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A Priori truth in the natural world : a non-referentialist response to Benacerraf's dilemma

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THESES

associated with the dissertation of Zsolt Novák

A Priori Truth in the Natural World
A Non-Referentialist Response to Benacerraf's Dilemma

1. An adequate response to Benacerraf's dilemma requires abandoning the standard referentialist construal of truth, the idea that the truth conditions of a certain truthbearer are to be specified in terms of the entities that the constituents of the bearer in question purport to be about.
2. Truth can be construed as the correct declarative applicability of a truthbearer, so a certain truthbearer qualifies as true if and only if the conditions of its correct declarative applicability obtain, or in other words, if and only if what its correct declarative applicability requires to obtain corresponds to what actually obtains in the world.
3. Acquiring a piece of knowledge requires that the obtaining truth conditions of the known proposition have a distinctive causal impact on the knowing mind, so the obtaining truth conditions of a knowable truthbearer cannot be causally inert in character.
4. A truth is *a priori* knowable if and only if it consists in the obtaining of some representational conditions in a subject's head that the subject can detect by a causal mechanism that conveys reliable first-personal information of this obtaining to her own mind.
5. The obtaining of the truth conditions of a necessary truth is a contingent fact of the actual world that is constitutive of the semantical content of the bearer expressing this truth.
6. A subject's first-personal knowledge of the obtaining of at least some representational conditions within her head is *a priori* and synthetic in character.
7. In philosophy, as in other disciplines, there is an epistemic hierarchy among beliefs, and the relation of more fundamental beliefs to less fundamental ones is, at least ideally, two-directional: more fundamental beliefs can be invoked to confirm less fundamental beliefs, but only in so far as the presumable truth of the latter contributes to the explanation of the presumable truth of the former.
8. Philosophy is continuous with ordinary and scientific belief formation: the confrontation of ordinary and scientific beliefs with philosophical considerations may result in the elimination of delusive phantasms from our theories of the world – but very often it results rather in the occurrence and survival of such phantasms in philosophy as well.
9. Philosophy is the only purportedly objective discipline in which the systematic investigations of the greatest thinkers seem to result in great disagreements about virtually everything that matters to these thinkers – and it is also the only purportedly objective discipline in which this apparent fact does not seem to bother many of these thinkers.
10. Philosophers love wisdom – but they love themselves slightly more.