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[8] Evolution and Philosophy of Mind

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0. Outline

1. **Truth and success**
2. **The issue of desires**

1. Truth and success

- As I mentioned in the last lecture, teleosemantics aims to provide an account of both belief- and desire- content.

- The teleosemantic account of *belief*-content, in the form presented here (Papineau's version – the 'original' teleosemantics), is promoted as a version of what is known as 'success semantics' (e.g. Papineau [1993]).

- Success semantics (Whyte, Papineau, Engel, Adams, Dokic, Mellor and others) is a fairly popular attempt to build an account of the truth-conditions of beliefs that accounts for the intuition that true belief is desirable.

- We all want to arrive at true rather than false beliefs, right? But *why so*?

- Any suggestions?

1. Truth and success

- Success semantics offers a very straightforward explanation for this fact…

- According to Whyte [1990]:

  'We want our beliefs to be true simply because, when they are, we get what we want by acting on them. The truth of beliefs explains the success of the actions they cause… this is the most interesting fact about truth, because it tells us not only why we want our beliefs to be true but also what truth is. Truth just *is* the property of a belief that suffices for your getting what you want when you act on it.'

- As a starting point for discussion, he offers a preliminary definition, which he – somewhat inaccurately – attributes to Ramsey [1927].

1. Truth and success

- The definition is the following:

    '(**B**): A belief's truth condition is that [(logically weakest condition?)] which guarantees the fulfilment of any desire by the action which that belief and desire would combine to cause.'

- Whyte's example:
    - Say Plumpton has a belief *B1* the content of which we are ignorant.
    - However, what we do know is that when combined with Plumpton's desire *D1* to lose weight, *B1* brings about Plumpton's action *A1* of going on a diet.
    - (B) yields the intuitively correct verdict: *B1* is a belief that dieting leads to weight loss.

1. Truth and success

- This example involves a simple means-end belief (of the form 'If I do *A*, then *B* follows'), which can *by itself* combine with a desire to cause action and whose truth is *by itself* sufficient for success.
- But what of non-means-ends beliefs, beliefs that only cause actions in conjunction with further beliefs and whose truth is sufficient for success only conditional on the truth of these further beliefs?
- Whyte's example:
    - Plumpton's belief *B2* that there is chocolate in the fridge won't *by itself*, in conjunction with his desire *D2* to have some chocolate, lead Plumpton to carry out action *A2* of walking over to the fridge, opening the door, reaching in, etc.

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1. Truth and success

- In addition, Plumpton needs a set of further auxiliary beliefs *S.* This set might for instance consist in the single belief *B3* that if there is chocolate in the fridge and he goes over to the fridge, opens the door, etc. he will get some chocolate.
- Furthermore *B2*'s truth isn't by itself sufficient for the success of *A2* wrt satisfaction of *D2* (what if Plumpton were to explode just before reaching the chocolate?).
- The set of further auxiliary beliefs *S* needs to be true as well.
- But as Papineau [1993] points out, it won't do to suggest:

  'The truth condition for any belief is that condition which guarantees that actions based on that belief will satisfy the desires it is acting in concert with, assuming that any other beliefs it is also acting in concert with are true as well'

1. Truth and success

- Whyte's proposal…
- *Step 1*: use a modified version of (B) to assign truth conditions to *sets* of beliefs:

  (**B***): The truth condition of *a set of* beliefs *S* is that logically weakest condition which guarantees the fulfilment of any desire *D* by the action which *S* and *D* would combine to cause.

- *Step 2*: obtain the truth conditions for *individual* beliefs by applying the following principle.

  (**B****): 'the truth-condition of a belief is what is common to the truth-conditions of all the conjunctions of beliefs within which it would cause actions: i.e. the common conjunct of all these conjunctive truth-conditions.' (Whyte [1997:86])

1. Truth and success

- In other words, according to Whyte, Plumpton's belief *B2* is a belief *that there is chocolate in the fridge* because there being chocolate in the fridge is part of the success conditions of whatever action *B2* combines with further beliefs and desires to cause.

- There are of course a number of important worries surrounding this proposal. For some of these, see the reading on the Moodle, as well as Papineau [1993; Chapter 3] (on reading for the next session).

- But right now we need to move on to another important issue: the provision of satisfaction conditions for desires.

2. The issue of desires

- Success semantics gives us an account of truth conditions for belief, but this account *requires an independent account of satisfaction-conditions for desires*.

- But can such an independent account be given?

- Whyte [1991] is optimistic.

- He starts off by noting (as many have) that desires are often extinguished by the obtaining of their satisfaction-conditions.

- Example: when I want to eat a roast dinner and satisfy that desire, I thereby lose my yearning for a roast dinner.

- He then points out, however, that it is no good to suggest:

    the satisfaction conditions of a desire = the desire's extinction conditions.

2. The issue of desires

- This is because there are desires extinguished by conditions that aren't their satisfaction conditions: my desire for a roast dinner is extinguished by a glass of sour milk.

- The 'extinction' theory of satisfaction conditions, he thinks, is too weak, further requirements are needed.*

  * Note: but isn't the theory also *too strong*? What about desires *fuelled* by their own satisfaction (e.g. wanting a cigarette)?

  Whyte's reply: when one smokes a cigarette one simultaneously extinguishes a desire for the cigarette one has just smoked and promotes a further, distinct, desire for *another* cigarette.

- Assuming that Whyte is right about the cigarette case, how could one satisfactorily strengthen the 'extinction' theory?

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- Here, Whyte turns to another commonly observed feature of the psychology of desire:

  the satisfaction of a desire often reinforces a disposition to behave, upon once again holding that desire, in the way that initially brought that satisfaction about.

- Building on this intuition, he then offers what one could call a 'extinction / reinforcement' theory of satisfaction conditions:

  the satisfaction conditions of a desire = the conditions that extinguish the desire & subsequently reinforce the behavioural dispositions that brought them about.

- However, Whyte then notes some immediate obvious counterexamples...

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2. The issue of desires

- There are a number of desires whose satisfaction conditions cannot possibly be given by the 'extinction/reinforcement' theory: those desires whose satisfaction in incompatible with the very existence of the desirer.
- Examples:
    - desires to be cremated,
    - desires for the prosperity of one's distant descendants,
    - etc.
- Whyte then makes an ingenious but ultimately unsuccessful move…

2. The issue of desires

- His suggestion:

    (i) There are two types of desires: 'basic' and 'non-basic'.

    (ii) The satisfaction conditions of 'basic' desires can be provided by the 'extinction/reinforcement' theory.

    (iii) From the content of these desires, by applying (B*) and (B**), we can obtain the truth conditions for a certain number of beliefs.

    (iv) With these truth-conditions in hand, the satisfaction conditions of the remaining 'non-basic' desires (e.g. desires to be cremated, etc.) can be provided by application of a further principle: principle (F).

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- Here is principle (F):

    '(**F**): A desire's fulfilment condition is that condition which is guaranteed to result from any action caused by that desire, if the beliefs with which it combines to cause the action are true'

- Here is Whyte's proposal in his own words [1991:65-66]:

    'Suppose something else, independent of [F] gives the content of some desire *D*. Then [(B*) and (B**)] would give the content of those beliefs with which *D* would combine to cause actions. [(F)] would then invoke the contents of those beliefs to give the contents of the other desires with which they would combine. And so on… [(B*) & (B**)] and [(F)] may not on their own give the contents of desires and beliefs; but is a few desires get their content in some other way, [(B*) & (B**)] and [(F)] may be able to give content to the rest'

2. The issue of desires

- But this proposal seems problematic…
- Say that, as suggested, we have used the extinction/satisfaction theory to get the satisfaction condition for some desire *D*.
- Now, still as suggested, we try to use (B*) and (B**) to obtain the truth conditions for the beliefs with which *D* combine to cause actions.
- At this point, two possibilities:

    (1) the relevant beliefs do not cause actions in combination with any further desires,

    (2) the relevant beliefs *do* cause actions in combination with further desires.

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- If (1): we can use (B*) and (B**) to obtain the truth conditions of the beliefs, but we cannot then use (F) to get the satisfaction conditions of any further desires (such as non-basic desires): there are no further desires that are appropriately connected to the beliefs.

- If (2): we can't yet use (B*) and (B**) to get the truth conditions of the beliefs, given the fact that we merely have the satisfaction conditions of *D*: to use (B*) and (B**), we need the satisfaction conditions of *all* the desires with which these beliefs could combine to cause actions, not just those of *D*.

- So it seems that, lacking anything sensible to say about satisfaction conditions for desires, success semantics is in trouble.

2. The issue of desires

- At this point, Papineau wheels in the notion of biological function.
- More on this in the next lecture…

Reference

- Papineau, D [1993]: *Philosophical Naturalism.* Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ramsey, F.P. [1927]: 'Facts and Propositions'. Published in F.P. Ramsey [1990] *Philosophical Papers* (ed. D.H. Mellor). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 34-51.
- Whyte, J.T. [1990]: 'Success Semantics', *Analysis* 50: 149-157.
- Whyte, J.T. [1991]: 'The Normal Rewards of Success', *Analysis* 51:65-73.
- Whyte, J.T. [1997]: 'Success Again: Replies to Brandom and Godfrey-Smith' *Analysis* 57(1): 85-88.

Next lecture: 'Evolution and Philosophy of Mind (ctd.)'

- Reading:
    - Papineau, D [1993]: *Philosophical Naturalism.* Oxford: Blackwell. Ch3, skipping sections 3.3, 3.5, 3.9 and 3.10.