Secondary Senses:
Self-Legislation and Other Figurative Dramas

Abstract:

I elucidate a conception of the mind in which figurative ways of expression are sometimes essential to understanding the mind. My claim is that ideas like self-deception, self-control and self-legislation are best understood as secondary uses of language: figures of speech that do not have a literal equivalent, and are therefore essential.

I propose to elucidate a conception of the mind. I do that by clarifying the idea of a term having a secondary sense. My claim will be that ideas like self-deception, self-

about parts of the soul that behave like paralyzed body parts when we try to move them.[4] The difficulty is

on nonsense. In one of those discussions, Wittgenstein mentions how we sometimes feel observed by a portrait on the wall.[5] This is a figurative way of expressing what we experience. The meaning of "observe" when said about a portrait depends on the meaning of "observe" when said about humans:

"lean," Wittgenstein says, he would be inclined to say that Wednesday was fat and Tuesday lean. He asks:

> [O]ught I really to have used different words? Certainly not that.—I want to use *these* words (with their familiar meanings) *here*. (PI, 216d)

The appearance of nonsensicality cannot be easily overcome in such cases, which separates secondary uses from other kinds of figurative uses of language.[7]

   Secondary uses, like some other figurative uses, involve a kind of indirectness. In other kinds of figurative uses, we use pictures, figures, to express something we can express without those pictures. For example: the content of "After a long period of pregnancy she finally delivered her talk" can be expressed without the picture of being pregnant and giving birth: "The talk was long expected, extremely important for her, hard to write, and harder to deliver." With a secondary use, the picture—the indirectness—is essential, and we cannot get rid of it. Sometimes we cannot say what we want in other terms, other words; 'We want these words here.' But often we can use synonyms: for example, say that Wednesday is corpulent instead of fat. The essential thing, however, is not the words; it is the meaning of the words, and those meaning in this case is determined by the grammatical picture: *this* we cannot do without. Importantly, this necessity is not empirical or psychological. In the empirical case, a picture is used to explain something that in itself does not depend for its sense on the picture.

   Whether some expression has a secondary sense does not depend on the words it contains, but on its use. For example: "This portrait is observing me" can be used in at least two distinct figurative ways. It can be a figurative way of saying that this picture is taken *en face* and not *en profil*. Here, the image of being observed by the portrait is unnecessary, and we can do without it. We may use the very

relative darkness in analogy to ordering colors according to relative darkness.[8] We might, thus, say that "u" is darker than "i." We have here two logical spaces: one in which we compare the darkness of colors and another in which we compare the darkness of vowels. But the relation between them is complex: It is not that some of the logical patterns that characterize those two spaces are the same. The two spaces are not altogether distinct: the vowel-space depends on the color-space; it can only come into existence from the analogy with the color-space. Given that dependency, though, are we to say that the contrast between "u" and "i" is sharper than between "o" and "e" as the contrast between blue and yellow is sharper than between red and orange? And are we to say that in certain circumstances "u" can be brighter than "i" as light-blue can be brighter than dark-yellow?[9]

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Self-deception, I suggest, is best understood as a secondary use of "deception," self-control as a secondary use of "control," and self-legislation as a secondary use of "legislation." Before I defend this suggestion, I need to clarify something. I have been implicitly opposing the figurative to the literal. But this opposition is really very problematic. Secondary language is figurative. However, since we cannot get rid of the picture in such cases, and since the figurative way is our most direct way to express our intention, one may insist that this talk is also literal. Here is Christine Korsgaard:

> Personal interaction, I have argued, is quite literally acting with others. But for a creature who must constitute her own identity, it is equally true that acting is quite literally interacting with yourself. (SC 202)

To the extent that this allows that self-legislation is at the same time both figurative and literal, I do not wish to disagree.

To investigate my suggestion, let us ask: what indicates that the problematic concepts I mentioned involve secondary uses of language? – A conjunction of reasons. First, they meet all the logical characteristics of secondary uses. Take self-legislation for example: (1) "self-legislation" does not carry the same logical implications as "legislation"; unlike inter-personal cases of legislation, for example, the self-legislator has to understand the reasons for, and agree with, the law with which she anyway must comply; (2) "legislation" in inter-personal contexts and "legislation" in intra-personal contexts are related, and do not merely have unrelated meanings like river-bank, and money-bank; and (3) we cannot learn the meaning of "self-legislation" independently of the meaning of "legislation," as we can learn the meaning of "cut

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the cake" independently of the meaning of "cut the grass." "Self-legislation" thus involves more than just application of "legislation" to a new kind of case. Like other secondary uses, we learn the meaning of "self-legislation" only by reference to, by looking at, the meaning of "legislation." This does not mean that we can simply deduce the meaning of "self-legislation" from the meaning of "legislation."[10] And similar things can be said about self-control and self-deception.

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[10] Elizabeth Anscombe famously rejected Kant's idea that we can legislate for ourselves. She insists that

A second indication that self-legislation self-deception and self-control are best understood as secondary uses is that like many other secondary uses, they indicate a sense of depth: a sense that what we mean lies beyond what minds and words can capture, so to speak, as a simple matter of course. In particular, we might resort to secondary uses to convey the depth of a soul, "the inner"—our own and others'. I take the possibility to describe that sort of depth, and to convey such intentions—for example to explain how and in what sense we talk about looking into the eyes of a loved one, but not into the eyes of a fish—I take this to be essential to any proper account of the mind.

When we self-legislate, this need not be a sophisticated way to say, for example, that we declare ourselves for something. Failure to act as we "ought" may incline us to say that we "cannot look at 4-20(l)17(a79.6(e)3(t)-2281 0 0 1 401170(u79( )-190 (ke)3( )-50(t)-22(h)19(e)3mgi)1(t)-4(l)17)-

could draw. And if we cannot draw those inferences, then with what insight does appeal to those notions provide us? How can it play a role in grounding our theories?

To answer this worry, let me ask: what do we need from moral theories, theories of action, and theories of mind? One thing we might expect from such theories is to tell us what is morally right and what is wrong, or to organize for us facts about actions and about our mental experience, and to identify the relevant forms of inference. Those facts should be independently available to us,