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Robert Stalnaker's latest work is divided into eight chapters and defends the "autonomy of pragmatics" thesis. Basically, this thesis states that the conditions that enable several agents to communicate with one another and the way in which a discourse evolves can be systematized whatever the linguistic and semantic features characterizing a given natural language. This view is supported by an analysis of the contexts in which speech acts may be used. In particular, the Author focuses on a specific type of context - the *common ground* - the role of which is to collect the information shared by the different parties engaging in a conversation.

In the first chapter Stalnaker argues that the common ground is necessary to successful communication, and he compares the role of the common ground with that of the context of use. A context of use is usually conceived as a sequence of parameters (e.g., a world, a speaker, an addressee) describing a concrete situation in which a sentence can be uttered. If one of its tasks is to specify the features needed to interpret indexical expressions and non-truth-functional operators, the notion of context of use also enables fine-grained distinctions to be drawn concerning how the proposition expressed by a sentence is determined. The Author distinguishes the character of a sentence *p* (a function from contexts of use to propositions) from the proposition expressed by *p* (a function from possible worlds to truth values), claiming that this distinction is needed to separate cases of equivocation from cases of disagreement. When A misunderstands B, then A may reject a statement uttered by B because A fails to grasp the character of B's utterance. When A and B disagree, both parties identify the proper character of B's utterance, but A may believe that what B has said is false (p.18). Although it is important, a given context of use does not convey the information that has to be available to speakers to determine

the proposition expressed by a sentence used at a context. For example, if B says to A, “You’re a fool”, then A and B communicate successfully only if both A and B share the belief that A is the addressee of B’s utterance. This belief enables both parties to be in a position to recognize the right character of B’s statement. The required belief is not specified in B’s context of use, however, so an adequate account of the communication needs to identify both a context of use and a common ground, which collects the body of information available to the speakers.

In the second chapter the Author defines the common ground as the set of possible worlds that are compatible with the background knowledge shared by the participants in a conversation. In general, the common ground can have two main functions: first, it provides the resources that speakers may use to decide what to say or ascertain what has been said; second, it provides the resources for explaining speech acts in terms of how they modify the common ground. In particular, Stalnaker proposes to characterize assertions as speech acts that aim to add their propositional content to the common ground. The Author also emphasizes that we can see this characterization as a conventional rule. Nevertheless the shift in the common ground induced by an assertion does not depend on any conventional rule, because it is changed by virtue of a mutual acknowledgement that an act with a given force has been made (p.52). It is in this sense that the common ground is consistent with the “autonomy of pragmatics” thesis: its roles do not depend on the particular features of a given natural language.

In the third and fourth chapters, Stalnaker deals with the problem of presuppositions, criticizing the view that they should be conceived primarily as semantic phenomena. The semantic approach states that a sentence p presupposes φ iff p has a truth-value only if φ. Stalnaker finds this approach misleading for various reasons. First, it poses several problems when it comes to interpreting how presuppositions in complex statements are a function of the presuppositions of their simple parts. The semantic approach also fails to recognize the pragmatic importance of the common ground in explaining what several

speakers do when they use or interpret statements involving presuppositions. According to the Author, presuppositions should be explained in terms of how they modify the common ground, since their assertions add new information about what a given speaker accepts or refuses. If A says, "I would like to introduce you to my wife", this statement not only presupposes that A is married, it also modifies the previously-shared common ground by adding the belief that he is presupposing. This kind of shift helps to explain the conditions under which complex sentences involving presuppositions can be successfully interpreted and felicitous uttered. Let us assume that *q* presupposes something entailed by *p*. Now let us assume that a speaker A says that *p and q*. By the time A gets to say that *q*, the common ground has shifted to include the shared belief that A accepts that *p*. So we can conclude that the presuppositions necessary for a felicitous assertion of a sentence of the form *p and q* are the same as those necessary for the felicitous assertion of *p* alone, plus those required for an assertion of *q* alone, minus the presuppositions entailed by *p* (p.96).

The fifth chapter concerns self-locating beliefs, i.e. those contents that represent how an agent takes himself to be. This type of information has to be included in a given common ground because each common ground needs to collect the beliefs shared by several speakers about how they identify each other. Stalnaker's main concern is to give an account that represents what an agent believes about how another agent sees him. Let us suppose that Ralph mistakenly believes that Ortcutt is a spy, and that Ortcutt knows this. To represent Ortcutt's knowledge, the Author introduces the notion of I-Concept. An I-Concept is a function f "that picks out the individual that $f(x)$ takes himself to be in each of the possible worlds that are compatible with what he believes in a given world x" (p.120). This definition is used to illustrate where a given individual self-locates himself relative to the worlds that are incompatible with what he believes in a given world x. Indeed, two I-Concepts that pick out the same subject A in a world x will identify the same

individual in worlds that are compatible with what A believes in *x*. But they may identify different individuals in worlds that are incompatible with what A believes in *x*. Accordingly, Ortcutt's knowledge can be represented by means of two I-Concepts; the first, g_1, picks out Ortcutt relative to what Ortcutt believes himself to be in the actual world, $w_@$; the second, g_2, picks out Ortcutt relative to worlds that are compatible with what Ortcutt believes about Ralph's beliefs in $w_@$. As a further step, the Author says that, for any I-Concept *f* and world *x*, a world *y* is R_f-accessible from *x* iff *y* is compatible with the beliefs of *f*(*x*) in *x*. The set $\{y : xR_fy\}$ contains all the worlds that are compatible with what *f*(*x*) believes in the world *x*. Given the transitive closure, R*, of R_{g1} and R_{g2}, the set $\{y : xR^*y\}$ would contain all the worlds compatible: (i) with Ortcutt's beliefs about himself in $w_@$, and (ii) with Ortcutt's beliefs about Ralph in the world $w_@$. In turn, $\{y : xR^*y\}$ is the common ground shared by Ortcutt and Ralph relative to the way in which they identify each other in $w_@$ (p.122).

In the sixth chapter, Stalnaker reminds us that the linguistic practices analyzed so far aim to add new information to the common ground. But he says there are several kinds of speech act the purpose of which is not only to add to the information being shared, but also to draw a partition between the propositions already accepted by the participants engaging in a conversation. A distinctive form of speech act that has this specific role is performed using epistemic modals. The standard semantic account for an epistemic modal such as "It might rain", uttered by A in the context of use *c*, interprets the use of "might" as a quantification over the worlds that are compatible with A's knowledge in *c*, or with the knowledge of a relevant group in *c*. If an epistemic modal uttered by A in *c* is about A's state of knowledge in *c*, it seems impossible for B to disagree with A. On the other hand, if A's claim in *c* concerns the state of knowledge of some larger group, then A could not be in a position to know what might be true in *c*. Stalnaker proposes that we interpret an epistemic modal as a quantification over the worlds that are compatible with a context that is posterior to the

context in which the epistemic modal is used. This posterior context is the common ground as modified after the speech act has been performed. The Author makes the point that, in saying "It might be that *p*", a speaker is proposing to adjust the common ground to state that the content of the sentence is true relative to the posterior context (p.140). The shift in the common ground prompted by epistemic modals does not always consist in the addition of information, however. For instance, if A says "It might rain in Rome", where it had not previously been supposed that it was not raining, then this utterance serves to add a new distinction among the possibilities of the common ground. To be more precise, even if A's claim does not convey any new information, it serves to make a possibility salient.

In the seventh and eighth chapters, Stalnaker clarifies that the phenomenon of disagreement draws several partitions on the content of a given common ground, focusing on the particular kind of disagreement that is due to incompatible epistemic priorities. Let us suppose that, as part of the common ground between A and B, there is the conviction that the murderer must be C or D. A was with C at the time of the murder, but she does not reveal this fact to B. On the other hand, B has misleading evidence that he believes to absolve D, so B infers that it must have been C who committed the murder. Then, although A concedes that it is common ground that the murderer must be either C or D, she would not accept B's conditional "If D didn't do it, then C must have done it". The Author claims that this case seems to involve a contrast between the content of the common ground and the content compatible with the individual's conditional knowledge. Indeed, A not only challenges the idea that C is guilty, she also contests that C might have been guilty. The proposition that C is guilty must nevertheless be compatible with the common ground, since B says that C is the murderer. The Author's solution is that, in this case, the common ground is *contested*: it is divided into several parts, each of which reflects what one party manifestly accepts (p.165).

In conclusion, one of the virtues of Stalnaker's book lies in that it deals with several philosophical problems taking a uniform approach, showing that the notion of common ground can answer different questions concerning the philosophy of language. On the other hand (as we have seen in the case of self-locating beliefs), the common ground's characterization relies to a significant degree on modal logic, which in turn was developed to give a semantic account for intensional languages. We might therefore wonder whether the structure attributed to the common ground depends on the conventional features of natural languages containing intentional expressions. If so, the "autonomy of pragmatics" thesis would pose some problems because the common ground (used to defend said thesis) would not be independent of the linguistic and semantic features characterizing several fragments of many natural languages.