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Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed

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Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed*

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I

Every student of English-speaking analytical metaphysics is taught that the early twentieth century philosophical debate about truth confronted the correspondence theory, supported by Russell, Moore, the early Wittgenstein and, later, J.L. Austin, with the coherence theory advocated by the British Idealists.[1] Sometimes the pragmatist conception of truth deriving from Dewey, William James, and C.S. Peirce is

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1 Two *loci classici* of coherentism are H.H. Joachim, *The Nature of Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1906) and F.H Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1914). Ralph Walker has argued that coherentism is implicit also in the forms of anti-realism canvassed by Michael Dummett and Hilary Putnam (at least, the Hilary Putnam of *Reason, Truth and History*). See Ralph Walker, *The Coherence Theory of Truth: Realism, Anti-Realism, Idealism* (London: Routledge, 1989). Myself, I doubt this — for further discussion, see my critical study of Walker's book in *Synthese* 103 (1995): 279–302.

regarded as a third player. And as befits a debate at the dawn of analytical philosophy, the matter in dispute is normally taken to have been the proper analysis of the concept.

No doubt this conception nicely explains some of the characteristic turns taken in the debate. Analysis, as traditionally conceived, has to consist in the provision of illuminating conceptual equivalences; and illumination will depend, according to the standard rules of play, on the analysans' utilizing only concepts which, in the best case, are in some way prior to and independent of the notion being analyzed — or, if that's too much to ask, then concepts which at least permit of some form of explication which does not in turn take one straight back to that notion. Thus if it is proposed, in this spirit, that truth is correspondence to external fact, it will be possible for a critic both to grant the *correctness* of the proposal and to reject it nevertheless — because, it may be contended, it fails to comply with the conditions on an illuminating *analysis*. In particular, it will be an obligation on an analysis of truth in terms of correspondence that it be possible to supply appropriate independent explications of the notions of "correspondence" and "fact," and it is exactly here, of course, that many of the traditional difficulties for the correspondence proposal have been located. Likewise, if we propose to analyze truth in terms of coherence, or on broadly pragmatist lines, we must be prepared to allow that any and every occurrence of "true" as applied to what the analysis recognizes to be its primary bearers — sentences, or propositions, or whatever — may be replaced, without change of meaning,[2] by an expression of the preferred analysans. And, again, many of the knots into which critics have tied proposals of these kinds depend upon exploitation of this constraint. As recently as 1982, for instance, Alvin Plantinga observed that if "true" just means *would be believed by cognitively ideal subjects operating under cognitively ideal conditions*, then there seems to be no

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2 How this constraint may be made to consist with the requirement that analysis be illuminating is, of course, the heart of Moore's paradox of analysis. But the sort of objection about to be noted need read no more into sameness of content than sameness of truth-conditions.

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prospect of recovering, without paradox, an account of the content of the thought: it is true that conditions are not cognitively ideal.[3]

When the debate is all about the analysis of the concept of truth, then at least two other kinds of position have to be possible — and, historically, they have indeed been occupied. One is the indefinabilist view adopted by Frege: that truth allows of *no* analysis, because it is too simple, or primitive, or because any notions involved in a formulation which is at least correct will rapidly bring one back to truth, so compromising illumination. Frege held this view for reasons whose cogency is a matter of dispute,[4] but the apparent paucity of successful analyses of *anything* in analytical philosophy, and the inchoate and uneasy state of the methodology of analysis itself, must encourage the thought that this negative stance will not easily be dismissed. Quite different — and rather more interesting — is the proposal that correspondence, coherentist, pragmatist, and even indefinabilist conceptions of truth all err in their common conviction that "true" presents a substantial concept at all. This is the deflationist tradition, which is usually thought to have originated in Ramsey, was defended in rather different ways by Ayer and Strawson, and which survives in contemporary writers such as Paul Horwich and Hartry Field.[5] According to

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3 Alvin Plantinga, "How to be an Anti-Realist," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 56 (1982): 47–70. Plantinga's point also engages certain formulations of the coherence theory. For instance to suppose that "true" means *would be believed by a subject who had arrived at a maximally coherent and comprehensive set of beliefs* is again implicitly to surrender the means to construe the truth of the thought: no-one holds a maximally coherent and comprehensive set of beliefs. The problem is a special case of the so-called conditional fallacy: any analysis in terms of subjunctive conditionals is potentially in trouble if its intended range comprises statements which are incompatible with the protases of the relevant conditionals.

4 For discussion, see Peter Carruthers, "Frege's Regress," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 82 (1981): 17–32. See also the useful account in Ralph C.S. Walker's survey article "Theories of Truth" in the Blackwell *Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, ed. Bob Hale and Crispin Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), esp. Section 6.

5 Paul Horwich's *Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) provides a detailed defence of the deflationary tradition and a useful bibliography of its literature. While Field's

deflationism, there simply isn't anything which truth, in general, *is*. It's a misconstrual of the role of the adjective "true" to see it as expressing the concept of a substantial characteristic of which one of the traditional accounts might provide a correct analysis, or which might allow of no correct analysis. Those who think otherwise are missing the point that the role of a significant adjective doesn't have to be to ascribe a genuine property.

My first principal point is that, notwithstanding the fact that it rationalizes many of the moves made, and doubtless reflects therefore the intentions of many of the protagonists, the conception of the traditional debate about truth as centred upon reductive analysis of the concept is not best fitted to generate the most fruitful interpretation of that debate. To see this, suppose for the sake of argument that the indefinabilists are right: that "true," like, say, "red," admits of no illuminating conceptual breakdown. It is striking that philosophical discussion of colour has hardly been silenced by the corresponding point about the concept *red* or basic colour concepts generally. The contention that there is, as Locke thought, an interesting distinction between primary and secondary qualities of objects and that red is a secondary quality; the contention that whether an object is red is, in some way, a "response-dependent" matter, or more generally that there is some form of implicit relativity in the idea of an object's being red; the contention that red is, on the contrary, a non-relational property of objects or, more specifically, that red things form a natural kind; even the "error-theoretic" view that a complete inventory of characteristics found in the real world would contain no mention of colours — all these views, and an acknowledgement of the interest of the debates to which they contribute, are consistent with recognition of the indefinability of colour concepts. So, consistently with its indefinability — if it is indefinable — a similar range of issues can be expected to arise in connec-

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"The Deflationary Conception of Truth" (in *Fact, Science and Morality*, ed. G. Macdonald and C. Wright [Oxford: Blackwell, 1986], 55–117) eventually suggests that there are purposes for which a correspondence conception is needed; his more recent "Deflationist Views of Meaning and Content" (*Mind* 103 [1994], 249–85) takes a more committed deflationary line.

tion with truth. "True" — even when taken, in the broad sense which interests us, as a predicate of content-bearing things — is predicated of a variety of items: beliefs, thoughts, propositions, token utterances of type sentences. But whatever such items we have in mind, we can ask whether one of them being true is in any way an *implicitly rela-tional* matter — and if so, what are the terms of the relation; whether it is a *response-dependent* matter, or in any other way dependent on sub-jectivity or a point of view; whether there is indeed nothing generally in which the truth of such an item consists — whether an inventory of all the properties to be found in the world would include mention of *no such thing as truth*.

Indeed, such issues arise for any putative characteristic, Φ. Should we (ontologists) take Φ seriously at all, or is some sort of error-theoretic or deflationary view appropriate? If we do take it seriously, should we think of the situation of an item's being Φ as purely a mat-ter of how it is intrinsically with that item, or are we rather dealing with some form of relation? Is an item's being Φ an objective matter (and what does it mean to say so)? These are analytic-philosophical issues *par excellence*, but their resolution need not await — and might not be settled by — the provision of a correct conceptual analysis.

II

Suppose we discard the analysis-centred conception of the traditional debate and look at it instead in the way suggested by the foregoing re-flections. Clearly the deflationary option remains in play, holding that truth is not a genuine characteristic of anything — that it would find no place in an inventory of what is real. The other views all allow the reality of truth but differ about its *structure*, or in respects relevant to the broad question of objectivity. Correspondence theory holds that truth is a relational characteristic whose terms are respectively propo-sitions — to pick one among the possibilities[6] — and *non-propositional*

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6 Sentences, token utterances, statements, beliefs, and thoughts are some among the other content-bearing items which we ordinarily think of as apt for truth.

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items — facts, or states of affairs — in an independent world.[7] The proposal thus bears both on structure and, so proposers of correspondence intend, on objectivity too. Coherence theory agrees about the relationality of truth, but disagrees about the terms of the relation: on this type of view, the truth of a proposition consists not in a relation to something non-propositional but in its participation in a system, meeting certain conditions, whose other participants are likewise propositions — so ultimately in relations to those other propositions. This is again, in the first instance, a view about the structure of truth, but it was intended by its original proponents to provide a vehicle for their idealism. And pragmatism — the view that truth is, broadly, a matter of operational success of some kind — while making no clear suggestion about structure (though there may be commitments in this direction once the relevant dimensions of success are clarified), stands in opposition to the correspondence theorists' thoughts about objectivity without — intentionally anyway — implying anything like such idealism.

Let's focus for the time being on the question of structure, and return later to some of the issues connected with pragmatism. We may chart the possibilities in a tree as follows:

A proposition's truth is:

a genuine characteristic   not a genuine characteristic

an intrinsic (non-relational) characteristic   a relational characteristic

a characteristic constituted by relations to other propositions   a characteristic constituted by relations to the non-propositional world

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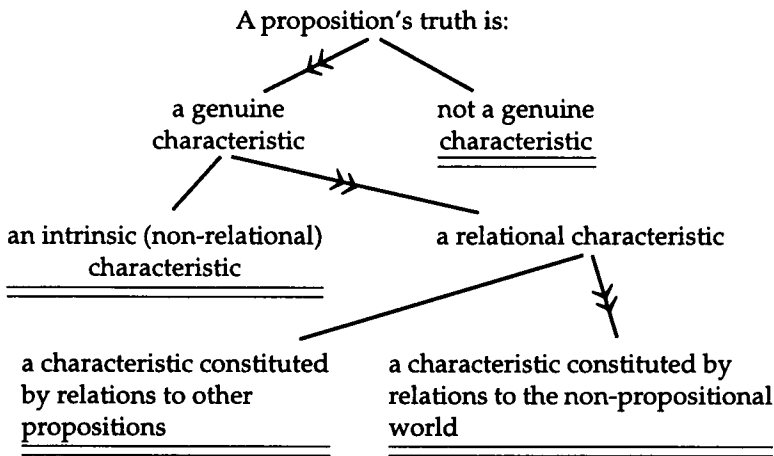
7 Excepting, of course, the case where a proposition is itself about propositions.

Essentially, then, just four structural proposals are possible: deflationism; intrinsicism; and the two forms of relationalism, coherentism, and correspondence. I think it's fair to say that this conception of correspondence, shorn of any further analytical or explanatory obligations, comes across as highly common-sensical. In general, we'd want to think both that there's a real distinction marked by the classification of some propositions as true and others as false, and that it is a distinction which cannot generally be understood without reference to things which are not themselves propositions, and so cannot be understood in intrinsicist or coherentist terms.

This piece of common sense is not to be confused with the idea that, understood one way, correspondence is nothing more than a platitude. The platitude is that predications of "true" may always harmlessly be glossed in terms of correspondence to fact, telling it like it is, etc. These paraphrases incorporate no substantial commitment about the structure of truth — any more than the paraphrasability of "she did it for John" by "she did it on John's behalf" involves a commitment to the view that altruistic action is really a three-term relation. By contrast, the ordinary, common-sensical conception of the kind of thing a proposition's truth is involves exactly the structural commitments associated with the feathered path on the above tree.

It will be a second main contention of this paper that there is no stable alternative to allowing at least some scope to this common-sensical conception.

III

In order to make good that contention, we need to see that each of the three alternatives gives rise to intractable problems.

Intrinsicism is the easiest case to deal with. Fix attention on the case of contingent truths. If its truth-value were an intrinsic — but contingent — property of a particular proposition, then no contingent change in any other object should entail change in the proposition in that particular respect. That's an instance of a quite general principle. The mass, for instance, of a given body is a contingent but intrinsic property of that body only if no contingent change in any other object would entail change in that object's mass. By contrast, a property — for instance,

being a grandfather — is essentially relational, even if expressed by what looks like a semantically simple predicate, if change in other objects may entail that a particular object sheds, or acquires, that property. By this simple test truth is, manifestly, not an intrinsic property. For the truth-value of any contingent proposition must co-vary with hypothetical changes in the characteristics of things it concerns — so that a hypothetical change, for instance, in the location of my coffee cup may entail an alteration in the truth-value of the proposition that there is no coffee cup on my desk, even though that proposition and the particular coffee cup in question are quite distinct existences. To be sure, this line of thought creates no difficulty for the idea that the truth-value of a *necessary* proposition might be an intrinsic property. So, indeed, it may be. But clearly intrinsicism cannot handle the general run of contingent cases.[8]

It might be rejoined that the canvassed account of the contrast between intrinsic and relational properties is incorrect or circular. For a property F may be an intrinsic characteristic of an object and yet its loss, say, may still be entailed by change in another object provided that latter change is permitted to be in *non-intrinsic respects*. For instance, if G is a ("Cambridge") property possessed by any object just in case a has intrinsic characteristic F, then any other object's losing G will entail that a has lost F. This observation is, however, beside the point. All the objection to intrinsicism needs is that the account be correct, not that it be explanatory. If it is at least granted that F is an intrinsic property of a just in case no *intrinsic* change in any other object can entail change in a in that respect, it will follow as before that truth cannot be an intrinsic property of any proposition whose content is that another object has some particular intrinsic but contingent property.

IV

It is a rather more complicated business to elicit what is fundamentally unsatisfactory about the deflationary conception of truth. The difficul-

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8 I do not know that anyone has ever seriously proposed an intrinsicist conception of truth quite generally.

ties here are owing partly to the point that deflationism is more of a "tendency" than a definite philosophical position, and different deflationists display differences of formulation and emphasis which make it hard to see what may be essential and what optional in their views. There are, however, a number of characteristic, inter-related claims: first,

(i)   that there is no property of truth which is an appropriate object of philosophical attention: something which we might try to analyze, or in whose structure we might be interested, or which might give rise to issues about objectivity. Contrary to the presupposition both of the traditional debate and of its revision canvassed above, there is *nothing* in which the truth of a proposition, e.g., consists. "True" expresses no real property.[9]

That negative contention is then characteristically augmented by a variety of considerations about the meaning or positive function of the word "true"; for instance:

(ii)   that, as applied to sentences, "true" is just the device of *disquotation* — a device for affirming at the metalinguistic level (by locutions of the form: "P" is true) exactly what can be affirmed at the object-language level by an assertoric use of "P";

(iii) that the Disquotational Scheme
            "P" is true $\leftrightarrow$ p,
        (or if the primary grammar of "true" is considered to be that of an operator on (or predicable of) propositions, the Equivalence Scheme
            It is true that P/that P is true if and only if P)
        is (all but) a complete explanation of the meaning of "true";

(iv)   that "true" is just a device of endorsement — we only have any use for such a term because we sometimes choose to endorse

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9   Horwich is more guarded on this than many writers in the deflationist tradition. But although he seems unwilling expressly to deny that truth is a property, it is not, he contends, a "complex property" — not "an ingredient of reality whose underlying essence will, it is hoped, one day be revealed by philosophical or scientific analysis" (*Truth*, 2). Thus there is, for Horwich, nothing to say about what truth really consists in, no real question for, e.g., correspondence and coherence accounts to address themselves to.

propositions indirectly, without specifying their content ("The sixth sentence of *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* IV, §3 is true" or "Fermat's Last Theorem has turned out to be true") and sometimes want to endorse whole batches of propositions at once ("Almost everything Chancellor Kohl says is true"). In other kinds of case we can dispense with the word altogether.

Deflationism has been subjected to a variety of criticisms: for instance, that its characteristic lionization of the Disquotational Scheme is in tension with the manifest unacceptability of that principle when vagueness or other phenomena leading to failures of bivalence are operative;[10] that it is inconsistent with a truth-conditional conception of meaning or more generally with the semantic role of truth;[11] that it cannot accommodate the idea of scientific progress; most generally, that it violates our intuitions about correspondence, about truth as bestowed by fit with an external, objective world.[12] Here I shall rehearse an argument I have given elsewhere to the effect that deflationism is internally unstable.[13] Specifically, there is a contradiction between the kind of account of the function of "true" which deflationists broadly want to give and the contention that the concept of truth, properly understood, is not the concept of a genuine, substantial property.

Let us focus, for ease of exposition, on "true" as predicable of propositions, and on the positive deflationist contention that, in its most basic use, the word is essentially a device of endorsement which, except in cases where the content of the proposition endorsed is not explicitly given, or where quantification over propositions is involved, may be dispensed with altogether in favour of a simple assertion of the proposition characterized as "true."

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10 This criticism is first lodged, I believe, in Michael Dummett's early paper "Truth," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 59(1959): 141–62.

11 This claim, too, is advanced in Dummett's "Truth."

12 All these directions of criticism are usefully referenced and reviewed in Horwich's *Truth*.

13 See Chapter 1 of my *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

It is hardly deniable that "true" does have this kind of function and that its uses may often be paraphrased away without materially affecting the content of what is said. The issue is rather whether the point can carry the intended deflationary implications. And the crucial question for that issue is, what is it to *endorse* a proposition? Endorsement generally involves an element of recommendation, or approval of an item as meeting a certain standard. That's what I'm doing when, for example, in helping my child choose an ice cream I point at the pistachio and say "That's a nice one." What kind of commendation is involved in the case of "true"? Plausibly, that if I affirm a proposition's truth, I'm recommending its acceptance, commending it as meeting a certain doxastic standard, as it were. In this way, affirmations of truth — and likewise denials of truth — are normative claims. To endorse a proposition as true is to affirm that it is acceptable as a belief or statement; to deny that a proposition is true is to affirm that it's correspondingly unacceptable.

To be sure, nothing in that should impress as immediately uncomfortable for deflationism. No deflationist has wanted, or ought to have wanted, to deny that believing and statement-making are normatively constrained activities — activities governed by standards, non-compliance with which opens a thinker to criticism. However, once that is accepted, the question has to be confronted of what the relevant standards are. In particular, if "true" is essentially just a device of endorsement, then in using it I'm saying that a proposition is in good shape as far as certain relevant norms are concerned. What, for deflationism, are those norms? What does "good shape" here consist in?

Believing and stating are, naturally, subject to rather different norms. In very many contexts, justification for a belief is insufficient to confer justification for its public expression, partly because assertion is socially constrained — the public expression of a fully justified belief may give offence, or bore people, etc. — and partly because complex principles of conversational implication make it possible to encourage false beliefs in an audience by the judicious selection and assertion of fully justified ones.[14] However, if one wanted to criticize an assertion

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14 The classic treatment of this phenomenon is, of course, H. P Grice's "Logic and Conversation," reprinted in his *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

on this type of broadly social or pragmatic ground, one wouldn't do so by denying its truth. So, as a first approximation, it seems the deflationist should say that the use of "true" in the basic kind of case is to endorse a proposition as *epistemically justified,* or to endorse an utterance as acceptable just insofar as the epistemic justification of the proposition it expresses is concerned.

In any case, what the deflationist clearly *cannot* allow is that "true," when used to endorse, has the function of commending a proposition for its satisfaction of *some distinctive norm* which contrasts with epistemic justification and which only "true" and equivalents serve to mark. For if there were a distinctive such norm, it could hardly fail to be reckoned a genuine property of a proposition that it did, or did not, comply with it. And if the norm in question were uniquely associated with "true" and its cognates, that would be as much as to allow that there was a special property of *truth* — at which point the deflationary game would have been given away. So for the deflationist, it appears, the basic use of "true" has to be to signal a proposition's compliance with norms whose proper characterization will not proceed in terms of equivalents of "true." If it is propositions, rather than utterances, that we are concerned with, epistemic justification would then seem to be the only plausible candidate.[15]

It would follow that the basic use of "not true" should be to signal a proposition's *non*-compliance with relevant norms of epistemic justification. But if that were so, there should in general be nothing to choose between the denial that a proposition is true and the denial that it is justified. And not only does that misrepresent the ordinary usage of the terms: it is inconsistent with principles to which deflationism itself is committed, and which are, indeed, at the heart of the deflationary account: the Disquotational Scheme and, its analogue for propositions, the Equivalence Schema.

I'll illustrate the relevant point as it flows from the latter. The schema provides that, for an arbitrary proposition *P,*

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15 This would be less than a commitment to the idea that "true" *means* epistemically justified. There is a distinction between holding that a word expresses no property but is used to commend items for their possession of a certain property and holding that it expresses that very property.

It is true that $P \leftrightarrow P$.

If we substitute "not-P" for "P"at both occurrences, we have

It is true that not-$P \leftrightarrow$ not-P,

while if we negate both sides, we derive

It is not true that $P \leftrightarrow$ not-P.

And from the latter two principles, via transitivity of the biconditional, we have

It is not true that P if and only if it is true that not-P.

In brief: the Equivalence Schema entails, given only the most basic assumptions about its scope and about the logic of negation, that truth and negation commute as prefixes. Manifestly, this is not true in general of warrant and negation: there is, in general, no sound inference from

It is not the case that P is warranted

to

It is the case that not-P is warranted.

This pattern of inference cannot be sustained in any case where the correctness of its premise is owing to the *neutrality* of our state of information — to the fact that we have no evidence bearing either on p or its negation.

The Equivalence Schema itself, then, is a commitment to repudiating the idea that "... is not true" is a device for denying that a proposition complies with norms of warrant/justification — for if it were such a device, it ought not to commute with negation. But what other account can deflationism offer of what the denial of truth amounts to, given its express contention that "... is true" is merely a device of endorsement, so a device for affirming a proposition's compliance with some norm or other, and given that the only norms on the board — in a context in which the existence of any self-standing norm of truth has been rejected — are justificatory ones?[16]

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16 There is scope for some skirmishing. Ian Rumfitt has responded (in "Truth Wronged," *Ratio* 8 [New Series] [1995]: 100–7) that the divergence in the

In fact, it's intuitively perfectly evident that the use of "true" *is* tied to a norm — to a way in which acceptance of a proposition may be in good, or bad, standing — quite separate from the question of its justification in the light of the acceptor's state of information. An acceptance that grass is green, that is, may be open to censure if there is no

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behaviour of "true" and "assertible" just noted may straightforwardly be accommodated in a fashion entirely consonant with the purposes of deflationism, without admission of a distinctive norm of truth, provided the deflationist is prepared to allow primitive norms of *warranted denial* to operate alongside those of warranted assertion. Rather, that is, than restrict his distinctive deflationary claims to the word, "true," the deflationist should contend "that 'is true' and 'is not true' function purely as devices for endorsing *and rejecting* assertions, beliefs and so on ... and which therefore register no norms distinct from justified assertibility *and justified deniability*" ("Truth Wronged," 103; compare my *Truth and Objectivity*, 30). How would this help to explain the commutativity of truth and negation? Rumfitt is not entirely explicit, but the point may seem clear enough. Since denying a statement is asserting its negation, a primitive warrant — an *anti-warrant* is Rumfitt's term — for the denial of *P*, registered by a claim of the form, it is not true that *p*, will be *eo ipso* a warrant for asserting the negation of *P*, so — via the Disquotational Scheme — for asserting that it is true that not-*P*. So the problematical direction of commutativity is secured, while the invalidity of the corresponding principle for assertibility is vouchsafed, as before, by the possibility of states of information in which one has neither warrant nor anti-warrant for *P*.

However, the problem recurs. Consider again the problematical equivalence,

It is not true that *P* if and only if it is true that not-*P*.

and the result of negating both its sides:

It is not not true that *P* if and only if it is not true that not-*P*.

Supposing that the role of "(is) not true" were merely to register the presence of an anti-warrant, there seems no way of shirking the transition to

It is not anti-warranted that *p* if and only if it is anti-warranted that not-*p*.

But that, of course, is no less unacceptable when neutral states of information are possible than is

It is not warranted that *P* if and only if it is warranted that not-*P*.

In short, for any discourse in which neutral states of information are a possibility, the Equivalence Schema imposes a contrast both between "is true" and "is assertible"; *and* between "is not true" and "is anti-warranted." Rumfitt's proposal that the deflationist should recognize anti-warrant as primitive — whatever its independent interest — is thus of no assistance with her present difficulty.

warrant for accepting that grass is green; but it is in bad standing in quite another way if, warranted or not, it is actually not the case that grass is green. Correspondingly it is in good standing, in one way, just if accepted on the basis of sufficient justification, whether or not grass is green; but it is in good standing in another way if, irrespective of what justification may be possessed by the acceptor, grass is actually green. The concept of truth is a concept of a way a proposition may or may not be in good standing which precisely *contrasts* with its justificatory status at any particular time. That's the point which we've elicited from the Equivalence Schema. But it is independently evident, and any satisfactory philosophy of truth has to respect it.

There is no hope, then, for a deflationary account of truth which allows, or is anyway committed to the idea, that "true," in its most basic use, is a device for endorsing propositions as complying with other norms. A device of endorsement it may be, at least in the basic case. But the concept of the associated norm is of something *sui generis*.

Can the deflationist regroup? What the foregoing forces is an admission that, for each particular proposition, we have the concept of a norm which is distinct from warrant and is flagged by the word "true." And once it's allowed that the role of "true" is to mark a particular kind of achievement, or failing, on the part of a proposition, contrasting with its being warranted or not, there will have to be decent sense in the question, what does such an achievement, or failing, amount to? To be sure, that is a question which may turn out to admit of no very illuminating or non-trivial answer — but if so, that would tend to be a point in favour of Frege's indefinabilism, rather than deflationism. If a term registers a distinctive norm over a practice, the presumption ought to be that there will be something in which a move's compliance or non-compliance with that norm will consist. And whichever status it has, that will then be a real characteristic of the move. So what room does deflationism have for manoeuvre?

There are two possibilities. First, it might be contended that all, strictly, that has been noted — has been shown to follow from the Equivalence Schema — is that "true" is so used as to *call for* — express — a norm over the acceptance of propositions which is distinct from warrant. It's quite another matter whether there *really is* such a norm — whether there really is such a way for a proposition to be in, or out, of good standing. It's one thing for an expression to be used in the

making of a certain distinctive kind of normative claim; quite another matter for there to be such a thing as a bearer's *really qualifying for* a judgment of that kind. An error-theorist about morals, for example like John Mackie,[17] would presumably readily grant that moral language is *used* normatively — is used to applaud, or censure, particular actions, for instance. What he would deny, nevertheless, is that there are any real characteristics which respond to this use — any real characteristics by possessing which an action may qualify for a deserved such appraisal.

It is easily seen that deflationism cannot avail itself of any counterpart of this first line of defence. For the deflationist must surely be quite content to allow that all manner of statements *really are true* — when the right circumstances obtain: that grass is green, for instance, really is true just when grass is green; that snow is white really is true just when snow is white; that the earth's orbit is an ellipse is true just in case the earth's orbit really is an ellipse; and so on. For deflationism, there has to be, for each proposition — or at least for those of an objective subject matter — *an objective condition,* viz., the very one specified by the appropriate instance of the Equivalence Schema, under which it qualifies as true. So there is no possibility of refuge in error theory in this context. The Equivalence Schema itself determines what the conditions of rightful application of "true" to a particular proposition, *p,* are; if as a matter of fact they obtain, then this, coupled with the distinctive normativity of the predicate, enforces the recognition that there really is such a thing as *p*'s complying, or failing to comply, with the distinctive norm of truth. It is not merely that our concept of truth calls for such a norm; the call is answered.[18]

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17 J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

18 This simple observation is a partial response to a recent tendency of Richard Rorty's, viz., to dismiss those features of our practice with "true" which are recalcitrant to "pragmatist" interpretation as mere reflections of the concept's absorption of a misguided representationalist metaphysic. See, for instance, his "Is Truth a Goal of Enquiry? Davidson *vs.* Wright," *Philosophical Quarterly* 45 (1995): 281–300. But it is to be expected, of course, that Rorty would refuse to hear any but a metaphysically inflated reading of "an objective subject matter."

We should conclude that two characteristic claims of deflationism are lost. It is not true, first, that "true" *only* functions as a device of (indirect, or compendious) endorsement; it also functions, for each proposition, to advert to the satisfaction of a distinctive norm, whose satisfaction is — at least for a proposition with an objective subject matter — a real matter of fact. Second, it is hard to hear a distinction between that last point and the admission that truth, for each such proposition, is a real property. But there is still a final line of defence — one last characteristic deflationary claim which a proponent might try to salvage. The question remains so far open whether the property in question should be regarded as *the same* in all cases. Perhaps the deflationist can dig a last ditch here. For if the property were not the same, we might yet have the resources to undercut the classical debates about the *general* constitution of truth; and that those debates were bad was one major point that deflationism wanted to make.

A line of thought with that tendency is nicely expressed by Simon Blackburn as follows:

> compare "is true" ... with a genuine target of philosophical analysis: "is con-
> scious", or "has rights", for example. We investigate these by looking for the
> principles which determine whether something is conscious, or has rights. These
> principles are intended to govern any such judgement, so that we get a unified
> class: the class of conscious things, or things that have rights. Each item in such
> a class is there because it satisfies the same condition, which the analysis has
> uncovered. Or, if this is slightly idealised, we find only a "family" of related
> conditions or "criteria" for the application of the term. Still, there is then a fam-
> ily relationship between the members of the class. But now contrast "is true".
> We know *individually* what makes this predicate applicable to the judgements
> or sentences of an understood language. "Penguins waddle" is a sentence true,
> in English, if and only if penguins waddle. It is true that snow is white if and
> only if snow is white. The reason the first sentence deserves the predicate is
> that penguins waddle, and the reason why the judgement that snow is white
> deserves the predicate is that snow *is* white. But these reasons are entirely dif-
> ferent. There is no single account, or even little family of accounts, in virtue of
> which each deserves the predicate, for deciding whether penguins waddle has
> nothing much in common with deciding whether snow is white. There are *as*
> many different things to do, to decide whether the predicate applies, as there
> are judgements to make. So how *can* there be a unified, common account of the
> "property" which these quite different decision procedures supposedly deter-
> mine? We might say: give us any sentence about whose truth you are inter-
> ested, and simply by "disquoting" and removing the reference to truth, we can
> tell you what you have to judge in order to determine its truth. Since we can do

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this without any analysis or understanding of a common property of truth, the idea that there is such a thing is an illusion.[19]

Blackburn here captures with characteristic felicity a thought which has unquestionably influenced many deflationists (though he does not himself explicitly endorse it). However, it surely provides no very good reason for the intended conclusion — that truth is no single property. For the pattern it calls attention to is a commonplace, exemplified by a host of properties which we should not scruple to regard as unitary, or as potentially open to philosophical account. *Many* properties, that is, are such that their satisfaction conditions vary as a function of the character of a potential bearer. Consider the property of having fulfilled one's educational potential. What it takes to instantiate this will depend naturally on other characteristics of the individual concerned; but that ought to be quite consistent with the substantiality and commonality of the property in question, since there is a clear sense in which anyone who has fulfilled his educational potential has done the same thing as anyone else who has done so, and what they have both done may be expected straightforwardly to allow of a uniform account. In general, how x has to be in order to be F can depend in part on how things stand in other respects with x, and vary accordingly, without any motive thereby being provided for regarding it as an error to suppose, or to try to characterize, a general condition which being F involves satisfying. Otherwise, you might just as well say that there is no single thing in which being twice as old as one's oldest child consists (being a *doubletenarian*), since for me it would involve being twice as old as Geoffrey, for Prince Charles being twice as old as William, and for Blackburn being twice as old as Gwen.

The general pattern, it should be evident, is that of properties whose satisfaction consists in an individual's meeting a condition implicitly involving existential quantification over the right field of a relation. To fulfil one's educational potential is for there to be certain levels of academic attainment such that under certain normal educational conditions it is possible for one to meet them, and such that one has met them.

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19 Blackburn, *Spreading the Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 230–31.

To be twice as old as one's oldest child is for there to be some individual of whom one is a father or mother and whose actual age is half one's own. In general, to be the bearer of such a property will be to stand in a relation of a certain kind to an appropriate instance or instances of this implicit quantifier, and the identity of that instance or instances may vary depending on the identity and character in other respects of the bearer in question. It is in the *nature* of properties of this general character to admit such variation, and it compromises their unity not at all.

There is accordingly no comfort for a deflationist in the platitude that how things have to be in order for particular propositions to be true varies. Propositions vary in *how they claim matters to stand* — as parents vary in how old their children are, or people vary in what their educational potential is — and propositions' truth-values will naturally be a function of the specific such claims they make. To impose the rubric explicitly: for any proposition p, it is true that p just in case *there is a way things could be* such that anyone who believed, doubted, etc., that p would believe, doubt, etc., that things were that way, and things are that way.[20] This paraphrase is doubtless wholly unilluminating — it offers little more than a long-hand version of the Correspondence Platitude. Its merit is to serve as a reminder how truth is naturally conceived to share a conceptual shape with, e.g., double-tenarianship, or fulfilment of educational potential, and thus to bring out why no conclusions follow about its integrity from the line of thought outlined in Blackburn's remarks.

A sympathizer with deflationism may essay a final throw. It may be contended that the position at which we have arrived, although inconsistent with the traditional formulations of deflationism, is still nothing terribly at odds with its spirit. Maybe it has to be recognized that truth is a property after all, contrasting with justification, and normative over assertion and belief. But the conviction of the traditional debate is that it is a *metaphysically deep* property, whose essence is

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20 For truth as a property of sentences, the rubric might naturally be applied to issue in something along the lines: for any sentence s, an utterance of s in a particular context is true just in case there is a proposition, that p, which such an utterance would express, and which is true.

unobvious and controversial. By contrast, the characterization of it now offered by way of rebuttal of the tendency of Blackburn's remarks is nothing if not obvious and *trivial*; and this triviality surely just as effectively cuts the ground from under the traditional debate as would the findings that truth is no unified property, or no property at all. The victory over deflationism is therefore Pyrrhic: the skirmishing has led us to say what truth in general is in such a way as to drain all metaphysical interest from the question.[21]

Someone inclined to resist this would not be prudent to stake all on the possibility of a less trivial account of truth. Where the rejoinder goes astray is in its oversight, rather, of the contrast, drawn at the start, between the project of analysis of the concept of truth and the debate about the structure and objectivity of the property of truth. One meritorious claim in the deflationist portfolio — though not its exclusive possession — may well be that the success of any purported analysis of the concept must pay a price in terms of triviality. But the above account of truth for propositions, trivial as it may be, simply does not engage the structural alternatives charted earlier nor the debate they delimit. Anyone who has mastered the concept of truth and does not scruple to quantify over "ways things could be" can accept it as necessary and sufficient for the truth of a proposition that there be a way things could be which anyone who believes that proposition will suppose realized, and which is indeed realized. To accept that much enjoins so far no commitment on the matter of what kind of characteristic — intrinsic, relational (if so, what are the terms of the relation?), etc. — the truth of a proposition is, nor on whether or to what extent its possession may be viewed as objective. Exactly those are the metaphysically substantial matters.

V

The third and last alternative to a correspondence account of the structure of truth is coherentism. Here is an expression of an old and sometime very influential objection to the coherence theory:

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21 Compare the remarks of Horwich quoted in note 9.

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the objection to the coherence theory lies in this, that it presupposes a more usual meaning of truth and falsehood in constructing its coherent whole, and that this more usual meaning, though indispensable to the theory, cannot be explained by means of the theory. The proposition "Bishop Stubbs was hanged for murder" is, we are told, not coherent with the whole of truth or with experience. But that means, when we examine it, that something is *known* which is inconsistent with this proposition. Thus what is inconsistent with the proposition must be something *true*: it may be perfectly possible to construct a coherent whole of *false* propositions in which "Bishop Stubbs was hanged for murder" would find a place. In a word, the partial truths of which the whole of truth is composed must be such propositions as would commonly be called true, not such as would commonly be called false; there is no explanation, on the coherence theory, of the distinction commonly expressed by the words *true* and *false*, and no evidence that a system of false propositions might not, as in a good novel, be just as coherent as the system which is the whole of truth.[22]

The Right Reverend W. Stubbs died of natural causes. Russell's point is that we may nevertheless envisage a comprehensive *fiction* part of which is that he was hanged for murder, and that in point of coherence such a fiction may very well stand comparison with what we take to be the truth. In order, then, to recover the idea that such a fiction *is* fiction, we need recourse to a notion of truth which the coherence account is powerless to explicate. Whatever "coherence" is taken to involve in detail, it seems likely that mutually incompatible, equally comprehensive, internally coherent systems of beliefs will be possible; more, *any* self-consistent proposition is likely to participate in *some* coherent system of belief with whatever degree of comprehensiveness you want. So the coherence theory cannot discriminate truth from falsehood — and it cannot justify principles like (non-contradiction):

if *p* is true, not-*p* is not true.

Yet surely any correct account of truth has to sustain such principles.

Notice that this objection in no way depends upon the detail of any particular proposed conception of coherence, and thus does not presuppose that the coherence account is being offered as an *analysis* of truth. The objection is purely structural. The driving thought is that whatever

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22 Bertrand Russell, "On the Nature of Truth," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 7 (1906–7): 33–4.

coherence is taken to consist in, the suggestion that the truth of a proposition consists in its participation in a coherent system in effect falls foul of a dilemma: if *fiction* can constitute such a system, then participation in such a system is clearly insufficient for truth. If it cannot, then it appears that truth is not constituted purely in inter-propositional relations — the propositions in question have to meet some other condition, so far unexplicated, and Russell's hostile suggestion is that the only available such condition is: truth as ordinarily understood.

There are two possible lines of response. First, the coherentist may go relativist, conceding that there is indeed no *absolute* truth, and embracing the contention that, to the contrary, truth is relative to the system. Thus the proposition that Bishop Stubbs was hanged for murder can indeed be true, relative to a sufficiently coherent and comprehensive body of propositions which includes it. What we are pleased to regard as *the* truth merely reflects the actually entrenched such system. Principles, like non-contradiction, which seem to require that the truth cannot extend to every conceivable coherent system of propositions, are misconstrued when taken to have that implication. Sure, they are valid *within* systems: no proposition can participate in a coherent system for which its negation is already a member. But they have no valid application *across* systems.

Alternatively, a coherentist might try to avoid this extreme and rather unappealing form of relativism by earmarking certain propositions as in some way *privileged*, and construing truth not as participation in any old sufficiently comprehensive, coherent system of propositions, but as participation in such a system which is required in addition to include the privileged propositions. To be sure, thinking of truth as having such a structure does not by itself guarantee its uniqueness. But the resources may be available to do so if the theorist chooses the privileged base class cannily and interprets the relation of coherence in some correspondingly suitable way. For instance, the base class might consist of a large sample of our most basic beliefs. Then what might ultimately defeat the truth, conceived as by coherence, of the proposition that Bishop Stubbs was hanged for murder would be its inability to participate in a maximally coherent and comprehensive system of belief incorporating that particular membership.

This manoeuvre, however, appears open to an extremely powerful objection. The objection does, admittedly, make an assumption about

the general character of the inter-propositional relationships which coherence, conceived as a structural proposal, might regard as important — albeit an assumption suggested by the very term "coherence," and validated by all the actual proposals which have been made under its head. That assumption is that the relations in question are *internal* relations: that the coherence, or otherwise, of a system of propositions is grounded *purely in their content*. The salient question is then: How can any proposal of this kind handle *contingency*? The general form of account proposed is that *P*'s truth consists in its participation in a coherent system based on a specified base class, i.e., its coherence with the other propositions in that system. But that situation, when it obtains, should be a matter of relations of a purely internal character holding between *P* and the other propositions in the system. If *P* coheres with those propositions, it will therefore do so in *all possible worlds*. So how could the truth of *P*, when it is true, ever be a contingent matter?

There is only one possible line of response. If *P*, although true, could be false, and if its truth consists in its sustaining internal — necessary — relations to a system of propositions, then what contingency needs is the possibility of a switch in the system — a change in which are the propositions coherence with which determines truth — and the possibility that *P* may fail to cohere with the new system. If we say that a system is *dominant* if it is coherence with *it* that constitutes truth, then what contingency demands is flexibility in the matter of dominance. (Dominance might be interpreted just as a matter of incorporating lots of what we actually believe, and its flexibility would then be secured by the flexibility in the identity of our beliefs.)

Now, though, interestingly, we find we have come full circle with the re-emergence of a version of the Bishop Stubbs objection. All contingency is now being construed as turning on contingencies of dominance. So the obvious next question is: What properly coherentist account is to be given of the truth of a proposition of the form:

(K)   *S* is dominant?

Naturally, the coherentist has to view the truth of an instance of K, like that of any true proposition, as a matter of its coherence with a system — but which system? Presumably any coherent system *S* will be such that it will cohere with *S* to suppose it is dominant even if it is not in fact so — if, for example, dominance is construed as a matter of

what is actually believed, it ought in general to cohere perfectly with a system of beliefs that we do not in fact hold to suppose that we do hold them. So in general, for each comprehensive, coherent system *S*, whether dominant or not, the relevant instance of K will cohere with *S* with the consequence, first, that the fact of dominance — the actual truth-value of that instance — goes unrecovered; and second, that we remain powerless to explicate the contingency of a system's dominance, since the coherence of the relevant instance of K with the system in question will be a matter of necessity.

There is thus no prospect of explicating what it is for a proposition of the form "*S* is dominant" to be true in terms purely of relations of coherence if the truth in question is conceived as contingent — as it has to be, if contingency in general is to be recovered in terms of a coherentist account. What has to be said, it seems, is that for that proposition, like any other, truth is a matter of relations with *what is in fact* the dominant system. But then exactly the move has been made that Russell triumphantly anticipated: for this appeal to the notion of *what is in fact so* has not been, and apparently cannot be, explicated in terms of coherence.

The upshot is that coherentism, taken as a proposal about the general nature of truth-constituting relations, has no means — provided the relations in question are all internal — to recover the notion of contingent truth except at the cost of, one way or another, an appeal to a notion of what is in fact true of particular belief systems (that they are based on what we mostly believe, or otherwise dominant in some sense to be supplied) whose contingency is taken for granted and whose obtaining cannot be construed in terms of coherence. In brief, coherentism demands exceptions to its own account.[23] It thus has nothing to offer as a general account of the structure of truth.[24]

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23 This moral is repeatedly emphasized in Walker's excellent study *The Coherence Theory of Truth* (see note 1 above).

24 The explicit argument has been against a response to the original Bishop Stubbs objection — the privileging manoeuvre — which was canvassed as an alternative to relativism about truth. Briskly, then, to review how a similar difficulty

VI

We have now reviewed each of the three possible structural alterna-
tives to a correspondence conception of truth, and found that each is
subject to seemingly decisive difficulties. It may seem to have been
established, accordingly, that among the four paths on the original tree
(p. 36 above), only the feathered path to the correspondence concep-
tion is viable — that, contra deflationism, our ordinary concept of truth
requires us to think of a proposition's being true as, so to speak, a dis-
tinctive accomplishment, and that, contra intrinsicism and coherentism,
we may not satisfactorily conceive of this accomplishment as an in-
trinsic property of a proposition or a characteristic conferred upon it
by dint of its relation to other propositions. It would follow that even

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afflicts the relativistic move: the relativist proposal has it that truth is always
coherence with a system, but that there are thus as many versions of the truth
as there are coherent comprehensive systems. Thus the proposition that Bishop
Stubbs was hanged for murder, while unfit to participate in any comprehensive
coherent system which is controlled by what we actually believe, may —
presumably will — participate in other comprehensive and coherent systems.
Well, we should now immediately press the question: What account has this
relativism to offer of the truth of contingencies about belief — of propositions
of the form "S is believed"? Again, it should cohere with any particular coherent
comprehensive system to suppose that it is in fact believed — so such a
proposition should be true relative to each particular system. So now the fact
of actual belief seems fugitive. Suppose there is a single comprehensive and
coherent system, S, incorporating (most of) what we actually believe, and that
the proposition that Bishop Stubbs was hanged for murder is not a participant.
Consider by contrast such a system, S', in which that proposition is a participant.
Add to each the proposition that it is believed by most human beings. Clearly a
Martian, presented only with axiomatizations of each system, would have no
way of telling, just on the basis of facts about coherence, which, if either, we *did*
believe. So the truth of the proposition that it is S we believe, if constituted just
in facts about coherence, must reside in other such facts. The relativist-
coherentist will offer, presumably, that it will be a matter of coherence with the
Martian's own beliefs. But that is to appeal to a non-reconstructed notion of
what is in fact believed by the Martian — and it was exactly the counterpart fact
about us that the proposal seems to have no means to construe. So there is no
progress.

if no satisfactory *analysis* of truth in terms of correspondence can be given, we are nevertheless squarely committed to a correspondence *conception* of truth — that there is no alternative but to thinking of the truth of a proposition as conferred upon it, in the general case, by its relations to non-propositional reality.

That is, in effect, the second main contention of the paper earlier advertised. But two very important qualifications are needed immediately. First, in the traditional debate, as we remarked, the correspondence theory was conceived as expressing a form of metaphysical *realism*, standing opposed to the idealism which kept company with the coherence theory. It merits emphasis that even if the effect of the foregoing arguments is indeed to impose a conception of truth as conferred on a proposition by aspects of non-propositional reality,[25] that conclusion certainly carries no direct implications for the realism debate in its modern conception. For example, nothing is yet implied about the *nature* of the relations in question, so there is consequently no immediate implication of the idea that the truth of a proposition consists in its successfully *representing* an aspect of reality, in any distinctively realist sense of "represent." There may in general be no alternative to thinking of propositions as made true, when they are true, by, *inter alia*, non-propositional matters. But there is so far no commitment to any specific general conception of the kind of relations that may be involved in truth, or of the nature of the non-propositional items in their fields. Any broad view which assigns a role in the constitution of truth to a domain outside the bearers of truth would be consistent with our findings; and that much most modern anti-realisms (for example, those canvassed by Dummett and Putnam) certainly do. In particular, nothing is implied about *cognitivism* — about whether the factors involved in appraising truth are invariably wholly cognitive — nor about *evidential constraint* — about whether it is possible for truth to outrun all evidence available in principle. Someone who thought, for example, of moral truth as broadly a matter of what *we* find acceptable in the light of a full appreciation of the non-moral facts and certain

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25 Except in cases, naturally, where the proposition is actually about other propositions.

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non-cognitive dispositions to moral sentiment would be making no demands on the notion to take him off the feathered path; on such a view, moral truth would be a complex matter, but one essentially implicating certain relations to aspects of the non-propositional world. Likewise, a proponent of a broadly Peircian conception of truth, that truth is what would be agreed upon by thinkers operating under epistemically ideal conditions, would be quite at liberty to think of the status of such propositions as owing in part to the impingements of a non-propositional world which such thinkers would feel. In sum, our findings at this point have almost no impact on the second of the great issues associated with the classical debate about truth: the issues of realism and objectivity.

However — this is the second necessary qualification — there ought in any case, I believe, to be no presumption in favour of a *monistic* view of truth.[26] If the difficulties which we have been exploring are to dispose of all the alternatives to correspondence once and for all, then it needs to be assumed that truth everywhere must possess a *uniform constitution*: that the truth of any true proposition always consists in the same sort of thing. Yet why should that be so? For instance, both intrinsicist and coherentist conceptions of truth fell into difficulty over the construal of contingent truth, but a proponent of either view could conceivably retrench if it could be argued that truth is only *sometimes* to be conceived as an intrinsic property of a proposition, or a property bestowed upon it by its relations of coherence with certain other propositions, while in other cases the structure of truth is best conceived as by correspondence. The upshot of the argument is that if truth has a single uniform constitution, then that constitution must be conceived along broadly correspondence lines. But what enforces the assumption of uniformity?

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26 That is, in favour of the view that truth everywhere consists in the same thing. (This kind of "monism" about truth contrasts, of course, with that of Bradley and Joachim, for whom the thesis of monism is rather that reality is an intrinsically unified whole which is distorted when conceived as a totality of individual states of affairs, each apt to confer truth on a single proposition considered in isolation.)

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I think the answer is: nothing. In fact, an opposed pluralistic outlook is intuitively quite attractive. It is quite appealing, for instance, to think of the true propositions of number theory as those which sustain certain internal relations — an appropriate kind of semantic consequence — to a certain base class of propositions — the Dedekind-Peano axioms, for instance. Such an account, it should be noted, would extend to the axioms themselves (assuming the reflexivity of the relevant internal relation). What it would not comfortably extend to would be truths of the form: *P* is a Dedekind-Peano axiom (more generally, *P* is a member of the relevant base class). But once coherentism forswears the ambition to a *comprehensive* account of the structure of truth, that limitation need not be a difficulty. An account along broadly similar lines might also be attractive for truth as it applies to general moral principles (as opposed to their applications).

A pluralistic conception of truth is also philosophically attractive insofar as an account which allows us to think of truth as constituted differently in different areas of thought might contribute to a sharp explanation of the differential appeal of realist and anti-realist intuitions about them. But I acknowledge, of course, that more detail and a sharper theoretical setting is required for the proposal before it can really be clear that it makes genuine sense, let alone possesses merit. In particular, an account is owing of what would make it *truth* that allowed of variable forms of instantiation in different areas — what would make for the relevant *unity*. (This is not work that one might excuse oneself from by pleading that truth is a "family resemblance" concept, or whatever. Even that suggestion would at least require that there be a network of marks of truth, any true proposition qualifying as such by its exemplification of some sufficiently substantial set of them; and the task of characterizing these marks would remain.)

In order to clarify the cast which a defensible alethic pluralism might assume, it will help to revisit the conception, dominating the traditional debate, that the winning position would be the provision of a satisfactory necessary-and-sufficient-conditions analysis of the concept. Earlier, I was concerned to point out that scepticism about that project remained consistent with the interest of many of the questions, about structure and objectivity in particular, which provided the driving force of the traditional debate, and that these questions could survive in a setting in which the idea of analysis of the notion of truth had been

abandoned altogether. Now, though, it is time to reconsider and qualify that scepticism. For misgivings about the project are driven by the particular conception we had in play of what a successful analysis — of truth, or anything — would have to accomplish. And on that score there is clearly some scope for relaxation. Such a necessary-and-sufficient-conditions analysis, after all, even if it could be provided, would only culminate in one particular *a priori* — presumably, conceptually necessary — claim. Why should not other such claims — even if not biconditional- or identity-claims — provide illumination of essentially the same kind? To be sure, if one wants conceptual clarity about what truth — or beauty, or goodness, etc. — is, then the natural target is an identity (or a biconditional). But perhaps the point of the inquiry can be equally if less directly served by the assembly of a body of conceptual truths which, without providing any reductive account, nevertheless collectively constrain and locate the target concept and sufficiently characterize some of its relations with other concepts and its role and purposes to provide the sought-for reflective illumination.

Faced, then, with the manifest improbability of an illuminating necessary-and-sufficient-conditions analysis of truth, there is still a different, more relaxed program of analysis which we might undertake before despairing of the whole business and falling back on the issues to do with structure. This more relaxed project will see us trying to build an overall picture of the concept of truth — of its contents and purposes — by the assembly and integration of as wide a variety as possible of basic *a priori* principles about it — "platitudes," as I've elsewhere termed them.[27] What would such principles be for the case of truth?

The method here should be initially to compile a list, including anything that chimes with ordinary thinking about truth, and later to scrutinize more rigorously for deductive articulation and for whether candidates do indeed have the right kind of conceptual plausibility. So we might begin by including, for instance,

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27 The limitation to *a priori* cases effects, of course, a restriction on the standard lay use of "platitude," which applies to anything which no-one would dispute (and also carries an unwanted connotation of tedium).

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: the transparency of truth — that to assert is to present as true and, more generally, that any attitude to a proposition is an attitude to its truth — that to believe, doubt or fear, for example, that p is to believe, doubt or fear that p is true. (*Transparency*)

: the opacity of truth — incorporating a variety of weaker and stronger principles: that a thinker may be so situated that a particular truth is beyond her ken, that some truths may never be known, that some truths may be unknowable in principle, etc. (*Opacity*)

: the conservation of truth-aptitude under embedding: aptitude for truth is preserved under a variety of operations — in particular, truth-apt propositions have negations, conjunctions, disjunctions, etc. which are likewise truth-apt. (*Embedding*)

: the Correspondence Platitude — for a proposition to be true is for it to correspond to reality, accurately reflect how matters stand, 'tell it like it is', etc. (*Correspondence*)

: the contrast of truth with justification — a proposition may be true without being justified, and vice-versa. (*Contrast*)

: the timelessness of truth — if a proposition is ever true, then it always is, so that whatever may, at any particular time, be truly asserted may — perhaps by appropriate transformations of mood, or tense — be truly asserted at any time. (*Timelessness*)

: that truth is absolute — there is, strictly, no such thing as a proposition's being more or less true; propositions are completely true if true at all. (*Absoluteness*)

The list might be enlarged,[28] and some of these principles may anyway seem controversial. Moreover, it can be argued that the Equivalence Schema underlies not merely the first of the platitudes listed — Transparency — but the Correspondence Platitude[29] and, as we have seen in discussion of deflationism, the Contrast Platitude as well.

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28 One possible addition is reviewed in Section VII below.

29 For elaboration of this claim, see my *Truth and Objectivity*, 24–7.

There's much to be said about this general approach, and many hard and interesting questions arise, not least, of course, about the epistemological provenance of the platitudes. But such questions arise on *any* conception of philosophical analysis, which must always take for granted our ability to recognize truths holding *a priori* of concepts in which we are interested.

Let us call an analysis based on the accumulation and theoretical organization of a set of platitudes concerning a particular concept an *analytical theory* of the concept in question.[30] Then the provision of an analytical theory of truth in particular opens up possibilities for a principled pluralism in the following specific way: that in different regions of thought and discourse *the theory may hold good*, a priori, *of* — *may be satisfied by* — *different concepts*. If this is so, then always provided the network of platitudes integrated into the theory were sufficiently comprehensive, we should not scruple to say that truth may consist in different things in different such areas: in the instantiation of one concept in one area, and in that of a different concept in another. For there will be nothing in the idea of truth that is not accommodated by the analytical theory, and thus no more to a concept's being a concept of truth than its furnishing a model of the ingredient platitudes. In brief: the *unity* in the concept of truth will be supplied by the analytical theory; and the *pluralism* will be underwritten by the fact that the principles composing that theory admit of collective variable realization.

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30 Readers familiar with Michael Smith's work will note a point of contact here with the conception of a *network analysis* which he derives from Ramsey and Lewis (see in particular Chapter 2, Section 10, of Smith's *The Moral Problem* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994]). The principal contrast with the approach to truth here canvassed is that a network analysis has to be based on a comprehensive set of platitudes whose conjunction so constrains the target concept that the replacement within them of all expressions for that concept by a variable and its binding by the description operator results in a definite description which is at the service of an analytically true identity,

Φ-ness is the property, *F*, such that {... *F* ... & ... *F* ... & ...}

which thus effectively supplies a reductive analysis of the concept Φ. An analytical theory, by contrast, need not — though it may — subserve the construction of such an analytically true identity.

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One important question is whether any unmistakably coherentist conception of truth is indeed such a truth-realizer for a particular region of thought.[31] Another candidate I have explored elsewhere[32] is the notion of *superassertibility*. A proposition is superassertible just in case someone investigating it could, in the world as it actually is, arrive at a state of information in which its acceptance was justified, which justification would then persist no matter how much more relevant information was acquired. Clearly a notion of this kind must make sense wherever the corresponding notion of justification makes sense — wherever we have a concept of what it would be to justify a particular proposition, it will be intelligible to hypothesize the attainment of such a justification and its stability through arbitrarily extensive further investigation. It turns out that in any region of discourse meeting certain constraints, superassertibility will satisfy each of the platitudes listed above, so a *prima facie* case can be made that, with respect to those regions, the concept of superassertibility is a truth-concept.[33] In these areas, it is consequently open to us to regard truth as consisting in superassertibility. In other areas, by contrast, where the relevant background conditions arguably fail — in particular, where we can see that there is no essential connection between truth and the availability of evidence — then the concept of truth will not allow of interpretation in terms of superassertibility, and the constitution of truth must accordingly be viewed differently. It is perhaps superfluous to remark that a superassertibilist conception of truth chimes very nicely with the semantic anti-realism which Michael Dummett has presented as a generalization of mathematical intuitionism, whose cardinal thesis may indeed be taken to be that truth is *everywhere* best construed in terms of superassertibility.

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31 For exploration of one local case, arithmetic, see the Appendix to this paper.

32 *Truth and Objectivity* Chapter 2; an earlier discussion is in Chapter 14, "Can a Davidsonian Meaning-Theory be Construed in Terms of Assertibility," of the second edition of my *Realism, Meaning and Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

33 For relevant details see the Appendix to this paper.

To be sure, the method of analysis incorporated in the analytic-theoretical approach is, as far as it goes, consistent with a monistic view of the target concept — but the approach cautions against prejudice in that respect since such an account may, in any particular case, prove to allow of multiple realization. That's a matter which will depend on the detail of the account, on whether it includes all relevant platitudes, and on whether the concept in question may justifiably be taken to have further components which are necessarily omitted by such an account (for instance, a component fixed by ostensive definition). Here, I have meant only to sketch how a principled pluralism about truth might conceivably emerge.

VII

I conclude by noting a different potential corollary of the analytic-theoretical approach to truth. If its satisfaction of the platitudes suffices for a concept to be a concept of truth, then wherever we can introduce a concept which is such a satisfier with respect to a particular class of contents, that fact on its own will justify us in regarding the contents in question as *apt for truth*. Or put another way: wherever the word "true" operates in a fashion agreeable to each of the theorems of a satisfactory analytical theory, then we should think of it as expressing a genuine concept of truth, and of the contents being expressed as genuinely truth-apt accordingly. And this will always be so just when we are dealing with contents which meet certain constraints of syntax and discipline. Roughly: the contents in question must allow for combination and recombination under the connectives — negation, the conditional, conjunction, disjunction — of ordinary sentential inference; they must allow of embedding within expressions of ordinary propositional attitudes; and their affirmation must be subject to recognized standards of warrant.[34] If that is right, then it falls out of the

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34 How does it follow that a satisfier of the platitudes will be definable on such contents? Very straightforwardly. First, if we are dealing with a range of genuine contents — to the extent ensured by the hypothesis of discipline — for which

very analysis of the notion of truth that the aptitude for truth is a comparatively promiscuous property. Comic, moral, aesthetic, and legal discourses, for instance, all exhibit the requisite syntax and discipline and so presumably pass the test. The upshot is thus a tension with one traditional form of anti-realism about such discourses: the idea, typified by "expressivism" in ethics, that a target discourse whose surface exhibition of these features is not questioned may nevertheless not really be dealing in truth-apt contents — in "genuine" propositions — at all.

However, some recent critics[35] have objected that this upshot depends on focusing only on a selection of the platitudes which constrain the notions of truth and assertion, and ignoring in particular equally platitudinous connections of those notions with *belief*. Their thought is that one may be forced to look below the propositional surface of, e.g., ethical discourse if one takes it as a platitude that an assertion is a profession of belief[36] but also accepts, with Hume, that no belief can

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we have the conditional construction, then nothing can stand in the way of the definitional introduction of a predicate, or operator, which is subject to the Equivalence Schema:

That P is Φ if and only if P.

As noted, that will then suffice for versions of Transparency, Contrast, the minimal degree of Opacity that attends contrast, and a Correspondence Platitude for Φ. It will further be open to us to insist that Φ be defined for all combinations of specified kinds of the contents in question and thereby secure Embedding. Assuming that the contents in question allow of tensed expression, Timelessness — effectively the principle that whatever may truly be thought or expressed at any particular time may, by appropriate variations of tense, be truly thought or expressed at every time — may be secured by stipulating that Φ is to be governed by analogues of the usual truth-value links between differently tensed counterparts. (If the contents in question are tenseless, then Timelessness will hold by default.) Absoluteness, for its part, will hold by default in any case unless we explicitly fix the use of a comparative.

35 For instance, Frank Jackson, Graham Oppy, and Michael Smith, in their "Minimalism and Truth Aptness," *Mind* 103 (1994): 287–302.

36 Of course, an assertion may be insincere. For an utterance to be a *profession* of a certain state means that one who accepts its sincerity must be prepared to ascribe that state to the utterer.

be, in and of itself, a *motivational* state and regards it as clear that whatever is professed by an ethical "assertion," it *is* such a motivational state.

One who advances this line of thought need not, it merits emphasis, be offering any criticism of the analytic-theoretical approach to truth as such. Moreover, the general point being made is obviously perfectly fair: conclusions drawn from a proposed analytic theory of a concept are, of course, liable to be vitiated if that theory omits to recognize what are in fact valid conceptual ties between the target concept and others. But what of the specific objection?

It might seem that the only clean way to dispose of it would be to controvert one of its two auxiliary premises; that is, to argue directly that certain kinds of belief *are* intrinsically motivational after all[37] or to make a case that the attitudes expressed by sincere ethical claims are, appearances notwithstanding, not *intrinsically* motivational.[38] However, it is not, on reflection, evident that it is necessary to take on either of those projects (even if either might very well succeed). Rather, the anti-expressivist may respond that, insofar as the questions whether a belief can be, in and of itself, a motivational state and whether the states professed by ethical utterances are indeed intrinsically motivational, are taken to be open, philosophically substantial questions, to that extent it is simply *not* a platitude that the assertion of any truth-apt content is a profession of belief. Or better: for one who accepts that those issues are open, *belief* is not the notion in terms of which to articulate the platitude which lurks in the vicinity. Instead, an alternative expression can be found by taking over for the purpose a term which Simon Blackburn conveniently introduces in his writings on these issues: *commitment*.[39] Blackburn's "commitments" are typically

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37 This is a view often taken to be defended by John McDowell; see his "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* Supp. Vol. 52 (1978): 13–29.

38 Michael Smith himself eventually takes such a view in *The Moral Problem.*

39 See Blackburn, *Spreading the Word,* passim but especially Chapters 5 and 6.

expressed by indicative sentences; they may be argued for and against, reasoned to and from, accepted, doubted, and entertained. So the notion ought to provide everything here required: the relevant platitude is, in effect, that the assertion of any truth-apt content is the profession of a commitment. Since the two auxiliary premises are not simultaneously good for commitments, the objection accordingly lapses.

Someone who sympathizes with the view that only some commitments are pukka *beliefs* owes an account of what is distinctive of the narrower class. I know of no reason to reject out of hand the suggestion that a worthwhile such distinction may exist; and if it exists, the annexure of the term "belief" to the narrower class might conceivably be a well-motivated linguistic *reform*. Until then, the fact remains that our ordinary practice does not scruple to use "belief" across the range of cases where the expressivist would have us worry about it; and the anti-expressivist is free to respond to the objection by charging that it is only with this more generous notion that there is a platitudinous connection with assertion, and that the two auxiliary premises which the objection exploits cannot both be acceptable if it is the more generous notion of belief that is in play.

Appendix: Two Illustrative Satisfiers of the Platitudes for Truth

We shall reckon with just the seven platitudes proposed above: Transparency, Opacity, Embedding, Correspondence, Contrast, Timelessness, and Absoluteness. First, we note the following dependencies:

(i) *Transparency* is tantamount to the validity of the Equivalence Schema,
    It is true that P if and only if P,
    for all propositional contents, P, which in turn ensures that of the Disquotational Scheme,
    "P" is true if and only if P,
    assuming only the validity of the corresponding instance of
    "P" says that P,
    and the stipulation that the truth of a sentence is to enjoin and be enjoined by that of the proposition it expresses.

(ii) *Correspondence* is a platitude, whether for propositions or for sentences, only if suitably neutrally interpreted — that is, interpreted

so as to be neutral on the status of the correspondence *theory*. As a platitude it thus carries no commitment to a real ontology of facts — "sentence-shaped" worldly truth-conferrers — nor to any seriously representational construal of "correspondence," but merely claims that talk of truth may be paraphrased by any of a variety of kinds of correspondence idiom. We may thus take the Correspondence Platitude for propositions to be, for example, this:

(CPP)   It is true that *P* if and only if matters stand in conformity with the proposition that *P*.

CPP is an immediate consequence of the Equivalence Schema, together with the analogous equivalence controlling correspondence idiom itself:

> Matters stand in conformity with the proposition that *P* if and only if *P*.

Likewise the Correspondence Platitude for sentences may suitably neutrally be taken to be:

(CPS)   "*P*" is true if and only if matters stand as "*P*" says they do.

Now wherever we have that

> "*P*" says that *P*,

it follows that

> Matters stand as "*P*" says they do if and only if *P*.

CPS is immediate from the last together with the Disquotational Scheme.[40]

(iii) *Contrast* — the contrast between truth and justification — is straightforwardly derived from the Equivalence Schema (or Disquotational Scheme) together with Embedding (specifically, its instance that every truth-apt content has a negation which is likewise truth-apt) and a very basic proof theory for negation. For propositions, the derivation runs as follows. Negation of both halves of the Equivalence Schema provides that

> It is not true that *P* if and only if not *P*,

while substitution of "not *P*" for "*P*" at each of its occurrences in the Equivalence Schema provides that

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40 For parallel discussion, see my *Truth and Objectivity*, 25–7.

It is true that not *P* if and only if not *P*.
Transitivity of the biconditional then yields what I termed the
Negation Equivalence,

It is not true that *P* if and only if it is true that not *P*,

— the commutativity of truth and negation. It then suffices for
Contrast to reflect that, for any range of propositions for which
neutral states of information are a possibility, negation does *not*
commute with justification. For in such a neutral state, a lack of
justification for *P* precisely does not convert into justification for
its negation.

The upshot, then, is that our illustrations need address only the fol-
lowing: the Equivalence Schema, Opacity, Embedding, Timelessness,
and Absoluteness.

Illustration 1: Pure Arithmetical Truth Conceived as Coherence

Assume a language, L, containing just the usual resources of first-order
logic with identity plus the non-logical constants: N*x* ("*x* is a natural
number"), S*x* ("the immediate successor of *x*"), and the decimal nu-
merals, "0," "1," "2," "3" … etc. Take as the coherence-base, **B**, the
Peano axioms suitably formulated in this language, say as:

(i) $N(0)$
     : Zero is a number

(ii) $(\forall x)(Nx \to NSx)$
     : Every number is immediately succeeded by a number

(iii) $(\forall x)(\forall y)(\forall z)(\forall w)(Nx \& Ny \to (Sx=Sy \to x=y))$
     : Numbers are the same if their successors are the same

(iv) $(\forall x)(Nx \to \neg 0=Sx)$
     : Zero is not a successor

(v) $(F0 \& (\forall x)((Nx \& Fx) \to FSx)) \to (\forall x)(Nx \to Fx)$
     : Any characteristic possessed by zero and by the
successor of any number which possesses it is possessed by
all numbers

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plus the standard recursive clauses for "+" and "×"

(vi) $(\forall x)\ x{+}0 = x$
(vi) $(\forall x)(\forall y)\ x{+}Sy = S(x{+}y)$

(vii) $(\forall x)\ x \times 0 = 0$
(viii) $(\forall x)(\forall y)\ x \times Sy = (x \times y) + x$

and axioms to govern the definition of the regular decimal numerals from "1" onwards in terms of iterations of "S" on "0."

The proposal, then, is that a statement's being a *pure arithmetical truth of first-order* may be identified with its *cohering with* **B**. How is coherence here to be understood? Intuitively all the significant statements of first-order number theory fall into one of two classes: a *simple-arithmetical* base class whose members draw on no expressive resources save the numerals, the expressions for addition, multiplication and identity, and expressions for other operations which may be (recursively) defined in terms of those notions; and a remainder, each of which can be formed by (iterated) introductions of the logical constants into sentences of the base class in accordance with the standard first-order formation rules. From a classical point of view, it is quite intuitive that the truth-value of every first-order pure arithmetical sentence *supervenes upon* the truth-values of sentences in the base class: specifically, determine the truth-value of each of the latter and you have implicitly settled the truth-value of every pure arithmetical thought which may be expressed at first-order. (The crucial point, of course, is that simple arithmetic has the resources to name every element in the domain of quantification of full first-order arithmetic.) A natural version of truth as coherence, which should be attractive to those of broadly formalist disposition, simply follows through on this intuition, characterizing the coherence of simple-arithmetical sentences in terms of their syntactic derivability from ingredients in **B**, and that of the remainder in accordance with the sort of recursive clauses familiar from standard truth-theories. It could run like this:

(i) If A is a simple-arithmetical sentence of L, then A coheres with **B** just if A may be derived from elements of **B** in standard (classical) first-order logic with identity.

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(ii)   If *Ax* is any open sentence of L in one free variable, *x*, and A is (∀*x*)*Ax*, then A coheres with **B** just if each of *A*0, *A*1, *A*2, ..., coheres with **B**.

(iii) If *Ax* is any open sentence of L in one free variable, *x*, and A is (∃*y*)(*Ay*), then A coheres with **B** just if at least one of *A*0, *A*1, *A*2, ..., coheres with **B**.

(iv)   If A is B&C, then A coheres with **B** just if both B and C cohere with **B**.

(v)   If A is B∨C, then A coheres with **B** just if either B coheres with **B** or C coheres with **B**.

(vi)   If A is B→C, then A coheres with **B** just if it is not the case that A coheres with **B** and C does not.

(vii) If A is ¬B, then A coheres with **B** just if B does not.

To the platitudes, then. First does this proposal validate the Equivalence Schema? Can it be affirmed, for all first-order expressible pure arithmetical statements, *P*, that

(E^C)   *P* coheres with **B** if and only if *P*?

Dialectically, the status of a positive answer is somewhat akin to that of Church's Thesis, that all effectively calculable arithmetical functions are general recursive. A formal proof of Church's Thesis would demand some independent formal characterization of the effectively calculable functions — the very thing that Church's Thesis purports to provide. Likewise a proof of (E^C) would demand some independent characterization of the first-order arithmetical truths. So, as with Church's Thesis, it seems it cannot be definitely excluded that *intuitive* counterexamples to (E^C) might be forthcoming: sentences of the relevant kind which intuitively ought to rank as true yet which there is no reason to regard as cohering with **B** in the light of the stated clauses; or conversely, sentences which intuitively ought *not* to count as true, yet which do apparently so cohere. What can be said to make it plausible that there are no such cases?

Well, if (E^C) did have counterexamples, then — assuming the consistency of **B** — they could not come from within simple arithmetic, which comprises a complete and consistent system which is axiomatized within **B**. So their provenance would have to be of one of two kinds. *Either* truth in first-order arithmetic does not supervene

upon simple-arithmetical truth — so that some arithmetical truths are determined by factors beyond the truth-value assignments in simple arithmetic and the semantics of the constants. That is surely excluded by the fact that "0," "1" and their suite collectively name everything in the domain. *Or* conversely, coherence as characterized outruns arithmetical truth (as it would if **B** were inconsistent or if, say, some quite different — perhaps intuitionistic — account of the truth-conditions of universally quantified arithmetical sentences was thought appropriate than that which informs clause (ii)). Prescinding from the scenario of inconsistency, then, it does seem reasonable to doubt — or at least that one of realist inclination should doubt — that intuitive counterexamples of either kind will be forthcoming.

Of course, some kinds of arithmetical realist will doubtless regard truth, so characterized, as at best merely *extensionally equivalent* with the real thing. But even for such a realist, the coincidence in extension would be necessary. What, if anything, is wrong with the coherentist account would not be its extensional inaccuracy.

(ii) How much Opacity should be required of a truth predicate is controversial, but the arithmetical coherentist proposal is generous on this score. Matters of syntactic derivability, even though effectively decidable, can be mistaken or unknown by any single competent judge, or group of judges, in practice. And the presence of clause (ii) ensures that coherence in effect follows the Omega Rule, so that the proposal is hospitable to the idea that some arithmetical truths may be unknowable in principle.

(iii) Embedding: any statement couched purely in first-order arithmetical vocabulary can be regarded as in the relevant sense apt to cohere with the Peano axioms. Since the logical constants are part of that vocabulary, aptitude for coherence with the Peano axioms is thus conserved under the usual logical operations.

(iv) Timelessness: relations of coherence as defined are eternal.

(v) Absoluteness: relations of coherence as defined do not admit of degree.

Illustration 2: Truth Conceived as Superassertibility

Recall that a statement is superassertible just in case it is justified by some accessible state of information and will continue to be so justi-

fied no matter how that state of information is improved. (When *I* is such a state of information with respect to a statement, S, I shall say that *I* is S-stable.) Superassertibility models the truth-platitudes under three assumptions concerning the region of discourse, D, with which we are concerned:

(i)   that it is *a priori* that all truths of D are *knowable*;
(ii) that the states of information which specifically bear on the characteristic claims of D are of a timelessly accessible kind;
(iii) that it is a necessary condition of knowledge (at least of the subject matter of D, if not in general) that it exists only where a claimant does not thereby lay himself open to a charge of irrationality.

(i) is a repudiation of evidence-transcendent truth for D. (ii) has the effect that the opportunity for justification of a particular claim within D is never ephemeral but remains eternally open in principle for any suitable enquirer, no matter what her circumstances. (Note, however, the qualification: *suitable* enquirer. Suitability may demand, in particular, a certain innocence. It may be impossible for one who *knows too much* to justify a certain statement, even though evidence speaking defeasibly on its behalf is timelessly available.) (ii) also implies that states of information may be conceived as *additive* — accessing one such state never costs you in principle the opportunity to access another (though again, since warrant is a function of one's *total* state of information, the import of a body of information under addition may naturally be different from what it would have been in isolation). (iii) imposes a boundary on externalist conceptions of knowledge: let it be that, at least with respect to certain subject matters, knowledge should be viewed as grounded purely in the exercise of what are in fact reliable cognitive powers and stands in no need of further internal qualification: still, it should not be open to internal *dis*qualification. There is no knowledge, even of such subject matters, in any case where persistence in a knowledge claim would commit a subject to disregarding the balance of the available evidence and so convict her of irrationality.

Pure mathematics and issues of moral and aesthetic principle may arguably be thought to supply examples of discourses meeting these conditions under only relatively modest idealizations of the powers of their practitioners. Discourse concerning the spatially and/or temporally remote would do so, if at all, only under more elaborate

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idealizations — maybe of dubious coherence, like the possibility of time travel.

The platitudes of Opacity, Embedding, Timelessness, and Absoluteness are all straightforward under these assumptions. To take them in that order:

First, it is clear that the superassertibility of a statement can *in practice* elude any single competent judge, or group of judges. On the other hand, it cannot be undetectable *in principle*: if a statement is superassertible, then that fact will show in the S-stability of the relevant — superassertibility-conferring — state of information and hence will be detectable, albeit inconclusively, in just the same way that such S-stability is detectable. But that is no objection under the assumption (i) that we are operating in a region where it is *a priori* that all truths are knowable. For that is to suppose that the truths are detectable in any case.

Second, any statement is apt to be superassertible which is apt to be warranted in the first place, since its superassertibility is merely a matter of the S-stability of some warrant-conferring state of information. But aptitude for warrant itself is, of course, inherited under embedding within the standard logical operators. So such embeddings conserve aptitude for superassertibility.

Next, since one of our assumptions is exactly that states of information are accessible timelessly, it follows that superassertibility is, likewise, an eternal characteristic of any statement that has it.

Last, the definition of superassertibility — though the notion must inherit any vagueness in the notion of (all-things-considered) warrant — manifestly makes no provision for degrees: one statement may be more warranted than another, but if both are nevertheless all-things-considered warranted, and if their warrants are respectively stable, then they are equally and absolutely superassertible.

The key issue is accordingly the status of the Equivalence Schema with "true" interpreted as "superassertible,"

(E^S)   It is superassertible that P if and only if P.

There are some subtleties here[41] but our discussion is simplified by

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41 See my *Truth and Objectivity*, Chapter 2, Section V.

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the announced assumption (i), that we are working in a region where the schema,

$P \rightarrow$ It is knowable that P,

holds good *a priori*.

We consider each direction of (E^S) in turn. First, suppose that it is superassertible that P but that it is not the case that P. Then, by (i), it can be known that it is not the case that P. But that is absurd. For whatever state of information was possessed by one who had that knowledge, it would have — by the implication of additivity in (ii) — to be able to co-exist with the enduring all-things-considered warrant for P ensured by its superassertibility. And no-one could be said to know that not P whose total state of information warranted, to the contrary, a belief in P unless — contrary to (iii) — the belief that not P can be an example of knowledge even when irrationally held.

Now suppose that P but that it is not superassertible that P. Since P is not superassertible, we have it that there is no P-stable state of information — that any warrant for P can be defeated. So any subject who claims to know that P is nevertheless destined to lose a debate with a sufficiently resourceful agnostic; for — by additivity — the agnostic will always be able to come up with some consideration which will spoil whatever case the believer advances for P. It follows that it will not be possible rationally to sustain a belief in P. So, by (iii), P cannot be known; whence by (i) it cannot be that P, contrary to hypothesis.