ON MACKIE'S SOLUTION TO SEMANTIC PARADOXES

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In this paper I am concerned with the solution to some of the paradoxes given by Mackie in his book: *Truth Probability and Paradox* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973).

Mackie says that paradoxical sentences are such that there is no answer to the question of how things are said to be in them (*op. cit.*, see p. 260). Thus, paradoxical sentences do not make statements. A statement is, according to Mackie, the content of an assertion (*op. cit.*, see p. 57); in other words, it is how things are said to be in a sentence (*op. cit.*, see p. 21). Moreover, Mackie says that statements are the truth-bearers and that a sentence can be said to be true when it is used to make a true statement (*op. cit.*, see p. 19). Therefore, when we are concerned with paradoxes the question of their truth value simply does not arise (*op. cit.*, see p. 260).

This would be a completly acceptable point of view only if it were supported with a general account of when a statement is made. Therefore, this account should give us some means for distinguishing a true statement from a false one and both of them from that which is not a statement all. Extrapolating from Mackie, the requirements a sentence must fulfil for making a statement are:

i. to have a referent;
ii. to have a meaning;
iii. that there *could* be something in the world that is as it is said to be in the sentence.

A sentence that fulfils these requirements has a content; that is, it can make a statement.

Moreover, there exists a technique first used by Ryle ("Heterologicality", *Analysis*, XI, 1951, reprinted in M. Macdonald (ed.), *Philosophy and Analysis*, pp. 45-53), for showing how things are said to be in a sentence. Thus, the technique is a means for distinguishing when a statement is made from when it is not. This procedure consists in unpacking the content of any sentence, according to the account given by Mackie of this technique, the sentence " 'The table is black' is true (false)" say, unpacks into

the assertion that things are (not) as they are stated in that sentence to be, i.e. The table is (not) black.

It has been claimed by Mackie (*op. cit.*, see p. 44), that because the procedure of unpacking sentences is a tool for understanding the truth-conditions of each and every sentence, if we showed that paradoxical sentence resist this technique, we would say that they do not make statements.

In fact, some paradoxical sentences unpack in such a way that we will never succeed in finding out how things are stated to be in that sentence. For example, let S be the sentence "S is false"; then "S is false" unpacks into "S is not false", which unpacks into "S is not not false", and so on. In this case, there is no end in the procedure of unpacking because, at each step, we still have a predicate such as "is false" that needs to be unpacked (*op. cit.*, see p. 286).

However, that is just a part of the argument, because the theories underlying the procedure of unpacking have to be shown to be powerful enough to explain the results obtained by the use of the technique. Thus, the problem is to analyse whether or not, using these theories, we can handle paradoxical situations. I believe that the answer should be that we cannot. In this case, even if the procedure of unpacking worked it would be a method in need of explanation. Afterwards, I will show that, in fact, the procedure itself does not work.

Let us suppose we have two different tokens of the same sentence type:

1. # The sentence in the box is not true #

2. The sentence in the box is not true

These two tokens of the same type seem to have the same referent and the same meaning. Nevertheless, the token in the box is paradoxical and, according to the results of the procedure of unpacking, makes no statement; while the other token makes a statement and is true, because it states that the token (1) is not true and this is the case.

Mackie (*op. cit.*, see p. 295) seems to suggest that both tokens could not be used to make any statements. However, the token outside the box satisfies the conditions given by Mackie which a sentence must fulfil for making a statement. That is so since it is at least counterintuitive to say

that regarding the token outside the box there is no question of how things are said to be in it. Thus, Mackie in fact needs to distinguish the truth-conditions for the two tokens.

Because of the requirements asked by Mackie for a sentence to make a statement, he has to show that the token (1) differs from the other one either in its referent or in its meaning. I think that, in fact, Mackie can not characterize the two tokens as different in these features. Mackie says that the paradoxical sentences have a reference (*op. cit.*, see p. 243); therefore, it seems he would agree in saying that those two tokens of the same type, we are concerned with, have the same referent.

On the other hand, some problems arise regarding the question of their meanings. Mackie claims that sentences which have different truth-conditions have different meanings too (*op. cit.*, see p. 36). Of course, this claim needs to be supported by some arguments. Mackie says that "the basic meaning of a sentence as used fixes how things are then said to be" (*op. cit.*, p. 36) in it; while the converse does not universally hold. Moreover, he says that "the truth (or falsity) lies in the agreement (or disagreement) between how things are said to be and how they are." (*op. cit.*, p. 35) Therefore, he claims that the different routes, by means of which we reach the truth or falsity or "the-question-doesn't-arise" conditions of a sentence, count as an explanation of its meaning. (*op. cit.*, see p. 36) In this way, not all the sentences, which have the same conditions, have the same meaning; for example, two tautologies do not express the same meaning when they are built up from different components. In other words, the collapse of meaning into truth is avoided.

All the different routes, therefore, depend on the relevant features of a sentence to determine the meaning it expresses. Mackie seems to say that those features are what constitutes the "internal structure" of a sentence (*op. cit.*, see p. 36). But it is not clear what he means by this concept.

We are concerned with two tokens of the same type; they present the same appearence but, according to Mackie's theory, they should have a different "internal structure". So, we are facing a situation where two different tokens of the same type and have the same referent and are both meaningful, should have different meanings. It would seem that the only feature we are left with for distinguishing their "internal structure" is: one of those tokens is paradoxical, while the other is not. Of course, this is not an explanation but, in fact, it is a description of the problem.

Moreover, the procedure of unpacking itself can not copy such cases as our example. This procedure consists, according to Mackie, of showing how things are stated to be in a sentence. Let us take the two tokens of our example: 1. unpacks into "The sentence in the box is not not true" that unpacks again and again adding one "not" at each step. On the other hand, 2. unpacks into "The sentence in the box is not not true". Obviously, this is not the result we want, nor is it an expression of how things are stated to be in the token outside the box.

Mackie remarks that the procedure of unpacking must not be taken too mechanically (*op. cit.*, see p. 260). In fact, I think that in some cases we are allowed to change the procedure so that it better represents our knowledge of how things are stated. These changes, however, should be viewed as a complex addition that leads to an improvement in that procedure. In other words, if the procedure has to be taken seriously then it should have at least some rules governing it and an inner criterion for recognizing which is its last step.

The two troublesome tokens can be unpacked in a different way so that the results agree with our naive understanding. In this way, 1. unpacks into "'The sentence in the box is not true' is not true", and 2. unpacks into "'The sentence in the box is not true' is not true". Therefore, it seems that we can claim that things are as they are stated to be in the token outside the box.

Usually, an expression, obtained as a result of the application of the procedure, constitutes the last step of that procedure when it does not contain a truth or falsehood predicate. But, I have just shown that there exist some sentences which are not paradoxical that unpack in the same way as the paradoxical ones. That is, if the procedure is taken seriously it has no end in these cases either.

The procedure of unpacking depends on linguistic facts and on reference; therefore, nothing of this kind would be able to explain what happens in those cases similar to the one I have given as an example. In fact, it seems that the only reason to end the unpacking procedure for the token outside the box is that it is not paradoxical. It follows that I have shown why it can not be proved that paradoxical sentences fail to make statements in the way Mackie thinks.

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