

Review of: "The Synthetic Concept of Truth and Its Descendants"

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I must confess that the author's philosophical approach is far removed from my own and that therefore I'm not sure if I have always understood him; the article is certainly well written and structured, but it contains theses that I do not agree with, although perhaps this is also due to my not having understood them well.

I will therefore only make a few critical points, hoping that they will be useful to the author.

General point:

It seems to me that what the author calls the "synthetic conception of truth" is not, at bottom, a conception of truth but a constructivist-linguistic metaphysics. Suppose, in fact, that the metaphysical claim of the author was right (and I believe it is not), i.e., that names, predicates, and sentences structure reality and that therefore reality is language-dependent. This entails nothing concerning the nature of truth: one could indeed accept the author's metaphysics and embrace whatever conception of truth, a correspondentist, a coherentist, or even a deflationist one. For instance, one could say, in a correspondentistic mood, that a sentence of the form "a is P" is true iff the object to which "a" refers has the property to which "is P" refers and, at the same time, think, like the author, that objects and properties are language-dependent; or one could have a deflationist conception according to which "'snow is white' is true" is cognitively equivalent to "snow is white," and this is all that there is to say about the truth of this sentence "snow is white," and, again, at the same time defend a conception of reality according to which snow's being white is a language-dependent fact.

Some more specific points (I quote before the parts of the article at stake):

"The selected truth value does not belong exclusively to us nor does it belong exclusively to nature. It is the objective result of the synthesis of us and nature in the process of rational cognition: it differentiates what is and what is not. That is why I have termed this primary concept of truth the synthetic concept of truth."

I don't understand this: the truth value of $P(a)$ seems to me to depend just on one thing: whether a has or has not the property of being P ; and this has nothing to do with the "synthesis" of us and nature. Consider the sentence "Dinosaurs were carnivores"; this sentence is true, and its truth depends on facts that happened when no human being existed. So, its truth is not "the objective result of the synthesis of us and nature in the process of rational cognition," since there was no "us" when the only thing necessary and sufficient for its truth happened. Of course, in order to "decide"/"discover" whether the sentence is true, we have to carry out research, and in this research, we will have to confront our beliefs with a number of pieces of evidence coming from nature; but one thing is the way in which one discovers the truth value of a

sentence, and another thing is what this truth value depends on. Missing this distinction is, in my view, to conflate the problem of truth with the problem of knowledge: while knowledge involves truth, the converse is not true: truth doesn't involve knowledge; indeed, surely there are unknown and perhaps also unknowable truths: Is there intelligent life in the universe? Is every even natural number greater than two the sum of two prime numbers? These two sentences are true or false, although maybe we'll never know their truth value, and so no "synthesis of us and the nature" will ever happen.

"Since names and predicate symbols are a means of extracting objects and predicates in rational cognition, each name is a part of the object it names, and each predicate symbol is a part of the predicate it symbolizes."

"In the synthetic conception of truth, atomic sentences themselves, with their interpreted parts – names and predicate symbols – and with their truth values, where nature is involved, form reality: reality is the result of the synthesis of us and nature through the creation and use of language."

Here the author embraces Sapir-Whorf radical linguistic relativism. But Whorf's thesis has been widely challenged both in linguistics, cognitive psychology, and philosophy (see for instance Berlin and Kay, *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*, 1969; Deutscher, G., *Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2010, Malotki, E., *Hopi Time: A Linguistic Analysis of the Temporal Concepts in the Hopi Language*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, 1983).

"The truth value of an atomic sentence, as the result of our synthesis with nature in the process of rational cognition, gives unity to the atomic sentence: it makes the atomic sentence to be something more than just the concatenation of its parts, the predicate symbol and the name involved in the sentence."

This seems to me a highly disputable solution to the problem of predication: 1) also sentences that haven't truth value are endowed with meaning, express a unitary thought; 2) in order to have a truth value, sentences must be already endowed with meaning, and so express a unitary thought.

(1) and (2) make it very hard to believe that "the truth value of an atomic sentence ... gives unity to the atomic sentence" (despite the fact that this was Davidson's idea).