"What is a Theory of Meaning? (II), p. 60

- "All that I feel sure of is that we have just two basic models for what it is to know the condition for the truth of a sentence. One is explicit knowledge—the ability to state the condition; this […] is unproblematic. And, moreover, is the model that we actually need in a large range of cases; but […] it is not a model that can be used if we want the notion of a grasp of truth conditions to serve as our general form of explanation of a knowledge of meaning. The other is the capacity to observe whether or not the sentence is true. This notion may legitimately be stretched a certain way. It is not important to determine exactly how far it may be stretched: the important fact is that it cannot be stretched as far as we need."

Understanding a problematic sentence

- It cannot consist in grasp of its truth conditions.
- It has to consist instead in grasp of its assertibility conditions.
- How is this different from a proposal as to the identity of the truth conditions of the statement?
- Bivalence.

Brueckner's objection

- How is implicit knowledge of the truth conditions of an unproblematic sentence manifested?
- Not by actually recognizing that the conditions are (are not) satisfied.
- Nor with the capacity to recognize when the truth conditions are satisfied. There is no such thing as conclusive verification of a contingent sentence.
- It has to be manifested then with the capacity to recognize good evidence for/against the sentence.
- But this capacity is what understanding a problematic sentence is supposed to consist in.

The challenge

- In the case of unproblematic sentences, grasp of truth conditions is manifested by the ability to recognize good evidence for/against the sentence.

- Since we have this ability in the case of problematic sentences as well, why doesn't it count as manifesting grasp of truth conditions?

A reply?

- Couldn't the anti-realist retort that we can **never** manifest implicit knowledge of truth conditions, of problematic as well as unproblematic sentences?

Modesty and full-bloodedness

- A modest theory of meaning gives no account of the concepts expressed by primitive terms of the language. A full-blooded theory does this.

- A theory gives an account of a concept just in case someone can acquire the concept by learning the facts that the theory states.

Dummett's full-bloodedness

- Dummett thinks that a theory of meaning has to be full blooded.

- He hopes to achieve this by describing, with respect to each concept expressed by a term of the language, a practical capacity such that to acquire it would be to acquire the concept.

A truth-conditional theory is modest

- Learning the facts stated by its axioms won't enable you to acquire the concepts expressed by terms of the language:
  - "la neige" refers to snow
  - "α est blanche" is true if and only if the referent of "α" is white
- This is even clearer with homophonic theories:
  - "snow" refers to snow
  - "α is white" is true if and only if the referent of "α" is white

Why does Dummett think that a theory of meaning has to be full blooded?

- He thinks that we need to provide an account of content "as from outside", i.e. one that doesn't rest on our grasp of contents.

- If the theory of meaning leaves the job undone, the job is being delegated to a theory of thought.

- This amounts to psychologism, the picture of language as a code for thought, which Dummett rejects.

McDowell's reply

- He rejects the demand for an account of content "as from the outside".

- Contents can only be characterised "from the midst of language as a going concern".

- This is all that a theory of meaning should seek to achieve.

Why truth?

- A theorem of a (modest) theory of meaning should specify what a sentence can be used to assert.
- And it is a truism that what a sentence can be used to assert is what would make the sentence true.

J. McDowell, "Anti-realism and the Epistemology of Understanding," 248.

- "The transcendental realist claims that from the cosmic exile's perspective one would be able to discern relations between our language and a realistically conceived world. Anti-realists justifiably recoil, but in different ways. The meaning-theoretical anti-realist recoils into giving a different picture of how things would look from that perspective; but the right course is to set our faces against the idea of the cosmic exile."

D. Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," 308-309.

- "I might be tempted to go along with Dummett if I thought we must choose between what Putnam calls transcendental realism […] and Dummett's identification of truth with warranted assertability, since I find the former view […] incomprehensible, while I find Dummett's view merely false. But I see no reason to suppose that realism and anti-realism, explained in terms of the radically nonepistemic or the radically epistemic character of truth, are the only ways to give substance to a theory of truth or meaning."

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