(1) Aristotle

On Similitude Theory of Meaning:

Implications and Alternatives

Introduction

Perhaps the linguistic turn at the beginning of the 20th century forced the philosophers to realise why language is so important in philosophical activity. Russell's descriptivist theory of reference showed that the Hegelian doctrines were flawed and needed to be abandoned. Later, the Oxford ordinary language philosophers have changed the perspective on action and morality. Afterwards, it was Kripke who showed that the identity theory of mind was false. Later, Putnam showed that the Cartesian scepticism was ill-founded. All of these events and progressions in different branches of philosophy tie into one single idea: analysis of language and of meaning.

In this paper we will do two things: First, we will analyse what Aristotle argues in his *De Interpretatione* and then; second, show some weaknesses of the Aristotle's theory of reference. Only after showing that it is not tenable, we will consider one other theory instead, early Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning. Then, the same process of analysis and criticism will be repeated for Wittgenstein as well. In link to these we will analyse the implications of the theory of meaning on the theory of truth: Where the similitude theory of meaning will be related to the correspondance theory of truth; the picture theory of meaning will be related to the identity theory of truth. Even though, we will consider the alternatives, the paper will focus on Aristotelian theory and its in depth analysis in terms of language, logic and epistemology.

In the first part, where we analyse Aristotle's argument, we will commit to a logical and linguistic analysis. I am aware that the argument involves some degree of links to mind and metaphysics but we will try to focus less on mind and metaphysics and more on language. In the second part, while we are criticising the Aristotelian theory of reference we will commit myself to the method of philosophical analysis and try to show what are the implications of such a similitude theory of meaning. In the third part, where we analyse the implications in terms of truth we will admit that the best theory we have now in terms of explanatory power

is the correspondance theory of truth even though it stands on faulty assumptions such as the similitude theory of meaning.

Similitude Theory of Meaning

The similitude theory of meaning is a theory that has three parts. In the first part there is the speaker (a rational agent, a person or something with a *mind*, in the Enlightenment sense) and the entity outside of the speaker's mind. This entity is not necessarily a physical one but it can be an idea or a thought, it only needs to be referable. Finally, there is a relation from the mind of the speaker to the outside world. This relation is a special one as a matter of fact, it is a relation of similarity. One could formalise the notion of similarity as a binary relation that "x is similar to y" but the problem with this will be seen presently.

There are four things to notice in the similitude theory of meaning. First, the Aristotelian theory of meaning takes above trio as the core of the concept of meaning. In fact, it is not the words that mean anything but only the ideas of those words. In that case what Aristotle means by "affections of the sould" should be clear now: ideas of objects and concepts. Second, the Aristotelian theory of meaning takes two faculties of communication into consideration: scripture and sound. Aristotle defends a hierarchy in which sound comes first and scripture later. This is an important aspect when the Aristotelian theory of senses is considered but for the brevity we will not be elaborating on that.

The third thing to notice is that the "affections of the soul" are common in everyone. Then it follows that if the "affections of the soul" satisfy a similarity relation to objects and concepts in the world; and if "affections of the soul" are same for everyone, it follows with *modus ponens* that a words have to have the same meaning for everyone, i.e. my 'elm tree' and your 'elm tree' must be the same! This seems like a fine conclusion if we think that we all speak the same language and share the common rules of language, reference and meaning. Yet, this conlusion will also be analysed in the following sections.

Finally, the last important point that we will focus is the fact that similarity relation cannot be so easily formalised. If x is similar to y, then there must be an aspect of similarity: by which means is x similar to y? Then the correct formulisation will be a triary predicate of similitude: "x is similar to y in terms of z." As a matter of fact, the Aristotelian theory does not specifty what is z, in which aspect should the affection of the sould needs to be similar to the world.

In conclusion, the Aristotelian similitude theory of meaning offers us a model in which there is a speaker and the speaker has ideas in his or her mind. These ideas or "affections of the soul" are similar to objects and concepts in the real world, they share a similarity. In addition to that the Aristotelian theory offers us that sound is prior to scripture and it is due to the assumption that in language the mind is prior to be body and in the mind there is no

scripture. Second, Aristotelian theory offers us a unity in terms of reference and meaning between the speakers of the same language and unity in terms of affections of soul, the ideas in the whole mankind or perhaps in the domain of speaking things. Finally should there be a similitude, then there must be an aspect of similarity, but the Aristotelian theory does not account for it.

Implications of the Similitude Theory of Meaning

What similitude theory of meaning implies is of great importance to us. It serves as a justification why this debate is important. The similitude theory of meaning as said postulates two realms: the linguistic one and the real one. In the linguistic realm, there are the words and they refer to things in the real realm. As there is a unity in the ideas then there must be a unity in terms of reference as well within the speakers.

Following these a formal notion of reference could be derrived: *An agent* A *refers to an object* B *with the word* B' *succesfully if there is a similitude of between the* B *and the meaning of* B'. Then the idea of reference is merely binding the meaning of a word with an object or a concept. In fact this formal notion of word can be generalised into a sentences or propositions as well. The sentences have words as their parts and if a partiucular system of reference works for a word then it must also work for the whole sentence. In fact we are using reference in a less strict sense now, generally sentences do not refer to objects or concepts but to states of affairs.

Then *a sentence* A *refers to a state of affairs* B *succesfully if there is a similitude between the* B *and the meaning of* A. In this notion of sentence, we could make a few arrangements. To start, we could take not sentences but propositions into our focus. As a sentence is a meaningful proposition in a given language, the notion of propositional reference will be less strict. Secondly, we could specify the type of similarity in question. Finally, we can offer a new name for 'succesful reference.'

To begin, let us take similarity into consideration. It can be said that a car is similar to a horse in a teleological perspective or water can be similar to hydrocholoric acid in terms of colour. However, these are not the similarities the propositional reference takes into account. It looks for a stricter similarity. The similitude between my conception of an elm tree and a real elm tree is what is needed here. This spesific similarity can be called a *correspondance*. In fact if we refer succesfully, according to the similitude theory of meaning we are stating a correspondance between the idea in our mind and the reality.

Secondly, what is in fact succesful reference? It involves a correspondance but correspondance is merely an implication of what it is. When we consider propositions and the reality, we can offer a multitude of binary relations having the two as its predicates. Yet, the

correspondance is one of them it could be argued that the more general term for it is truth. In fact we define truth as a function that is operating between the propositions and the world.

Thus, considering all these remarks above, I believe we can offer a formal notion of the relation between propositions the world: *A proposition* P *is true if it corresponds to a state of affairs* Q *and that* P *describes* Q. This formal notion of truth directly follows from the similitude theory of meaning. Where the theory of meaning has ideas and the world as its arguments in the predicate of the similitude theory of meaning; the correspondance theory of truth takes propositions and the world as its arguments. The parallelism is clear!

Therefore it can be said that the correspondance theory of truth is the primary implication of the similitude theory of reference. In fact we can derrive theories of truth from theories of meaning very easily as we will see in the following case of picture theory of meaning and the identity theory of truth. That is the very reason why the discussion of theories of meaning if of great importance; they are the primary source we have to formalise the idea of truth as a function of propositions and the world. It, then, follows that if we want an explenatory, informative, valid, consistent and sound theory of truth we have to have a so theory of meaning in our hands. Otherwise, as the latter follows from the former we are doomed to the philosophical blindness on the question of truth.

Critiques of Similitude Theory of Meaning

To show that the similitude theory of meaning is not that well-founded we are going to use three instances of criticism. First, we will questions the limits of similitude; what can be called similar and what cannot? Second, we will take the unity of ideas into consideration and offer a thought-experiment to show that it is not the case. Finally, we will extend the implication of the correspondance theory of truth and similitude theory of meaning and show that it is inconsistent, in the example of Locke and Berkeley.

To start with limits of similitude, I believe it is Putnam who offered the most well-grounded attack to the similitude theory of reference in a mathematical way, yet for brevity and to avoid being technical I will not get into the mathematical proof of the criticism.

It simply acknowledges that there could be found an infinite number of similarities between any given two things. We could say that a butterfly is similar to an albatros that they both fly, they are both animals, they are both composed of carbonic compounds, they are both composed of atoms, they both occupy some space, etc. This is the main problem of the Aristotelian similitude theory of meaning. It does not limit the idea of similarity: how much similarity is enough for a word to mean an object.

A possible answer to this criticims would be an offer of comparison of the number of similarities and differences of the two given things, which has the most similarities and less

differences it is the meaning of the object. Yet, when we consider Putnam's mathematical approach, both words would have an infinite number of similarities to an object and thus, it would be an inconclusive effort. In short, the similitude theory of meaning is not tenable unless it specifies and limits the 'threshold' for similarities.

Secondly, the unity of the meanings of words with different people is not a tenable conclusion to make. Let us consider the modal twin-Earth thought-experiment, again by Putnam in his *Meaning of 'Meaning'*. We will offer a derrivative of the thought-experiment and for brevity I will avoid the twin-Earths.

Suppose I had very mean parents and they showed me an oak tree and called it 'elm tree' and later on, they showed me an elm tree and called it an 'oak tree.' In this case what I mean when I say 'elm tree' will be drastically different from what you mean by 'elm tree' as my 'elm tree' is oak tree. In this case even though an elm tree and an oak tree may said to be similar in nature the thought-experiment can be rearranged for cats and trees etc. Yet the main point is that the same word does not always mean the same thing.

In short, it is not always the case that there is a strict unity in terms of meaning within a language. This is what makes language of a twofold nature; there is a public language and a private language. It is possible that the private languages of two speakers are not always the same. In this case the Aristotelian similitude theory of meaning contradicts the fact that private languages may differ. As the argument went as modus ponens, it must be the case that one of the premises must be faulty and we can guess which one.

The final criticism we could offer now is the extend of the similitude theory of meaning in collaboration with the correspondance theory of truth. Let us consider the theory of meaning and theory of truth adopted by the British empiricists.

Locke, as the first one, offers a substitution of the world as understandable with senses, he argues that the man is in a blank state, *tabula rasa*, at the beginning and he moves on to learn new things with experience. In the process he offers his theory of primary and secondary qualities. Yet, the conclusion he comes is that the human mind depicts the world and the ideas are true if and only if they correspond to the world, if they are similar to the world. The ideas on the mind are copies of the external world in the Locke's theory of knowledge. They are true only if there is a correspondance between them. However, this also has a metaphysical implication: there must be one and only one constitution of the world accesible to the human mind. In that line of discourse it can be said that Locke follows an unnamed similitude theory of meaning and the implication of the similitude theory, the correspondance theory of truth.

Then for Locke a proposition is true if and only if it corresponds to the reality. Berkeley adopted the theories Locke used and showed us a great inconsistency. If Berkeley said, a

proposition is true only if corresponds to the world and a proposition means what is similar to the idea, then the world would cease to exist when I stopped experiencing it. It is due to the logical connector between the proposition and the world, "if and only if." The similitude theory of meaning binds the world and the language togather but this would mean that where there is no language, there cannot be the world. This was Berkeley's conclusion when he asked if the tree fallen in a quad where there is no-one to hear will make a sound. The common sense dictates us to say that it would make a sound because the laws of physics prohibit the trees from disappearing when we do not look but the similitude theory of meaning and the correspondance theory of truth force us to say that it would not make a sound. It is perhaps Berkeley's wit that he offered a solution *ad Domino*, he said that the God experiences us all and therefore our existence and the existence of the trees are fine.

This is not only a problem about the theory of knowledge but it shows a great inconsistency. As the Lockean idea of the world was understandable through the senses, Berkeley's conclusion shows that it is not understandable at all! The inconsistency lies with the assumptions of the theory and the conclusions. Locke could not have denied the Berkeley's problem of disappearing trees nor can he ammend his theory to avoid this problem. The fact is that the Lockean theory falls because of the similitude theory of meaning and the correspondance theory of reference.

In short we believe we have some three reasons to abandon the Aristotelian similitude theory of meaning in favour of a better alternative. First, the similitude theory is inadequate to specify the concept of similarity, what is similar and what is not. Second, the unity of the meaning is a faulty conclusion and it shows that the assumptions are faulty. Finally, if we extend the scope of the theory, then we see that it shows us that the world diasppears when we close our eyes and the world is one and existing and understandable simultaneously.

Picture Theory of Meaning and Identity Theory of Truth

It is Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that champions the picture theory of meaning. Perhaps this is best understood as a reaction to the long-rooted Aristotelian theory and its counterparts. Wittgenstein offers a model in which meaning of a word is the mental picture of in one's mind. In fact, picture theory of meaning argues that we are painting pictures when we speak. This can be understood as a metaphor but we will not as Wittgenstein excessively stresses that meanings are pictures.

The notion can be formalised so: *An agent* A *refers to an object* B *with the word* B' *succesfully if there is a identity of between the* B *and the meaning of* B'. In this case the meaning is a picture and a picture can be identical with state of affairs in the world. Unlike the relation between similitude theory of meaning and correspondance theory of truth the relation between picture theory and identity theory requires too little analysis. Then it follows

6

that *A proposition* P *is true if its meaning is identical to a state of affairs* Q *and that* P *describes* Q.

Picture theory and identity theory has its advantages over the similitude theory and correspondance theory. Primarily it does not fall into the problem of inconsistency in itself as seen in the Locke and Berkeley example. It is in fact immune to be inconsistent as there is only one basic assumption, viz. the meaning is mental pictures, and the theory of truth is directly derrived from the theory of meaning. Therefore, there is no internal problem but there is an external one that the picture theory is not a sound theory.

Wittgenstein himself discovered the unsoundness of the picture theory and abandoned it. There are two reasons for abandoning the picture theory of meaning. First, the picture theory is spesific to an ideal language and thus cannot account for ordinary languages. Second, the picture theory fails to acknowledge the problem of private languages and rule following.

As far as languages are concerned logicians tend to offer a dichotomy. There are ideal languages and ordinary languages. In an ideal language there is exactly one word for every object of concept and the meanings of the words are constant and they cannot change. In ordinary languages however, as our languages in Earth, there can be multiple words for an object or a concept and a word can mean multiple ojbects or concepts. Anew, the meaning of words change a lot in our langauges and thus they are ordinary.

Early Wittgenstein's picture theory of truth was a theory if truth in an ideal language unlike Aristotle's. The theory offers an identity between the world and the meaning. Leibniz' Law states that two things are identical if and only if they have all their properties the same. In that case only one mental picture could be identical with the world; therefore, the picture theory operates in an ideal language.

This limits the explenatory power of the theory. As we speak in ordinary languages, so should the philosophy of language analyse ordinary languages. If that is not the case the theory will be distant from every-day examples and have no value in terms of the problems in ordinary language. This is something to be avoided, the best theory of meaning should both explain the ordinary and the ideal languages simultaneously and Wittgenstein's theory fails on that.

Second problem is the private language and rule following. In fact it is late Wittgenstein who promotes this criticims against his old theory in his *Philosophical Investigations.* I will adopt a version used by Kripke in his *Wittgenstein on the Rules of Private Language*.

Suppose I have just learnt to make the mathematical operation of sums. I can add five to four and get nine without problem but I have never made a sum with a number greater

than 56. In that case when you ask me to add ten to fifty seven I can doubt the operation. I could say that in fact there is another mathematical operation with the symbol of not plus but *quus*. *Quus* is shown exactly like a plus and has the following properties. If the second number is greater than 56, the answer is five, if not it is a sum. Wittgenstein shows that such a scepticism is not ill-founded, even though unreasonable. Then, he offers that the language operates on basis of rule-following. The speakers follow some rules that govern the language and thus they can communicate. However, Wittgenstein also notes that in provate languages there is only one person who knows the rules. This is why the private languages are not communicative.

The private language might have rules differing from the public language just like that plus is not plus but *quus*. Also, the private language might be painting differend pictures than the real world. Recall the thought-experiment of twin-Earths and elm trees. The thopught-experiments offer a great criticism to the picture theory but at the time Wittgenstein had not got the tools of modal logic to construct them. Instead he offered that the private language of a speaker could be differing in terms of consistency. The speaker might be making a mistake while speaking of the interlocutor might understand some part of the discourse wrong or perhaps even though the speaker and the interlocutor agree their pictures might again differ. At any rate we would not think of the same thing when we say 'apple,' one can think it green and the other one red.

These two reasons forced Wittgenstein to abandon his picture theory and move to a new approach in which he suggests that meaning is use. We will not go into the detail of the meaning is use conjecture. This abandoning of picture theory also caused a start of ordinary language philosophy opposing the ideal language of logicians. Anew, the fall of the picture theory also forced the identity theory to be abandoned as well, even though not explicitly. As the identity theory stood on the grounds of the picture theory it had to fall as well. A return to the correspondance theory follows, yet without the similitude theory.

In conclusion the first attempt to remove the correspondance theory of truth and the similitude theory of meaning fails due to two reasons. First that the picture theory is not an ordinary language theory and second that it also fails to account for private language.

Final Remarks and Conclusion

In this paper we have discussed two things the Aristotelian similitude theory of meaning and Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning. The discussion of the Aristotelian theory consisted of three parts. First the theory itself were analysed into components such as similitude as a relation between the ideas or "affections of the soul" and the world. This analysis provided us with the future points of the debate.In the second part, we have analysed the formal notions of word, reference, sentence, proposition and truth according to the similitude theory. We came to the conclusion that the similitude theory of meaning offers a

correspondance theory of truth. In the final part we have offered three critiques to the theory. First, we have remarked Putnam's treatment of the limitations of similarity and his mathematical proof that every two things are similar to each other in infinite number of ways. Second, we have again remarked Putnam's twin-Earth thought-experiments and showed that the Aristotelian theory of meaning fails to account for the provate languages and thus it is unsound. Finally, we have derrived an example of inconsistency of British empiricists Locke and Berkeley. we first showed that both of them accept the Aristotelian theory of meaning and the correspondance theory of truth and then they contradicted each other.

Considering all these problems in the second part we have given my attention to an alternative theory of meaning championed by early Wittgenstein. The discussion of the picture theory of meaning consisted of two parts. In the first part we showed the easy relation between the identity theory of truth and the picture theory of truth. In the second part, we have remarked late Wittgenstein's criticism on the picture theory on two grounds. First ground was the problem of ordinary languages as the picture theory only explained the ideal languages. Second problem was the problem of private language which is analogue to Aristotle's.

Even though the analysis shows that the identity theory and the picture theory are ill-founeded just like the similitude theory -that dominated the history of western philosophy from Aristotle to Wittgenstein regardless of its falws- we need to have a theory of truth. This forces us to accept the correspondance theory of truth as it has the most explenatory power and it is simple enough that there are minimal assumptions. We have not and will not discuss the advantages of the correspondance theory of truth but it is enough to say that the correspondance theory of truth is not contradicting with any logical, epistemic or linguistic finding but only lacks a justification for following. That is why the philosophers and the logicians tend to use it today.