

The Truth Is Out There

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The main thesis of the correspondence theory of truth is really quite simple. Truth lies in the correspondence of belief with objective facts. In this paper I will outline the correspondence theory of truth and defend it against some of the main criticisms against it. I find Bertrand Russell's formulation of the theory to be the right place to start, and I will begin by giving an outline of it. I will then defend the theory against criticisms against it, namely the manifestation and the acquisition arguments, which are drawn from epistemological theories. While these arguments have some merit, it is not these that present the greatest challenge. The one main hurdle for the correspondence theory is time. I will argue that in order to deal with sentences about the future, whether one minute or one million years from now, the correspondence theorist must generally give up the principle of bivalence. I use the word 'generally', because there is a set of sentences for which bivalence can be kept. We may not be able to know the exact set, but this does not mean it does not exist.

In formulating his correspondence theory, Russell was looking for a theory that could do three things: 1. allow for falsehood, 2. make truth a property of belief and 3. make the truth conditions of a belief lie completely outside of the belief itself. Because this is the correspondence theory, the third criterion must be correspondence with objective facts. In order to allow for falsehoods it cannot be the case that a judgement has a single object, which is how Russell considered it at one time. Russell gives the example of the two beliefs that Charles I died on the scaffold and that Charles I died in bed. Suppose that each belief corresponds to a single object. Russell calls these objectives. Thus every judgment has an objective. True judgements are about true objectives, and false judgments about false objectives. But there is a problem in allowing false objectives. For if we allow this, we allow false things into the world that exist even if there were no minds. There can be no false things if there are no minds, only states of affairs. The same

problem arises in allowing true objectives. If there are true objectives, then there are truths without minds. We would also need an infinite number of these objectives around, as there are an infinite number of ways to describe something mistakenly. Although there may be some ways around these problems, it will be much more beneficial to look at what Russell comes up with as to what our beliefs do have relations to, as what he does come up with certainly seems to be the most likely.

Russell introduces the concept of the complex whole. Russell uses the example of "Othello believes falsely that Desdemona loves Cassio" (Problems of Philosophy p72). As stated before, this belief cannot be in related to one thing. Instead the belief is related to a number of things. In the belief 'Desdemona loves Cassio' there are three things: Desdemona, loving and Cassio. "Desdemona and loving and Cassio must all be terms in the relation which subsists when Othello believes that Desdemona loves Cassio." (Problems of Philosophy p 73). The relation consists of four terms, as Othello is a part of the relation by his act of believing. Othello does not have a relation to each term separately, as in the same relation to Desdemona and to loving and to Cassio, but to all of them tied together. "The relation called 'believing' is knitting together into one complex whole the four terms" (Problems of Philosophy p 73). Othello is the subject of the complex whole. All of the other terms are called the objects. The subject and the objects are all constituents of the judgement. The relation of judging has a certain sense or direction. When the belief is expressed in the English phrase above, it is the order of the words. The belief that 'Desdemona loves Cassio' is different from the belief that 'Cassio loves Desdemona'. It would also be a different complex whole if Desdemona believed 'Cassio loves Othello'. All of the constituents must have the correct 'sense' or 'order' for them to make the correct complex whole.

A complex whole can have as its members other complex wholes or only singular members. "When an act of believing occurs, there is a complex in which 'believing' is the uniting relation, and subject and objects are arranged in a certain order by the 'sense of the relation of believing' (Problems of Philosophy p 74). In the above example of Desdemona loving Cassio, the relation that holds the complex whole together is the act of loving. "When an act of believing occurs, there is a complex in which 'believing' is the uniting

relation, and subject and objects are arranged in a certain order by the 'sense' of the relation of believing"(Problems of Philosophy p74). The act of loving now becomes just one of the other objects of a complex whole. Loving is "a brick in the structure, not the cement. The cement is the relation 'believing'(Problems of Philosophy p74). If Othello's belief is true there is a complex unity where loving is the cement. If there is no such complex unity, then his belief is false.

"Thus a belief is true when it corresponds to a certain associated complex, and false when it does not"(Problems of Philosophy p74). In this manner Russell has fulfilled the three criteria set above. There are means to make beliefs false. Truth is a property of beliefs. However, you cannot determine truth by simply examining that belief for some intrinsic property.

Since truth conditions are decided by objective facts, this means that some sentences are true without our being able to tell that they are true. Some people ask 'how could someone talk about conditions he does not know about?' In this section I shall examine two such objections; the manifestation and the acquisition argument.

The manifestation argument is formulated as follows. Whatever speakers know about meaning will show up, manifest itself, in their language use. The question 'Does knowledge of objective truth conditions show up in language?' must be asked. The objectors answer it in this fashion. There are plenty of objective truth conditions (possibly the majority) that people cannot recognize. People utter a sentence when they notice something that warrants saying it. Thus when they use a sentence it can only be about recognizable conditions. It is these conditions that give a sentence its meaning. You understand what a sentence means if you know what its truth conditions are. Thus you cannot understand a sentence whose truth conditions are not recognizable. To use a radical interpretation example, people say 'There goes a rabbit' when a rabbit runs by. They can only say this if they have rabbit running evidence. It is these attainable conditions that are the only ones that can be manifested in speech. How could someone possibly manifest their knowledge of objective conditions that are totally unrecognizable? The manifestation argument suggests that we should conclude that sentences are made true by the conditions that warrant saying them, not by objective conditions as the correspondence theory suggests.

The answer is that truth is much wider than knowledge. A person could very easily assert a sentence which he does not know to be true, but which is true. The manifestation argument is supposed to work against sentences such as 'There is a cup on a table in the third furthest galaxy from earth.' We could never recognize those truth conditions, and advocates of the manifestation argument conclude that that sentence is neither true nor false. However, we do know what sorts of things cups are, and we do know what sorts of things tables are, and we have a good deal of knowledge about the relation of being 'on', and 'the third galaxy from earth' certainly has a referent. In this way you can certainly figure out what the sentence means. Thus, if these things make up a complex unity then a belief about them will be true, if not, it will be false. But just because we cannot go there to check it out does not mean that that sentence has no truth value. If we had no idea what the words meant, then we would be in trouble. Or if the words named only things that we had absolutely no evidence for and thus had no idea what sorts of things they were, we would again be in trouble. But the mere fact of extra large supersized distance does not get rid of truth values.

The meaning of a sentence is more than just what justifies our saying it. I agree that if we had no cause to say it, we probably would not. However, it is a bit of a jump to go from what justifies it, to what it means. When I say 'There is a table in front of me', I do not mean 'Oh, look, table evidence'. I mean that there is a real, existing in the objective world, genuine table. As Russell puts it in "On The Nature Of Truth" in his Philosophical Essays

The distinction between the *nature* of truth and the *criterion* of truth is important A criterion is a sort of trade-mark, i.e. some comparatively obvious characteristic which is a guarantee of genuineness. 'None genuine without the label': thus the label is what assures us that such and such a firm made the article. But when we say that such and such a firm made the article we do not mean that the article has the right label; thus there is a difference between meaning and criterion. It is this difference that makes a criterion useful. (page149)

There is a difference in why I say something and what I mean by it. I could say something for which I have no justification at all for saying, and have my sentence be true. I could also have all the justification in the world and be incorrect. What better justification can there be than being a personal eyewitness to something? Suppose that on every Tuesday, the garbage man comes and takes my garbage. Suppose that the garbage man has already come and taken my trash, but that I do not know it. I hallucinate and see before me, at 1:00 pm, the garbage man. I wave and say hello and wish him a good day. I take notice of his new eye-patch. After this I notice that my garbage can is empty verifying that the garbage man was there. Also, suppose that later that day the garbage man is the victim of horrible Visine accident and must wear an eye-patch. My friend was witness to this, and tells me that the garbage man is wearing an eye-patch. What possible better justification could I have for saying 'The garbage man was wearing an eye-patch at 1:00 pm.'? But at 1:00 pm he was not wearing an eye patch; he did not receive his eye-patch until after 3:00 pm. When I say 'The garbage man was wearing an eye-patch at 1:00 pm', I mean that there was some real state of affairs that included his eye-patch wearing at that time, not that I am merely justified in asserting it. Thus I have all the justification I could possibly want, but my belief is still false. Truth conditions are more than those conditions that merely justify your belief in something. When I say a sentence, it is not just about what justifies me in saying it, I am asserting that there is a complex whole to which my belief has a relation. This complex whole exists in the real world and is not necessarily made up of what justifies my believing in it.

There is still the objection made by the acquisition argument. This argument is based on the way we learn to use language. Suppose that an adult is trying to teach a child to use English. The adult will do this by showing the child a set of noticeable conditions and will say a sentence or word that is associated with those conditions. For instance, in the U.S., in order to teach a child the correct use of 'There is an assault rifle', the adult will say this only when an assault rifle is present. Since this is the only way we can use language, how could anybody assert a sentence whose truth conditions cannot be obtained.

Luckily, people quickly pass from the learning of a language to being able to use it in more complex ways. Suppose that you are a member of the KGB, and that a western spy has escaped from a prison and it is your job to hunt him down. You are in Northern Russia trying to track this man in the snow. You come across his footprints and say to your partner 'He was here not long ago'. Now, what you have seen would be the conditions under which you were taught to say 'There are some footprints', but you are able to tell that these justify you in asserting that something has made them, probably the man you are looking for. The truth conditions for 'He has been here not long ago' however, is if he actually was there not long ago. I have never seen a thousand pound potato, but I know what sort of conditions would make a sentence about a thousand pound potato true. I also know what sort of situations would make things true that are said about the distant past. I know what dinosaurs are, I know what it means to say one hundred million years ago, and I know what certain numbers mean. Thus I can assert a sentence about the number of dinosaurs that existed one hundred million years ago. If there is a complex whole that has the correct sense and everything else that was discussed earlier, then my sentence will be true. If not, it will be false. The point is that we are able to talk about things even though we do not have access to them.

I have just mentioned things happening in the past which have a truth value. This brings us to the one real hurdle that the correspondence theory has, namely time. In this section of the paper I will deal with this issue. I shall spend a short time on the past and why those sorts of sentences do have determined truth values. I shall also discuss the future, which is what presents the problem. It is the future that makes it necessary to make a revision in Russell's theory.

Take the sentence 'The cat is on the mat.' When someone says a sentence such as this one he actually means more than what is just there. What is actually meant is something like 'The cat is on the mat *now*.' Russell noted that time can be a part of the complex in "On The Nature Of Truth" in the book Philosophical Essays (p 157). However, he says virtually nothing about it. I believe that time must be a part of every complex whole. The time does not have to be precise, but it must enter into the truth conditions. Saying something occurred in January is, for the purposes here, just as good as

saying something occurred March 12, 1999, at five o'clock pm pacific standard time. The only requirement is that some range of time is provided. Thus the sentence 'The cat is on the mat now' is true only if the objective conditions other than time make a complex whole occurring at the specified time. I have added two more things to the complex whole. I have added a specified time, in this case 'now', and there must be a relation between the rest of the complex whole and that specified time, namely that all of the objects made a complex unity at the time specified. 'The cat is on the mat' is false if the cat was on the mat but has since left to shred what is left of your furniture. It is not sufficient for the time to exist, it must also have the right relationship to the rest of the objects. Thus, sentences about the past present no problem for the correspondence theory. The past has one way that it has been, and for every sentence about the past there is a corresponding time. The same goes for the present. One set of objective circumstances and one time, namely now, that can match up with it. The problem for the correspondence theory still lies ahead, in real life and in this paper. I now turn to the future.

On the face of it, the future does not seem as big a problem as it really is. Your first instinct, when thinking about the truth of beliefs about the future for the first time, is that a sentence or belief about the future is true if the world turns out to be the way described. (At least that was my first instinct). Thus the sentence 'It will rain tomorrow' is true if at some time tomorrow it ends up raining. The problem arises when you are asked to what complex whole does your belief correspond.

For this question Russell offers no help. The only place that I have found where he talks about the future is in Problems of Philosophy, where he says

It will be seen that minds do not create truth or falsehood. They create beliefs, but when once the beliefs are created, the mind cannot make them true or false, except in the special case where they concern further things which are within the power of the person believing, such as catching trains. (Problems of Philosophy p74)

Thus I have had to embark out on my own to try to get around this problem.

I will argue that in order to deal with the future it is necessary to give up bivalence for the majority of sentences. But first I will look at some of the options and show why they are not satisfactory. First I will examine what happens if we make future times part of the complex whole. Take the sentence 'The watch will be on the table tomorrow' as our example. What makes up this complex whole? It is quite simply made of : the watch, the table, being on, the time of tomorrow, and the relation of the other objects having the proper relation at the time of tomorrow. For the sentence to be true these things must all fall into place. But tomorrow does not exist. Since there is no tomorrow, there cannot be the proper relation to it. Thus, two of the things needed to make the sentence true are gone. According the theory as thus expressed, this sentence must necessarily be false. It is just as false as any false sentence about the past. Yet this position is an extremely undesirable one to take. There is the chance that the watch might end up on the table tomorrow. This changing of truth values from false to true, although not an impossible stance to take, seems to address the problem in the wrong way. After all one of the tenets of the correspondence theory is that truth value is constant over time. This way of examining statements about the future also makes every sentence about the future false. I do not think anyone really wants to say that this is the case. Thus I will look elsewhere for my solution.

Perhaps beliefs and sentences about the future correspond to objective facts about the world that exist now and that cause the events we talk about happening in the future to happen. Thus, if I see one billiard ball rolling towards another and believe that the second will roll away after the first has hit it, my belief is true due to the objective facts about the first billiard ball and the laws of physics and so forth that make some sort of complex whole at the time of my belief. This position, however, is also generally wrong. There are two things wrong with it. The first is that it leads to determinism, which I will argue is false, and the second is that it muddies the idea of beliefs corresponding each to one complex whole. The position does have some merit however, and we may not have to give up bivalence for all sentences about the future, just those that concern us.

I shall deal first with determinism. If the future is determined by the past it must be in the form of causal laws. t_2 could not be any other way because of what went on in t_1 . If you have situation A at t_1 then you must get situation A' at t_2 , and if B was the situation at t_1 , then B' will occur at t_2 . If the universe works like this, then it should be possible for the following situation to arise. Suppose that we are able to come up with all of the laws concerning physics that there are. We know everything about the human brain as well. We know exactly how it functions, what causes our emotions, why we say the things we do at certain times and such. There is no part of science that escapes us. We also have an incredibly powerful computer, more powerful than you can imagine by today's standards. It is programmed with these laws and some incredibly powerful mathematics and so on, and we feed it a sufficient amount of information. We also have amazing information-gathering powers as well. From this, our computer, call it the Oracle 5000, should be able to tell us exactly what has happened in the past and be able to predict with one hundred percent accuracy the future. Suppose that I were to go to the Oracle 5000 and make a few inquiries. It would know that I am coming and would thus be ready for me. I should be able to find out anything I want about the past or future. Suppose I were to ask it to list exactly what I was going to have for lunch, every day for the next year. This should be no problem for it. Oracle 5000 spits out a list and I am on my way. There is no possible way that anyone could convince me that I cannot deviate from this list. All I have to do is just skip lunch on one of the days that I am told I will be eating. Or, I could just have one cookie instead of two. My knowledge of the list will not effect the predictive accuracy of the machine. The computer "knew" that I was going to ask and would have compensated for that. However, it seems that I would have the freedom to deviate. Thus, there must be some things in the future that occur not because of some causal law. I am not suggesting that things occur for no reason, just that what occurs does not have to occur as it is. t_2 is caused by t_1 , but t_1 could also have caused t_2' . Therefore, statements about the future cannot be true due to a correspondence with facts about the present, as the present state of affairs do not have to cause what they end up causing.

Suppose though, that you are not persuaded by this argument, and still believe that the future is determined.¹ Sentences about the future really do correspond to facts of the present. I would then ask, how does one know to which complex whole any sentences correspond. Does the sentence 'Charles I died on the scaffold' refer to the complex whole involving Charles I, the scaffold, dying, and being on? Or does it refer to the state of events that caused that to happen? Or does it refer to objective facts even before that? Does every true sentence refer to the beginning of time? Allowing all of this makes the correspondence theory lose the simplicity that makes it so attractive. No one could tell to which set of objective facts the sentence corresponds.

However, there are some circumstances where a sentence about the future may be either true or false. Certain universal laws which govern physical matter do exist, whether we know of them or not. Through time, science has been able to improve on its ability to predict the activities of physical matter. I take this to evidence that we are getting closer to realizing these laws. The problem with the future is the non-lawlike nature of the mental. If someone were talking about a closed system, in which only physical matter existed, sentences about the future would be either true or false, and bivalence would be kept. The problem is determining where the mental does not affect. Assuming that there is no life at the edges of the universe, this would be one such place. The problem arises when you consider chaos theory. Very small mental events could make huge changes in physical events at a later date. It seems reasonable to think that there are some things that no matter what minds do they will not be able to affect it. For instance we will probably never be able to shrink the sun, or certainly not in my lifetime. So the sentence 'Tomorrow the sun will not be the size of a basketball' will be true. It is more difficult with other events. According to chaos theory, the flapping of a butterfly's wings can set off a hurricane. Let us consider an entirely mental event such as imagining that you are skiing. As before, I hold that there is no physical occurrence that made it so you have to think of skiing in the exact way that you are. Imagining something in you

¹Those of you who hold that everything is determined should not be too hard on me, as I am sure you realize that I have no choice but to believe in free will.

mind takes energy though. While I have no scientific evidence to back this up, suppose that imagining you are skiing takes less energy than mentally picturing a bunny. Some of this energy will be dissipated as heat out of the top of your head. This small amount of extra heat will make a difference in how events in the future will turn out. This is just one way in which the mental will effect the physical. Choosing to fire cannons and set fire to things are also mental activities. While some of them can be predicted fairly well, none of them have the certainty that is needed to form laws concerning their occurrences in the future. There is no way of telling how the mental will effect the physical. The choice of someone today could affect the amount of matter in our part of the galaxy. This in turn could affect the path of a star very far away from us. While these will be only small changes, they are small enough to disallow precise certainty. Even if a statement about the future is 99.99% probably, truth cannot be prescribed to it.

Some statements about the future, such as very general ones, those about very far away places, and especially those about the immediate future, will be true or false. If the laws of logic that we use are correct, then we have another class of sentences that we will be able to keep bivalence for. Although neither 'It will rain tomorrow' or 'it will not rain tomorrow' can have a truth value, the sentence 'It will rain tomorrow or it will not' can be said to be true. It will be true if the law of excluded middle is an actual universal law that we have discovered. If it is just a rule that we live by, and not a universal law, then that sentence is as indeterminate as the two sentences that go into making it.

For sentences about the future that are determined, bivalence is held. Sentences concerning the law of excluded middle need only be meaningful and correspond to the law of excluded middle to be true. The other sentences about the future that have determinate truth values are true due to the state of the world in the present and whatever universal law should cause the future to be determinate. If the universal law will cause the future to be other than it is described then the sentence is false.

It might be objected that just as there is no object whole existing that can make future sentences true, due to future time not existing, there is no existing complex whole for sentences about the past to correspond to. However, a complex whole from the past has existed at some time. There is

only one determinate way for the past to have existed. If a belief corresponds to a complex whole that has existed then the belief is true. While it is true that the past complex whole does not exist at this moment, it does not need to. It is enough for it to have existed at some previous time. The past is determined. It is this set way in which the past has occurred that allows for truths about the past. It also allows for falsehoods about the past. Since the past is set, a belief can be about a complex whole that did not exist at a certain time. If this is the case, then the belief is false.

When I say that the past and present are determined, I do not mean that they are determinable by us. I am simply asserting that there is only one set way that the past and present either existed or exists. The events of the past and present are set in the line of time, but it is indeterminate which events will happen in the future. For a belief to be true or false it must be about a complex whole whose existence is either determined, or its non-existence determined. Since the majority of sentences and beliefs about the future are about indeterminate complex wholes, they are not true or false, but rather indeterminate.

Therefore, all sentences about the present or the past can either correspond to the way the world is or was, and be true, or not correspond and be false. This is because the present and the past are determined. The future is generally not determined and thus bivalence must be lost for most beliefs and sentences about the future. However, there is a small subset of future sentences which are determined, and for these bivalence is kept.

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