

Cluster definitions

- Define a change in absolute length in terms not only of the link between absolute length and relative length with respect to a given standard, but in terms of all the links sustained by absolute length in our overall theory of the world.
- But this would mean that the possibility of a change of absolute length that is not supported by our overall theory of the world would involve a contradiction. And this is not right. Our theory is empirical, fallible, revisable.

Ideal conditions

- Define a change in absolute length in terms not of the links sustained by absolute length in our current theory of the world, but in terms of the links it would sustain in the theory of the world that we would endorse under ideal conditions.
- But what conditions are ideal is an empirical question, and our views on this are part of our overall theory of the world.

The source of the problem

- Defining absolute length involves treating certain beliefs in the following way: we can't revise them without changing what we mean by absolute length.
- The problem is that it wouldn't seem right to ascribe this status to any beliefs that would enable us to fix the extension of absolute length.

Quine's second dogma

- The totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs, from the most casual matters of geography and history to the profoundest laws of atomic physics or even of pure mathematics and logic, is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges. Or, to change the figure, total science is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience. A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions readjustments in the interior of the field. [...] the total field is so underdetermined by its boundary conditions, experience, that there is much latitude of choice as to what statements to reevaluate in the light of any single contrary experience. (“Two Dogmas”, pp. 42-43)

Realism and anti-realism according to Dummett

- “Realism I characterise as the belief that statements of the disputed class possess an objective truth-value, independently of our means of knowing it: they are true or false in virtue of a reality existing independently of us. The anti-realist opposes to this the view that statements of the disputed class are to be understood only by reference to the sort of thing that we count as evidence for a statement of that class. That is, the realist holds that the meanings of statements of the disputed class are not directly tied to the kind of evidence for them that we can have, but consist in the manner of their determination as true or false by states of affairs whose existence is not dependent on our possession of evidence for them. The anti-realist insists, on the contrary, that the meanings of these statements are tied directly to what we count as evidence for them, in such a way that a statement of the disputed class, if true at all, can be true only in virtue of something of which we could know and which we should count as evidence for its truth. The dispute thus concerns the notion of truth appropriate for statements of the disputed class; and this means that it is a dispute concerning the kind of *meaning* which these statements have.” (“Realism”, p. 146)

Furthermore...

- “It is not, of course, simply a matter of whether the truth of a statement of the disputed class is something objective. The realist and the anti-realist may agree that it is an objective matter whether, in the case of any given statement of the class, the criteria that we use for judging such a statement to be true are satisfied: the difference between them lies in the fact that, for the anti-realist, the truth of the statement can only consist in the satisfaction of these criteria, whereas, for the realist, the statement can be true even though we have no means of recognising it as true.” (“Realism”, p. 147)

Disputed classes

- The distant past
- Quantification over infinite domains
- Subjunctives
- Other minds

Davidsonian semantics

- A theory of meaning for a language is a theory which has as a theorem, for each sentence S of the language, a true instance of the schema:
 - S is true if and only if p
- Example:
- Axioms:
 - “John” refers to John
 - “ α smokes” is true iff the referent of “ α ” smokes
- Theorem:
 - “John smokes” is true iff John smokes

Dummett's argument against truth-conditional semantics

- Understanding is knowledge of meaning.
- A theory of meaning must make understanding possible.
- If meaning is truth conditions, then understanding is knowledge of truth conditions.
- What does it mean to say that someone knows the condition that must obtain for a sentence to be true?

Knowledge of truth conditions

- Two options:
 - Explicit knowledge—you can say what would have to be the case in order for the sentence to be true.
 - Implicit knowledge.
- Not all knowledge of truth conditions can be explicit.
- The claim that the truth conditions of a sentence are known implicitly has to be supported by an account of how this implicit knowledge can be manifested.

Manifestation

- For truth conditions whose satisfaction you can recognize this is not a problem.
- But for truth conditions whose satisfaction you cannot recognize manifestation is not possible:
“[...] whenever the condition for the truth of a sentence is one that we have no way of bringing ourselves to recognize as obtaining whenever it obtains, it seems plain that there is no content to an ascription of an *implicit* knowledge of what that condition is, since there is no practical ability by which such knowledge may be manifested.” (“What is a Theory of Meaning? (II), p. 46)₁₁

References

- Dummett, Michael. "Realism." In *Truth and Other Enigmas*, 145-65. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978.
- Dummett, Michael. "What Is a Theory of Meaning? (II)." In *The Seas of Language*, 34-93. Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.
- Quine, Willard Van Orman. "Two Dogmas of Empiricism." In *From a Logical Point of View*, 20-46. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980.