

Truth and Correspondence

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What is truth?

1. First, let's get clear about the question.
2. 'True' is an adjective, like 'male' and 'prime'. Intuitively, 'male' expresses a property of animals, 'prime' expresses a property of numbers, and 'true' expresses a property of ... what? Consider some of the ways we use it:
 - (2.1) 'Grass is green' is true.
 - (2.2) It is true that Caspar sometimes forgets his tutorial.
 - (2.3) The {belief, claim, assumption, hypothesis, thought, proposition, statement} that today is Tuesday is true.
 - (2.4) What I just said is true.
 - (2.5) My last utterance was true.

So, 'true' expresses a property of what?

3. We shall take *truth* to be the property that 'true' expresses, and understand the question 'What is truth?' as asking what this property is.

Compare this with the questions 'What is maleness?' and 'What is primeness?' and how we might answer them.

Note: one possibility is that 'true' does not express a property at all (despite appearances). That would be to say that there is no such thing as truth. Whether or not this is right should be considered as part of the question 'What is truth?'.

Correspondence

4. One very natural answer to the question: truth is correspondence with a fact. More precisely:

(4.1) For the proposition p to be true is for p to correspond to a fact.

(Compare this with: For the person S to be a parent is for S to have a child.)

- The proposition that grass is green is true because it corresponds to a fact, which we can refer to as the fact that grass is green.
- The proposition that grass is black is not true because it does not correspond to any fact. Note: there is no fact that grass is black.
- Suppose that the proposition p is true. Which fact does it refer to?

5. Frege's gripe with this (given in his 'Thoughts'):

- (i) The grammar of 'true' suggests that it expresses a property.
- (ii) Correspondence is a relation, not a property.
- (iii) Therefore, truth is not correspondence.

Response: this is a bad argument. The claim is that 'true' expresses a property, not a relation, albeit a *relational property* (just like 'is a parent').

6. Impossible to have knowledge?

To know that a thought is true is to know that it corresponds to a fact. But we cannot get outside our thoughts and compare them with the facts. So we cannot know that our thoughts are true. So we cannot have knowledge.

Two problems:

- (i) To be an item of knowledge my thought has to be true, but I do not have to know that it is true. This is to confuse knowledge with knowledge of knowledge.
- (ii) Water is H₂O. It does not follow that to know that my glass is full of water I have to know that it is full of H₂O.

7. Too many facts?

The proposition that the queen is not bald is true. So, according to the correspondence theory, it corresponds to a fact. Which fact? Presumably, the fact that the queen is not bald. But then there seem to be a lot of 'negative' facts: the fact that the queen is not a kangaroo, the fact that the queen is not Lithuanian. If there is not such a fact, then which fact does it correspond to? Or does the proposed account only apply to a certain class of 'positive' propositions?

The same questions can be raised of propositions expressed using sentences with double-negatives, disjunctions, conjunctions, conditionals, and so on.

8. Only one fact?

- (i) The fact that grass is green is the fact that $\{x: x \text{ is } x\}$ is $\{x: x \text{ is } x \text{ and grass is green}\}$
- (ii) The fact that $\{x: x \text{ is } x\}$ is $\{x: x \text{ is } x \text{ and grass is green}\}$ is the fact that $\{x: x \text{ is } x\}$ is $\{x: x \text{ is } x \text{ and snow is white}\}$.
(Just like the fact that Superman is strong is the fact that Clark Kent is strong.)
- (iii) So the fact that grass is green is the fact that $\{x: x \text{ is } x\}$ is $\{x: x \text{ is } x \text{ and snow is white}\}$
- (iv) But the fact that $\{x: x \text{ is } x\}$ is $\{x: x \text{ is } x \text{ and snow is white}\}$ is the fact that snow is white.
- (v) So the fact that grass is green is the fact that snow is white.

The same argument goes for any pair of facts, so there is just one fact.

If that is right, then the correspondence theory amounts to this:

(8.1) For the proposition p to be true is for p to correspond to the fact.

But that seems to be no more informative than saying that it is for p to have a certain property.

9. Why is it not true that grass is black? Because there is no fact that the proposition that grass is black corresponds to. If there were, it would be the fact that grass is black. If it were a fact that grass is black, then it would be true that grass is black. So it seems that whether or not it is true that grass is black boils down to whether or not it is a fact that grass is black. But does that really get us anywhere?