Seminar: Relative Truth and the Language of Value

Week 3: More on relative truth, something on values, emotions

1. shifting the context of assessment

Case 1:
(1) Alethe tastes good. (mother to child)

Case 2:
(2) John took another spoon of the honey because it tasted so good. (E/H/W)

Case 3:
(3) Is walking all day fun?

How can this shift be accounted for on relativist theories?

MacFarlane:
Context of truthvalue evaluation is always the context of the assessor (‘context of assessment’)

E/H/W:
The context of evaluation can be the context of the person the assessor pretends to be.

Lasersohn:
The speaker can choose an endocentric or exocentric perspective, or no perspective at all.

2. The treatment of attitude reports

MacFarlane:
context of assessment of embedded sentence always context of assessment of entire sentence
possibility for treatment of belief: two-place relation between agent and truthconditionally incomplete proposition
problem: truth as the aim of belief

E/H/W:
Belief relation is two-place relation between agent and (truthconditionally incomplete) proposition
B(a, p) in w: a believes p true relative to a
Or: a believes p true relative to the person a pretends to be.
problem: the de se problem:
A cannot believe p to be true relative to a, which a fails to identify as himself
better: a believes p by self-ascribing p to himself

Lasersohn:
With embedded sentences involving relative truth, belief-relation is three-place relation between agent, context of evaluation (which depends on the perspective the agent chooses) and truth conditionally incomplete proposition
believe(a, c, p): a believes p relative to the chosen perspective c
problem: it seems we need the same belief relation for embedded sentences involving relative truth and embedded sentences involving absolute truth

(4) a. Mary disagrees with everything John believes, that white chocolate tastes good, that ophtamologists are eye doctors etc.
    b. Everything John believes is true.
    c. What did you say John believes? (must chose ‘neutral’ belief-relation)

3. Schiffer ‘Meaning and Value’
point of departure:
Schiffer’s pleonastic conception of propositions:
That S is true – the proposition that S is true
You get propositions for free – there are propositions!
Thus eating animals is wrong expresses a proposition.

Schiffer’s point:
moral predicates have no application conditions (there are no interpersonal criteria for their application), but they have meaning, and interpersonally shared meaning
Agents may widely differ in their criteria / moral considerations for applying moral predicates, yet they share the meaning of moral predicates
moral sentences have no truth conditions
No moral truths (but still moral sentences are useful…)

linguistic facts:
(5) A believes that X is good
    B believes that doing X is good, but for very different reasons.
    A and B believe the same thing (but for very different reasons)

(6) a. A believes what B believes
    b. This is what A and B believe.

Schiffer’s criteria:
- even if two agents have different moral principles, their concepts of good and wrong are the
  same given the roles of those concepts in determining how the agents want the world to be
- same kinds of emotional responses the use of moral predicates trigger,
- same relations of moral concepts to related ones (ought, just)
- the same process of moral training (of punishment and reward) in the acquisition of moral
  concepts
- same common ‘point’ in use of moral predicates, in getting people to behave in a certain
  way.

4. Other functions of sentences than contributing to truth conditions

expressivist views:
Noncognitive meaning, not to be understood in terms of truth conditions but in terms of
relations to noncognitive attitudes that motivate actions and relate to norms and values.

but also belief and knowledge can be understood normatively:
cognitive discourse equally driven by normative considerations as to what one should belief

4.1. Practical reasoning

essential first-person ascription
Perry: sentences with and without essential indexical (de se pronoun) play different role in
explaining actions, associated with different mental states playing different causal roles

Value descriptions can naturally act as arguments of practical syllogism

(7) a. I intend to do E.
I think that unless he does (I do) X, he cannot (I cannot) bring about E.
I do X.

(7) b. I am / what I intend to do is nice / good / admirable
   It is nice / good / admirable to do E.
   I think that unless I do X, I cannot bring about E.
   I do X.

*first-person directed genericity (Moltmann to appear):*
P holds for anyone as if it does for myself
P predicated of anyone x as if x was myself

What is evaluated: actions / possible actions
Use of infinitives:
(8) a. It is nice / good / bad / admirable PRO(arb) to do X.
   b. It is nice / good / admirable for John PRO to do X.

PRO: necessarily self-ascription
(9) a. John expects PRO to become a hero. *de se*
   b. John expects that he will become a hero. *de se or de re*

generic (‘normative’) statements about actions
evaluation from the inside: *nice, good*
from the outside: *admirable, good*

4. 2. Emotions
emotion and sensation: qualitative feel
emotion: intentional object / object of emotion (object, proposition, action)
(10) a. I fear dogs / that dog.
   b. I fear that the dog was killed.
   c. I am afraid to walk alone.
sensation: not necessarily intentional object
Cause of emotion vs intentional object
(11) John was angry that Mary was there (because he was drunk)
cognitivist approaches to emotions:
1. Emotions to be understood in terms of propositional attitudes of some sort, especially desire and belief
2. Emotions as perception
   Perception of objective value
   (world-word direction of fit)

**Emotions as dispositions (persisting states of the mind) and as occurring events:**
*I fear dogs. My occurrent fear of that dog.*
Appropriateness conditions for occurrent emotions, depending on whether they relate to relevant features of the intentional object
e.g. frightening physical features of (certain) dogs
Appropriate emotion is intelligible (given the disposition), inappropriate emotion is not.

**Emotion and value**
Emotion simply perception / emotional knowledge of value?

**Mulligan:**
Emotion does not reveal value, *feeling* does
emotions: *fear, admire, love*
feeling: *feel, prefer*
(12) a. A feels the injustice of the situation / the race of that movement.
   b. A prefers justice to injustice.
(13) a. * A admires admirability.
   b. * A regrets that p is regrettable.

Emotion has polar opposites (gradual transition from one to the other), feeling does not
Emotion is a reaction, feeling is not.
emotional reaction vs feeling aesthetic value

Feeling is a case of knowledge, takes values as its objects
Felt values are what we react to emotionally and act on