

The Role of "Conceptual Role Semantics"

BARRY LOEWER*

In his paper Gilbert Harman defends conceptual role semantics (CRS), a theory of meaning he has been elaborating for the past decade ([11]-[13]). CRS is especially interesting for the way it combines issues that are central to both the philosophy of language and the philosophy of mind. According to Harman it is founded on two claims:

- I. The meanings of linguistic expressions are determined by the contents of the concepts and thoughts they can be used to express.
- II. The contents of concepts and thoughts are determined by their "functional role" in a person's psychology.

A corollary of I and II is that the use of symbols in calculation and thought is more basic than the use of symbols in communication. It seems to me that a good way to appreciate the role of CRS is to compare it with truth conditional semantics (TCS). Harman seems to consider the two approaches to be to some extent in competition with each other and has argued that TCS can make at most a subsidiary contribution to the theory of meaning. In my comments I will argue that the two approaches are best seen as complementary. Although CRS is a significant contribution, TCS has a central role to play both in accounts of language used for communication and in language used for calculation and thought. In Section 1 I will sketch an account of understanding language used for communication which is based on TCS. In Section 2 I consider an argument of Harman's which he thinks demonstrates the impotence of TCS. In Section 3 I consider some contributions of CRS and in 4 I argue that TCS is central to an account of language used in thought.

*I would like to thank Robert Laddaga and Ernie Lepore for helpful discussions on the issues surrounding conceptual role semantics.