*Presidential Address

TRUTH: THE IDENTITY THEORY

by Jennifer Hornsby

I want to promote what I shall call (unoriginally, and for the sake of its having a name[1]) 'the identity theory of truth'. I suggest that other accounts put forward as theories of truth are genuine rivals to it, but are unacceptable.

A certain conception of *thinkables* belongs with the identity theory's conception of *truth*. I introduce these conceptions in Part I, by reference to John McDowell's *Mind and World*; and I show why they have a place in an identity theory, which I introduce by reference to Frege. In Part II, I elaborate on the conception of thinkables, with a view to demonstrating that the identity theory's conception of truth is defensible. Part III is concerned with the theory's relation to some recent work on the concept of truth: I hope to show that the identity theorist not only has a defensible conception of truth, but also, in the present state of play, has appropriate ambitions.

I

I. 1 McDowell introduced the notion of a think*able* in order to fend off a particular objection to the following claim (1994, p. 27).

[T]here is no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can… think, and the sort of thing that can be the case. When one thinks truly, what one thinks *is* what is the case…. [T]here is no gap between thought, as such, and the world.

Someone who objects to this supposes that, by denying any gap between thought and the world, one commits oneself to a sort of idealism. But such an objector confuses people's thinkings of things with the contents of their thoughts. If one says that there is no ontological gap between thoughts and what is the case, meaning by 'thoughts' cognitive activity on the part of beings such as ourselves, then one is indeed committed to a sort of idealism: one has to allow that nothing would be the case unless there were cognitive activity—that there could not be a mindless world. But someone who means by 'thoughts' the contents of such activity, and who denies a gap between thoughts and what is the case, suggests only that what someone thinks can be the case.

[T]o say that there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world, is just to dress up a truism in high-flown language. All the point comes to is that one can think, for instance, *that spring has begun*, and that the very same thing, that spring has begun, can be the case. That is truistic, and it cannot embody something metaphysically contentious....

In order to avoid the ambiguity in 'thought' which would be exploited if a metaphysically contentious idealism were reached, McDowell suggests using the word 'thinkables' for what may be thought. My

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[1]. For 'the identity theory' in recent and contemporary philosophy, see Candlish 1995.

policy here will be to use the word 'thinkable' generally, in place of any of the more familiar 'content', 'proposition' or 'Thought'. Further reasons for this choice of word will show up in due course.

McDowell's demonstration that his position avoids a simple idealism may strike some people as an inadequate defence. I think that it can help to defend it to locate it by reference to debates about truth. One may view the quotations from McDowell as encouraging an identity theory of truth.[2] This says that true thinkables are the same as facts. True thinkables then make up the world of which McDowell speaks when he dresses up a truism. The world is 'everything that is the case', or 'a constellation of facts', as McDowell puts it, following Wittgenstein.

I. 2 The identity theory is encapsulated in the simple statement that true thinkables are the same as facts. But it may be wondered how that statement could amount to a *theory* of truth: 'If someone asks what truth is, and receives an answer which helps itself to the idea of a fact, then hasn't she been taken round a very small circle?' Yes. But the simple statement on its own is not supposed to tell us anything illuminating. A conception of truth can be drawn out from an elaboration of what the simple statement can remind us of. And, as we shall see, the conception can be set apart from the conceptions of other accounts that go by the name of theories of truth.

The identity theory is not vacuous. It cannot be vacuous because it takes a stand on what the bearers of truth are, calling them thinkables. This is not an uncontentious stand. For there are philosophers who have told us that the notion of proposition (and thus of thinkable) is so dubious that we should take the truth-bearers to be sentences.[3] The identity theory proceeds without such doubts, taking it for granted that we can make adequate sense of what is meant when someone says, for instance, 'She told me something that isn't true'.[4] And the identity theory not only asks us to understand such 'something's in appreciating where truth is applicable, but it also asks us to understand such 'something's in saying what truth's applicability consists in. Certainly there is no illumination at the point at which the word 'fact' is resorted to in order to say what this applicability consists in. But the identity theory makes definite commitments nonetheless.[5]

I. 3 Whether or not its title to be a theory can be made out, it may be unclear why the word 'identity' belongs in it. What could be the point in saying that true thinkables *are the same as* facts, rather than—more simply and apparently to the same effect—that true thinkables *are* facts?[6]

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[2]. I do not say that McDowell himself would see a point in viewing them thus.

[3]. The doubts are induced by Quine's attack on propositions, which I touch on below (at §II.2, and see nn. 6 & 10).

I think that someone who had never encountered logic or semantics might have encountered predications of truth to thinkables without encountering predications of truth to sentences; and the question *what truth is* surely concerns a concept which might feature in a language about which logicians and semanticists had never had anything to say. At a minimum, then, a philosopher who takes *truth* primarily as a property of sentences must say something about what appear to be its predication to thinkables. Although I accord priority to thinkables' truth here, I acknowledge that, when returning answers to particular philo-sophical questions, the application of 'true' to sentences is indispensable: see below, Part II. I acknowledge also that what appear to be predications of truth to thinkables may be treated as no such thing, as in the prosentential theory (see nn. 6 & 16). *Pro hac vice* I talk as if the surface appearances were sustainable.

[4]. In saying that the identity theorist proceeds without doubts, I do not deny that hard work has to be done to give accounts of what appears to be talk about propositions/thinkables. An identity theory of truth evidently places constraints on such accounts. See e.g. Rumfitt 1993's account of the construction of propositions: Rumfitt's constructionalism goes hand in hand with a paratactic treatment of the logical form of sentences containing 'that'-clauses; but his kind of constructionalism might be entertained outside the context of such treatment.

[5]. Candlish says, of what he calls a 'modest' identity theory, that it is 'completely uninteresting—trivial… precisely because it has no independent conception of a fact to give content to the identity claim' (1995, p. 107). Candlish here assesses the theory as if it had the ambitions of a definition. But what I call 'the identity theory' has no such ambitions (and indeed it acknowledges truth's indefinability: see below). The interest of the theory derives from what it can be seen, from what it says, to be opposed to philosophically. Candlish allows that an *im*modest ('robust') identity theory might be interesting: its interest could derive from its 'independent conception of facts', independent, that is, of the conception of thinkables, or truth-bearers. For my own part, I cannot see a point in thinking that such a theory deserves the name of *identity* theory. (Here I disagree with Julian Dodd 1995, from whom Candlish takes the robust/modest distinction. There is much about which Dodd and I agree, however: see our 1992.)

[6]. The introduction of 'identity' might seem to have the consequence of upping the ontological stakes (so that thinkables are to be treated as OBJECTS). That is not so. When we have understood, for example, 'She does it in one way, and he does it in another way', we have also made sense of 'They don't do it the *same* way'—but not at the expense of treating either things that are done or ways of doing them as OBJECTS. I think that hostility to propositions derives partly from Quine's assumption that all quantification is objectual or (in Quine's own sense) substitutional. This assumption has seemed to have the consequence that unless we give a Quinean substitutional account of these 'something's, we shall be forced to treat propositions as OBJECTS, in a sense of the term

A familiar argument in Frege (1918) may help to show the point. It is an argument against the correspondence theory of truth. Frege introduces it with the words 'It might be supposed... that truth consists in the correspondence of a picture with what it depicts'. 'This is contradicted, however', he says, and then argues by *reductio* (pp. 18–19):

A correspondence… can only be perfect if the corresponding things coincide and so just are not different things at all… [I]f the first did correspond perfectly with the second, they would coincide. But this is not at all what people intend when they define truth as the correspondence of an idea with something real. For in this case it is essential precisely that the reality shall be distinct from the idea. But then there can be no complete correspondence, no complete truth. So nothing at all would be true; for what is only half true is untrue.

Putting this only slightly differently, we hear Frege saying: if truth were explicated in terms of any relation, it would have to be identity, since anything less than a candidate for truth's coincidence with a putatively corresponding thing would lead to the intolerable conclusion that there is no truth. Someone who takes herself to think that true thinkables correspond to the facts has it right, then, only if she actually means that any true thinkable is the same as some fact—which is what the identity theorist says.

Frege's argument has a sequel. This starts by showing how Frege thinks his opponent will respond. The opponent asks (p. 19):

But can't it be laid down that truth exists where there is correspondence in a certain respect?

Here it is conceded that truth cannot be unspecified corres-pondence, so to speak. The problem with taking truth to be unspecified correspondence is that there can be correspondence in this respect, or that respect, or that other respect, so that there can be less or more correspondence according as there is corres-pondence in fewer or more respects; but there can't *in any analogous way* be more or less truth.[7] The opponent supposes that he can get out of this difficulty by picking on one respect of correspondence. To this Frege has a response.

But in which [respect]? What would we then have to do to decide whether something were true? We should have to inquire whether an idea and a reality, perhaps, corresponded in a laid-down respect. And then we should have to confront a question of the same kind, and the game would begin again. So the attempt to explain truth as correspondence collapses.

The idea now is that if there was something distinct from a thinkable such that establishing that some relation obtained between it and the thinkable was a way of getting to know whether the thinkable was true, then someone could be in the position of knowing what is known when the

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caught up with a particular understanding of singular reference. But Quine's assumption is not compulsory: see e.g. Davies 1981, Ch. VI, §3. Some of the interest of the prosentential theory of truth, defended in Grover 1992 and Brandom 1994, derives from the directness of its challenge to Quine's assumption.

  The identity theory is not formulated in order to take a stand on the logical form of predications of truth. If taken to reveal logical form, it would take an erroneous stand—the one which is contradicted by Frege's remark that '"true" is not a relative term'. Comparison with Russell's Theory of Descriptions may be helpful here. In the analysis of 'the' provided by Russell, the word 'the' is not treated as the simple quantifier which, presumably, so far as logical form is concerned, it is. One point of giving the analysis which Russell's theory states is to show what is involved in seeing 'the' as a quantifier, and to show which quantifier it is. Something analogous goes on when 'identity' is introduced into an account of truth. Just as Russell's Theory can present the negative semantical claim that 'the' does not combine with predicates to form names, so the identity theory of truth can present its own negative metaphysical claims—claims such as emerge from seeing how the identity theory arises out of rejection of a correspondence theory.

  One point of a formulation including 'same' might be to draw attention to the principles of distinctness of facts presupposed to the theory: those principles cannot allow a coarser grain to facts than to thinkables. (This means that it is not a target of the so-called slingshot argument; see Neale 1995.) A naive account of facts, attractive to those who seek facts in line with a correspondence conception, might incorporate the principle: Where $a = b$, 'Fb' does not express a different fact from 'Fa'. Such a principle, obviously, is at odds with the identity theorist's conception of facts. (In Neale's terms: 'the fact that ( ) = the fact that ( )' is –PSST.)

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[7]. Frege pointed out that 'with every property of a thing is joined a property of a [thinkable], namely that of truth' (p. 20). For illustration, suppose that Fred is tall. Putting it in Frege's way, a property of Fred (being tall) is joined to a property of a thinkable: if Fred is indeed tall, then a true thinkable is put forward when Fred is said to be tall. But if this is correct, then it can seem that we should allow that *truth* can have any of the features which the property of *being tall* can have, so that if *being tall* admits of degrees (if x can be to some extent tall), then *truth* admits of degrees (it can be to some extent true that x is tall). But now it seems that Frege appreciates a characteristic of 'true' which ensures that, when treated as a predicate, it will seem to admit of degrees, if any does. This makes me think that when Frege invokes the claim that what is half-true is untrue, he is relying on the thought that any *relation* introduced to account for truth cannot be a relation which admits of degrees. And that is why I say that there cannot *in any analogous way* be more or less truth.

thinkable is known, yet of still not knowing whether it was true. But of course one could never be in that position: to discover whether *p* is already to discover whether it is true that *p*.

This reveals a general difficulty about defining truth—the difficulty which shows up 'when we confront the same question again'.

In a definition certain characteristics would have to be stated. And in application to any particular case the question would always arise whether it were true that the characteristics were present.

'Consequently', Frege concludes, 'it is probable that the word 'true' is unique and indefinable' (p. 19).

When one follows Frege's argument through to this general conclusion, about the definability of truth, explicit opposition to the correspondence theory is lost: the correspondence theorist's definition fails to meet a constraint on any adequate definition; but it turns out not to be alone in that failure. Frege accordingly might be thought to have argued against an especially naive correspondence theory in the first instance, and then turned to opposing the whole idea of truth's definability. But there can be a point in thinking of Frege's initial argument as meant to show that a correspondence theory in particular—and *any* correspondence theory—is untenable. This is an argument which is sound only if the identity theory escapes its *reductio*. Its conclusion may be dressed up in high-flown language: there cannot be an ontological gap between thought ('an idea') and the world ('something real').

I. 4 The identity theory, at any rate, is distinguishable from any correspondence theory. And the identity theory is worth considering to the extent to which correspondence theories are worth avoiding. I think that correspondence theories *need* to be avoided. I mean by this not merely that they are incorrect, but that people are apt to believe them.

It is common for philosophers to speak as if a correspondence theory of truth had no metaphysical import whatever. We are sometimes told that the idea of correspondence is recorded in a series of platitudes that any theorist of truth has to respect. Simon Blackburn has spoken of the phrase 'corresponds to the facts' as sometimes a piece of Pentagonese—a paraphrase of 'is true' deployed with the purpose of saying something important sounding (1984, p. 255). But of course this is not all that has ever been read into the phrase. Someone who says 're-rendered it operational' for 'got it going again', may be criticized for needless portentousness, but not on other grounds; but when 'corresponds to the facts' gets in, the phrase's wordiness should not be the only source of doubt. Certainly there are glosses on 'is true' that are platitudinous: 'is a fact' is one such—the one that the identity theory singles out for attention. Perhaps it is also a platitude that true sentences say how things are. And this again is unobjectionable, so long as the 'things' in question are ordinary objects of reference: the true sentence 'that book is red', for example, says something about how things are by saying how one of the things (sc. that book) is (sc. red).[8]

From the point of view introduced by the identity theory, it will be distinctive of correspondence theorists to seek items located outside the realm of thinkables, and outside the realm of ordinary objects of reference, but related, some of them, to whole thinkables. The idea is widespread, and it takes various guises. In the Russell of *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (1940), the basic correspondents are percepts. Percepts can be 'surveyed but not defined'; utterances appropriately associated with them get their particular meanings from them; and propositions, the truth bearers, can be constructed out of percepts. In the Quine of *Philosophy of Logic*, the correspondents are cosmic distributions of particles. 'Two sentences agree in objective information, and so express the same proposition, when every cosmic distribution of particles over space–time that would make either sentence true would make the other true as well' (1970, p. 4). These very different candidates for things that make sentences true—percepts and particle distributions—reflect the very different obsessions of Russell and Quine, epistemological and cosmic. But what is common to their accounts, despite this vast difference, is a willingness to reconstruct thinkables

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[8]. This platitude points up the independence of thinking from what there is. Whether you want to know the book's colour, or to know something of what I think about the book, you have to think of something that is not sustained in existence by your thinking. But the thing to which you are then related (that book) is obviously not something which corresponds to a thinkable.

Davidson used to say that a relation like Tarskian *satisfaction* could provide the language–world links sought by a correspondence theorist of truth. But Davidson now regards this as a mistake (1990, p. 302). It must indeed be a mistake if opposition to correspondence theories can be combined with thought about mind-independent objects.

from posited entities of a different sort, entities which make things true. Percepts and particle distributions, then, are supposed to be items which we can specify independently of an account of thinkables, items which may confer truth upon a thinkable. When they are introduced, however, we cannot hold onto the truism that inspires the identity theory. The fact (as it is) that autumn has begun, if it were to be a cosmic distribution of particles, would not be the same as what I think when I think (truly) that autumn has begun. It is evident now that the words 'corresponds with' do not have to be in play for an ontological gap between thought and the world to open up. This is something that we see in formulations used over the years by Michael Dummett and Crispin Wright in stating the semantic anti-realist's case. Their formulations often appear to invoke a conception of a truth-maker which will suit a corres-pondence theorist but which an identity theorist cannot allow.[9] Dummett asked 'If it were impossible to know the truth of some true statement, how could there be anything which *made* that statement true?'. Wright spoke of 'a truth-conferrer for a sentence': in the case where the truth of the sentence cannot be known, he said that this is something that 'the world fails to deliver up'. And he spoke of 'the states of affairs' that are in question when a sentence is undecidable as things that 'could not be encountered'. These ways of speaking give rise to an image of something with which a thinkable might have connected up, but a something which we are expected to think of the world as taking sole responsibility for. This is the image that an identity theory may help to rid us of. For when the conditions for the truth of a sentence are supplied by an identity theorist, nothing is brought in besides the thinkable that is expressed by the sentence itself. By introducing 'sources of truth', 'truth conferrers' and 'states of affairs', Dummett and Wright drive a wedge between what is demanded by a thinkable and what is demanded by a thinkable that is true. The identity theorist leaves no room for any wedge.

Of course these remarks about Dummett and Wright do not get to grips with the position which was their concern. But they can illustrate a point—that philosophers' formulations are apt to create an outlook which is forsworn when an identity theory displaces a correspondence theory. I hope that they also suggest how the identity theory may displace forms of anti-realism more subtle than the crass idealism which results from equating thinkables with thinkings of them.

II

II. 1 It would be laborious to attempt to show that the identity theory is incompatible with all things irrealist. In order to show that it embodies nothing metaphysically contentious, I shall attempt only to reveal its actual compatibility with a perfectly common-sense realism.

McDowell's rebuttal of any simple idealism emphasizes the independence of thinkables from thinkings. One way to grasp this independence is to see that there are (so to speak) more thinkables than there are thinkings. I suspect that those who find the theory problematic are apt to suppose that it could be part of commonsense that there are (so to speak) more facts than there are true thinkables. If this is right about where the opposition lies, then further reflections on the identity theory, if they are to serve as a defence, must expand on the notion of a thinkable. By the identity theorist's lights, our grasp of the notion of a fact cannot exceed our grasp of the notion of a true thinkable. But someone who wishes to express doubts on that score might be helped by having it made apparent how generous the notion of a thinkable nonetheless is.

II. 2 There can seem to be an immediate obstacle, however, to *any* account of thinkables—of the contents, the meaningful things that bear truth. Quine's attack on the Myth of the Museum is directed against the

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[9]. See Dummett 1976, at p. 61 in the version reprinted in Dummett 1993.

    A different sort of illustration may be got from Frank Jackson, Graham Oppy and Michael Smith 1994. They argue for the compatibility of versions of non-cognitivism (in ethics, say) with minimalism about truth. They follow Michael Devitt in characterizing minimalism as holding that 'terms for truth and falsity are linguistic devices for talking about reality by appending the truth predicate'. Their claim then is that it might not be that any old sentence is such as to talk about reality: non-cognitivists, they say, 'precisely deny that (e.g.) ethical sentences talk about reality'. But someone who is opposed to correspondence theories in all their versions will not allow this 'talking about reality'. Suppose that Devitt had characterized minimalism by saying that truth and falsity are terms for going on talking while adding a word or two. Would Jackson et al. then have said 'Non-cognitivists precisely deny that (e.g.) ethical sentences are used in talking'?

    This example may serve to show how easily ideas of correspondence get in through the back door.

assumption that there could be things external to thought and meaning, lodged like exhibits in the mind, whose relations to other things could constitute the foundations of meaning (1960). The identity theorist agrees with Quine about the incoherence of the hope that intersubjective sameness of meaning might be explained in terms of relations with things external to thought and meaning.

From the identity theorist's point of view the correspondents of correspondence theories of truth play the same role as the exhibits in the museum of the mind: they are items located beyond the bounds of human play with concepts, in terms of which one is supposed to explain meaning. As Quine puts it, speaking himself of particle distributions, the item assigned to one sentence as a condition of its truth is the same as the item assigned to another sentence as a condition of *its* truth if and only if the two sentences have the same meaning. But such items as cosmic distributions of particles are in the same boat as items in the mind's museum according to the identity theory: neither can be used in the reconstruction of thinkables from something else.

If one countenances the cosmic items, but is led by the problems of the items in the mind's museum to think that ordinary talk of meaning is unsupported, then one may invoke a double standard. Quine tells us that a second class standard is appropriate so long as we are tolerant of such everyday psychological talk as involves any notion of a thinkable (1960, §45). But he said that we can, and in science we must, employ a first class standard; it is then that objective information, corresponding to (say) cosmic distributions of particles, can do duty for thinkables, Quine thinks. The upshot of this is hard to make coherent. For the view of everyday reports of people's psychological states which is required by Quine's lower standard for them is not a view that can be sustained by someone who takes herself (for instance) to seek the truth in some area. A person's being an enquirer of any sort requires that she be interpretable as aiming at gleaning the facts, and we have no conception of what that is excepting as we can think of her as more generally intelligible—as apt to perceive things, and to think them, and to draw conclusions. We cannot then be in a position to make statements about Quine's first-class reality but of refusing (according to the same standard) to make any statements which say, for instance, what people are doing when they are investigating that reality. The identity theory helps to make this difficulty with the Quinean picture vivid. The first-class standard was meant to be the standard of genuine facts; the second-class standard was to be invoked when the language of thinkables was used. But if any fact is the same as some true thinkable, then we cannot endorse facts and despise thinkables.

II. 3 It can seem as though the identity theorist had nowhere to turn for an account of thinkables. At least there is nowhere to turn for an account besides an investigation of other predications to them—predications other than 'is true'. This brings me to further reasons (which I said I would come to) for using the term 'thinkable'.

'Thinkable' is a word for a sort of things to which a person can be related in various modes. I say that the Labour Party will win the next election. I have just said something (that Labour will win) which many now believe, which a good few hope, which John Major fears. The example then shows that thinkables can be beliefs, hopes and fears. They are called beliefs when thought of in connection with one psychological attitude towards them; they are called hopes or fears when thought of in connection with other attitudes. They are thought of as propositions when thought of as propounded.[10] A modal term, like 'thinkable', may serve to remind one of the variety of relations here: it is not only thought which relates to think*able*s, because a thinkable can be believed and hoped, for instance. (And just as we must not confuse a thinkable with a thinking, so we must not confuse a thinkable with someone's believing one, or with someone's hoping one.)

Besides '—— is true', then, there are predicates of thinkables, such as '—— is believed by Tony', '—— is hoped by members of the crowd'. Yet other predicates of thinkables show people as related to them by

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[10]. It seems worth remembering that propounding is a propositional attitude, and that Quinean hostility to propositions is hostility equally to beliefs (say). Because the opposition to certain abstract conceptions of thinkables has typically been directed against things called propositions, we find philosophers whose attitude towards beliefs and statements is one of acceptance, but towards propositions is one of rejection. (See e.g. David 1994, p. 12.) Of course it might be stipulated that the term 'proposition' is to mean what is meant by those who use the term illicitly. But short of making such a stipulation, it will be hard to justify an attitude of hostility peculiarly to propositions.

their speech acts: a statement, for instance, is what we call a thinkable when we think of it in connection with someone's making a statement. 'Thinkable' gives a word for what is truth-evaluable which is indifferent between the case where the evaluable thing is presented as the object of a state of a thinker's mind and the case where it is presented as having been put into words. But it is the linguistic expression of thinkables which we are bound to focus on, if we are to find anything of a systematic sort to say about them. One aim of theories of meaning is to show the significance of sentences as systematically dependent on properties of the words that make them up: theories of meaning, one might say, treat of thinkables' composition. The productivity of language, which can be revealed in its theory of meaning, then points towards another reason for using a modal notion, and speaking of think*ables*. Someone in possession of a theory of meaning for some language can say what was expressed in the use of any of the sentences on some list, composed from some stock of words; and is in a position to see that there are other things that would be expressed in the use of other sentences, not on the list, but composed only from words in the same stock. A theory of meaning, though its data are uses of actual sentences, is a theory which speaks to potential uses—to what would be said if some hitherto unused sentence of the language were used. There are actually unused sentences, which, just like the sentences we have given voice to or heard or read, express thinkables.

This suggests the place to look if we want to expand on the notion of a thinkable. We cannot postulate meanings in the mind or correspondents in the world. But we can look to the actual practices of language users. And we shall be reminded here of an idea first recommended by Donald Davidson—that we might put to work, as a theory of meaning of the language of some speakers, a definition of truth for the language which enables the interpretation of those speakers. Davidson's claim that a definition of truth for a language can serve as its theory of meaning depended in part on his thinking that Tarski had shown a way of displaying the recurrent significance of words—by treating words as having characteristics which affect the truth of sentences they come into.[11] In the present context, much of the importance of the idea of deploying such a definition of truth for a language is the view of predications of thinkables it affords. Where an account of a language's workings is interpretive of its speakers, it enables the theorist to give expression, in the case of any sentence in the language and any speaker of it, to the thinkable expressed by the speaker using that sentence. It thus gives the theorist the resources to say what speakers are doing when they use their language.[12]

An interpretive account of speakers is not narrowly linguistic. For speakers' productions of sentences cannot be seen as intelligible expressions of thinkables except as speakers are seen to have some purpose in producing the sentences. And any hypothesis about the purpose of a person who uses words on some occasion goes hand in hand not only with a hypothesis about the thinkable then expressed but also with hypotheses about her mental states—about how *belief* and *desire* and the other attitudes relate her to thinkables—and with hypotheses also about the states of mind of audiences to her speech, and of all the others who use the language on other occasions.

The imaginary theorist, who compiles the facts about words that could put one in a position to understand foreign speakers, would be involved not only in making attributions to speakers of psychological attitudes and speech acts towards thinkables, but also, and inevitably, in taking a view of the truth of the thinkables to which speakers are then taken to be related. One cannot generally take a view about what someone's purposes are without having some view of which of those purpose are achieved; people intentionally do what they try to do to the extent that the beliefs which explain their doing what they do are true (are

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[11]. Davidson 1967. I use '*definition* of truth' here as Davidson did there; and this allows me to avoid using 'theory of truth' ambiguously. (It seems impossible to avoid all possible ambiguity, however. Where a theory of truth [in the only sense of that phrase I use here] purports to give a definition, it purports to give a definition of truth; but of course what it purports to give is not the sort of language-relativized thing that Tarski showed one how to construct.)

One makes no assumptions about Tarski's own intentions in saying that Tarski in fact showed us a way to construct a definition of truth for L that can be used to do something that a theory of meaning for L has to do. (Etchemendy 1988 has an understanding of Tarski's purpose which leads to a view of a definition of truth for a language which encourages the deflationist attitude discussed in §III below.)

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[12]. I cannot here do more than take for granted a vast body of literature which shows the workability of definitions of truth for languages having natural languages' features. See, e.g., further papers in Davidson 1980. Davidson's idea has been endorsed by many others, of whom, in the present connection, McDowell should be mentioned; see, for example, his 1976.

believings of true thinkables, that is). Of course the word 'true' does not have to be dragged in in order to see someone's taking an attitude towards a thinkable as working as it does. One can just as well say 'She believed that the 'plane took off at 9, and the plane took off at 9' as one can say 'She believes that the 'plane took off at 9 and that is true'. But insofar as an interpretive account requires more than the idea of people's relations to thinkables, and more than the idea of interconnections between those relations, it requires grasp of the distinction involved in assessments of thinkables as true or false. The view of thinkables that emerges, then, in trying to expand on the notion, is one in which some thinkables are taken to be (the same as) facts.

The study of interpretive accounts affords a distinctive per-spective on the application of 'is true' to thinkables. 'True' can be treated as having a role alongside a variety of psychological predicates; but it is not itself treated as a psychological predicate, of course.[13]

II. 4 Discussions of coming to understand a foreign language sometimes assume its speakers to be more ignorant than the theorist: the facts at the theorist's disposal go beyond any of which the interpreted people are apprised. But this assumption is not essential to the idea of an interpretive account. Contemplating interpretive accounts shows the acceptability of a conception of potential uses of language expressive of thinkables outside one's ken, and some of which are facts.

One might think inductively here. Over the centuries, human knowledge, at least in some spheres, has expanded, and its expansion has been assisted by the introduction of new concepts, for instance in the formulation of scientific theories. If one believes that human knowledge will continue to expand, one is entitled to predict that thinkables which none of us here and now is capable of thinking will come to be known. One may envisage a theorist interpreting a language of the future: its speakers would think things, and the theorist, in coming to understand them, would learn from them. She could come to have access to facts, which in her present situation she is not even equipped to express.

Here one thinks of thinkables in connection with expanding knowledge. And it might then be supposed that the facts are to be circumscribed by reference to what is known by an ideal knower, at the limit, as it were, of an inductive series of more and more knowledgeable beings. But acceptance of unthought thinkables, some of which are facts, requires no such supposition. The supposition requires an understanding of the ideal situation for arriving at knowledge. And this can only be a situation in which all sources of error are eliminated or taken account of—a situation, that is to say, in which one is sure to believe what is *true*. Perhaps we can gesture towards such an ideal. But since we can explain it at best in terms of an antecedent notion of truth, the style of thinking used here to uncover a conception of facts can lend no support to an epistemic theory of truth.[14]

The conception of unthought thinkables elicited here does not depend upon any settled opinion about human ambitions or limitations, but only upon an idea of intelligible others from whom one could learn. It evidently yields a generous conception of facts, to which an identity theorist is entitled. I hope, then, that the identity theory emerges as a defensible theory of truth, in keeping with our commonsensically realist view about the extent of facts independent of us.[15]

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[13]. Cp. Davidson 1990, p. 287: 'the concept of truth has essential connections with the concepts of belief and meaning'; and 'what Tarski has done for us is to show in detail how to describe the kind of pattern truth must make'. Davidson himself thinks that the empirical evidence we need in order to identify the pattern must avoid, in the first instance 'states with (as one says) a propositional object'. Davidson, then, would not be happy with the intro-duction of, 'as one says', propositional objects (i.e. thinkables) at the outset. This explains why his objections to Paul Horwich begin at an earlier point than my own do (see n. 19). For his part, Davidson has a theory of verbal interpretation to elaborate: see 1990. To question the need for this would take me too far afield. But I can try to state Davidson's view in my own terms: such a theory of verbal interpretation has to be understood from the standpoint of someone contemplating an interpretive account in order that such contemplation should ensure that a philosophically adequate conception of truth is elicited.

[14]. Here I am thinking of, for example, the theory which seems to be endorsed in Putnam's 1981, which says that truth is an idealization of rational acceptability. In later writings (e.g. 1990), Putnam asks us to read the remarks he makes in supporting his Internal Realism as meant only to convey a picture, rather than as a theory of truth.

[15]. The remarks of this section are intended to go further than those of McDowell (reported in §I.1)—further towards showing that it is not a difficulty for the identity theory that it circumscribes the world using the notion of a thinkable. Although offered in defence of the claim that an identity theorist has a commonsensically realist conception of facts, they are not offered as a defence of any 'Realism' meriting a capital 'R'. In defending his 'Internal Realism' (see n. 14), Putnam's target was 'Metaphysical Realism', a doctrine which the identity theory is evidently also opposed to.

III

III. 1 However defensible the identity theory of truth might be made out to be, it might seem that there is an alternative to it—in the minimal theory of truth.
The minimal theory is advanced by Paul Horwich (1990, pp. 6–7).

[I]t contains no more than what is expressed by uncontroversial instances of the equivalence schema:

(E) It is true *that p* if and only if p.

Horwich calls this 'the deflationary point of view'. In advocating a minimal theory, he means us to think that those who have waxed philosophical about truth in the past have tried to say too much and overshot the mark. He believes that we are apt to have an erroneously inflated conception of truth.
There has been so much writing under the head of 'minimalism' and 'deflationism' that in order that something should be fixed, I shall use Horwich's position to define 'a minimalist theory'. Deflationism, on the other hand, I shall treat as an attitude towards truth which a minimalist theorist takes, but which is also taken by others—disquotationalists, and, it seems, Richard Rorty.[16] In an attempt to make out the identity theory's superiority to the minimal theory, I start by suggesting that, despite what they have in common, there has to be a genuine difference in their conceptions of truth. Then I suggest that to the extent that the minimal theorist wants to convey a deflationary message about truth, which is not already conveyed in the identity theorist's opposition to corres-pondence, the message has to be resisted.

III. 2 One thing that the identity theorist and minimal theorist agree about shows up in connection with a point that Dummett once made (1958/9). Dummett famously said that an advocate of a minimal theory is ill-placed to tell us that *truth* can be used to explain *meaning*.[17] The point relies on two features of the minimal theorist's conception. On the one hand, *truth* is not a notion of substance, which can be utilized in accounting for something else; on the other hand, *meaningfulness* is simply taken for granted when one predicates truth. We find parallel features in the identity theorist's conception: On the one hand, facts are thinkables, so that there is nothing external to thought and meaning in terms of which truth can be understood; on the other hand, thinkables are what facts are, so that *thinkability* is presupposed when one talks about truth. These features of truth presented the obstacle

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Of course it is possible to think that a defence even of commonsense realism is required: Michael Dummett has long urged this. In his 1990, Dummett thinks of the 'tacit acquisition of the concept [of truth]' as involving 'a conceptual leap;... just because this is so, it is open to challenge' (p. 200, in 1993 reprinted version). The leap, Dummett says, is one 'we all [made] at an early stage in our acquisition of our mother tongues': it involves a transition from the 'justifiability condition of an assertion to the truth-condition of the statement asserted' (p. 198). Now Dummett's own understanding of the conceptual leap is shown in his speaking of the notion of justification as 'cruder' and of truth as 'more refined'. But Dummett's opponent may resist any picture of the concept of truth as got from something cruder—as if there were something which might be added to justifiability to get truth, so that the child at some stage had to acquire the added extra. (The identity theorist seems bound to resist this, since she cannot allow *truth*'s applicability to be separated from *thinkability*.) Against Dummett, it may be said that the child who comes to belong to a community of speakers (a systematic account of whose uses of sentences deploys the concept of truth) is drawn into practices in which the concept already has a place. Evidently in saying this, one still does not supply the defence which Dummett seeks. But perhaps it helps to make it clear that one can reject Dummett's story about the acquisition of the concept of truth while acknowledging that truth is indeed in an obvious sense more demanding than justification.

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[16]. Disquotationalists differ from Horwich in taking the truth of *sentences* to be primary, so that I have taken a stand against their position already (see n. 3 above). For criticisms of disquotationalism as such, see David 1994. Many of these criticisms have versions applicable to Horwich's theory: in connection with Horwich they would start from asking what is involved in the acceptance of propositions—which is the question that I press below.
    For Rorty's deflationism, see n. 21.
    The characterization of deflationism here is deliberately vague (it is meant to be as vague as the statements used to convey the deflationary message, see §III.3). But I should note that, with Horwich's minimalist theory used as the paradigm of a theory provoking the deflationist attitude, it is *not* a characteristic thesis of deflationism to deny that truth is a predicate. Brandom 1994 takes his treatment of '... is true' as a prosentence-forming operator to secure one of deflationism's characteristic theses. But I think that the identity theorist's opposition to the deflationist attitude that Horwich means to provoke might survive arguments about the correctness of pro-sentialism. (From Brandom's position, one would see these issues in a different light. I cannot speak to it here, but I make a further remark about it at n. 23 below.)

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[17]. Dummett was actually talking about the redundancy theory of truth. For the purposes of considering his argument, we may think of this as a species of minimalist theory. Dummett himself has called Horwich's theory (which Horwich calls 'minimal') 'redundancy'. (The name 'redundancy theory', however, is *sometimes* reserved for a theory in which predicate-hood is denied of 'is true', i.e. for a species of a kind of theory mentioned at nn. 16 & 23.)

that we initially saw to giving any account of thinkables (see §II.2). And they explain the lack of illumination which is felt at the point at which the identity theorist resorts to the word 'fact' (cp. n. 5).

To the apparent obstacle as it presents itself to the identity theorist, I have responded with the idea of an interpretive account of a group of language users. Taking the perspective that such an account provides, one does not purport to *explain* either meaning or truth. (Of course not: Dummett's point is well taken.) But one is in a position to elicit features of one's conception of truth. By turning to interpretive accounts, one can shed light simultaneously on truth and thinkability (where an account of linguistic meaning is situated in an account of thinkables). One does so by contemplating the use of definitions of truth which are such as to contain all the instances of the schema found in Tarski's Convention T (the analogue, as it were, for sentences, of Horwich's Schema (E)). But it is here that a real disagreement with the minimal theory is revealed. For the idea of an interpretive account is alien to the conception of truth that Horwich means us to take away from his theory. Horwich for his part defends not only a minimal theory of truth, but also minimalism about meaning; and he defends minimalism about meaning by doing his best to show that the concept of truth is not needed in the explication of meaning. It is supposed to be a consequence of a minimal theory, that 'true', being deflated and shown to have no substance, could not play a crucial part in something as interesting as an interpretive account is thought by its defenders to be.[18]

Pressure can be put upon the minimal theorist, by showing that his conception of truth will be found wanting unless it is supplemented at least with some idea of interpretability. The minimal theorist hopes to say everything that needs to be said about truth by allusion to the Equivalence Schema. So he has said nothing about truth except insofar as the Schema is fully intelligible. When the Schema is used to give a theory of *truth*, it is taken for granted that the 'that p' construction within it is in good order. And this might be doubted.[19] But even when there are no doubts about the admissibility of the construction it uses, it must be a good question to ask of someone who advances the Schema what the intended range of its instances is. If one wrote the left hand side of the Schema 'The thinkable that p is true', then it would be clear that the 'that p' construction employed in it is just that which is employed when any of 'believes', 'hopes', 'states' *et cetera* are used. Making out the Schema's intelligibility, or revealing its range, then, would be a matter of showing how 'that p' and related constructions work, as it were, in the large. One would then be drawn to the idea of an interpretive account.[20]

The place to which one turns to answer questions about the minimal theorist's Equivalence Schema, then, is exactly the place where the identity theorist finds the resources to demonstrate her theory's consonance with commonsense. It is not, however, that the allusion to interpretive accounts enables the identity theorist to understand the 'that p' construction in terms of something more primitive. Like the minimal theorist, the identity theorist takes the 'that p' construction for granted in the statement of a theory of truth. Both theorists assume that thinkables are the primary bearers of truth, and give priority to 'It is true that p' over 'sentence s is true' (see n. 3). The identity theorist nonetheless sees a particular point in the use of 'true in L' applied to sentences. As we saw, an interpretive account of a particular language L contains a

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[18]. On this reading, Horwich's argument to deflationism about *meaning* is indirect. (Truth has no substance, so meaning doesn't either.) But Horwich sometimes defends minimalism about meaning more directly, by reference to his own idea of semantic compositionality, which is 'minimal' and is supposedly superior to a so-called truth-conditional idea (i.e. one which portrays a language's structure in a definition of truth for its sentences.) This other style of defence suggests that Horwich's own deflationist attitude may rely on more than the thought that one says everything a philosopher could have any reason to say about truth by writing (E) down. Horwich seems sometimes to side with Rorty, see n. 21.

There are other ways of encouraging a generally deflationist attitude than Horwich's. Sometimes it is encouraged by the thought that 'true' having been shown (supposedly) to have no substance, we cannot be 'factualists' about the semantical. (Paul Boghossian, 1990, points out that it is hard to make sense of this except by supposing that we are factualists sometimes; but if we are factualists sometimes, then we cannot actually sustain the wholesale deflationary attitude to truth. Boghossian's thought suggests a difficulty for the move that Horwich makes on my reading—from 'Truth has no substance' to 'Meaning doesn't either'. The move seems to require connections between truth and meaning, which should, it would seem, have been officially renounced.)

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[19]. Davidson doubts it: see n. 13. Davidson's objections to the minimal theory which were made in his Jacobsen Lectures (University of London, 1995) began from an objection to the use of 'that p' in the theorist's Schema.

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[20]. Such an account, of course, treats utterances of sentences which are not appropriate substitutes for 'p' in Schema (E). (The treatment does not fall within the scope of the definition of truth for a language which it contains, but makes connections with the definition. Consider non-indicatives.) Horwich acknowledges that not all sentences are fit for substitution in (E) at the point at which he glibly dismisses the semantic paradoxes (pp. 41–2).

definition of truth in L which speaks to *potential* uses of the sentences of L—to what would be said if one were used by an L-speaker (see §II.3). Within such an account, we find, for instance 'sentence *s* is true in L iff *p*'; and where this assists in interpretation, the place of '*p*' is taken by a sentence in a theorist's language, fitted for the expression of a thinkable that a speaker would express if, as a speaker of L, she used the sentence *s*. (The thinkable that *p* is true if and only if it is a fact that *p*, which of course is exactly the condition for *s*'s being true in L.) An interpretive account enables thinkables which might be expressed by speakers to be matched with thinkables that theorists can express. The idea of such an account would fill the lacuna in the minimal theorist's development of his conception of truth. With the lacuna filled, deflationary impulses go away.[21]

III. 3 The identity theorist, unlike the minimal theorist, is willing to look to accounts of interpretation to elicit our conception of truth. But the identity theorist accepts the idea which the minimal theorist's Schema E may be taken to encapsulate. This is the idea that in introducing a word for *truth* into a language not containing such a word, one introduces nothing which is new (so to speak).[22] For sure, the identity theorist introduces the word 'facts'; but that is only in order to find a way of saying that the facts are the same as what is true, and thus to be quite explicit about her opposition to a correspondence theory of truth. By using the correspondence theorists' own vocabulary of 'fact', the identity theorist sets herself apart from the correspondence theorist's conception of truth. We may ask what the minimal theory is supposed to be set apart from. What might one have wanted to say about truth which it becomes impossible to say when one's conception of truth has been deflated sufficiently to conform to the conception that a minimal theorist recommends?

Well, there are three popular statements of the deflationary idea. First, it is said that truth has no underlying nature. Secondly, it is said that in using the predicate 'true' we cannot get at any more facts than we had access to already. Thirdly, it is said that there is no more to truth than its serving a logical need.

The first claim, that truth has no underlying nature, is Horwich's favourite. But if we try to read it in a distinctively deflationary way, then it may seem to suggest that truth is not a predicate of thinkables with any application independent of other predicates of thinkables. And that is surely wrong.[23]

The second claim, that we cannot get at any more facts than we already have access to, is correct if it makes a point about what the word 'true' enables us to say or to think. (The identity theory shows what is correct about this. When we say or think that *p* is true, we say or think that it is a fact that *p* [and it *is* a fact that *p* if we are right]; but the fact that *p* which we may take ourselves now to have access to is the same as the thinkable that we say or think when we say or think that *p*: there is then no new fact to which we have

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[21]. To subdue the deflationist impulse, it is not enough to acknowledge that definitions of truth for languages play a role in interpretive accounts: the exact role needs to be understood. Rorty promotes a kind of deflationism from the position of a pragmatist, rather than a minimalist. The basis for his dismissive remarks about truth are not the Equivalence Schema, but glosses on truth of the kind that Putnam gives in defending Internal Realism (see n. 14). Speaking of a definition of truth for a language playing the role to which Davidson wishes to put it, Rorty says: 'I should think that an empirical theory which entails T-sentences could as well be called "a theory of complex behaviour" as "a theory of truth"' (1995, p. 286). Well, of course a definition of truth for a language (often enough called 'a theory of truth', which Rorty here expresses a dislike for calling it) is not a theory of truth in the sense in which the correspondence theory, or identity theory, or epistemic theory, or whatever, claim to be. (It is because of the ambiguity in 'theory of truth' that I have here reserved '*definition*' for the Tarskian theories whose role is at issue between identity theorists and minimal theorists: see n. 11.) But Rorty's thought that it could 'just as well be called "a theory of complex behaviour"' does not depend upon any ambiguity in 'theory of truth'. It depends upon Rorty's failure to appreciate that a definition of truth for some speakers' language is [a] only a component in any account of their behaviour, but [b] a component in which 'true' plays a crucial role.

  Where Horwich would have us think that the presence of 'true' ensures that the definition participates in nothing with any substance, Rorty, with the focus on 'behaviour', would prevent us from seeing 'true' as playing its normal, normative role there (cp. McDowell 1994, p. 150).

[22]. Not only is nothing new introduced; nothing is excluded. This point may be used to dispute the title of 'minimal' to the minimal theory. As Gupta 1993 points out, the ideology of the theory is, in one obvious sense, maximal: cp. Frege's remark quoted at n. 7.

[23]. Truth's lack of 'an underlying nature' seems sometimes to amount to the impossibility of analyzing or defining it. Such impossibility, of course, is acknowledged by the identity theory: see n. 5.

  Horwich sometimes tells us that the predicate 'lacks substance'. But again I find a difficulty. It seems as if *truth* can have any of the features of any property predicated in a true thinkable (cp. nn. 7 & 22). But in that case 'true' is exactly as substantial as, and exactly as insubstantial as, any predicate in the language; which would seem to ensure that we actually cannot make sense of the claim that truth lacks substance. (This peculiarity of 'true' might be used to motivate a treatment in which 'is true' is not a predicate. I do not think that someone with the identity theorist's motivation has to be opposed to such treatment. The kind of deflationism to which it leads need not be assimilated to Horwich's: see n. 16.)

access.) When a distinctively deflationary understanding of this claim is sought, however, it becomes all too easy to construe it as saying something incorrect. It could be understood as saying that the facts are exhausted by the thinkables to which we already have access. But then it would be suggested that we here now are not entitled to our view that there are facts which no-one here now can actually think. That suggestion is incompatible with the part of commonsense realism whose compatibility with an identity theory I have tried to show.

What, then, about the deflationist's third claim, that there is no more to truth than its serving a certain logical need? This is a claim about the point of having a word which functions as the English word 'true' does. Understood as such, it is correct. But a philosopher who thought to ask 'What is *truth*?' may not be satisfied by being told what sort of device the truth predicate is: she wants to know what sort of distinction it records.

We saw that a grasp of the distinction involved in assessments of thinkables as true or false is required in order to be in a position to make psychological predications of them (§II.3).[24] This is quite compatible with the truth predicate's being the sort of device that the deflationist says it is. And it ensures that there is no new mode of evaluation for thinkables which is brought onto the scene when the word 'true' is introduced. Yet a minimal theorist purports to advance a deflationary claim in using the Equivalence Schema (E) to tell us what sort of device 'true' is. How could he deflate truth further— beyond what is necessary to restore it to the uninflated condition in which the identity theory finds it? It seems that he must either take the distinction involved in assessments of thinkables as true or false to be implicit in some gloss on (E) that he might offer, or he must deny that there is any such distinction. But of course there is a distinction between what is true and what is false. And unless a gloss on (E) has the sort of platitudinous ring that 'fact' carries, it will be bound to spoil the deflationary message.[25]

We have found no positively deflationary and correct thesis about truth for a minimal theorist to advance.

III. 4 The conception of truth which the identity theory brings with it allows truth to be a *sui generis* norm, in play where there are rational beings who may go right or wrong in their thought and speech. This is enough to let us shun correspondence theories, and it leaves us well-placed to make out our title to commonsense realism (if that should seem necessary). To the extent that advocates of a minimal theory say distinctively and genuinely deflationary things, they deny us that title; and then they lead us astray.

Answers to philosophers' questions about the relation between language and the world have traditionally taken a form which we now call theories of truth. I have not meant to develop any new theory here. Indeed I do not think that we need any theory of truth save insofar as we may go astray without one. I have promoted the identity theory, because I think that we have to find a position from which to avoid the false dilemmas that the theories currently on offer present us with.[26] I hope that reflection on the identity theory shows that antagonism towards correspondence theories, and indeed towards all theories which purport to analyze truth, is independent of the deflationary attitude. The identity theory provides a perspective from which many other theories will appear indefensible.[27]

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[24]. There could be debate about whether this suffices to ensure that truth is 'explanatory'. But however that debate might go, truth will not turn out to have the kind of 'causal explanatory role' that e.g. Hartry Field associates with assignments of truth-conditions which count as correspondence truth-conditions. (I touched on some of the issues about truth's role in my 1989.)

[25]. Wright 1992, Ch.1 §III, argues, in effect, that the deflationist's position is not made out until such a gloss is allowed, but that any such gloss must be inflationary by the deflationist's own lights.

[26]. David furnishes a good example of the false dilemma: the reader of David 1994 is invited to accept a correspondence theory of truth on the basis of a demonstration of the untenability of disquotationalism. The dilemmas are sometimes subtler: 'robustness', for instance, is sometimes taken to accrue to truth, or 'factualism' to a discourse which is 'truth apt' as soon as minimalism is denied; and correspondence conceptions may enter with talk of robustness and factualism.

[27]. A visit to Monash University in 1991 provided me with some time for thought about truth: for that and more, including a useful discussion of this paper's first ancestor, I thank the Philosophy Department there. Both before and after that visit, I had helpful conversations with Julian Dodd; I can now reciprocate the generous acknowledgement of me in his doctoral thesis. I am grateful both to the members of a discussion group in Oxford which David Charles convenes, and to the Centro de Studie sulla Filosofia Contemporanea for sponsorship of a conference in Genoa in November 1995. My final thanks are to John Collins and David Wiggins, for comments on what was necessarily the final draft.

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