

Charles Travis, Views of My Fellows Thinking

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o. By thinking, Sid makes truth turn in some determinate way on how things are. Different thinkings may make truth turn in different ways on the same ‘how things are’: “two thoughts may differ only in which way each represents what it does as being”.

Core thesis: “Thought” is not a count noun. For any set of features that characterise a thought, there may be two thoughts that share them. For a given object and a fixed way for it to be, there can be different thoughts that the object is that way.

The thought I’m thinking, on the proposed tool model, has no canonical expression: there is an open-ended list of other ways of thinking the same thought; these ways (“modes of presentation”) are not part of the thought, because they are not part of what you make truth depend on when thinking. Thoughts stand to thinking like dances stand to dancing: they do not really exist.

1. Sentences may be said to express thoughts in different ways:

1. that’s what they are for
2. that’s what they do (*as used*)
3. that’s what they do if used

(3) turns out to be ‘incoherent’ because what thought is expressed in a given use depends on an open-ended range of things; what it depends on (and what we have to conditionalise on to ascribe thought-expressing to the sentence itself, as per (3)) cannot be parametrised; while the thought (what makes truth depend on the world) is different from a speaker’s way of achieving it, there is no principled way of distinguishing between what the thought expressed is and how it is expressed. Words are tools that can be used in many different ways.

2a. Singular thoughts. A thought *t* is singular iff “[f]or it to be *that* thought [...] is *per se* for its truth to turn on how *that* object (or *n*-tuple) is”. The same singular thought can be expressed by means of non-synonymous descriptions, because the different sentences do not express it (differently) in the sense of having it as their meaning, but rather make it recognisable (as, e.g., Sid’s thought) in different ways.

2b. Ascriptivism. What a sentence expresses (on some use) is what it is most reasonably taken to express (on that use). By its audience / intended audience? Reasonably over all or given the available / reasonably available information? Core thesis: This varies, and in a way such as not to allow a ‘road back’ from (3) to (1) [against Kaplan’s Carnapian utopism].

3. The core thesis does not need to deny Frege’s criterion of equipollence for the individuation of thoughts expressed (two sentences express the same thought iff one cannot recognise just one of their contents as true) for one can fail to recognise what thought one (but not the other) of the sentences expresses.

By Frege’s context principle, thought-elements are ontologically posterior to thoughts and individuated by them: they are parts of ways (partial doings) of making truth turn on some specific way the world is. Vari-

able decomposability thus does not mean that the non-identity of the thought-elements, if any, expressed by “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus” entails that they are parts of different thoughts.

Nor does the core thesis need to deny Frege’s claim that thoughts are *Sinne* of sentences, and expressed by the latter. This can be maintained as long as we deny that “a *Sinn* is something a sentence has as such, so that for it to mean what it does is for it to have, or to be associated with a given *Sinn*”.

The core thesis does have to deny, however, that whether or not “Odysseus” refers does not make a difference to what thoughts the *Illias* expresses.

4. Main argument: there is a tension between the notion of proof and the requirement of sharability. To say that two people are thinking the same thought we need a proof, but we cannot have a proof for that. To recognise, e.g. that A, saying “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ”, and B, saying “ $2^2 = 4$ ”, express the same thought, we have to know that “ $2 + 2$ ” and “ 2^2 ” express the same thought and this we cannot do, for provint that $2 + 2 = 2^2$ only gives us that they have the same *Bedeutung*: that they contribute in the same way to making truth turn on the number 4 cannot be determined. .

5. If we think of Sid using a singular concept (a concept intrinsically such that it generalises over all ways of making truth turn on how Sid is), different such ways of thinking of him will have the same truth-value.

6. Thought-expressions are to make thoughts shareable, and thought-expressions differing in what singular concept for the same thing they put to work are, within these bounds, doing the same work. On the tool model, they are thus of the same thought.

7. Understanding propositional logic as concerned with types of thoughts and taking two thoughts to be the same if no proof is needed that they entail each other gives us the individuation criteria for thoughts of 6.

Understanding perception as truth-generation gives us a notion of proof depending on one’s abilities to recognise thoughts, which in turn depend on circumstances and on what singular concepts the world makes available to us. What counts as proof in this sense depends not on the thinker’s circumstances, but on ours.

8. What needs or does not need proof is a certain thought involving identity, involving two different singular concepts (designative thought elements), and we count otherwise identical thoughts involving them different if proof of their being of the same thing is needed.

9. As the need and the possibility for proof changes with our perspective, so do our identity criteria for thoughts.

Meaning-scepticism: for any putative case of an attribution of a meaning m_1 to some meaning-bearer b , there is another candidate meaning m_2 that has an equally good claim to be the meaning of b , such that there is a possible or actual case where b would be true if it meant m_1 but false if it meant m_2 .

Long ago, Quine mounted an attack on the philosophical respectability of meanings, arguing that (i) there is no fact of the matter what individual words mean (because our only available evidence in interpretation concerns truth-values of sentences, which, even assuming extensional compositionality, only underdetermine the meanings of their subsentential constituents) and (ii) that there is no principled (i.e. non-arbitrary) way of assigning meanings to whole sentences (because our only available evidence in interpretation concerns their truth-values).

Incompatible translation manuals may be compatible with the totality of speech dispositions (? : 27) and nothing else than speech dispositions bears on the question which one of them is correct. Even if the attribution of some mentally realised grammar may be just underdetermined (cf. ? : 315 on behalf of Chomsky against Quine), the attribution of *meanings* (and even just truth-conditions) is *indeterminate*, because there is no way to gain independent access to what these attributions attribute (cf. ? : 295).

Recent and not-so-recent developments in the philosophy of language and philosophical linguistics may be interpreted as a vindication of Quinean scepticism about meaning. Starting from the Gricean assumption

that word-meaning is determined by speaker-meaning (which in turn is determined by utterance-meaning), a very large family of (more or less radical) contextualists have pointed out that utterance-meaning very often, and perhaps always, radically underdetermines meaning, i.e. that for any plausible choice of a class of things for the meanings (or lexical meanings, or ‘ingredient senses’) of words, there are, given the utterance-meanings of its uses, many candidates for the meaning of a given word. While there is much discussion about whether the utterance-meanings are interconnected, either by (i) being modulations of some more abstract template, network or schema or (ii) by being instances, parts or abstractions from some richer prototype, grab-bag or mental file, it is widely agreed (and in fact most often tacitly assumed) that neither modulation (of some template) nor realisation (of some prototype) are functional: as from sense to reference, there is no backwards road from what is said in contexts to some abstract thing that can be matched up with expressions. There simply is no such thing as ‘the meaning of’ a given word, individuated syntactically.

Quine is vindicated in a second way as well: not only is there not one meaning per word, but the different possible meanings we may take words to have to account for what they are used to say in context will not only contain ‘conceptual’ (in a traditional sense of this word), but also empirical information.

The metaphysically most careful elaboration has such radical contextualism found in the work of Charles Travis. We may sketch the basic picture as follows: we start with an internal state of some agent, Sid in whose power it lies (quite miraculously) to make that state depend on how things are, making it a state of either thinking truly or thinking false. What he is thinking is the question on what the truth of his thinking depends – it is what he is representing.

Thoughts, according to Frege (letter to Darmstaedter 1919, letter to Marty(?) 1882), are “that by which truth can come into question at all”. In Travis’ formulation, it is “a particular way for truth to turn on how things are, or, reifying, just that which makes truth turn in a particular such way”. A thought is thus not individuated solely by that on which it makes truth turn (what it ‘represents’), but also by the way it makes its own truth thus dependent: “two thoughts may differ only in which way each represents what it does as being, and not in *what* each so represents [...] two thoughts may differ only in their ways of bringing truth into question – of making truth depend, turn, on how things are”. Because we cannot count such ways, thoughts themselves are uncountable.

Using words is a way for Sid to make his internal state recognisable and he may do so in quite different ways, using different words. What the words express, used by Sid for this purpose, is what they are most reasonable taken to express, i.e. what Sid is, in these circumstances, is most reasonably understood to be doing. On this “authoring-tools model”, “words are tools for an author of representation to use in achieving authorship”. Such tools may or may not be individuated as finely as what they are used to represent: two sentences may differ in meaning, and still express the same thought; they may also have the same meaning and (be used to) express two different thoughts if there can be more than one thought of a given object that it is thus and so.

We have diversity of thoughts if a proof of one is not *ipso facto* a proof of the other; on the other hand thoughts, being objective, must be entertainable in different ways and this difference may always underwrite a difference in graspability. Travis (sect 5) sketches a way to reconcile these desiderata for singular thoughts: even though when representing, of Sid, that he is sober, there is just one way for the world to be such that representing Sid as sober (under whatever description) is representing it truly, we may have different singular thoughts representing Sid as sober, for different singular concepts may pick out Sid in different ways. We cannot, however, conclude that they *have to be* different singular thoughts, for the different singular concepts could feature in decompositions of one and the same thought.