

Defending the objectivity of ontology

December 4th, 2002

1. Charity and “eligibility” in the theory of interpretation

2. The argument from analyticity

T Any sentence that can be translated as an analytic truth is itself analytic.

H No sentence that logically entails ‘There is something’ is analytic.

C No sentence is analytic unless it can be transformed into a truth of standard logic by replacing predicates with their definitions (correct conceptual analyses).

Suggestion: C applies to the language of the metaphysics room, even though it doesn’t apply to all languages.

3. Problems with the argument from analyticity

Against T: example of aliens whose only word for water is a term of chemistry.

4. “Metaphysical analysis”

T Any sentence that can be translated as an analytic truth is itself metaphysically analytic.

C No sentence is metaphysically analytic unless it can be transformed into a truth of standard logic by replacing predicates with their metaphysical analyses.

5. Empty predicates

Translating ‘phlogiston’

C No sentence is metaphysically analytic unless it can be transformed into a truth of standard logic by replacing predicates with their metaphysical analyses, or replacing empty predicates (like ‘phlogiston’) with arbitrarily chosen logically contradictory predicates.

6. Are Carnapians really Nihilists?

Nihilists should count ‘is part of’ as an empty predicate.

Hence, “Nihilese”—the language the Carnapian initially wanted to interpret the Nihilists as speaking—does after all obey C , unlike the languages imputed to the other tribes.

Thus, if the right interpretation of the metaphysicians is as speaking a language that obeys C , they should be interpreted as speaking Nihilese. So, the metaphysicians who say ‘nothing is [a proper] part of anything’ are right, and the others are wrong!