

The Semantic Conception of Truth: and the Foundations of Semantics

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Let us consider an arbitrary sentence; whall replace it by the letter 'p.' We form the name of this sentence and we replace it by another letter, say 'X.' We ask now what is the logical relation between the two sentences "X is true" and 'p.' It is clear that from the point of view our basci conception of truth these senteces are equivalent. In other words, the following equivalence [T] holds:

X is true if, and only if, p.

[...]

we shall call a definition of truth "adequate" if all these equivalences follow from it.

[...]

The definition of truth which was outlined above [...] implies all equivalences of the form (T). In this connnection it is important to notice that **the conditions for the material adequacy of the definition determine uniquely the extension of the term "true."** Therefore, **every definition of truth which is materially adequate would necessarily be equivalent to that actually constructed.** The semantic conception of truth gives us, so to speak, no possibility of choice between variaous non-equivalent definitions of this notion..

358-359 CONTRE L'ELIMINABILITE "SIMPLE" DE LA VERITE

[the semantic conception of truth] esentially consists in regarding the sentence "X is true" as equivalent to the sentence denoted by 'X' (where 'X' stands for a name of a sentence of the object-language). Consequently, the terme "true" when occurring in a simple sentence of the form "X is true" can be easily eliminated, and the sentence itself, which belongs to the emta-language, can be replaced by an equivalent sentence of the object-language. [...]

Some people have therefore urged that the terme "true" in the semantic sens can always be eliminated, and that for this reason the semantic conception of truth is altogether sterile and useless. [...]

But [...] [t]he sort of elimination here discussed cannot always be made. [...] For instance, we can prove in the theory of truth the following statement:

All consequences of true sentences are true.

However, **we cannot get rid here of the word "true"** in the simple manner contemplated.

[...] our present historical knowledge does **not** give us **any possibility of elimintaing the word "true"** from the following sentence:

The first sentence written by Plato is true.

361-364 LA VERITE "METAPHYSIQUE"

I have heard it remarked that the formal definition of truth has nothing to do with "the philosophical problem of truth." However, nobody has ever pointed out to me an intelligible way just what this problem is. I have been informed in this connection that my definition, though it states necessary and sufficient conditions for a sentence to be true, does not really graps the "essence" of this concept. Since I have never been able to understand what the "essence" of a concept is, I must be excused from discussing this point any longer.

[...]

For the most part [...], the term "metaphysical" is used as directly opposed—in one sense or another — to the terme "empirical"; at any rate, it is used in this way by those people who are distressed by the thought that any metaphysical elements might have managed to creep into science.

[...]

I should like to make one final remark in connection with this group of objections. The history of science shows many instances of concepts which were judged metaphysical (in a loose, but in any case derogatory sense of this term) before their meaning was made precise; however, once they received a rigourous, formal definition, the distrust in them evaporated. As typical examples we may mention the concepts of negative and imaginary numbers in mathematics. I hope a similar fate awaits the concept of truth and other semantic

concepts; and it seems to me, therefore, that those who have distrusted them because of their alleged metaphysical implications should welcome the fact that precise definitions of these concepts are now available. If in consequence semantic concepts lose philosophical interest, they will only share the fate of many other concepts of science, and this need give rise to no regret.

367-368 REJET DES THÉORIES INCONSISTANTES

I believe everyone agrees that one of the reasons which may compel us to reject an empirical theory is the proof of its inconsistency: a theory becomes untenable if we succeed in deriving from it two contradictory sentences. Now we can ask what are the usual motives for rejecting a theory on such grounds. Persons who are acquainted with modern logic are inclined to answer this question in the following way: A well-known logical law shows that a theory which enables us to derive two contradictory sentences enables us also to derive every sentence; therefore, such a theory is trivial and deprived of any scientific interest.

I have some doubts whether this answer contains an adequate analysis of the situation. I think that people who do not know modern logic are as little inclined to accept an inconsistent theory as those who are thoroughly familiar with it; and probably this applies even to those who regard (as some still do) the logical law on which the argument is based as a highly controversial issue, and almost as a paradox. I do not think that our attitude toward an inconsistent theory would change even if we decided for some reasons to weaken our system of logic so as to deprive ourselves of the possibility of deriving every sentence from any two contradictory sentences.

It seems to me that the real reason of our attitude is a different one: **We know (if only intuitively) that an inconsistent theory must contain false sentences; and we are not inclined to regard as acceptable any theory which has been shown to contain such sentences.**

369 FLOU DE LA FRONTIÈRE MÉTA

[the] distinction between mathematics and meta-mathematics is rather unimportant. For meta-mathematics is itself a deductive discipline and hence, from a certain point of view, a part of mathematics; and it is well known that—due to the formal character of deductive method—the results obtained in one deductive discipline can be automatically extended to any other discipline in which the given one finds an interpretation. Thus, for example, all meta-mathematical results can be interpreted as results of number theory. Also from a practical point of view there is no clear-cut line between meta-mathematics and mathematics proper; for instance, the investigations on definability could be included in either of these domains.