

Philosophy 324A

Philosophy of Logic

2016

Note Ten

AMBIGUITIES REAL AND IMAGINED

*** To save time, I've cobbled together some speaking points of the sort that I write in preparing for a lecture. Even so, I think that they flow together well enough to make rewriting them in essay format unnecessary.***

THURSDAY, OCT 6/16

BEFORE WE GET STARTED

- The systematic ambiguities which infest formal philosophy are certainly recognizable in principle, and sometimes are indeed recognized; Mainly, however, they aren't noticed.

AND YET

- This *doesn't* preclude formal philosophers from advancing in well-supported ways some extremely engaging philosophical theses.
- If we were to ask Frege about this, he would be fit to be tied. True, his complaint was against the intractable *vagueness* of natural languages, hence their incapacity to say anything true or false. But had he twigged to the pervasive ambiguities of natural languages in their employment by formal philosophers, it's hard to imagine his not being equally perturbed by them. Mind you, it is Frege himself who is the nominal founder of formal philosophy, hence directly responsible for the ambiguities in which it so liberally and profitably traffics.

THIS IS IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO HAVE A NAME

- Let's call this The Ambiguity Riddle.

This is not something that we philosophical logicians can be indifferent to. We won't be doing our job unless we at least try to solve the riddle.

HERE IS SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

- **The Ambiguity Avoidance Thesis:** Given what our second bulleted passage says, it is a reasonable abduction that although the texts delivering the formal philosophy goods is suffused with ambiguity, we manage to keep it out of harm's way by virtue of an **ambiguity-filtration device** operating automatically and subconsciously. It allows us to be "just-in-time" disambiguaters

- Keep this in mind for comparative purposes when we get to the *inconsistency-management* part of the course

SOME REMARKS ABOUT B & R

- The chapter in which pluralism is defined (chapt. 3) opens with the claim that pluralism “is a thesis about logical consequence.” (25).
- “Crudely put, a pluralist maintains that there is more than one relation of logical consequence.” (*idem.*)

There are now two questions to which we should attend.

(1) *Evidence*: What reason is there to think that the thesis is true?

(2) *Motivation*: Supposing that the thesis is true, why would that motivate a whole book on it?

WELL?

- As for the EVIDENCE question, it would appear that reasons that support the pluralist thesis is that the English expression “logical consequence” is ambiguous.
 - By “logical consequence”, B & R mean *deductive* consequence. So the reference to inductive consequence, historical consequence, etc. is nothing of consequence (sorry!): I mean it is neither here nor there.
 - The same is true of the ambiguity of “necessity”. It doesn’t matter, because it lends no support to the idea that *deductive* consequence is ambiguous. Yes, it is true that deductive consequence is the converse of following of necessity from. But the *cited* ambiguities of “necessity” – bare, metaphysical, physical, historical – are of no matter here. Why? Because when consequence is deductive, the embedded necessity is “bare”.
- As for the MOTIVATION question: Since the evidence question hasn’t been adequately answered, it is hardly possible that the motivation question would admit of an adequate answer in B & R terms.

THE CORRECT ANSWER(S)

- The FACT is that there are more different logics of deductive consequence than you can shake a stick at. This is the MULTIPLICITY factor.
- The PROBLEM is that many of those systems are one another’s same-subject rivals and that the rivalries have resisted resolution. This is the STRIFE factor.

SO THEN

The CORRECT answer is that:

- Pluralism is offered as a CONFLICT RESOLUTION device for bringing this embarrassing rivalry to an intellectually satisfying end.
- It would operate as a DISAMBIGUATION DEVICE. It would show that in a conflict between system S and system S*, there is something x of which S is true and S* not, and something else y of which the reverse is true.
- This is a special case of a RECONCILIATION STRATEGY.

BACKGROUND REMARKS

- The SOURCE of these same-subject rivalries is REALISM, the doctrine that the truths of logic are **objectively** true and state OBJECTIVE FACTS about logical reality.
- The SEEDS of the CONFLICT-RESOLUTION REALISM lie in **model theory**, in which logical consequence is INDEXED TO INTERPRETATIONS.
- Accordingly, the truths of logic tell the objectively true story of what really holds of SYSTEMS, but not necessarily of the WORLD..

YES BUT

- What is **really true** about logical consequence in S is **really false** in S*. Which of them, if either, captures the REAL TRUTH about consequence in LOGICAL REALITY?
- Only if ONE of the real truths about logical reality is that it harbours two genuinely real but different relations of logical consequence – one of them reliably captured by S, and the other by S* – can IRREALISM be avoided.
- If this cannot be shown, the SYSTEM-REALISM collapses into IRREALISM – there are NO objectively true facts about logical consequence in logical reality.
- In shorter words, on current assumptions, there would be NO logical reality AT ALL.

WHAT NOW?

- There is no empirically sustaining evidence for the ambiguity of “logically follows from” in English.
- So it looks as if pluralism is committed to logical irrealism.
- Why, then, do B & R even BOTHER with whether “logical consequence of” is ambiguous in ENGLISH?

A SURMISE

- B & R’s **real take** on “logical consequence” in English is that English is vague and imprecise. Why even mention the meaning of “computable function” in (mathematical) English? The answer is
 - a) that it is vague and imprecise

and

b) that “recursive function” is a desirable *precisification* of it, i.e., a rational reconstruction of it in our sense.

OH YEAH, HOW COME?

- Because the Church-Turing Thesis is *widely believed* (pp. 25 ff)

SO WHAT?

- Where is the formal representability proof that the Church-Turing thesis does indeed formally represent computable functions in everyday mathematical usage?
- Doesn't the wide acceptance move commit the *ad populum* fallacy? Or maybe not?

SUMMARY REMARKS

- The whole of B & R 's *Logical Pluralism* is an exercise in FORMAL PHILOSOPHY in which (among other things) INTERPRETATION-VARIABILITY in model theory formally represents MEANING-VARIABILITY in English.
- Which takes us straight back to the AMBIGUITY RIDDLE discussed in the early parts of this note.
- B & R are technically sophisticated and philosophically adroit logicians. In a number of respects, they are reliable representatives of the present state in philosophy of logic. This alone makes their book a valuable thing for a modern philosopher of logic to read. We could even go so far as to suggest that the core idea of the book is the root and branch idea of formal philosophy, to wit
- **The frailty thesis:** ALL concepts of logical interest are, as formulated in English (or whatever) in no fit shape to bear the burdens of logic. What is therefore required is that , prior to philosophical deployment, all of them be RATIONALLY RECONSTRUCTED in the ways we've been lately discussing.