Philosophy of Language // Spring 2017

Handout 13

Assertion II: Stalnaker

Representation of contingent a priori. Another application of two-dimensional semantics is in representing of contingent a priori statements. Consider an earlier example: 83

Julius is the inventor of the zip. (13-1)

Here we say that the name 'Julius' is used in such a way as to refer to whoever in fact invented the zip. But whoever in fact, in the actual world u, invented the zip might not have invented the zip under other circumstances v. Hence (13-1) is contingent.

On the other hand, consider that other world v. If v is considered *as the actual world*, then there the name 'Julius' is again used with the same stipulation as in u—though but it refers to a different individual. Hence $\delta_{uu} = \delta_{vv} = 1$. In general we get the diagonal proposition necessary across every world (see Table 1).

JZ	u	v	w
u	1	0	0
v	0	1	1
w	0	1	1

Table 1: 'Julius is the inventor of the zip'

Question 1. Is the same person invented the zip in v and w in Table 1?

As before, we can diagonalise the proposition (13-1). Intuitively, the resulting †JZ is what we assert by uttering (13-1). In the propositional concept for †JZ, $\delta_{ij} = 1$ for every i, j.

Finally, sometimes we want to make a comment about apriority, e.g., when we say that a certain proposition is knowable a priori. If the propositional concept of the original proposition was M, then the matrix for this proposition is $\square \dagger M$. Here is the rationale for this operator. Consider then this statement:

'Julius is the inventor of the zip' is a priori true. (13-2)

Filling in the cells in its propositional concept, what is the value of δ_{uv}? Evidently the original proposition is a priori true in every possible circumstance. Hence in this instance $\dagger M = \square \dagger M$. But then consider the following:

'Judson is the inventor of the zip' is a priori true. (13-3)

Here $M = \dagger M$, but $\dagger M \neq \square \dagger M$.

JudZ	u	v	w
u	1	0	1
v	1	0	1
w	1	0	1

Table 2: 'Judson is the inventor of the zip'

□†JudZ	u	v	w
u	0	0	0
v	0	0	0
w	0	0	0

Table 3: "'Judson is the inventor of the zip" is a priori true.'

Remark 2. In later work Stalnaker repudiates this account of a priori representation. (Details. . .)

Negative existentials. Diagonalisation helps in the case of true negative existentials. When I say of the fictional character that he (it) does not exist, I am uttering a necessarily true statement. Yet with different presuppositions about how the name refers, different propositions will be associated with the utterance by different speakers. Suppose we examine the claim: 93

Sherlock Holmes does not exist. (13-4)

Suppose that we have our actual world; then there is a world where Holmes is a detective of whom Conan Doyle wrote a historical account; and then there is a world where a detective named 'Sherlock Holmes' wrote memoirs of his adventures under the pseudonym 'Conan Doyle'. Accordingly we get:

SH	u	v	w
u	1	1	1
v	1	0	1
w	0	0	0

Table 4: 'Sherlock Holmes does not exist'

†SH	u	v	w
u	1	0	0
v	1	0	0
w	1	0	0

Table 5: 'Sherlock Holmes does not exist' diagonalised