Rayo and Williams

Ted Sider
Ground seminar

1. A linguistic conception of levels

> The work of any interesting metaphysician involves two or more levels. I do not mean levels of reality: the metaphysicians I am talking about do not describe reality as stratified; rather, they stratify their accounts of it. At the basic level of speech, thought and conceptualization, they express truths that directly reflect the metaphysical situation; at the less basic level, they say things that are still true, but, as stated, are bad pointers to the metaphysical situation, and one needs an account of what their truth amounts to, comes down to, arises from, in terms of facts expressed at the basic level. The non-basic level gets a hearing only because it involves ordinary, familiar ways of saying things. (Bennett, 2001, p. 147)

> I am a fan of the Bennettian picture. Mind-independent reality is thus-and-so (perhaps an ontology of concreta spread through space-time, characterized by the instantiation of various natural properties). The relation between this reality and *representations of it*—including the sentences of natural language and the language of thought—is complex and demands analysis. When the dust settles, some of these representations will turn out to be *true*. But—for example—all that may be required of reality for the representation 'there are tables' to be true, is that certain simple particles stand in certain arrangements. (Williams, 2012, p. 171)

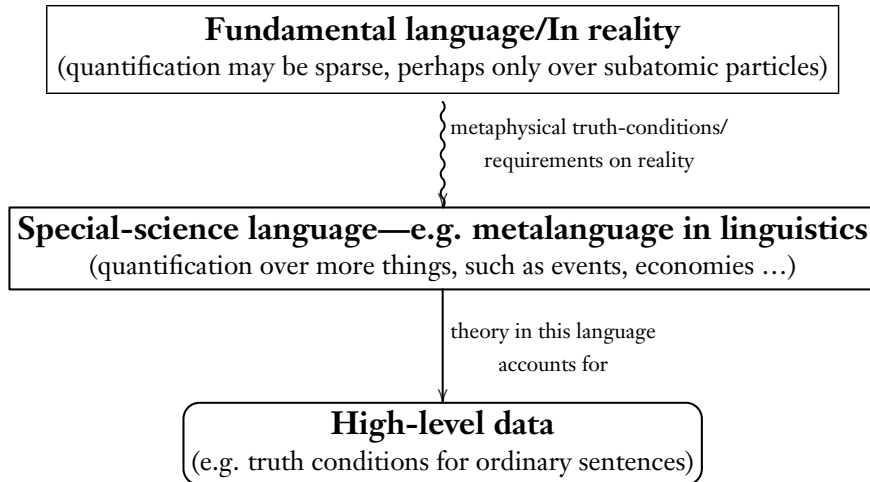Different representations might connect to reality in different, more or less "direct", ways.[1]

2. "Autonomous" conception of "requirements on reality"

> …what is required for 'Billy is sitting' to be true, is that, in reality, the things arranged Billy-wise be arranged sitting-wise. (Williams, 2012, p. 175)

This notion of "requirements on reality" is not to be tied to speculative syntactic or (descriptive) linguistic claims.

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[1]Compare Horgan and Potrč (2000).

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│              Fundamental language/In reality                 │
│ (quantification may be sparse, perhaps only over subatomic particles) │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                             ⌇ metaphysical truth-conditions/
                             ⌇ requirements on reality
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Special-science language—e.g. metalanguage in linguistics   │
│ (quantification over more things, such as events, economies …) │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                             │ theory in this language
                             │ accounts for
                             ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                      High-level data                         │
│       (e.g. truth conditions for ordinary sentences)         │
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3. Requirements on reality part of semantic theory

'Larry' refers to x iff x's simple parts are the yy, and in reality, the yy are arranged Larry-wise.

x satisfies 'sings' iff x's simple parts are the yy, and in reality, the yy are arranged singing-wise.

'Larry sings' is ture iff there's some x with simple parts yy such that (i) in reality, the yy are arranged Larry-wise, and (ii) in reality, the yy are arranged singing-wise.

- The "metaphysically loaded" semantic clauses describe the same semantic relations as less loaded semantic clauses.

- It's ok that the semantic clauses partly invoke composite things:

  …if our view is that a minimal metaphysical base (say: atoms arranged this way and that) is sufficient to allow talk of macroscopic things to be true, then we should be able happily use such talk within a range of theoretical projects. Why shouldn't that include giving a semantic theory? Or indeed, in the present case, in saying what reality has to contain in order for the sentences to be true? (Williams, 2012, p. 180)

Williams and I agree that *the statement that a sentence has certain requirements on reality* must be stated in nonfundamental terms; but only Williams thinks that the statement *of the requirements themselves* can be stated in "mixed" terms.

4. Rayo on requirements

Suppose there are no sets (and no irreducibly plural quantification). He wants to say that the following sentence demands of reality merely that it contain at least one mouse:

> There is a set containing at least one mouse

Consider nominalistic possible worlds: no sentence quantifying over sets is true at any of these worlds. The demand on reality is the set of worlds w satisfying the following condition:

> For some set, α, and some $x \in \alpha$, [x is a mouse] is true at w

The following condition also generates the same set of worlds:

> For some x, [x is a mouse] is true at w

But now take the Geach-Kaplan sentence:

> GK There are some critics that admire only one another
>
> There are some things, such that each of them is a critic, and whenever y is one of them and admires z, then $z \neq y$ and z is one of them too

Here we can only generate the appropriate condition on worlds by quantifying over sets:

> There is a nonempty set α such that: (a) for any y, if $y \in \alpha$, then [y is a critic] is true at w, and (b) for any $y, z \in \alpha$, if [y admires z] is true in w then $z \in \alpha$ and [$y \neq z$] is true in w

And that's ok—provided you accept this very theory.

References

Bennett, Jonathan (2001). *Learning from Six Philosophers*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Horgan, Terence and Matjaž Potrč (2000). "Blobjectivism and Indirect Correspondence." *Facta Philosophica* 2: 249–70.

Williams, J. Robert G. (2012). "Requirements on Reality." In Fabrice Correia and Benjamin Schnieder (eds.), *Metaphysical Grounding: Understanding the Structure of Reality*, 165–85. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.