

Re: Tautologies and Empirical Truth

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.cognitive/2004-10/0817.html>

From: patty (pattyNO_at_SPAMicyberspace.net)

Date: 10/28/04

Date: Thu, 28 Oct 2004 20:33:13 GMT

Lester Zick wrote:

> *On Thu, 28 Oct 2004 16:01:54 GMT, patty <pattyNO@SPAMicyberspace.net>*

> *in comp.ai.philosophy wrote:*

>

>

>>*Lester Zick wrote:*

>>

>>>*On Thu, 28 Oct 2004 01:50:18 GMT, patty <pattyNO@SPAMicyberspace.net>*

>>>*in comp.ai.philosophy wrote:*

>>>

>>>

>>>

>>>>*Lester Zick wrote:*

>>>>

>>>>

>>>>> *Tautologies and Empirical Truth*

>>>>> -----

>>>>>

>>>>>*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.*

>>>>>

>>>>> *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.*

>>>>>

>>>

>>>Yeah, that'll really do a lot of good.

>>>

>>>

>>>

>>>>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".

>>>

>>>

>>>patty, you really need to take that web of belief back to the church
>>>where you bought it and get a refund. It doesn't matter where ideas
>>>originate. It matters where they wind up through demonstration.

>>>

>>

>>If "web of belief" connotes "church" to you, then please substitute
>>"network of tautologies, generalities, and contingent observations" and
>>reread.

>

>

> Oh, no, by all means, use "web of belief". In fact I prefer it. It
> just doesn't matter where your beliefs come from or mine. It's the
> destination that counts and not the source. Whether it comes from
> church or Quine or Wittgenstein is irrelevant to whether it's true or
> false.

>

Okay.

> If you use your web of belief as the standard of truth, you're going
> at the problem backwards.

You must use your own web, or perhaps even some other web if you are capable of that kind of imagination, but you must use some particular web. There just is no universal web in which you can think. Were you to imagine such a web, and were i to imagine such a web; the web you imagine will not be the same web that i imagine. So we are just left with err ... you web or mine.

> Any two-bit philosopher can use his web of
> beliefs as justification for what he believes and most do. It's so
> much easier than proving them true or false in universal terms.
>

If by universal terms, you mean that the proof would apply to *any* web, then i will categorically state that is impossible to do. But if you mean that these terms are universal for a particular web, then what we

are saying is that if you have proved a tautology, then you have proved something *about a particular web*, but not about a world.

>>> *Problematic means contingent.*

>>

>> *Well at least i got that one right :)*

>

>

> *Except there's no reason to change the term I used since it said what*

> *was meant.*

>

Well for me "problematic" carries the connotation of ... err having problems ... but we do not wish to imply any problems with our usage here ... after all there may or may not be any problems. All we wish to imply is that the observations are contingent upon a world being in some particular condition.

Regards.

patty