representation: the intentional feature of our mental states means that while the objects of our thoughts are represented *in* our thoughts and in that sense are determined by the content of our mental states, it’s an essential feature of the representational content and of feature of intentionality that it be directed outside of itself, that it projects to the public.⁹ More work is needed to develop an account of projection and intentional inexistence, though

8 See Dreyfus (1982) and Chisholm (1960) for discussions of how contemporary cognitive science is re-examining phenomenology and intentionality.

9 Heil’s (2004) dispositional account of intentionality gives him a naturalistic account of the intentionality of physical states, and also helps him to avoid the metaphysical Meinongian morass. Dispositionalism is used as a way to account for projection, and grounds intentionality in the intrinsic properties of the physical state rather than in a relation between the state and some object. Heil argues that this natural notion of intentionality could be used to explain the intentionality of mental states.

REFLECTIONS ON DAVIDSONIAN SEMANTIC PUBLICITY

Richard N. Manning

Abstract

The topic of the present essay is the proper understanding of Donald Davidson's version of the publicity requirement for the determinants of linguistic meaning. On the understanding I promote, the requirement is very strict indeed. My narrow aim is to show how such a strict conception of the publicity requirement can be maintained despite the evident need for interpreters to go beyond what is public on that conception in the process of constructing Davidsonian theories of meaning. Towards that aim, I engage dialectically with treatments of Davidson's principle of charity owing to Lepore and Ludwig and to Bar-On and Risjord, each of which, in different ways, recommend a more permissive approach to the publicity requirement than the one I recommended here. A broader aim is to shed some light on what would be required to take seriously the larger ambitions of Davidson's semantic program.

I.

With stunning ambition, Donald Davidson argues that skepticism and conceptual relativism are both incoherent, that thought is essentially intersubjective, and that psycho-physical reduction is impossible. Central to his arguments for these grand theses is his approach to semantic theory, and central to that approach is a very strict conception of the sense in which the determinants of meaning must be public. The proper understanding of this conception is the topic of the present paper. I will not blaze any entirely new trail. Were the matter of interpreting Davidson not such a gnarled thicket, one could even say the path I will take is well worn. But because it is such a thicket, I should make clear that I do not pretend that the reading I offer is unimpeachably correct about what Davidson's precise views might have been at any stage of his career. My narrow aim is to show how the strict conception of the publicity requirement can be maintained despite the evident need for interpreters to go beyond what is public on that conception in the process of constructing Davidsonian theories of meaning. Towards that aim, I engage dialectically with treatments of Davidson's principle of charity owing to Lepore and Ludwig and to Bar-On and Risjord, each of which, in different ways, recommend a more permissive approach to the publicity requirement than the one I recommend

MEANING, PUBLICITY AND KNOWLEDGE

Marija Jankovic and Greg Ray

Abstract

An influential view about the relationship between publicity and linguistic meaning is brought into question. It has been thought that since public languages are essentially public, linguistic meaning is subject to a kind of epistemic cap so that there can be nothing more to linguistic meaning than can be determinately known on the basis of publicly available evidence (Epistemic Thesis). Given the thinness of such evidence, a well-known thesis follows to the effect that linguistic meaning is substantially indeterminate. In this paper, we consider the sort of reasons offered for the Epistemic Thesis and uncover an unexamined presupposition about the epistemic requirements of communication and the establishment of meaning conventions. We show this presupposition is undermined by independently motivated considerations about communication and convention, giving us good reason to reject the Epistemic Thesis and its corollary about indeterminacy.

Both Donald Davidson and W.V. Quine held a strong view about the relationship between publicity and linguistic meaning – one that crucially informed their highly influential theories about language. Public languages are public and linguistic meaning is subject to a kind of epistemic cap owing to this publicity.

Epistemic Thesis (ET): There can be nothing more to linguistic meaning than can be determinately known on the basis of publicly available evidence.

So, what a sentence/expression/word in a public language means could never be more determinate than what can be genuinely settled by publicly available evidence. For both these philosophers, the Epistemic Thesis (ET) implies an indeterminacy result.

Indeterminacy Thesis (IT): Linguistic meaning is substantially indeterminate.

The argument for this is straightforward. From the ET it follows that, if assignments of meaning are underdetermined by the public evidence, then to that extent linguistic meaning is indeterminate. For Quine such assignments (for

A PUZZLE ABOUT CONTEXT AND COMMUNICATIVE ACTS

Daniel W. Harris

Abstract

A context-directed theory of communicative acts is one that thinks of a communicative act as a proposal to change the context in some way. I focus on three influential examples: Robert Stalnaker's theory of assertion, Craige Roberts' theory of questions, and Paul Portner's theory of directives. These theories distinguish different categories of communicative acts by distinguishing the components of context that they aim to change. I argue that the components of context they posit turn out not to be distinct after all, and that these theories therefore collapse the taxonomic distinctions that they set out to draw. Although it might be possible to avoid this problem by devising a more adequate theory of the nature of context, I argue that it should be taken as a reductio of context-directed theories.

1 Communicative Acts

A communicative act is the speaker's contribution to a potential episode of communication. It is whatever it is that a speaker has to do, and that their addressee must correctly interpret, in order for communication to happen.¹ Suppose, for example, that Sam uses (1) to request that Ann buy him a drink.

(1) You should buy me a drink.

In order for Sam to thereby communicate with Ann, she must interpret him as performing a request rather than an observation or a prediction, as addressing her rather than someone else, as requesting that she buy him a drink now, rather than next month, and so on.

The central task of a theory of communicative acts is to tell us what it takes

¹ Communicative acts are most often referred to as 'speech acts' or, more specifically, 'illocutionary acts'. My terminology, which follows Bach and Harnish (1979), is meant to signal that I am not interested in *conventional* illocutionary acts, such as performing a ceremony or testifying in court, that are performable only against the background of social or institutional conventions.

THE PUBLICITY OF MEANING AND THE PERCEPTUAL APPROACH TO SPEECH COMPREHENSION

Berit Brogaard

Abstract

The paper presents a number of empirical arguments for the perceptual view of speech comprehension. It then argues that a particular version of phenomenal dogmatism can confer immediate justification upon belief. In combination, these two views can bypass Davidsonian skepticism toward knowledge of meanings. The perceptual view alone, however, can bypass a variation on the Davidsonian argument. One reason Davidson thought meanings were not truly graspable was that he believed meanings were private (unlike behavior). But if the perceptual view of speech comprehension is correct, then meanings (or at least conveyed meanings) are public objects like other perceivable entities. Hence, there is no particular problem of language comprehension, even if meanings originate in “private” mental states.

Introduction

Consider the following two views of language comprehension:

Inferential view: We hear the sounds associated with a speaker’s utterance and infer (likely unconsciously but not necessarily on a subpersonal level) what was said, drawing on our competence in the syntax and semantics of the language together with background information.

Perceptual view: Fluent speakers of a language have a non-inferential capacity to auditorily (or otherwise) perceive not just the sounds of speech but also what was said or conveyed by the speaker.

There are no doubt circumstances in which the inferential view of language comprehension is correct. Suppose upon your return from the mall I hear you say ‘I just bought a new goat’ (Balcerak-Jackson, manuscript). It perceptually seems to me that you just said that you bought a new goat. But I make the

LOCAL MEANING, PUBLIC OFFENSE

Robert Shanklin

Abstract

The internalist-externalist debate about semantic and mental contents concerns whether the contents of certain claims and beliefs depend on facts external to the people having those beliefs or not. However, rather than just join up with either side, I argue for re-casting the debate so as to allow for hybrid internalist-externalist views, on the grounds that such views can help explain certain phenomena associated with slurs and pejoratives. If the debate can indeed be recast in this way and if hybrid views offer significant explanatory power, then they deserve further exploration.

I. Introduction

When Maria is feeling pain in her thigh and says she has arthritis, what are the contents of that assertion and its corresponding belief? An externalist might argue that, because ‘arthritis’ refers only to inflammations of the joints, Maria speaks falsely and moreover does not actually believe she has arthritis. An internalist, on the other hand, might argue that Maria does believe she has arthritis, though her belief is false on the grounds that arthritis is a condition only of the joints. The internalist-externalist debate about semantic and mental contents thus concerns whether the contents of certain claims and beliefs depend on facts external to the people having those beliefs or not. However, rather than just join up with either side, I argue that we should re-frame the debate so as to allow for hybrid internalist-externalist views, on the grounds that such views can help explain certain phenomena associated with slurs and pejoratives.¹ If the debate can indeed be recast in this way and if hybrid views offer significant explanatory power, then such views deserve further exploration.

¹ Insofar as it is pragmatic (by appealing to the usefulness of its theses), my argument is not unique in the debate; for instance, see Fodor’s (1987) as well as Loar’s (1988) arguments for Internalism. However, hybrid views are importantly distinct from their views, as will be discussed below in Section 3.4

ANALYSES ON ARBITRARINESS OF CHINESE CHARACTERS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MORPHOLOGY

Feng Li

Abstract

The arbitrariness of a sign is considered a universal feature and a well-established property of the world's languages by many linguists, which makes languages flexible and facilitates distinguishing the particular referents to words. However, there are some exceptions in the case of Chinese, a language quite different from western languages. This article analyzes Chinese's arbitrariness mainly from the perspective of word formation and will show that Chinese characters, which were iconic originally, depart from this universal feature to a great extent. Through many transformations and changes, Chinese characters continue to display three features: iconicity, systematicity and arbitrariness.

Preface

Human beings are in possession of a unique capacity – the use of language, which sets us apart from all other creatures on earth. Armed with it, we are able to communicate about our abstract feelings or emotions as well as matters seen, heard and felt; Armed with it, we are able to reason logically as well as make small talk; Armed with it, we are able to summarize and analyze the past as well as predict the future. An individual can acquire a language in a certain social environment and by this means he can convey complicated and abstract concepts besides daily social communications, which is a distinctive talent all other animals lack. What makes human language so complicated yet so flexible? What makes human language so creative in its capacity for novel expression without being restricted by direct contexts? In short, what sets human language apart from the languages of other creatures?

According to the Bible, in the beginning the world had but one language and one common speech. It was Adam who named the animals, plants and other objects in the world. People strove to build a Tower of Babel so high it could reach the heavens; their effort irritated the Lord so much that He chose to con-

FORMAL SEMANTICS OF ENGLISH SENTENCES WITH TENSE AND ASPECT

Wenyan Zhang

Abstract

As common expressions in natural language, sentences with tense and aspect play a very important role. There are many ways to encode their contributions to meaning, but I believe their function is best understood as exhibiting relations among related eventualities (events and states). Accordingly, contra other efforts to explain tense and aspect by appeal to temporal logics or interval logics, I believe the most basic and correct way to explain tense and aspect is to articulate these relations between eventualities. Building on these ideas, I will characterize a formal semantics – Event-State Semantics (ESS) – which differs from all formal semantics based on temporal logics; in particular, one with which sentences with tense and aspect can be adequately explained, including molecular sentences and those with adverbial clauses.

o. Introduction

Derczynski and Gaizauskas (2013) assert that natural language is the most important tool for conveying temporal information. A necessary part of language is temporal ordering, through which speakers can discuss change, describe what happened, and communicate plans for what will happen.

Unlike other theories of tense and aspect, according to this monograph, relations among eventualities are more basic than temporal information in natural language. Altshuler (2016) considers eventualities denote events and states. And the central thesis is that people can discuss change, describe what has happened and communicate plans for what will happen without appealing to temporal ordering or temporal information.

Eventualities include events and states. I acknowledge an ontological distinction between events and states, but, just the same, events and states are both widely used in semantics and pragmatics.

Standardly, events correspond to activities, processes or changes; and states to static conditions. Whereas “John broke a bowl.” denotes an event, “John was sleeping.” denotes a state. I presuppose that when people cognize an event they cognize its parts as states. Under this presupposition, an event should be treated as a chain of states rather than a chain of events. It is hard to demarcate

THE AXIAL AGE AND MODERNITY: FROM MAX WEBER TO KARL JASPERS AND SHMUEL EISENSTADT

Vittorio Cotesta

Abstract

This essay highlights the theoretical relations between Weber, Jaspers and Eisenstadt on the issue of the axial age and modernity. For Weber Modernity is an “axial age” but also an event in the history of Western rationalization. So we can’t say which is his idea on this topic. For Jaspers the axial revolution took place at the same time in China, India, and Greece. Modernity can’t be an “axial age” because it took place in the West and only after in these three civilizations. For Eisenstadt, on the contrary, modernity is a second “axial age”. He thinks the XX and the XXI century as an era of multiple modernities.

Introduction

Jaspers was one of the students closest to Weber. Maybe only Paul Honigsheim was closer. Weber appreciated him. We all know how cutting his judgments could be. In his essays on the Sociology of Religion, where he may have been addressing Stefan George, he exclaims: “Anyone who *wants* ‘visions’ should go to the *cinema*!” but, in a note immediately following this he hastens to add that “this does not refer to *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* by K. Jaspers (Weber 1988 (1920), *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, I, p. 14). It is to him that his last letter was addressed. A small gesture of kindness. Weber had received a book from Jaspers and wrote to him saying:

Esteemed Mr. Jaspers, thank you for your much appreciated book (2nd edition). I shall be able to “read it” in August. In *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Vorbemerkung, Kap. I., §1) I have already quoted your *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* and you know how much I appreciate it. Kindest regards/ Max Weber. (Weber 2012, p. 1101)

After Weber’s death, Jaspers remained very close to the widow Marianne Weber. Both were anxious lest something Weber had written (a report he had drawn up for the doctors) might fall into the hands of the Nazis. Frau Weber gave this report to Jaspers who, afraid he might not be able to keep it safe, gave it back to her. Frau Weber then destroyed it in agreement with Jaspers.¹

1 Perhaps there is some exaggeration in this. But if we consider what Johannes Haller said about him in 1944/45 we can understand Jaspers and Marianne Weber’s caution. Haller accused

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ON PROTO SOCIOLOGY

Protosociology plays an important role among philosophy journals with connected contributions on important and breaking topic – such the nature and special features of collective cognitive state – that do not receive such generous attention in other journals. It is worth serious consideration for inclusion in a library's philosophy collection.

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The journal Protosociology has become an important forum for discussion in the philosophy of social science and of sociality and, more broadly, for theoretical discussion in social science. It is especially interesting and important that such new fields as social metaphysics and social epistemology as well as research related to collective intentionality and its applications have acquired a prominent place in the agenda of Protosociology.

Raimo Tuomela, Finland

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The Borders of Global Theory – Reflections from Within and Without

Edited by Barrie Axford

Contents

Introduction: Global Scholarship from
Within and Without
Barrie Axford

THINKING GLOBALLY – WHAT DOES IT MEAN TODAY?

Reflections on “Critical Thinking” in Global
Studies
Manfred B. Steger

Globality and the Moral Ecology of the
World: A Theoretical Exploration
Habibul Haque Khondker

Real Leaps in the Times of the Anthro-
pocene: Failure and Denial and ‘Global’
Thought
Anna M. Agathangelou

On the Possibility of a Global Political
Community: The Enigma of ‘Small Local
Differences’ within Humanity
Heikki Patomäki

INSIGHTS FROM THE GALAXY OF SCHOLARSHIP

Geohistory of Globalizations
Peter J. Taylor

Autonomy, Self-determination and
Agency in a Global Context
Didem Buhari Gulmez

The Neglect of Beauty: What’s In and
What’s Out of Global Theorising and Why?
Heather Widdows

Mastery Without Remainder? Connection,
Digital Mediatization and the Constitution
of Emergent Globalities
Barrie Axford

Global Theory – To be Continued
Whither Global Theory?
Jan Aart Scholte

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Book on Demand, ISBN-13: 9783744838924, 49,50 €

ProtoSociology

An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research

Volume 32, 2015

Making and Un-Making Modern Japan

Edited by Ritu Vij

Contents

Making and Un-Making Japanese Modernity: An Introduction
Ritu Vij

PART I THE VICISSITUDES OF JAPANESE MODERNITY

Naturalized Modernity and the Resistance it Evokes: Sociological Theory Meets Murakami Haruki
Carl Cassegard

Ethno-politics in Contemporary Japan: The Mutual-Occlusion of Orientalism and Occidentalism
Kinhide Mushakoji

PART II CITIZENSHIP, MIGRANTS AND WELFARE IN MODERN JAPAN

A Dilemma in Modern Japan? Migrant Workers and the (Self-)Illusion of Homogeneity
Hironori Onuki

Pretended Citizenship: Rewriting the Meaning of Il-/Legality
Reiko Shindo

What Japan Has Left Behind in the Course of Establishing a Welfare State
Reiko Gotoh

PART III RISK, RECIPROCITY, AND ETHNO- NATIONALISM: REFLECTIONS ON THE FU- KUSHIMA DISASTER

The Failed Nuclear Risk Governance: Reflections on the Boundary between Misfortune and Injustice in the case of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Disaster
Hiroyuki Tosa

Ganbarō Nippon: Tabunka Kyōsei and Human (In)Security Post 3–11
Giorgio Shani

Reciprocity: Nuclear Risk and Responsibility
Paul Dumouchel

ON CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIOLOGY

Civil Religion in Greece: A Study in the Theory of Multiple Modernities
Manussos Marangudakis

Underdetermination and Theory-Ladenness Against Impartiality.
Nicla Vassallo and M. Cristina Amoretti

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Celso Sánchez Capdequí

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ProtoSociology

An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research

Volume 31, 2014

Language and Value

Edited by Yi Jiang and Ernie Lepore

Contents

Introduction

Ernest Lepore and Yi Jiang

I. SEMANTICS AND ONTOLOGY

The Relation of Language to Value

Jiang Yi

Refutation of the Semantic Argument
against Descriptivism

Chen Bo

Semantics for Nominalists

Samuel Cumming

Semantic Minimalism and Presupposi-
tion

Adam Sennet

Compositionality and Understanding

Fei YuGuo

Values Reduced to Facts: Naturalism with-
out Fallacy

Zhu Zhifang

II. WORD MEANING, METAPHOR, AND TRUTH

Philosophical Investigations into Figura-
tive Speech Metaphor and Irony

Ernie Lepore and Matthew Stone

Norms of Word Meaning Litigation

Peter Ludlow

The Inconsistency of the Identity Thesis

Christopher Hom and Robert May

Describing I-junction

Paul M. Pietroski

Predicates of Taste and Relativism about
Truth

Barry C. Smith

Mood, Force and Truth

William B. Starr

A Semiotic Understanding of Thick Term

Aihua Wang

III. FEATURES OF CHINA'S ANALYTICAL PHILOSOPHY

An Echo of the Classical Analytic Philoso-
phy of Language from China: the Post-
analytic Philosophy of Language

Guanlian Qian

The Chinese Language and the Value of
Truth-seeking: Universality of Metaphysi-
cal Thought and Pre-Qin Mingjia's Philoso-
phy of Language

Limin Liu

Mthat and Metaphor of Love in Classical
Chinese Poetry

Ying Zhang

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An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research

Volume 30, 2013

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Contents

CONCEPTS, SENSE, AND ONTOLOGY

What Happened to the Sense of a
Concept-Word?

Carlo Penco

Sense, Mentalese, and Ontology

Jacob Beck

Concepts Within the Model of Triangulation

Maria Cristina Amoretti

A Critique of David Chalmers' and Frank
Jackson's Account of Concepts

Ingo Brigandt

The Influence of Language on Conceptualization: Three Views

Agustin Vicente, Fernando Martinez-Manrique

REPRESENTATIONS, CONTENTS, AND BRAIN

Views of Concepts and of Philosophy
of Mind—from Representationalism to
Contextualism

Sofia Miguens

Changes in View: Concepts in Experience

Richard Manning

Concepts and Fat Plants: Non-Classical
Categories, Typicality Effects, Ecological
Constraints

Marcello Frixione

Concepts in the Brain: Neuroscience,
Embodiment, and Categorization

Joseph B. McCaffrey

**RECALLING HISTORY: DESCARTES,
HUME, REID, KANT, OCKHAM**

Conceptual Distinctions and the Concept
of Substance in Descartes

Alan Nelson

The Concept of Body in Hume's Treatise

Miren Boehm

Conceiving without Concepts: Reid vs. The
Way of Ideas

Lewis Powell

Why the "Concept" of Spaces is not a
Concept for Kant

Thomas Vinci

Ockham on Concepts of Beings

Sonja Schierbaum

ON CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

Paradoxes in Philosophy and Sociology

Note on Zeno's Dichotomy

I. M. R. Pinheiro

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Robert Kowalski

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Volume 29, 2012

China's Modernization II –

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Contents

ON CONTEMPRARY THEORY OF MODERNISATION

Multiple Modernities and the Theory of Indeterminacy—On the Development and Theoretical Foundations of the Historical Sociology of Shmuel N. Eisenstadt
Manussos Marangudakis

CHANGING CHINA: DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

Dissent of China's Public Intellectuals in the Post-Mao Era
Merle Goldman

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Qingbo Zhang

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Scott Wilson

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Francis Schortgen and Shalendra Sharma

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Beatriz Carrillo Garcia

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Ritu Vij

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David C. Schak

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Ho-fung Hung

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Volume 28, 2011

China's Modernization I
Contents

CHANGING CHINA: DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

Class, Citizenship and Individualization in China's Modernization
Björn Alpermann

Chinese Nation-Building as, Instead of, and Before Globalization
Andrew Kipnis

Principles for Cosmopolitan Societies: Values for Cosmopolitan Places
John R. Gibbins

ON MODERNIZATION: LAW, BUSINESS, AND ECONOMY IN CHINA

Modernizing Chinese Law: The Protection of Private Property in China
Sanzhu Zhu

Chinese Organizations as Groups of People—Towards a Chinese Business Administration
Peter J. Peverelli

Income Gaps in Economic Development: Differences among Regions, Occupational Groups and Ethnic Groups
Ma Rong

THINKING DIFFERENTIATIONS: CHINESE ORIGIN AND THE WESTERN CULTURE

Signs and Wonders: Christianity and Hybrid Modernity in China
Richard Madsen

Confucianism, Puritanism, and the Transcendental: China and America
Thorsten Botz-Bornstein

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Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom

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Ying Zhang

ON CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

Can Science Change our Notion of Existence?
Jody Azzouni

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Gerhard Preyer and Georg Peter (Eds.)

Introduction:

Raimo Tuomela's Philosophy of Sociality,
Gerhard Preyer and Georg Peter

I COLLECTIVE INTENTIONALITY, MEMBERSHIP, AND REASONING,

Kirk Ludwig
*Methodological Individualism, the We-
mode, and Team reasoning*
Response by Raimo Tuomela

Michael Schmitz
*What is a Mode Account of Collective Inten-
tionalit*y?
Response by Raimo Tuomela

Hans Bernhard Schmid
What Kind of Mode is the We-Mode?
*On Raimo Tuomela's Account of Collective
Intentionality*
Response by Raimo Tuomela

David Schweikard
*Voluntary Groups, Noncompliance, and
Conflicts of Reasons: Tuomela on Acting as a
Group-Member.*
Response by Raimo Tuomela

Raul Hakli, Pekka Mäkelä
Planning in the We-mode
Response by Raimo Tuomela

II SOCIAL ONTOLOGY AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Arto Laitinen
*We-mode Collective Intentionality and its
Place in Social Reality*
Response by Raimo Tuomela

Martin Rechenauer
*Tuomela meets Burge. Another Argument
for Anti-Individualism*
Response by Raimo Tuomela

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