

# ARE ALL GENERALIZATIONS FALSE?

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, I develop a new semantic criterion for evaluating universal quantifications based on problems of self-reference, and use it to evaluate theories in Metaphysics, Philosophy of Logic, Philosophy of Language, Cultural Criticism, Philosophy of Mind, Epistemology, Action Theory, Ethics, and Philosophy of Science, arriving at significant results in each case. The criterion is that universally quantified sentences cannot convey any substantive information about the nature of meanings *qua* meanings, as that would involve them in circularities or something akin to self-contradictions. I illustrate this point by showing how examples of such sentences are circular or self-undermining. I close with some general considerations of the appeal of such claims.

**Keywords:** semantics, proposition, propositional attitude, intrinsic, extrinsic, methodology

It is sometimes said that all generalizations are false. I want to suggest that, while this isn't strictly true, many do have something wrong with them, having to do with the fact that, if a generalization is general enough, it will say something about itself, and self-reference, as is well known, causes problems. Although I shall make use of formal devices where I can for clarity, I shall be posing and explaining the problem largely in natural language, but I hope that will not lead you to think that it's not a real logical problem. Real semantic difficulties can be recognized without the innovations of a Tarski or a Russell. Some semantic words, such as 'true' and 'false', are as old as written language. Even 'meaning' was used with a sense recognizable to modern philosophers for centuries before they adopted it. The Liar's Paradox was first promulgated twenty-six centuries ago, and was immediately recognized as a problem. Tarski bases his T-conventions on the work of Aristotle (Tarski 1944, 342-3) and Hartry Field finds fault with modern, formal approaches to truth on the grounds that they can't deal with problems posed in natural language (Field, *passim*.) It would be desirable to have a formal system capable of making the points I want to make, but it's not necessary.

I shall begin by laying out the problematic

sorts of sentences, and explaining them, in order to motivate my criterion for unacceptable generalizations. I shall then propose and explain my criterion, *i.e.*,

(M) All synthetic generalizations that predicate intrinsic properties of all propositions are semantically flawed.

After that, I shall explain, and give example of, how this criterion applies to theses in metaphysics, philosophy of language, philosophy of culture, philosophy of mind, epistemology, ethics, and other areas, to show its reach and importance. I shall not always aim at giving the most accurate or strongest account I can of the views I attack, since I'm aiming at showing how a certain line of attack on them can be made to work, and for that purpose, oversimplification can be valuable, and the general strategy for dealing with more complicated cases, will, I hope, be clear from the way I approach simple ones. I shall close by considering one possible sort of response that could be made to it, and saying a little more about why it's important.

Let 'F' be a predicate and p be a proposition. If 'Fx' is true of p in circumstance c just in case p is true in circumstance c, or 'Fx' is true of p in circumstance c just in case p is false in circumstance c, and in no other cases, I want to call 'F' a metasemantic predicate of p in circumstance c, and the property 'F' refers to a metasemantic property of p in circumstance c. The paradigm metasemantic predicates are 'is true' and 'is false'. Now consider the following sentence.

(1) Every sentence in this article is true.

If I were to use (as opposed to mention) this sentence in an article, what would its truth-value be? If one of the other sentences in the article were untrue, then straightforwardly untrue. But suppose I were so blessed as to write an article that consisted only of true sentences apart from (1)? The truth-value of this sentence would depend on itself, so that it could be determined to be true only if it were true and false only if it were false. Similar things can be said about:

(2) Every sentence in this article is false.

Only there the dependency would be inverted.

Although 'is true' and 'is false' are the clearest cases of metasemantic predicates, they are not the only ones. On uncontroversial assumptions, predicates whose application to a proposition depends on the total truth conditions of said proposition work like 'is true' and 'is false' in similar circumstances. If you have '(x)Fx' and 'Fx' is true of p or not depending on what the truth conditions of p are, and 'Fx' applies to all propositions possibly excepting '(x)Fx', then to know whether it were true or false in those conditions you'd have to know what its truth conditions were. But you couldn't know what its truth conditions were until you knew whether the sentence were true or false in those conditions, so the problem would be insoluble. Whether it were true or false would depend on what its truth conditions were, and what its truth conditions

were would depend on whether it were true or false, so its truth-value would depend on its truth-value. Likewise for a predicate 'Fx' that applies to sentences based on how the references of their component parts contribute to the determination of the reference of the whole (the truth-value.) If you have '(x)Fx', and 'Fx' is true of all other sentences, then, to know whether the universal quantification were true or false, you'd have to know whether 'Fx' were true of *it*, and to know that, you'd have to know how its component parts contributed to the determination of its own truth-value, and, hence, whether it were true or false, a vicious circle. Again, its truth-value would depend on its truth-value. And likewise for any 'Fx' which is true of p or not based on how it determines truth-values. If you had a predicate 'Fx' which was true of propositions which determined truth-values in some particular ways and not others, and it were true of all other relevant propositions, and you universally quantified into it, then, to know whether '(x)Fx' were true or false, you'd have to know how its proposition determined its truth-value, but that means you'd have to know whether it were true or false, since those alternatives exhaust the two general ways that it could determine its truth-value, and, again, you'd be caught in a vicious circle. Its truth-value would depend on what proposition it expressed, but, granted that it's of the nature of propositions to determine specific truth-values, that would depend on its truth-value, so, again, its truth-value would depend on its truth-value.

All the above properties are intrinsic, that is, they belong to propositions in virtue of what they are in themselves, not in virtue of their relations to other things (the latter sort are called 'extrinsic', or, sometimes, 'relational'.) There may be other intrinsic properties that propositions have; they may turn out to be ordered tuples for example. If so, the sentences attributing those intrinsic properties to propositions are plausibly analytic (at least I can't think of any that wouldn't be.) So, plausibly, all true sentences that attribute intrinsic properties to all propositions are analytic. (On the other hand, such properties as who expressed a proposition, when, where, and in what possible world, are extrinsic. It is the function of a proposition to relate utterances [by given people and at given places, times, and possible worlds] to truth values, and it does so by relating those people, places, times, and possible worlds to itself, so the properties mentioned in the previous sentence are relational, or extrinsic, properties of propositions, since propositions have them in virtue of being related to other things.) From the claim that all true sentences that attribute intrinsic properties to all propositions are analytic, it follows that all synthetic generalizations that predicate intrinsic properties of all propositions, cannot be straightforwardly true. As for the exception I make for analytic truths, I can do that because in such cases there aren't two alternative ways in which the truth value could be determined by the proposition, and, hence, no unwholesome dependency of the way it's determined on itself. If someone were to say "All bachelors are unmarried," or "All propositions about bachelors are necessarily propositions about unmarried people," we wouldn't have to worry about whether or not the predicates applied to themselves or not, because that they might not is not a genuine alternative. There is no possibility of the actual meanings of 'bachelor' and 'unmarried' being such that the meanings of the above mentioned sentences might be unmarried bachelors or propositions about bachelors that aren't propositions about unmarried people. That is what it is for something to be analytically true—the meaning is such that it can't be

otherwise. It follows that the only universally quantified sentences without restricted domains that can be true are the ones that don't tell us anything synthetic about the nature of meanings. Among acceptable universal statements I include, as analytic, ones about the nature of meaning, such as 'All meanings mediate between lexical items and referents.' In addition, logicians' claims about the semantics of universal quantifications would have to be analytic to be true, since these are themselves universal quantifications. I would count my principal claims about what happens when universally quantifying into a metaseantic predicate as true because analytic as well, because they follow directly from plausibly logical claims about the semantics of universal quantifications.

It follows from these considerations immediately, that all existential statements with metaseantic predicates and unrestricted domains are true or analytically false, if not merely problematic.

It might help to consider another sentence somewhat removed from (1) and (2) to see how sentences not obviously circular or self-contradictory might still be flawed. Consider this:

(3) It is unreasonable to believe any sentence in this paper,

written in a paper in which no other sentence is reasonable to believe. It might seem that this would not lead to paradox, because sentences which aren't reasonable to believe can be true nonetheless. However, if it's reasonable to believe it, it's reasonable to believe that it's not reasonable to believe it, so it would seem that it's not reasonable to believe it. On the other hand, if it's not reasonable to believe it, it would seem to be true, and its obvious truth should count as a reason to believe it. So, it's reasonable to believe it if and only if it's not reasonable to believe it. There might not be an outright semantic paradox, but there's what might be called an epistemological paradox, a paradox in justification. Its flaws can also be brought out by considering that, if it's reasonable to believe it, then it should be rejected on the basis that it says it isn't, and if it's not reasonable to believe it, it should be rejected on that basis, so, one way or another, it should be rejected.

We shall call sentences such as I've stipulated (1), (2) and (3) to be "semantically problematic" (or "problematic" for short.) and say they are not straightforwardly true and not straightforwardly false. I intend this terminology to be neutral among the different theories of such sentences, and don't want to take a stand on whether they're true, or false, or both, or neither. Having said that, I shall henceforward abbreviate "not straightforwardly true" as "untrue", and "not straightforwardly false" as "unfalse." This goes against the plain English meaning of the words, but shall simplify the rest of the paper.

These considerations, moreover, in addition to giving us a new and powerful rule whereby we can evaluate theories, suggest a further way in which we can verify the verdicts given by the rule. All the views condemned by this criterion, according to what we've developed so far, have problems of circularity or self-contradiction in regard to

how they apply to themselves. If we examine examples in the concrete, I submit that we're likely to find circularities or tendencies to undermine themselves in all the cases that fail our test. I shall try to expose such failings as I consider the consequences of our criterion in the remainder of this paper, and I think the ability to do so should further confirm the basic principle that suggests them. As I said before, I shall not aim at historical accuracy, or at refuting the strongest form of a theory, but at illustrating how the criterion works. I hope that, once that's clear, it can be applied in more difficult, or complicated, cases.

First, let's consider an extreme Idealism, holding that everything is dependent on minds, including meanings. This would seem to be a synthetic universal statement, banned by our criterion. Does it fall prey to problems when applied to itself? Well, if everything is dependent on minds, then the fact that everything is dependent on minds is dependent on minds, so, if the relevant minds came to think differently, there might be no such fact. And, if it weren't a fact that everything was dependent on minds, something wouldn't be dependent on any minds. So something could exist independently of any mind. Presumably, Idealists would resist such a consequence. Physicalism, on the other hands, claims that everything real, including propositions, can be reduced to physics. But, consider the sentence "Everything can be reduced to physics." The laws of physics can't be the full story on what makes a proposition satisfy 'x can be reduced to physics' as that would make the laws of physics circular, so Physicalism can't account for it's formulation, and, taken to its logical extreme, can't be true, either.

We can have sentences such as 'Nothing is both so and not,' and other logical principles, be true by relying on the old distinction between form and content, and holding that laws of logic tell us nothing about the content of the sentences they apply to. I'm aware that this distinction is in disrepute in some circles nowadays, but I think the above considerations can both motivate and help to explain it. We can also see that a sentence such as

#### (4) Logic is merely a tool of oppression

can't be true. After all, if it were, it would have to predicate an intrinsic property of logic, for logical principles, to be oppressive, would presumably have to favor some propositions (the "oppressive" ones) over others (the "liberating" ones,) presumably by predicating an intrinsic property (either being oppressive or being liberating) of every sentence, including (4). So, in order to know whether the predicate 'x is a tool of oppression' applied to logic one would have to know how logic classed all propositions, and in order to know how logic classed all propositions, one would have to know how logic applied to (4), and the meanings of the laws of logic and (4) would depend on each other in a vicious circle. We can see how the sentence undermines itself by considering how it could be justified. If it can be supported by logical argument, then it condemns itself. If it can not, then it is condemned on that ground.

It might be objected that the above argument would not be convincing to the misologue since it presupposes logic, which he undertakes to reject. I deny that it

presupposes logic. It is possible to employ logic, I maintain, without presupposing it. In standard natural deduction systems, one routinely employs inference rules before one has proven any logical truths by means of them, and it is possible to know how to reason logically even if one has mistaken beliefs about logic, just as it's possible to know how to ride a bicycle even if one has very mistaken beliefs about bicycle-riding. I think Hume did the former. It's true that a determined misologue could just deny my distinction between presupposing and employing logic, and remain a misologue. I think my argument is valuable anyway because it gives reasonable people more insight into where the misologue goes wrong. In addition to this theoretical value, I also think it is of some small dialectical use. Although it's true, for better or worse, that there's no infallible way of keeping a suitably determined man from being an ass, this may influence some of the less determined ones, and might well force the most determined one to work harder to misunderstand the issues, making him more confused and less considerable of an opponent in the future. All of these are good results.

The considerations I've been developing here have consequences for other sorts of philosophy than metaphysical monisms and misologies. So far, we've mostly considered universal quantifications of atomic formulae, but other sorts of universal statements fail in the same way, provided their truth depends on the nature of their own semantics. Consider theories of meaning, which can be regarded as having the form:

(5) For all  $x$ ,  $x$  is a meaning just in case  $x$  is  $S$ .

These are all suspect as long as they can be used to rule out some things as meanings. Often they have been so used, which is doubtless one of the motivations for coming up with them. The dictum that all meaning is utterly indeterminate, which I believe Deconstructionists have held, would seem to be problematic. If that is so, then the sentence "Meaning is utterly indeterminate" might mean that meaning is not utterly indeterminate, and I presume that whatever protagonists it might have would balk at that interpretation. And there are liable to be problems facing theories that don't aim to characterize all meanings, but only some, as well. Consider the following:

(6) All talk about how much one cares about others is nothing but a cover for selfishness.

This says of every sentence that either it is not about how much one cares about others, or it is, by virtue of its meaning, a cover for selfishness. This seems to be a disjunction of two metasemantic predicates, attributing at least one of them to each sentence, and, hence, must be false or meaningless. To see this more clearly, consider that talk about how much one cares about others would seem, indirectly, to be talk about how much one cares about others, since there is a close connection between meanings and the things they pick out, and talking about one tells one something about the other. Indeed, such sentences are often put forward to tell us, not just something about caring talk, but something about caring itself. Thus, the sentence says of itself that it's nothing but a cover for selfishness, reason enough to disregard it. Looking at it another way, if the sentence is right about all other talk, the question remains whether it's

reasonable to believe it or not. If it is, it shouldn't be believed, because it's just a cover for selfishness. If it's not, it's credible, since it warns others not to be fooled. So the sentence should be believed if and only if it shouldn't, a contradiction.

The only semantic theories, local or global, that could be correct would be ones that don't set limits on what can be meaningful, and center on the relation between language and the world, the latter requirement being plausibly analytic. (Note that I do not claim that this means that *no* talk about how much one cares about others is a cover for selfishness, still less that talk about how much one cares about others *can't be* a cover for selfishness. On the contrary, such sweeping generalizations would have to be false or meaningless as well as (6).)

Talk about discourses and texts is standardly talk about sentences and their meaning. Thus, the postmodernist claim that all discourses are informed by power relations would have to be untrue. It occurs in a discourse, and, so, by its own account would have to be informed by power relations. This is ordinarily thought to rule out the possibility of rationality or objectivity. So, it would be at least as suspect as views it's used to condemn, perhaps more, because it condemns itself, something that the others rarely do. Consider also, the case in which it's true of all other discourses. Then, if it's reasonable to believe it, it's not reasonable to believe it, because it proclaims its unreliability, and, if it's not reasonable to believe it, it is, because it warns you that it's not. It's true that the determined postmodernist might choose not to be persuaded by these considerations, but this gives us an additional reason not to take his choices seriously, if we need one, by giving us greater insight to his views, and can be of use in persuading those on the fence.

Since literature and philosophy and all other theorizing falls under the rubric of "culture", much theorizing about culture will be disapproved by this account. The Marxist claim that all culture is a result of economic forces and the Nazi claim that culture is a product of the race will both have to be rejected. Each of them says of itself that it has no particular claim to objectivity. If it's right about itself, it shouldn't be believed for that reason; if it's wrong, it shouldn't be believed because it's false. Likewise, if either is right about all other forms of culture, it will follow that it should be believed just in case it shouldn't, by an argument which must be familiar by now. Whatever account of culture we ultimately settle on, if correct, will have to allow any semantic kind of theory at all to be entertained by the culture that arrives at it.

Since theories of truth purport to be true, they can be considered under the same light we have been considering other theories under. If a theory of truth makes truth merely a property of sentences' meanings, rather than a matter of their relations to the world, then it fails along the lines sketched above. As for coherence theories of truth, either the criterion of maximal coherence favors no sentences above others, in which case it has the obvious problem that it can't distinguish between true and false sentences, or else it does, in which case the proposed definition must be false or meaningless as I have argued. If it favors itself, its justification will be circular, if it doesn't, it will undermine itself. Only the correspondence theory of truth evades the above problems,

in that it makes truth not a matter of the metasemantic properties of a sentence, but of its relation to the facts. This definition of truth doesn't discriminate among different sentences on account of their properties, but doesn't allow for pluralism either. What makes a sentence true is not just its meaning, but the facts; the facts determine truth; the definition treats all sentences equally. This argument might well not persuade doubters to adopt the correspondence theory. After all, it's based on an account of a metasemantic property that might be regarded as presupposing much of it. Still, I think it's worth mentioning, as giving better insight into how the others fail than we might have been able to attain without it.

So far I've mostly been working with a very thin notion of a proposition; all that I required of one, for the most part, was that it determine a truth value together with the facts. Granted that sentences have truth values that have something to do with the facts, it's hard to see how there could be nothing which determines them, and I think even people who might resist a robust notion of propositions or meanings can accept my reasoning to this point without ontological qualms. We can get further important results, however, if we add to this thin notion that propositions are the objects of propositional attitudes. If we do this, then often we can regard properties of propositional attitudes as properties of propositions. Thus many theories of intentionality and mental content can be judged by the standard we have developed. Consider the dictum that all conscious mental states, and their contents, are merely the surface manifestations of subconscious drives. We are conscious of thinking about it, so it must be false or problematic. After all, if it is a surface manifestation of subconscious drives, that in itself would commonly be thought to rule out rationality and objectivity, so it should be rejected, and if it's not, it's false and, so, should be rejected. Consider also, that, if it's true about all other propositional attitudes, then the speculation that it's so should be believed precisely if it's not trustworthy. The same thing can be said about many more specific attempts to reduce propositional attitudes. Consider: 'Mathematics is merely a sublimation of the sex drive.' This can be regarded as claiming of all propositional attitudes that either they're not about Math, or else they are about sex, which fails along the lines of sentence (6) above. This seems to say something about Math, and so, says of itself that it's merely a sublimation of the sex drive. If it is, we can't expect the desire to make the two-backed beast to result in reliable information about Mathematics, so we have no reason to believe the sentence in question, and if it's not, it's false. If it's true about all other mathematical reasoning, it has the consequence, once again, that it's rationally credible just in case it isn't. Attempted reductions of one propositional attitude to another fail, and Bishop Butler's comment, "Everything is what it is and not another thing," originally posed to controvert those who would try to reduce other mental states to self-love, is vindicated (Butler 1983, 20)

In fact, the account we have developed places severe constraints on attempts to discover a general account of how the human mind works. If one makes the assumptions that the content of mental states affects behavior, and that the way it affects it can only be known *a posteriori* and, hence, isn't analytic, he can soon come to the conclusion that such a general account must be inconceivable to human beings. Such an account, if complete, would have to contain an account of the effect which conceiving *it* would



have upon behavior, but, since that would depend upon its content, that couldn't be conceived until one had conceived the whole theory, since it would depend on the content of the theory. Thus, one couldn't conceive of the whole of the theory until he had conceived of the part, and one couldn't conceive of the part until he had conceived of the whole, so conception of the theory would be impossible. What's more, the inconceivability of the theory couldn't be due to its subject matter. To see this, consider the supposition that there's a being who can understand *everything*. If so, and if what people could conceive of were limited by subject matter, then a correct theory of the human mind would have to say what sort of subject matter it couldn't conceive of, by a metasemantic predicate. This predicate, in turn, could not be understood unless and until one understood what sorts of contents it applied to. But that would mean one couldn't understand the content of the theory without understanding the predicate, and one couldn't understand the predicate without understanding whether it applied to the theory, understanding which would, in turn depend on understanding the content of the theory. So the being that could understand everything couldn't understand the theory until he'd already understood it, which is impossible. But something which can't be understood by a being that can understand everything can't exist, so there can be no such theory. A theory of the human mind that was inconceivable to humans would have to be inconceivable due to its structure, or complexity, or something other than its subject matter. The only accounts of the roles of propositional attitudes in our mental economy that we can conceive of would have to be in terms of their logical or analytic properties, or their relations to reality. Likewise, theories of what selves are or should be fall under suspicion to the extent that they have implications for what propositional attitudes selves can and do hold. Thus, the claim that subjectivities are constituted by institutions would seem to fail. It says of itself that it came from subjectivity constituted by institutions, and we can't expect such a subjectivity to get things right. If it did, the claim is suspect, if it didn't, the claim is false.

We can draw conclusions about particular kinds of propositional attitudes, too. One of the most important propositional attitudes, philosophically, is knowledge, and we might expect to get interesting results applying our methods to the field of Epistemology. The view that knowledge proceeds from some sort of causal connection between the knower and what is known would seem to rule out knowledge of certain propositions, knowledge of mathematics for example, and, so, would stand condemned on our account. Moreover, knowledge of the proposition that knowledge is due to a causal connection between the knower and the known would seem to be possible, on this account, only on the basis of a causal connection with knowledge in general. This would include knowledge of that proposition, so knowledge of the causal theory would seem to have to have caused itself. (None of this would rule out some role for causality in the formation of knowledge, or prevent it from explaining it in some cases. In fact, the criterion I use would guarantee that it must have some role in some cases, since that is the negation of the right sort of generalization. All that would be ruled out is the claim that it's the whole story in all cases, which there's other reason to doubt.) More generally, the only accounts that would pass muster would be ones that analyzed justification in terms of the properties that can apply generally to propositions, the proof-theoretic ones or truth. Some sort of reliabilist account seems our best bet.

Actions involve propositions in two ways. First, they are often held to be the results of propositional attitudes (belief and desire are the most commonly mentioned); second, they can be regarded as bringing about states of affairs expressible by propositions. From either perspective, properties of actions can be metasemantic properties of propositions. They can be applied to Ethical theories. Utilitarianism is an example of a theory that would fail such a test, making the right action one that had the property of maximizing happiness. It would follow that one shouldn't obey Utilitarian ethics if acceptance of the theory didn't maximize happiness. I think this is a real possibility. Many people find the Utilitarian view of the world profoundly repellent, as Utilitarians themselves have noticed, and it may well be that general acceptance of it would not maximize happiness. Even if it did, this would, nonetheless, seem to be a contingent fact about human nature. *We could have been* so constituted as to become hopelessly demoralized by acceptance of Utilitarianism, in which case, our Utilitarian duty would have been to reject it, surely an embarrassment for that view. It would seem that, if we are to come to an adequate account of what actions are right and what wrong, it will have to be based on the form of the rules we follow, rather than on their content, or perhaps on their relations to the facts.

Philosophy of Science might be regarded as being subject to some of the constraints we've developed, inasmuch as it can be regarded as giving an account of the propositions that make up the scientific corpus of knowledge. Consider a sentence such as:

(7) All science is informed by contextual values.

It might be unclear initially whether this sentence says anything about itself, since it might be unclear whether there are metasemantic criteria associated with what makes something scientific. If there are, then it's a universal quantification into a metasemantic matrix, but what if there aren't? I think we can show that (7) is in trouble when we reflect that it is supposed to express a necessary truth. It's not supposed to be merely a coincidence that science is informed by contextual values, but due to the nature of how science has been done. If there are no metasemantic criteria for what constitutes science, then any proposition could be part of science under the right circumstances, so the one expressed by the above sentence could. That would render the sentence, minus the implicit necessity operator, untrue in the possible worlds in which it is part of science, in turn rendering the sentence, with the necessity operator, untrue in our world, since, if a sentence prefaced by necessity operator is untrue in any world, the sentence formed by prefacing said sentence with the necessity operator is untrue in ours, by a plausible extension of modal semantics. Thus, the sentence is untrue whether or not 'is science' is a metasemantic predicate. Consider that, if any subject matter can be part of science, then (7) can, and, if it were, and it were right about all other sentences, then it would, once again be rationally credible precisely if it weren't, a contradiction. The only predicates that can hold necessarily of the whole of Science would have to be non-metasemantic ones, presumably ones that characterize it in terms of justification.

It follows by parity of reasoning that all universal statements about what propositions must necessarily be like fail even if they only have partly metasemantic matrices, and

the only necessary properties that propositions have are analytic or logical ones. From this it follows that all statements of propositions' potentialities are unfalse, except those that say they can violate logical or analytic rules.

Before closing, I'd like to discuss two more, general, points. First, the semantic principle I've been discussing is liable to some counter-moves. A frequent response to a claim that a theory undermines itself is to give a non-cognitivist account of the sentences that make up the theory, that is, to deny that their purpose is to describe the world. For example, the ancient Pyrrhonian Sceptics, in response to the question of how they knew that nothing could be known, denied that they knew it, and claimed just that it was a useful tool for acquiring *ataraxia*, which can very loosely be translated 'peace of mind.' Similar moves are probably available to the proponents of many of the views mentioned above. I think my approach is worthy of attention anyway, because, first, the result that views of this kind can't be understood as assertions is itself an important one, and second, the claim that their proponents aren't committed to them as assertions is often itself open to challenge. In the case of the Pyrrhonians, it's hard to see why you'd think resting in ignorance would lead to peace of mind better than discovering knowledge would, unless you knew that knowledge were unattainable; the arguments that Pyrrhonians used to attain suspension of judgment often weren't convincing to those who didn't already believe that knowledge was unattainable (the Stoics, in particular, didn't accept many of them); and, even if the method had worked in the past, without knowledge of the skeptical claim there was no reason to believe it would work in the future, and hence no reason to continue to be a Pyrrhonian. Pyrrhonian practice contravened Pyrrhonian protestations.

Second, a mental review of the views our criterion would rule out suggests to me that many of them are not views taken seriously in Anglo-American philosophy anyway, and even a review of the views I've discussed might suggest it. I submit that that doesn't make my results about them devoid of all interest. For one thing, the fact that my criterion gives the result that many views we hold to be flawed are flawed is a reason to accept it. We *want* a test that agrees with our best judgment in large part; what would we do if it contradicted it? For another thing, even though these sorts of views, including totalitarian ones, may not command respect in our circles, it's a known fact that they do command, or have commanded, respect in many others. Why and how they do this are legitimate questions which have philosophical dimensions. After all, if you accept that human beings are rational, as many of us do, and that they desire the good, as is the common opinion in Moral Psychology, it then becomes difficult to explain why they'd accept so many views that seem to be deliberate affronts to reason and goodness. My account can throw light on these facts. The universal statements I discuss are prone to becoming meaningless due to circularity in how their meanings are determined. This circularity in the determination of meanings can be disguised by a parallel circularity in argument, using the universal sentences to support themselves, and the circularity in the former would naturally suggest to those who grasp them dimly the circular argument. Thus, these theories have a built in (bad) argument ready at hand to support them. Moreover, some of these views have resulted in very great harm being done (especially Marxism and Nazi Race Theory,) and if I can either help

to discredit them or further our understanding of them to guard against such harms in the future, it would be a good thing, and, while such merely practical concerns should not be the primary consideration for a philosopher, I hold that, if they can be pursued without compromising our work of theoretical understanding, we have some obligation to do so.

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