BOOK REVIEW


The book under review is a comprehensive treatment of realism in metaphysics and the philosophy of language. The author delineates connections between metaphysical realism on the one hand and various realist tenets in the philosophy of language about the character of truth on the other hand. Metaphysical realism claims that the objects of the external world exist independently of our perceptions and of the way we conceive of them. In the philosophy of language realist conceptions of truth stress the importance of truth for epistemology and the theory of meaning, and insist furthermore on the explanation of truth as a correspondence with facts by having recourse to the concept of reference. The combination of metaphysical realism and realist conceptions of truth advocated by Schantz in the book under review constitutes a particularly strong version of realism.

Influential philosophers of the Anglo-American analytical tradition in the last decades have been attacking this strong version of realism in various ways, and they have criticised all its planks: the doctrine of metaphysical realism, the claims to the functions of truth in epistemology and the theory of meaning, the claim to an explanatory role of reference in a correspondence theory of truth. In particular, Quine has been arguing for the inscrutability of reference and for ontological relativity, and thus has detracted from the correspondence theory of truth and the explanatory role of reference. Davidson has argued – partially by recourse to Quine – for the explanatory redundancy of reference. Exponents of deflationary theories of truth have denied the explanatory function of truth in epistemology and the theory of meaning. Many theoreticians (among them Davidson), going back to an idea of Frege, have used the so-called sling-shot argument against the correspondence theory of truth, and have concluded that an ontology of facts has no explanatory value. For many years now Dummett has been arguing against the explanatory use of truth in the theory of

meaning. The various arguments against metaphysical realism propounded by Putnam have proved particularly influential. Over the years all these attacks against realism have been subject to various heated discussions, but no one until now has undertaken a comprehensive defense of the strong version of realism sketched above. This is the aim of Schantz in the book under review. In pursuing this aim, Schantz restricts himself to realism in metaphysics and the philosophy of language. Therefore he does not discuss issues directly relating to problems of realism in the philosophy of science.

In defending the strong version of realism Schantz proceeds (in 13 chapters) in five stages of argumentation as follows: In the first step he exposes difficulties for deflationist theories of truth. In the second step he argues that the concept of truth has various explanatory functions, above all in the theory of meaning. Then Schantz shows how truth itself can be an object of explanations, in particular of a correspondence-theoretic account which gives truth a foundation with an ontology of facts. The fourth step is a thorough discussion of the antirealist theory of meaning which denies the explanatory function of realist truth in the theory of meaning. The fifth and last step is an extended examination of Putnam’s criticism of metaphysical realism.

Let us take a closer look. In the first two chapters Schantz examines versions of truth-theoretic deflationism, exposes their deficiencies, and confronts them with Tarski’s semantic theory of truth. In this discussion he concludes that Tarski’s theory – in contrast with the deflationary theories – is based on the idea that there is a referential relation between linguistic expression and their objects, and hence can be considered a form of a correspondence theory of truth (49). In chapters III and IV Schantz explains Davidson’s meaning theoretical programm in which truth plays various explanatory roles in connection with the beliefs of people and their use of language. He compares it with Quine’s approach to radical translation, and criticises Davidson’s attitude versus empiricism: Davidson neglects the epistemic role of perception in the formation of our beliefs about external objects. Chapters V–VII discuss the question whether truth itself can be explained by a relation between language and the world. Davidson has countered this idea with the above mentioned sling shot argument. This argument purports to show that there can be no non-trivial correspondences between true sentences and facts. Schantz examines the argument in detail (Chaper V), and criticizes one of its premisses in particular. According to this premiss logically equivalent sentences correspond to the same facts. As the slingshot argument has to establish a connection between truth and the reference of sentences, it must not contain premisses prejudging the issue (155). But the premiss under consideration does exactly that. Having