

DPRN Philosophy of Language Workshop with Professor Dilip Ninan (Tufts University)

23 & 24 May 2016

Henry Jones Room, Trinity College, Dublin (see [here](#))

MONDAY (23 MAY)

- 09.30 Thomas Hodgson (University College Dublin), 'Variation of propositional structure'
- 10.45 Elmar Unnsteinsson (University College Dublin & University of Iceland), 'Solving puzzles is not enough: Confusion and theories of reference'
- 12.00 Dilip Ninan (Tufts University), 'Attitudes and the self'
- 13.00-14.00 LUNCH
- 14.00 Paal Antonsen (Trinity College, Dublin), 'Common ground and private commitment'
- 15.15 Niall Connolly (University of Sheffield), 'I am here now; but I won't be here when you get this message'

TUESDAY (24 MAY)

- 10.00 Daniel Deasy (University College Dublin), 'Real change and contingency without primitive temporal or modal operators'
- 11.15 Suki Finn (University of York & Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies), 'Diagnosing the Adoption Problem in logic'
- 12.30 Zuzanna Gnatek (Trinity College, Dublin), 'Ontological commitments of abstractionism'
- 13.30-14.30 LUNCH
- 14.30 James Miller (Trinity College, Dublin), 'Merely verbal disputes and common ground'
- 15.30 Edward Nettel (University College Dublin), 'Objects, content, communication'

Abstracts

MONDAY

Thomas Hodgson (University College Dublin), 'Variation of propositional structure'

A neo-Russellian theory of semantic content assigns structured propositions to sentences in context. Sentences containing proper names are assigned singular propositions containing those names' referents. But, some names are empty i.e. they lack a referent. There are various ways that a neo-Russellian might try to deal with this problem. One option would be to say that in these cases a non-singular proposition is assigned. That the semantic content of a sentence depends on how things are in the world is not a radical idea. That the structure of the semantic content can vary is. I will present some motivation for this view in comparison with alternative proposals. I will also respond to the objection that the view cannot make sense of the important semantic property of structural entailment. The idea is that the genuinely interesting property is one that is restricted to cases where the name is not empty.

Elmar Unnsteinsson (University College Dublin & University of Iceland), 'Solving puzzles is not enough: Confusion and theories of reference'

The job of philosophers of language is often described in terms of providing solutions to semantic puzzles of various kinds; Frege puzzles, de se puzzles, Twin-Earth puzzles, and so on. Many of these puzzles share two interesting features. First, they involve speakers who are confused about the identity of some object or other and, secondly, the puzzle itself arises because the theorist wants to determine some semantic property of an utterance made by such speakers. In this talk, I present general reasons to doubt the merits of a puzzle-driven methodology in philosophical semantics. More specifically, I look at the debate between intentionalists and contextualists about singular reference, arguing that semantic puzzles are not useful to adjudicate between the two theories. To this end, I focus on two examples of puzzle-driven semantic arguments: Kripke's argument for a distinction between semantic reference and speaker's reference and Perry's Rip Van Winkle argument for so-called automatic indexicals.

Dilip Ninan (Tufts University), 'Attitudes and the Self'

Indexical attitudes are attitudes that would characteristically be expressed or reported with an appropriate indexical-containing sentence. The literature on indexical attitudes tends to focus on de se attitudes ("I"-attitudes) and de nunc attitudes ("now"-attitudes); for simplicity, I focus on the former. The standard view of these attitudes is that they are 'exceptional' in some way: they pose a distinctive problem for standard theories of attitudes, a problem that we wouldn't see if we restricted our attention to non-indexical attitudes. But this view, which I call "de se exceptionalism," has been subjected to criticism in recent years by philosophers who hold that indexical attitudes pose no special problem for otherwise plausible theories of attitudes. My talk will attempt to clarify this dispute, and then argue for de se exceptionalism. In my view, the distinctive feature of de se attitudes is that there are token de se attitudes A such that, for any attitude B possessed by someone distinct from the

possessor of A, if B is truth-conditionally equivalent to A, then B is functionally distinct from A. This feature of de se attitudes poses a problem for what might reasonably be called a standard theory of attitudes.

Paal Antonsen (Trinity College, Dublin), 'Common ground and private commitment'

According to the standard view, assertoric contents are sets of possibilities. To handle self-locating contents, Lewis (1979) suggests that a possibility should be construed as an <agent, time, world> triple, i.e. a centered world. As an alternative, Stalnaker (2008, 2011) takes a possibility to merely be a world. The phenomena of self-location is understood in terms of a special relation between agents and contents. This paper outlines a version of the Stalnaker account. On this version, the special relationship is characterized by adding a view of assertion as an act by which one undertakes commitments.

Niall Connolly (University of Sheffield), 'I am here now; but I won't be here when you get this message'

Answering machine messages allegedly refute Kaplan's 'classical account' of the semantics of 'I', 'here' and 'now'. The classical account doesn't allow that a token of 'I am not here now' can be true; but these words in an answering machine message can communicate something true. In this paper I argue that the true content communicated by an answering machine message is extra-semantic content conveyed via the familiar mechanism of 'externally oriented make believe'. An answering machine message instigates or suggests a game of make believe whose rules prescribe making believe that the agent who recorded the message is speaking there (at the end of the line) and then; and it thereby conveys the proposition whose real truth makes the message fictionally true.

TUESDAY

Daniel Deasy (University College Dublin), 'Real change and contingency without primitive temporal or modal operators'

Developing an idea from Ninan (2010), Dorr (*Counterparts MS*) suggests that *propositional temporalists* (according to whom there are propositions that are sometimes true and sometimes false) can accept popular semantic theories which posit explicit time variables in syntax by positing an unvoiced existential quantifier restricted to the one and only present instant. In that case, simple sentences like 'Erdogan is a fool' have a form along the lines of ' $\exists t(\text{Present}(t) \ \& \ \text{Fool}(\text{Erdogan}, t))$ '. Deasy (2015) builds on this idea in order to defend a version of the *moving spotlight theory* of time according to which (i) there is exactly one temporary fundamental property of presentness and (ii) there are no fundamental temporal operators. I describe this view along with its modal analogue, the *modal moving spotlight theory*. I consider three problems facing this pair of views: one metaphysical, one semantic, and one logical.

Suki Finn (University of York & Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies), 'Diagnosing the Adoption Problem in logic'

There have been many ways to understand what the Tortoise taught us in Carroll's puzzle, 'What the Tortoise Said to Achilles'. Quine famously used the puzzle as a 'regress problem' against Carnap to show that the logical rules cannot be true by convention. More recently, Kripke has interpreted the puzzle as an 'adoption problem' (coined by Padro) which he uses against Quine to show that the logical rules cannot be empirical. I will argue that Carroll's puzzle, the regress problem, and the adoption problem, are distinct, and that we learn different lessons from each. The aim of this paper is to map out the debates between Kripke, Quine, and Carnap, in order to show that Kripke's adoption problem is far further reaching than originally considered. I will show how the problem of adopting a logical rule arises whether we take the rules to be empirical (in Quine's sense) *or* analytic (in Carnap's sense), demonstrating that the adoption problem does not discriminate among different interpretations of the status or justification of logical rules. Rather, there is a far more fundamental issue with adopting a logical rule that cannot be resolved by appeal to how we justify our logic. The fundamental issue in the adoption problem is the role that logical rules play in our practice of making inferences. Therefore, the problematic element in adoption is the application, rather than the acceptance or justification, of the logical rules.

Zuzanna Gnatek (Trinity College, Dublin), 'Ontological commitments of abstractionism'

Bob Hale and Crispin Wright's abstractionism involves an important argument for the existence of numbers - based on the neo-Fregean view that objects just are what singular terms refer to and that it is sufficient for singular terms to have reference that they occur in true statements. As it's been widely debated, the argument seems to be exposed to an objection of ontological commitment to other kinds of objects whose existence is questionable. Roughly speaking, the idea is that if the neo-Fregean argument holds for numerical terms, it should also hold for such terms as fictional names or terms like 'the present king of France', for those terms do function as singular terms and appear in statements that seem to be true. Although that objection is interesting, it relies on a significant simplification - it doesn't take into account a crucial part of the neo-Fregean view of reference which has to do with abstraction principles. A detailed analysis of the neo-Fregean view of reference and the role that abstraction principles play in it shall show why the above objection is easy to undermine exactly (roughly, it is due to some difficulties raised by identifying a relevant equivalence relation required by the formulation of an appropriate abstraction principle in case of fictional terms or such terms as 'the present king of France').

James Miller (Trinity College, Dublin), 'Merely verbal disputes and common ground'

In this paper I will discuss merely verbal disputes. Various different proposals have been made about how to characterise or understand the idea of a merely verbal dispute. After giving background to the notion, I propose an alternative conception based on Stalnaker's idea of 'common ground'. I then argue that this new conception allows us to understand various metaphysical disputes as substantive.

Edward Nettel (University College Dublin), 'Objects, content, communication'

Peter Pagin tells us that it is natural to assume that, during a communicative exchange between a speaker and a hearer, “communication succeeds when the content of the hearer’s terminal state is the same (or approximately the same) as the content of the speaker’s initial state.” This assumption, at least in Pagin’s hands, brings with it a presupposition: that the content of a saying is capable of being a relatum of a relation of objectual identity. This presupposition is undermined by considerations about what it takes for the same thing to be said in the course of two sayings; considerations that, I claim, should be our point of departure in this area. In the first instance, expressions such as ‘what is said’ should not be thought of as referring expressions; in the second instance, sameness of what is said cannot be presumed to be an equivalence relation. Abandoning that presupposition offers the promise of dissolving certain problems that have come to exercise some philosophers of communication—that is, problems concerning whether it is identity or mere similarity of ‘contents’ that is needed for communication’s success.