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

The 'slingshot' is a form of argument which shows that all true sentences have the same reference. 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.

Against this, I argue the conclusion of the slingshot argument is compatible with facts-based and similar correspondence theories of truth. I show that the intuitions leading to correspondence theories accord with the slingshot's conclusions. I use Davidson's 'Great Fact' argument as an example throughout, but draw conclusions concerning the slingshot in general.

Since the slingshot is meant to challenge correspondence theory significantly, this essay is

meant to defend it significantly. That is, to defend a 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 (sentences, propositions, beliefs etc.) A 'truthmaker' makes a truthbearer true or false (facts, states of affairs etc.). This terminology is meant to be neutral on what truthmakers or truthbearers actually are, because I am defending correspondence theory from the slingshot in general, regardless 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 intuitively: truth seems to be about what *is the case* in the world, and true truthbearers seem to be 'made true' somehow (e.g. by corresponding with a fact). This also agrees with the intuition that truth has a single nature (is 'monism' about truth)—here of correspondence with a truthmaker.

The slingshot is a form of argument showing that all sentences with the same truth value have the same reference. It can be extended to show that if 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 facts are sentences' truthmakers, but the argument can be constructed with any truthmaker (propositions, states of affairs etc.) [1] (ibid.: 752)

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[1]It might seem that if sentences have truthmakers, then they must be truthbearers—this would be a significant assumption. Although sentences can be true or false, they might not be 'primary' or basic truthbearers. Instead sentences are often thought to be 'secondary' truthbearers, true or false in virtue of some 'primary' truthbearer they are related to (e.g. a proposition or thought they express).

The argument assumes: (Davidson 1969: 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.

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

This sentence must refer to whatever P refers to, and will be true iff 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 says that this set is identical with the set of all objects, so 1 is true iff the first set is the set of all objects. So 1 is true iff P is true—they are logically equivalent. Since 1 is logically equivalent with P, they must have the same reference. (Equivalence) Hence, 'P' can be substituted for 1. (Substitutivity)

Applying this conclusion to sentences about correspondence with truthmakers, we show that the statement that P corresponds with the fact that Q. First, 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 1, 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 Q is logically equivalent with:

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. Since Q and P have the same truth value, the sentence's reference must be the same as it's counterpart's in 1. Hence, 4 is constructed from 1 by substituting a singular term with the same reference, so 4 must have the same reference as 1. Hence, 4 is logically equivalent with 1, so the two are substitutable in 3 to produce 5: (Substitutivity)

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 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. (which Davidson calls the 'Great Fact'.) (Davidson 1969: 753) Others have identified it with truth (Frege 1948: 216) or with the actual state of affairs.

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

This conclusion is compatible with correspondence theory. The correspondence theory does not say that all true sentences do *not* correspond to the same truthmaker (though this would be in the spirit of the motivating intuitions). A further premise is needed: that the correspondence theory is in some way incompatible with the conclusions of the slingshot argument:

Incompatibility 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, 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 then shows 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: 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.

On the slingshot argument, then this truthmaker will the be Great Fact. Alternatively 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', '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 etc. This is in accord with the monistic intuition which correspondence theory began with. True sentences might mean or express different things, but all true sentences share a common nature in their truth. So this consequence accords with our intuitions too.

Bibliography

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