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PROPERTIES AND TRUTH: RESPONSE TO RICHARD VALLÉE

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Abstract: I agree with Richard Vallée that predicates like ‘big’, ‘tall’, etc., are comparatives, and that there are no properties of being big, or tall, etc., simpliciter. I also agree that sentence-types are not the primary carriers of truth, and, with one qualification, I too reject the three main assumptions (a)-(c) critically examined by him.

Keywords: Language. Reality. Predication. Properties. Truth.

PROPRIEDADES E VERDADE: RÉPLICA À RICHARD VALLÉE

Resumo: Concordo com Richard Vallée que predicados como ‘grande’, ‘alto’, etc., são comparativos, e que não há propriedades de ser simplesmente grande, ou alto, etc. Concordo também que sentenças-tipo não são os portadores de verdade primários e, com uma qualificação, também rejeito as três suposições principais (a)-(c) examinadas criticamente por ele.

Palavras chave: Linguagem. Realidade. Predicação. Propriedades. Verdade.

I agree with so many of Richard's critical remarks that I wonder why he is addressing them to me—although he does say he is not addressing them to me but to a view of language underlying my views. Thus, I quite agree with Richard that predicates like 'big', 'tall', etc. are comparatives, based on the relational predicates 'bigger-than', 'taller-than', etc., and that there are no properties of being big, or tall, etc., *simpliciter*. I agree that sentence-types are not the primary carriers of truth, and that there is no "straightforward connection between truth of sentences and the world". In fact, with one qualification, I too reject the three main assumptions (a)-(c) he critically examines.

1. TRUTH

It is a mere question of misinterpretation when Richard says I take sentence types as my primary objects of truth, meaning, etc. In the passage on p. 111, to which he refers on p. 499, I am presenting what I take to be the standard view of propositional and predicate logic, which is a view that takes sentence types as primary, and which is a view I oppose.

In fact, from the very beginning of my discussion of truth and denotation in Chapter 1, I make it clear I am *always* talking in context, but as a concession to standard usage in logic I often use the de-contextualized terminology. Thus, in Chapter 1 (p. 61) I say:

I shall say that a sense which individuates an entity (property, object, or state of affairs) denotes that entity, but for linguistic expressions I shall mostly talk of denotation in relation to their *use*—rather than in relation to the expression as such. Nevertheless, one can talk ambiguously of the denotation of a name, or definite description, or predicate, or sentence, and for certain purposes it is convenient to do so.

...

There are many objections to talk of properties, states of affairs, senses, propositions, statements, etc. The general tendency in logic is to talk of truth in connection with sentences and to treat of denotation set-theoretically as a relation between names, predicates, etc., and objects, sets of objects, relations among objects, etc. Although this approach does not seem to me the most natural it provides a common ground for discussion and I shall use it in the next few chapters to illustrate the discussion of various issues.

Whereas Richard prefers to talk about utterances, I normally prefer to talk about statements, and I certainly agree with him that one cannot apply schema (T) to de-contextualized sentences such as ‘Victor is tall’, involving a comparative. In fact, as I make clear in Chapter 7, I am very critical of schema (T) for many other reasons as well. We are thus in agreement in rejecting what he calls “the semantic intuition”.

2. PROPERTIES

Richard begins his discussion of the relationship between one-place predicates and properties with the following characterization of what he calls “the syntactic intuition” (p. 491):

The tradition in philosophy of language assumes that one-place predicates, like “is square” and “is blue”, are echoed in the ontology by properties, like *being square* and *being blue*, and generalizes that assumption to all *prima facie* one-place predicates. On that picture, grasping “is square” is plausibly mastering a function made true by a class of objects, and/or learning what the property of being square is. Following that model, “is tall” is a one-place predicate, and it determines a property, *being tall*. “Is tall” is *prima facie* a context insensitive expression since, as distinct from “I”, its linguistic meaning does not make it react to aspects of context. “Is tall”, hence, determines the same property for all tokens and in all utterances.

Again, although I hold that one-place predicates with well-defined applicability conditions do determine properties as their reference,¹ I quite agree with his rejection of the conclusion for the predicate ‘is tall’. For, as Richard goes on to discuss in the next section, this predicate, being a comparative, does not have well-defined applicability conditions in all contexts. We are thus in agreement in rejecting “the syntactic intuition”—and, given this agreement, “the ontological puzzle” simply does not arise.

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¹ See, e.g., Chateaubriand (2004) and (2007).