Analytic philosophy for synthesis from early education on

Pieter Wisse

abstract
A proposal is offered for fitting analytic philosophy with assumptions for more intuitive appeal. Now encompassing an irreducible synthesis, it can be integrated in productive educational practice and programs, helping children to develop ever increasing multi-facetted competences. Aimed at bringing out what distinguishes it most from more traditional analyticity, a briefest of discussion of sorts is included based on work by S.A. Kripke (while recognizing that other works might have qualified equally for that purpose).

Starting at the youngest possible age

What I would like to contribute to, is a reorientation of analytic philosophy. I feel such philosophy both can and should already be taught to children, to better equip them for life. Teaching may start when a child is able to distinguish behaviors, and perform experiments accordingly (or can then be reasonably warned). As a matter a fact, current adults are also emphatically targeted here (with educators first).

The relevant concept of behavior mediates between the apparent opposites of identity and difference. Example: water. The child is familiar with water as a fluid. Cool it sufficiently, and water becomes a solid. For it to appear as steam, heat it. Throughout, it remains water. However, what makes its properties change, in other words, what makes water behave differently, are mutually exclusive circumstances, or situations.

Even from a much earlier age on, a child can be helped to a growing recognition of different reactions while continuing as itself. With reactions being actions, too, a child learns about its own developing behavioral variety, thereby aiming at changing a situation, and so on. And making up its situations are often one or more persons taking a similar approach: social exchange.

Object in situation: behavior

An object exhibits differential behavior. A particular behavior always occurs relative to some situation. It is taken as axiomatic that when an object's behaviors are different, it performs them in different situations.

Equally axiomatic, non- or asituational behavior does not exist. Yet, for a variety of situational behaviors to be attributed to one and the same object, for an object to change behavior from one situation to the next, et cetera, there must also be cohesion. It follows that identity must be assumed non- or abehaviorally. Elsewhere, I have called what connects an object's situationally partial objects exhibiting pertinent situational behaviors its nil-identity (Wisse, 2001).

Assumptions for the actual world and its variety

I have only recently come across the concept of rigid designator. Saul A. Kripke has introduced it (Kripke, 1980) for, say, tracking an object between so-called worlds. There is the "actual world," and then there are "possible worlds."

I acknowledge that my concept of nil-identity closely resembles Kripke's rigid designator. So, I agree with Kripke about a – proper – name merely facilitating reference. What I don't get, though, is all the excitement. I'm afraid it says more about logicians' isolation than mark a genuine breakthrough. Didn't Ferdinand de Saussure already clearly mention that a sign is arbitrary regarding meaning? Shakespeare has Juliet desperately hoping for a future with Romeo, exclaiming "What's in a name?"

Beyond the indeed similar solutions from rigid designator and nil-identity, respectively, my assumptions seem to vary greatly from Kripke's. Please note that I have to make some guesses here, because Kripke doesn't make much in the way of his assumptions explicit. And, yes, I do believe I may be able to help advancing analytical philosophy and turn it into something that is practically teachable, to be used by many.

First of all, there is what I care to call an objective difference. With Kripke, I don't read any treatment of an object's behavioral variety in the actual world. Apparently, an object's properties are considered singular, and not only in the actual world, but for every world in which it either actually or possibly exists. Already differentiating between relevant situations for an object's behaviors in one and the same world makes the distinction between actual and possible worlds unnecessary. For possibility may be taken to exist in the – actual – world, too.

Secondly, there is a fundamental difference in that I don't see Kripke at all dealing with subjectivity. An evolutionary advantage lies in adaptability. When an organism can change its behavior, there is a survival premium. At the low end of adaptability, an organism selects from preset, fixed behaviors (including recognizing situational difference from a preset, fixed variety). Much more adaptable, of course, is an organism that can learn to differentiate situations and perform behavior accordingly. Where does a subject come in? An organism may avoid many risks when it can simulate a situation including both its very own behavior and that of other objects and subjects. Variable is what count as objects (including subjects) and situations, and therefore situationally partial objects with their behaviors. The objectivity of object gets lost. To a large extent what Kripke calls possible worlds seem to me such simulations, call them counterfactual if you want, but necessarily performed by an actual subject and therefore in the actual world. I don't see any other necessity, and of course this one is contingent upon the axioms that have been set. Other necessities are derivative. Anyway, the concept of possible world outside a subject I find confusing.

Identity as a boundary concept, only

I also find it confusing to apply identity when comparing. Knowing there are different objects with their behaviors involved, when no difference can be established I would call them indistinguishable, rather than identical. I propose to limit identity to a boundary concept, and there I agree with Kripke as to the need for a rigid designator aka nil-identity.

Language use is exchanging requests for compliance

What Kripke also leaves out, is elaborating on language. With the ability for simulating behavior might come ideas about what another object, when seen as subject, could, should, et cetera, do for you. Next comes the task of communication. How does one subject try to get its message across to one or more other subjects? And what invariably is such sign exchange about? I find that language only makes evolutionary sense with every sign being a request for compliance (Wisse, 2002).

The question is what we are habitually being taught. It is simplistic to think of it as learning to associate names with things. Names serve a purpose. They appear as part of requests for compliance. A name can appear in a wide variety of contexts. With context corresponding to situation, as I have formalized in a semiotic ennead (Wisse, 2002), in fact we never stop learning to vary behavior.

So-called counterfactual examples that Kripke and like specialists are fond to supply, are actually without necessary assumptions. (I apologize for the pleonasm entailed in labeling assumptions necessary; at this stage I find it helps putting a necessary emphasis.) Examples can only make actual sense as a report of one particular subject addressing another particular subject, i.e. as a request for compliance. That way, the largest part of sign is recognized as context, needed for precision. There's no contextless sign, as there is no situationless object to behave.

Scoping context

Context disambiguates. It follows that necessary and sufficient context varies with scope. The children of a family are given different – first – names. For example a parent calling a child can do with that first name, only. For the child will recognize the voice as from one of his parents. In a classroom, children from different families come together. Addressing a pupil, the teacher may need more than just a first name (or more than just a last name, for that matter). Should combination of first and last name come out equal, yet another naming convention is in order. The purpose is precision of address. It makes the producer of a sign more certain about the compliance he aims to achieve when a particular subject should do the complying. Many governments are now identifying citizens with unique numbers, forgetting that across governments such a number alone no longer qualifies.

As results require team work, much learning and training is oriented at communication efficiency. When a surgeon needs a particular instrument, she may 'name' it. A nurse should hand it to her immediately, otherwise the patient might die. Outside the operating theatre, it is not the request for compliance that it is inside it with a patient during surgery. Should the surgeon have said "give," the nurse would still have to guess what instrument to give. Learning to be a participating member of a language community is about sharing efficiency of language use. Why do you stop when some lights turn to, or are, red, while you don't act at the sight of another red light? What is the difference? What is it for you, then and there?

Differentiating behaviors all the way up, and down

By now it might have dawned that developing a structured view of the world takes more that assuming a set of worlds with each filled with objects as if they were atoms within that scope. Rather, its different behaviors establish situationally partial objects. What constitutes, then, some situation? And in, say, the other direction, what constitutes some behavior? I would say, more situationally partial objects in all directions. In the direction of situation a limit must be set: horizon. Ever more detailed – specification of – behavior may be left open. See (Wisse, 2001) for schematic formalization of recursion, including cascading nil-identities.

At last, a different way of doing logic, too

Differentiating between situations to the extent that behaviors can be unequivocally attributed shifts much of traditional logic. For myself, after having drawn up a well-differentiated model, by which I mean the stage at which an object's behaviors are situated as disjunct for which Metapattern may be applied for modeling (Wisse, 2001), I don't see relevance of – other – formal logic.

Easy tool for real variety

Let me return to early education, both at home and in school. Teaching children along the lines of Metapattern gives them the flexible and near-intuitive tool to start expressing their experience of variety, and so on to learn better to proactively deal with it. Indeed it is a world full of variety, and changing at that, in which they live.

literature

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Pieter Wisse was a fellow of PrimaVera, the research program in information management of the University of Amsterdam. He holds an engineering degree in mathematics and information systems from Delft University of Technology, and earned his PhD in Amsterdam from work on semiotics. Pieter developed Metapattern for modeling variety at whatever scale. He is also founder and president of Information Dynamics, Netherlands.

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