

## Re: Tautologies and Empirical Truth

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**From:** patty (pattyNO\_at\_SPAMicyberspace.net)

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Lester Zick wrote:

> *Tautologies and Empirical Truth*

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>

> *In a frank discussion with Wolf Kirchmeir yesterday concerning whether  
> tautologies constitute empirical evidence he took occasion to remind  
> me quite candidly that tautologies are always true. And the moral he  
> drew from this was that tautological truths can't be empirical because  
> empirical observations are always problematic and tautologies are not.*

>

> *Then I got to pondering. It seemed a shame to have something that was  
> always true and not be able to draw some useful information from it.  
> Here was this beacon of universal truth, and we had no use for it. I  
> understood that philosophers and scientists consider tautologies  
> useless despite their universal truth. However, I decided that the  
> final chapter on usefulness of the tautology had yet to be written.*

>

> *Let's suppose we have a tautology, any tautology. And we recognize the  
> universal truth of that tautology. What conclusions can we draw from  
> this?*

>

> *If a tautology is universally true, alternatives to the tautology  
> cannot be true and must be universally false. And, further, this  
> must be true of all tautologies.*

>

> *Consequently, everything including empirical evidence represents a  
> tautology or it cannot be true and must be false.*

>

> *Thus any empirical observation which is problematic must represent  
> part of a tautology. For example, three inches and not three inches or  
> blue and not blue. These are empirical observations and form parts of  
> tautologies or they cannot be problematic and must be false.*

>

> *In point of fact each part of a tautology is an empirical observation,  
> and this is what we mean by an empirical observation despite the  
> conventional interpretation of empirical observations as inherently  
> problematic.*

>

sci.cognitive: Re: Tautologies and Empirical Truth

- > *Further each part of the tautology is subject to evaluation either in*
- > *terms of problematic correctness or in terms of self contradiction. If*
- > *either part of a tautology is self contradictory, it must be false and*
- > *the other part must be universally true whether empirical in*
- > *conventional problematic terms or not.*
- >
- > *In other words, even though tautologies in themselves are not*
- > *problematic and cannot represent empirical observations, the reverse*
- > *is not true and empirical observations can and do represent parts of*
- > *tautologies.*
- >

Well for some interpretation of your words, i think you are skirting dangerously close to rediscovering a bit of wisdom from an eminent 20th century philosopher.

This is the way i see it ...

A truth is stated from some web of belief. Outside of that web it may, or may not be true. The question is whether some agent in the web must sense something outside of the web to determine a truth. For example a person in the web of literate English speakers would say it true that a bachelor is unmarried and male. No one in that web needs to check outside of that web to be quite confident that truth applies in all cases – no matter what.

But outside of that web (literate English speakers) this may not be the case. Let me set a scene. There was an attractive widow and her young daughter named Bernice. The widow was seeking a new husband. Frequently in the presence of Bernice she would ask a man, "Are you a bachelor?" and if he answered yes, she would gladly accept his advances; otherwise she would sternly rebuff him. Now occasionally Bernice would mingle with these same men in the market and on occasion she would be introduced to their wives. Now you can see that from Bernice's web of belief a bachelor may be married or not, you must ask him to find out.

So we see, that whether a truth is analytic or synthetic is totally dependent on your web of belief. Or in your words "even though tautologies in themselves are not contingent and cannot represent empirical observations, the reverse is not true and empirical observations can and do represent parts of a web of belief." ... but i have substituted "contingent" for your "problematic" and "web of belief" for your use of "tautology".

For another discussion please see:

<[http://www.philosophos.com/knowledge\\_base/archives\\_15/philosophy\\_questions\\_1513.html](http://www.philosophos.com/knowledge_base/archives_15/philosophy_questions_1513.html)>

or just read it in the original:

<<http://www.ditext.com/quine/quine.html>>

patty