PHIL 470: *Seminar: Metaphysics & Epistemology*
Truth and Reality

Handout (10)

Professor JeeLoo Liu

Marian David: Truth as Correspondence

§ **Main Goals:**
1. **To find an appropriate definition of the correspondence relation for a correspondence theory of truth (of a sentence).**
2. **To separate the correspondence theory from the disquotation theory.**
3. **To defend the correspondence theory from the attacks of deflation theorists.**
4. **To finally suggest that the best definition of "correspondence" is in terms of "representation."**

§ **[Corresponding to Facts]**
___ **Truth as a relation to reality.**

Q: What is the relation supposed to be? What are we to understand by 'reality'?

    I. The central definition of the classical correspondence theory of truth for sentences:

    x **is a true sentence** $=_{\text{def}}$ *x* **is a sentence, and there is some fact** *y* **such that** *x* **corresponds to** *y***;**
        x **is a false sentence** $=_{\text{def}}$ *x* **is a sentence, and there is no fact** *y* **such that** *x* **corresponds to** *y***.**

    Its correspondence generalization (the universal biconditional that is entailed by the definition) is well formed and can be expressed:
    ____ **a sentence is true just in case it corresponds to a fact.**
⇒ **For a sentence to be true** *is* **for it to correspond to a fact.**

[Problem]:
___ The correspondence definition, as given above, is not very specific. It does not, for example, tell us which sentences correspond to which facts. I think it is the desire for more information on this point that frequently leads proponents as well as adversaries of the correspondence theory to confuse (*C*) with the following schema:
    (*C**) **'*p*' is a true sentence iff '*p*' corresponds to the fact that** *p***.**
___ Ultimately, I think, the mistake lies in the misguided attempt to make the definition do the work that should be done by an account of the correspondence relation.

Q: **What is a fact?**
___ Facts are composed of things, properties, and relations, and maybe also of sets and functions.

Q: **What is it for a sentence to correspond to a fact?**

Proposal 1: "congruence"
___ This account proceeds by showing how sentence-to-fact correspondence can be constructed from further correspondence relations that obtain between the constituents of sentences and the constituents of facts (namely, how names, predicates, and logical particles can *refer* to things, properties, relations, sets, and functions).
___ A straightforward congruence approach will also require all kinds of logically complex facts. It will require negative facts, conjunctive facts, disjunctive facts, conditional facts, subjunctive facts, and so on. ➔ "funny facts"

Conclusion:

Working out a correspondence theory will require an ontological account of facts and a semantic account of word-to-world relations: a rather daunting task.

§ Deflationary theory vs. the Correspondence theory

[The deflationist's attack]: *vacuity*
1. The notions of fact and correspondence are vacuous notions with zero explanatory import and that, therefore, the correspondence definition itself is pretty much vacuous – a string of words that creates an air of profundity while explaining nothing.
2. The correspondence theorist's ontology is itself projected from the notion of sentence-truth; hence, it cannot fruitfully be employed to explain what it is for a sentence to be true.
3. The only thing the definition (C) tells us is that the correspondence relation in question must be one that has to obtain between a sentence and a fact in order for the sentence to be true. So the deflationist will charge that the notion of correspondence that appears in (*C*) is also a fabrication – that it has been invented for the sole purpose of binding the invented facts to the true sentences.
4. According to the deflationist, the notion of truth is at the root of the correspondence theorist's ideology as it is at the root of her ontology. He sees nothing of explanatory value in correspondence and facts and suggests deflating the correspondence definition – to delete its vacuous ingredients and to work with the remainder.

§ Other Problems with the First Definition (C):

1. **According to (*C*), *false* sentences would not mean anything, which is absurd.**
2. **Definition (*C*) defines a sentence as false just in case there is no fact that it corresponds to, that is, just in case the sentence is not true. This identification of falsehood with *un*truth is problematic. It leads to difficulties with sentences that are neither true nor false and it leads to difficulties with sentences that are both true and false.**
   e.g. Sentences that are neither true nor false:
   ___ The most obvious examples are interrogative and imperative sentences.

Suggestion: Restrict the category to declarative sentences only.

II. Revised Definition:

> **(C_D)   *x* is a true sentence =_def *x* is a declarative sentence, and there is some fact *y* such that *x* corresponds to *y*;**
>
> ***x* is a false sentence =_def *x* is a declarative sentence, and there is no fact *y* such that *x* corresponds to y.**

(*C*) vs. (C_D):
___ As soon as falsehood is distinguished from untruth it becomes clear that a simple definition like (*C*) cannot handle falsehood adequately…. (*C*) simply does not have enough "degrees of freedom" to allow for a third possibility bedsides truth and untruth; it does not allow any room for the recognition that falsehood is not simply something negative but consists partly in the presence of a positive property.

* Problems with (C_D):
1. **(C_D) has latched on to a superficial grammatical feature.**
2. **It is actually problematic to assume, as (C_D) does, that being a declarative is sufficient for being a sentence that is either true or false (e.g., 'Santa Claus is a nice guy.')**
3. **It seems that vague declaratives are neither true nor false. Vague declaratives constitute a problem for (C_D): they force the correspondence theorist to admit that a purely grammatical understanding of declarativeness will not be sufficient to make the definition work.**
4. **(C_D) cannot handle sentences that are both true and false.**
   e.g. Sentences that are true and false:
   ___ What I have in mind here are sentences that are *ambiguous* and are true under one of their interpretations and false under the other. Examples are sentences that contain lexically ambiguous words; sentences that are ambiguous in syntactic structure; and sentences that exhibit syntactical as well as lexical ambiguity. Such

sentences are best regarded as being true as well as false. But the above definition of falsehood does not allow us to evaluate such sentences in this way. Since (C_D) identifies false declaratives with declaratives that are untrue, it makes declaratives like the above come out both true and not true – an evaluation that is inconsistent.

Conclusion:
___ The correspondence definition in its present form cannot handle ambiguity. Ambiguity is a matter of having more than one interpretation – more than one content. Sentences that are both true and false are so because they are true under one of their interpretations and false under the other one.
___ A definition of truth that can handle ambiguity will be one that acknowledges the need for content in the theory of truth; it will be one according to which the truth or falsehood of a sentence is due, in part, to its content.

§ A Third Proposal: Representing States of Affairs that Obtain

* [the *representational theory of truth*]
1. **It is natural to hold that what is distinctive about sentences that are truth or false is that they *represent* reality as being a certain way. True ones represent it as it actually is, while false ones represent it as it is not.**
2. **The ways reality can be represented as being are often called *states of affairs*, which are entities that are typically denoted by that-clauses.**
   ___ Instead of having to say that the sentence 'Snow is white' represents reality as being such that it has snow in it that is white, we can say that it represents the state of affairs that snow is white.

3. **A state of affairs can *occur* or fail to occur, or, it can *obtain* or fail to obtain.**

4. **If a sentence represents a state of affairs that obtains, then it is true in virtue of representing that state of affairs and in virtue of that state's obtaining.**

5. **If, on the other hand, a sentence represents a state of affairs that does not obtain, then it is false in virtue of representing that state and in virtue of that state's failing to obtain.**

6. **If, finally, a sentence does not represent any state of affairs at all, then it is neither true nor false.**

III. *The Representational Definition of Truth*

(R)   *x* **is a true sentence $=_{def}$** *x* **is a sentence, and there is a state of affairs** *y* **such that** *x* **represents** *y* **and** *y* **obtains.**

     X **is a false sentence $=_{def}$** *x* **is a sentence, and there is a state of affairs** *y* **such that** *x* **represents** *y* **and** *y* **does not obtain.**

* Problems with (R):
___ It is not very informative. A satisfying representation *theory* of sentence-truth should go beyond the mere definition: it should offer an account of the definition's ideology (representation) as well as of its ontology (states of affairs).

Q: **What is a state of affairs?**

(a) structural account of states of affairs
____ According to this view states of affairs are complex entities whose ontological structure is reflected in the grammatical structure of the sentences that represent them.
____ Logically complex (negative, conjunctive, disjunctive, conditional) states of affairs must be composed of logically simple states of affairs, which, in turn, must be composed of constituents that are not states of affairs.

(b) unstructured account of states of affairs
___ According to this view, states of affairs are unstructured entities, namely sets of possible worlds.

Q: **What is "obtaining"?**
___ States of affairs are essentially such that they either obtain or fail to obtain. A satisfying representation theory should contain some account of what it is for a state of affairs to obtain.

Example: Socrates is dead
Option 1:
___ One could hold that the state obtains just in case Socrates instantiates the property of being dead and fails to obtain just in case Socrates does not instantiate the property of being dead.

Option 2:
___ One could try to explain what it is for the state of affairs that Socrates is dead to obtain by relating it to yet further objects that are not among its constituents, such as particular events like Socrates' death, Socrates' dying, et. On such a view a state obtains just in case it *s* "realized" by an event and fails to obtain just in case it is not realized by any event.

A satisfying account of obtaining will have to decide in favor of one of the two options.

[Conclusion]:
____ The very magnitude of the representationalist task with its inherent difficulties is certainly one of the factors that make it tempting to adopt deflationary theories of sentence-truth. After all, these theories contain the promise that we can account for the truth and falsehood of sentences without getting involved with any of the complicated issues that the representation theory has to address.

IV. *A Refined Representational Definition of Truth* (relative to languages):

Case 1: Koreans and English speaking people and the sentence 'Snow is white'
_____ What we want to say here is that I am right because the sentence 'Snow is white' has a content in English in virtue of which it is true in English, while the Korean is right too because the sentence has no content in Korean and is therefore not true in Korean: no contradiction. But (R) does not allow us to say anything like that.

Case 2: 'Empedokles leaped.'
____ We want to say that both speakers are right because the uttered sentence in question has one content in English and another content in German, in virtue of which it is false in German. But (R) leaves no room for such a conciliatory analysis and forces us to make a harsh judgment.

[Solution]:
___ The standard treatment of cases like the two described above is to suggest that the expression 'x is a true sentence', even though it looks like a one-place predicate, has the "deep structure," or "logical form," of a two-place predicate, namely the predicate 'x is a true sentence of language y.'

Truth for sentences, according to this suggestion, is a *relative* notion, and its relata are sentences and *languages*.

> **(R_L) x is a true sentence of language y =$_{def}$ x is a sentence of language y, and there is a state of affairs z such that x represents z in y and z obtains.**
>
> **X is a false sentence of language y =$_{def}$ x is a sentence of language y, and there is a state of affairs z such that x represents z in y and z does not obtain.**

V. *Representational Definition of Truth as Applied to Propositions:*

Consider a definition of truth and falsehood for sentences in terms of propositions. Such a definition will assume that there are (at least) two notions of truth, *sentence-truth* and *proposition-truth*, and it will propose that the former can be defined and explained in terms of the latter:

> **(P) x is a true sentence =$_{def}$ x is a sentence, and there is a proposition y such that x expresses y and y is true;**
>
> **x is a false sentence =$_{def}$ x is a sentence, and there is a proposition y such that x expresses y and y is false.**

I think it is quite all right to regard (R) and (*P*) as notational variants of each other.

§ Conclusion

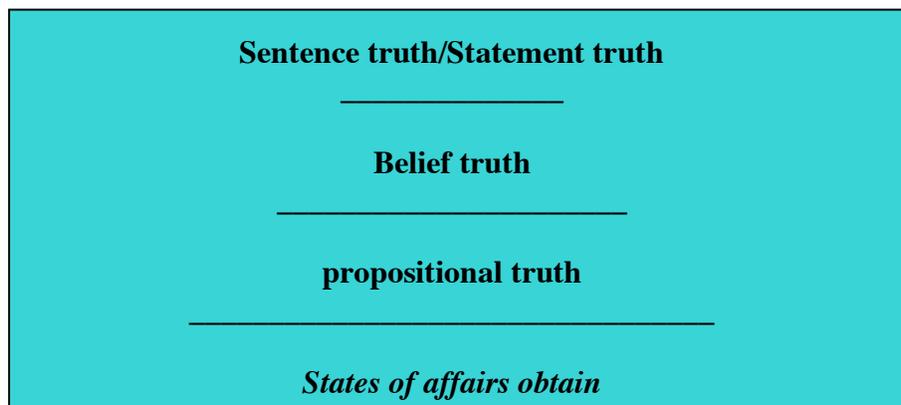**What a general correspondence theory of truth would look like:**

It is clear that a general correspondence definition of truth should take the form of the disjunctive definition

> X **is true** $=_{def} x$ **is either**
> **(i)   a true sentence,** *or*
> **(ii)   a true statement,** *or*
> **(iii)   a true belief,** *or*
> **(iv)   a true proposition.**

In which each of the disjuncts is in turn defined and explained in a manner that makes it appropriate to say that the resulting definition constitutes a correspondence definition of truth *simpliciter*.

If all of this is on the right tack and there really are such explanatory connections among the different notions of representation, the resulting correspondence theory of truth *simpliciter* will reveal that truth is not a merely disjunctive notion. The theory will take proposition-truth as its "bottom-level" explanandum: true propositions are (or determine) states of affairs that obtain.

An Explanatory Structure of 'Truth'

Sentence truth/Statement truth

_____

Belief truth

_____

propositional truth

_____

States of affairs obtain

A correspondence theory of this form promises an explanation of truth as a uniform concept. I would take this to be a definite virtue – a standard that other theories of truth have to live up to.