Philosophy 125 — Day 15: Overview

- Reminder: First Papers and SQ's due **October 16** (**Thursday!**)

- Office Hours for This Week

  - Me: Today 4–6 (after class), Tomorrow 2–4:30

  - Vanessa: Today 11–1:30, Tomorrow 10–11 & 2–3, Th. none

  - Josh: Friday 3–5

- Agenda: Propositions & Their Neighbors

  - (Retro) Quick Summary of Theories of Particulars

  - Propositions: Statements & Thoughts

  - Realism about Propositions

    * What are propositions, and what work do they do?

  - Nominalism About Propositions

    * Quine, Sellars, and Prior's Metalinguistic Approaches

An Overview of the Theories of Concrete Particulars

	Trope Bundle	Realist Bundle	Substratum	Aristotelian (Loux)
How many attributes of a particular are *necessary*?	All (Loux) Some (me)	All (Loux) Some (me)	None	Some (its *Kinds*)
Whatís the truth-value of the Identity of Indiscernibles (II)?	Vacuous *or* False	True *and* *non*-vacuous	False	False (Loux)
Are particulars *complexes*?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
What are the *constituents* of concrete particulars?	Tropes	Properties (Relations?)	Properties + Substratum	None
What *diversifies* particulars?	Tropes	Properties (Relations?)	Substratum	Kinds (primitive?)
Do attributes require a *subject*?	No	No	Yes	Yes

Propositions I: Realism about Propositions 1

- According a the metaphysical realist, when one utters the sentence "Socrates is courageous," one thereby picks-out both a concrete particular, and a property.

- But, realists will also say that simply uttering the sentence, and picking out (referring to) Socrates and Courage (and perhaps Exemplification) does not fully explain what happens when an *assertion* is made — *something* must *be asserted*.

- But, what could this "thing that is asserted" in the speech act in question *be*?

  - It cannot be the *sentence* itself, since (intuitively) the same thing can be asserted in other languages (or the same language!) using different sentences.

  - It can't be the things to which the speaker refers (Socrates, Courage, *etc.*). It makes no sense to "assert a person" or to "assert a property". The existence of the referents is *implied by* the assertion, but that is not *what is asserted*.

- We can use *nominalizations* (that-clauses) to identify what declarative sentences assert. *E.g.*, Branden asserted *that Socrates is courageous*. By prefixing "that" to a declarative sentence, we get something that is seems to play the role of a noun.

Propositions II: Realism about Propositions 2

- Indeed, that-clauses can even play the subject role in sentences. For instance:

    That the Red Sox beat the Yankees is what Branden said.

- As realists are wont to do, they will now insist that there must be something that such that-clauses *refer to* when they occur as subjects in S–P discourse.

- Realists will say that such clauses refer to "the things speakers assert or state in uttering declarative sentences." They are "names of the objects of acts of asserting or statement making." Realists call these things *statements*.

- According to realists, statements (*not* sentences) are the bearers of truth and falsity; and *each statement is either true or false but not both*. Three roles:

    – Statements are the objects of acts of assertion and denial (statement making).

    – Statements are the bearers of the truth values.

    – Statements are the referents of that-clauses.

- In support of their claims about statements, the realist cites more examples:

   That Socrates is courageous is true.

   Such examples show that *the very same that-clauses* that undergird acts of assertion and denial serve as the subject of the predicates 'true' and 'false'.

- Moreover, the same clauses can be the direct objects of verbs that do not express acts of saying, claiming, asserting, denying, or stating, as in the following:

   Branden believes that glass is a liquid.

- So, it appears that such clauses can refer to objects of *thought* as well as objects of assertion. Indeed, realists will use the word *thought* to denote such things.

- At this stage, realists suggest a unifying hypothesis: that statements and thoughts are really *one and the same thing*. And, the word "proposition" has been widely used to refer both to thoughts and to statements.

- So, realists about *propositions* are committed to the existence of (abstract) things that are both the objects of statement making and the objects of thought.

Propositions III: Realism about Propositions 3

- Propositions, according to the realist, are *language-independent* and *thought-independent*. They can be the *objects* of *propositional attitudes* such as thought, assertion, denial, belief, doubt, *etc*. But, they exist *independently*.

- All the propositions exist *eternally* and *necessarily* (they are pre-existing, *abstract* entities – "platonic"). They are equally thinkable, statable, *etc.* by all. It is the intersubjective availability of propositions that makes communication and a "shared conception of the world" possible, according to realists.

- Propositions are *essentially* the bearers of truth-values. But, this does not mean that they are all necessarily true or necessarily false. Some are contingent (*e.g.*, that Socrates is courageous), and some are not (that $2 = 2$).

- Non-contingent propositions (*e.g.*, $2 = 2$) have their truth-values *eternally*. But, what about contingent propositions? Do they have their truth-values eternally? Or, can their truth-values change? Opinions differ on this question.

- Some say *that Branden is standing* is true sometimes and false sometimes. Others insist that propositions already include all salient contextual information about time, place, *etc.*, and so are true or false *eternally*.

- Nonetheless, realists agree that, for each proposition p, it is necessarily the case that either p is true or p is false (and not both). That is, we have:
  – Necessarily, either p or not p. [Law of the Excluded Middle]
  – But, NOT (generally): Either necessarily p or necessarily not p. [Fatalism]

- Propositions are *primary* truth-bearers. We talk about *sentences* being true or false, but *strictly speaking* it's the *propositions they express* that are true/false.

- **Famous Puzzle**: Aristotle (*De Interpretatione* 1.9). Consider the sentence s: "There will be a sea battle in the Persian Gulf on November 10, 2005." Either the proposition p expressed by s has its truth-value eternally, or not.
  – If so, then p's truth-value is *now determined*. Logical determinism?
  – If not, then (nonetheless) p must have a truth-value *now*. But, how could (why would) that truth-value *change* between now & 11/10/05? If, as it seems, it cannot (would not) change, then we're back to case 1. Dilemma!

Propositions IV: Realism about Propositions 4

- That-clauses, according to the realist, are complex singular terms that denote propositions. But, they behave differently than other complex singular terms.

- Consider the complex singular term (definite description)

  (1) "The tallest man in Indiana"

  And, assume that (1) denotes a 7′ 7″ basketball player named "Sam Small". (1) is a *complex* singular term, because the name "Indiana" is *part of* (1).

- "Indiana" has the same denotation (referent) as "The 19th state in the Union". We call such terms *coreferential.* If we substitute "The 19th state in the Union" for "Indiana" in (1), we get the following complex singular term:

  (1′) "The tallest man in the 19th State in the Union"

- Note: (1) and (1′) are coreferential – they both denote Sam Small. In this case, substituting coreferential terms preserves the reference of the singular term.

- This is often the case with complex singular terms. But, *not* with that-clauses!

- Consider the following that-clause (complex singular term):

  (2) "That Sam Small has been admitted to Harvard"

- And, assume that "Harvard" and "The most illustrious American university" are coreferential. Now, if we substitute coreferential terms into (2), we get:

  (2′) "That the tallest man in Indiana has been admitted to the most illustrious American university"

- Note: (2) and (2′) are *not* coreferential. It is possible for the proposition denoted by (2) to be true, while the proposition denoted by (2′) is false.

- To see this, imagine that a 7′ 7″ man moves from Illinois to Indiana (then (1) has no *unique* referent, and (2′) is *false* – on Russell's account), or that Harvard mismanages its endowment and loses many of its prestigious faculty.

- This is a useful feature of that-clauses, since it allows the realist to explain what is sometimes called the *opacity* of the propositional attitudes.

- Someone can believe that Sam Small has been admitted to Harvard, without believing that the tallest man in Indiana has been admitted to Harvard (other examples of *opacity*: Lois Lane's beliefs about Clark Kent *&* Superman).

Propositions V: Realism about Propositions 5

- Realists agree that popositions are abstract entities with these characteristics:
  - They're the objects of acts of asserting/denying and acts of thinking.
  - They're contingently asserted/thought, but necessarily assert*ible*/think*able*.
  - They exist eternally and necessarily, and are intersubjectively available.
  - Hence, propositions constitute the materials necessary for the public communication of a shared conception of the world.
  - They are essentially truth vehicles, the primary bearers of truth values.
  - They are the things that primarily enter into logical relations.
  - They are the referents of that-clauses. Each is a unique representation of the world, which explains why that-clauses and propositional attitudes are *opaque* (not referentially invariant across coreferential substitutions).

- Realists disagree one some things, including:
  - Do all propositions have their truth-values *eternally*?
  - Are propositions *complexes* like the sentences that express them?

Propositions VI: Realism about Propositions 6

- Realists are divided on whether propositions are complexes or organic wholes. Some have suggested that propositions are just *meanings of sentences*.

- Since the meanings of sentences are *compositional* (built-up from the meanings of *parts* of sentences), propositions will have *parts* on this view.

- There are some good reasons for taking propositions to be meanings.
  - It allows for a *semantical* explanation of the opacity of that-clauses.
  - If that-clauses refer to meanings of declarative sentences, and such meanings are *compositional*, then substitutions with coreferential terms will only preserve reference if they *have the same meaning*.
  - Of course, expressions with the same referent can have different meanings ["Clark Kent" and "Superman", "Morning Star" and "Evening Star", *etc*.].

- But, do speakers assert or deny meanings? Do thinkers believe, hope, or fear meanings? Are meanings true or false? And, "I am here now" seems to have a single meaning – used by different speakers to assert different propositions.

Propositions VII: Nominalism about Propositions 1

- One of the Realist's challenge examples is the following sentence:

  (3) "I am going where you have just been."

- The realist claims that, since (3) is true in some situations and false in others, if one takes *sentences* as the primary bearers of truth, then (3) comes out both true and false, which is absurd – truth bearers cannot be both true and false.

- Nominalist Reply: all this shows is that sentences do not have their truth-values *absolutely* (*not* that they don't have truth-values at all). Lesson: Sentences only have truth-values *relative to contexts of utterance*.

- Contexts of utterance include information concerning who is uttering the sentence to whom, where, when, *etc.* This is required to fix the referents of *indexicals* like "I", "you", "now". We'll assume context relativity hereafter.

- Generally, nominalists want to do all the work realists do, without positing these abstract entities the realist calls "propositions". Some strategies:

Propositions VIII: Nominalism about Propositions 2

- Quine suggests that statements which appear to be about propositions are really just statements about people and sentences. *E.g.*, Quine's paraphrase:

    "John believes *that* $2 + 2 = 4$" $\mapsto$ "John believes-true '$2 + 2 = 4$'."

- Quine's 'believes-true' predicate is supposed to eliminate that-clauses (and reference to propositions). But, what does 'believes-true' *mean*? It seems that $\ulcorner p$ believes-true $s \urcorner$ just means $\ulcorner p$ believes *that s is true*$\urcorner$. Will that do?

- Perhaps Quine could give a purely behavioristic (austere) account of 'believes-true'. Or, he could always take it as such predicates as *primitive*. Quine, ultimately, rejected this approach, which seems wise, since:

    "John believes-true 'two plus two equals four'" *is not equivalent to*
    "John believes-true 'Deux et deux font quatre.'"

- In this sense, Quine's account of the propositional attitudes is like Carnap's account of abstract reference – it is *language bound* (or *language variant*).

Propositions IX: Nominalism about Propositions 3

- Recall: Sellars introduced *dot quotation* to rescue Carnapian metalinguistic nominalism (about universals) from the problem of language relativity.

- Sellars does the same thing in this context, to rescue the naive Quinean metalinguistic nominalistic account of the propositional attitudes (and that's).

- Here, we dot-quote entire declarative sentences to yield things like:

  – ·Two plus two equals four·s are true declarative sentences. [paraphrase of the realist's sentence "That two plus two equals four is true"]

  – John assertively utters a ·two plus two equals four·. [paraphrase of the realist's sentence "John says that two plus two equals four"]

- The case of belief is more complicated. Sellars posits a *language of thought* called "Mentalese" (*i.e.*, acts of "speaking to oneself" in a natural language):

  – John tokens (or is disposed to token) a Mentalese ·two plus two equals four·. [paraphrase of "John believes that two plus two equals four"]

Propositions X: Nominalism about Propositions 4

- Arthur Prior has an alternative (and ingenious) way to approach propositional attitudes and that-clauses from a nominalistic perspective.

- Prior adopts Ramsey's *redundancy theory of truth*, according to which asserting ⌜that s is true⌝ is equivalent to asserting s (full stop). So, *e.g.*,

  "That grass is green is true" ↦ "Grass is green."

- This eliminates *that-clauses* in a very elegant, general, and unified way. But, what about the propositional attitudes like belief, assertion, *etc.*?

- Here, Prior suggests that the logical form of statements like "John believes that two plus two is four" is not ⌜X believes *that p*⌝, but ⌜*X believes that p*⌝.

- *I.e.*, it is not that X bears the believing relation to a proposition p, rather X has the *property believing that p*. [Believes(X,p) *versus* Believes$_p$(X)]

- So, "believing that p" is simply a *psychological property of a person*. And, we don't need to postulate any mind-independent propositions to explain *that*.

- There are some tricky cases for Prior's account, such as the following:

  (4) "John believes some falsehoods."

  (5) "Sam believes everything Peter says."

- Prior introduces *sentence variables p*, *q*, *etc.*, and then *quantifies over them*.

  (4′) For some p, not-p and John believes that p.

  (5′) For every p, if Peter says that p then Sam believes that p.

- For this to work, the right sorts of linguistic expressions must *exist*, in order to make (*e.g.*) (4′) true. In cases such as these, it is plausible that such expressions will exist (some falsehood John believes can be *expressed*).

- What about truths (or falsehoods) that cannot be expressed in language?

  (6) There are truths for which there is no linguistic expression.

- On Prior's account, (6) would get paraphrased as follows:

  (6′) For some *sentence p*, p and there is no linguistic expression for p.

- If (6) is true, then (6′) seems *paradoxical*! If there are truths "beyond the reach of language," then metalinguistic approaches seem to be in trouble here.