Is truth a relation between what is said or thought and how the world is?

The 'slingshot' is a form of argument (of which Davidson's 'Great Fact' argument is an example) which shows that all true sentences refer to the same thing. This conclusion has been used argue against fact-based and similar correspondence theories of truth, to motivate either non-facts based correspondence theories, or rejecting correspondence completely.

Contrary to this, I argue that the conclusion of the slingshot argument is compatible with facts-based and similar correspondence theories of truth. I show that in fact, the intuitions which lead to correspondence theories accord well with the slingshot's conclusions (when applied to truth). I use Davidson's 'Great Fact' argument as an example throughout, but draw conclusions concerning the slingshot in general.

Since the slingshot argument is meant to be a significant challenge to correpsondence theory, this essay is meant to be a significant defense of correspondence theory. That is, a defence of the view that truth is a relation between what is said or thought and how the world is.

I will use the term 'truthbearer' for a thing which is true or false (perhaps sentences, propositions, beliefs etc.) A 'truthmaker' makes a truthbearer true or false (truthmakers might be facts, states of affairs etc.). This terminology is meant to be neutral on what truthmakers or truthbearers actually are. This is because I am concerned with the correspondence thoery and slingshot argument in general, not any particular formulation of either.

The correspondence theory is a group of theories, sharing the view that truth is a relation ('correspondence') with a truthmaker in the real world (a fact, a state of affairs etc.). This is motivated by intuition: intuitively truth (especially contingent truth) has to do with *is the case* in the world, and true truthbearers are 'made true' somehow (in this case, by corresponding with a fact). The correspondence theory also agrees with the intuition that truth has a single nature—that of correspondence with a truthmaker (this is 'monism' about truth).

The slingshot (so-called because it is a small argument meant to bring down a great opponent) is a form of argument which shows that all sentences with the same truth value have the same reference. It can then be extended to show that if the correspondence theory is true, then all sentences with the same truth value must correspond to the same truthmaker. The version of the slingshot presented here is Davidson's. (Davidson 1969:

753) Davidson assumes that facts are sentences' truthmakers, but the argument can be constructed with any candidate truthmaker (e.g. (true) propositions, (actual) states of affairs etc.) (Davidson 1969: 752)

The argument assumes: (ibid.: 753)

Reference Sentences refer (like names or definite descriptions do).

Equivalence Logically equivalent singular terms (including sentences) refer to the same thing.

Substitutivity What a complex singular term refers to will not change if a part of it which is a singular term is substituted with another singular term with the same reference. (e.g. if a name in a sentence is substituted with a different name for the same thing, the sentence's referenece will not change.)

Given these assumptins, and any two sentences P and Q with the same truth value, the argument runs as follows.

The following sentence must refer to whatever P refers to, and will be true if and only if P is true.

1 The set of all objects which are identical with themselves and (for which) P obtains is identical with the set of all objects which are identical with themselves.

All things are identical with themselves, so the 'set of all objects which are identical with themselves and (for which) P obtains' will just be the set of all things if P is true, and

the empty set otherwise. The whole sentence just asserts that this set is identical with the set of all objects, so 1 is true just if the first set is the set of all objects. So 1 is true just if P is true—so the two are logically equivalent. Since 1 is logically equivalent with P, the two must have the same reference. (Equivalence) Hence, 'P' can be substituted for 1. (Substitutivity)

By applying this conclusion to sentences about correspondence with a truthmaker, we can show that the statement that P corresponds with the fact that Q. First, the correspondence theory entails the following sentence:

2 the statement that P corresponds with the fact that P.

From this, and the fact that P can be substituted for Substitutivity, 3 can be derived:

3 the statement that P corresponds with the fact that the set of all objects which are identical with themselves and (for which) P obtains is identical with the set of all objects which are identical with themselves.

Next, for similar reasons to above the following sentence will be logically equivalent with Q:

4 The set of all objects which are identical with themselves and (for which) Q obtains is identical with the set of all objects which are identical with themselves.

The expression 'the set of all objects which are identical with themselves and (for which) Q obtains' can be constructed from it's counterpart in 1, only by substituting Q for P.

The reference of the expression depends only on the truth value of the sentence P or Q in it. (Substitutivity) Since Q and P have the same truth value then, the sentence's reference must be the same as it's counterpart in 1. Hence, 4 is constructed from 1 by substituting a singular term (a sentence) with the same reference, so 4 must have the same reference as 1. (Substitutivity) Hence, 4 is logically equivalent with 1, so the two can substituted in 3 to produce 5:

5 the statement that P corresponds with the fact that the set of all objects which are identical with themselves and (for which) Q obtains is identical with the set of all objects which are identical with themselves.

Finally, by reversing the initial step from 2 to 3, we can derive 6:

6 the statement that P corresponds with the fact that Q.

Since this will work for any two sentences with the same truth value, all true sentences must be made true by the same truthmaker. Davidson calls this truthmaker the 'Great Fact'. (Davidson 1969: 753) Others have identified it with truth (or for Frege the object 'the True'(Frege 1948: 216)) or with a general state of affairs of the universe

Many objections can be made to this argument in itself, but this essay is not concerned with them.

Althought it might seem so, this conclusion in itself is not incompatible with the correspondence theory. The correspondence theory does not say that all true sentences do *not* correspond to the same truthmaker (though to say so would be in the spirit of the intu-

itions which motivate it). A further premise is needed: that the correspondence theory is in some way incompatible with the conclusions of the slingshot argument:

Incompatibility (If the correspondence theory is true) then not all true truthbearers are made true by the same truthmaker.

Incompatibility is motivated by the intuition that true sentences which correspond with the same truthmaker are similar is some way (other than just 'corresponding with the same truthmaker') that not all true sentences are. Put another way: intuitively, true sentences actually differ in some respect, but if all true sentences had the same truthmaker, then they would not so differ. For example, meaning might be such a difference: one might think different true sentences mean different things, but sentences with the same truthmaker always mean the same thing. The conclusion of the slingshot argument would then show that all true sentences mean the same thing, which is absurd! Similar absurdities could be derived with other differences that sentences have, but supposedly could not have if they had the same truthmaker.

Davidson expresses a similar sentiment: that if two sentences correspond to the same thing then the statement of each is 'identical' with that of the other. But clearly not all true sentences state identical things. Davidson takes this as a reduction to absurdity of (facts-based) correspondence theory. (Davidson 1969: 750)

However, the above intuition, and Davidson's articulation of it are false. Just because two sentences have the same truthmaker, they need not mean the same (as in the intuitive version), state identical things (Davidson's version) or generally have anything else

'important' in common. For example, if I have just eaten a apple and it has been my only one this week, then the following two sentences have the same truth maker:

7 I ate an apple yesterday.

8 I have eaten an apple this week.

If one accepts the slingshot argument, then this truthmaker will the be Great Fact, if not then it will be the fact (or proposition etc.) that I just ate a apple. Whatever it is, the truthmaker will be the same for the two sentences, but they mean different things, and have different contents in other respects. They have different semantically significant parts ('yesterday' and 'this week') and different meanings (one could be true and the other false, if I had eaten an apple today, but not yesterday, so the two cannot mean the same).

Generalising this, even if all true sentences have the same truthmaker, they may differ in other important respects: their semantically significant parts and their meanings. I do not think there is any respect in which sentences with the same truthmaker must be the same but in which sentences actually differ. Thus it is not a problem for correspondence theory that all true sentences have the same truthmaker. In fact Frege—whom Davidson follows in his argument (Davidson 1969: 750)—accepted a similar conclusion without seeing it as a problem. (Frege 1948: 216)

Of course, this means that all true sentences are true 'together' in various ways: all true sentences will be true in the same way, in virtue of the same truthmaker, 'at the same time' etc. But this is entirely in accord with the monistic intuition which correspondence

theory began with. True sentences might mean different things or express different things, but all true sentences share a common nature in their truth. So this consequence accord with our intuitions too.

Bibliography

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