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The Pot Paradox: Resoluteness in Philosophy and Ethics with Reference to Alice Crary  

I discuss the application of Wittgenstein’s views to ethics. I argue that there is an internal connection between the resolute understanding of our task in philosophy in general (not only moral philosophy) and the kind of view of morality given expression to in Wittgenstein’s “Lecture on Ethics.” To achieve that, (1) I discuss the form of a general dilemma for philosophical criticism: when the criticism is logical—when, for instance, some idea is declared logically incoherent—the criticism may undermine itself, and leave itself nothing to criticize. Reminiscent of a short story by Sholem Aleichem, I call such dilemmas “Pot Paradoxes.” (2) I identify such critical dilemmas in the literature on Wittgenstein's early and later philosophy, and (4) diagnose and focus on such a dilemma in Alice Crary’s application of Wittgenstein’s ideas to ethics. (5) I discuss three ways to deal with Crary's dilemma. (6) Drawing on Wittgenstein’s “Lecture on Ethics” I suggest that his appreciation of the difficulties of dealing with what is apparently incoherent claims—his resoluteness—leads him to a conception of moral thought very different from Crary’s.

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The Principle of Tolerance and Carnap's Scientific Philosophy  

The aim of this paper is to establish that the dominant interpretations of Carnap’s principle of tolerance share a common misconception, namely that it is applied uniformly throughout his philosophical program. Carnap’s scientific philosophy has a number of aims and it will be argued that the principle of tolerance has a distinct scope and motivation within each of these tasks.

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The Multiple-Relation Theory of Intentionality and its Contemporary Significance  

Abstract: Russell developed the idea that, instead of being a dual relation between a subject and a mysterious entity known as a proposition, belief is a multiple relation between a subject and various unmysterious would-be propositional constituents. A convergence of recent work on propositions suggests that both ideas might be reconciled by an approach that appeals to the
notion of a mental event type, a notion already found in earlier work by John Wisdom. The talk discusses how the approach might best preserve important insights of Frege, Moore, Russell, Wittgenstein, and Ayer about the nature of intentionality.

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Carnap’s *Aufbau* and Quine’s Objection

Quine famously interpreted Carnap’s *Aufbau* as a failed attempt to reduce all claims to a phenomenal and certain given. Less well known is that Michael Friedman and Alan Richardson showed convincingly that Quine misunderstood what Carnap was trying to do. This paper shows that even if we ignore the Friedman/Richardson result, Quine’s argument misfires. It does not show that even what it takes to be Carnap’s project must fail. Quine sought to legitimate his own framework by contrasting it with Carnap’s, so the present result both illuminates the *Aufbau* and undermines Quine project.

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Scientific Representation from an Analytic Perspective

One of the oldest problems in the philosophy of science is to understand how abstract theoretical structures manage to represent the concrete world of experience. Reichenbach characterized this problem as one of “coordination,” and Van Fraassen has recently posed this problem in a particularly stark form, as one that can be solved only with the help of an implicit indexical element, a link between the theoretical structure and the phenomena as represented by a particular subject in particular circumstances. I argue that such approaches start from an improper formulation of the problem, based on a misunderstanding of the problems in the foundations of science, in the 19th century, by which they were first suggested. I suggest that by revisiting the analytic context in which this problem first arose, and by emphasizing the role of conceptual analysis in connecting formal structures with experience, we may arrive a more promising approach to scientific representation.

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Making Sense of Wittgenstein's Lecture on Ethics

It seems fair to say that Wittgenstein's Lecture on Ethics is a strange document. I propose trying to make sense of some of the puzzling things he says in it, taking my cue from his later work. I use the Lecture as an extended language-game that helps to illustrate aspects of
Wittgenstein’s attitude in the “Philosophical Investigations”. Thus I see reading the Lecture in this way as an exercise that helps us to understand Wittgenstein's *Investigations*-era work.

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Ahistoricism in Analytic Philosophy: A Case Study

In his *Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (1900), Russell appears to concern himself with “… a reconstruction of the system that Leibniz should have written” over an historical treatment of his actual views. Remarks of this sort lend themselves to the charge that Russell excluded historical considerations from his presentation of Leibniz's philosophy, treating his texts sub specie aeternitatis. Normal Goethe (2007) writes: the suggestion here seems to be that learning from the past is like learning mathematics”. I aim to show i. that the historical (archival) record, along with Russell's extensive correspondence with Louis Couturat, suggest that Russell was in fact concerned with the historical development of Leibniz's views, ii. that Russell frequently mischaracterized Leibniz's views (particularly his 'subject-predicate doctrine') as a result of his own preoccupations (particularly with the requirements of an adequate account of relations in mathematics), iii. that Russell's anti-psychologism does not commit him to ahistoricism, as Goethe maintains, and iv. that, in the Leibniz book, Russell not only propounds a coherent position on the role of history and historicism in philosophy, but his criticisms of positivist history and extreme historicism are relevant and compelling.

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Frege's Performative Argument Against Truth Relativism

In the context of his critique of the “idealist” conception of logic, Frege presented an original argument against truth relativism that is designed to show that the relativity of truth cannot be asserted in a coherent way, because the absoluteness of truth is a success condition for making assertions. The purpose of the present paper is to reconstruct and critically assess this “performative” argument, which has hitherto received little attention. The main problem to be tackled is to explain why, in Frege’s view, the successful making of an assertion depends on the properties of truth. Three options are discussed, according to which this claim is based on (i) his deflationist analysis of the sense of ‘true’ according to which the sense of this word is a part of the sense of any assertoric sentence; (ii) the conception of assertion as naming the True suggested by his theory of sense and /Bedeutung/; and (iii) the conception of the “form of the assertoric sentence” as an illocutionary truth operator suggested by his claim that the proper linguistic devise of putting something forward as true is, not the word ‘true’, but this form. It is argued that the last option leads to a plausible version of the argument.
Wittgenstein's Private Language Game

We can distinguish two types of approaches in the secondary literature on Wittgenstein’s remarks on ‘private language’ in Philosophical Investigations §§243–315, namely in their respective attitude towards (the expression) of the idea of a private language. While the so-called standard reading sees Wittgenstein as arguing for its falsity, the alternative, ‘resolute’ reading sees Wittgenstein as arguing that its expression was strictly speaking nonsense. In other words, while the so-called standard reading appears to ascribe one determinate sense to the idea of a private language and subsequently argues that it is a false hypothesis, the alternative, resolute reading argues that there is no possible sense that could be given to the idea in the first place.

I do not agree with either of these two readings. Instead of taking it that the idea of a private language would either simply have sense or not, I am going to argue that the idea of a private language is first and foremost unclear in its supposed sense (as expressed in §§243ff.), and that Wittgenstein’s discussion is thus directed at the multitude of possible senses rather than at the truth or falsity, or mere nonsensicality of (what would appear to be) only one possible sense of it.—But most important seems to me the fact that Wittgenstein also tries to make good sense of the idea of a private language, in a way that has been widely neglected by readers of the relevant passages in the Investigations, so far.

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The Origins of Semantic Content in Early 20th Century Logic

Contemporary semantics got off the ground with the assumption that all there is to linguistic meaning is whatever is needed to determine truth conditions or propositional content (together: semantic content). This idea has been called into question by two trends, one of which involves recognizing that meaning has several dimensions that don’t reduce to truth conditions or propositional content, and the other of which involves recognizing that semantic underdetermination presents intractable problems for the very idea of semantic content. These trends raise the question of why we identified meaning with semantic content in the first place. Taking Frege and Tarski as case studies, I argue that the origins of the notion of semantic content lie in an idealization employed by early 20th century logicians. In adopting their methodology from these logicians, Davidson and Montague also took on board the idealization. But, whereas this idealization was both deliberate and harmless in its original, logical context, its unreflective adoption by natural language semanticists led to confusion.
Significance in Quine

This paper concerns the role of significance, or the meaningfulness of linguistic expressions, in Quine’s thought. Meaningfulness, and its opposite, meaninglessness, is one of two ideas which Carnap says he got from Wittgenstein; the other is tautologousness or analyticity. At first sight, there is a great difference in Quine’s reaction to these ideas: he seems to accept the former and reject the latter. I argue that this appearance is mistaken. In each case Quine accepts a behavioural version of the idea but denies that it will play any significant philosophical role. I also discuss the relevance of Quine’s discussion of language acquisition to the issue of meaningfulness. Quine emphasizes that the language-learner ‘depend[s] strictly on overt behavior in observable situations’ and this might make it look as if he is committed to a view resembling verificationism. I argue that this is not so: meaningfulness imposes no philosophically significant constraint on language. Finally, I point out that this fact makes it clear that Quine does not take his canonical notation to be the only meaningful form of language.

Russell on the Propositional Liar

In works from 1906–1910, Russell considers versions of the Epimenides or Liar paradox formulated so as to involve "propositions" rather than sentences or linguistic items. These, and certain related paradoxes, helped push Russell away from his earlier realism about propositions, and adopt instead a hierarchy of senses of truth for statements of various orders. His precise views change over these years, and especially the initial description of the truth hierarchy as involving the number (rather than type) of bound variables involved in a formula is particularly puzzling. I try to shed light on the development of Russell’s thinking here, especially in light of some of the still unpublished manuscripts of this period.

Russell and the Curious Calculi of Spencer Brown and Wittgenstein

In his Tractatus, Wittgenstein sets out what he calls his N-operator. In his Laws of Form, George Spencer Brown offers what he calls a “primary algebra.” Both systems are difficult and obscure. But comparing two blurry images can reduce noise, producing a focus. This paper reveals that Spencer Brown independently discovered the calculus embodied in the N-operator. The connections between the two sheds a flood light on two otherwise inscrutable systems.
Bolzano’s Logical Realism

This paper has three parts. First, I define "logical realism" as a position regarding the existence and nature of "logical facts" and make a distinction between what I call metaphysical and instrumental logical realism. Second, I argue that the logical realism Bolzano adopts is of the latter kind. Accordingly, I argue that the value of Bolzano’s theory, rather than residing in its ontological commitments, is a function of the significance of his analyses of logical notions and the intuitions they are meant to epitomize. Finally, I discuss some of Bolzano’s analyses and argue that his views on logic present a large improvement over those of his predecessors and contemporaries.

Frege, Carnap, and Explication: ‘Our Concern Here is to Arrive at a Concept of Number Usable for the Purpose of Science’

This paper argues that Carnap both did not view, and should not have viewed, Frege’s project in the foundations of mathematics as misguided metaphysics. The reason for this is that Frege’s project was to give an explication of number in a very Carnapian sense | something that was not lost on Carnap. Furthermore, Frege gives pragmatic justification for the basic features of his system, especially where there are ontological considerations. It will be argued that even on the question of the independent existence of abstract objects, Frege and Carnap held remarkably similar views. I close with a discussion of why, despite all this, Frege would not accept the principle of tolerance.

The Place of Vagueness in Russell's Philosophical Development

While there is an increasing recognition that in his writings after 1918, Russell advanced a behaviorist approach to the study of language and, more generally, a naturalistic approach to philosophy, it is still commonly suggested that before then, Russell accepted a number of views—including an “Augustinian” view of meaning and a conception of analysis constrained by his “principle of acquaintance”—that were severely criticized by later philosophers including Wittgenstein, Quine, and Sellars. I argue that understanding Russell’s philosophical development requires distinguishing the views he accepted in following G.E. Moore in breaking...
with Idealism towards the end of 1898 from his philosophical practice following his attending the International Congress of Philosophy in Paris in August 1900, which he calls “the most important event” in “the most important year in my intellectual life”. I illustrate this by focusing on the notion of vagueness as it figures in Russell’s philosophical development. While it is clear that it is only in the context of his post–1918 concerns with symbolism that Russell articulates his influential theory of vagueness in 1923, I argue that the same notion of vagueness he presents in 1923 is central to Russell’s post–Peano practice of analysis; that his post–Peano practice of analysis is thereby incompatible with the Moorean conception of analysis, which assumes both the Augustinian view of meaning and the “principle of acquaintance”; and that it is only after 1918 that Russell develops an account of understanding that is compatible with his post–Peano practice of analysis.

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Radical Interpretation and the Problem of Asymmetry

Davidson holds that thinkers cannot employ sets of concepts that differ radically, but he affirms that local conceptual divergences are possible and commonplace. He defends the former claim by arguing that (a) a speaker must mean whatever a fully informed radical interpreter would take her to mean, and (b) radical interpreters must employ a “Principle of Correspondence” whereby they read their own concepts into those they interpret. These considerations, however, appear to rule out not only the possibility of radical conceptual divergence between thinkers, but of any divergence whatsoever. To avoid this difficulty, Davidson must restrict the applicability of the Principle of Correspondence to instances of ‘symmetrical’ interpretation, i.e., cases where the speaker does not employ any concepts that are lacking in the interpreter’s own conceptual repertoire. I argue, however, that Davidson cannot draw a principled distinction between cases of symmetrical and asymmetrical interpretation without tacitly assuming that (a) is false. I conclude by suggesting, following McDowell, that we can make sense of genuine conceptual differences only by rejecting Davidson’s picture of interpretation as approaching the thought of another person from a ‘sideways-on’ perspective.

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Logical Form in Mathematical Practice

Throughout the twentieth century it was widely assumed that at least some mathematical knowledge is fully explained by appeal to the notion of logical form as that notion is understood in model theory, and the deduction of theorems from axioms on the basis of logical form so understood. But it has also become increasingly evident that this notion of logical form is of no help in our coming to understand either the nature of mathematical inquiry or its fruits. I
develop a very different conception of logical form, and indicate its role in reasoning in actual mathematical practice.

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Quine, Ontology, and Quantifying in to Predicate Positions

This paper is part of a broader effort to make sense of Quine’s views on higher-order logic. Many philosophers (George Boolos and Stewart Shapiro, chief among them) have opposed and criticized Quine’s position. But it seems that both opponents and proponents, alike, of Quine’s views have failed to understand exactly what it was. By presenting its development in the historical context of Quine’s general philosophical aims, I will hope to provide a better understanding of his position, ultimately showing that it is defensible against contemporary criticisms. In particular, I stress that Quine’s central philosophical aim is the clarification of our conceptual scheme. So-called higher-order logic, on his view, is odds with this goal in obscuring both its ontological commitments and mathematical strength.

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The Real Lessons of Bradley’s Regress(es)

This article aims to dispel some commonly held assumptions and misconceptions concerning the nature and extent of the challenge posed by Bradley’s regress. The main focus are two theses: 1) that external relations are incapable of relating their relata; and 2) that complexes cannot be both fundamental and analyzable. In the first part of the paper I offer a careful analysis and reconstruction of the three regress arguments that can be found in Bradley’s Appearance and Reality (1893) and show that none of the original arguments formulated by Bradley demonstrate that external relations cannot relate. I then argue against contemporary attacks on external relations, and show that such attacks rely on presuppositions that beg the question against the proponent of external relations. In the second part of the paper I examine Bradley’s 1910 and 1911 objections to Russell’s complexes and I indicate ways in which Russell then, and a contemporary realist today, could respond to Bradley.

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Russellian Acquaintance

I discuss the philosophical significance of two distinctions Russell draws involving acquaintance. First, he distinguishes knowledge by acquaintance from knowledge by description. Second, he
distinguishes knowledge by acquaintance from “knowledge about.” I argue that the first
distinction figures in Russell’s argument against William James, the second in his argument
against the British Monistic Idealists. In the course of making this second point I focus on the
significance of Russell’s claim that acquaintance with sense-data gives us knowledge that is
“perfect and complete.”

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Truth-functions and Independence in the *Tractatus*

I argue that the understanding of truth-functions built into the conception of sentences as logical
pictures motivates the both the independence of elementary sentences and the characterization of
sentences generally as truth-functions of elementary sentences.

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Are Analytic Truths About the World?

Many of the positivists held that one of the distinctive features of analytic statements is that they
are empty of factual content, or, as they might have put it, such statements are not "about the
world". In this paper, I consider an argument that is commonly directed against this claim. The
outline of the paper is as follows. First, I present the "Incomprehensibility Argument", which
argues not merely that the claim is false, but actually incomprehensible. Second, I cite some key
passages from positivists who hold that analytic truths are not about the world, as this proves
helpful in understanding why they held this view. Third, I critically evaluate the
Incomprehensibility Argument. Examining both the Incomprehensibility Argument (IA) and
the views of the positivists, it seems clear that there is reason to believe that a more charitable
reading of the positivists’ views provides us with interpretations of what they meant by "the
world" and "about" that at least should make us question whether IA should be granted any
significant force. Further, the chalkboard analogy provides a means for seeing not only the
coherence of the claim that analytic truths are not about the world, but perhaps even its
plausibility.

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Are there Violations of Logical Syntax?

Notoriously the resolute approach to reading Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* denies that there are
violations of logical syntax. This denial was criticized on the basis that Tractarian logical syntax
consists of constitutive rules. I argue that although certain conceptions of constitutive rules are unsustainable, a version of the idea of logical syntax as constitutive of making sense is in fact presupposed by the main arguments for the "austere" view of nonsense. In addition, on this view there are violations of logical syntax. Moreover, commitment to the view can be discerned in the work of some opponents of the resolute approach. I conclude by pointing to some Tractarian textual bases for this conception.

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Editing Moore’s notes on Wittgenstein’s lectures, Cambridge 1930-1933

Gabriel Citron, Brian Rogers, and I are co-editing G. E. Moore’s notes of Wittgenstein’s Cambridge lectures, 1930-1933, for a book to be published by Cambridge University Press. In this co-authored talk, we first set Wittgenstein’s 1930-33 lectures in the context of the development of his philosophy more generally, and in the context of contemporary scholarly debates about how best to understand Wittgenstein’s later thought. We then describe the text of Moore’s notes, explaining their unique value as records of Wittgenstein’s 1930-33 lectures; we briefly review the varied and wide-ranging content of the lectures; we discuss Moore’s role in the lectures themselves and in responding to their content. Finally, we outline the principal editorial challenges that these materials present, and provide a brief outline of our editorial project.

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Carnap’s Response to the Charge that Verificationism is Self-Undermining

A classic objection argues that the statement of the verificationist criterion does not itself meet the criterion; since verificationism is neither empirically confirmable, analytic, nor contradictory, verificationism implies its own meaninglessness. The criterion is thus as metaphysical as the sentences about “the Absolute” that it was intended to eliminate. This essay reconstructs Carnap’s response to this self-undermining objection to verificationism. I begin in §1 by presenting work on this topic by Putnam and Ricketts. On Putnam’s interpretation, Carnap draws on his principle of tolerance to construe verificationism as a non-cognitive proposal. Putnam argues that, since tolerance presupposes verificationism, this response involves Carnap in a vicious circle. Ricketts responds to Putnam on behalf of Carnap by denying that tolerance presupposes verificationism; according to Ricketts, Carnap does not argue for tolerance, and his response to the self-undermining objection is therefore not circular. I argue in §2.1 that both Putnam and Ricketts overlook Carnap’s basic move in response to the self-undermining objection, i.e., his construal of verificationism as an analytic sentence that is meaningful by its own lights. In §2.2, I consider what kind of a definition verificationism provides and how to motivate it. I argue, against Reichenbach, Ayer, and Hempel, that it is not an analysis of the everyday concept of meaning. Instead, I claim, verificationism replaces the ordinary conception
of meaning with one that purports to capture all and only the expressions that are pragmatically useful to the scientist. On my response to Putnam, then, in contrast to Ricketts’, Carnap argues for verificationism on the basis of his pragmatism. In §3.1, I consider whether pragmatism faces an analogue to the self-undermining objection to verificationism. I argue that pragmatism is a preference concerning formal languages, and that, since preferences need not apply to themselves, pragmatism is not self-undermining.

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On the Tractarian Critique of Frege’s use of ‘|—’

Making sense of Wittgenstein’s Tractarian criticisms of Frege’s views on assertion, truth, and the “assertion sign” has proven to be difficult, not least because they can easily appear to be based on one or another misunderstanding of Frege’s views. I will try to show how, when viewed in the context of Wittgenstein’s criticism of propositions (sentences) as proper names of truth values, we can make better sense of a number of these puzzling passages—and, indeed, can see them successfully to expose some significant underlying difficulties with Frege’s mature views.

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An Elementary Exposition of the General Propositional Form

The notational conventions underpinning Tractatus 6 are explained.

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Moore’s Proof of an External World: Method and Misunderstanding

G. E. Moore’s “Proof of an External World” is a worrisome bit of reasoning: at first glance, it clearly begs the question does so in such an obvious way that it is difficult to take the Proof seriously. Baldwin (1990) has shown that the proof ought to be treated as an intended refutation of idealism—not an argument against skepticism. Drawing on Baldwin’s reading of the proof as a metaphysical argument, I offer a new interpretation of the proof that draws on the “nonlinguistic components” of the proof (Stroll 1994, 56). This interpretation of the proof avoids the charge of vicious circularity so often levied against it; seeing Moore’s Proof in its proper light helps us to see its implications for defending realism.