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Against a Uniform Understanding of Truth

> *THEORIES OF TRUTH. The difference between what is seen and said may be illustrated with the major theories of truth. The so-called correspondence and coherence theories of truth certainly see something of the truth, and so does the pragmatic theory. But if each said faithfully what it saw, they would not contradict each other as in fact they do.*[1]

I. Introduction

This paper is much in the spirit of the above passage from Walter Kaufmann. It may be tempting to say roughly and generally that 'p' is true, where p is a truth-bearer,[2] if and only if p is the case. But while this is in some sense correct, by itself it is not very illuminating. The aim of this paper is to say something illuminating about truth—namely, to show that that which gives a truth-bearer its truth-value is not the same kind of thing for every true or false sentence. The impetuous for this essay is the acknowledgment of the multifarious nature of language. For example, there are statements, questions, orders, judgments, utterances, pleas, requests: of each, there are many types, and between them the edges may blur. Looking at statements, claims, assertions, and the like we find a great plurality ranging over what we may call factual or empirical, aesthetic, ethical, mathematical, logical, and analytic. Except perhaps in regard to mathematical, logical, and analytic truths, truth is typically argued to be a matter of correspondence, *or* coherence, *or* perhaps utility or the like. That is, a look at

[1] Walter Kaufmann. *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*, p74.
[2] 'Truth-bearer' is here used as a neutral term for what is controversially thought of as, e.g., a proposition, sentence, thought, belief, or utterance. In this paper the issue of whether sentences, propositions, beliefs, utterances, etc. are the proper truth-bearers is not relevant. Therefore, for ease of discussion, 'sentence' will be used as the prototypical truth-bearer.

the various attempts to explicate the concept of truth reveals that whatever the answer to the question of why a particular proposition 'p' is true or false—correspondence, coherence, utility—all other propositions are true or false for the same reason.[3] The aim of this essay is to cast doubt upon this idea. As such each section of this paper will have the aim of giving support to the following thesis:

T: Different kinds of sentences are true for different reasons.[4]

We will first look more closely at the truth project with which we will concern ourselves before looking at the various types of sentences and why they are true.

II. The Truth Project

Our project concerns looking at the answer to the question of why 'p' is true where 'p' is a sentence. Possible answers would be that 'p' corresponds to a fact, state of affairs, etc., 'p' coheres with a system of sentences (or beliefs), or 'p' is useful to human endeavors. Following Kirkham's truth project typology, we can say, then, that the truth project of this essay is metaphysical and extensional. That is, our discussion of truth concerns the identification of what truth consists in, in the sense of the necessary and sufficient conditions for a sentence's being true. As Kirkham emphasizes, the kinds of questions with which our project is concerned ask whether correspondence to facts, coherence with other sentences, or usefulness for humans is necessary or sufficient for a sentence's being true. The metaphysical project is not concerned with our justification

[3] Please see the Appendix at the end of this paper for sketches of the different theories of truth and their problems.

[4] This is meant to be vague, but the idea is that the necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for a sentence's being true vary by sentence type or subtype.

for thinking a sentence to be true, or with the "conversational purpose" of calling a statement true.[5]

It must be kept in mind, however, that while the project of this paper is metaphysical, our aim is not to argue for a *particular understanding* of correspondence, coherence, or utility as the correct way to answer the question of why 'p' is true, where 'p' is a sentence; rather, we will argue in general that none of these alone is wholly adequate as an answer to the questions with which our metaphysical project is concerned.

Donald Davidson is quick to point out that truth cannot be generally defined. He writes:

> Truth is, as G.E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, and Gottlob Frege maintained, and Alfred Tarski proved, an indefinable concept. This does not mean we can say nothing revealing about it: we can, by relating it to other concepts like belief, desire, cause, and action. Nor does the indefinability of truth imply that the concept is mysterious, ambiguous, or untrustworthy.[6]

So, while Davidson does not think truth can be generally defined, he does think interesting things can be said about it—in fact, he has much to say about it. It is unclear whether Davidson, or the others, is correct about the indefinability of truth; however, be that as it may, our project is not, strictly speaking, concerned with defining truth. Our aim is not to say what 'true,' 'truth,' or 'is true' mean. As Kirkham writes, the metaphysical project "does not attempt to find an expression that is synonymous with any of these terms."[7] Admittedly, if a definition is conceived of as giving the necessary and sufficient conditions of a sentence's being true, the metaphysical project does concern a definition of truth.[8] Nevertheless, as has been emphasized, our interest is not in arguing

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[5] *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction*, p22.
[6] "The Folly of Trying to Define Truth," p265.
[7] *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction*, p22.
[8] *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction*, p22.

for a correct, detailed understanding of *the* necessary and sufficient conditions for any sentence's being true. Quite the opposite, our aim is to argue that there are not uniform necessary and sufficient conditions for all sentences that can be called true or false. Thus, insofar as a definition of truth will be argued for, it will be argued that a definition of truth will vary by sentence. It is not obvious whether such a goal would be objectionable to Davidson, since we do not seek a general definition of truth.

III. Sentence Varieties

We now turn to examine the implications of the variety of sentence types and their subtypes on truth. Recall that the thesis to which we seek to lend support is:

T: Different kinds of sentences are true for different reasons.[9]

In all of the discussions of truth referenced for this paper, the issue of truth is treated as generally concerning propositions, sentences, statements, utterances, thoughts, or beliefs. One of the canonical examples of a sentence with a truth values is 'Snow is white.' One exception to this type of example occurs when bivalence is at issue. For example, with Michael Dummett truth requires verifiability—hence for Dummett certain sentences, such as 'If Chicago were to win the championship, its citizens would celebrate,' are undecidable and therefore neither true nor false.[10] In general, with discussions of truth, the variety of sentence types is not discussed. The focus is on such sentences as 'Snow is white.' Further, it is safe to say that when discussing theories of truth, i.e., whether truth is correspondence, coherence, utility, or deflationary, philosophers steer clear of aesthetic and ethical statements. There very well may be good reason for doing so; after all, the nature and status of aesthetic and ethical statements are extremely controversial. As

[9] The necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for a sentences being true vary by sentence type or subtype.

[10] *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction*, p255.

such, what will here be said is not meant to settle the dispute about the nature of aesthetic or ethical statements. Much that will be said is speculative and meant merely to call into question the issue of whether truth can be thought of only in one way, i.e., as correspondence, coherence, *or* utility. Logical truth, while discussed more frequently in discussions of truth, is equally controversial in its own right. Again, the point of discussing logical truth is the same as that for aesthetic and ethical statements. While the discussion of aesthetic, ethical, and logical truths will hopefully lend support for the main argument of this paper, if their discussion leaves one unmoved, the discussion of the variety of subtypes of factual or empirical statements will be enough to make the argument that truth is not an either/or matter. So, thesis T will be strongly supported if we can give reasons for thinking that for some sentences truth is correspondence, for others it involves coherence, and still others it involves utility.

III Ethical Sentences

A central issue when discussing the truth of ethical statements is the distinction between fact and value made, for example, by David Hume in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals*.[11] Among all the facts that describe the birth of a child, there is not to be found the fact that the mother ought to care for the baby or that the baby should not be left to die. That is, from what is the case, there cannot be found a fact about value or what ought to be the case. If the fact/value dichotomy is correct, if we are to say that 'A newborn should not be left to die,' it is not because that sentence corresponds to a fact, state of affairs, or the way the world is. A similar position is found in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "there can be no ethical propositions.

[11] For example, p287.

Propositions cannot express anything higher."[12] This is because the essence of language in the *Tractatus* is to say what is the case. But what is the case is a contingent matter: "The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is and happens as it does happen. *In* it there is no value….For all happening and being-so is accidental."[13] A similar position is found in one of Wittgenstein's later talks on ethics:

> Suppose one of you were an omniscient person and therefore knew all the movements of all the bodies in the world dead or alive and that he also knew all the states of mind of all human beings that ever lived, and suppose this man wrote all he knew in a big book, then this book would contain the whole description of the world; and what I want to say is, that this book would contain nothing that we would call an ethical judgment or anything that would logically imply such a judgment. It would of course contain all relative judgments of value and all true scientific propositions and in fact all true propositions that can be made. But all the facts described would, as it were, stand on the same level and in the same way all propositions stand on the same level. There are no propositions which, in any absolute sense, are sublime, important, or trivial.[14]

The question, then, remains whether under this view ethical statements would have a truth value. If truth were only a matter of correspondence to world or fact, ethical judgments would not have a truth value. This position, however, would still leave open the possibility for ethical truth. If there were a god and that god decreed certain moral laws—thou shall not steal, murder, etc.—one might say that because of god's decree, the sentences 'One should not steel' or 'Theft is wrong' are true. Why would they be true, though? If the god were to make a declaration, public or private, that declaration itself would constitute a fact, but what is declared would not constitute a fact. That is, a god's decreeing 'Thou shall not steal' would constitute a fact, a happening, something in the

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[12] 6.42.
[13] 6.41.
[14] *Philosophical Occasions*, p39.

world, but the content of the decree—that one should not steal—would not be a fact.[15] So, a god could decree various moral laws, laws that would make it true to say 'It is wrong to steal' and the statement would not be true because it corresponded to a fact or state of the world. Does it correspond to the decree? It is consistent with the decree and is implied by the decree, but to say that it corresponds to it does not seem right. So, in support of thesis T, it might be argued that while 'The book is on the table' is true because it corresponds to how the world is, 'It is wrong to steal' is true by implication of divine decree. It is unclear whether we should say in such a case that 'It is wrong to steal' is true because it coheres with divine decree. Nevertheless in this case the truth is not a matter of correspondence. The preceding line of thought is clearly incomplete and riddled with controversy; however, it seems to lend possible support thesis T.

Another possible line of thought for the truth of ethical statements is that they are true insofar as they have proved themselves useful over time for the survival, flourishing, and happiness of the human race, or groups of humans. That is, 'It is wrong to steal' is true because of the negative consequences that would come about if people were to regularly steal. A society of thieves can easily be imagined not to flourish and its people to lack happiness. There would be no fact to which 'It is wrong to steal' would correspond in such a case. It would be a fact that if people steal, there are negative consequences, and if they do not steal, the society flourishes and happiness is more likely. But these do not constitute a fact such that it is wrong to steal. So, it might be argued that while 'The book is on the table' is true because it corresponds to how the

[15] Though one could argue that the divine decree makes it a fact that, for example, one should not steal. But, as will be argued in section VII, this may not be the "kind" of fact to which a sentence could correspond. There is a great difference between the factuality of a god decreeing something and the content that of that decree becoming a fact by decree.

world is, ‘It is wrong to steal’ is true on pragmatic grounds. Again, this line of thought is clearly incomplete and surely contentious; however, it is suggestive of another possible line of support for T.

Another possibility is that ethical statements (though perhaps not all) are true by stipulation. That is, a society may make a contract whereby it is wrong to steal, murder, etc. Again, in such a case there would not be a fact to which ‘It is wrong to steal’ would correspond. ‘It is wrong to steal’ would be true by stipulation or agreement, or by implication or coherence in a way similar to the case of god’s decree.

The preceding discussion is incomplete, but it suggests that insofar as ethical statements might have truth values, their truth would not be a matter of correspondence with some aspect, state, or fact of the world. In contrast, while the correspondence theory of truth is, as seen in the appendix, quite contentious, it seems on some level obviously correct for such sentences as ‘The book is on the table.’ Therefore, thesis T, while certainly not confirmed, is given support.

IV. Aesthetic Sentences

In looking at aesthetic sentences the fact/value dichotomy is once again an important point of departure. Taking a painting as our primary example, the fact that there is a particular distribution of colors, shapes, and lines on the canvas does not seem to constitute a fact of the matter about its beauty. An aesthetic pronouncement on the painting is based on the facts of the painting—its color, lines, etc.—but those facts do not make a further fact of aesthetic quality. Calling the painting ‘beautiful’ is to evaluate the painting from an aesthetic standpoint. There does not initially seem to be a fact of the matter concerning the beauty of the painting. How many times have we heard the now

trite, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder”? Indeed, it is sometimes the case that children are taught to respect the right of other’s to have their own opinion to the point that they are scolded if they disagree with or question another’s opinion. It is, perhaps, tempting to compare aesthetic judgments with a person’s food tastes. Just as one person’s taste buds may flinch at the sight of peas, another person may flinch at the sight of a Picasso. There indeed are similarities between art tastes and food tastes, but there are important differences. A person may be taught to appreciate a Picasso, while a person’s taste buds may be so arranged that she could never learn to appreciate cooked peas. The question is whether we can even speak of aesthetic sentences as being true or false.

If a tourist visits a New York art gallery and looks at a piece by Andy Warhol and pronounces, “It’s beautiful,” has he said something true or false? Is there a fact of the matter? There seem to be several possible approaches to answering the question. We could say that the sentence is true, but only true for him. So, another person could say, “It’s rather boring,” and that would be true, too. Here aesthetic truth would be subjective truth. Alternatively, we could say that the sentence is neither true nor false. One might argue that it is neither true nor false because it is a subjective matter of taste—mere opinion—and opinions are not true or false. Just as a person’s saying, “I believe George W. Bush will be reelected,” expresses an opinion that is neither true nor false, so does “It’s beautiful.” However, this is problematic, for “It’s beautiful,” seems to be a description—it says something about the painting—in a way that “I believe George W.

Bush will be reelected," is not.[16] Further, since an opinion is often just a belief, and belies can be true or false, a statement does not lack a truth value by being an opinion. One might argue on Tractarian grounds that aesthetic statements are like ethical statements and, "It is clear that ethics cannot be expressed. Ethics is transcendental. (Ethics and aesthetics are one.)"[17] However, the failure of the Tractarian project casts doubt upon whether we should hold ethics and aesthetics to be transcendental in the Tractarian sense. Alternatively, one might argue along later Wittgensteinian grounds by saying that when someone sees a painting and says, "It's beautiful," she is not making a descriptive statement that is either true or false. Rather, much like a cry of pain, the aesthetic pronouncement is an utterance that came spontaneously from her. From this point of view the aesthetic pronouncement is seen as a reaction to the painting and not as a description. This might be satisfactory in some cases, but it does not seem to work in cases where, for example, a person is familiar with the painting and is asked what they think of it. In such a case the "It's beautiful," once again seems like a description, one to which another could respond, "That's not true; the painting is tasteless and has a terrible color scheme." Yet another way to look at the matter is to think of the painting as beautiful or ugly insofar as it partakes in, or instantiates, the universal or form of the beautiful. On such a Platonic approach, one who has more experience with the forms might be considered able to make truer aesthetic pronouncements than one who is not. Such a view is of course problematic.

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[16] 'I believe George W. Bush will be reelected' could be viewed as a description of what one believes. In such a case it will be true or false based on whether one actually believes George W. Bush will be reelected.

[17] *Tractatus*, 6.421.

Given the above, albeit general, considerations, it seems we can conclude that it is unlikely that all aesthetic pronouncements lack a truth value. Additionally, it seems plausible to attribute a truth value to them because we are often ready to disagree with each other's aesthetic pronouncements. We cannot disagree with commands, questions, cries, and the like—uses of language which lack truth value—in the way that we can with aesthetic pronouncements. Rather, aesthetic pronouncements seem closer to descriptive remarks such as, "The color of his hair was black," which is either true or false (where the referent of the 'his' is a real person with hair), than to commands, questions, cries, and the like.

To complicate things, there are the evaluative remarks of experts compared to those of the laypersons. The expert looking at a Picasso surely sees, in a sense, a much different painting than does the layperson looking at the "same" painting. While this may complicate our present issue, it also provides for an alternative way to think of the truth of an aesthetic sentence. That is, the experts may make their aesthetic pronouncements based on aesthetic standards that the "experts" have antecedently agreed on. For example, we might say that the expert has a list of qualities that a painting must have it is beautiful, ugly, banal, boring, etc.: a list of aesthetic criteria. So, if a Picasso has only four out of the six requisite qualities it is not beautiful. Such a method of evaluation makes the matter in some sense more objective than the layperson's aesthetic pronouncement, which may very well be a simple, unreflected reaction to the painting.

In these subjective and objective ways of making aesthetic pronouncements, it seems that if we are to say that the aesthetic pronouncements are true or false, they are not so because of some fact of the matter. That is, in the subjective case of the layperson,

we might say that the aesthetic pronouncement is true, though not because the painting is in fact the way the person pronounces, but because that is how it appears to the person—in such a case, the sentence, “It is beautiful,” is not true because of correspondence with reality, but by virtue of what we might call aesthetic fiat. In the more objective case of the expert appealing to aesthetic criteria, we might say that the aesthetic pronouncement is true, though not because the painting is in fact the way the person pronounces, but because the conventional criteria are met—in such a case the sentence, “It is beautiful,” is implied by the facts about the painting satisfying the aesthetic criteria.

Perhaps even more than with the ethical sentences, our discussion of aesthetic sentences is incomplete, provisional, and open to many criticisms. In spite of that, hopefully some reason has been given for thinking of aesthetic sentences as having truth values and if they do, they are not true or false in the same way that “The book is five hundred pages long” is true or false. If these considerations are at all correct, they give support to thesis T.

V. Logical Sentences.

What we might call logical sentences are as complicated to deal with as ethical and aesthetic sentences. We will just briefly touch on this complex subject in order to make a further point about the diversity of the ways sentences may be true. ‘Bachelors are unmarried males,’ ‘A thing cannot be what it is and not be what it is at the same time,’ ‘If p then q, p, therefore q,’ and ‘(p & p) therefore p’ are all in some sense logical sentences. The first is generally considered to be analytic, the second a law of thought, and the third and fourth rules of inference. None of them are considered to be true or false because of the way the world is. The first for example is often considered to be true

by virtue of the meaning of the constitutive terms, whereas the second can be argued to be necessarily true because its denial presupposes what is to be denied. Unlike the others, the analytic sentence 'Bachelors are unmarried males' lacks generality and thus is importantly different from the laws of thought and rules of inference. We will look at one way of characterizing logical truths.

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein understands logical sentences (propositions) to be tautologies that say nothing.[18] Similarly, Bertrand Russell at one point writes, "Everything that is a proposition of logic has got to be in some sense or other like a tautology. It has got to be something that has some peculiar quality, which I do not know how to define, that belongs to logical propositions and not to others."[19] Wittgenstein perhaps identifies this peculiar property when he writes that logical propositions are special because their truth can be recognized from the symbolism alone ("and this fact contains in itself the whole philosophy of logic")—as a corollary, experience can neither confirm or refute logical propositions.[20] However, this Tractarian picture of logical propositions is imbedded in the rest of the Tractarian picture of language. Tautologies are:

> "part of the symbolism, much as '0' is part of the symbolism of arithmetic" (4.461) Tautologies and contradictions symbolize a kind of absence of sense, the first because it admits all situations, the second because it admits none, yet are nonetheless ineliminable in logic. One needs the truth-functional operations of negation and disjunction to express the truth possibilities of elementary propositions, even though in a picture language some combinations of these (e.g., "*p* or not-*p*") do not represent any states of affairs.[21]

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[18] 6.1 and 6.11
[19] *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, pp107-108.
[20] *Tractatus*, 6.113.
[21] *From Frege to Wittgenstein*, p205.

Further the necessity of logical propositions according to the *Tractatus* cannot be stated but can only show itself: language is pictorial and what can be pictured are facts, but facts can be otherwise, therefore necessities cannot be pictured, i.e., stated in language. Russell would not agree with this last bit about saying and showing, and it is doubtful that we should either. Nevertheless, whatever the status of logical truths, it should be clear that their role in language is different from empirical, ethical, and aesthetic statements. Insofar as logical sentences are true, they are true in a much different way than empirical, ethical, and aesthetic sentences, if for no other reason than that their truth seems to be wholly independent of how the world is. That logical sentences are true in a different way and for a different reason than, say, empirical sentences is not really questioned in philosophy—though perhaps it is brought into question with Quine's attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction. However, we iterate and emphasize that there is a difference in order to lend further support to thesis T.

VI. Empirical Sentences[22]

We turn now to the most important set of sentences for providing support for thesis T. Where we spoke in great generality and incompleteness about ethical, aesthetic, and logical sentences, with empirical sentences we will go into much more detail. We will attempt to lend strong support to the idea that the truth of empirical sentences is sometimes a matter of correspondence, *and* sometimes a matter of coherence—this leaves open the possibility of the truth of some sentences being a combination of the two. Our saying that empirical truth is a matter of both correspondence and coherence goes further than Quine's saying that correspondence and coherence theories need not be rivals. As in

[22] 'Empirical sentence' will be used to mean sentences that are about the world and which are the usual subject matter of theories of truth.

the appendix, Quine takes truth to be disquotational—disquotation, according to Quine, is the residue of the correspondence theory. For Quine, correspondence theories leave room for coherence, for they compliment one another. That is, we can view correspondence as connecting observation sentences to the world and coherence as connecting other sentences to truth through the strength of their relation to those sentence that correspond to the world.[23] Quine applies this coherence to the completion and tying together of a world system: "We work out the neatest world system we can that conforms to the record of observations, and we tighten the squeeze by multiplying the observations. Here is the reasonable place to appeal to coherence, in a vaguer but richer sense than logical consistency."[24] It is quite reasonable to say that in regard to our beliefs forming a system we should want more than logical consistency—such as support and implication between certain beliefs.[25] But while such coherence is to be desired it is not the coherence for which we will be arguing. In support of thesis T, it will be our main contention that some empirical sentences are true because they correspond to the way the world is and others are true because of the way they cohere with other beliefs, facts, and socio-linguistic practices.[26]

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[23] *Quiddities*, p214.
[24] *Quiddities*, p214.
[25] Kaufmann writes something similar:

> True is what is trustworthy and truth always involves a correspondence of appearance and reality or of expectation and fulfillment. True is what does not deceive, what is not false, what keeps its promise. All correspondence, however, is known through coherence; we have no second sight to see whether appearance and reality correspond, and if we would know whether a proposition is true we must see whether it is consistent with what else we know, with our other experiences…. Coherence here is not a matter of consistency with a fixed number of other propositions, which is clearly not enough. (*Critique of Religion and Philosophy*, p74.)

Kaufmann may in some sense be correct, though, given thesis T, we would have to disagree that "truth always involves correspondence."
[26] The term 'socio-linguistic practice' will be fleshed out below, for example, pages 22ff. 'Socio-linguistic practice' may seem redundant, but it is meant to emphasize the social and linguistic aspect of certain practices, for example, talk of dates and times.

One further note before we begin: the issue of truth is further complicated by differences in tense. The examples we will consider will be sentences in the present tense, since examining statements about, for example, what has been and what will be unnecessarily complicates the project of giving support to thesis T.

As our first example and one subtype of empirical sentences, let us look at the sentence 'The book is on the table'—a wholly uninteresting but useful sentence for our purposes. Now, if it is true, why it is true? Less interesting than the sentence itself is the answer that it is true because of how the world is, for whether it were true because of correspondence, coherence, or utility it would be true because of how the world is. That is, correspondence, coherence, and utility all involve how the world is. Hence, saying it is true because of how the world is does not tell us anything interesting. To say that it is true because it corresponds to a fact, state of affairs, how the world is, etc., does say something interesting. We, of course, can eschew talk of facts, etc., and just say that the sentence is true if the book really is on the table. This is the naïve answer and, again, it may seem uninteresting because of the simplicity of the case. Other cases which we will examine are not so simplistic.

As in the appendix, there are those, such as Quine, that find the employment of facts in a theory of truth to be problematic and an unnecessary ontological cluttering. Among other reasons, this is why Quine takes truth to be disquotational. Indeed, in the case of 'The book is on the table' we can quite rightly say it is true if and only if the book actually is on the table. So, for Quine truth is disquotation and disquotation is the residue of the correspondence theory.[27] It would be hard to deny that the truth of 'The book is on the table' is not somehow dependent upon whether the book is on the table. As also seen

[27] *Quiddities*, p214.

in the appendix, philosophers start to take issue with this at the point where we try to specify the nature of the relation and the relata. However, we will assume for our present project that some form of the correspondence theory is correct for sentences such as 'The book is on the table.'[28]

Now, while we can say that the truth of sentences such as 'The book is on the table' can be understood quite well disquotationally—for it is quite right to say that it is true if and only if the book is on the table—this is not the case for other subtypes of empirical sentences. That is, in the case of the book's being on the table, if it is asked how it is that the book is on the table, we can answer in at least two ways. First, we can say that the thing called a 'book' is in the position called 'on' the thing called a 'table.' Second, we could tell a complex story about who wrote the book, how we came to have it, and how it came to be on the table. Neither of these kinds of answers is very interesting in regard to why 'The book is on the table' is true. Our next example is different in this regard. Let us look at the sentence 'Today is Tuesday.' The sentence contains an indexical, which brings in its own complications; however, for our purposes we can treat the indexical as unproblematic. Now, if 'Today is Tuesday' is true, why is it true? We can say it is true because today really is Tuesday, but this is unsatisfying in a way that saying 'The book is on the table' is true because the book is on the table is not unsatisfying. What makes today Tuesday is very different from what makes it that the book is on the table. An obvious difference is that both the book and the table are physical objects—today and Tuesday are not. A person can look for a book, sit at a table—a person cannot look for a Tuesday or sit at a today. But the difference is greater

[28] Of course, 'The book is on the table' is only one of various subtypes of empirical sentences that are true by virtue of correspondence. For example, 'He is leaving' corresponds to his leaving, but is much different from a book's lying on a table.

than that; though for Searle its being Tuesday is not an institutional fact, a good way to look at the difference is to employ Searle's analysis of what he calls 'institutional facts.'

For its relative simplicity, Searle uses money as one of his primary examples of institutional facts. He writes:

> As a preliminary formulation we can say, for example, in order that the concept "money" apply to the stuff in my pocket, it has to be the sort of thing that people think is money. If everybody stops believing it is money, it ceases to function as money, and eventually ceases to be money….If nobody ever thinks this sort of thing is money, then it is not money. And what goes for money goes for elections, private property, wars, voting, promises, marriages, buying and selling, political offices, and so on.[29]

As Searle says, this is only a preliminary formulation, so the objections one might have right off may be answered by looking at a more detailed formulation of his ideas. The key point here is that something's being money depends on people treating it a particular way and an important part of that treatment is that people believe certain things about it. We can easily enumerate beliefs we have about money. We believe that the twenty dollar bill in our pocket is valuable, that we can exchange it for items valued up to twenty dollars, that if we buy something for ten dollars, we will receive ten dollars change, that we could exchange it for other types of currency, that it will be valuable tomorrow, etc.

A key aspect of Searle's analysis of institutional facts is his notion of a 'status function.' A wall may serve the physical *function* of keeping livestock in or thieves out. But these functions of the wall do not rely on anyone's agreeing to treat the wall a particular way, i.e., the function of the wall does not depend on people giving the wall a particular status. In contrast, a boundary marker, say a stake with a red ribbon, has the function of marking off property boundaries only insofar as it is given this status by

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[29] *The Construction of Social Reality*, p32.

social agreement. The stake and ribbon do not have a function by themselves in the way that a brute physical wall does. The stake and ribbon have a status function of a boundary marker by virtue of social agreement.[30] Dollar bills have a status function as money. Unlike gems or gold, which could be considered to be in some sense inherently valuable, paper currency has value in a similar way to how the stake and ribbon serve as a boundary marker. Their function is a result of the status attributed to them as money and boundary marker.[31]

A further part of Searle's analysis of institutional facts are constitutive rules. These are tied to status functions. The general form of a constitutive rule is 'X counts a Y in C.'[32] The idea is that something X, for example, green, rectangular paper, counts as something else Y, for example, money, in context C. C is a social context in which something is given a status function. The stake and ribbon count as a boundary marker in the context of the laws and social practices concerning property and ownership.[33]

Yet another aspect of Searle's analysis of institutional facts is his distinction between brute facts and institutional facts. He gives logical priority to the brute facts. For there to be the institutional fact of money, there has to be something prior to the institutional fact to which we can assign a status function:

> all sorts of things can be money, but there has to be some physical realization, some brute fact—even if it is only a bit of paper or a blip on a computer disk—on which we can impose our institutional form of status function. Thus there are no institutional facts without brute facts.

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[30] *The Construction of Social Reality*, pp40-41.
[31] *The Construction of Social Reality*, p41.
[32] *The Construction of Social Reality*, pp43-44.
[33] *The Construction of Social Reality*, p44.

Similarly with our boundary marker, there needs to be some fact of the matter about the property and something like the stake and ribbon that can count as a boundary marker.[34] Since the institutional facts depend in part on social agreement, another brute fact would be that there are other people that recognize boundaries and that are willing to exchange goods for green slips of paper.

The final aspect of institutional facts which we will examine is their language dependence. Searle distinguishes between language dependent and language independent thoughts. By 'thoughts' he also means such things as beliefs, inclinations, and cognitions. He takes hunger and a dog's belief that cat is up a tree—when the dog, for example has chased the cat up the tree—to be language independent and the thought "'The water is a marvelous blue' is an English sentence" to be language dependent.[35] Searle understands institutional facts such as money and property ownership to be language dependent. It is sufficient for a fact to be language dependent if two conditions are met: first, the fact is at least partially constituted by "mental representation," for example, thoughts, and second, those mental representations are language dependent.[36] Searle holds status functions with their connection to constitutive rules to be *eo ipso* linguistic.[37] The general idea is that the assigning of the Y status to the X involves symbolization or representation:

> The Y term creates a status that is additional to the physical features of the X term, and that status has to provide reasons for action that are independent of our natural inclinations. The status exists only if people believe it exits, and the reasons function only if people accept them as

[34] It is clear that there is great flexibility as to what can count as a property marker. We can imagine anything from a wall to a device that gives off a signal to a beam of light to reference to a coordinate system on a map.
[35] *The Construction of Social Reality*, pp61-62.
[36] *The Construction of Social Reality*, p62.
[37] *The Construction of Social Reality*, p63.

> reasons. Therefore, the agent must have some way to represent the new status. He cannot do it in terms of prelinguistic brute features of the X term….Because the new status exists only by convention, there must be some conventional way to represent the status or the system will not work.[38]

So, in order to assign the function of money to green paper and property marker to a stake and ribbon, there has to be a way to represent that status, we "can't get from thoughts just about the color and shape of the dollar bill to the status 'money' any more than [we] can can [sic] get from thoughts just about the movement of the man with the ball to the status 'touchdown, six points.'"[39]

What does Searle's analysis of institutional facts have to do with the truth of 'Today is Tuesday'? This question is especially apt since Searle explicitly writes, "The fact that today is Tuesday the 26th of October is not an institutional fact…."[40] But first let us answer the question as to why it is not an institutional fact. According to Searle, even though a day is "institutionally identified," 'Today is Tuesday the 26th of October' is not an institutional fact because the label 'Today is Tuesday the 26th of October' does not carry a new status function.[41] It is not altogether clear from this why 'Today is Tuesday the 26th of October' does not carry a new status function. It becomes clearer when we look at a footnote: "Some names for dates are labels for status-functions, for example, 'Christmas,' or 'Thanksgiving.' Such labels do more than identify a day relative to a verbal system; they also assign a status to which functions attach."[42] So for Searle, to say 'Today is Tuesday' identifies what day it is relative to a verbal system, but does not assign a status to which functions attach in the way that saying 'Today is Christmas'

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[38] *The Construction of Social Reality*, p69.
[39] *The Construction of Social Reality*, p69.
[40] *The Construction of Social Reality*, p65.
[41] *The Construction of Social Reality*, p65.
[42] *The Construction of Social Reality*, p65.

does.[43] If we consider Searle's constitutive rule of 'X counts as Y in C,' it is not clear at first whether it fits dates as it does such things as pieces of paper and stakes with ribbons. We might say '*This* span of time counts as Tuesday in the context of the use of the Gregorian calendar,' but does this really assign a function to the span of time or just name it? In this case people can use the label of 'Tuesday' to coordinate meetings, etc., but they are not using the span of time, i.e., the span of time itself has not been given a function as the pieces of paper have been given the function of money and the stake and ribbon the function of a boundary marker. Hence, Searle's denial of a date's being an institutional fact. It is important for our project that 'Today is Tuesday' is not an institutional fact.

Though 'Today is Tuesday' is not an institutional fact, Searle's analysis of institutional facts is still helpful in looking at what it is that makes today Tuesday. First we have the brute facts by virtue of which there are days and dates. Some of those are that the earth goes around the sun such that there are periods of light and darkness, the periods of light and darkness are regular in duration and when they change, as with the seasons, they do so gradually, humans have alternating periods of sleep and waking, humans find it useful to keep track of the periods of light and darkness for purposes of working, resting, buying, selling, traveling, meeting, etc., humans have language ability, etc. Second, language clearly plays a central role in making today Tuesday or any day that particular day. Searle writes that "there is no fact of the matter about its being Tuesday the 26th of October except the fact that it occupies a position relative to a verbal system."[44] We can agree with this, but we can flesh it out a bit more. Today's being

[43] This would, of course, not mean that a day's being Tuesday could not carry a status function.
[44] *The Construction of Social Reality*, p65.

Tuesday is relative to a verbal system, but that verbal system is more than just a language. Some of the things that go into today's being Tuesday are the following: the use of the Gregorian calendar, millions of calendars hanging on walls, the time clocks at places of employment, the writing of 'Tuesday' on letters and faxes, people answer the question 'What's today?' with 'Tuesday,' the scheduling of a meeting last Friday for the following Tuesday and that meeting taking place today, etc. Are any of these necessary conditions for today's being Tuesday? Well, it could be Tuesday even if there were no time clocks, letters, people asking what day it is, meetings taking place, or calendars hanging on the wall. Do we need the Gregorian calendar for today to be Tuesday? In some sense yes and in some sense no. Today could still be Tuesday under the Julian calendar, though perhaps if we were using the Julian calendar today would have ended up being Wednesday instead. Clearly it could still be Tuesday even if all the people on the earth were killed but one. Our survivor could, even without a calendar, use the calendar system to keep track of what day it is. So we are back to where we started with a verbal system as being necessary for today's being Tuesday. It seems, then, that a verbal system and some kind of regular calendar use are necessary for a day having a particular date and name. What would be a sufficient condition for today's being Tuesday? Could it just be someone's calling today 'Tuesday'? Someone could wake up and say, "Today I am going to start a new calendar for myself. Today will be called 'Tuesday' and it will be the first day of this new calendar year." Of course, if no one else adopted this new calendar she would presumably run into problems with others in the same way someone using the Islamic calendar would run into problems with our use of the Gregorian calendar. Importantly, its being Tuesday makes sense only within a particular practice of

naming days.[45] So, saying 'Today is Tuesday' only has meaning as part of a practice, even if that practice is not fully realized over time.[46] Language may be a necessary condition for today's being Tuesday, and a single person's adopting a calendar[47] and calling today's 'Tuesday' may be a sufficient condition for today's being Tuesday, but we should not forget that today's being Tuesday, or any day of the week, is actually tied in with all kinds of activities, documents, statements, calendars, etc., all the things making up the socio-linguistic practice. Hence, there is a third similarity with institutional facts—while on some level it may not be a necessary condition, agreement among calendar users[48] is part of what makes today Tuesday, or Wednesday, or Thursday, etc.

We finally come to the main point of our discussion. Where we said that 'The book is on the table' is true because it in some sense corresponds to the book's being on the table, 'Today is Tuesday' is not true because it in someway corresponds to today's being Tuesday. If 'Today is Tuesday' is true, then indeed today is Tuesday, but it is true because of the verbal system: the socio-linguistic practice. The sentence 'Today is Tuesday' is true because it *coheres* with the verbal system, the calendar and practices we have for naming and keeping track of days, the documents, the time clocks, the meetings scheduled for Tuesday, etc. Searle would not agree with this conclusion, since he advocates a correspondence theory of truth, but his words lend support to it—to iterate,

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[45] What is meant here is something similar to Wittgenstein's saying a rule could not be invented and then followed only once, for example, *Philosophical Investigations* §199. Similarly, to just say 'Today is Tuesday' without it being a part of a larger practice of naming days that is to be carried out over time in a regular fashion would mean that 'Today is Tuesday' does not mean what it does for us, if it meant anything at all.

[46] These ideas are controversial even among Wittgenstein scholars; unfortunately, we do not have the space to elaborate on them further.

[47] In adopting a calendar we assume she adopts a particular practice of naming days and dates.

[48] 'Calendar users' is meant in the sense of a society or group keeping track of time via some kind of calendar like system. Here there are also private language considerations in the Wittgensteinian sense.

he writes: "There is no fact of the matter about its being Tuesday the 26th of October except the fact that it occupies a position relative to a verbal system."[49] We have already discussed what is tied up with that verbal system. In what way does 'Today is Tuesday' *cohere* with that system? The coherence is more than just logical consistency. In a sense we could say that the verbal system implies that today is Tuesday. Everything that goes into that verbal system goes into making today Tuesday, thus implying the truth of 'Today is Tuesday.' But more than that, when the sentence 'Today is Tuesday' is true, it is a part of that verbal system, a part of what makes today Tuesday. Therefore, when 'Today is Tuesday' is true, it is not because it corresponds to a fact, but because it coheres with, is implied by, and helps to make up the verbal system that makes today Tuesday.

VII. Objections and Responses

There must certainly be many objections to this line of thought. One of those might be against the idea that when the sentence 'Today is Tuesday' is true, it partially constitutes the verbal system which is responsible for it actually being Tuesday. The objection might simply be that it is quite possible for it to be Tuesday and for us to mistakenly say it is Wednesday, but nevertheless it would still be Tuesday. Hence, today's being the day that it is, is independent of whether we utter or write the sentence 'Today is Tuesday,' and therefore, our uttering or writing that sentence does not partially constitute today's being Tuesday. In reply, it is of course not a necessary condition for today's being Tuesday that we utter or write 'Today is Tuesday.' Further, without the adoption of the appropriate calendar and socio-linguistic practice, our uttering or writing 'Today is Tuesday' may not even be sufficient condition for making today Tuesday. But

[49] *The Construction of Social Reality*, p65.

this need not mean that our uttering or writing 'Today is Tuesday' is not *partially* constitutive of today's being Tuesday. As we argued above, a verbal system and a calendar system may be considered necessary conditions and a single person's implementing that system and calendar may be sufficient to make today Tuesday, but in *actual practice* today's being Tuesday is constituted by a myriad of activities, things, and practices. To single out any one utterance or writing of 'Today is Tuesday' as the necessary one and all the rest as unnecessary seems misguided.[50] Hence, while our uttering or writing 'Today is Tuesday' is not necessary for today's being Tuesday, that does not imply that it does not partially constitute Tuesday's being Tuesday.

A more pressing objection is that today's being Tuesday really is a fact to which 'Today is Tuesday' corresponds. Hence, the relation is one of correspondence and not coherence. Searle for instance might argue that while 'Today is Tuesday' is not an institutional fact, it is a social fact. Indeed, it would be foolish to deny that in some sense it is a fact that it is a particular day. It is easy to imagine a context where someone says, "The fact is that it's Tuesday, so you have to go now." But this need not mean that today's being Tuesday is a fact to which 'Today is Tuesday' corresponds. There is not something in the world or some state of the world which could function as the corresponding relata to 'Today is Tuesday.' There are various instances of people saying and writing 'Today is Tuesday' and there are calendars and encoded computer disks to which one might argue 'Today is Tuesday' corresponds. But none of these utterances, writings, calendars or computer disks are necessary or jointly sufficient by themselves[51]

[50] As would be the case if one said that the only thing needed to make it Tuesday is the fulfillment of the necessary and sufficient conditions for it being Tuesday, and all the rest is just superfluous. As if Joan Smith in What Cheer, Iowa is responsible for today's being Tuesday by her use of the Gregorian calendar.
[51] By themselves, in the sense of their not being part of an overall practice. See footnote 45.

for its being Tuesday. As we saw above, that it is Tuesday is dependent upon there being some practice of using a calendar and the names of days. The utterance or writing of 'Today is Tuesday' does not correspond to that practice. It is in accord with that practice and is an instance of it. As has been argued, our saying 'Today is Tuesday' partially goes into making it Tuesday. This is not the case, for example, with the book's being on the table. The book is on the table independently of what is said about it or what practices humans engage in.[52] Our saying 'The book is on the table' in no way constitutes the book's being on the table. To quote Searle for the third time, "there is no fact of the matter about its being Tuesday the 26th of October except the fact that it occupies a position relative to a verbal system."[53] There is, however, a fact of the matter about the book's being on the table. We might say that to insist that the fact that it is Tuesday is the kind of fact that corresponds to a sentence is a symptom of the prejudice for making all fact talk the same and all truths true for the same reason, i.e., correspondence of sentences to facts.

We have used Searle's analysis and ideas a great deal, so it is only fair to give him another chance to object to our conclusions. In arguing for a correspondence theory of truth, Searle argues for a loose understanding of correspondence—one that will allow for the full range of possible ways that the variety of sentence may "fit" the facts. It will help to quote him at length:

> we…need a verb for describing the relations between the statements and the facts when the statements are true.
>
> Statements are true if and only if they blank the facts.

[52] This is not to deny that the particular object is called a 'book' and another a 'table' does not depend on practices and language—nor does it deny that having tables and books is part of human practices and ways of living.
[53] *The Construction of Social Reality*, p65.

> We need a word for "blank" and is should be just empty enough and vague enough to allow for all the different kind of ways in which statements can blank the facts, in ways that render the statement true. In English there are a number of such verbs: "fit," "match," "describe," and "correspond to" are four. Just as we need a general term for all the different features of the world that can make statements true, so we need a general term for naming the ways in which true statements can accurately represent how things are in the world, and "correspond to the facts" is just such a general characterization. "Corresponds to the facts" is just a shorthand for the variety of ways in which statements can accurately represent how things are, and that variety is the same as the variety of statements, or more strictly speaking, the variety of assertive speech acts.[54]

Searle's taking note of the variety of features of the world that make the variety of sentences true is laudable; however, that this variety of features of the world functions as truth-makers does not imply that correspondence is the only truth making relationship. That is, if such statements as 'Today is Tuesday' are true by cohering with a socio-linguistic practice, it is still features of the world that make 'Today is Tuesday' true—those features being the socio-linguistic practices of people with all the other features that that implies. Further, 'Today is Tuesday' can accurately represent how things are, not by corresponding or fitting, but by cohering with a socio-linguistic practice. For 'A' to accurately or truthfully represent B, 'A' need not correspond to B. We can agree to the usefulness of a term such as 'correspond to' for describing the variety of ways that statements can represent how things are without agreeing that that is the only way that statements can represent how things are. In other words, even if we understand 'corresponds to' in a general and loose way, we need not assume that it applies to all possible true or false statements. To assume that it applies to all true or false statements would seem to beg the question. So, part of the problem with Searle's writing

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[54] *The Construction of Social Reality*, p213.

'Statements are true if and only if they blank the facts' is that he assumes that what replaces the 'blank' is going to always be generally characterizable by 'correspond to.' Since we have seen reason to believe that the truth of 'Today is Tuesday' is not a matter of correspondence, we need more than what Searle gives to cast doubt upon our conclusions.

VIII. Conclusions

Given what we have seen concerning 'Today is Tuesday,' it is reasonable to think that the same conclusions would apply to such sentence as 'The year is 2004,' 'It's the 15th,' 'It is 2:00 PM,' etc. Similar conclusions would apply to such sentences as 'Taxes are due on April 15th';[55] there is a difference with this example, however, for it is in some sense stipulative, i.e. a rule, and though 'Today is Tuesday' is in some sense true by the adoption of a calendar among other things, 'Taxes are due on April 15th' is a rule in a way that 'Today is Tuesday' is not. The latter is perhaps in accord with a rule, while the former is a rule. Further, sentences such as 'It's Tuesday and we are now leaving,' if true, would seem to be a mixture of coherence and correspondence—'It's Tuesday' cohering with socio-linguistic practices and 'and now we are leaving' corresponding to the movements and actions of those leaving. 'It's Tuesday and we are now leaving' is a relatively simple example in comparison to others: leaving the present tense behind, we have, for example, 'On Tuesday, at around 8:00 PM, he walked out into the blustery night, knowing it was wrong for him to leave her behind.' The truth or falsity of such a sentence is certainly a complex matter. And that is just it: truth is a complex matter. We should not expect it to be the same for all types of sentences. That is the main contention of this paper.

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[55] It is presumed that this sentence is meant for the tax system of the United States.

We have tried to make plausible the idea that sentences like 'The book is on the table,' are true by way of correspondence to the world, however that correspondence relation is understood. In contrast, it has been suggested, albeit sometimes very cursorily, that the truth of other kinds of sentences is not a matter of correspondence. It has been suggested that the truth of ethical and aesthetic sentences, insofar as they are considered true or false, is not a matter of correspondence with facts. Logical sentences are generally taken to be true by definition, meaning, necessity, or something similar—the main point being that they are not considered to be true by correspondence with the world. We have focused on sentences like 'Today is Tuesday,' arguing that they are true by way of cohering with socio-linguistic practices. That coherence understood to be one of consistency with, implication by, and partial composition of, the socio-linguistic system and practices that go into making it Tuesday or any day of the calendar. We have left much open and undecided, particular in terms of the details of how the correspondence and coherence relations. Nevertheless, the project of this paper has been to cast doubt upon the idea that truth is an either/or matter. At the very least, it is hoped that reason has been given for thinking thesis T plausible.

A final note: an implication of coherence being applicable to only some sentences is that it avoids objections to coherence theories that the coherence theory does not easily avoid when it is taken to be the whole story for truth—see appendix for those objections.[56] Further, if it were to turn out that the truth of ethical sentences were a matter of utility, it is possible that, since truth as utility would be applicable to only a

[56] The coherence that has here been advocated is similar to what Fumerton calls 'impure coherence,' but it is not quite the same and thus may avoid the problems he attributes to impure coherence theories. See, *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, pp111ff. Unfortunately, space does not allow for consideration of this issue.

range of sentences, objections against the pragmatist theory of truth could also be avoided.

Appendix: Sketches of Theories of Truth

Here are sketches of deflationary, correspondence, coherence, and pragmatist theories of truth and some of the problems associated with them.

I. Deflationary Theories

In general deflationary theories of truth deny that the concept of truth has philosophically explanatory importance and that anything interesting can be said about truth:

> Deflationists deny that truth is a property of truth bearers. They maintain that there is nothing more to the meaning of the truth predicate than what enables it to serve certain logical functions in language. To put it another way, deflationists propose that truth talk is expressive (enhances the powers of our language) rather than descriptive.[57]

Two examples of deflationary theories of truth are the redundancy theory and the disquotational theory. The redundancy theory, which traces back to F. P. Ramsey, generally holds that the truth predicate adds nothing to a statement—hence the redundancy. It, however, is limited in that "it applies only when truth is predicated of a particular proposition and the content of the propositions is specified. It does not generalize to other cases of truth predication."[58] Quine provides a good example of disquotation. Concerning the sentence 'Snow is white' Quine writes, "To attribute truth to the sentence is to attribute whiteness to snow. Attribution of truth to 'Snow is white' just cancels the quotation marks and says that snow is white."[59] The impetus for Quine's adopting a disquotational stance to truth would seem to be his desire for an ontology that is as little cluttered by additional entities as possible. Hence his negative attitude toward facts in regard to correspondence theories: the introduction of facts is "an idle positing of

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[57] "Truth: An Introduction." *Theories of Truth*. Blackwell Readings in Philosophy, p28.
[58] "Truth: An Introduction." *Theories of Truth*. Blackwell Readings in Philosophy, p28.
[59] *Quiddities*, p213.

entities solely to create correspondence. It is pernicious, engendering an illusion of explanation."[60] A positive thing about disquotational theories is that they allow for the use of 'true' in giving assent to such sentences as, "Whatever Wittgenstein might have thought about meaning and use was surely true," where the content of what one is giving assent to may not be known.[61] There are, however, various objections to a disquotational theory of truth. Frederick F. Schmitt offers three. The first, and one similar to an objection from Davidson,[62] is that disquotation is incomplete, since it does not define truth in general but only truth for a particular language.[63] It is not necessary for us to go into the details of these objections. For us, the main objection is that the deflationary theories in general are unhelpful for our project. For example, in terms of disquotation, to say that 'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white does not in any interesting way answer the question as to why 'Snow is white' is true. This becomes clearer if we consider other sentences that do not concern physical things such as snow—for example, 'Rainfall was below normal in 2003 in Iowa," or simply, 'It is 2004.' The deflationist would answer that that is the point of a deflationary theory, i.e., the emphasis that nothing interesting can really be said about the concept of truth. At the risk of begging the question against the deflationist, it remains to be seen whether something interesting can be said about the concept of truth. One of the deflationist's motivations is the various problems one encounters with correspondence, coherence, and pragmatist theories of truth. However, while there are problems with those theories, there are equally problems with deflationary theories. But more importantly for our current project is the more

[60] "Responses." *Inquiry*, 37, no. 4, 1994, p496.
[61] "Truth: An Introduction." *Theories of Truth*. Blackwell Readings in Philosophy, p29.
[62] "Truth Rehabilitated," p69.
[63] "Truth: An Introduction." *Theories of Truth*. Blackwell Readings in Philosophy, p29.

pressing question of whether there is a more general problem with correspondence, coherence, pragmatist theories of truth in their assumption that a theory of truth is an either/or matter—either truth is correspondence or coherence, coherence or utility, etc. In investigating whether this is a problem, we will assume against the deflationist that there is something interesting to be said about the concept of truth.

II. Correspondence Theories

The correspondence theory of truth takes various forms, but at its most basic it holds that truth consists in a correspondence between a truth-bearer and that which makes the truth-bearer true or false, i.e., the truth-maker. Truth is the relational property of correspondence—the relata are the truth-bearer and truth-maker. Truth-bearers are usually either thoughts, beliefs, propositions, or sentences.[64] Truth-makers are usually either facts, states of affairs, or in an attempt to avoid talk of facts, how the world is. Problems arise when trying to say exactly what the correspondence relation of the relata really is, and in giving reasons for a choice of relata, e.g., propositions as truth-bearers and facts as truth-makers.[65]

Correspondence theories of truth are generally realist theories of truth.[66] This realism is distinct from ontological realism in that realism about truth, alethic realism

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[64] The 'usually' is important here, for Fumerton notes that 'Sentences, claims, assertions, propositions, *states of affairs*, thoughts, and beliefs are all among the candidates for being the bearers of truth value" (p4, my emphasis).

[65] Quine for example, who is not a fan of correspondence theories per se, writes:

> The correspondence theory would have it that [truths] qualify as true by corresponding to reality….the correspondence theory, as thus far stated, is vague and vacuous. What on the part of true sentences is meant to correspond to what on the part of reality? If we seek a correspondence word by word, we find ourselves eking reality out with a complement of abstract objects fabricated for the sake of the correspondence. Or perhaps we settle for a correspondence of whole sentences with *facts*: a sentence is true if it reports a fact. But here again we have fabricated substance for an empty doctrine. The world is full of things, variously related, but what, in addition to all that, are facts? They are projected from true sentences for the sake of correspondence. (*Quiddities*, p213)

[66] *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction*, p73.

after Alston, is not concerned with what kinds of entities there are but with the nature of truth-makers. That is, for the alethic realist truth-makers are mind-independent.[67] That is in general terms, there is a mind-independent world consisting of objects related to one another in particular ways that makes truth-bearers true or false.[68] The notion of mind-independence becomes complicated when one tries to say in what sense or to what extent the truth-maker is mind-independent. For example, Searle[69] argues that certain facts are institutional, e.g., my having a dollar bill in my pocket, and are thus dependent upon language and thus dependent upon thoughts or minds. So if Searle is right, it would seem that some truth-makers are not *completely* mind-independent.

Fleshing out the specifics about relata, the correspondence relation, and the degree to which truth-makers are mind independent is difficult, but correspondence theories face at least two other difficulties. The first is the objection that in comparing a sentence to the world to see if it is true, one cannot actually compare the sentence to the world but only to some other propositional belief about the world. Thus, since one can never really compare a sentence (a truth-bearer) with the world (the truth-maker), the notion of truth as correspondence does not work. Davidson cites both Otto Neurath and Carl Hempel as giving this objection.[70] However, Davidson thinks the objection is unsound because it depends on assuming the correctness of an epistemic theory of truth—the correspondence theorist could simply say that truth is "independent of our beliefs or ability to learn the truth."[71] A further objection to correspondence theories, and the one Davidson takes to be the real objection, which is often called the 'slingshot

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[67] Richard Fumerton. *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, p4.
[68] *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, p4.
[69] In *The Construction of Social Reality*.
[70] "The Structure and Content of Truth," p302.
[71] "The Structure and Content of Truth," pp302-303

argument,' in general says that if a proposition corresponds to one fact, it corresponds to all facts.[72] Davidson happily endorses the slingshot argument and from it concludes that the notion of correspondence is trivial: "there is no interest in the relation of correspondence if there is only one thing to which to correspond, since, as in any case, the relation may as well be collapsed into a simple property: thus, 's corresponds to the universe', like 's corresponds to (or names) the True', or 's corresponds to the facts' can less misleadingly be read 's is true'."[73] In Searle's discussion of the slingshot argument he concludes against it that "it is implausible and the most that such an argument shows is the falsity of its presuppositions."[74] Fumerton thumbs his nose at the objection, as well, writing:

> Were it not for the inexplicable seriousness with which this argument is sometimes treated, I would apologize for taking the time and space to discuss it. No correspondence theorist in his or her right mind would ever dream of accepting the principle of substitutivity upon which the argument rests. The idea that one should be able to substitute co-referential expressions in the context of a statement is silly…. In intentional contexts (and correspondence claims are surely intensional contexts), one can't mess around substituting co-referential expressions and expect to preserve truth value.[75]

We are not going to go into the details of this debate, and Searle's and Fumerton's disapproval of the argument does not show that it is unsound (Davidson after all finds the argument congenial), but we see that these objections to the correspondence theory are not in themselves conclusive. We turn now to coherence theories of truth.

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[72] Because it will not be necessary for our project and would take us off track we will not explicate the reasoning behind the slingshot argument. In general it has to do with substituting co-referential terms and logically equivalent terms in such a way that truth is preserved but the fact to which a statement corresponds implies that the statement corresponds to any number of other facts. See *The Construction of Social Reality* or *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth* for a more detailed exposition of the argument.

[73] "The Structure and Content of Truth," p303.

[74] *The Construction of Social Reality*, p221-226.

[75] *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, p61.

III. Coherence Theories

Fumerton has a useful discussion of coherence theories of truth from which we will draw.[76] Fumerton distinguishes between pure and impure coherence theories. We will look at the pure, which "offer completely general accounts of truth and justification."[77] Generally a coherence theory of truth says that truth consists in a coherence relation between the truth-bearer and truth-maker. With the coherence theory the truth-maker will be some set of , e.g., propositions, sentences, thoughts, or beliefs—we will use sentences as truth-bearers and makers in what follows. The first question is what set of sentences should the coherence theorist take to be the truth-maker of a sentence p? As Fumerton points out, it cannot be the set of all sentences, since that set would contain not only not-p but also the negation of all the sentences that are supposed to make p true. Even with our notion of 'coherence' undecided, it is reasonable to assume that contradictory sentences will not be members of the truth-making set. We must be careful in trying to narrow down the truth-making set, for in excluding all contradictory sentences from the truth-making set we cannot say that p is true if and only if it coheres, in some sense of coheres, with other true sentences.[78] That is, the concept of truth cannot be assumed when saying what it is that makes p true. So the truth-making set cannot be the set of true sentences. Given this, Fumerton thinks it obvious that we restrict the truth-making set to a set of hypothetical or actual beliefs, i.e., the set of

[76] *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*.
[77] *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, p103.
[78] *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, p104.

propositions that would be affirmed "by the relevant person or persons."[79] So, the coherence is still between propositions, but propositions that are "the actual or hypothetical objects of belief."[80]

Based on how we use belief to specify the truth-making set, there may be a relativization of truth to different believers or groups of believers. Fumerton distinguishes between six kinds of relativization. Without going into their details, they are distinguished by their degree (full or partial) and kind (time, universal, or individual) of relativization.[81]

With the relata decided upon, there remains to specify the nature of the coherence relation. The weakest way to understand the coherence relation is to say that it consists in logical consistency within the conjunction of propositions actually or hypothetically believed. So, p is true if and only if it is logically consistent with the set of beliefs held by the individual or community. One problem with this is that it would take only one logically inconsistent belief to undermine the whole set. And given the vast number of propositions that one would affirm, it is very possible that one holds at least one inconsistent belief.[82] But this problem can presumably be dealt with in some way.[83] To strengthen the coherence relation of logical consistency, we can add some kind of probability condition. That is, P is true when it is logically consistent with the truth-making set of beliefs and that truth-making set implies in some way the probability of P.[84]

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[79] *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, p104.
[80] *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, p104.
[81] *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, pp104-105.
[82] *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, pp105-106.
[83] Fumerton suggests by way of a relevance logic, p106.
[84] *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, p106.

Fumerton, as a realist and correspondence theorist, has little sympathy for a coherence theory of truth and thus quickly points out some of it faults. First, there is the problem of conceptual circularity. Consistency, entailment, and probability all rely on a notion of truth. Sentence p is *consistent* with the truth-making set if p can be true in conjunction with the truth of the truth-making set. The truth-making set *entails* p if the truth-making set is true, p cannot be false.[85] The probability connection between the truth-making set and p is circular because something's being probable means it is probably true. Second, there is the problem of conceptual regress. Given the relativization of truth to a set of beliefs of an individual or community by most coherence theories, the coherence theorist will have difficulty in saying that her theory is true and other theories are false.[86]

IV. Pragmatist Theories

As there are different versions of deflationary, correspondence, and coherence theories of truth, there are different versions of pragmatist theories. Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, James Dewey, and more recently Richard Rorty each endorse some version of a pragmatic theory of truth. We will focus on James—he writes:

> Truth, as any dictionary tells you, is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their 'agreement,' as falsity means their disagreement, with 'reality.' Pragmatists and intellectualists both accept this definition as a matter of course. They begin to quarrel only after the question is raised as to what may precisely be meant by the term 'agreement,' and what by the term 'reality,' when reality is taken as something for our ideas to agree with.[87]

James goes on to say that the popular idea of truth is that of an idea copying reality. He calls into question what it might be for our ideas to copy such things as the 'elasticity'

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[85] *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, p107.
[86] *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, p107.
[87] "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth." In *Theories of Truth*. Blackwell Readings in Philosophy, p59.

and ‘time-keeping function’ of the works of a clock. Further, he says the intellectualist understands truth to be a static property. Once you have the truth you’re done—you know what you need to know. In contrast, the pragmatist asks what difference it makes for one to be in possession of a true idea, what difference would it make if the idea were false, and what would it take to realize the truth of the idea: “What, in short, is the truth’s cash-value in experiential terms?”[88] James then writes:

> The moment pragmatism asks this question, it sees the answer. *True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot.* That is the practical difference it makes to us to have true ideas; that, therefore, is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known-as.[89]

It is the validation and corroboration that James takes to be activities that characterize truth as a process in contrast to it being a static property. Ideas agree with reality insofar as their validation has practical consequences. James admits to the vagueness of these ideas but goes on to note the importance of truth to our lives and that his characterization of truth has important results. Through our many experiences we acquire many truths, which we store in our minds for later use—say the truth that there is a hospital on North Gilbert—and which upon some emergency suddenly becomes relevant and ready “to do work in the world.”[90] Of a true idea such as ‘there is a hospital on North Gilbert,’ James writes that:

> you can say of it then either that ‘it is useful because it is true’ or that ‘it is true because it is useful’. Both these phrases mean exactly the same thing, namely that here is an idea that gets fulfilled and can be verified. True is the name for whatever idea starts the verification-process, useful is the name for its completed function in experience. True ideas would never have been singled out as such, would never have acquired a class-name,

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[88] “Pragmatism’s Conception of Truth.” In *Theories of Truth*. Blackwell Readings in Philosophy, p60.
[89] “Pragmatism’s Conception of Truth.” In *Theories of Truth*. Blackwell Readings in Philosophy, p60. James’ emphasis.
[90] “Pragmatism’s Conception of Truth.” In *Theories of Truth*. Blackwell Readings in Philosophy, p61.

> least of all a name suggesting value, unless they had been useful from the outset in this way.[91]

There is, of course, much more that can be said to elucidate James' understanding of the pragmatist's notion of truth. However, we can glean the general idea from what we have seen. Agreement between an idea and reality is not a matter of an idea copying reality; rather, an idea through its validation and corroboration, through its usefulness or uselessness, achieves or fails to achieve agreement with the world of one's experiences and one's endeavors. Schmitt emphasizes that for James truth is what can be eventually verified.[92] Truth is not a fixed, static property of an idea that copies reality—rather, truth is a process of verification, validation, and corroboration tied to human endeavors and needs.

It is not difficult to come up with general objections to such a view of truth. It seems obvious that there are ideas that we would think of as false but which may prove very useful. We may think the hospital is on Lynn street and so head in the direction of Lynn street. In our hurry to get to the hospital we may mistake North Gilbert for Lynn street and in so doing actually arrive at the hospital, since the hospital is on North Gilbert not Lynn. In this case it was useful to think that the hospital was on Lynn street as opposed to, say, Brown street, for if we had thought it was on Brown we likely would not have turned onto North Gilbert by mistake. Such an objection is not altogether fair, since the idea that the hospital is on North Gilbert and not Lynn would surely have been verified in the long run and it is what is useful in the long term that really is what is true for the Jamesian pragmatist. Still, James does equate 'it is useful because it is true' and 'it is true because it is useful.'

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[91] "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth." In *Theories of Truth*. Blackwell Readings in Philosophy, pp61-62.
[92] "Truth: An Introduction." *Theories of Truth*. Blackwell Readings in Philosophy, p9.

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