

Paper Abstract

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Paper Title: “Charity as a Bridge from Use to Meaning”

Philosophy of Language

Abstract:

Important projects in conceptual analysis include the study of how we use concepts, what those concepts mean, to what and how they refer. I think that different branches of science analyze the concepts that they find interesting, and these are often disparate. For the concepts that are *philosophically* interesting, the way a concept is *used* is relatively easy to discern, the meaning less so, and the objects of reference the most difficult, because normativity is involved. I think when we interpret, we move intellectually between use, meaning and up to reference. This paper argues that the meaning of a concept can be extrapolated from the use made of it via a principle of charity. I will argue that a principle which maximizes *truth* explains our practice better than one like Timothy Williamson’s recent knowledge maximizing alternative, because our practice of self-interpretation is more truth-centered than knowledge-centered. Trying to maximize knowledge goes too far by involving justification: a complex concept that is not as well suited as truth to the fast-as-lightning interpretation-acts used in communication. Some empirical consequences are considered as well as areas for further research.