

Some more proposed solutions to the skeptical paradox

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1 Skeptical solutions

A ‘skeptical solution’ to Kripke’s problem is one which entails that facts about meaning are, in some sense or other, of a lesser status than ordinary, objective facts.

1.1 *Nonfactualism about meaning*

Nonfactualism about meaning is the denial that that there are any facts about meaning; this is analogous to the denial that there are any moral facts. As in the moral case, there are two options: error theory and some form of expressivism.

Why error theory seems to imply that no sentences are true.

Why — if we assume that any sentence which is entailed by a nonfactual sentence is itself nonfactual — expressivism about meaning seems to entail ‘global expressivism’. Consider the following:

S means that p

S has the truth condition that p

S is true iff p

Suppose that the final biconditional is nonfactual. It is plausible that a biconditional cannot be nonfactual unless at least one of the component sentences is. But if we suppose that either the left or the right side is nonfactual, the nonfactuality of that sentence together with the nonfactuality of the biconditional and the premise that anything entailed by a nonfactual claim must itself be nonfactual yield the result that the other sentence is nonfactual.

This sort of global expressivism is one interpretation of Kripke's 'skeptical solution' to the rule-following paradox. It is a very surprising view, though not obviously incoherent.

1.2 Response-dependent views of meaning

To take some property to be response-dependent is not to deny the existence of that property, but rather to say that what it is for something to have that property is for it to cause (be disposed to cause, ...) certain reactions or responses in us (beings suitably like us ...). Consider, for example, the property of being *tasty* or *funny*.

Two sorts of response-dependence analyses: those which analyze the property in terms of non-contentful responses (like laughing) and those which analyze the property in terms of a propositional attitude which represents the property as instantiated (visually representing the surface as red). It seems plausible that any response-dependent treatment of meaning will have to be of the second sort; but content cannot, in general, be given the second sort of response-dependent analysis.

2 Straight solutions

2.1 Lewis on naturalness and the rule-following paradox

In the book, Kripke considers and rejects as confused an attempt to solve the paradox by appealing to the simplicity of addition relative to quaddition. David Lewis defends a closely related response to the paradox in 'New Work for a Theory of Universals':

The naive solution is that adding means going on in the same way as before when the numbers get big, whereas quadding means doing something different; there is nothing present in the subject that constitutes an intention to do different things in different cases; therefore he intends addition, not quaddition. We should not scoff at this naive response. It is the correct solution to the puzzle. But we must pay to regain our naiveté. Our theory of properties must have adequate resources to somehow ratify the judgement that instances of adding are all alike in a way that instances of quadding are not. The property of adding is not perfectly natural, of course, not on a par with unit charge or sphericity. And the property of quadding is not perfectly unnatural. But quadding is worse by a disjunction. So quaddition is to that extent less of a way to go on doing the same, and therefore it is to that extent less of an eligible thing to intend to do.

Lewis's idea is that some properties are, objectively, more natural or fundamental than others. And, in general, part of what it is for a property to be the referent of a term is for that property to be more natural than others which fit the subject's dispositions equally well. (More generally, you might think of the referent of a term as the object or property which best satisfies two constraints: naturalness and fitting the subject's dispositions to use the term.)

Is there a clear sense in which addition is more natural than quaddition? Is redness more natural than a color which differs very slightly from redness?

2.2 Kripke equivocates on 'determines'

Scott Soames argues that if we think of the skeptical paradox as an argument for the conclusion that there are no facts about meaning, the argument fails due to an equivocation on claims about what it is for one sort of fact to determine another.

Kripke often argues that, given some class of facts about the language user, it is impossible to derive or know what the language user means by some expression. (For example, given some language user's dispositions, it is hard to know how we could infer what he ought to say in response to a given problem, and hence what he means.) Let's suppose that Kripke shows that facts about meaning are not a priori deducible from some class of base facts. It does not immediately follow that facts about meaning are not necessary consequences of the base facts. So there is no easy path from Kripke-style argumentation + a supervenience requirement for facts about meaning to skepticism about those facts.

This relates to our earlier question about when we should think questions like 'What is it for such-and-such fact to obtain?' or 'What is it for an object to instantiate *F*?' have answers. One way to read Soames is as suggesting that facts about meaning globally supervene on unproblematic facts (states of the brains of language users, their dispositions, ...), but that there is no analysis of the meaning facts in terms of the supervenience base. Is it possible for there to be this sort of brute necessary connection between the physical facts and the meaning facts, or should the supervenience be explained in some way?

2.3 Meaning as determined by the intentions and beliefs of language users

An intuitively plausible response to Kripke's question about the facts in virtue of which we use the '+' sign to stand for addition is that the meanings of public language terms like this are fixed by the beliefs and intentions of language users. There are different versions of this view, but we can use *mentalism* as a name for the view that facts about meaning are to be analyzed in terms of some class of mental states of language users.

Given its plausibility, it is striking that Kripke never discusses this view. The most likely explanation is that Kripke thinks that the same problems arise at the level of thought as at the level of language. Is this true?

Suppose that both the intentions and beliefs of language users, and the meanings of their expressions, globally supervene on the physical properties. Is there still an asymmetry

which indicates that the facts about meaning, but not the facts about mental content, need some sort of analysis or explanation?

Note: even if it is true that we need some analysis of mental representation, it is not obvious that any answer to the question ‘What is it for a mental representation to stand for x ?’ would also be a good answer to the question about representations in public languages. The example of covariational theories of mental content.