



Senses and Kinds

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SENSES AND KINDS *

I WISH to call attention to a seldom-noticed confusion, which I shall call the "sense-kind confusion."

I

The sense-kind confusion arises in the naturalness with which we move back and forth between saying "In a sense, so-and-so" and "In a way, so-and-so." Thus in ordinary conversation 'in a sense' and 'in a way' would each do equally well as a substituent in the following sentences; moreover, the replacement of one substituent by the other would leave the meaning of the whole unaltered.

- (1) Playing the violin is, . . . (in a sense, in a way), more difficult than playing the organ.
- (2) Mathematics is, . . . (in a way, in a sense), the most abstract of disciplines.
- (3) (In a sense, in a way) . . . , it is Jefferson, not Washington, who is the father of our country.

Reflecting on the colloquial interchangeability of 'in a sense' and 'in a way', one might become a little nervous about the obvious glibness with which we use 'in a sense'. There are, after all, an indefinitely large number of ways in which one thing may be more difficult than another. But surely it is absurd to suppose that there are an indefinitely large number of senses of 'difficult' in which one thing may be said to be more difficult than another. It is absurd to suppose that any word has an indefinitely large number of senses (cf. Aristotle, 1006a34-b11).

Since it is absurd to suppose that a word has an indefinitely large number of senses, I should argue that the colloquial use of 'in a sense' to mean 'in a way' shouldn't be taken literally. To use 'in a sense' this way is, I suggest, to employ a material-to-formal-mode transfer (to be classified either as metonymy or synecdoche). One

* I am indebted to Fred Feldman for helpful criticisms.

speaks of a respect in which x is more difficult than y as if that respect specified a distinct sense of the word 'difficult'.¹ The transfer, I should add, is so commonplace that it does not strike one as a figure of speech. It is a dead trope. Still, no one would think of trying to provide a separate entry in the dictionary under 'difficult' corresponding to each of the limitless ways in which one thing may be more difficult than another. And so it is by a figure of speech that we use 'sense' so glibly.

More interesting than the contexts in which a literal reading of sense talk threatens rampant homonymy are the contexts in which there are only a manageable number of senses in question. Here the inclination to take sense talk seriously, and literally, will be very great. Thus the following two claims would doubtless strike most people as interchangeable:

- (4) There are two (and only two) senses of 'prior'—a temporal sense and a logical sense; in the temporal sense 'is prior' means "comes before," in the logical sense it means "is presupposed or entailed by."
- (5) There are two ways of being prior—a temporal way and a logical way [or: there are two kinds of priority—temporal priority and logical priority]; x is prior to y if, and only if, either x comes before y or x is presupposed or entailed by y .

I am not now concerned with whether either (4) or (5) is correct. It is enough that they be plausible. What interests me here is that they strike one as making roughly the same assertion. So the naturalness with which we equate 'in a sense more difficult' and 'in a way more difficult' finds a parallel in the naturalness with which we equate 'in a sense prior' and 'in a way prior'. But since the number of senses claimed by (4) for 'prior' is only two, there is not here the reason we had earlier for supposing that sense-talk embodies a non-literal way of speaking. (4) has the look of literal truth—or at least the look of an attempt at literal truth.

Yet if (4) is construed literally, (4) and (5) are "linguistically incongruent"; that is, we cannot suppose that (4) applies to a language (English, say) in which (5) is correctly stated without supposing that what (5) states in that language is false.² To see this, suppose that

¹ The transfer is thus somewhat like the recognized substitution of genus for species—as when one uses 'animal' to mean 'lower animal', i.e., to refer solely to beasts. ("Don't behave like a bunch of animals!") However a typical genus-to-species transfer results in only two senses, the generic sense and a single specific sense. But in the transfer discussed above one is prepared to speak as if there were a specific sense of 'difficult' to go with each way in which one thing can be said to be more difficult than another.

² I was at first inclined to say simply that (4) and (5) are incompatible. The more cautious claim I have substituted here is a response to admonitions from Edmund Gettier and Bruce Aune.

(4) is true. Then we can ask which of the two possible senses 'is prior' has in (5). Substituting into (5) each of the two alternatives (4) gives us we get these results:

(5') . . . x comes before y if, and only if, either x comes before y or x is presupposed or entailed by y .

(5'') . . . x is presupposed or entailed by y if, and only if, either x comes before y or x is presupposed or entailed by y .

Both (5') and (5'') are false. As for (5'), it is not a sufficient condition of x 's coming before y that x be presupposed or entailed by y . As for (5''), it is not a sufficient condition of x 's being presupposed or entailed by y that x come before y .

What I wish to call "the sense-kind confusion" is exemplified in the supposition that (4), taken literally, and (5) are congruent—perhaps even ways of saying the same thing, or perhaps ways of making two closely connected points such that the point about two kinds of priority might be taken to justify or somehow underlie the point about two senses of 'prior'. As illustrated by this example, then, the sense-kind confusion is the mistake of supposing that talk about two senses of 'prior' (a temporal sense and a logical sense) lives amicably with talk about two kinds of priority (temporal priority and logical priority). One could as well call the confusion a "sense-mode" or "sense-way" confusion. For it could as well be said to be the confusion of supposing that talk about senses of 'prior' is congruent with talk about modes or ways of *being* prior.

The sense-kind confusion is a confusion, because sense talk and parallel kind talk (or mode talk) are, in fact, incongruent.

I should emphasize that what is guaranteed to be incongruent (and what, therefore, exhibits the sense-kind confusion) is *parallel* sense and kind talk (i.e., talk of there being the very same number of senses as there are kinds, with the reasons offered for distinguishing senses directly analogous to the reasons offered for distinguishing kinds). One way to try to remove the incongruity and thereby eliminate the confusion would be to disrupt the parallel. Thus, to continue with the 'priority'/priority example, one could try arguing that although there are only two kinds of priority, there are three senses of the word 'priority'—two, so to say, specific senses, and one, so to say, generic sense. One could then add that when we speak of "two kinds of priority" we use 'priority' in its "generic" sense rather than in either of its "specific" senses. Whether such an account could be made at all plausible is something I shall not go into here. I mean to restrict myself to parallel sense and kind talk.

II

So there is such a thing as the sense-kind confusion. Of what philosophical interest or importance is it?

To assess its interest and importance one would have to study the contexts in which it is found. Perhaps one such context is provided by discussions of perception. Some philosophers seem to want to maintain that there are two senses of 'see' (or 'perceive') and, for parallel reasons, that there are two kinds or ways of seeing (or perceiving). One sense of 'see' and kind of seeing is thought to be purely phenomenological, the other realistic. The object of seeing in the phenomenological sense of 'seeing' and in the phenomenological way of seeing is, perhaps, a sense datum. The object of seeing in the realistic sense and way is, perhaps, a physical object.

Perhaps another context is provided by Russell's discussion of knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. Russell is sometimes inclined to say that knowledge by acquaintance is knowledge in the strict and primary sense of 'know' (or 'knowledge').³ (This inclination finds reinforcement in the fact that German and French each have two verbs for the English verb 'to know'—one for acquaintance and one for knowing-that, including knowing that x is the so-and-so; this fact makes 'know' in English look rather obviously homonymous; cf. *ibid.*, p. 44.) On the other side it seems important to Russell to say that there are two *kinds* of knowledge; for he wants to be able to contrast knowledge by acquaintance with knowledge by description by saying what sort of knowledge each is. (Knowledge by acquaintance is direct, immediate, and intuitive knowledge, whereas knowledge by description is indirect, mediate, and judgmental knowledge.) He cannot succeed in making this contrast unless he can use 'knowledge' univocally for two kinds of knowledge.

Interesting as it might be to discuss these two contexts in which the sense-kind confusion seems to be found, I shall ignore them in what follows so as to be able to concentrate on two Aristotelian doctrines. The first is the so-called Doctrine of the Four Causes.

The Greek word that gets rendered 'cause' in English translations of Aristotle is '*aition*'. Commentators on Aristotle give the impression that the Doctrine of the Four Causes could be presented indifferently as (i) a doctrine about what senses the word '*aition*' has, or as (ii) a doctrine about what kinds of *aition* there are. According

³ ". . . all our knowledge of the table is really knowledge of *truths*, and the actual thing which is the table is not, strictly speaking, known to us at all" [*Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford, 1959) ch. v, p. 47].

to them these are both good ways of putting Aristotle's point:

- (b) '*aition*' has four (and only four) meanings, viz., "matter," "form," "agent," "purpose."
 (b) x is the *aition* of y if, and only if, x is either the matter, the form, the agent, or the purpose of y .

The foregoing discussion should prepare one to realize that, far from being interchangeable, (a) and (b) are actually incongruent. Thus suppose (a) is correct. Then we can ask what sense '*aition*' has in (b). If it means "matter," then (b) comes to this:

- (b') x is the matter of y if, and only if, x is the matter, the form, the agent or the purpose of y .

(b') is clearly false. And so are the analogous three sentences to be got by substituting 'form', 'agent', and 'purpose' for '*aition*' in (b).

Was Aristotle clear on this point? And did he present a doctrine of senses rather than a doctrine of kinds? Or a doctrine of kinds rather than a doctrine of senses?

Aristotle's commentators are of no help in answering these questions because they are themselves caught up in the sense-kind confusion. Thus Ross⁴ summarizes Aristotle as saying that

'Cause' means (1) constituent material; (2) the form, pattern, and the generic and other elements in the definition; (3) the proximate originator of change or rest; (4) the end (351/2).

and then goes on to add immediately that

A thing has causes of more than one of these kinds (and this not merely incidentally), and what is the cause of a thing in one sense may be its effect in another (352).

Perhaps the most recent commentator to touch on these points is W. Charlton,⁵ who states the theme of *Physics* B3 this way:

This chapter is concerned with the various sorts of thing which may be given as *aitia*. It consists of two enumerations, one of senses in which a thing may be said to be an *aition*, the other of ways (*tropoi*) in which we may meet a request for an *aition* in any one of these senses (98).

Six pages later Charlton refers to the (as he supposes) same point this way:

The classification of kinds of cause has received more attention than the classification of ways in which a cause may be given (104).

⁴ Sir David Ross, *Aristotle's Physics* (Oxford: Oxford, 1936).

⁵ *Aristotle's Physics* I, II (New York: Oxford, 1970).

Was Aristotle himself confused? If we can agree that Aristotle at least made no provision for a "generic" sense of *'aition'* (in addition to four "specific" senses), the remaining pure possibilities are these:

1. Aristotle presented a doctrine about the senses of *'aition'* (and not a doctrine about the kinds of *aitia*).
2. Aristotle presented a doctrine about the kinds of *aitia* (and not a doctrine about the senses of *'aition'*).
3. Aristotle was confused.

In addition to these pure possibilities there are impure variants. For example, it might be that Aristotle was confused when he first broached the subject of *aition*, but he came later to settle on an unconfused doctrine about senses of *'aition'* (or kinds of *aitia*).

Until we know what Aristotle wanted to say, we are in no position to evaluate his doctrine. If, for example, his doctrine is an unconfused claim about the senses of *'aition'*, we should ask whether the Greek word *'aition'* really has the senses claimed for it. (Certainly the English word 'cause' doesn't, as every English-speaking lecturer on Aristotle is soon brought to recognize.)

If, on the other hand, the doctrine is one about kinds, then we may want to ask what the central concept of an *aition* is, or might be, such that by adding appropriate differentiae we can arrive at the four species of *aition* that Aristotle recognizes.

If, however, the doctrine as found in Aristotle embodies a sense-kind confusion, then what we must say about it is that it is confused.

So far, all we can be confident of is that Aristotle's commentators are confused.

III

For my second major example of the sense-kind confusion I turn to another point that arises in Aristotle. But this time I shall ignore Aristotle himself and discuss the issue in a contemporary setting.

In chapter 1 of *The Concept of Mind*⁶ Gilbert Ryle maintains that the Cartesian dualist makes a "category mistake," or perhaps a whole battery of category mistakes. By this Ryle is commonly taken to mean that the dualist assigns minds and mental such-and-suches to the wrong category.

No doubt Ryle does want to say that the dualist assigns minds and many mental such-and-suches to the wrong category. But what Ryle actually says in chapter 1 of *The Concept of Mind* is something rather different. What he says comes close to a charge that the Cartesian dualist is guilty of a sense-kind confusion. The dualist

⁶ New York: Barnes & Noble, 1959.

supposes, according to Ryle, that there are different kinds of existence (in particular there is a bodily kind of existence and there is a mental kind), whereas what is true, and incompatible with there being such kinds of existence, is that bodies are said to exist in a different sense of 'exist' from that in which minds are said to exist.

Here Ryle states the dualist's doctrine:

It is assumed that there are two different kinds of existence or status. What exists or happens may have the status of physical existence, or it may have the status of mental existence. Somewhat as the faces of coins are either heads or tails, or somewhat as living creatures are either male or female, so, it is supposed, some existing is physical existing, other existing is mental existing. It is a necessary feature of what has physical existence that it is in space and time; it is a necessary feature of what has mental existence that it is in time but not in space (13).

And here Ryle gives his own view:

It is perfectly proper to say, in one logical tone of voice, that there exist minds and to say, in another logical tone of voice, that there exist bodies. But these expressions do not indicate two different species of existence, for 'existence' is not a generic word like 'coloured' or 'sexed'. They indicate two different senses of 'exist' (23).

Unfortunately Ryle's commentators, defenders, and critics have fallen victim to the confusion Ryle so clearly avoids.

Take John Passmore, for example. In his book, *Philosophical Reasoning*,⁷ Passmore devotes major portions of two chapters to Ryle's *Concept of Mind*. In chapter 3 ("The Two-Worlds Argument") Passmore discusses Ryle's criticism of the notion that there are two worlds, a physical world and a mental world (53/4). Ryle's rejection of that notion makes Ryle what Passmore calls an "existence monist." Yet this is the way Passmore has characterized existence monism:

. . . when we say that something exists, or that things of a certain kind exist, this *exist* or *exists* has an invariant meaning whatever the 'something' or 'kind' may be, i.e., [sic] there are not sorts, or levels, or orders of existence (53).

Certainly Ryle does reject the dualist's two-world story.⁸ But he doesn't do that by insisting on the univocity of 'exists.' Quite the reverse, he does it by insisting that minds are not said to exist in the same sense of 'exist' as are bodies, and by adding that this fact

⁷ New York: Scribner's, 1961; Basic Books, 1969.

⁸ Again and again in *The Concept of Mind*. See, e.g., pp. 12, 83, 135, 139, 154, 161, 199, 245, 329.

rules out there being different kinds of existence as required by the dualist's two-worlds story.

In a paper titled "On Category Differences,"⁹ Manley Thompson insists we must be prepared to say both that (1) categories are kinds (genera) of being (and hence there are exactly as many kinds of being as there are categories) and (2) 'being' has as many senses as there are categories. Here are relevant quotations:

Instead of saying that category differences are extreme differences among entities [that would be putting the matter in what Thompson calls "the ontological idiom"], we may say that they are extreme differences in the use of certain words ["the linguistic idiom"], each such difference giving rise to a different sense of the word existence" (506).

Even if we prefer an account of category differences stated exclusively in one idiom, a philosophically adequate account seems well-nigh impossible unless we remain constantly aware of the force of the alternative idiom. Interplay between the two idioms runs through traditional philosophy, and from Aristotle on, category differences have been spoken of as "different senses of 'being'" and "different genera of being" (507).

This necessity for recognizing different idioms in the statement of category difference is, I believe, one of the more important philosophic points that can be made in a general survey of the issues (507).

R. C. Cross¹⁰ and Bernard Harrison¹¹ take up Thompson's line and apply it specifically to Ryle. Cross says this:

The view [under discussion, which we find in Ryle] recommends that we keep clear of ontological investigations, and that we explain the meaning of words by exhibiting their use in discourse, i.e., it argues that we should confine ourselves to logical investigations, in a broad sense of logical . . . On the traditional view [by contrast] the uses reflected different categories of being, and the categories of being themselves provided a limited list. They also could, as studies in ontology, provide a theory of *why the uses of words were limited as they were*. [emphasis mine] (269).

So Ryle is to be criticized for failing to realize (!) that the reason 'exists' has a different sense for each category of thing said to exist is that the categories are categories of existence, i.e., kinds, or genera, of existence!

Certainly Ryle does wish to keep clear of alleged investigations into the modes of existence. But his shyness is not the result of a

⁹ *Philosophical Review*, LXVI, 4 (October 1957); 486-508.

¹⁰ "Category Differences," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, LIX (1959): 255-270.

¹¹ "Category Differences and Rules of Language," *Mind*, 74 (1965), 309-325.

reluctance to face up to the ontological underpinnings of his doctrine of categories. On his view there is no such thing to face up to; for 'exists' has a distinct sense for each category of thing said to exist; and *therefore*¹² it is not the case that the categories are categories of being.

Whether or not Ryle is right about there being different senses of 'exist',¹³ he is certainly right in thinking he has to reject at least one of the following:

- (1) 'Exists' has ten senses; it means either 'is a substance' or 'is a quality' or 'is a place' or . . . (etc. for the other seven categories).
- (2) There are ten kinds of existence; x exists if, and only if, either x is a substance or x is a quality or x is a place or . . . (etc. for the other seven categories).

To suppose that (1) and (2) are jointly acceptable is to fall into the sense-kind confusion. And to suppose that the *reason* there are n senses of 'exist' is that there are (correspondingly) n kinds of existence is to compound the confusion; for the sense doctrine, if true, deprives us of a way of even stating the kind doctrine successfully.

Cross is right in thinking that, on a persistent and traditional view, the reason 'being' has ten or so different senses is that there are exactly that many categories of being. We must add that this persistent and traditional view rests upon a confusion.

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THE PARSING OF 'POSSIBLE'

PHILOSOPHERS' attempts to separate the warp and woof of possibility have resulted in tangles. This paper is an attempt to find some straight threads.

I

Nelson Goodman addresses the last sections of his essay "The Passing of the Possible" to what he considers to be the problem of

¹² I do not mean to suggest that Ryle is himself completely clear of the sense-kind confusion. Consider this passage: "A person's knowledge about himself and others may be distributed between many roughly distinguishable grades yielding [sic] correspondingly numerous roughly distinguishable senses of 'knowledge.'" *Op. cit.*, p. 180).

¹³ I think he is not. See my "Dualism and Solecism," *Philosophical Review*, LXXX, 2 (January 1971): 85-95.