

Another excellent chapter in this section is Malachowski's (his third appearance in the volume), "Imagination Over Truth: Rorty's Contribution to Pragmatism," in which he offers a remarkably lucid overview of a thinker whose work tends to be read incorrectly and uncharitably. In recognition of this fact, Malachowski's essay proceeds by way of responding to Rorty's critics in order to "unravel and clarify" his relationship with pragmatism. Once this is accomplished, Malachowski suggests, "it becomes more difficult, and often less appropriate, to pin labels of intellectual irresponsibility on his efforts" (208-209).

The third and final section, "Pragmatism at Work" (Chapters 10-19), shows how pragmatism can inform various practices, namely, feminism, education, aesthetics, religion, and law. There are two essays that stand out as particularly valuable for both the pragmatist and non-pragmatist. The first is Carol Nicholson's chapter, "Education and the Pragmatic Temperament." Though it doesn't deal with education as explicitly as one might expect, Nicholson's efforts to define "the pragmatist temperament" as "a habit of mind that is open to uncertainty, change and different points of view" (250) has clear implications for how we might think about pragmatism itself, as well as the task of educating our students. The second is Michael Sullivan and Daniel J. Solove's "Radical Pragmatism," which takes aim at the suggestion, recently defended by Richard Posner, that pragmatism is politically neutral. The authors argue instead that (Deweyan) pragmatism is inherently democratic because both democracy and pragmatism hold "a commitment to a form of inquiry—the endorsement of [the] experimental method on the social and political stage" (337). Thus, "far from being timorous, far from accepting our current practices and institutions as given realities, pragmatism subjects them to criticism and reconstruction. Pragmatism is anything but banal—it is radical" (343).

In sum, this volume does an admirable job of presenting pragmatism in its best light to those who are unfamiliar or less well-versed in the tradition. There are occasions where the volume lapses into the risks inherent in such a project. Some papers, for example, seem more preoccupied with debates among pragmatists; some papers assume more familiarity with thinkers outside the pragmatist canon than many readers are likely to have; some papers, in appealing to a general audience, remain a little too superficial; and some papers are inattentive to current research on their topics. However, most papers, and the volume overall, will benefit both pragmatists and non-pragmatists by offering clear and concise overviews of those thinkers traditionally identified as pragmatist, others who exhibit pragmatist tendencies, as well as the broad-ranging applicability of the pragmatist approach. Philosophers from any and all traditions are bound to find something in this volume that will enhance their own research.

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Context

ROBERT STALNAKER

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This is Stalnaker's highly anticipated, book-length treatment of the concept of common ground, of what participants in a linguistic discourse agree to take for granted. He develops an account of the structure and dynamics of common ground that, he argues, allows both

a simpler semantics and a better explanation for certain linguistic constructions and devices. A methodological strategy threads through the book: idealized formal models are useful, not just for describing complex phenomena, but in separating the data from the problem, and in identifying what a solution needs. I will summarize the book and then comment on this strategy.

In Chapter 1, he contrasts three notions of a linguistic activity's context. One is the intuitive idea of the objective situation in which the activity takes place. The second is a semantic idea meant to capture how what a participant says can depend systematically on variable features of that situation. The third is the psychological idea of the information that each participant presumes is accepted by the others—the 'common ground.' In enormously influential early work, Stalnaker developed a formal model of this common ground, which he further develops and applies in this book.

In Chapter 2, he explains how the model represents, not just what each participant presumes the others accept about the facts they are discussing, but also the *fact* that they each presume this in their discussion. This iterative structure is essential to common ground. As conversation proceeds, the common ground evolves with different sorts of changes being possible. At the heart of Stalnaker's project is the hypothesis—dubbed the 'autonomy of pragmatics' (1)—that understanding the structure and dynamics of common ground independently of language yields insight into otherwise puzzling linguistic constructions and devices.

In Chapters 3 and 4, he contrasts his notion of common ground with a semantic notion of sentence presupposition. Of special value is his discussion of the need to clearly distinguish descriptive versus explanatory uses of theoretical terms. He argues that the phenomena the semantic notion was introduced to explain are better described and more clearly understood in terms of common ground. Central to this argument is the claim that a notion of common ground is needed anyway for understanding rational linguistic activity, unlike appeals to special semantic or syntactic structures.

Indeed, we need the notion to understand all coordinated rational activity. Drivers on a highway, doctors in surgery, cooks in a kitchen, and even kids on a soccer pitch coordinate their activities by relying on common ground. The common ground always has the same iterated structure, but its dynamics are special in the case of discourse, where participants can question what is taken for granted or suppose something new, and where they can disagree about which questions remain open. Stalnaker models these dynamics using special 'derived' contexts, determined as a function of the information in the common ground (the 'basic' context), and shows (in Chapters 6 and 7) how various linguistic devices (including assertoric and other forces, conditionals, epistemic modals like 'might' and 'may,' and so-called 'subjunctives') are used to bring about these changes. He argues that this strategy allows for a simpler truth conditional semantics for these constructions.

Stalnaker's model uses a possible worlds framework to represent informational content. This framework has well-known difficulties representing the information a person has about who, where and when she is. The iterated structure of common ground compounds these difficulties, since it must represent the self-locating information that each participant presumes the others have. Stalnaker develops a modified version of David Lewis' centered-worlds framework, but, contra Lewis, insists that uncertainty or error about who, where or when one is in a world requires uncertainty

or error about what world one is in (115). This is the topic of Chapter 5, which develops some of his recent work.¹

In Chapter 8, he discusses recent work on relativism and contextualism, arguing that his account of common ground can clarify what seems true in these accounts. The book ends with an appendix dealing with several technical topics. The final section summarizing relations between basic and derived contexts is especially helpful.

Stalnaker's strategy employs idealized formal models to clarify complex phenomena. While this strategy may not be to every philosopher's taste, I found it enormously helpful, both for identifying disagreements and for clarifying solutions. But any strategy has potential risks.

One is that the model may make what is deviant seem perfectly normal. Stalnaker's discussion of indexical information runs this risk. The cognitive state of someone uncertain or mistaken about who she is ought to seem disorderly, as fundamentally defective. While I think Stalnaker agrees, his modeling of Mark Richard's notorious phone booth case makes the characters' beliefs seem too orderly; he even claims that their beliefs are true (125). This makes it hard to recapture the confusion at the heart of their cognitive states.

A second risk is that the model may raise explanatory problems of its own. Stalnaker's discussion of what he calls propositional 'detachment' illustrates this. On his model, common ground determines not just what participants in a discourse say, but also what there is for them to say, what propositions there are to be expressed. This means that propositions are, in the model, context-dependent.² Stalnaker appeals to this in his accounts of epistemic modals (144-146), conditionals (149), disagreement (163); and in his response to relativism (207). Now, Stalnaker is clear that adopting an explanatory framework is not neatly separable from making a substantive claim (180-4). So the idea of context-dependent content may be viewed as an insight made possible by the model. Still, one may find the idea of a proposition's truth conditions being "fragile" (163) even more puzzling than the phenomena it is meant to clarify.

Stalnaker's book is an extremely impressive achievement. In this review, I give but a small sense of its remarkable depth and breadth. Written with his characteristic wit, elegance and admirable generosity for opposing views, it makes a forceful and compelling case for the autonomy of pragmatics. Because its topics are subtle and complex, it is not always an easy read. But it is guaranteed to repay the effort and is destined to become the focus of considerable research among philosophers and linguists alike.

¹ This chapter develops arguments presented in (Stalnaker 2008).

² This is discussed in more depth in (Stalnaker 2012).

References

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