Meaning and Semantics


Strawson (1952) observes, concerning what he calls statement-making sentences, ‘To know the meaning of a sentence of this kind is to know under what conditions someone who used it would be making a true statement; to explain the meaning is to say what these conditions are.’ In this essay I want to consider whether such a connection between truth and meaning tells us anything about the nature of meaning or only tells us something about the nature of truth. More specifically, I shall be concerned with the question whether a theory of truth for a language can tell us something about meaning that is not revealed by a method for translating that language into ours. By a theory of truth for a language, I mean a formal theory that implies a statement of truth conditions for every sentence in the language. My question is whether such a theory sheds light on meaning.

The question arises because theories of truth for artificial languages, containing one or another device, often do seem to illuminate meaning. The truth functional analysis of sentential connectives seems to determine the meaning of those connectives. The Frege-Tarski analysis of quantification, which culminates in Tarski’s (1956) theory of truth for quantificational languages, appears to give an account of the meaning of the quantifiers. Kripke’s (1963) semantics for modal logic and Stalnaker’s (1968) analysis of the conditional, both concerned with defining truth conditions in terms of possible worlds, seem to tell us something
about meaning (even if not everything we might want to know). Similarly for
Davidson's (1967a) analysis of the logical form of action sentences, which
explains truth conditions in terms of events. In these cases a formal theory of truth
seems to tell us something about meaning that no mere translation scheme could
reveal. That is no doubt why there is a use of the term ‘semantics’ among
logicians simply to mean a theory of truth in this sense for a language. So, there is
empirical evidence that semantics (in this sense) sheds light on meaning.

On the other hand, it is not obvious why. As far as I can see, nothing in the
extensive recent discussion of this subject explains why the theories of truth I
have mentioned should shed any sort of light on meaning in the way that they do.
At the end of this essay, I will suggest a way in which a formal theory of truth can
be relevant to the meaning of certain expressions; but, if I am right, the relevance
of such a theory to meaning is much more indirect and less central than many
philosophers have supposed.

11.1 A Theory of Truth as a Theory of Meaning

I begin by considering the views of three philosophers who have suggested that a
theory of meaning might take the form of a theory of truth—Donald Davidson,
David Wiggins (who, however, has doubts about this, as I shall note below), and
David Lewis. I start with Davidson, who has argued in a number of places that a
theory of meaning should take the form of a formal theory that satisfies a
‘convention T,’ borrowed from Tarski. Roughly speaking, the theory is to imply
all relevant instances of the schema ‘s is true if and only if p,’ where what
replaces ‘s’ names a sentence and what replaces ‘p’ is that very sentence or a
translation of that sentence into the metalanguage in which the theory of truth is stated. According to Davidson (1967), such a theory of truth can be a theory of meaning since ‘to give truth conditions is a way of giving the meaning of a sentence. To know the semantic concept of truth for a language is to know what it is for a sentence—any sentence—to be true, and this amounts, in one good sense we can give to the phrase, to understanding the language.’

Wiggins (1972) advocates a similar thesis. He argues that everyone must, accept the following ‘minimum contention’. ‘Any satisfactory theory of meaning... must entail the following proposition: To know the sense of an indicative sentence s is to know some condition p which is true if and only if s is true and which is the designated condition for s.’

Similarly, in the following passage Lewis (1971) complains about theories of meaning that do not mention truth conditions.

My proposals concerning the nature of meanings will not conform to the expectations of those linguists who conceive of semantic interpretation as the assignment to sentences and their constituents of compounds of ‘semantic markers’ or the like. Semantic markers are symbols: items in the vocabulary of an artificial language we may call Semantic Markerese. Semantic interpretation by means of them amounts merely to a translation algorithm from the object language to the auxiliary language Markerese. But we can know the Markerese translation of an English sentence without knowing the first thing about the meaning of the English sentence: namely, the conditions under which it would be true. Semantics with no treatment of
truth conditions is not semantics. Translation into Markerese is at best a substitute for real semantics, relying either on our tacit competence (at some future date) as speakers of Markerese or on our ability to do real semantics at least for the one language, Markerese. Translation into Latin might serve as well, except insofar as the designers of Markerese may choose to build into it useful features—freedom from ambiguity, grammar based on symbolic logic—that might make it easier to do real semantics for Markerese than for Latin.

On the other hand, many philosophers and linguists do not seem to believe that a theory of meaning must involve a theory of truth in any way that is important for the theory of meaning. Of course, everyone would agree that there is some connection between truth and meaning, since whether a sentence is true depends on its meaning. But not everyone would conclude that a theory of meaning should take the guise of a formal theory of truth. There is no suggestion that such a theory of truth might provide a theory of meaning in (Katz & Postal, 1966), which Lewis refers to. Nor does any such suggestion appear in (Katz & Fodor, 1964) or (Grice, 1956).

Even where philosophers explicitly concede the obvious connection between truth and meaning, they do not always suppose that the connection illuminates the theory of meaning. In his comments on (Wiggins, 1972), Alston (1972) concedes that linguistic rules which give meaning to certain sentences may cite their truth conditions; but he evidently takes this point to have limited significance. And when he developed his own theory in an early introductory text (Alston, 1964),
which also surveyed what he took to be the important philosophical theories of meaning, he nowhere mentioned the view that a theory of meaning might be presented as a formal theory of truth. Presumably he did not think that this is one of the important philosophical theories of meaning.

I began this paper with a quotation from Strawson (1952), ‘To know the meaning of a sentence of [a statement-making] kind is to know under what conditions someone who used it would be making a true statement; to explain the meaning is to say what these conditions are.’ But (Strawson, 1974) is an attack, with special reference to Davidson's views, on the idea that a formal theory of truth could be a theory of meaning.

In this light of such disagreement, it is appropriate to ask what reasons can be given for the supposition that a formal theory of truth—a formal ‘semantics’—for a language could be a theory of meaning for that language that reveals anything more about meaning than a translation procedure would. There is, of course, the empirical evidence that I have already mentioned. Partial theories of truth for certain portions of language do seem to shed light on meaning which mere translation does not. But this evidence does not conclusively establish that a theory of truth is directly relevant to a theory of meaning; perhaps its relevance is indirect. In any event, we want to know why a theory of truth should tell us something about meaning.

11.2 Arguments for Truth Conditional Semantics

Three sorts of argument have been given for the thesis that a formal theory of truth should tell us about meaning. There is, first, an argument that the thesis
follows from the fact that knowing the meaning of certain sentences is knowing their truth conditions. Second, there is an argument that appeals to an analogy from what is expected of a theory of meaning and what is expected of a theory of truth. And, third, there is an argument that the normal use of language in communication rests on a background of conventions that correlate sentences with truth conditions. I will discuss each of these arguments in turn and will eventually be led to give my own positive account.

11.2.1 The Argument from Knowledge of Meaning

The first argument might be put like this: ‘For certain sentences, anyway, to know their meanings is to know their truth conditions and to know their truth conditions is to know their meanings. So, the meanings of these sentences are their truth conditions, and a theory of truth that gives the truth conditions of these sentences amounts to a theory of meaning.’

Two replies can be given to this argument. First, it can be said that whatever is correct about the redundancy theory of truth is sufficient to account for why knowing meaning is knowing truth conditions. Second, it can be said that to specify meaning simply by specifying truth conditions would not seem to require a full-fledged theory of meaning; it would require only a translational theory that specifies the meaning of an expression by providing another expression with the same meaning. Let me elaborate these replies.

11.2.1.1 The Redundancy Theory of Truth

The first reply points to the fact that one can take it to be a remark about the nature of truth, rather than meaning, that knowledge of meaning is knowledge of
truth condition for certain sentences. ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white; and similarly for many other sentences. To understand the meaning of the word ‘true’ is to understand at least that much. That is what is correct about the redundancy theory of truth.

So, if you understand the sentence ‘snow is white’, that is, if you know what the sentence means, and you also understand what truth is, then you can figure out what the truth conditions of the sentence ‘snow is white’ are; and similarly for other sentences. But the point has to do with what ‘true’ means, not with what ‘means’ means. That is the first reply to the argument that to know meaning is to know truth conditions.

11.2.1.2 Translational Theory of Meaning

The second reply suggests that there is a sense in which a theory that would explain meaning in terms of truth conditions would be open to Lewis's objection to Katz and Postal's theory of semantic markers. Lewis says, you will recall, ‘But we can know the Markerese translation of an English sentence without knowing the first thing about the meaning of an English sentence: namely the conditions under which it would be true.’ Similarly, there is a sense in which we can know the truth conditions of an English sentence without knowing the first thing about the meaning of the English sentence. To borrow David Wiggins's (1972) example, we might know that the sentence ‘All mimsy were the borogroves’ is true if and only if all mimsy were the borogroves. However, in knowing this we would not know the first thing about the meaning of the sentence, ‘All mimsy were the borogroves’.
The truth theorist will respond that he envisions stating truth conditions in a metalanguage that is already completely understood. If the sentence, ‘All mimsy were the borogroves’ is not antecedently understood, it will not be part of this metalanguage, and, if its truth conditions are to be given, it must be translated into terms that are antecedently understood. But then it is not clear how the theory of truth can say anything more about meaning than a straightforwardly translational theory that gives the meanings of sentences in one language by giving translations of those sentences into a language that is antecedently understood. Lewis complains that Katz and Postal give a translational theory of this sort and that they must therefore rely on a tacit and unexplained competence in Markerese; someone who explains meaning in terms of truth conditions similarly relies on a tacit and unexplained competence in the metalanguage.

11.2.2 Argument from Analogy

Davidson (1967) argues that a theory of meaning should imply results of the form, ‘s means p,’ where what replaces ‘s’ names a sentence of the object language and what replaces ‘p’ is that sentence itself or its translation into the metalanguage. Davidson observes that such a condition is similar to Tarski’s convention T, which requires of a theory of truth that it imply relevant instances of ‘s is true if and only if P’.

It is easy to see that a theory of meaning in this sense is equivalent to a formal (infinitely axiomatizable) theory of translation. Suppose that we have a formal procedure for translating a language L into our language. Suppose in particular that we have a recursive procedure for recognizing the relevant instances of ‘s (in
L) translates into our language as t’. Then we can easily formulate a recursive procedure for recognizing relevant instances of ‘s (in L) means p’ or ‘s (in L) is true if and only if p’ (where what replaces ‘s’ is the same name of a sentence as that which replaced ‘s’ in the previous schema and what replaces ‘p’ is the sentence named by what replaces ‘t’ in the previous schema). Then we can treat each of the instances of one of the latter schemas as axioms in a formal theory of meaning or a formal theory of truth, since each of the infinitely many axioms in the theory will be formally specifiable and recognizable. Similarly, given a formal theory of truth or a formal theory of meaning in this sense, we can easily state a formal theory of translation.

Now, the light that is shed on meaning by the theories of truth I have mentioned, of Tarski, Kripke, Stalnaker, and Davidson, is not due merely to the fact that those theories tell us how to translate sentences of the object language into the metalanguage; so Davidson's analogy gives us no explanation of the fact that these formal theories of truth shed the sort of light they do on meaning.

Perhaps that is why Davidson no longer takes the interest for meaning of a theory of truth to lie only in the T sentences, ‘s is true if and only if p’. (Davidson, 1970) also emphasizes the recursion clauses in a finite theory of truth that implies those T sentences. The unilluminating theories of truth that are equivalent to theories of translation are infinite theories in which all the T sentences are treated as axioms. The theories of truth that do shed light on meaning are finite theories. Our current difficulty is that we do not understand why this should be so. Why should we expect a finite theory of truth to shed light on meaning? Is it just an
accident that the theories in question (Tarski’s etc.) shed such light? Is it possible that these theories only seem to shed light on meaning? I will return to those questions later.

11.2.3 Argument from Communicative Conventions

The third argument that I want to consider asserts that normal linguistic communication exploits conventions that correlate sentences and truth conditions. Lewis (1969) gives a very clear statement of the argument. In brief, he argues that a theory of meaning for a language spoken in some community must be a theory of the linguistic conventions that speakers normally observe; and, he claims, these conventions include in effect the principle that, in certain circumstances, speakers are to try to say what is true in the language in question.

Lewis argues that normal linguistic communication is made possible by the fact that there are certain regularities in the use of the language by speakers and by hearers. People adhere to these regularities because others do and because it is common knowledge that they do. Lewis considers a number of different uses of language, but for our purposes we can confine the discussion to the normal use of language in a situation of communication of information using ordinary statement-making sentences. According to Lewis, it is a relevant background regularity that normally speakers try to observe certain general principles which, if consistently observed in all cases, would have such implications as these: speakers would say ‘It is raining’ only if it were raining; speakers would say ‘It is snowing’ only if it were snowing; speakers would say ‘Snow is white’ only on the condition that snow is white; they would say ‘Grass is green’ only on the
condition that grass is green; and so forth. Furthermore, in gaining information from what has been said, hearers (according to Lewis) normally rely on the fact that speakers normally try to adhere to these regularities. Speakers normally rely on hearers' doing this; and so forth.

Now it may seem that, if Lewis is right about the conventions of a language that are relied on in normal linguistic communication and is also right that a theory of meaning is a theory of these conventions, then a theory of meaning would have to involve something like a theory of truth. For it may seem that the conventional regularities that he is thinking of would have to connect sentences and their truth conditions. And it may seem that the recursion clauses in a finite theory of the conventional regularities would exactly match the recursion clauses in a finite theory of truth in that language. So it may seem that, if Lewis is right, a good way to give an account of the conventions of a particular language L would be, first, to give a theory of truth in L and, second, to say that linguistic communication using L exploits the conventional regularity that speakers normally try to say only what is true in L.

However, it is not obvious that Lewis's theory (even if correct) has this consequence. According to Lewis, the basic convention is that speakers try to say what is true in L. But to try to say what is true is to say what you believe. So, for Lewis, normal linguistic communication in a language L exploits the expectation that a speaker normally says something only if he believes it. What is conventional about language has to do with what sentences express what beliefs. This seems to yield the theory that the meaning of a statement-making sentence
depends on the belief it could normally be used to express. Meaning is taken to be a matter of the belief expressed rather than a matter of truth conditions.

Clearly, it is more accurate to say that hearers rely on an expectation that speakers will normally say what they believe than an expectation that speakers will normally say what is true. The expectation that speakers normally say what is true is more optimistic than the expectation that they normally say what they believe. The optimistic expectation would seem to rest not just on an understanding of the conventions of the language but also on an estimate of the reliability of speakers' beliefs.

It is sometimes said that, if speakers did not normally speak the truth, the language could not be learned. We are supposed to conclude that it follows from linguistic conventions that speakers normally say what is true; and such a conclusion would support the idea that meaning is a matter of truth conditions. But, such an argument is not compelling. If as a result of false beliefs speakers did not normally speak the truth, the language could still be learned by someone who shared with speakers those false beliefs.

How wrong can we take someone's beliefs to be before we must decide that we have misinterpreted them? It can and has been argued that the thesis that people are normally right in their beliefs is not an empirical generalization but rather a presupposition of ascribing any beliefs to them at all. However, such an argument could not possibly show that linguistic conventions correlate sentences with their truth conditions. For one would have to argue that it follows from linguistic conventions that people are normally right in their beliefs. But the
argument would, it seems, apply not only to beliefs that can be expressed in language but also to beliefs, or expectations, or whatever else are analogous to beliefs and expectations, in dumb animals and children who have not yet learned a spoken language. There would be the same sorts of limits to the interpretation of the beliefs, expectations, or what have you of these creatures. So these limits do not seem to be derived from linguistic conventions.

11.3 What Linguistic Conventions Are There?

Taking the point one step further, observe that there is no general convention among English speakers to say only what one believes. Speakers violate no linguistic conventions when they make suppositions, give examples, joke, tell stories, and so forth. Furthermore, when speakers do such things, they utilize the same linguistic conventions they make use of when they try to say only what is true, and they use these conventions in the same way. Of course, it may be that speakers are supposed to assert only what they believe; but that is not a general linguistic convention; it is a particular point about assertion.

The relevant linguistic conventions do not associate sentences only with beliefs but more generally with propositions or, as I shall say, thoughts, which are sometimes believed, sometimes supposed, sometimes just presented for consideration. The meaning of a sentence is determined by the thought with which the sentence is conventionally correlated, that is, the thought which, by convention, speakers would normally intend to communicate to a hearer by using that sentence.
Thoughts in this sense are not mysterious objects; they are just beliefs, hopes, suppositions, and so forth, more generally described. The term ‘thought’, as I use it here, is simply a more general term than ‘belief’, ‘hope’, and ‘supposition’. A belief that cigarettes are good for you, a hope that cigarettes are good for you, and a supposition that cigarettes are good for you are all thoughts that cigarettes are good for you, in this sense of ‘thought’.

The relevant thoughts are to be identified, not in terms of truth conditions, but rather in terms of their potential role in a speaker's ‘conceptual scheme’—the system of concepts constituted by the speaker's beliefs, plans, hopes, fears, and so on, ways the speaker has of modifying his beliefs, plans, hopes, fears, and so on, and ways these modify what the speaker does. I defend a ‘functionalist’ theory of this sort in (Harman, 1973) and will say more about it later in this essay and in the following essays. Supposing that such a theory is correct, there is a sense in which meaning depends on role in conceptual scheme. The meaning of a sentence is determined by the role in a conceptual scheme of the thoughts that the sentence would normally be used to express.

Now, to get to the main point, the implications that a thought has are very important to its role in a conceptual scheme; and logical implications are particularly important. Furthermore, logical implication is a matter of truth and logical form. P logically implies Q if and only if, whenever a proposition with the same logical form as P is true, the corresponding proposition with the same logical form as Q is also true. And this, according to me, is how truth is relevant to meaning. It is relevant to the meaning of those syntactic elements of sentences
that determine logical form. For the meaning of those elements depends on their role in logical implication; and logical implication is to be defined in terms of truth.

11.4 Conceptual Role Semantics

I say that meaning depends on role in conceptual scheme rather than on truth conditions. That is, meaning has to do with evidence, inference, and reasoning, including the impact sensory experience has on what one believes, the way in which inference and reasoning modify one's beliefs and plans, and the way beliefs and plans are reflected in action. For me, the meaning of the relevant sort of sentence is determined by the thought it would normally express. The nature of that thought is not in the first instance determined by its truth conditions; it is, rather, a matter of psychology. For a thought, as I am using this term, is a psychological state, defined by its role in a system of states that are modified by sensory input, inference, and reasoning, and that have an influence on action. To specify a thought is to specify its role in such a conceptual system. To specify the meaning of a sentence of the relevant sort is to specify a thought, so to specify its meaning is to specify a role in a conceptual scheme.

The idea that meaning is a matter of role in conceptual scheme is not a philosophical novelty. It appears, in simplified form, in verification theories of meaning. Quine's (1960a) is a better version because it corrects the mistaken assumption of verificationist theories that evidence can have a direct bearing on individual statements apart from considerations of theory. Although Quine sometimes stresses pragmatism, he often considers only role in relation to sensory
experience, evidence, and theoretical inference, leaving the practical side out.

Hampshire (1959) takes the practical aspect of role to be important for meaning. Meaning is a matter of role because meaning is a matter of the thought expressed; and a thought is defined by its role in a psychological system that includes not only the effect of sensory stimulation and inference but also the impact on the environment of this system via action.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the relevant thoughts must have an existence independent of the language in which one expresses them. As suggested in the previous two essays, learning a language is not just learning a way to encode thoughts one already has. It is rather in part to acquire the possibility of new thoughts, thoughts that are in that language. That is why a language carries with it aspects of a world view. Learning a language is not to be distinguished from learning a theory. One acquires a new system of representation for thought. One learns a new way of thinking.

Principles of linguistic communication would be difficult to state and harder to learn if they correlated sentences with thoughts that had to be specified independently of each other. But, as a first approximation, the rule is simple: a sentence expresses the thought that one would have if one thought exactly those words. That is only a first approximation because thoughts in words are not just strings of words. They are sentences under an analysis that reveals logical form. They are words with more structure than a string. The thought which a speaker intends to communicate with his words is a complex structure of words. In the normal case, communication is successful if the hearer perceives what is said as
having the intended structure. The difference between two possible interpretations of ‘Jack dislikes pleasing students’ is like the difference between the two interpretations of an ambiguous drawing of a staircase. To hear one interpretation is to hear the sentence as having a particular structure. One does not need to decode the sentence into a completely nonlinguistic thought. The principles of language that are relevant to communication are the principles of grammar that correlate sentences with their underlying logical forms.

But the principles of language that are thus relevant to communication are not the only regularities involving language relevant to meaning. More relevant are regularities concerning the way in which language is used in thought. For example, one may accept a number of basic principles that partially determine the roles and therefore the meanings of various terms. These principles, sometimes misleadingly called ‘meaning postulates,’ might include such things as statements of transitivity for ‘more than’ and so forth. Furthermore, there will be certain regularities in the way in which beliefs are formed as the result of sensory experience. It is regularities of this sort that are primarily relevant to the roles in belief and therefore the meanings of color words. And then there will also be some conventional regularities relevant to the meanings of logical words, like ‘and’, ‘or’, ‘if’, ‘every’, ‘some’, ‘not’, and so forth.

11.5 Logic, Meaning, and Truth

Principles of logic differ from other general principles in two respects. First, logical principles have a special role in inference (which is not to say that principles of logic are themselves rules of inference—see essay 1). Second,
general logical principles cannot be stated directly in the object language but only indirectly by talking about language and truth. A general logical principle must say that all thoughts of a specified form are true.

The meaning of a logical term is a matter of its role in one's conceptual scheme; and that is a matter of the way such a term is involved in principles of logic which have the special role in inference. Logical principles say that all thoughts of certain specified logical forms are true, where forms are specified with reference to the logical constructions that they involve. A truth of logic can be said to hold by virtue of its form, since any other thought with the same logical form is also true. Logical terms have an important role in logical truths, since the truths hold by virtue of their logical terms. That is why consideration of truth conditions can sometimes tell us something about meaning. It can tell us something about the meanings of logical elements of structure since it can provide an account of the role of such elements in determining what the logical truths are.

I have already mentioned Davidson's idea that what a formal theory of truth tells us about meaning is not given by the T sentences it implies but rather by the recursion clauses of the theory. We can now make sense of that idea, at least as it applies to logical terms. Consider a logical term like ‘and’, representing logical conjunction. The infinite number of T sentences by themselves tell us nothing about the meaning of ‘and’ since these T sentences by themselves tell us nothing in particular about the function of ‘and’. What is relevant is the clause in a formal theory of truth that says a conjunction is true if and only if both conjuncts are. For that tells us something about conjunction that is relevant to its logical role. Since
to specify the meaning of ‘and’ is to specify this role, the relevant clause of the theory of truth tells us something about the meaning of ‘and’.

We can easily envision formal theories of truth that would tell us nothing about the meaning of ‘and’, for example the theory that simply took all T sentences as axioms. A theory that sheds light on the meaning of ‘and’ and other logical terms does not do so simply in virtue of being a theory of truth but rather because it contains specific clauses saying how conjunction and the other logical terms contribute to the truth or falsity of complex sentences.

Now it seems to me that consideration of those cases in which a theory of truth appears to tell us something about meaning supports my account over the thesis that meaning is generally a matter of truth conditions. For consider some of the examples I have already mentioned: the truth functional account of the logical connectives, the Frege-Tarski analysis of logical quantification, or Kripke's semantics for operators of modal logic.

Davidson's theory concerning the logical form of action sentences illustrates the point in a different way. Davidson (1967a) does not give clauses in a truth definition for any new logical operator. His aim is rather to argue that the logical form of action sentences can be represented in ordinary quantificational logic on the assumption that these sentences involve disguised quantification over events. Davidson suggests that a sentence like ‘John walks’ has the logical form,

\[(\exists x) \text{(John walks } x)\]

The sentence ‘John walks in the rain’ has the form

\[(\exists x) \text{(John walks } x \& x \text{ is in the rain)}\]
That the first of these sentences is implied by the second is taken by Davidson to be an instance of a simple implication of ordinary quantificational logic.

Davidson's theory tells us something about meaning because it tells us about logical form, and meaning is partly a matter of logical form. The linguistic conventions that are relevant to meaning include those grammatical conventions that correlate surface forms of sentences with their logical forms. So to say something about the logical form of a sentence is to say something about its meaning. But Davidson's theory does not tell us everything we might want to know about the meaning of action sentences, since the theory sees quantification over events in these sentences. Although a theory of truth can explain the meaning of the quantification, it cannot fully explicate the reference to events. For that, something more is needed, a theory of events along with some indication of how we are to confirm or disconfirm statements about events.

A similar point can be made about Kripke's (1963) semantics for modal logic. It does not fully specify the meaning of ‘possible’ or ‘necessary’ because it accounts for truth conditions in terms of quantification over possible worlds. No theory of truth can by itself explain that reference to possible worlds. What is needed is a theory of possible worlds and an indication of how we are to confirm or disconfirm statements about possible worlds.

Recall the sentence, ‘All mimsy were the borogroves’. As Wiggins (1972) remarks, the thing that we lack here is not an understanding of what the relevant clauses in a truth theory would look like (for we know that), but rather an
understanding of evidence and inference. I say that this will always be the case for nonlogical terms.

If by ‘semantics’ we mean a finitely axiomatized formal theory of truth, we must not identify semantics with the theory of meaning. Semantics in this sense can tell us something important about the meanings of logical terms and other aspects of logical structure, but it cannot in the same way illuminate the meaning of nonlogical terms.