

Why the “veridic” is not any better than the “liar”*

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Wees Uzelf! zei' ik tot iemand;
Maar hij kon niet – hij was niemand.
(Be yourself—I said to somebody;
But he could not—he was nobody.)

Attributed to Godfried Bomans, a Dutch poet.

The subject of the present essay is a sentence which I shall be calling the “veridic”, namely the sentence: “this sentence is true”. The “veridic” appears strangely barren and empty, *nichtssagend*, as a German would say. I shall try to explain why, and I shall show why the “veridic” is even worse than barren.

To begin with, the “veridic” is not paradox. This distinguishes it from the “liar”, i. e. the sentence “this sentence is false”, which is paradox.¹ The “liar” is paradox in the sense that whatever we assume its truth-value to be, by a simple reasoning we arrive at the conclusion that its truth-value is the opposite to what we just assumed: Suppose it is true, then, since it says it is false and is true, it must be false; suppose it is false, then, since it says so and is false, it must be true.

The “veridic” is not paradox, because the assumption that it is either true or false does not lead to the opposite conclusion. For, if the “veridic” is true, it is true, if not, it is false, that is all. And of course, if the “veridic” is true, then the “veridic” is true or Schubert wrote the quintet called “The Trout” or

*Trento, 27 April 2007, A symposium on Truth and ie, organized by Gianfranco Ferrari under the auspices of the Faculty of Sociology of the Trento University. One important source of inspiration for this essay was Emilio Betti’s *Allgemeine Auslegungslehre...*, not for any particular statement but for the pervading passion in striving for sense and meaning in what is said and written. Another source of inspiration was a conversation with Dr. Thomas Zwenger of the University of Bonn. I asked dr. Zwenger, an excellent knower of Kant, whether the sentences of which the *Critique of Pure Reason* consists were themselves synthetic or analytic, or if synthetic, whether they were a priori or a posteriori. Dr Zwenger answered that the distinction pertained to judgments, i. e. predicative thoughts, not to sentences in the grammatical sense, and that it was far from clear that the *Critique of Pure Reason* contained any judgments at all (all the while it clearly contains very many sentences).

¹This paradox was the starting point of Tarski’s famous investigations into the nature of truth. On this, see the works listed in the References. For a synopsis of various paradoxes on positions taken on them by modern philosophers see Ferrari, *Paradossi*, esp. section 3.1.

Rome is the capital of Italy and so on—this is classical logic. Such conclusions are, maybe, a little boring but logically unimpeachable.

My thesis is, however, that the “veridic” is neither true nor false. This is not, perhaps, a very original, upsetting thesis—none would be, it remains to be the feared, as there are only three to choose among (that the “veridic” is true, that it is false, that it has no truth-value”).² Yet, the reader may, perhaps, find my argument for that non-original thesis worth his while.

The thesis that a sentence has or—much more still, has not—a truth-value may seem poorly motivated, overly programmatic or quite arbitrary if the principles of assigning truth-values to sentences, adopted by whoever is proposing a thesis like that, seem themselves poorly motivated or too programmatic. In the diverse variants of Positivism such principles, appearing obvious to the Positivists themselves but less obvious to others were amply exemplified. This is no place to discuss merits and demerits of all the various principles and axioms on the strength of which philosophers have thought that a truth-value may, or may not be assigned to a sentence. However, my position in this essay is this, that a sentence (conceived as a linguistic structure, such as the “veridic” or the “liar” or such as “Jack Sprat could eat no fat”) cannot have a truth-value (at least neither of the classical truth-values) if it does not express a thought. To put it in an Aristotelian style: Those who say such things as “This sentence is true” (and a similar reasoning could have been, and in fact has been, applied to the “liar”³) seem to be more like plants than like human beings.⁴

I believe that, however useful from a methodological point of view it may be to regard sentences (as linguistic structures) as primary bearers of truth-values, they are not primary, but only secondary and derivative, bearers of truth-values, and the primary bearers are thoughts (*De Interpretatione* I⁵). I am of course aware that this might seem a hopelessly out-moded or old-fashioned position, ‘thoughts’ (note the scoff-quotes) being nowadays almost universally regarded as somehow suspect, ‘weird entities’ and such; I ask the reader, how-

²This solution, applied to the “liar”, and known in the Middle Ages as *cassatio*, has been known at least since Chrysippus’ *Λογικὰ Ζητήματα*. (Basically, Chrysippus says that two statements claiming at the same time something to be and not to be the case “τοῦ σημειωμένου τελέως ἀποπλανώμενα” or “completely deviate from being meaningful”: Crönert, “Λογικὰ Ζητήματα”, p. 561.) See also Mignucci, “The Liar Paradox...”. In the Middle Ages, this solution was in circulation at least since 1225: De Rijk, “Some Notes...”; concerning a XIV century anonymous treatise (by William of Shyreswood?) *De insolubilibus*, where *cassatio* also occurs, it goes like this: “*Cassantes autem dicunt, quod dicens, se dicere falsum, nihil dicit*”, Bocheński, *Formale Logik*, p. 153. This is “probably the correct view” as say Kneale and Kneale (Kneale & Kneale, *The Development... p. 228*) meaning probably that the view is probably considered correct by the anonymous author. *Cassatio* was also contemplated by Paul of Venice in his *Logica Magna* (Kneale & Kneale, *The Development... p. 229*). Among twentieth-century philosophers let us mention Koyré (Koyré, “The Liar”) and Cooper Langford (Langford, ch. 13 in *Symbolic Logic*). A quite recent statement in favour of this idea is to be found in Colloca, *Autoriferimento...*, p. 69.

³For instance by myself: Żelaniec, “New Considerations...”.

⁴Aristotle says somewhere that one who denies the Principle of Contradiction “οὐθὲν [...] λέγει”, says nothing, makes no real statement (*Metaphysics*, Γ, 1008a), and then Aristotle asks rhetorically “τί ἂν διαφερόντως ἔχοι τῶν γε φυτῶν;”, p. 1008b, what makes him different from plants? (“He’s no better than a cabbage”, as Miss Anscombe once put it: Anscombe, “Aristotle”, p. 40.)

⁵“Ἔστι [...] τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθημάτων σύμβολα, καὶ τὰ γραφόμενα τῶν ἐν τῇ φωνῇ”, p. 16a.

ever, to accept my position for the sake of argument. Apart from Aristotle, I could invoke the Stoic idea of a λεκτόν (*dictum, effatum, enuntiatum* in Latin)⁶, the Bolzanian idea of a *Satz an sich*⁷, the Fregean of a *Gedanke*⁸, the Russellian of a proposition⁹, and many other out-moded and old-fashioned ideas of a similar sort, but instead of invoking authorities (which is, deplorably, all too often “a method of proof” in humanities) I prefer to put my idea to the test of actual use.

So let us start the hard test with this. What is a thought? you shall ask somewhat impatiently, and is it, whatever it is, not too flimsy to serve as an object of serious scientific investigation? Well, in a sense it certainly is, I shall answer, because it is a mental being and the mind is ill-suited (for evolutionary reasons?) for dealing with its own affections. And certainly, dealing with petrified products of the mind (Nicolai Hartmann’s *objektivierter Geist*), such as sentences (linguistic structures) has many advantages, for instance that such products are more tangible and more tractable than thoughts.¹⁰ On the other hand, while the premises of a university, its halls, dormitories and libraries are certainly more tangible than the university itself (it too being, in a sense, a mental entity, though unlike in the case of the thought, the minds involved here are many¹¹), none such is the university purely and simply, as we know from Gilbert Ryle.

A thought is, in any case, something directed to a thing, or things, in a very special mode, characteristic of nothing else—except, perhaps, of those signs which (to employ Aristotle’s phrase) are “τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθημάτων σύμβολα” or symbols expressing affections of the soul (or mind, if you will). This mode has been called “intentionality” (the thought itself being called “intention”, when considered in the aspect of that directedness to things¹²) since the Middle Ages¹³, and then again since 1874 when Franz Brentano reintroduced the term in his *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*. It was eagerly adopted by Husserl and his pupils, and has made a brilliant career even in the Anglo-Saxon philosophy, since the Great Linguistic Turn inimical to things mental.¹⁴ The directedness called “intentionality” is *sui generis* and it is useless trying to reduce it to something else; it is also difficult to explain except by examples;

⁶On various Latin translations of that Greek word, as much as on its meanings, see Kneale & Kneale, *The Development...*, pp. 140ff.

⁷*Wissenschaftslehre*, §§ 121ff. A useful and informative study on Bolzano theory of proposition and nominal thought is Textor, *Bolzano...*

⁸Frege, “Der Gedanke”.

⁹Unless, of course, a Russellian proposition is a state of affairs.

¹⁰“The tradition of logic throughout most of this century has been to take sentences as bearers of truth value [...] sentences are more convenient, since they provide fairly concrete and structure objects to use in defining satisfaction and truth”, Barwise & Etchemendy, *The Liar*, p. 9.

¹¹For this see: Searle, *The Construction...*

¹²On the history of “intention” and “intentionality” see Kneale & Kneale, *The Development...*, pp. 229f.

¹³A masterful synthesis of that mediaeval logic can be found in John of St. Thomas’ *Cursus philosophicus* of 1637, for a critical edition see Ioannes a St. Thoma, *Cursus...*. For partial translations see: Ioannes a St. Thoma, “Entia Rationis...”, Ioannes a St. Thoma, *Material Logic*, Ioannes a St. Thoma, *Outlines...*, Ioannes a St. Thoma, *Tractatus...*. For a modern work based largely on John of St. Thomas see Veatch, *Intentional Logic*.

¹⁴See for instance: Searle, *Intentionality*. A well-known prominent adversary of Searle is Barry Smith, whose article “Truth-Maker Realism”, is no less worth consulting in the present context.

its specificity is expressed by the somewhat embarrassed adverb *quodammodo* (in a certain way) which recurs in Aquinas' formulation of the highest principle of his epistemology, "*anima est quodammodo omnia*"¹⁵, the soul—or the mind, if you will—is 'in a certain way' everything.

Thoughts, however, are not all of one mould, that is, thoughts are not just thoughts. They have their grammar, somewhat similar, but characteristically different from the grammar of a language. In the Norwegian national anthem they sing (in the context of the therein professed love of their motherland, Norway): "*vi [...] tenker på vår far og mor*"—we are thinking of our father and mother; now the thought of one's father and mother (Bolzano would have called this nominal thought a *Vorstellung an sich*¹⁶) is different from that that one's father or mother are old, or are a happy couple, or need loving care or some such. The latter affirm or deny¹⁷ something of the parents, while the former refers to them only. Generally, thoughts which are expressed by sentences having, or pretending to have¹⁸, truth-values are different inasmuch as they not only represent something but affirm or deny something about that which they represent. If there is no such affirmation or denial, there is no thought, either.

Finally, there are various ways in which several thoughts can be combined to one "apophantic" thought (if we may borrow a term from Aristotle¹⁹), that is to say, to a thought which, unlike the nominal thought of one's father and mother, has, or can have a truth-value, and both Bolzano and in particular Husserl in his VI *Logical Investigation* had a lot to say about such "grammar of thought".²⁰ For our purposes, however, it will be enough to say that a subject-predicate sentence—such as the "veridic"—affirms, or denies, a property (expressed in the predicate-expression) of the entity for which the subject-expression stands (τι κατὰ τινος, to use Aristotle's language from *De Interpretatione*²¹, or τι ἀπὸ τινος, in the case of negative sentences: something about something).

Now for a sentence to express an apophantic thought it must not just have the appearance of affirming or denying something, but it must do so in fact. Clearly, a 'sentence' (scoff-quotes) like "Meindarts are bulkkrums", although to a foreigner might look like an English apophantic sentence, is none: it does not knit together any partial intentions in such a way as to affirm the property of

¹⁵*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 14, a. 1, c., q. 16, a. 3, c., *De Veritate*, q. 24, a. 10 ad 2, *Sententia De anima*, b. 2, lesson 5, n. 6. This "*quodammodo*" only echoes Aristotle's "πῶς" from *De Anima*, III, 8: "ἡ ψυχὴ τὰ ὄντα πῶς ἐστὶ πάντα" (p. 431b), but at other places Aristotle is less fussy and quite flatly asserts the (intentional, as we should say today) identity of the mind and the thing, e. g. *De Anima*, III, 5: "τὸ αὐτό ἐστὶ ἡ κατ' ἐνέργειαν ἐπιστήμη τῷ πράγματι" (p. 430a). "ἡ κατ' ἐνέργειαν ἐπιστήμη" may be understood as "the contents of an act of knowing" (as distinct from habitual and dispositional knowledge).

¹⁶*Wissenschaftslehre*, §§ 47ff.

¹⁷Well, affirm in the examples given, but the thought could just as well have been that father and mother are no longer middle-aged, still less young, and such.

¹⁸One highly instructive study concerning the question when such pretensions may be justified and how is Lorini, *Il valore...*

¹⁹*De Interpretatione*, *passim*, e. g. p. 17a: λόγος ἀποφαντικός.

²⁰And so had, needless to say, mediaeval logicians, such as Peter D'Ailly and others; see Kneale & Kneale *The Development...*, p. 230f.

²¹*De Interpretatione*, VI, p. 17a. A phrase which Ernst Tugendhat made the title of his study of "Aristotle's basic concepts", as it will be recalled.

being a bulkrum of meindarts, because there are no such partial intentions in the first place; there are but *flatūs vocis*, such as “meindart” or “bulkrum”. But neither does “John will mend his stockings yesterday”, or “This stick is longer than” express an apophantic thought, because, although the several intentions contained in them are no worse than that of our father and mother from the Norwegian national anthem, they do not have the right “categorical form”, as would call it the Husserl of the VI *Logical Investigation*.²² Their grammar is wrong, and therefore, even though we know how to think the several nominal thoughts contained in them, we do not know, nor can we conceivably know, how to think the apophantic thought purportedly expressed by the sentence as a whole.²³ And if we do not know how to think the thought, it remains unthought, in other words, there is no thought, nor can there conceivably be any. A sentence like the Chomskian “Colorless green ideas sleep furiously”²⁴ does, by contrast, have the right categorical form, and it looks as if it affirmed something, but in fact it does not, for we know that ideas (in the sense intended here) cannot be green (in the sense intended here) and cannot sleep (again, in the sense intended here), nor can sleeping (in the sense intended here) be done—by those lucky creatures who, as distinct from ideas, *can* sleep—furiously (again, in the sense intended here). When we try to actually think the thought that is pretendedly expressed in that sentence we find that we do not know how to go about it, and in particular, how to connect the partial intentions of “colorless”, “ideas”, “sleeping” etc. in a coherent whole. This sentence is like a ‘mathematical formula’ (again, scoff-quotes) such as “ $4=1/0$ ” which only looks like one.²⁵ In certain other cases, it is not, perhaps, as immediately clear that a sentence does not express a thought, for instance in the case of “When it is here five p. m., on the Sun it is five p. m. too”²⁶. It takes some reflection to realise that it makes really no sense to ascribe our time-measuring conventions to the Sun. Such sentences (in the merely grammatical sense) do

²²A further example is furnished by the slogan with which a chain-store operating also in Poland keeps advertising itself: “Nie jesteśmy obojętni”, we are not indifferent.

²³Not always wrong grammar annihilates thought: sometimes it is a means to express a thought that one is unwilling to express explicitly, for instance in German they sometimes say “*er wurde gegangen*” which, although ungrammatical, expresses by this very token the thought of “he was fired under the pretence that he quit himself of his own accord”.

²⁴Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures...*, p. 15. Other senses could, of course, be given to the words in question so that the sentence will, after all, come out as expressing a thought, and maybe quite a trivial one at that, for instance “unimaginative environmentalist ideas are unpopular”. For a discussion of this entertaining and instructive topic see:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colorless_green_ideas_sleep_furiously.

²⁵“Why not like $\sqrt{-1}$, which once was a horrendum and then became a respectable denizen of the realm of mathematical formulas?” you may ask somewhat venomously. Because, I shall reply, this symbol did not seem to make sense even to those, like Tartaglia or Cardano (in the context of the discovery of the formula for solving cubic equations, discovered by Tartaglia and named after Cardano), who were led, by the logic of their reasonings to use it first, but later Bombelli (in his *L’Algebra* of 1572) showed that it did, in fact, make and have sense within the framework of abstract algebra; later, these by Descartes so-called “imaginary” numbers were given geometrical interpretation, by Wessel the Dane, Buée, Argand, and Gauß; see v. d. Waerden, *A History of Algebra*, pp. 60f., Alten, *4000 Jahre Algebra*, pp. 255–261, 263–266, 306ff. Today, imaginary number are not just part of pure mathematics but also of mathematical applications. See virtually any textbook on the history of mathematics for this. “ $4=1/0$ ” by contrast does not yet make sense and, as distinct from Cardano’s negative square radicands, does not have any use even as a theoretical fiction.

²⁶Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 350.

express, if they express anything at all, at best inchoate would-be or would've-been thoughts, or else they are poetry, or a brainless, parrot-like claptrap²⁷ or gobbledygook, or verbal smoke-screen raised to conceal one's real thoughts or thoughtlessness²⁸.

Armed with such—self-evident, to a large extent—considerations we can now ponder the question whether the “veridic” expresses a thought.

Being a rather simple (as far as its surface-grammar is concerned, at least) subject-predicate sentence the “veridic” ought to—in order to express a thought—deny or affirm “something of something”, τι κατὰ/ἀπὸ τινος, and the first “something” is easily identified, because it is the “veridic” itself. But what about the property that it purports to predicate (affirm or deny) about itself?²⁹ To this simple question the “veridic” has an equally succinct answer: It is the property of being true, which it affirms of itself.

This answer is certainly grammatically correct (again, on the surface-grammar level), yet, if one is to understand the thought purportedly expressed in this answer, one must recall what the thought expressed by the adjective “true” is. What property is being thought whenever we say or hear the word “true” not in parrot-like manner, but intelligently? Is it, for instance, the same property as is expressed in the phrase “a four-word sentence” (the “veridic” being, beyond any doubt, a four-word sentence, at least in English)? No, we know well that it is not. When we think of sentences true (or false) in the sense of this adjective here intended we think of such sentences as are characterised by a certain correspondence (or the lack thereof), adequacy or congruency with reality.³⁰ This correspondence is quite *sui generis*,³¹ and it is futile to try to reduce it to some other kind of correspondence, but roughly speaking it consists, in the case of subject-predicate sentences, in the thing for which the subject-term stands having the property that the predicate-term

²⁷Such was all religious discourse to one personage in Aldous Huxley's novel *Chrome Yellow*. Here we touch upon the difficult problem of background knowledge and beliefs as well as other presuppositions which one must satisfy to be in the position to think thoughts expressed in certain sentences. Considering such issues, though, would lead us too far afield, and needlessly so, because we are dealing here with sentences only which do or do not express thoughts whatever beliefs and knowledge their hearers or readers have.

²⁸Sometimes, to be fair, sentences which do not seem to express a thought are abortive results of an attempt to render a difficult thought in a different wording or a different language. For instance, this passage from Alcman (Page, *Alcman*, p. 16): “ὄρω F' ὅτ' ἄλιον, ὄνπερ ἄμιν Ἀγιδὸ μαρτύρεται φάνην” (ll. 5–8). Horst Rüdiger, a German translator, quotes two translations: “*ich sehe auf sie wie die Sonne, die uns Agido anruft zu scheinen*” and “*ich seh sie wie die Sonne, die Agido zum Zeugen ruft, es uns zu zeigen*” and adds: “*ich gestehe, daß ich beiden Übersetzungen keinen Sinn abgewinnen kann*”, that is, “I admit that I can find no sense in either translation” (Rüdiger, *Griechische Lyriker*, p. 302). May the reader try for himself—I shall not try to translate either translation into English. Rüdiger's own translation is “*Doch ich besinge die strahlende Agidó: der Sonne gleicht sie, und rühmende Zeugin des Sonnenlichtes ist Agidó*”. Rüdiger, *Griechische Lyriker*, p. 83.

²⁹It will be worth noting that the self-referentiality here involved is, in fact, spurious. If there is a thought (even an inchoate one) expressed by the “veridic”, it is not about itself, but about the sentence. “Itself” is here an abbreviation for “the sentence in which this thought is expressed”.

³⁰Aristotle: “[T]ὸ [...] [λέγειν] τὸ ὄν εἶναι καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν μὴ εἶναι ἀληθές”, *Metaphysics*, Γ, VII, p. 1011b. Aquinas: “[V]eritas [est] adaequatio intellectus et rei, secundum quod intellectus dicit esse quod est vel non esse quod non est”, *Summa contra gentiles*, b. I, ch. 59, no. 2. Similar formulations in Aquinas' *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. I, a. 1., c.

³¹As is the relation of intentionality, *vide supra*, and could, in fact, be characterised as intentional correspondence.

stands for (or not having it, in the case of negative sentence). Thus, for the claim that the “veridic” is true to be intelligible, the “veridic” must be taken ascribe to, or to deny of, itself a certain property and if fact to have it, or not have it, respectively.

Leaving aside the question if the “veridic” really has (or has not) the property which it pretends to ascribe to, resp. to deny of, itself (it has various properties, such as for instance being a four-word sentence and so on, and if the one that it ascribes to itself is not among these then it will be false, at worst, and similarly, for not having a property) we turn to the question if the “veridic” really ascribes to (or denies of) itself a property. Note well: not “what property it ascribes to (denies of) itself” because this question we have pondered already, and now we are trying to understand the answer that the “veridic” itself seems to carry, but “if it ascribes to (denies of) itself a property at all”.

Well, it obliquely says that it does and that it does so rightly, i. e. in such a way as to secure the intentional correspondence between what is ascribed to the “veridic” and what the “veridic” is.

However, one cannot ascribe to (or deny of) oneself a property, as I propose must be evident, neither directly nor (still less) obliquely by merely *saying* that one is ascribing to (or denying of) oneself a property (unless, of course, this is taken to mean: “the property of having a property”, but this is not what the “veridic” is saying about itself.)

To understand this, not better, because this is hardly possible, but maybe a little more vividly, let us suppose that the “veridic” does not merely express a thought, but is a mind in its own right (a *substantia mentalis* rather than just an *affectio substantiae*) whose whole mental life is exhausted in thinking the thought it pretends to express. It then would say: “I am right in ascribing to (denying of) myself a property”. We should then ask humbly: “Let us understand that by telling us where and when you have ascribed to (denied of) yourself a property, and what property that was”. To this, the “veridic” would answer: “Why, the property of rightly ascribing to (denying of) myself a property: I am *hereby* rightly ascribing to (denying of) myself a property”. But it is evident that there is no, nor can conceivably be any, property of rightly ascribing to (denying of) oneself a property if that latter property is in no way specified, not even hinted at, and not left to be gathered from the context. Nor is it possible to ‘hereby’ ascribe to (deny of) oneself a property even if this is not nested in the claim that one is doing so rightly. A sentence like “This sentence is saying [affirming or denying] something of itself” is like a one-thought mind saying: ‘I am hereby ascribing to/denying of myself a property’. It is evident that in such ‘sentences’ (note the scoff-quotes) no properties are ascribed to anything, let alone to themselves, and that they are like saying “I am hereby giving you the name” (not: “I am hereby giving you the name Eva” or such but simply “I am hereby giving you the name, full stop”) or “this stick is longer than (full stop)” where there is no name that is ‘hereby’ being given and nothing which the stick is supposed to be longer than.³²

³²Since the sentence [1] “This saying is affirming/denying something of itself” does not express a thought, nothing will be won by denying it—“not” being, after all, a *logical* connective, the resulting sentence will not possess any truth-value either. It would read: [2] “This sentence is

From where I conclude that the “veridic” does not really ascribe to, or deny of itself a property and hence does not really affirm (or deny, but it does not claim to be denying) anything of itself, and hence does not express a thought, and hence, finally (under my Aristotelian premis that thoughts, not sentences, are primary bearers of truth-value) does not have a truth value.

It is important to realize that the claim (to be true) that the “veridic” raises about itself is not unintelligible just because the property which it ascribes (or rather: looks like ascribing, pretends to ascribe) to itself is somehow vague, or epistemologically inaccessible, or too difficult to assess for some technical reasons, or the like. Rather, the property does not exist and cannot exist, because, for its existence a certain two-term relation would have to obtain, but does not obtain and cannot obtain, since one of its one term turns out to be another two-term relation, one term of which, again, turns out to be a two-term relation, and so on, in infinity. Therefore, I conclude, no property is here being assigned. Again, to make things clear: The “veridic” is not ascribing to itself a non-existent property, a property which, say, is not instantiated by the “veridic” itself or even at all, such as for instance, being squarely round; it, much rather, is not ascribing to itself, appearances notwithstanding, any property at all.

The “veridic” is like a check such that when you try to cash it you receive another check, which you again get another check for and so on, in infinity. Such a check would not be a real, true check. Or, somewhat closer to the subject-matter of this essay: the “veridic” is like a sentence saying “this sentence is similar to (full stop)”, “this sentence faithfully represents (full stop)”, “this sentences is congruous with (full stop)”. Such examples are dangerous inasmuch as they may be taken to suggest that being true is a matter of similarity or faithful representation. Yet, the abstract structure (of the failure to ascribe a property to oneself) is the same in these examples and in the “veridic”.

It is instructive to realise that things would have been otherwise had the “veridic” contained an ever so slight suggestion as to what it ascribes to itself

neither affirming nor denying anything of itself”, and so it would—in a Wittgensteinian fashion—show on its face that does not express an apophantic thought, for all such thoughts either affirm or deny something of something. But it will be true to say [3] “The sentence «This sentence is affirming/denying something of itself» is not true”, not because inserting the “not” into [1] (and distributing it over disjunction in accordance with De Morgan’s laws) will make it true, but because [1] is just an empty string or words, a sentence merely in the grammatical sense of the word “sentence” and not at all in the order of things that can be true or false. This being so, inserting negation into [1] and distributing it according to De Morgan’s laws is illegitimate. At the same time, one cannot help having the impression that [2] is true, for, on hearing and understanding it verbally one is inclined to sigh and say: “This sentence is neither affirming or denying anything of itself? No dear, it certainly isn’t” creating thus a verbal coincidence and agreement between the sentence in question and what one is oneself (rightly) negating of it. This verbal agreement gives rise, in its turn to a logical (not optical) illusion as if the sentence in question, [2] were true, and consequently, as if [1] were false, and not deprived of truth-value, as I have maintained. But one says “No dear, it” ([2]) “certainly isn’t” because one sees that what is here meant by “it”, i. e. [2], being the result of an illegitimate assertion of a logical connective into a sentence (in the linguistic sense) not having a truth-value, is itself deprived of a truth-value, i. e. does not express an apophantic thought and therefore is not even in the market for affirming or denying anything of itself. The illusion that [2] is true would not arise if “it” had been a sentence (in the merely grammatical sense) like “this sentence is not meindarting” or “colorless ideas do not sleep furiously”; here, too, we could have sighed and said: “no dear, it isn’t” or “no dear, they don’t” without committing ourselves to the position that the sentence “this sentence is meindarting” or “colorless ideas do sleep furiously”, respectively, is false.

in order for its claim to be true to be intelligible. For instance, the “veridic” could have read, not “this sentence is true”, but, for instance, “this sentence is true in that it ascribes to it the property of having a property.” This modified “veridic” is still very barren and one is hard put to think up a use for it, yet it is at least comprehensible—and, in addition, it is empirically true, since the sentence does, in fact, seem to have various properties, such as for instance, that it is barren, comprehensible, English, and others. Or: “This sentence is true in that it claims of itself to be comprehensible” or “This sentence is true in that it claims to be now being understood by me” and so on. All of these are not just empty forms of sentences or strings of words which look like sentences—much rather, they are sentences that express thoughts, however useless or weird these thoughts might, rightly or wrongly, seem to be. But the “veridic” in the original form does not say anything like that, and so, it is not just barren—it is not a true sentence (in the eidetic sense of the adjective “true” distinguished by Conte³³).

Concluding (“unscientific”) remarks

I believe to have shown that the “veridic” is not true, not because it is false, but because it is simply, as not expressing a thought, not at all in the order of things which can be true or false (in the logical sense of “true”, as distinguished by Conte.)

A similar reasoning would have shown that the “liar” is not true (or false), either³⁴. This conclusion 1. has been known since the Middle Ages as the *cassatio* solution of the Liar-paradox, the solution held “probably correct” by Kneale and Kneale in their history of logic.³⁵

I have reached my conclusion without the detour of a *logische Syntax der Sprache* analysis, and without issuing any prescriptions as to what may, and what must not, be said in ordinary language. This is where I differ from Tarski, but on the whole I suspect that Tarski, had he but seen it fit to study the “veridic” would have found that it (the “veridic”) must not be said, for reasons analogous to those for which he found the “liar” must not be said. I also am saying then neither may be said, however, not because one must not talk about sentences formulated in a language in that very same language, but because neither expresses a thought, however barren and inane (such as “this sentence has at least one property”) and thus neither has a place in rational discourse (maybe in poetry? journalism? politics? general mountebankery?³⁶)

Moreover, I surmise that my result is by and large concurrent with another result by Tarski³⁷, namely, that the predicate “(is) true” is not definable within the language to sentences formulated in which it should be applicable. This

³³See Conte, “Tre sensi...”, p. 1005f. As an example suffice this: “*Una teoria non falsificabile non è una vera teoria*”, p. 1006. For our purposes this example will suffice: An uncashable check is not a true check.

³⁴I believe to have shown it in my article mentioned in footnote 3, but the reasoning, inspired by certain ideas by Mackie, *Truth...*. However, my initial assumption was, in that paper, that sentences (as linguistic entities) were primary bearers of truth-values.

³⁵Kneale & Kneale, *The Development...* p. 228.

³⁶Such as the slogan “We are not indifferent”, see note 22.

³⁷See Postscript of his “Wahrheitsbegriff”.

thesis would require a much more in-depth and detailed study than what was possible within the framework of this essay.

I also surmise that a similar reasoning would resolve two similar “paradoxes”, both formulated by Conte: the erotetic paradox: “Is the answer to this question negative?” and the command paradox “Do not carry out my command!”³⁸.

To the Wittgensteinian adage: “A proposition cannot possibly assert of itself that it is true”³⁹ one must add: inasmuch as the sentence does not say in any way indicate what property it ascribes to itself in order for the claim “*daß er wahr sei*” to be at all intelligible. A sentence like “This sentence is true inasmuch as it says of itself that it is English” is, we have seen, true, and says so of itself without any self-destructive effects.

One avenue of research, in the present context, which may, but need not, eventually invalidate my methodology and/or results is that proposed by Barwise and Etchemendy in their *Liar*⁴⁰, whose fundament is the concept of a non-well-founded set (or a hyperset). A non-well-founded set is, in a way, like the claim “This sentence is true” without there being anything ascribed to, or denied of this sentence, in relation to which the claim could at all be intelligible: it is a set without a “ground-floor”, a basic level of elements which are not, in their turn, sets of other elements of the set at issue. But if my methodology and/or results can in this way be in fact invalidated and/or subverted remains to be seen.⁴¹

Some people have thought that the famous Löb theorem⁴² from the area of provability logic:

for any formula P of Peano Arithmetic, if it is provable that “if P is provable then P” then P is provable.

is equivalent to the “veridic”. But, first, the issue here is provability, not truth, and, second, technically, the protasis says not: P is provable, but the Gödel number corresponding to P has a certain arithmetic property interpretable, in the metalanguage, as “being provable”. Besides, the whole issue concerns the language of Peano Arithmetics, not ordinary language in which the “veridic” is formulated. But the matter, as I also suggested in my “New Considerations” would bear longer scrutiny.

From the point of view of medieval logic, the “veridic” offends against two principles: i. that there can be no second intentions without first intentions on

³⁸It could seem that No. 458 of the *Philosophical Investigations* by Wittgenstein (“An order orders its own execution”) blocks the possibility of analyzing the command version of the “veridic” along the lines proposed here. But a short reflection on the contents of No. 458 suffices to establish that it does not. Wittgenstein refers to ‘real commands’, such as “soldier, rest!”. A very valuable contribution to the study of self-reference in commands is Colloca, *Autoriferimento...*

³⁹*Tractatus*, 4. 442.

⁴⁰Barwise & Etchemendy, *The Liar*.

⁴¹On p. 93 of their work the authors claim that the “veridic” or the “Truth-Teller”, as they call it, is “true in some maximal models”, whatever that means, and false in others. I am not sure if their methodology is not biased in favour of interpretable—but not yet interpreted and not endowed with a ‘natural’ interpretation—formal sign-systems or calculi, which would make their enterprise orthogonal to mine.

⁴²See, for instance, Boolos, *The Logic...*, p. 56. Barwise & Etchemendy (in *The Liar*, p. 23) think that the Löb theorem presents a paradox and that it is not identical but related to that presented by the “liar”.

which they are founded⁴³, and ii. that there can be no intentional relation of itself to itself, or that “no sign can signify just itself and nothing else”⁴⁴. But I did not wish to introduce this terminology and these principles, in this essay, for fear of being “overly programmatic” and needlessly so.

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⁴³On “second intentions” see Ioannes a St. Thoma, “Entia Rationis...”, pp. 395-413, Koridze, “Intentionale Grundlegung...”.

⁴⁴Veatch, *Intentional Logic*, p. 412.

⁴⁵References to Aristotle and Bolzano by title and page number and/or chapter number.

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