

## *Between Saying and Doing: Towards an Analytic Pragmatism*

### **Lecture Six:      Intentionality as a Pragmatically Mediated Semantic Relation**

#### **Section 1: Pragmatism and Semantics**

Some pragmatist theses about intentionality:

P1]      The most fundamental kind of intentionality (in the sense of directedness towards objects) is the *practical* involvement with objects exhibited by a sentient creature dealing skillfully with its world.

P2]      The most basic form of such activity is a Test-Operate-Test-Exit cycle of perception, performance, assessment of the results of the performance, and further performance—that is, a process or practice consisting of an open-ended sequence of feedback-governed performances.

P3]      Feedback-governed practices are ‘thick’, in the sense of essentially involving objects, events, and worldly states of affairs. Bits of the world are *incorporated* in such practices, in the exercise of such abilities.

P4]      The specifically *semantic* intentionality displayed in language-use, engaging in *discursive* practices, deploying an autonomous *vocabulary*, should be understood both as a development of and a special case of the sort of basic *practical* intentionality exhibited already by the kind of feedback-governed transactions mentioned in the first three theses.

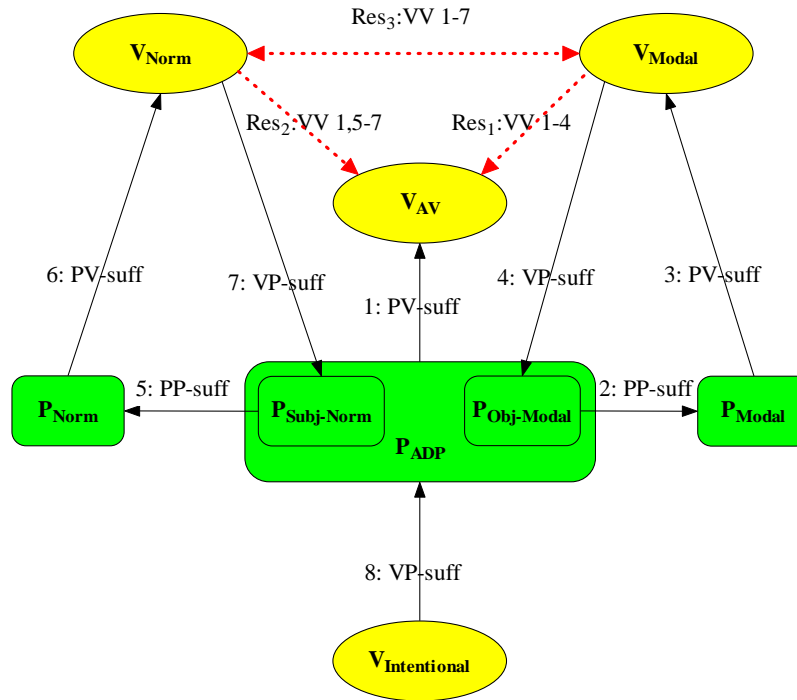
P5]      One cannot understand the two poles of specifically semantic or discursive intentionality—knowing and acting subjects and the objects they know of and act on, their representing activities and the objects and objective states of affairs they represent—independently of the semantic intentional relations they stand in to one another, and then somehow bolt together those ways of understanding the relata to understand those relations between them. One must rather start with an understanding of the thick practices engaged in and abilities exercised, and abstract from or dissect out of that an understanding of the two poles of the semantic intentional relations those practices and abilities institute and establish.

#### **Section 2: Normative and Modal Vocabularies Again**

Both modal and normative vocabularies should be seen as LX for, as elaborated from and explicating of, various features essential to every autonomous discursive practice. Normative vocabulary makes explicit important features of what knowing and acting subjects *do* when they deploy a vocabulary, when they *use* expressions so as to *say* something. And modal vocabulary makes explicit important features both of what is *said* and of the objective world that is talked *about*.

Thinking about complex, pragmatically mediated resultant semantic relations between deontic normative and alethic modal vocabularies is a way of thinking analytically both about discursive intentionality (the kind that involves distinctively *semantic* relations), and about the relation between what one who engages in a discursive practice *does* and what she *says about* the objective things she thereby represents or talks about.

Analyzing or Dissecting Discursive Practices  
into Subjective-Normative and  
Objective-Modal Components



**Section 3: Discursive Representation and Rational Rectification**

An essential part of what one is doing in committing oneself (doxastically or practically) to some claimable content is taking responsibility for *integrating* it into a whole constellation of such commitments, by following out the inferential consequences it has in the context of its fellows, and subjecting it to rational criticism by confronting it with any concomitant commitments that turn out to be materially incompatible with it. Engaging in that fundamental sort of discursive activity is what Kant called “synthesizing the transcendental unity of apperception.”

Apperception is discursive (that is, conceptually articulated) awareness: undertaking commitments whose contents can be specified by sentences. The *unity* of those discursive commitments is a *normative* unity: a matter of taking responsibility for one’s commitments by acknowledging what else they commit and entitle one to, and what other contents to which one may initially be committed they preclude entitlement to. Discursive updating aims at the material inferential completeness and compatibility of one’s commitments, in the sense that insofar as one falls short of those ideals, one is normatively obliged to do something about it, to repair the failure.

Acknowledging material inferential and incompatibility relations essentially involves representing objects as having properties (perhaps complex relational ones) that stand in corresponding relations to one another. In drawing inferences and ‘repelling’ incompatibilities, one is taking oneself to stand in representational relations to *objects* that one is talking *about*. A commitment to *A*’s being a dog does *not* entail a commitment to *B*’s being a mammal. But it

*does* entail a commitment to *A*'s being a mammal. Drawing the inference from a dog-judgment to a mammal-judgment *is* taking it that the two judgments represent one and the same *object*. Again, the judgment that *A* is a dog is not incompatible with the judgment that *B* is a fox. It *is* incompatible with the judgment that *A* is a fox. Taking a dog-judgment to be incompatible with a fox-judgment *is* taking them to refer to or represent an *object*, the *one* object to which incompatible properties are being attributed by the two claims.

Discursive intentionality of both sorts, 'that'-intentionality and 'of'-intentionality—indeed, as we can now say, along both of its inextricably intertwined expressive and representational dimensions—is the paradigmatic *semantic* phenomenon. We have been rehearsing some of the ways in which it can be seen to be a *pragmatically mediated* semantic phenomenon, by looking at some of the things one must *do*—the practices one must engage in, the abilities one must exercise—in order to say *of* something *that* it is thus-and-so.

#### **Section 4: Two Senses of 'Incompatible'**

The meaning-use analytic pragmatist approach to semantics requires appeal to two different senses of 'incompatibility', which turn out to be related in a surprising and revealing way:

- One is an objective *modal* sense of 'incompatible': a matter of what states of affairs and properties of *objects* actually are incompatible with what others, in the world as it is independent of the attitudes of the knowing-and-acting subjects of practical, feedback-governed transactional engagements.
- The other sense of 'incompatible' is *normative*, and concerns *commitments* on the part of knowing-and-acting *subjects*—the ones who engage in discursive practices and exercise discursive abilities. To say that two commitments (whether doxastic or practical) are incompatible in this sense is to say that one cannot be *entitled* to both, and so that if one finds oneself with such commitments, one is *obliged* to *do* something: to rectify or repair the incompatibility, by relinquishing or modifying at least one of those commitments (to enter into a process of updating, of rectification, of further synthesizing a rational unity). What is incompatible with what in this sense is a matter of the practices and attitudes of the subjects of those commitments: the norms implicit in their behavior, what they in practice *take* or *treat* as incompatible in acknowledging and attributing the deontic statuses of commitment and entitlement.

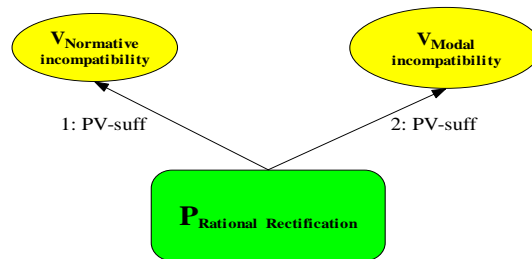
These are *different* notions of incompatibility. It is *impossible* for one and the same *object* to have incompatible *properties* at the same time. But it is merely *impermissible* for one and the same *subject* to have incompatible *commitments* at the same time.

The relation between 'incompatibility' in the normative sense and 'incompatibility' in the modal sense is an expression of deep structural features of the nexus of intentionality: the nature of its subjective and objective poles and of the relation between them.

By engaging in the practice of rectifying commitments, subjects are at once *both* taking or treating the *commitments* involved as incompatible in the *normative* sense of obliging them to do something about that collision *and* taking or treating two *states of affairs* regarding *objects* as incompatible in the *modal* sense that it is impossible for both to obtain.

It is an essential individuating feature of the metaphysical categorial sortal metaconcept object that objects have the metaproperty of *modally* repelling incompatibilities. It is an essential individuating feature of the metaphysical categorial sortal metaconcept subject that subjects have the metaproperty of *normatively* repelling incompatibilities.

**Rational Rectification =  
Treating Commitments as Normatively Incompatible =  
Treating Properties as Modally Incompatible**



The practical activity of rectifying commitments by removing incompatibilities provides a perspective from which deontic normative and alethic modal vocabulary show up as two sides of one coin, as making explicit essentially complementary aspects of what then becomes visible as an intentional nexus semantically connecting knowing and acting subjects with the objects they know about and act on. This is the activity that *pragmatically mediates* the semantic relations characteristic of discursive intentionality.

**Section 5: Conclusion**

1. A suitably chosen normative (deontic) vocabulary (of commitment and entitlement) can serve as a sufficient pragmatic metavocabulary for modal vocabulary. That is, we can explain what one must *do* in order to be deploying the objective modal notion of incompatibility in terms of the normative notion of claimings that are incompatible just in case commitment to one rules out entitlement to the other.
2. The notion of incompatibility introduced that way can be used as the basis of a *semantic* metavocabulary, in terms of which we can define both logical and modal operators, and also represent important aspects of the contents of non-logical concepts.
3. The “Kant-Sellars theses” constitute the first half of the complex resultant expressive property of vocabularies I called “LX-ness”: As is the case with logical vocabulary, practices-or-abilities PV-sufficient to deploy both modal and normative vocabulary can be algorithmically elaborated from practices PV-necessary for deploying any autonomous vocabulary.
4. The other half of the LX-ness of these vocabularies is that normative and modal vocabularies each make explicit (a matter of the VP-sufficiency of a vocabulary to specify practices-or-abilities) important aspects implicit in the use of any autonomous vocabulary.
5. Those complementary aspects made explicit by normative and modal vocabulary correspond to the subjective and objective poles of the intentional nexus between what discursive practitioners *do*, their activity of claiming, and the objects, properties, and facts that they thereby count as *saying something about*.