

Conceptions of Truth

WOLFGANG KÜNNE

CLARENDON PRESS · OXFORD

Contents

1	Some Questions about Truth	1
2	A Bogus Predicate?	33
2.1	Frege's Identity Thesis	34
2.1.1	Redundancy and omnipresence	34
2.1.2	An internal conflict within Frege's theory?	37
2.1.3	Conditions of propositional identity	42
2.1.4	Who is right, Frege or Bolzano?	48
2.1.5	Two kinds of truth talk	52
2.2	Truth-Theoretical Nihilism	53
2.2.1	The performative potential of 'true'	56
2.2.2	Introducing 'somewhether' and 'thether'	64
2.2.3	'True' as a syncategorematic expression	77
2.2.4	'Is True' as a prosentence-forming operator	84
2.3	A Real Predicate, After All	87
3	Varieties of Correspondence	93
3.1	Classical Correspondence	94
3.1.1	From Aristotle to Aquinas	95
3.1.2	Interlude: non-propositional truth	104
3.1.3	Variants and limits of the Aristotelian conception	107
3.2	Cambridge Correspondence	112
3.2.1	Moorean prodigality	114
3.2.2	Logical atomist parsimony	118
3.3	A Battery of Objections	126
3.3.1	The comparison objection	126
3.3.2	The treadmill	129
3.3.3	The spectre of fact monism	133
3.3.4	The unworldliness objection	141
3.4	A Neglected Alternative	145
3.5	Varieties of Making True	148
3.5.1	Aristotle and the Principle C	150
3.5.2	A propositional reading of 'making true'	154
3.5.3	An ontic reading of 'making true'	158
3.5.4	Another propositional reading	165
3.5.5	Correspondence and alethic realism	169

4	In and Out of Quotation Marks	175
4.1	The Semantic Conception	175
4.1.1	Preliminaries on ‘semantic’	176
4.1.2	Formal correctness and material adequacy	180
4.1.3	Three Tarskian truth-definitions	192
4.1.4	Recalcitrant features of natural languages	202
4.1.5	Explanatory ambitions	208
4.1.6	Explanatory success?	217
4.2	Disquotationalist Conceptions	225
4.2.1	Redundancy again	226
4.2.2	Truth for the sake of brevity	237
4.2.3	Truth in my present idiolect	242
5	Propositions, Time, and Eternity	249
5.1	What Is It that Is True or False?	249
5.1.1	Introducing ‘proposition’	249
5.1.2	Contents and (intentional) objects	258
5.1.3	More on truth-value bearers	263
5.2	Eternalism	269
5.2.1	A first division in the eternalist camp	270
5.2.2	A critique of eliminativist eternalism	272
5.2.3	An alleged metaphysical vindication of eternalism	281
5.2.4	Further divisions in the eternalist camp	285
5.3	Temporalism	295
5.3.1	Who is afraid of temporally indeterminate propositions?	295
5.3.2	Over-hasty arguments for temporalism	306
5.3.3	Limits of temporalism	308
5.4	An Irenic Epilogue	313
6	Two Pleas for Modesty	317
6.1	Minimalism	318
6.1.1	Clinging to the denominalization schema	318
6.1.2	A denial of intelligibility	327
6.1.3	Modest enough?	331
6.2	A Modest Account of Truth	333
6.2.1	Exposition	333
6.2.2	A new theory?	339
6.2.3	Questions, objections, and rejoinders	350

7 Truth and Justifiability	375
7.1 Classical Versions of Alethic Anti-Realism	375
7.1.1 Foundationalism	375
7.1.2 Coherentism	381
7.1.3 Consensualism	393
7.2 ‘A Long Journey from Realism back to Realism’	404
7.2.1 ‘Idealized’ rational acceptability	406
7.2.2 Kindred constraints	416
7.2.3 Reasons for recantation	419
7.3 Limits of Justifiability	424
7.3.1 Anonym’s argument	425
7.3.2 An example under hermeneutical pressure	430
7.3.3 The argument from justification blindspots	437
7.3.4 Attempts at answering the challenge	443
7.3.5 The priority of justification	449
7.3.6 Against alethic pluralism	452
<i>Bibliography</i>	455
<i>Name Index</i>	481
<i>Subject Index</i>	487

Some Questions about Truth

To the lay mind it is a perplexing thing that the nature of truth should be a vexed problem. That such is the case seems another illustration of Berkeley's remark about the proneness of philosophers to throw dust into their own eyes and then complain that they cannot see. . . . The plain man . . . has learned, through hard discipline, that it is no easy matter to discover what the truth is in special instances. But such difficulties assume that the nature of truth is perfectly understood. . . . Whence and why the pothole?

(John Dewey, 'The Problem of Truth', 12)

There are at least two ways of asking the question, 'What is truth?' One of them is commonly attributed to Pilate: is there ever any hope that we might disclose the truth if the problem is a really delicate one? As is well known, 'jesting Pilate . . . would not stay for an answer'.¹ Another way of putting that question is the way Socrates asked, 'What is courage, what is piety, what is knowledge?' Many great philosophers took the question 'What is truth?' in a Socratic spirit, and the answers given through the ages are what the title of this book alludes to as 'conceptions of truth'. In advocating a conception of truth, philosophers may pursue different, though internally related, goals. Some of them try to explain the concept of truth—or to demonstrate the futility of all attempts at explaining this concept. Some of them mean to tell us what being true consists in (assuming that this may very well not be written into our concept, as it were). Most of them endeavour to specify (conceptually) necessary and sufficient conditions for something's being true. All of them aspire to be faithful to our workaday concept of truth, which is employed by Dewey's 'plain' men and women who have 'learned, through hard discipline, that it is no easy matter to discover what the truth is in special instances'.

The phrase 'the concept of truth' or, equivalently, 'the concept of being true', like all locutions of the type 'the concept of being F' or 'the concept of F-ness' (where 'F-ness' is a placeholder for the appropriate nominalization of the general

¹ Francis Bacon, 'Of Truth', 377 (alluding to John 18: 38). Austin echoes Bacon's remark in his 'Truth', 117.

term replacing 'F'), must be handled with care. Having a concept is having a cognitive capacity: you have the concept of being thus-and-so, I take it, if and only if you are able to think of something *as* thus-and-so (or as not thus-and-so). The concept of being F differs from the concept of being G if it is possible that somebody thinks of something as F without thinking of it as G. This may be the case even if (the property of) being F *is* (the property of) being G. An example or two will do no harm. A girl may be able to think of her father as having spent half of his salary on drink without being able to think of him as having spent 50 per cent of his salary on drink, notwithstanding the fact that having spent half of one's salary on drink *is* having spent 50 per cent of it for this purpose. Two concepts, one property. Thinking of a dish as needing some salt was something we often did long before our first lessons in chemistry, but at that stage we were not yet able to think of a dish as needing some sodium chloride. Nevertheless, needing some salt *is* needing some sodium chloride. Two concepts, one property. Of course, having the concept of being F differs vastly from having the property of being F: fortunately, you do not have to commit a murder in order to acquire the concept of a being a murderer.²

I shall try to defend a (decidedly non-startling) answer to the Socratic question, 'What is truth?', understood as a request for an elucidation of the concept, but I also invite the reader to a journey through the ages. The focus is clearly on the analytical tradition, but I think there is still a lot to be learned from pondering over conceptions of truth which grew on different soils. Michael Dummett once remarked, as an aside, that 'philosophical theories of truth have usually been intended as contributions to delineating the outlines of some theory of meaning'.³ I am taken aback by the adverb. Generations of philosophers, from Plato and Aristotle to Bolzano and Brentano, Peirce and Bradley, had no such intention, and quite a few analytical philosophers and logicians of the twentieth century who struggled with the concept of truth did not dream of thereby contributing to the theory of meaning; neither Moore nor Tarski did, to mention just two examples.⁴

In this introductory chapter I shall present a kind of flow chart. It is meant to give a bird's-eye view of a fairly large theoretical landscape and to provide a guide to the overall structure of this book. The chart comprises sixteen *quaestiones de veritate*. They draw attention to some of the main junctions of the many roads which lead through this landscape. I shall describe these intersections, explain

² Cf. Strawson, 'Concepts and Properties', 88–9. 'Having' is used differently in 'having (= having command of, being able to use) a concept' and 'having (= exemplifying) a property'.

³ Dummett, *Frege—Philosophy of Language* (henceforth *FPL*), 457; cf. 462–3.

⁴ As far as Tarski is concerned, Dummett himself is clearly aware of this.

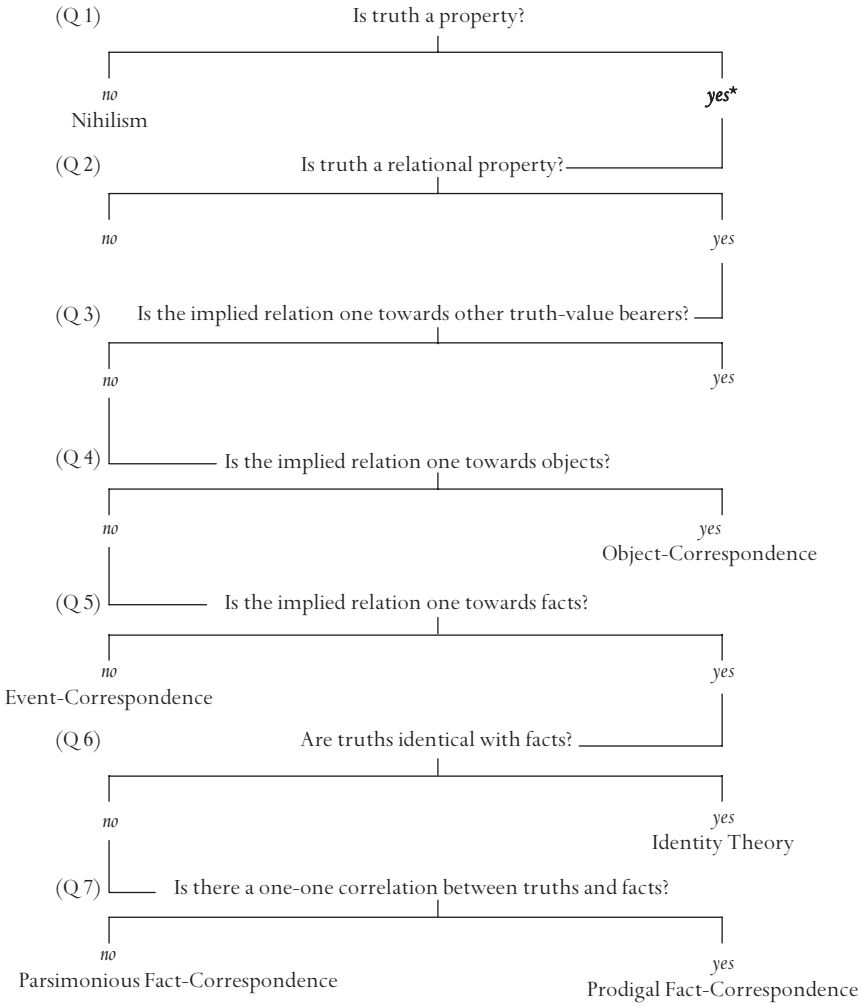


Figure 1.1. QUESTIONS 1–7

some key terms, mention some of the philosophers who took either this road or that one, and mark those answers I intend to examine as well as those which I am going to put aside. I will announce which answers I shall endorse. (On the chart they are marked by asterisks.)

Is truth a relational or a non-relational property? Is it a naturalistic property or a non-naturalistic one? Is it epistemically constrained or unconstrained? Some philosophers give the same answer to all three questions: it is neither one nor the other. Truth isn't any kind of property, so nothing has the property of

being true. I call this view (tongue in cheek) ‘nihilism’. In a way this is the most radical stance one can take in our field, so in Chapter 2 (‘A Bogus Predicate?’) I shall devote quite a lot of critical attention to the negative answer to QUESTION 1 in Figure 1.1. One strand in Gottlob Frege’s reflections on truth points in this direction. The question when, according to Frege, two sentences express one and the same proposition will loom large in this chapter, and some lessons will be drawn from Bernard Bolzano’s rather different answer to that question. In his very first essay on truth Peter Strawson drew nihilist conclusions from certain observations concerning the performative potential of the expression ‘is true’.⁵ Frank Ramsey’s so-called Redundancy Theory and its refinement in the work of Arthur Prior have been a fertile source of inspiration for nihilism in the last three decades. Detailed expositions of nihilism were given by Christopher Williams and by Dorothy Grover, and the most recent version is Robert Brandom’s. I shall scrutinize their views at length, and I shall reject all of them.

Suppose, truth *is* a property: is it a *relational* property (QUESTION 2)? In order to get a grip on this question, some terminological preparations will be useful. A predicate is an expression which takes one or more singular terms to make a sentence, in other words, it is a sentence-forming operator on singular terms. So from ‘Rachel is married to Jacob’ you can obtain two different monadic predicates, depending on which singular term you delete; when you remove both singular terms, the result is a dyadic predicate. A property which is *designated* by a singular term of the type ‘F-ness’ (or ‘being F’) is, as I shall put it, *signified* by the corresponding predicate ‘is F’. (This predicate *applies* to all, and only to, F-things, if there are any, and if one fully understands it, one possesses the concept which is *expressed* by it.) So if truth is a property, then the singular term ‘truth’ (or ‘being true’) designates it, and the monadic predicate ‘is true’ signifies it. Being F is a *relational property*⁶ if and only if (the property of) being F is (the property of) being related in such-and-such a way to something/somebody. Thus, (i) being married to Jacob and (ii) being a spouse (that is, being married to somebody) are relational properties of Rachel. Both properties are signified by monadic predicates, ‘is married to Jacob’ and ‘is a spouse’ respectively. Only polyadic predicates signify relations. The dyadic predicate ‘is married to’ signifies the relation that is implied, as it were, by (i) and (ii). In case (i) a member of the right field, or counter-domain, of the implied relation is identified, in case (ii) it is not.

⁵ In his post-1950 writings on our topic Strawson unequivocally abandoned what is nowadays still referred to in the literature as ‘Strawson’s Performative Theory of Truth’.

⁶ Moore seems to have introduced this term: see his ‘External and Internal Relations’, 281–2.

So if truth is a relational property, then, in analogy with case (ii), being true is being related in a certain way to something. In giving a negative answer to QUESTION 2 one denies the consequent of this conditional. Nihilism is bound to give a negative answer to QUESTION 2. *Prima facie* at least, several other conceptions of truth are not committed to a positive answer, thus disquotationalism, minimalism, and the account I favour. (We will soon have occasion to give a provisional description of these views when we confront a different set of questions.⁷)

But suppose truth *is* a relational property: is the implied relation one in which truth-candidates stand to other truth-value bearers (QUESTION 3)? Yes, say those who embrace a Coherence Theory. (This, too, is a view we shall encounter again when posing a different kind of question.) Philosophers who opt for a Correspondence Theory answer QUESTION 3 negatively. Strangely enough, only one of the varieties of correspondence which are distinguished under QUESTIONS 4–7 tends to be registered in the literature, namely the Cambridge variety, which I call ‘Fact(-based) Correspondence’.⁸ A central aim of Chapter 3 (‘Varieties of Correspondence’) will be to restore the balance. Aristotle paved the way for ‘Object(-based) Correspondence’, the affirmative answer to QUESTION 4, which was to be the prevailing view for many centuries. Paradigmatic elements of the right field of the correspondence relation thus understood are material objects such as mountains and people. In the first decades of the twentieth century some philosophers in Cambridge took *facts* to be what truths correspond to. The entries under QUESTION 7 allude to a sort of economical difference between the Cambridge friends of correspondence: George Edward Moore was rather lavish with facts, whereas Bertrand Russell, pushed by Ludwig Wittgenstein, came to be rather stingy with them. More recently, John Searle is hardly less generous than Moore was: ‘If it is true that if the cat had been on the mat, then the dog would have had to have been in the kitchen, then it must be a fact that if the cat had been on the mat, then the dog would have had to have been in the kitchen. For every true statement there is a corresponding fact.’⁹

⁷ See below, (Q 10) and (Q 14).

⁸ Here are two representative examples from the recent literature. In his comprehensive survey, Richard Kirkham takes the following thesis to be the common denominator of *all* correspondence theories of truth: a truth-bearer is true if and only if it corresponds to a state of affairs and that state of affairs obtains (*Theories of Truth* (henceforth *ThT*), 131–3). David Lewis, who advises us to ‘Forget About the “Correspondence Theory of Truth”’ (henceforth ‘Correspondence’) describes it as the theory which ‘says that truth is correspondence to fact’ (281).

⁹ Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 219.

In the course of weighing up the main objections against Fact-based Correspondence, we will see that there is yet another option for correspondence theorists. Under the left branch of QUESTION 5 it is registered as ‘Event(-based) Correspondence’. Here and elsewhere in this book, the term ‘event’ is meant only to cover one-off happenings that could not be repeated, such as the eruption of Vesuvius which buried Pompeii, or the death of a particular cat. (Even if a cat had nine lives, none of its nine deaths could be repeated.) By contrast, the Venice Carnival, which is celebrated year after year, is not an event, but an event-kind. Russell, never at a loss for a new answer to his old questions, pleaded for Event-based Correspondence in 1940. Let me briefly illustrate the three options for friends of correspondence which have to be canvassed. Suppose I have the true belief that Vesuvius erupted in 79. Does the correspondence obtain (i) between the concept expressed by the predicate ‘erupted in 79’ and the mountain my belief is about? Or between (ii) my belief as a whole and the fact that Vesuvius erupted in 79? Or between (iii) my belief and an event which took place in 79? On the whole, my verdict on correspondence accounts of truth will be less than favourable.

Nowadays there is much talk about ‘*making true*’. Making sense of this talk turns out to be rather difficult. In the long final section of Chapter 3 I shall try to convince you that several readings, with very different credentials and ranges, should be carefully distinguished.

The limiting case of a relational conception of truth is referred to under the right branch of QUESTION 6. According to the so-called Identity Theory, something is true if and only if it is (identical with) a fact. This contention makes sense only if one does not regard linguistic or mental entities as truth-value bearers, but, rather, propositions, something which can be expressed by declarative sentences and which can be the content of certain mental acts and states.¹⁰ So the tenet is

(*Idem*) For all x , x is a true proposition iff (if and only if) there is a fact with which x is identical.

Between 1899 and 1906 Moore and Russell upheld the Identity Theory (which by 1910 they were to renounce in favour of fact-based correspondence views).¹¹

¹⁰ Contrast Kirkham, *ThT*, 138: ‘[F]acts, they say, are not really anything different from true sentences.’ I wonder who ‘they’ are.

¹¹ As for Russell, compare his ‘Meinong’s Theory of Complexes and Assumptions’ (III). For documentation, explanation and discussion of the early Moore–Russell view, see Richard Cartwright, ‘A Neglected Theory of Truth’, and Julian Dodd, *An Identity Theory of Truth* (henceforth *ITT*), 159–66.

Around the turn of the century they complained that correspondence theorists suffer from double vision:

It is commonly supposed that the truth of a proposition consists in some relation which it bears to reality; and falsehood in the absence of this relation. The relation in question is generally called a 'correspondence' or 'agreement' .../... It is essential to the theory that a truth should differ in some specific way from the reality, in relation to which its truth is to consist.... It is the impossibility of finding any such difference... which refutes the theory.... A truth differs in no respect from the reality to which it was supposed merely to correspond: e.g. the truth that I exist differs in no respect from the corresponding reality—my existence. (Moore, 'Truth', 20, 21)

The derived nominal phrase at the very end of this passage is to be understood, I take it, as in a sentence like 'Not many people are aware of my existence', which comes to the same thing as 'Not many people are aware (of the fact) that I exist'. Alexius Meinong characterized truths as 'subsisting objectives [*bestehende Objektiv*]', 'factual objectives [*tatsächliche Objektiv*]', or 'facts [*Tatsachen*]'. Implicitly, this provides identity theorists with an account of falsity as well. Analysing the notion of a fact as that of a state of affairs [*Objektiv*] which obtains [*besteht*], an advocate of (*Idem*) can say: *x* is false iff for some *y*, *y* is a state of affairs and *y* does not obtain and *x* is identical with *y*. However, Meinong's agreement with the identity theorists is only partial: he accepted only the left-to-right half of (*Idem*), because he took only those facts to be truths which are contents of acts of judgement.¹² Frege, who referred to the truth-evaluable contents of utterances as thoughts, embraced (*Idem*) without any reservation when he wrote in his paper 'The Thought':¹³

'Tatsachen! Tatsachen! Tatsachen!' ruft der Naturforscher aus... Was ist eine Tatsache? Eine Tatsache ist ein Gedanke, der wahr ist. ['Facts, facts, facts', cries the scientist... What is a fact? A fact is a thought that is true.] ('Der Gedanke', 74)¹⁴

¹² Meinong, *Über Annahmen*, ch. 3. As can be seen from his writings in those years, Moore did accept the biconditional in both directions.

¹³ The Fregean identification has been endorsed by philosophers of very different stripes: for example, by Ducasse ('Propositions, Truth, and the Ultimate Criterion of Truth', 154); Prior (*Objects of Thought*, 5, 11); Armstrong (*Belief, Truth and Knowledge*, 113); Chisholm (*Theory of Knowledge*, 2nd edn., 88); Tugendhat (*Logisch-semantische Propädeutik*, 232); Strawson ('Reply to John Searle', 403); Brandom (*Making It Explicit*, 327–8); and Schiffer ('Pleonastic Fregeanism', 2, 6). According to Carnap, only *contingently* true propositions are facts (*Meaning and Necessity*, 28). Such a restriction is suggested by Leibniz's distinction between 'truths of reason' and 'truths of fact', and by Hume's cleavage between 'relations of ideas' and 'matters of fact'. In §3 of *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik*, Frege too used a narrower notion of 'fact': according to his less than perspicuous explanation, it is meant to cover all and only 'unprovable truths devoid of generality which contain predications of particular objects'.

¹⁴ Frege's articles are cited by page number of the original publication, since the original pagination is given both in the German collection, *Kleine Schriften*, and in the English translation in *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy*. Whenever I refer to one of Frege's articles just by title and page number, it is contained in these collections. The preface to Frege's *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik* is cited by the page

Frege, Moore and Russell are agreed that for a correspondence theory it is essential that the relata of the correspondence relation are distinct. (That's why I introduced the Identity Theory as the limiting case, not of a correspondence view, but of a relational conception of truth.¹⁵) But unlike Moore and Russell in their early writings, Frege never dreamt of saying that reality, or the world, consists of true propositions (and their components): his 'first realm', the physical world, and his 'second realm', the mental world, do not contain any proposition (nor any constituent of propositions), and the 'third realm', with its somewhat unfortunate German name, harbours not only *true* propositions, but also false ones. In the correspondence between Russell and Frege the reason for this disagreement became clear. Both take propositions to be structured entities, but whereas the components of Fregean propositions are 'modes of presentation' ('senses'), Russellian propositions are composed of the things represented, objects and properties. For Frege, the proposition that Mont Blanc is more than 4,000 metres high consists of the sense of 'Mont Blanc' and the sense of 'is more than 4,000 metres high'; Russell, on the other hand, takes that proposition to contain the mountain with all its snowfields and the property of being 4,000 metres high as constituents.¹⁶ The claim that true propositions (and their components) are the building-blocks of the world is surely more palatable if one thinks of Russellian propositions.

There is, however, at least one adherent of (*Idem*) who does take the world to consist of true Fregean propositions, namely John McDowell:¹⁷

[T]here is no ontological gap between the sort of thing . . . one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case. When one thinks truly, what one thinks is what is the case. So since the world is everything that is the case (as [Wittgenstein] once wrote), there is

number of the original publication which is also given in the translation, *The Basic Laws of Arithmetic*. Unfortunately, the English translations of *Nachgelassene Schriften* (henceforth *NS*) and of *Wissenschaftlicher Briefwechsel* (henceforth *WB*) do not indicate the pagination of the German editions. References to these collections are to the German versions, followed, in brackets, by the page number of *Posthumous Writings* or *Philosophical and Mathematical Correspondence*. (Responsibility for translations from German, Latin, and Greek is mine, even when I refer to, benefit from, or simply echo published translations.)

¹⁵ Cf. the above extract from Moore, and Frege, 'Der Gedanke', 60. By contrast, Roderick Chisholm contends, 'There is no question . . . about the sense in which true propositions may be said to "correspond with" facts. They correspond with facts in the fullest sense that is possible, for they *are* facts' (*Theory of Knowledge*, 88); and Lewis maintains: if one takes a fact to be 'nothing other than a true proposition', then 'of course truth is correspondence to fact: each truth corresponds to a fact by being identical to that fact' ('Correspondence', 277).

¹⁶ Compare Frege, *NS*, 203–4 (187), 243 (225), 250 (232), 275 (255); *WB*, 127 (79), 245 (163) [letter to Russell, 13/11/1904], with Russell's reply to Frege, *WB*, 250–1 (169) [12/12/1904], and his *Principles of Mathematics*, §§47, 51.

¹⁷ McDowell's conception is spelled out and enthusiastically endorsed by Jennifer Hornsby, 'Truth: The Identity Theory'. Dodd, *ITT*, 174–86, raises formidable objections.

no gap between thought, as such, and the world But to say that there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world is just to dress up a truism in high-flown language. All the point comes to is that one can think, for instance, *that spring has begun*, and that the very same thing, *that spring has begun*, can be the case. That is truistic, and it cannot embody something metaphysically contentious . . . / . . .

Given the identity between what one thinks (when one's thought is true) and what is the case, to conceive the world as everything that is the case (as in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1) is to incorporate the world into what figures in Frege as the realm of sense. The realm of sense (*Sinn*) contains thoughts in the sense of what can be thought (thinkables) as opposed to acts or episodes of thinking. The identity displays facts, things that are the case, as thoughts in that sense—the thinkables that are the case. (*Mind and World*, 27, 179)

Is (*Idem*) really truistic, as McDowell wants us to believe? It is indeed a truism that one and the same that-clause can be used to single out a true thinkable (a true proposition) and a fact. But does it follow from this that facts are nothing but true thinkables?¹⁸ Suppose we accept

- (P1) What Ben first thought was that Ann survived the accident.
 (P2) That Ann survived the accident is a miracle.

If the identity of the that-clauses in (P1) and (P2), provided that the context is kept constant, were to guarantee that 'the very same thing' is introduced into discourse, then we would have to conclude from these premisses:

- (C) Therefore (?), what Ben first thought is a miracle.

We can avoid this slide into nonsense by treating that-clauses as systematically ambiguous. Then we can say: only in (P1) does the that-clause single out a thinkable (and a true one, provided that Ann survived the accident), hence the displayed argument commits the fallacy of equivocation.¹⁹ We do not have to dwell on the question (which we will face in due course²⁰) what the that-clause singles out in (P2): what matters here and now is only the explanatory potential of assigning different 'things' to the that-clauses in (P1) and (P2). The unacceptability of the argument to (C) shows that McDowell cannot simply conclude from the identity of his italicized that-clauses that 'the very same thing' can be both a true thinkable (a true proposition) and a fact.

Of course, even if McDowell's argument is weak, (*Idem*) may be correct. But a former advocate of (*Idem*) seems to have refuted it a long time ago:

[Suppose I have the true belief] that a given tree, which I see, is an oak. . . . [T]he proposition that the tree is an oak is something which is and equally is whether the belief is true

¹⁸ The question is raised, in passing, in Dodd, *ITT*, 179.

¹⁹ Cf. Terence Parsons, 'On Denoting Propositions and Facts', sect. 3.

²⁰ In Ch. 5.1.1.

or false. . . . But . . . the fact that the tree is an oak is something which *is*, only if the belief be true; and hence it is quite plain that . . . the fact that the tree is an oak is quite a different thing . . . from what I believe, when I believe that it is one. . . . (Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, 308²¹)

Let 'p' express some contingently true proposition. Somebody could think that p even if it were false that p; what our thinker thinks, the *proposition* that p, exists whether or not he is right. But the *fact* that p would not exist if it were false that p. Therefore, Moore argues, the proposition that p is not identical with the fact that p.

But is this refutation really cogent?²² An advocate of (*Idem*) can reply: 'Socrates' designates Socrates in every possible world in which he exists, regardless of whether he is married or not. By contrast, 'Xanthippe's husband' designates him only in those possible worlds in which he is married. Obviously this does not prevent Socrates from being identical with Xanthippe's husband. Now, similarly, the adherent of (*Idem*) continues, 'the proposition that p' designates the proposition that p in all possible worlds, whereas 'the fact that p' designates that proposition only in those worlds in which it is true. So why, he asks, should this observation refute the identity claim?²³

But I think there are good reasons for rejecting (*Idem*). If facts are nothing but true propositions, why is it that 'True propositions are true' expresses a trivial truth, whereas 'Facts are true' has an awkward ring?²⁴ Why is it that 'The Pythagorean Theorem is true' makes sense, whereas 'The Pythagorean Theorem is a fact' does not? Why is it that 'The victory of the Labour Party in 2001 is a fact' is significant, whereas 'The victory of the Labour Party in 2001 is a true proposition'

²¹ Henceforth *SMPP*. Cf. *ibid.*, 260.

²² As A. J. Ayer, in *Russell and Moore*, 211, and Kit Fine, in 'First Order Modal Theories III—Facts', 46–7, maintain. Cf. also Parsons, 'On Denoting Propositions and Facts', 454–5.

²³ The counter-argument is due to Cartwright, 'A Neglected Theory of Truth', 77–8. Dodd offers a reconstruction which assumes that the subject-term in a sentence of the form (F), 'The fact that p is well known', is a (referentially used) *definite description* (*ITT*, 87–8). This assumption, which can also be found in Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits*, 43 (henceforth *KL*), and in Stephen Neale, *Facing Facts* (henceforth *FF*), 87 n., is not a matter of course. As it stands, an expression of the form 'the fact that p' does not seem to contain any part which signifies a condition that could be met by exactly one fact. Since we can scarcely make sense of the pseudo-predicate 'is a fact that p', the putative Russellian analysans of (F), 'For some x, x is a fact that p, and for all y, if y is a fact that p then y = x, and x is well known', looks very fishy. In English, that pseudo-predicate makes sense only if prefixed by the pseudo-subject 'it': the resulting sentence can be construed either as the output of the application of the operator 'it is a fact that' to a sentence or as a stylistic variant of 'that p is a fact'. (I owe this point to Jonathan Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics*, 231.) Perhaps one can circumvent this problem by assigning more structure to the locution 'the fact that p' than meets the eye, something like 'the unique x such that x is a fact and x = that p'. (The same problem arises, of course, with respect to the phrases of the form 'the proposition that p': it will be discussed in Ch. 5.1.1.)

²⁴ Austin declares 'A fact is a truth' to be absurd ('Unfair to Facts', 173).

is nonsense? If you think that the doubtful propriety or undeniable impropriety of certain forms of speech cannot bear much weight as evidence against a philosophical thesis like (*Idem*),²⁵ recall that McDowell at least did not offer any other support for that thesis than a linguistic observation. But this is only an *ad hominem* argument.

By reminding us of an earlier use of ‘fact’ and offering an alternative explanatory hypothesis, Julian Dodd has tried to show that the kind of linguistic observations I adduced does not rebut the identification of facts and true propositions. Once upon a time, he tells us, ‘fact’ was used as a synonym for ‘event’. John L. Austin has conveniently summarized the evidence collected in the Oxford English Dictionary, so let me insert his summary here:

For the first 200 years of [the] use of [‘fact’] (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) it meant (cf. ‘feat’) a deed or action, either the thing done or the doing of the thing, and more especially a criminal action; during the eighteenth century this use gradually died out in favour of a more extended meaning which began to appear already in the seventeenth century: a fact is now *something that has really occurred* (even classical Latin extended *factum* to mean [‘actual] event’ or [‘actual] occurrence’). (‘Unfair to Facts’, 164)

Nowadays this use is no longer predominant, but, Dodd argues, if there were still occasional hangovers from that earlier usage in our ‘fact’ talk, this would explain why the expressions ‘fact’ and ‘true proposition’ are sometimes not interchangeable, although facts, in the currently dominant use of this term, *are* true propositions. For then we could say that ‘this [substitution-resistant] part of our discourse concerning “fact” is still stained with its old meaning.’²⁶ But consider the following expansion of one of my examples: ‘The victory of the Labour Party in 2001 is a fact which no British citizen denies.’ Dodd’s hypothesis cannot explain why the substitution of ‘true proposition’ is not acceptable therein. One can deny only what can be stated, but no *event* can be stated. So although ‘fact’ does *not* have its earlier meaning in this sentence, it cannot be replaced by ‘true proposition’, and Dodd’s alleged inference to the best explanation evaporates.

At any rate, the next observation should carry conviction: we individuate facts less finely than true propositions. The fact that you never met Cassius Clay is the same as the fact that you never met Muhammad Ali, the fact that I am

²⁵ We would badly affect rhythm, rhyme, and reason in Schiller’s *Ode to Joy* if we were to replace the final word of ‘All men become brothers’ by ‘male siblings’. Nevertheless, brothers *are* male siblings, and ‘brother’ even *means* MALE SIBLING.

²⁶ Dodd, *ITT*, 84. This book contains a careful exposition and defence of the Fregean reading of (*Idem*). Dodd rightly takes it to be an answer to the question what facts are rather than to the question what truth is (120), but he wrongly takes it to be the correct answer to the former question, or so it seems to me. He makes a very convincing case for his claim that the Fregean identification is compatible with what he calls a deflationist view of truth.

German is identical with the fact that WK is German, the fact that three-quarters of the electorate went to the polls is the same as the fact 75 per cent of the electorate went to the polls, and the fact that for cooking we often need some common salt is identical with the fact that for cooking we often need some sodium chloride. But (as Frege would be the first to insist²⁷) in each of these cases my utterances of the embedded sentences express different propositions.

Criticizing his teacher Husserl and other members of the Brentano school, Adolf Reinach once said: ‘All Austrians constantly confuse proposition [*Satz*] and state of affairs [*Sachverhalt*].’²⁸ Philosophers who quite explicitly identify facts (obtaining states of affairs) with true propositions cannot be accused of *confusing* them, but I think they, too, are confused. So I shall not revisit (*Idem*) in the following chapters.

Let us now consider the next three questions on my flow chart (see Figure 1.2). Suppose truth is a property of sentences (QUESTION 8), of type-sentences perhaps or of token-sentences (or of acts of producing such tokens):²⁹ then the next question is whether the concept of (sentential) truth is explainable (QUESTION 9). I call those philosophers who answer ‘No’ adherents of ‘sentential primitivism’. You will not hear ‘primitivism’ as a term of abuse once you realize, or recall, that Donald Davidson has maintained, for many years now, that our general notion of truth is a ‘primitive concept’:

[T]ruth is as clear and basic a concept as we have. . . . Any attempt to explain, define, analyse or explicate the concept will . . . either add nothing to our understanding of truth or have obvious counter-examples. Why on earth should we expect to be able to reduce truth to something clearer and more fundamental? After all, the only concept Plato succeeded in defining was [the concept of] mud. (‘Afterthoughts’, 155–6)

(The sarcastic allusion is to Plato’s *Theaetetus*: in this dialogue ‘mud’ gets defined as ‘earth mixed with water’, whereas the attempt at defining ‘knowledge’ is the first of a long series of failures.) The very title of Davidson’s paper, ‘The Folly of Trying to Define Truth’, epitomizes the theme.³⁰ Of course, primitivism does

²⁷ See Ch. 2.1.3 below.

²⁸ Reinach, ‘*Zum Begriff der Zahl*’, 526. As to ‘the Austrians’, cf. Edgar Morscher’s lucid overview, ‘Propositions and States of Affairs in Austrian Philosophy’.

²⁹ The standard reference for the type–token distinction is Peirce, *Collected Papers* (henceforth *CP*), vol. 4, sect. 537: ‘There will ordinarily be about twenty *the*’s on a page, and of course they count as twenty words. In another sense of the word “word”, however, there is but one word “the” in the English language; and it is impossible that this word should lie visibly on a page or be heard in any voice.’ This distinction obviously also applies to whole sentences.

³⁰ Cf. also Davidson, ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’, 139, ‘Introduction’ to his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (henceforth *ITI*), xiv. David Wiggins concurs: see especially his crisply titled paper, ‘An Indefinibilist cum Normative View of Truth and the Marks of Truth’ (henceforth ‘Indefinibilist’).

Alfred Tarski's elaboration of the so-called semantic conception of truth has often been read as if it were an attempt to answer the philosophical question 'What is truth?', an attempt which should be entered under the right branch of QUESTION 10. Whether this is a correct reading is a matter of controversy, and we will have to enter this debate, which has been raging now for six decades. What can hardly be doubted is that Tarski provides us with a recipe for systematically specifying the truth-conditions of sentences in languages which have a certain tightly circumscribed structure. If *L* is such a language, then the complete specification of the truth-conditions of all sentences in *L* is what Tarski calls a definition of a truth-predicate for *L*. Without much deference to Tarski's own words, various claims and counter-claims have been made, sometimes by one and the same philosopher, on behalf of such truth-definitions, and only very few of his critics and admirers (outside of Poland) ever take his background in Austro-Polish philosophy into account. Trying to make up for these omissions will turn out to be particularly helpful, or so I would like to think, when it comes to determining the relation between Tarski's conception of truth and correspondence views.

Tarski offered a touchstone for definitions of truth-predicates which has been a source of inspiration for the view registered under the left branch of QUESTION 10. According to Tarski's criterion of material adequacy, a definition of 'true' for a regimented part of English which contains the sentence 'Snow is white' is materially adequate only if it allows for the derivation of the biconditional: '*Snow is white*' is true if and only if snow is white. Here, the sentence quoted on the left-hand side is disquoted³³ (shorn of quotation-marks) on the right-hand side. The biconditional is a substitution-instance of the Disquotation Schema

(Dis) 'p' is true if and only if p,

where both occurrences of the letter 'p' are to be taken as place-holders for occurrences of the same declarative sentence. In other words, we are not to understand the left-hand side of (Dis) as ascribing truth to the sixteenth letter of the Roman alphabet.³⁴ Starting from the observation that we are generally inclined to accept as a matter of course any instance of (Dis), save for those that engender paradox,³⁵ champions of disquotationalism go a step further and

³³ This term was coined by Quine.

³⁴ Incidentally, if you have a close look at the German translation of the snowy biconditional, you will realize that not all languages permit the use of a syntactic replica of the quoted sentence on the right-hand side: '*Schnee ist weiß*' ist wahr genau dann, wenn *Schnee weiß* ist. ('So much the worse for German', you may say. Well, there are a few other languages which suffer from the same disease.)

³⁵ The cautionary restriction will be explained in Ch. 4.1.2.

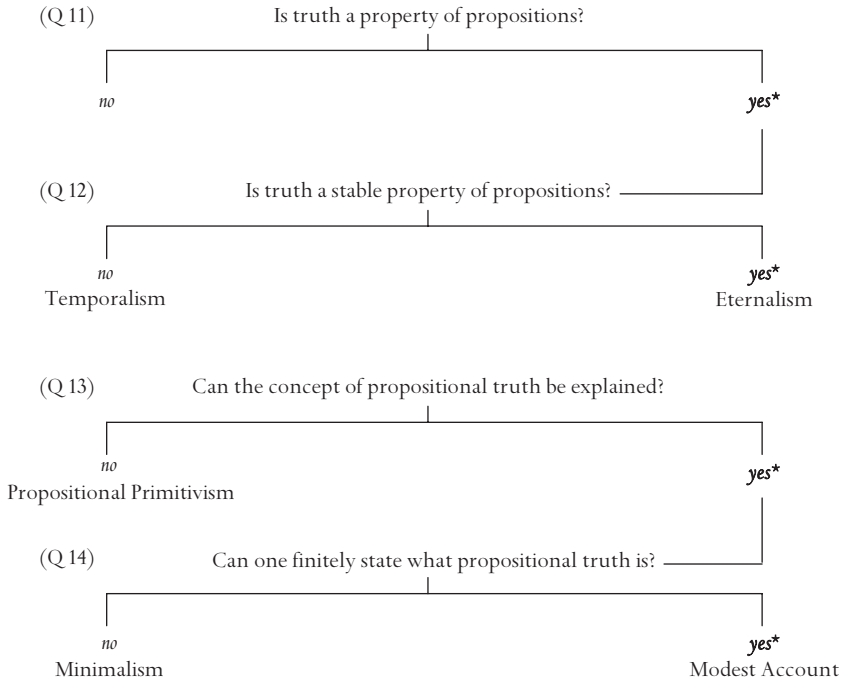


Figure 1.3. QUESTIONS 11–14

maintain that what is said remains unaffected whether we append the predicate ‘is true’ to the quotational designator of a sentence or whether we simply erase the quotation marks. But then, why use such a predicate at all? Because it turns out to be a priceless gift, so the disquotationalists’ answer runs, when we want to talk about truth-candidates that we cannot present verbatim. Disquotationalists like Hartry Field claim that in the mouth of a certain speaker of English at a certain time *x is true* abbreviates an infinite disjunction: ($x = \langle p_1 \rangle$, and p_1), or ($x = \langle p_2 \rangle$, and p_2), or ($x = \langle p_3 \rangle$, and p_3), or . . . , where ‘ p_1 ’, ‘ p_2 ’, ‘ p_3 ’, etc. are all the declarative sentences which that speaker at that time understands. I have put this conception of truth under the left-hand branch of QUESTION 10, since it is not only for medical reasons (as Russell might have put it) that this disjunction cannot be written down. I shall devote Chapter 4 (‘In and Out of Quotation Marks’) to the semantic conception of truth and to disquotationalism. We shall see that, for different reasons, both approaches provide us, not with an explanation of our workaday concept of truth, but rather with a multitude of surrogates.

The penultimate sequence of questions on my flow chart is given in Figure 1.3. Suppose truth is primarily a property (not of sentences but) of what sentences can be used to say, of propositions (QUESTION 11): then my next question is whether truth is a stable property of propositions (QUESTION 12). Is there such a thing as *the* proposition that today is Tuesday, which (if today *is* Tuesday) will become false tomorrow and will regain truth next week? Or is the proposition which is today expressed by ‘Today is Tuesday’ different from the proposition which will tomorrow be expressed by this sentence? In Chapter 5 (‘Propositions, Time, and Eternity’) I shall first elucidate the concept of a proposition and argue that truth is primarily a property of the things which fall under that concept. Then I will confront the question whether it is a property that can be lost. I shall mark some divisions within the opposing camps of temporalists and eternalists and plead for a version of eternalism. As is to be expected, indexicality is a topic which will loom large in that chapter.

With respect to sentential truth, there was no counterpart to QUESTION 12 on my flow chart, because if type-sentences can be said to be true at all, then it is a matter of course that some sentences *have* shifting truth-values, and if utterances of type-sentences can be said to be true at all, then they do *not* have shifting truth-values. QUESTION 13, on the other hand, echoes question QUESTION 9. Propositional primitivism is an important ingredient in Frege’s reflections on truth, from his early to his late work:

Was wahr sei, halte ich für nicht erklärbar. [What is true, I hold to be not explainable.] (‘Kernsätze zur Logik’ [1880], in NS 189 (174))

Wahrheit ist offenbar etwas so Ursprüngliches und Einfaches, dass eine Zurückführung auf noch Einfacheres nicht möglich ist. [Apparently truth is something so primitive and simple that a reduction to anything still simpler is not possible.] (‘Logik’ [1897], in NS, 140 (129))

Hiernach ist es wahrscheinlich, daß der Inhalt des Wortes ‘wahr’ ganz einzigartig und undefinierbar ist. [Hence the content of the word ‘true’ is probably quite unique and undefinable.] (‘Der Gedanke’ [1918], 60)

As can be seen from the beginning of the last statement, Frege thinks he has a good argument for his primitivism. (It is actually a very puzzling argument which is not above the suspicion of sophistry.³⁶) Looking back at our discussion of the Identity Theory above, the three extracts from Frege put it beyond any doubt that, by assenting to (*Idem*), Frege did not mean to explain the concept of truth. Rather, he took (*Idem*) to explain the notion of a fact.

Note that Frege moves from ‘explanation’ to ‘reduction to something still simpler’. The similarity to Davidson’s move is striking, and once again the question arises why a concept couldn’t defy the latter while permitting the former.

³⁶ I shall comment on it in Ch. 3.3.2.

Moore and Russell, too, were adherents of propositional primitivism—as long as they identified truths with facts. As in the case of Frege, this throws some light on the status of the Identity Theory in their thinking. They did not take it to be an explanation of the meaning of ‘true’,³⁷ but, rather, as a metaphysical claim. Reality, Moore and Russell then thought, is the totality of all true propositions; it consists of true propositions and their components. Here is Moore’s own characterization of the theory that he once pleaded for:

[The] theory which I myself formerly held . . . adopts the supposition that in the case of every belief, true or false, there is a proposition which is what is believed. . . . But the difference between a true and a false belief, it says, consists simply in this, that where the belief is true the proposition believed . . . has a . . . simple unanalysable property which is possessed by some propositions and not by others. The propositions which don’t possess it, and which therefore we call false . . . just have not got this . . . property of being *true*. (SMPP 261)

Certainly, the young Moore would have been ready to say of truth what he actually did say of goodness and yellowness:

‘[G]ood’ is a simple notion, just as ‘yellow’ is a simple notion. . . . Definitions . . . which describe the real nature of the . . . notion denoted by a word . . . are only possible when the . . . notion in question is something complex. . . . But yellow and good, we say, are not complex: they are notions of that simple kind, out of which definitions are composed and with which the power of further defining ceases. (*Principia Ethica*, 6–8)

Here again, primitivism with respect to a concept does not exclude that a lot of what we know a priori involves that concept essentially. Thus we know a priori that no surface that is yellow all over is black all over, that personal affection is intrinsically good, and that whatever follows from what is true is itself true. The colour example makes it plain that the following comment on the early Moore’s conception of truth is misguided: propositional primitivism, we are told, ‘gives a sense of impenetrable mysteriousness to the notion of truth’.³⁸ Does Moore give a sense of impenetrable mysteriousness to the notion of *yellowness* by declaring it to be indefinable? As Davidson’s example shows, one can be a primitivist with respect to truth and yet contend that ‘truth is as clear a concept as we have’. The entailment example (‘Whatever follows from what is true is itself true’) helps us to see why Frege’s primitivism does not prevent him from maintaining, a few lines before making his indefinability claim that ‘it is the task

³⁷ Nor does Hornsby (and presumably the same applies to McDowell): see her ‘Truth: The Identity Theory’, n. 5.

³⁸ Horwich, *Truth* (references always to the revised second edition unless otherwise stated), 10.

of logic to discover the laws of truth. . . . In the laws of truth the meaning of the word “true” is spelled out.³⁹ Of course, talk of spelling out is very misleading here, since it almost inevitably suggests the idea of dismantling analysis. The point must be rather that of uncovering a system of principles concerning truth, such as ‘Every logical consequence of a truth is itself a truth’, ‘The conjunction of a truth with its own negation is a falsehood’, or ‘The negation of a truth is a falsehood.’ In this book I shall confront propositional primitivism only indirectly.⁴⁰ It is a conception of truth which should only be resorted to, I think, when one has made sure that ‘the decent alternatives have been exhausted’,⁴¹ and I will try to show that there is a decent alternative, a non-reductive explanation.

In Chapter 6 (‘Two Pleas for Modesty’) I shall confront QUESTION 14. At the centre of Paul Horwich’s highly influential reflections on truth⁴² stands a schema which I propose to call the Denominalization Schema

(Den) It is true that p, if and only if p,

since the sentence nominalized in the left branch of the biconditional is denominalized in the right branch.⁴³ Most authors call this schema either ‘T-schema’ or, following Dummett, ‘Equivalence Schema’. The obvious drawback of both titles is that they suit the Disquotation Schema equally well. Note that the crucial feature of the biconditionals covered by (Den) and by its translations into other languages is that the sentence-nominalization on the left-hand side is cancelled on the right-hand side. Not all languages are so obliging that the nominalization of a sentence literally contains an occurrence of that very sentence. Thus, in the Latin translation of ‘It is true that snow is white, iff snow is white’, the nominalization of ‘*nix est alba*’ needed in the left-hand branch is an accusative-cum-infinitive construction: ‘*nivem albam esse verum est*’. This difference notwithstanding, ‘*verum est*’ shares with ‘it is true’ the feature that is captured by (Den) and enshrined in my title for this schema.

³⁹ ‘*Der Logik kommt es zu, die Gesetze des Wahrseins zu erkennen In den Gesetzen des Wahrseins wird die Bedeutung des Wortes “wahr” entwickelt*’ (Frege, ‘*Der Gedanke*’, 58–9). This contention, too, is already to be found in much earlier writings: *NS* [between 1879 and 1891], 3 (3); *Grundgesetze* [1893], xvi. Cf. also *NS* [1897], 139 (128).

⁴⁰ The only latter-day advocate of propositional primitivism I have come across (and on whose presentation I have drawn) is Ernest Sosa: see ‘*Epistemology, Realism, and Truth*’, 10–15 (= ‘*Epistemology and Primitive Truth*’, 653–9, 661 n. 8).

⁴¹ As Horwich puts it in *Truth*, 10.

⁴² The first edition of his book *Truth* was published in 1990, the revised second edition in 1998.

⁴³ I will treat ‘it is true that p’ and ‘that p is true’ as synonymous, and ‘the proposition that p is true’ as a pleonastic variant. Justification of this treatment will have to wait until Chs. 5.1.1 and 6.2.3. Incidentally, the comma in (Den), though usually omitted, serves to distinguish (Den) from ‘It is true that (p iff p)’ which, though praiseworthy in itself, is irrelevant here.

Horwich's 'minimal theory' of truth contains all and (almost) only those propositions which are expressed by (non-pathological) instances of (Den).⁴⁴ According to Horwich's 'minimalist conception' of truth, the content of the concept of truth is completely captured by the minimal theory. Since one cannot write down the minimal theory, I have put this view in the left-hand branch under QUESTION 14. Finally, I shall explain the contrasting conception of truth that I favour: the Modest Account. 'A new theory of truth?'—Heaven forbid. I shall unearth the roots of this account in earlier works; but I will introduce, motivate, and develop it in my own way, and I will be at pains to defend it against various objections.

Let me insert here a remark on terminological policy. I shall steadfastly refrain from using the term 'deflationism', which has been applied to various entries on my flow chart (in particular to nihilism, disquotationalism, and minimalism). What deflationism comes to varies with the target that is alleged to be inflated. So we find a confusing multiplicity of uses in the literature.⁴⁵ According to Field, "Deflationism" is the view that truth is at bottom disquotational.⁴⁶ This implies that deflationists must take truth to be a property of something that can be put between quotation marks. But then Horwich's minimalism cannot be called deflationist, since he takes truth to be a property of *propositions*. Yet he is very keen to promote his conception of truth under the label 'deflationism'. Nihilists, too, would lose the right to call themselves deflationists,⁴⁷ since they deny that truth is a property *at all*. Marian David links deflationism with a metaphysical distaste for non-physical entities.⁴⁸ Again, minimalism is out, and so is every conception according to which truth is a property of type-sentences. According to Paul Boghossian, Crispin Wright, and William Alston, deflationism is the view that 'it is a mistake to suppose that there is a *property* of truth (falsity) that one attributes to propositions, statements, beliefs, and/or sentences'.⁴⁹ Once

⁴⁴ The cautionary restrictions in parenthesis will be explained in Chs. 4.1.2 and 6.1.1.

⁴⁵ Isaiah Berlin's paper 'Logical Translation' (1950) contains what is perhaps the earliest philosophical use of this pair of terms. Berlin used them ('for want of a better label') to characterize opposite vices in metaphysics, ontological stinginess (of the logical positivist type), and ontological prodigality (of the Meinongian type): 'deflationists' condemn much that is significant as nonsensical because their ontology admits *too few* entities; 'inflationists', on the other hand, accept as significant much that is nonsensical because their ontology admits *too many* entities. When Cartwright borrowed Berlin's terms a decade later in his 'Negative Existentials', he also used them for labelling two ontological positions which he deemed to be equally unacceptable. Cf. also his 'Propositions of Pure Logic', 225–6.

⁴⁶ See, 'Disquotational Truth and Factually Defective Discourse' (henceforth 'Disquotational'), 405.

⁴⁷ Claimed by Grover in Ch. 9 of her collection *A Prosentential Theory of Truth* (henceforth *PrTh*).

⁴⁸ David, *Correspondence and Disquotation* (henceforth *C&D*), 53–60.

⁴⁹ See Boghossian, 'The Status of Content', 161; C. Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (henceforth *T&O*), 16. A few pages later Wright acknowledges that at least one 'deflationist' *does* take truth to be a property (*T&O*, 21 n. 15). The quotation is from Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth* (henceforth *RCT*), 41; cf. p. 2. In Kirkham, *ThT*, 307 ff., 'the Deflationary Thesis' is explained along the same lines.

again, minimalism turns out to be inflationist, and so does disquotationalism, because they take truth to be a *property* of propositions or of certain linguistic objects. A few pages later Wright tells us that it is deflationism's 'most basic and distinctive contention that "true" is merely a device for endorsing assertions'.⁵⁰ But this characterization only fits the position that Strawson took in 1949. Horwich himself seems to mean by 'deflationism' the denial of the claim that 'the property of truth has some sort of underlying nature,'⁵¹ but why not call the minimalist account an attempt at disclosing the nature of truth? In view of this terminological chaos, I propose to put the term 'deflationism' on what Otto Neurath once called, tongue in cheek, the *Index Verborum Prohibitorum*.

The last two questions to be considered in this book are given in Figure 1.4. The term 'alethic realism' (which I have borrowed from Alston⁵²) is not only a very ugly Greco-Latin concoction. It also tends to be mispronounced or misprinted as 'athletic realism', which is very unfortunate because the doctrine for which I use this title is not a very muscular affair. Its one and only contention is this: *some true propositions which human beings are able to comprehend can never be contents of any justified human beliefs*. Truth, alethic realists contend, outruns rational acceptability; it is not epistemically constrained.⁵³ (Notice that in my mouth these slogans are intended to abbreviate the italicized statement.) Alethic realism, thus understood, calls attention to a kind of *inevitable ignorance* on our part, but it is not committed to allowing the possibility of *undetected error*: it does not imply that even a 'theory that is "ideal" from the point of view of operational utility, inner beauty and elegance, "plausibility", "simplicity", "conservatism", etc. might be false.'⁵⁴ (Since it lacks this implication, alethic realism differs vastly from the doctrine Putnam calls 'metaphysical realism'.) Furthermore, alethic realism is *not* wedded to the principle of bivalence, according to which every truth-candidate is either true or false.

According to alethic *anti*-realism, on the other hand, every truth that is comprehensible to human beings can become the content of a justified human

⁵⁰ C. Wright, *T&O*, 33; cf. p. 21. Somewhat ironically, Wright's justified complaint that 'deflationism is actually something of a potpourri' (30) is confirmed by the use of this term in *T&O*.

⁵¹ Horwich, *Truth*, 120.

⁵² Alston, *RCT*. As to the doctrine associated with this term, the definition in *RCT*, 1, 6, and 231 differs widely from my own explanation in the text above.

⁵³ I have adopted the second term from C. Wright, 'Can a Davidsonian Meaning-Theory be Construed in Terms of Assertibility?' (henceforth 'Assertibility'), 426. In *T&O* Wright uses 'not evidence-transcendent' with the same intent, but the latter phrase is less felicitous: most justified beliefs 'go beyond' the evidence because they are not strictly entailed by the evidence.

⁵⁴ Putnam, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, 125; cf. *Realism and Reason*, 13. The kind of realism that Davidson rejects is also characterized by the admission of undetectable error: see his 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', 140, 'Epistemology and Truth', 188–9; and 'The Structure and Content of Truth' (henceforth 'Structure'), 298, 308.

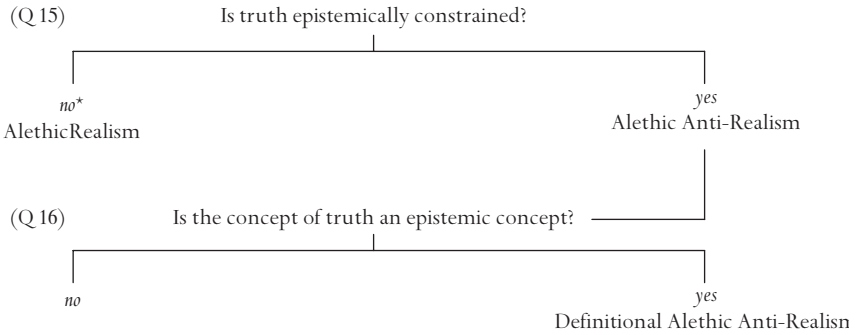


Figure 1.4. QUESTIONS 15–16

belief. (The term ‘anti-realism’ is Dummett’s coinage. Its paleness is intended: ‘idealism’ carries too many connotations which are irrelevant to the point at issue.) Truth, alethic anti-realists claim, does *not* outrun rational acceptability, it is epistemically constrained: whatever is true *could be* rationally accepted.

Taking the variables in the following universally quantified biconditionals to run over acts or states or propositions (as the case may be) which human beings can perform or be in or comprehend, we can say that alethic anti-realism is correct if (the left-to-right half of) any of these biconditionals expresses a truth about truth.

- Brentano* $\forall x (x \text{ is true} \leftrightarrow x \text{ is, or has the same content as, an evident judgement})$
- Bradley* $\forall x (x \text{ is true} \leftrightarrow x \text{ belongs to a maximally coherent set of beliefs})$
- Peirce* $\forall x (x \text{ is true} \leftrightarrow x \text{ is a belief that all investigators would finally share if investigation were pursued long enough})$
- James* $\forall x (x \text{ is true} \leftrightarrow \exists t (x \text{ is a belief acquired at time } t \text{ \& } x \text{ meets all experiences at } t \text{ and after } t \text{ satisfactorily}))$
- Goodman* $\forall x (x \text{ is true} \leftrightarrow \exists t (x \text{ is credible at time } t \text{ \& } x \text{ remains credible at all times after } t))$
- Putnam* $\forall x (x \text{ is true} \leftrightarrow \text{it would be rational to accept } x \text{ if epistemic conditions were good enough})$
- Dummett* $\forall x (x \text{ is true} \leftrightarrow x \text{ can in principle become a content of knowledge})$
- (*Wright*) $\forall x (x \text{ is true} \leftrightarrow \exists y (y \text{ is an actually accessible state of information \& } x \text{ is warrantably assertible in } y \text{ \& } x \text{ remains warrantably assertible no matter how } y \text{ is enlarged upon or improved}))$.

I've put the last name in brackets, because Wright offers this biconditional in an exploratory spirit. In Chapter 7 ('Truth and Justifiability'), the final chapter of this book, I shall explain, and brood on, the above anti-realist biconditionals.⁵⁵

I have spelt out the anti-realist slogan, 'Truth does not outrun rational acceptability', in such a way that 'it is rationally acceptable that p' abbreviates 'it is in principle possible that some *human being* or other is justified in believing that p'. Let me now motivate this anthropocentrism by considering certain features of traditional theism and of Dummett's portrayal of the realist. The God of the Philosophers cognitively surpasses us to such an extent that He literally knows *everything*. Which impact would this doctrine, if it were true, have on the alethic realism/anti-realism issue? Bolzano marks one respect in which it would have no impact:

Aus der Allwissenheit Gottes folgt zwar, daß eine jede Wahrheit, sollte sie auch von keinem anderen Wesen gekannt, ja nur gedacht werden, doch ihm, dem Allwissenden, bekannt sey. . . . Daher gibt es eigentlich nicht eine einzige, durchaus von Niemand erkannte Wahrheit. Dieß hindert uns aber doch nicht, von Wahrheiten an sich als solchen zu reden, in deren Begriffe noch gar nicht vorausgesetzt wird, daß sie von irgend Jemand gedacht werden müßten. Denn wenn dieß Gedachtwerden auch nicht in dem Begriffe solcher Wahrheiten liegt: so kann es gleichwohl aus einem anderen Umstände (nämlich aus Gottes Allwissenheit) folgen, daß sie, wenn sonst von Niemand, wenigstens von Gott selbst erkannt werden müssen. [It follows indeed from God's omniscience that each truth is known to him, even if it is not recognized nor even thought by any other being. . . . Consequently, there actually is no truth that is recognized by nobody at all. This, however, should not keep us from speaking of truths in themselves, since their concept does not presuppose that they must be thought by someone. It is not contained in the concept of such truths that they are thought, but it can nevertheless follow from some other circumstance (in this case the omniscience of God) that they must be recognized by God himself, if by no one else.] (*Wissenschaftslehre*, I, 113⁵⁶)

As we shall soon see, only *definitional* anti-realists take the concept of 'recognizability' to be 'contained in the concept of truth'. But in any case one does not forsake alethic realism by conceding that an omniscient deity would not miss any truth. If it were the case that a deity who is essentially omniscient exists necessarily, it would be *impossible* for there to be any truth beyond rational acceptability, but even that would not settle the issue of alethic realism,⁵⁷ for the constraint that realists deem to be misplaced is characterized in terms of 'recognizability by cognitively *finite* beings'.

⁵⁵ I did not enter in the above catalogue of anti-realist pronouncements Rorty's off-hand remark that true is whatever is accepted by our cultural peers, for I cannot help thinking that this is just an attempt at being provocative (at playing Nietzsche?). In any case, Putnam has said all that needs to be said about it (see his *Renewing Philosophy*, 68–9), and Rorty himself has come to regret it.

⁵⁶ References to Bolzano's *WL* (as I shall hereinafter abbreviate the title of his *magnum opus*) are always to the original pagination, which is reproduced in all later editions as well as in the (abridged) English translations.

⁵⁷ *Pace* Alvin Plantinga, 'How to Be an Anti-Realist'.

Now even cognitively finite beings might be much superior to *us* (and other beings with our modes of sensory awareness and our conceptual resources), and this possibility is relevant for the way Dummett conceives of alethic realism. According to the Dummettian anti-realist biconditional, it is true that *p*, iff it is in principle possible to *know* that *p*. But the difference between knowability and, say, rational acceptability is not important for the point that is now at issue. There is another worry that can be safely put aside here. The modal expression ‘*can*’ in the Dummettian biconditional is to be understood in such a way that the following holds: if it is not true that *p*, then it cannot be known that *p*. Under the standard reading of ‘possible’ in alethic modal logic, the right-to-left half of that biconditional would be clearly incorrect: some contingent falsehoods *are* possible contents of knowledge, since a proposition that *p* which is false in the actual world but true in other possible worlds may be such that in some of those possible worlds somebody knows that *p*.⁵⁸ So Dummett needs a reading of ‘knowable’ in which the possibility of knowledge implies truth. (Thus understood, the right-to-left half of his biconditional is a matter of course. Contrast, for example, Putnam’s equivalence, read in the same direction: ‘If under epistemically optimal conditions it would be rational to believe that *p*, then it is true that *p*’ is a substantial claim, as can be seen from the fact that it has been seriously debated.⁵⁹) But what we are interested in here is the left-to-right half of Dummett’s biconditional.

Somewhat surprisingly, Dummett maintains that even a *realist* has to concede that the concept of truth is governed by the principle of knowability: ‘If a statement is true, it must be in principle possible to know that it is true.’⁶⁰ A realist is bound to reject this principle, of course, if ‘in principle possible’ is supposed to mean: in principle possible for beings with our modes of sensory awareness and our conceptual resources. But his attitude towards the principle of knowability will change, Dummett contends, as soon as it is taken also to cover hypothetical beings endowed with super-human (yet sub-divine) perceptual and conceptual abilities. Why is the realist’s attitude towards the principle of knowability supposed to change if it is given this reading? Dummett challenges him to explain how we can understand answers to questions that we do not know how

⁵⁸ This warning is due to Georg Henrik von Wright: see his *Logical Studies*, 183–4. Cf. also Richard Routley, ‘Necessary Limits to Knowledge’, 96–7, 105, 112 n. 27. (Could one avoid this trouble by prefixing the indexical modal operator ‘actually’ to ‘*p*’, i.e. by formulating the principle of knowability thus: ‘It is true that actually *p* iff it is possible to know that actually *p*’? There are grave problems with making real sense of such a formula; that was the upshot of the discussion of a paper by Dorothy Edgington, referred to below on p. 443 n. 206.)

⁵⁹ Cf., for example, J. J. C. Smart, ‘Realism vs Idealism’.

⁶⁰ Dummett, ‘What is a Theory of Meaning? II’ (henceforth ‘Meaning’), 61; cf. ‘Truth’, 23–4; *FPL*, 465; *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (henceforth *LBM*), 345.

to decide, and the hypothesis of a super-human (yet finite) verifier seems to enable the realist to give such an explanation:

The realist holds that we give sense to those sentences of our language which are not effectively decidable⁶¹ by appealing tacitly to means of determining their truth-values which we do not ourselves possess, but which we can conceive of by analogy with those which we do. ('Truth', 24)

[The realist] concedes the absurdity of supposing that a statement could be true if it was in principle impossible to know that it was true. The anti-realist's mistake, he thinks, is to apply this proposition in such a way that 'impossible' is taken to mean 'impossible for us'. Our... observational and intellectual faculties are, contingently, limited, so that there is no reason to suppose that any true statement will be able to be known to be true by us. All that is necessary is that there could be a subject capable of knowing it, if only with greater perceptual or cognitive powers than ours. (*LBM* 345)

In the case of questions we do not know how to decide, the realist is supposed to think of a super-human, but not omniscient, verifier, of a being with cognitive abilities which transcend our own, but which we can conceive of by analogy with those we do possess. This being, just to mention a few of its most remarkable achievements, is *per hypothesin* able to inspect not only each cup in his or her cupboard individually but also all elements of an infinite totality, and it can 'directly see' into the remote past and future as well as into your soul. Dummett then goes on to reject this appeal to a hypothetical super-human cognitive subject as an *obscurum per obscurius*. After all, what is dubious is whether the realist correctly ascribes to *us* an ability to understand answers to questions we do not know how to decide. How could this ascription be legitimized by appealing to the idea of an ability which we—undoubtedly—do not possess?⁶² Realists will be well advised to lock out this Trojan Horse before Dummett can jump out with the sword of his criticism. But then they must find a more plausible way of answering Dummett's hermeneutical challenge: how can we understand sentences that allegedly express truths beyond justifiability?

⁶¹ Statements of a certain class are 'effectively decidable' iff there is a standard procedure which can be applied in any given case and which is guaranteed to lead to a correct verdict as to the statement's truth-value. A statement may lack this property, although under certain circumstances we may be able to tell whether the condition for its truth is fulfilled or not. Take Goldbach's Conjecture that every even number greater than two is the sum of two prime numbers. If it is false, we might one day be confronted with a counter-example and recognize it for what it is; if it is true, we might one day stumble upon a proof of it and recognize this proof for what it is. But there is no standard procedure of bringing about a situation of either kind.

⁶² Cf. Dummett, *FPL*, 467–8; 'Meaning', 62; and, especially, *LBM* 346–8. Cf. also McDowell, 'On "The Reality of the Past"', §5. Gareth Evans cautioned against 'ideal verificationism' in *The Varieties of Reference*, 94–100.

Alethic anti-realists never present empirical evidence for their biconditionals, and they never restrict the alleged co-extensiveness of truth and a certain epistemic property to the actual world. So we may assume that they take their biconditionals to express *conceptual* (necessary and a priori knowable) truths about truth. They do not thereby incur an obligation to identify the sense of 'true' with that of any epistemic predicate. But some of them make such an identification and thus answer QUESTION 16 affirmatively. Charles Sanders Peirce, for example, seems to do so when he says:

If your terms 'truth' and 'falsity' are taken in such senses as to be definable in terms of doubt and belief and the course of experience . . . well and good. ('What Pragmatism Is' (1905))⁶³

The distinction registered under QUESTION 16 and the implications of calling a claim 'conceptual' are of great importance for the enquiry to be undertaken in this book. So let me pause to elaborate. The demands on 'is F' in tenets of the form 'for all x, x is true iff x is F' can be of various strengths, ranging from absolutely minimal to absolutely maximal. This predicate may be required to express

- (I) a concept that is *co-extensive* with the truth concept;
- (II) a concept that is *necessarily co-extensive* with it;
- (III) a concept that *can be known a priori to be co-extensive* with it;
- (IV) a concept that is *self-evidently co-extensive* with it;
- (V) *the same concept* as is expressed by 'true'.

If a predicate expresses a concept C, fully understanding that predicate suffices for possessing C. Satisfaction of condition *n* is a necessary but not sufficient condition for satisfying condition *n + 1*. Here are some philosophically neutral examples of predicate pairs, arranged in the same order, in which the second predicate meets the pertinent requirement with respect to the concept expressed by the first. (These examples will serve us at various points in the course of our reflections on truth.⁶⁴) For all x,

- (1) (a) x is a vertebrate with a heart iff x is a vertebrate with a liver
- (b) x was written by the author of *Middlemarch* iff x was written by the author of *Silas Marner*

⁶³ In CP 5.416. (Peirce pleads here for a definition of truth in terms of what he calls an *inquiry*: we embark on an inquiry whenever we seek to transform a state of doubt by means of a course of experience into a state of belief.) As for the question whether he really is a definitional anti-realist, cf. Peirce, CP, 5.407 [1905], cited below on p. 679, as well as my cautionary remark in the accompanying footnote.

⁶⁴ As for (1a), I take it on faith that Kirkham knows his biology here: *ThT*, 4–5. As for the modal status of (2), I accept Kripke's and Putnam's view of such statements.

- (2) (a) x is a lump of common salt iff x is a lump of sodium chloride
 (b) x was written by George Eliot iff x was written by Mary Ann Evans
- (3) (a) x is a triangle iff x is a closed plane rectilinear figure whose internal angles add up to 180°
 (b) x is an equiangular triangle iff x is an equilateral triangle
 (c) x has a hundred inhabitants iff x has $1^3 + 2^3 + 3^3 + 4^3$ inhabitants
- (4) (a) x is a closed three-sided plane rectilinear figure iff x is a closed three-angled plane rectilinear figure
 (b) x is a glass which is half-full iff x is a glass which is half-empty
- (5) (a) x is a triangle iff x is a plane figure bounded by three straight lines
 (b) x is an equiangular triangle iff x is a triangle with equal angles
 (c) x is a drake iff x is a male duck
 (d) x is a serpent iff x is a snake.

The property of being F is identical with the property of being G only if *necessarily* all and only F's are G.⁶⁵ So properties are more finely individuated than extensions. The concept of being F is the same as the concept of being G if and only if 'F' and 'G' are *synonymous*. So concepts, too, are more fine-grained than extensions. If two predicates need not have the same sense in order to signify the same property (as many philosophers plausibly assume⁶⁶), then properties are more coarsely individuated than concepts. The predicates paired in (5b), for example, unlike those in (3b), are synonymous, hence they express the same concept.

No philosopher who tries to define 'true' is aiming to graft a new meaning upon an old word. So the notion of a definition which my rubric 'definitional alethic anti-realism' invokes is not that of a 'constructive definition' or a *stipulation*, which either introduces a new expression for purposes of abbreviation (such as 'pi-meson' in physics) or forces an old expression into a new, tightly circumscribed service (e.g., 'model' in mathematical logic), but rather that of an *analytic definition* which purports to capture, by means of a compound expression, the sense of an atomic expression already in use.⁶⁷ The predicate on

⁶⁵ If this condition is also sufficient, there can be neither two or more necessarily co-exemplified properties nor two or more necessarily unexemplified properties.

⁶⁶ e.g. Putnam, 'On Properties'; Armstrong, *A Theory of Universals*; Peacocke, *A Study of Concepts*. Carnap used 'concept' to cover properties and relations, and he took F-ness to be the same property as G-ness iff 'F' and 'G' are logically equivalent (*Meaning and Necessity*, §4). This is to individuate concepts too coarsely, I think. Nowadays Horwich regards F-ness and G-ness as identical iff 'F' and 'G' have the same meaning, so it is not surprising that he sees 'no good reason not to identify properties with concepts' (*Meaning*, 21). In *Abstrakte Gegenstände*, 245–8, I took the same view. I now think that this is to individuate properties too finely.

⁶⁷ The terminology in quotation marks is Frege's: see *NS*, 224–9 (207–11) on definitions that are *aufbauend* (lit., 'building up') and those which are *zerlegend* (lit., 'dissecting').

the right-hand side of (5c), for example, could serve as definiens in an analytic definition of the predicate on the left-hand side. As can be seen from (5d), a non-analytic definition need not be a stipulation.

Tenets of strengths (III), (IV), and (V), if correct, articulate *conceptual* truths about truth. Acquiring the knowledge that is described in (III) may be a strenuous undertaking (as your school-day memories concerning the examples under (3) may confirm). By contrast, the knowledge alluded to in (IV) is just a matter of lexical competence: two predicates express self-evidently co-extensive concepts if and only if nobody who fully understands both predicates (knows their conventional linguistic meanings) can believe that one of them applies to a certain entity x (doesn't apply to x) without believing that the other one applies to x as well (doesn't apply to x either). Meeting this requirement is also a necessary condition for two predicates' expressing the same concept. It isn't a sufficient condition, though, for otherwise we would have to declare the predicates paired in (4), or the predicates 'is true' and 'is true and either denied by someone or not denied by anyone' to express the same concept.

Let us now consider, in the light of these distinctions, two attempts at refuting all epistemic conceptions of truth. They both brandish the Denominalization Schema

(Den) It is true that p , iff p

as an allegedly lethal weapon. It is commonly thought that advocates of very different views about truth—including alethic anti-realists—can, with the greatest equanimity, accept as conceptually true all propositions expressed by (non-pathological) instances of this schema. But Alston and Lewis disagree with the common lore. Let us start with Alston's argument. How does he reach the heterodox conclusion that 'epistemic accounts of the concept of truth... are incompatible with an acceptance of the T-schema [i.e. (Den)]'?⁶⁸ The core of his argument is this:

[T]he fact that sugar is sweet is both necessary and sufficient for its being true that sugar is sweet. It is true that p if and only if p Any such biconditional is necessarily, conceptually true. . . . Since the fact that p is (necessarily) both necessary and sufficient for its being true that p , that leaves no room for an epistemic necessary or sufficient condition for truth. Nothing more is required for its being true that p than just the fact that p ; and nothing less will suffice. How then can some epistemic status of the proposition . . . that p be necessary and sufficient for the truth of [the proposition that] p ? It seems clear that the imposition of an epistemic necessary and sufficient condition for truth runs into conflict with the T-schema. (*RCT*, 209)

⁶⁸ Alston, *RCT*, 217; cf. 3, 209.

Since there is no reference to facts in the schema, I assume that Alston's talk of facts here is just a manner of speaking: as soon as one replaces the binary connective 'if and only if' by the dyadic predicate 'is necessary and sufficient for', one has to grope for 'noun phrases. (Actually, it isn't a very felicitous way of speaking, for if it is *not true* that *p*, talk of 'the fact that *p*' is inappropriate.)

As Alston recognizes, the argument will not yet do by itself.⁶⁹ Why shouldn't *two* non-synonymous sentences equally succeed in specifying a (necessarily) necessary-and-sufficient condition for a certain proposition's being true? Substitution-instances of our examples (3a) and (5a) contain on their right-hand sides two non-synonymous sentences which equally succeed in specifying such a condition for a certain figure's being a triangle.

Before we turn to Alston's reaction to this reply, let us look at Lewis's (more recent and apparently independent) attempt to show how acceptance of instances of (Den), which he somewhat misleadingly calls 'redundancy biconditionals', conflicts with any 'epistemic theory of truth'.⁷⁰ Consider the following derivation. Its first premiss is a substitution-instance of (Den), its second premiss results from applying an anti-realist ('epistemic') conception of truth to a particular truth-candidate, and the conclusion is obtained via transitivity of 'iff':

- (P1) it is true that cats purr, iff cats purr;
- (P2) it is true that cats purr, iff it is (knowable) that cats purr;
- (C) therefore, cats purr iff it is (knowable) that cats purr.

I have kept Lewis's feline example, but I have replaced his 'it is useful to believe' with 'it is (knowable)'. This is legitimate because Lewis explicitly claims that his reflections on what he calls the 'pragmatic theory' of truth apply with equal force to 'epistemic theories'. The locution 'is (knowable)' is just a place-holder for a predicate that is alleged to signify an epistemic necessary-and-sufficient condition for truth. (You find serious candidates in my list of anti-realist biconditionals.) Now Lewis rightly says about the premisses of the derivation that 'these two biconditional are meant to be a priori', he declares the conclusion to be 'manifestly not a priori', and he concludes that a conception of truth which embraces (P1) is incompatible with an account which endorses something like (P2). How is this supposed to follow? A logically valid derivation, the premisses of which are all a priori, cannot have a conclusion that is not a priori. The above derivation is logically valid. So if (C) is not a priori, then (P1) and (P2) cannot both be a priori, and, consequently, the two theories which assign apriority to the premisses cannot both be true. This is incontestable. Unfortunately, Lewis does not

⁶⁹ RCT, 211.

⁷⁰ Lewis, 'Correspondence', 275. Cf. Colin McGinn, *Logical Properties*, 88–90.

say *why* he takes (C) to be manifestly not a priori. An alethic anti-realist who thinks otherwise is not refuted by being told that he is obviously wrong.

Alston substantially agrees with Lewis. He explicitly says that all (non-pathological) instances of (Den) express ‘necessary, conceptual, analytic’ truths,⁷¹ so by his lights, too, it is a priori knowable that P1. His argument from (Den) is directed against definitional alethic anti-realists who ‘identify the concept of truth with the concept of a positive epistemic status’⁷² and who are thereby committed to maintain that it is a priori knowable that P2. When confronting the anti-realist reply to his core argument cited above, Alston argues that the biconditional connecting the two allegedly necessary-and-sufficient conditions for the truth of a given proposition must itself also be taken to express a conceptual truth.⁷³ Thus (C*) sugar is sweet iff it is (knowable) that sugar is sweet

would have to formulate a conceptual truth. And at this point Alston believes himself to have shown what he had set out to show, for ‘what should we say about that [i.e. about the assumption that it is conceptually true that C*]? So far as I can see, it is totally lacking in plausibility.’⁷⁴ So he concurs with Lewis’s comment on (C).

Alston does tell us why he finds this assumption about the status of (C*) totally implausible. The proposition expressed on the left-hand side of (C*), he says, ‘attributes sweetness to sugar. It says nothing whatever about [any epistemic condition]. It asserts a fact about a substance, a foodstuff.’⁷⁵ This reasoning presupposes that a biconditional cannot express a conceptual truth if one side of it ‘says something about’ something about which the other side is silent. Is this presupposition plausible? A truth (about truth, or whatever) is either conceptual or non-conceptual, and if it is non-conceptual then it is either contingent or necessary. Alston duly registers these distinctions, but he neglects the differences, within the field of conceptual truths, between (III), (IV), and (V). He takes it for granted that an anti-realist biconditional can only express a conceptual truth about truth if an epistemic condition is, as it were, *written into* the concept of truth; in other words, if the epistemic predicate in its right branch spells out the sense of the truth-predicate.⁷⁶ This explains why Alston takes it to be an objection against anti-realist biconditionals that we are not ‘saying anything about [any epistemic condition] when we say that a proposition is true’ (unless, of course, that proposition itself happens to be about an epistemic condition).⁷⁷

⁷¹ *RCT*, 1.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 219. We will soon see that this seriously restricts the scope of his argument.

⁷³ His argument for this contention is less perspicuous than that of Lewis: see *ibid.*, 211–14.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

Alston is keenly aware that advocates of an epistemic conception of truth are not obliged to identify the concept of truth with any epistemic concept. In any case, one may wonder whether any appeal to (Den) is needed to refute the conceptual identity claim: as the ongoing philosophical debate amply illustrates, the concept of truth is not self-evidently co-extensive with any of the concepts expressed in the anti-realist biconditionals, hence it is a fortiori not identical with any of them. When Alston characterizes the alternative option (which he then goes on to reject as well) he uses biconditional (2a) as a model:

There may be necessary and sufficient conditions for [a proposition's being true] that are not embodied in the concept [of truth]. Having a chemical composition of sodium chloride is necessary and sufficient for a substance's being salt, even though that is different from the conditions embedded in our (ordinary) concept of salt (looking and tasting a certain way). (*RCT*, 229–30)⁷⁸

If alethic anti-realists really had to rely on the model of equivalences like (2a), then one should scold them as follows: 'A necessary but non-conceptual truth can only be discovered a posteriori. But you never offer empirical evidence for your claim about truth. Hence your contention is just a wild speculation.' But does alethic anti-realism depend on that model? A biconditional may very well express a conceptual truth even though on its right-hand side something is said about something, about which nothing is said on the left-hand side. Recall our examples for pairs of concepts that can be known a priori to be co-extensive: (3a) something is a triangle iff it is a closed plane rectilinear figure whose internal angles add up to 180°; (3b) something is an equiangular triangle iff it is an equilateral triangle; (3c) something has a hundred inhabitants iff it has $1^3 + 2^3 + 3^3 + 4^3$ inhabitants. Nothing is 'said about' a sum of angles on the left-hand-side of (3a), or about sides of equal length on the left of (3b), or about a sum of numbers on the left of (3c). Nevertheless, all three biconditionals formulate conceptual truths. So an alethic anti-realist can consistently claim to teach us a conceptual truth about truth and deny that 'true' has the same sense as any epistemic predicate.

For all that, I confess to finding the assumption that (C) and (C*) express conceptual truths as implausible as Alston and Lewis do. But Lewis does not pause to argue for this verdict, and I have tried to show that Alston's argument from 'aboutness' does not succeed. Suppose a version of alethic anti-realism implies that (even if there is no omniscient being) it can never be true that things are thus-and-so unless there (actually) is at least one thinking being. Advocates of this view who also subscribe to (Den) are committed to a kind of idealism

⁷⁸ His argument for this contention is less perspicuous than that of Lewis: see *RCT*, 37–8.

according to which things can never be thus-and-so if no thinker exists. So if you believe that the moon would be round even if there were no thinkers around, you would be well advised not to embrace such a variety of alethic anti-realism. Still, acceptance of (Den) can consistently be combined even with this view of truth, provided the latter is in itself consistent.

So it seems that the common lore got it right: the Denominalization Schema is not a lethal weapon against every conception of truth which takes truth to be epistemically constrained. It may, however, provide ammunition against some such accounts. Thus, Spinoza, who seems to favour a coherentist conception of truth,⁷⁹ comes dangerously close to denying the right-to-left half of a (non-pathological) instance of (Den) when he writes in his *Treatise on the Emendation of Human Understanding*:

Si aliquis dicit, Petrum ex. gr. existere, nec tamen scit, Petrum existere, illa cogitatio respectu illius falsa est, vel, si mavis, non est vera, quamvis Petrus re vera existat. Nec haec enunciatio, Petrus existit, vera est, nisi respectu illius, qui certo scit, Petrum existere. [If somebody says, for instance, that Peter exists, although he does not know that Peter exists, then his thought, with regard to him, is false, or, if you prefer, not true, even though Peter really does exist. Nor is this statement, ‘Peter exists,’ true except with regard to somebody who knows for certain that Peter exists.] (*Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*, 26 (trans. 31))

These reflections, I daresay, scarcely contribute to the emendation of our understanding of *truth*.

Russell attributes to William James the tenet that, for all *p*, it is true that *p*, iff it makes for happiness to believe that *p*. His critique of this contention relies on (Den):

Take the question whether other people exist. . . . It is plain that it makes for happiness to believe that they exist—for even the greatest misanthropist would not wish to be deprived of the objects of his hate. Hence the belief that other people exist is, pragmatically, a true belief. But if I am troubled by solipsism, the discovery that a belief in the existence of others is ‘true’ in the pragmatist’s sense is not enough to allay my sense of loneliness: the perception that I should profit by rejecting solipsism is not alone sufficient to make me reject it. For what I desire is not that the belief in solipsism should be false in the pragmatic sense, but that other people should in fact exist. And with the pragmatist’s meaning of truth, these two do not necessarily go together. The belief in solipsism might be false even if I were the only person . . . in the universe. (‘Transatlantic “Truth”’, 122)

The core of Russell’s argument (using ‘*p*₁’ as abbreviation for ‘There are other people’ and ‘*p*₂’ for ‘I am alone’) is this: (A) It may be pragmatically-true that *p*₁, although not-*p*₁, and (B) it may not be pragmatically-true that *p*₂, although *p*₂. Hence ‘pragmatically-true’ is not equivalent with ‘true’. Why does this follow? Well, if we replace ‘pragmatically-true’ in the first conjunct by ‘true’, we see that

⁷⁹ Cf. Ralph Walker, *The Coherence Theory of Truth*, 48–60.

it does not comply with the right-to-left half of (Den), and if we make the same substitution in the second conjunct, we recognize that it offends against the left-to-right half of (Den).⁸⁰ (In his reply James hastens to assure his critic that the pragmatist conception of truth, properly understood, does not allow for (A). He forgets to tackle (B).⁸¹)

For more than a decade Hilary Putnam, partially under Dummett's influence, advocated what may very well be the most liberal variety of (non-definitional) alethic anti-realism. At that time he was convinced that

every truth that human beings can understand is made true by conditions that are, in principle, accessible to some human beings at some time or other, if not necessarily at all times or to all human beings. ('Reply to David Anderson', 364)

By the early 1990s he had given up this position. After rehearsing his reasons, I shall offer an argument from blind spots in the field of justification, which refutes all varieties of anti-realism at one stroke—or so I would like to think. I shall try to show how the alethic realist can cope with Dummett's hermeneutical challenge if this challenge is directed at the starting-point of that argument.

Before embarking on the long exploratory voyage on which I have invited you to join me in this chapter, some of my readers may want to know where they will come across my own (positive) views. So I'd better tell them right now that in

- Chapter 2, sections 1.3–5, 2 (Introduction), and 3,
- Chapter 5, sections 1, 3.3, and 4,
- Chapter 6, section 2, and
- Chapter 7, section 3.

I shall argue for the answers that are 'starred' in the flow charts in Figures 1.1–1.4, and explain the principles and notions that are required for those arguments. I hope this hint will not be misunderstood. I would have written a book that comprises not much more than the sections just mentioned, if I were not thoroughly convinced that much is to be learned from engaging with the opposite answers.

⁸⁰ Whereas Lewis takes 'It is useful to believe that cats purr, iff cats purr' to be 'manifestly not a priori', Russell declares 'It is useful to believe that there are other people, iff there are other people' to be manifestly false. Lewis's verdict could be correct even if Russell's is not.

⁸¹ James, 'Two English Critics', 148. Putnam is convinced that Russell was unfair to James, but at the end of his paper, 'James's Theory of Truth', it turns out that under his reading, too, the theory is 'disastrous'. Interestingly, his objection is structurally the same as Russell's: James's view, as understood by Putnam, implies that a judgement that p may not be pragmatically-true, although p; so pragmatical 'truth' isn't truth. Putnam's 'p' is a past-tense sentence (which doesn't ring any bells with me): 'Lizzie Borden committed [didn't commit] the famous axe murders.' See Putnam, *op. cit.*, 182–3. For my own reading of, and objection to, James, see Postscript to Ch. 7.1.3 below.