

*Worlds of Truth*

By ISRAEL SCHEFFLER

Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

*Worlds of Truth* is an admirably clear synthesis of ideas developed by Israel Scheffler over his long and distinguished career. What is striking about *Worlds of Truth* is how Scheffler combines views of epistemology, truth, and metaphysics that may seem *prima facie* to be at odds. Scheffler defends an anti-foundationalist account of epistemic justification, an 'absolute' notion of truth, and a metaphysical 'plurealism,' according to which there are multiple real, actual worlds.

In the first chapter, 'Justification,' Scheffler presents a case for epistemic anti-foundationalism, contending that only an anti-foundationalist account is able to avoid the Scylla of justificatory regress as well as the Charybdis of dogmatic foundationalism. Scheffler offers a case-by-case consideration of different attempts to provide a foundation for knowledge, finding each candidate lacking. The arguments offered against possible foundations for knowledge are not all persuasive. Scheffler rejects the opinion that mathematical truths are known with certainty on the ground that '...the current popularity of this opinion rests on the belief that mathematics has been reduced to logic,' a belief that is mistaken in light of the failure of logicism (12). It is unlikely, given the widespread knowledge among philosophers of the troubles of logicism, that this is the case. Non-logicist intuitionistic platonism is not given a hearing here.

The positive account of justification offered by Scheffler is a Neurathian one, holding that a belief is justified within a system of beliefs. The justificatory status of a belief is relative to the system containing it. Scheffler distinguishes between this relative status of justification and his own nonrelative account of truth in the second chapter of *Worlds of Truth*. Drawing on Carnap's arguments in "Truth and Confirmation" (Carnap 1949), Scheffler argues that the issues of the justification of beliefs and truth of beliefs are distinct. Truth is transparent: if snow is white, then it is true that snow is white, and vice versa. Belief, however, is not transparent. The truth of a claim does not imply that a claim is justifiably believed, nor does the fact that a claim is justifiably believed imply that it is true. In light of this sharp distinction between belief and truth, Scheffler holds that there is no problem for an account holding that the justification of beliefs is relative to context, while truth of beliefs is not relative. The case made for this distinction is clearly stated and convincing.

The discussion of truth within the text, overall, is inconclusive. Scheffler offers a brief account of Tarski's theory of truth, claiming that such a theory captures 'the force of the absolute conception of truth' (40). Scheffler, however, rejects the idea that Tarski's account is a full definition of truth on the ground that Tarski's theory does not adequately account for blind ascriptions of truth such as 'The first sentence in the next volume of *Analysis* will be true.' Scheffler does not attempt to address this concern for Tarski, and has not given consideration to how theories of truth other than Tarski's may be better suited to address this concern. In the third chapter of the text, 'Worlds,' Scheffler contends that it is unproblematic if truth cannot be defined. Truth, like many other concepts, may be useful even if it

cannot be described in other words. While this may be correct, the possibility of defining truth is raised without adequate resolution and consideration of alternatives.

The chapter on 'Worlds' contains the most novel idea within the text, plurealism. A plurealistic view is both a realist view insofar as it holds that there can be mind- and language-independent facts, and a pluralist view insofar as it holds that there is not just one world, but many worlds. The pluralism about worlds put forward by Scheffler is not the kind of pluralism for which David Lewis is well-known: Scheffler is not claiming that there are existent possible worlds in addition to the actual world. In his view, there is more than one actual world.

The argument presented for this pluralism about worlds is based on concerns about reduction within the sciences. Scheffler, like many other philosophers, is doubtful that a full reduction of all of the sciences to physics is possible. The failure of a full reduction of all sciences to physics would imply that different sciences have different domains. The domain of psychology includes beliefs, desires, and emotions. The domain of physics includes electrons, protons, and neutrons. If the domain of psychology cannot be reduced to the domain of physics, then Scheffler would contend that there is more than one world: a world of physical entities and a world of psychological entities. This conclusion is reached based on Scheffler's identification of a world with the notion of the domain of a science.

If the word 'world' is taken in the ordinary sense of the word, this claim is implausible. There is no reason to hold that the irreducibility of one scientific domain to another implies the existence of more than one actual world. There could be one world, containing many different mutually irreducible domains. The fact that one domain cannot be reduced to another does not exclude the possibility that each of these domains is contained within a single world. There may be weaker relations, such as supervenience, that hold between these different domains. If, on the other hand, we use the word 'world' as Scheffler seems to be using the term, as synonymous with 'the domain of a science,' then the claim that there is more than one world may be true, but not as metaphysically radical as it first seemed. Plurealism, construed in this way, would just be another way of stating a nonreductionist account of the sciences.

At times, the monograph within *Worlds of Truth* reads like a collection of notes. For instance, the third chapter contains a brief, inconclusive discussion of the nature of ethics, raising well-known objections against Ayer and Moore without putting forward a clear alternative metaethical theory. An account of how Scheffler sees his general views on epistemology, truth, and metaphysics in relation to metaethics would have added significantly to the book. This section on ethics is followed by a discussion of the role of religious rituals within culture that has little relation to the issues discussed throughout the rest of the text.

*Worlds of Truth* will be of interest to readers of Scheffler's previous works and to philosophers interested in pragmatist metaphysics and epistemology.

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*References*

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