

Abstract

Tarski's *semantic conception of truth* is arguably the most influential – certainly, most discussed – modern conception of truth. It has provoked many different interpretations and reactions, some thinkers celebrating it for successfully explicating the notion of truth, whereas others have argued that it is no good as a philosophical account of truth. The aim of the thesis is to offer a systematic and critical investigation of its nature and significance, based on the thorough explanation of its conceptual, technical as well as historical underpinnings. The methodological strategy adopted in the thesis reflects the author's belief that in order to evaluate the import of Tarski's conception we need to understand what logical, mathematical and philosophical aspects it has, what role they play in his project of theoretical semantics, which of them hang in together, and which should be kept separate. Chapter 2 therefore starts with a detailed exposition of the conceptual and historical background of Tarski's semantic conception of truth and his method of truth definition for formalized languages, situating it within his project of theoretical semantics, and Chapter 3 explains the formal machinery of Tarski's truth definitions for increasingly more complex languages. Chapters 4-7 form the core of the thesis, all being concerned with the problem of significance of Tarski's conception. Chapter 4 explains its logico-mathematical import, connecting it to the related works of Gödel and Carnap. Having explained the seminal ideas of the model-theoretic approach to semantics, Chapter 5 tackles the question to what extent Tarski's path-breaking article 'The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages' (and related articles from the 1930s) anticipates this approach, and what elements might be missing from it. Chapter 6 then deals with the vexed question of its philosophical import and value as a theory of truth, reviewing a number of objections and arguments that purport to show that the method fails as an explanation (explication) of the ordinary notion of truth, and, in particular, that it is a confusion to think that Tarski's truth definitions have semantic import. Chapter 7 is devoted to the question whether Tarski's theory of truth is a robust or rather a deflationary theory of truth.

On the basis of a careful analysis, the thesis aims to substantiate the following view. [A] Tarski's theory with its associated method of truth definition was primarily designed to serve logico-mathematical purposes. [B] It can be regarded a deflationary theory of a sort, since it completely abstracts from meta-semantic issues concerning the metaphysical or epistemological basis or status of semantic properties. Indeed, [C] this can be interpreted as its laudable feature, since by separating formal (or logico-mathematical) from meta-semantic (or foundational) aspects it usefully divides the theoretical labour to be done in the area of meaning and semantic properties in general. [D] In spite of the fact that Tarski's conception of truth has this deflationary flavour, the formal structure of its method of truth-definition is quite neutral in that it can be interpreted and employed in several different ways, some of them deflationary, others more robust.