The Correspondence Theory of Truth

Narrowly speaking, the correspondence theory of truth is the view that truth is correspondence to, or with, a fact—a view that was advocated by Russell and Moore early in the 20th century. But the label is usually applied much more broadly to any view explicitly embracing the idea that truth consists in a relation to reality, i.e., that truth is a relational property involving a characteristic relation (to be specified) to some portion of reality (to be specified). This basic idea has been expressed in many ways, giving rise to an extended family of theories and, more often, theory sketches. Members of the family employ various concepts for the relevant relation (correspondence, conformity, congruence, agreement, accordance, copying, picturing, signification, representation, reference, satisfaction) and/or various concepts for the relevant portion of reality (facts, states of affairs, conditions, situations, events, objects, sequences of objects, sets, properties, tropes). The resulting multiplicity of versions and reformulations of the theory is due to a blend of substantive and terminological differences.

The correspondence theory of truth is often associated with metaphysical realism. Its traditional competitors, pragmatist, as well as coherentist, verificationist, and other epistemic theories of truth, are often associated with idealism, anti-realism, or relativism. In recent years, these traditional competitors have been virtually replaced (at least from publication-space) by deflationary theories of truth and, to a lesser extent, by the identity theory (note that these new competitors are typically not associated with anti-realism). Still more recently, two further approaches have received considerable attention. One is truthmaker theory: it is sometimes viewed as a competitor to, sometimes as a more liberal version of, the correspondence theory. The other is pluralism: it incorporates a correspondence account as one, but only one, ingredient of its overall account of truth.

The correspondence theory is often traced back to Aristotle's well-known definition of truth (*Metaphysics* 1011b25): "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true"—but virtually identical formulations can be found in Plato (*Cratylus* 385b2, *Sophist* 263b). It is noteworthy that this definition does not highlight the basic correspondence intuition. Although it does allude to a relation (saying something *of* something) to reality (what *is*), the relation is not made very explicit, and there is no specification of what on the part of reality is responsible for the truth

of a saying. As such, the definition offers a muted, relatively minimal version of a correspondence theory. (For this reason it has also been claimed as a precursor of deflationary theories of truth.) Aristotle sounds much more like a genuine correspondence theorist in the *Categories* (12b11, 14b14), where he talks of underlying things that make statements true and implies that these things (*pragmata*) are logically structured situations or facts (viz., *his sitting* and *his not sitting* are said to underlie the statements "He is sitting" and "He is not sitting", respectively). Most influential is Aristotle's claim in *De Interpretatione* (16a3) that thoughts are "likenessess" (*homoiomata*) of things. Although he nowhere defines truth in terms of a thought's likeness to a thing or fact, it is clear that such a definition would fit well into his overall philosophy of mind.

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A proposition (judgment, opinion, expression, thought) is true only if it is appropriate for the state of the entity it claims about. Accuracy is a kind of reciprocity, and this is to establish close links between epistemology and ontology (Existence - Thought / Existence - Spirit / Known - Knowing / Object - Subject / World - Language / Reality - Knowledge / Things - Judgment / Fact - Proposition / Exist which is - Idea / Being - Knowledge / External world - mind etc.).

Criticism points:

• Are thought and reality two entities of the same type?

• If correspondence depicts the reality of thought, this picture / design is only possible within the scope and limit of thought and sensory data.

• How can the correspondence itself be controlled? If the audit initiative is based on some kind of correspondence, this will create a vicious circle.

Discussion Text:

Object-Based and Fact-Based Versions

It is helpful to distinguish between "object-based" and "fact-based" versions of correspondence theories, depending on whether the corresponding portion of reality is said to be an object or a fact (cf. Künne 2003, chap. 3).

Traditional versions of object-based theories assumed that the truth-bearing items (usually taken to be judgments) have subject-predicate structure. An object-based definition of truth might look like this:

A judgment is true if and only if its predicate corresponds to its object (i.e., to the object referred to by the subject term of the judgment).

Note that this actually involves two relations to an object: (i) a reference relation, holding between the subject term of the judgment and the object the judgment is about (its object); and (ii) a correspondence relation, holding between the predicate term of the judgment and a property of the object. Owing to its reliance on the subject-predicate structure of truth-bearing items, the account suffers from an inherent limitation: it does not cover truthbearers that lack subject-predicate structure (e.g. conditionals, disjunctions), and it is not clear how the account might be extended to cover them. The problem is obvious and serious; it was nevertheless simply ignored in most writings. Object-based correspondence was the norm until relatively recently.

Object-based correspondence became the norm through Plato's pivotal engagement with the problem of falsehood, which was apparently notorious at its time. In a number of dialogues, Plato comes up against an argument, advanced by various Sophists, to the effect that false judgment is impossible—roughly: To judge falsely is to judge what is not. But one cannot judge what is not, for it is not there to be judged. To judge something that is not is to judge nothing, hence, not to judge at all. Therefore, false judgment is impossible. (Cf. Euthydemus 283e-288a; Cratylus 429c-e; Republic 478a-c; Theaetetus 188d-190e.) Plato has no good answer to this patent absurdity until the Sophist (236d-264b), where he finally confronts the issue at length. The key step in his solution is the analysis of truthbearers as structured complexes. A simple sentence, such as "Theaetetus sits.", though simple as a sentence, is still a complex whole consisting of words of different kinds—a name (onoma) and a verb (rhema)—having different functions. By weaving together verbs with names the speaker does not just name a number of things, but accomplishes something: meaningful speech (logos) expressive of the interweaving

of ideas (eidon symploken). The simple sentence is true when Theaetetus, the person named by the name, is in the state of sitting, ascribed to him through the verb, and false, when Theaetetus is not in that state but in another one (cf. 261c-263d; see Denyer 1991; Szaif 1998). Only things that are show up in this account: in the case of falsehood, the ascribed state still is, but it is a state different from the one Theaetetus is in. The account is extended from speech to thought and belief via Plato's well known thesis that "thought is speech that occurs without voice, inside the soul in conversation with itself" (263e)—the historical origin of the language-of-thought hypothesis. The account does not take into consideration sentences that contain a name of something that is not ("Pegasus flies"), thus bequeathing to posterity a residual problem that would become more notorious than the problem of falsehood.

Aristotle, in De Interpretatione, adopts Plato's account without much ado—indeed, the beginning of De Interpretatione reads like a direct continuation of the passages from the Sophist mentioned above. He emphasizes that truth and falsehood have to do with combination and separation (cf. De Int. 16a10; in De Anima 430a25, he says: "where the alternative of true and false applies, there we always find a sort of combining of objects of thought in a quasi-unity"). Unlike Plato, Aristotle feels the need to characterize simple affirmative and negative statements (predications) separately—translating rather more literally than is usual: "An affirmation is a predication of something toward something, a negation is a predication of something away from something" (De Int. 17a25). This characterization reappears early in the Prior Analytics (24a). It thus seems fair to say that the subject-predicate analysis of simple declarative sentences—the most basic feature of Aristotelian term logic which was to reign supreme for many centuries—had its origin in Plato's response to a sophistical argument against the possibility of falsehood. One may note that Aristotle's famous definition of truth (see Section 1) actually begins with the definition of falsehood.

Fact-based correspondence theories became prominent only in the 20th century, though one can find remarks in Aristotle that fit this approach (see Section 1)—somewhat surprisingly in light of his repeated emphasis on subject-predicate structure wherever truth and falsehood are concerned. Fact-based theories do not presuppose that the truth-bearing items have subject-predicate structure; indeed, they can be stated without any explicit reference to the structure of truth-bearing items. The approach thus embodies an alternative response to the problem of falsehood, a response that may claim to extricate the theory of truth from the limitations imposed on it through the presupposition of subject-predicate structure inherited from the

response to the problem of falsehood favored by Plato, Aristotle, and the medieval and modern tradition.

The now classical formulation of a fact-based correspondence theory was foreshadowed by Hume (Treatise, 3.1.1) and Mill (Logic, 1.5.1). It appears in its canonical form early in the 20th century in Moore (1910-11, chap. 15) and Russell: "Thus a belief is true when there is a corresponding fact, and is false when there is no corresponding fact" (1912, p. 129; cf. also his 1905, 1906, 1910, and 1913). The self-conscious emphasis on facts as the corresponding portions of reality—and a more serious concern with problems raised by falsehood— distinguishes this version from its foreshadowings. Russell and Moore's forceful advocacy of truth as correspondence to a fact was, at the time, an integral part of their defense of metaphysical realism. Somewhat ironically, their formulations are indebted to their idealist opponents, F. H. Bradley (1883, chaps. 1&2), and H. H. Joachim (1906), the latter was an early advocate of the competing coherence theory, who had set up a correspondence-to-fact account of truth as the main target of his attack on realism. Later, Wittgenstein (1921) and Russell (1918) developed "logical atomism", which introduces an important modification of the fact-based correspondence approach (see below, Section 7.1). Further modifications of the correspondence theory, bringing a return to more overtly semantic and broadly object-based versions, were influenced by Tarski's (1935) technical work on truth (cf. Field 1972, Popper 1972).

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