

# **A History of Philosophy**

## **80 Philosophy of Language**

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Since positivism with its ideal language philosophy, as well as the ordinary language philosophy development of the 1940s and 50s, with which we've been talking in connection with philosophy of religion and ethics. More recent developments of philosophy of language have involved developments in metaphysics, in ontology. That that would be so shouldn't be a great surprise when we recognize that the categories of thought, categories of being for Aristotle, for Hegel, and that in that sense the logical categories evident in language would be related to ontology.

And particularly when we're talking of the demise of logical positivism and the way in which its reductionist view of language eliminated metaphysics, it's understandable that new views of language would open up to metaphysics. And if you want to get some glimpse of this, one of the sources which you'd find helpful is a book by John Passmore that was published, I think, six years ago. John Passmore's book, *Recent*, it's not *Recent Philosophy*, but *Recent Philosophers*, *Recent Philosophers*, which you will find a helpful summary of this sort of thing, though it's by no means complete.

Now, I want to divide what I want to look at here into three topics, all three of which sound like topics in metaphysics dealing with ontology. Indeed, they are. The first has to do with logical entities.

In addition to physical entities and mental states, is there a third kind of object, logical objects, of an unchanging sort? It's analogous to asking, are there real universals, except that it's sometimes asked in terms of essences and sometimes in terms of logical objects, logical entities. Now, how does this sort of question arise in connection with language? And we have to go back to Frege, who in the early part of this century was quite influential. He died in 1925.

Frege distinguished between sense and reference in regard to language. That is to say, you can have a sentence, a sentence which has both sense and reference. Now, the reference, of course, is to that which it is about.

If it's a sense datum statement, it would be about sense data. If it's a material object statement, it would be about material objects. If a statement's about God, then the reference would be God, a reference in that sense.

But the word sense, the sense of the sentence, has to do with its logical meaning, with its logical meaning. That is to say, a sentence stands for a proposition, where a proposition is not just a sentence, a statement, but is an objective state of affairs, an objective state of affairs which can be talked about in a variety of sentences, some in

English, some in French, some in German, some in Dutch, some in Japanese, so on and so forth, you name it. So the proposition is the logical state of affairs, which is the meaning of the sentence.

And, of course, that logical state of affairs can have reference to things like sense data, material objects, and so on and so forth. So that distinction becomes important. You might have a proper name, for instance, the sense of which, the meaning of which, might be very significant.

You're named after someone, the word has all sorts of connotations, and at the same time, the sense of the proper name is to be distinguished from its reference. It refers to you as the individual who has been given that proper name. The name, the sense, the reference to the individual.

Or you might be thinking of some other abstract term, some abstract term or some general term, where the sense has to do with the concept, whether it be a universal concept or a general concept. Okay? And the reference is to a whole set of individuals, a whole class of individuals. Perhaps the reference is to real universals.

So distinguish, then, between sense and reference. Sometimes we distinguish them by talking of sense as the intentional meaning, and reference as the extensional meaning. Extensional meaning, yes, we use the term extension in talking in logic, do we not? The extension of a noun, as it's used in a sentence, all men are mortal, universal extension, and "some men, particular extension, has to do with the reference.

The intention has to do with the sense. Now Karl Popper distinguishes, however, not just these two worlds of sense and reference, but also a third world. That is to say, in addition to physical objects to which a sentence can refer, in addition to physical objects, there are two things that are involved here at the intentional level.

There are, first of all, mental states. What it is that's running through your mind, the mental state, which can be empirically described in terms of ideas of reflection, those subjective conditions. And then he distinguishes the logical objects of that mental state.

So that you might be thinking in terms of some logically objective state of affairs that is thought, not seen, even though what you are thinking there in that logical state of affairs has reference to something else. And the classic case would be when you're talking of universals. So that your mental state has to do with certain words which are the vehicles for the logical object, which is the universal, the real universal essence, an objective state of affairs that is unchangingly what it is.

A is always A, so forth. The logical object is distinct from the object. So even if you take the language and the mental states which we have, which we experience, the logical object, the physical object.

The logical object would be the essential nature of humanness. The physical object, humans. So logical objects, logical entities, come in that sort of context.

Now, as you could well imagine, this notion of logical objects to which Frege and Popper are saying yes is going to be challenged by anybody with a strongly empiricist bent. And that's precisely the case with W. V. O'Quine, who challenged it in an essay of his called Logic Without Ontology. Logic without ontology.

His view, you see, is that logic does not need that intentional object. That language does not need that intentional object. That logically objective state of affairs, which cannot be otherwise, does not need essences, does not need universals.

All that language needs is simply predicates and qualifiers. Predicates and qualifiers. Predicates that have empirical reference and qualifiers that have formal functions.

So if we want to say simply that some men are mortal, then in saying some men, we're making reference to certain empirical entities, physical entities. Mortality is an empirical property, predicated of some men. Some is simply a logical qualifier.

All we need, you see, is those sorts of things. And he's quick to point out that we can therefore state such things, such statements, in logical terms using the symbolism of ideal language. There exists some x's such that x is human and x is mortal.

Some men are mortal. Okay. And if you want to make it all, simply have it's true of all x's that if x is human, then x is mortal.

So you can play simply with logical qualifiers that we do in the formalities of formal logic and terms that have empirical reference. Now, what Coyne is trying to say, and he makes very explicit, is that meanings are functions of language, not of mental states. The question, when something is uttered, is not what are you thinking of, but what are you referring to? What are you talking about, you see? He takes language, that is to say, he takes language to be verbal behavior, a kind of overt physical behavior.

He's only interested in thought insofar as it is expressed in the symbolism of language. Thought is not psychological activity. Uniquely, it is verbal behavior.

You don't have to utter it out loud. You formulate it in your mind. The language symbols, language behavior.

So universal terms like roundness, humanness, are not names for essences, logical objects. They are simply terms that refer to any member of a whole set of similar particulars. He's a thorough-going nominalist.

He uses the fancy word syn-categor-matic. There are some syn-categor-matic terms, those universal, logically universal words, like roundness and humanness. They used to be called universal terms.

He simply wants to say that we use those terms to talk about all members of a category together. Syn-categor-matic, simply that. But what is a set of similar things, but merely a classification we make with our language? It is the language that classifies similar things, so that we organize our worlds by means of the language we use.

The sets, the categories of things, do not have real essences in common, logical objects. They're simply empirical similarities which we draw together in these syn-categor-matic terminology. So, as far as coin is concerned, there are no real universals.

Now, let me add to that discussion of logical entities the name of Nicholas Wolterstorff, who got into that debate with a book called *On Universals* that was published in the late 70s, published by the University of Chicago Press. What Wolterstorff does, and incidentally, his book, that particular book was reviewed when it came out as perhaps the best book on the theory of universals in the 20th century, and it certainly established his professional reputation in this analytic field. But what he does is to speak of universals as possibles.

Possibles. That is to say, unchanging logical possibilities that are objectively real in the sense that they cannot be something other than they are. They're bound by the law of identity.

What he's doing is saying that in addition to the actual entities of a physical sort, perhaps of any material sort as well, okay, in addition to actual entities, this world and any possible world is such that there are only certain kinds of things that are logically possible. A cat cannot be a non-cat. You know, that's implying there is a logical essence which cannot be something other than it is.

And so he's trying to reintroduce the discussion of universals as a realm of possibilities. I said to him once in discussing this, you mean, do you, by possibilities, that these are objective logical possibilities? That there are objective logical possibilities so that not everything is possible, but certain ranges of things are possible, only some of which have been actualized in this world. And he said precisely that.

Now, where's he coming from in this regard? He did his doctoral dissertation on Whitehead, on Whitehead's metaphysics. And what he is doing, you see, is then spinning off from some of Whitehead's terminology where these logical possibilities are eternal objects as distinct from the actual entities of the space-time world. Now, he's not a Whiteheadian, but what he is doing is picking up on the notion of universals in Whiteheadian terms because of the radical change that it makes from Platonism.

You see, in Plato and Platonism, the most real things were universals, and particulars were, to use Plato's metaphor, shadows. They were images of, you see. Now, what Waltersdorf is saying is that particulars are the actual entities, the independently existing real things in that sense.

Universals are not objective entities of some sort, as with Plato, but they are objective logical possibilities, you see. And these actual entities instantiate some of these possibilities. All of us here instantiate the logical possibility of humanness in our individual ways.

So, he is arguing then that there are these logical possibilities, this realm of possibilities, that in these terms are logical entities rather than physical entities. Now, let me add the footnote that this ties in to Waltersdorf's aesthetic theory. A few years before his book on universals, a book on aesthetic theory came out that he called, as I recall, *The Works and Worlds of Art*, in which he was trying to develop the ontology to underlie the view that there are objective aesthetic values of a universal sort.

Now, if you've seen his shorter, more popular thing called *Art as Action*, which is used in the Philosophy of Arts course here, you may recall that he argues for that by pointing out that there are similar associations to the same sounds in all sorts of different languages. I've seen him do it in lecturing to students on aesthetics by playing a game of ping-pong. Which of the following is ping? A dainty girl.

A boisterous boy. What is ping? Which is pong? Well, the dainty girl is ping, the boisterous boy is pong. And he'll go running through scores of examples like that to illustrate the point.

Similar associations of similar sounds. And document his claim that this is cross-cultural by literature that has researched that sort of thing. His point is that there is an objective basis for certain aesthetic associations and qualities.

Now, when I read his book on universals, I said to him, and this was a conversation in the Cornerspot restaurant down here at Wesley and Hale, breakfast conversation one time, I said to him, now tell me, your aesthetic theory, this is tied into your theory of universals, the theory of logical possibles, precisely. So one use he's making

of this, you see, is in his aesthetic theory. Another use he's making in his doctrine of creation, you see.

That from this range of all sorts of logical possibilities for any possible world, God freely selects those which he wishes to actualize. And so forth. And he works into that in the book on universals.

So what we have here then is a debate on logical entities which opens up into the discussion of universals and of real essences. Keep that in mind. Now, the second issue that comes up in connection with philosophy of language is the realism, anti-realism issue that we've made reference to in epistemology.

And the starting point here that we need is the work of the French linguistic structuralist. Now, just a note about the term structuralism, you get structuralism in anthropology, you get structuralism in psychology, you get structuralism in linguistics. In psychology, I think it's fair to say that Piaget, the French-Swiss psychologist, sees certain pre-set stages in cognitive development through which the human mind goes in the gradual process of growth and maturation.

Seems to be tied to brain development. So he has, if you will, a, you can hardly call it a priori, but it's a sort of a priori, a pre-established, okay, a pre-established structure to cognitive development. And if you look at Chomsky, he has structuralism in linguistics.

Now, de Saussure, similarly, talks about language, but with a peculiar twist that has had a great deal of impact. According to de Saussure, language consists of arbitrarily assigned words that are signs that refer to empirical objects. These arbitrarily assigned terms are interrelated to each other.

The point is that you get, therefore, a variety of different languages, not only because of the differences in words, but because of the differences in the relationships between words. We structure our own languages. And so, we structure our own worlds of experience and give them the structured meaning that we think they have.

So, by structuring the language of science the way that the positivists did, they constructed a world, an organized world of positivist experience. They provided, as it were, the linguistic spectacles through which positivists could see this world and only see it that way. There are no fixed meanings, universal conceptions, or logical entities to refer to.

There are only the particulars of sense experience organized in different ways by means of the language that we employ. Now, you can see in that, if you like, a neo-Kantian strain. It's not Kant in the sense of a universal grid.

It's not Kant in the sense of a conceptual grid. But it's Kantian in the sense of there being a linguistic grid, a language structure grid, which we impose a priori, as it were, on actual sensibility. With the result that the way in which one language sees the world is going to be different from another.

There is a relativity of different constructions, and none of them can be taken as identical with the real world. Now, what this boils down to is that by virtue of the fact that our language structures the world of experience, we do not know reality in itself. Anti-realism is the result.

Now, it's that kind of structuralism which was the springboard for developments in philosophy of language and linguistic theory in Europe, in the phenomenological tradition, and in this country, in analytic philosophy. In Europe, it's from that sort of background that Derrida, the deconstructionist, comes. What is deconstruction? Well, it's undoing what the structuralist says we have structured.

What Derrida, the deconstructionist, is doing, you see, is trying to deconstruct the verbal schemes which a writer builds to show that that really doesn't work completely, or that there are a variety of languages there that work inconsistently. It is our language that dominates our world of experience and keeps us from seeing it and talking about it in other ways than we might, and so the relativity is extended in that regard. Now, I mentioned the name of Chomsky, the structural linguist.

The difference with Chomsky is that he's much more Kantian in that he thinks there is a universal, in-depth structure shared by all languages. A universal depth structure in addition to this kind of surface structure, as he calls it, which the Saussure seems to be talking about. But the deconstructionist sees no depth structure, so it's all surface structure, stuff that we've built.

Well, you can understand what the structuralist is saying, I think, if you hear, oh yes, some of your friends around here talking their languages as distinct from yours. The musician talks of the language of music. And if you tune in closely, I think that's the appropriate metaphor, if you tune in closely to musicians, you'll notice that there is a different language in, shall we say, classical music than there is in some very contemporary music.

You'll say, different languages. The same is true with science, different languages in Aristotelian science from Newtonian science, and so forth. Now, that sort of variability is picked up in the analytic tradition by Nelson Goodman.

Nelson Goodman, who, yes, is a nominalist in the Quine tradition, buys this business of structuring our worlds of experience into philosophy of science. So science is simply dealing with language constructs. A scientific theory is just a language.

Now, that's not new. We heard Ernst Marx say that. When Marx said that a scientific theory is just an economical way for describing the relationships between sense data, an economical way.

Well, there are various economical ways of doing it. So there can be various scientific languages and alternative scientific theories. You'll see.

And these alternative scientific languages are not inter-translatable. They're not inter-translatable. Or, to use the technical term, they are incommensurable.

You cannot measure one by the other. They're incommensurable languages. And yet they're equally sound, equally viable.

Now, there's some influence here from Thomas Kuhn with his structure of scientific revolutions. You'll see. Kuhn, who has recognized that with paradigm shifts, you get, as Goodman would say, a new language, a new way of structuring things.

Well, these alternative scientific languages are due to the fact that you can link up the sense qualities in different ways. You know those follow-the-dots, follow-the-number puzzles where you trace the numbers from 1 to 103 and come out with some animal picture that you've outlined that way. It's as if science is doing that sort of thing, except that the numbers aren't given.

And so you can link them up in all sorts of different ways and make sense of the overall picture. Alternative ways of structuring it. So that our theories and general concepts in science are symbols, not descriptions.

They are symbols rather than artistic symbols. And Nelson Goodman has written in aesthetic theory. In aesthetic theory, where he sees a work of art as a creative language structuring certain things, you see.

The worlds of art and science are created similarly. Well, the outcome, you say, is that he's going to be a relativist and a phenomenalist. Yes, indeed.

He has a phenomenalist view of science. There's really no such thing as a true theory. You can accept a picture as being correct.

You can accept several pictures as being correct. You can link the dots up in different ways. A correct scientific picture is one that covers the scope of data.

It has adequate scope. It's coherent. It's logically consistent, and it hangs together in a unified fashion.

It enables you to talk about the data in simple rather than unnecessarily complicated ways, the principle of parsimony. And you can infer things from it that are fruitful for further hypotheses and experimentation. So his philosophy of science goes that way.

Now, the person who in philosophy of science has taken it to the relativistic stream is a man named Feyerabend, who is much less given to talking about a correct picture or pictures and is very blunt about the relativity of all scientific knowledge. And this anti-realism in philosophy of science is one of the things that feeds into the postmodernism of Richard Rorty in his now famous book on philosophy and the mirror of nature. *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*.

The mirror, you recall, is the subjective ideas in the mind that John Locke talks about, representational. And what he is doing is insisting on the failure of that representational theory of knowledge and the foundationalism with which it was associated. The relativity of all of our structures of ideas, complex concepts, and scientific theories, so that he sees philosophy not as giving us access to the truth at all about things in themselves, but as simply a conversation that has pragmatic value.

But there's really no inter-translatability of various languages and structures. Richard Rorty. Well, in contrast to, let's see, in contrast to Nelson Goodman is the work of Hilary Putnam at Harvard.

Hilary Putnam, who is quick to grant that alternative constructs are certainly possible and that scientific theories, of course, are subject to revision. In other words, he's rejecting foundationalism. But he still wants scientific theories to be taken realistically.

And he insists that our constructs are not just conventional ways of talking. He wants to be a realist. Now, how does he justify that? He justifies it by saying that we have firm knowledge of certain observations and material entities.

There are observations and material entities that are firmly known. In other words, there is given data. And within those, he includes things like electrons, force fields, and spatial magnitudes.

Okay? The sorts of things that all scientists observe and measure, regardless of their theoretical constructs. So that the frameworks that we build, the theoretical structures may be tentative, but they're intended to be statements about reality. Whitehead's provisional realism about science.

Putnam wants science to be taken realistically in a provisional way. Now, within these known points of reference, which he talks about, are not only electrons, force fields, but also certain natural kinds. Certain natural kinds of things.

In other words, there are classifications that are objective. Classification is not simply our language structuring something. There are objective categories of things.

Objective kinds. Species, if you like. And there are general laws that we recognize, regardless of the language.

In this sense, there are logical entities. There are logical objects. Objects of thought, not just particular data.

There are objects of thought. Universals, if you like. Essences.

Natural kinds. So Putnam turns out to be a realist about science, but also a realist about certain classifications. Certain general principles.

As well as about publicly recognized particular observations. It's not all our structuring. So, realism versus anti-realism.

Okay? That's the second issue. How are you doing? Ready for the third one? Okay, I've used the term possible worlds. Possible worlds.

Because of two considerations that we've already run into. One is that there are alternative ways that we, with our language, can structure experience. So there might be possible worlds in the sense of worlds that we structure.

Other possible worlds than this one. But second, the sort of thing that comes up with a theory of logical entities, which admits that not all logical possibilities are actualized in this space-time world. Wolterstorff's theory of universals, for instance, would admit that there are many other logically possible worlds than this one.

There are logical possibilities that have not been actualized. And in that sense, among the logical objects of thought are other possible worlds. You see? Because if there are objective, logical possibilities, then there are objective, logically possible worlds other than this one actualized.

The worlds, for instance, in which we all had three halves. Or worlds in which my first child was a girl. Which would be another world than this one.

Other possible worlds with minor deviations from this, major deviations from this, of all sorts. Logical possible worlds. So the fact that things could be other than they are, whether by virtue of our language or by virtue of the realm of logical possibles, has opened up debate on the language of possible worlds and the ontology of possible worlds.

Possible worlds ontology. Now, Nelson Goodman is the first one to pick on here. And you can already see what he's going to say.

I introduced him by saying that he wants logic without ontology. He does not want logical entities. He sees us as structuring our own worlds.

So for Nelson Goodman, the language of possible worlds is merely a verbal device. It's a semantical trick. All possible worlds are simply linguistic constructs where the particular points of reference are things we all experience or might possibly have experienced.

Like my first child being a girl. So in that sense, another possible world is simply a hypothetical world. It's a hypothesis about what this world might have been or might yet be.

So the language of possible worlds is just the language of empirical hypotheses and nothing more. And he is therefore an anti-realist when it comes to possible worlds. An anti-realist when it comes to possible worlds.

On the other hand, you get the English philosopher D.K. Lewis. D.K. Lewis, who is not convinced that the language of other possible worlds is reducible to hypothetical statements about this actual world, if only statements. Or, as they get to be called in the discussion, they get to be called counterfactual statements.

Counterfactuals. And a lot of attention has been given then by recent language philosophy and logic to the logic of counterfactuals. Can counterfactual statements be adequately explained as simply hypothetical statements about this actual world? Explained simply as empirical hypotheses that will not be confirmed as empirically correct? Can they be taken just that way? Or if they're not reducible to hypotheticals, then it would seem that we have to admit that there are logical objects, logical entities of an objective sort that we are talking about when we talk about logical possibilities that haven't been actualized.

The argument is, of course, that counterfactual statements cannot be reduced without remainder. Cannot be translated without remainder into hypotheticals. And if they cannot, then you have to be a realist about possible worlds.

But to be a realist about possible worlds, you have to be a realist about logical entities. And so the debate goes about counterfactuals, about what's called trans-world identity. That is to say, whether the Socrates of another possible world in which, shall we say, he did not have a hooked nose, whether that Socrates would still be the same Socrates.

Now the question is, what constitutes the same Socrates? Is it of the essence of Socrates that he has a hooked nose? And of course you want to say no, but in saying that you're admitting it. So the translatability from one language of one possible world to another. Well, that kind of debate has all sorts of fascinating implications.

Alvin Plendiger, in his book *The Nature of Necessity*, worked with this sort of issue and argued that there is a logically possible world in which God necessarily exists. Now you'll see, Plantinga is not given to trying to demonstrate the existence of God. He's given to trying to remove objections to the existence of God.

And if you can show that there is a logically possible world in which God necessarily exists, then you've removed any objection. And it's logically possible that God exists. And so, his next question to the objector is, okay, now what's your objection? So, this is the direction that philosophy of language is given, and you can see how it's opened up virtually all of the traditional metaphysical questions.

Fascinating kind of development. So that, as we are today, as I said before, not only philosophy of religion and ethics are alive and well, but so is metaphysics. Here, I just didn't succeed in eliminating it, but in postponing it.

Now, somebody was, yeah. I was just going to ask you about what Plendiger, you were just saying that Plantinga said about there's a logically possible world in which God necessarily exists. Yeah.

So, does he say that there is some logically possible world out there, or does he say that a logically possible world could be the world that we live in now? Oh, of course, yes. Yeah. Yeah, but you see, it's one thing to demonstrate that something is logically possible.

It's another thing to demonstrate that that's the way it is in this world. Right. You see.

Does he think that in this world God necessarily exists? Yes. Yes, but the difficulty is in moving from *de dicto* to *de re* necessity. That is to say, from what is necessary in a language, that is to say, in the language of a possible world, to what is necessary in and of itself.

You see, and you can show that in some languages it's possible, it's necessary, but that this is the world is the thing that isn't as easy to show. Troy? Yeah, I was wondering about that notion of metaphysical possibility. Yeah.

Well, what is metaphysically possible is what is logically possible. He doesn't acknowledge the distinction. Well, what distinction could you draw? To say it's logically possible is to say there's no objection.

You see, there's no logical objection. It's logically possible. Now, is it actually possible, if we were talking of a fairy giraffe with butterfly wings, we'd say it's logically possible, but is it actually causally possible? You see, and you'd say, well, I suppose so in some possible world, it's causally possible.

You wouldn't say it's causally necessary in any possible world, because finite things aren't causally necessary. Yes, sir? I was wondering more in terms of God. I'd say God is refraining from sin or determining the cause.

Okay. Is it possible, logically, that God could do that? Is there a possible world in which God could sin? That's right. Yeah, and you see, he would say, now that resolves into the question as to whether God would still be God if he did.

Because God, by definition in theistic religions, is one who is altogether good, you see. In other words, it resolves into the question, does God have an essence? Which is the title of some lectures that he gave at Marquette University that were published under that title, Plantinga, Does God Have an Essence? Now, if God has an essence, then there are some things God cannot do. God cannot be God.

No, God cannot be not God, you see. God cannot be not God. If being perfectly good is of the essence of God, and if sinning is imperfection, then God cannot sin, you see.

So, it gets back into this business of essences again. Now, if you say, oh, certainly God could sin, God doesn't have an essence, then what are you saying? You're saying that the word God is an arbitrarily assigned name to a certain entity, in which case, you see, you might as well call God not God with all of the conceptual baggage that that brings, but apply some other name completely. You see, if the name God is simply an arbitrary sign that does not have any conceptual content, any intentional meaning as well as extensional reference, you see, if the word God has only extensional reference and no intentional sense, you see, then you can make God do anything.

But if the word God has intentional meaning as well, then not even God can be not God. Are there things that God cannot do? Yes, He cannot be not God. Now, you know, if you want to say, oh, that's subordinating God to the laws of logic.

No, it's saying that God is a being, the laws of logic are laws of being, ultimately the laws of God, because they're laws of being. God is the ultimate being, creator of all other beings, so the laws of being are laws of God. So, in that sense, every being has at least some essence, the essence of being which is to be and not to be.

Well, it looks like we ran out of time again.