Introduction

Tibbles the cat is sitting on his mat. I know this because Rachel told me. She said, "Tibbles is on his mat." And I believe what she says is *true*.

There is something puzzling, however, about how my knowledge of a cat could arise from hearing Rachel's statement. How exactly is her statement relevant to Tibbles' relationship to a mat? The statement about Tibbles is true. But what does the truth of a statement have to do with the location of a cat?

Truth has *something* to do with reality, it seems. Suppose I shove the cat off his mat. I have thereby changed the truth of Rachel's statement: her statement is now false.[1] By changing reality, I change the truth-value of Rachel's statement. So, it may appear that there is some sort of link between the truth of Rachel's statement and the reality it describes. Such a link isn't unique to statements about cats, of course. Rachel could have said something about birds, cars, the news, *anything*. One might generalize: for any statement, its truth-value is in some way related to how things in reality are. In short, truth and reality are linked.

The idea that truth and reality are linked is the foundational idea that gives rise to the *correspondence theory* of truth. As a first pass, we may state the basic correspondence theory as follows: for any proposition *p*, *p* is true if and only if there is some *corresponding* reality *R*. (I will discuss variations on this theme in Chapter 1.) Truth, on this view, is relational. It is not part of the correspondence theory *per se* to specify the nature of the "correspondence" relation between truth and reality. At the core of the correspondence theory is just the idea that truth consists in some connection with reality.

[1] Maybe you don't think propositions can change truth-values (because you think propositions implicitly specify time information, and so are *eternally true* if true at all). Then translate the example. By *preventing* the cat from being on the mat at a particular time, I thereby prevent Rachel's statement from being true. The point is that a difference to reality implies a difference to the truth of Rachel's statement. Reality affects truth.

I will briefly outline two reasons why one might favor a correspondence theory of truth. First, truth seems to behave like a relational property because the truth of a statement seems to depend upon – or be correlated with – the properties of things *other than* that very statement. So, for example, the truth of "Tibbles is on the mat" seems to depend upon certain spatial properties of Tibbles. Relational properties are the same way: a relational property of a thing depends upon what properties are had by *other* things. Take *being adjacent to something*, for example. This property is a paradigm case of a relational property. Suppose I exemplify this property. Then I am adjacent to something – Tibbles, let's say. But suppose Tibbles meanders away so that I am no longer adjacent to anything. Then I no longer exemplify the property of *being adjacent to something*. In this situation, what happens to Tibbles affects what happens to me. More generally, what happens to things *distinct from me* affects what *relational* properties I have. Compare, then, the behavior of truth: change the cat, and you thereby change the truth of a statement about the cat. In other words, by affecting something distinct from the statement, one thereby affects what truth-value the statement itself has. It seems, then, that truth behaves like a relational property: truth consists in some *relation* to some reality.

Second, there is an epistemological reason one might think truth is relational. Consider again the statement that Tibbles is on the mat. To find out whether or not this statement is true, it does me no good to merely inspect the statement itself. I must consider what the statement is about: I must find Tibbles and see if he is on the mat (or ask someone who knows Tibbles' whereabouts). In general, the only effective way to *find out* whether or not a given statement is true is to find out something about the reality the statement purports to describe. Scientific inquiry is successful, one might think, precisely because it involves *testing* hypotheses (statements) against observations about reality. In general, it seems we can't figure out if a statement is *true* merely by investigating that statement's intrinsic properties – like the statement's font, color, mass, atomic composition, and so on.[2] This all makes perfect sense if truth is linked to a reality beyond the statement itself.

[2] Even in the case of *self-evident* statements, it's plausible that such statements are known by rational insight into a reality (abstract or conceptual) that goes beyond the statements themselves – so that knowing the intrinsic properties of the statement doesn't suffice for knowing the truth of the statement.

Challenges to correspondence

Although the correspondence theory continues to be the most popular theory of truth among philosophers,[3] there are some serious criticisms of the theory that lead many contemporary truth-theorists to prefer a deflationary alternative. In this section, I will mention three of the major challenges. (I will develop these challenges in detail in Chapter 2.)

Challenge 1: The Problem of Negative Facts (or "Funny Facts")

The correspondence theorist says that every true statement (or proposition or belief) corresponds to some portion of reality. But consider the statement that there are no unicorns. The statement "there are no unicorns" says there are *no* unicorns. So if it is true, then the reality it is about – that is, unicorns – is *absent*. What reality, then, could be the correspondent for "there are no unicorns"? One traditional answer is that "there are no unicorns" corresponds to *reality as a whole* (which lacks unicorns). But what happens if a planet of unicorns is added to our reality? Clearly, "there are no unicorns," which is now false, would stop corresponding to the sub-portion that *was* our reality. Yet how can that be if the sub-portion is intrinsically unchanged and *still* lacks unicorns?

There are other challenging cases, too, such as counterfactual propositions, logical and mathematical truths, and truths about the past.[4] Correspondence theorists must overcome these challenges if they are to defend a robust correspondence theory of truth.

Challenge 2: The Problem of Matching

How exactly shall we characterize the correspondence link between truth and reality? Consider that the true statement and the reality to which it supposedly corresponds are starkly different. In what sense, then, can statements be said to *correspond to* parts of reality so

[3] According to *PhilPapers Surveys* (2009), 50.8% of philosophers surveyed favor the correspondence theory.
[4] See especially Merricks 2007, pp. 59–63.

different from themselves? How is it that a statement made of (say) ink bits could *correspond to* a portion of reality that contains (say) Tibbles and his mat? We could answer these questions if we had a way to *analyze* the correspondence relation in terms of features of its relata. The problem, however, is that previous attempts to analyze correspondence leave crucial terms undefined. A number of contemporary correspondence theorists, such as Fumerton (2002) and Englebretsen (2006), treat the term "correspondence" as an unanalyzed primitive. But the lack of analysis may inspire worries.

Challenge 3: The Slingshot Argument

One of the most technical (and least understood) objections to the correspondence theory is the Slingshot Argument. The argument purports to show that there can be only *one* portion of reality (or fact) to which true propositions may correspond. This conclusion causes trouble for correspondence theorists (and fact theorists more generally) because correspondence theorists generally think that different true propositions can correspond to *different* portions of reality. For example, "Tibbles is on his mat" should correspond to something different than "the Earth revolves around the Sun." They are very different propositions, after all. Yet the Slingshot Argument is built from premises that are generally attractive to correspondence theorists, such as that (i) strictly logically equivalent propositions correspond to the same basic reality, and that (ii) true propositions that are about the very same things correspond to the same basic reality. I will show how to deduce the troublesome conclusion in Section 2.5. And, in Chapter 7, I will develop an especially potent, restricted version of the argument. The restricted version poses a unique challenge to the correspondence theory.

Roadmap

The primary task of this book is to better understand the connection between truth and reality. In the course of the book, I will investigate the correspondence theory's metaphysical building blocks, including *propositions* and *facts*. A substantial part of my project will be to

develop precise accounts of each of these items using terms that are ultimately definable in basic, commonsense terms. These analyses, I'll argue, enable new answers to the toughest objections to the correspondence theory. They also constitute a metaphysical framework for understanding truth and its relation to reality.

1 The correspondence theory and its rivals

Then that speech which says things as they are is true . . .

– Plato[1]

What does truth have to do with reality? How do they relate? The *correspondence* theory labels the relation "correspondence." But what is correspondence? That question guides the central inquiry of this book.

In this chapter, I will describe the cluster of views associated with the correspondence theory and compare them with other theories of truth. I will begin by articulating the basic components of a correspondence theory. Then I will spell out several versions of the correspondence theory, ranging from simple to complex. Next, I will discuss how the correspondence theory relates to various competing theories of truth. The end goal of this chapter is to clarify what is at stake in giving a correspondence theory of truth.

1.1 Basic components

The correspondence theory is motivated by the idea that truth is connected in some way to some reality. This connection is thought to consist of a relationship between true things – such as thoughts, beliefs, statements – and the reality those true things describe.[2] So, for example, if it is *true* that the cat is on the mat, then the proposition that the cat is on the mat accurately describes a certain cat and its spatial relationship to a certain mat. On this view, to be true is to accurately describe – match, picture, depict, express, conform to, agree with, or

[1] Plato 1921a, p. 385a.

[2] Correspondence has sometimes been applied to what might be considered *parts* of propositions, such as names (see Plato 1921a, p. 385a–c) or ideas (Spinoza 1883, Axiom vi). I will follow the contemporary discussion, which focuses on the truth of complete propositions (thoughts, beliefs, statements, etc.).

correspond to – the real world or parts of it. This idea that truths are linked in some way to reality is the kernel that gives rise to the various articulations and versions of the correspondence theory.[3]

How do correspondence theorists understand the link between truth and reality? To answer that, we must consider the items involved: true things, reality, and the relation between them. We will do that next.

1.1.1 True things

Where there is truth, there are true things. True things are the primary bearers or exemplifiers of truth: they are the things that are true. In addition to truths, we may recognize falsehoods: things that are false. In the course of this book, I will refer to true and false things as *propositions*. So, by "proposition" I mean a (primary) bearer of a truth-value.[4] I do not make any assumptions at the outset about the nature of propositions: they might be sentence tokens, brain states, thought types, or whatever.

My only starting assumption about propositions is that there are some. That is to say, there are such things as true things, whatever they might be. The inquiry into the nature of truth does not get off the ground if there is nothing that is true. I wish to understand the difference between true propositions and false ones, and it seems I could not even begin to analyze that difference if I were never acquainted with any true propositions. Of course, truth theorists differ widely in their understanding of true propositions. But the inquiry into truth seems to at least presuppose that there are such things. Therefore, I will be assuming for the sake of inquiry that true things are among the real things.[5]

[3] Contemporary defenders of the correspondence theory include, for example: David 1994; Fumerton 2002; Newman 2002; Vision 2004; Englebretsen 2006. David (2009) identifies the following endorsements of the correspondence throughout history: Plato 1921a, 385a; Aristotle 1989, 1011b; Descartes 1639, 597; Spinoza 1883, Axiom vi; Locke 1836, IV.vi.16; Leibniz 1996, IV.v; Hume 1896, 3.1.1; Kant 1787, B82. See also: Moore 1953, pp. 276–7; Russell 1912, p. 128.

[4] If there are truth-values other than "true" and "false," bearers of them also count as propositions.

[5] Or at least, I assume that there are things arranged truth-wise (cf. Merricks 2003).

The correspondence theory does not itself say what true things (propositions) are. Some philosophers suggest that true things are sentence tokens or classes of sentence tokens;[6] others propose they are mental states or things that depend upon mental states;[7] still others think they are abstract things of some sort.[8] My own view, which I will motivate in Chapter 4, is that propositions are complexes of properties (or concepts). Although one's view of propositions affects one's view of correspondence, the correspondence theory does not itself hang on any particular account of propositions. The options are wide open.

Since I will be talking a lot about propositions in this book, I will often abbreviate "the proposition that . . . " as "<. . . >." So, for example, "<snow is white>" abbreviates "the proposition that snow is white." Again, I leave it open at the outset what sort of things propositions are.

1.1.2 Reality

True propositions correspond to *reality*. What is this reality? According to tradition, the reality to which true propositions correspond consists of *facts*. I will use the term "fact," then, to designate the sort of things – whatever they might be – that true propositions correspond to, if they correspond to anything. The term "fact" may apply to a state of affairs, a trope, an event, or anything else that acts as an object of correspondence.

Correspondence theorists are not necessarily committed to any particular theory about the nature of the objects of correspondence. Such things don't even have to exist independently of minds or language. Admittedly, the correspondence theory is often associated with *metaphysical realism* – the view that the facts of reality are the way they are independently from how we, humans, take reality to be. But as I shall explain in Section 1.3, the core correspondence theory makes no claim about the nature of reality other than that reality is the sort of

[6] See, for example, Tarski 1944, p. 342, n. 5.

[7] David Armstrong (1997, pp. 131, 188) expresses this view. More recently, Armstrong (2004, pp. 15–16) favors the view that propositions are properties of (concrete) intentional objects (such as beliefs or statements), where uninstantiated propositions are "deflated." See also Newman 2002, p. 123.

[8] Cf. Dowden and Swartz 2004. Swartz confirmed to me via email (March 2008) that he accepts the correspondence theory and is a Platonist with respect to truth-value bearers.

thing that propositions can correspond to. So, as far as the correspondence theory is concerned, reality could be entirely mind-dependent. In that case, true propositions would correspond to elements within or dependent upon a mind. That isn't ruled out.

Although the correspondence theory does not specify any particular theory of facts, it would certainly help to have an account of them. In the next chapter, we will explore objections that attack facts. Adequate responses to these objections inspire a deeper understanding of the nature of facts. Moreover, *unanalyzed* facts are difficult to distinguish from true propositions. Consider the fact that Tibbles is on the mat. How is that fact different from the true proposition that Tibbles is on the mat? If facts are supposed to be distinct from true propositions, as correspondence theorists typically think,[9] then how shall we account for this difference? Without an account of facts, one might be skeptical that there are facts *in addition to* true propositions. Maybe W. V. Quine was right when he called facts a "factitious fiction."[10] To address these concerns, I will pursue an account of the nature of facts in Chapter 3.

I should point out that, strictly speaking, correspondence theorists may go without facts. They may suppose, instead, that a true proposition corresponds to the particular *things* it describes. So, for example, <Tibbles is on the mat> describes a particular cat and a particular mat. The idea, then, is that <Tibbles is on the mat> is true if and only if it accurately describes (corresponds to) both the cat and the mat together. No fact "over and above" those particular things is strictly required for correspondence.

1.1.3 The link between true things and reality

So there are truths, and there is reality. Now how do they relate? The minimal correspondence theory by itself says just that they *do* relate; truth is linked to reality. One way to put this is that, wherever there is a true thing, there is a certain relation between that true thing and some portion of reality. (We will consider other ways to express this basic idea in Section 1.2.)

[9] But see Section 4.3, where I explain why a minimal correspondence theory is actually consistent with identifying facts with propositions.
[10] Quine 1987, p. 213.

Of course, correspondence theorists may wish to say something about the nature of the link between truth and reality. After all, a common criticism of the correspondence theory is that it fails to provide an adequate account of the correspondence relation. Consider also that the whole point of the correspondence theory is to tell us what truth is – to de-mystify the notion. So, if we have no idea what it is for a true thing to correspond to something, then we may worry that the correspondence theory merely replaces one mystery with another – it replaces the mysterious notion of *truth* with the mystery of *correspondence*.

Here is a catalogue of the representative accounts of correspondence that have been given. (We will examine these and others in more detail in Chapter 5.) One strategy is to analyze correspondence as an *isomorphism* between truths and facts. According to proponents of this strategy, correspondence consists in a structural correspondence between truths and the facts to which those truths correspond.[11] The basic idea is that truths and facts have parts (or constituents), and a true proposition corresponds to a fact in virtue of the proposition's parts standing in certain relations to the parts of the fact. Those who have adopted this approach typically analyze the relations between the parts in terms of semantic properties or intentional properties of our concepts.[12]

A second answer is to analyze correspondence in terms of more familiar notions *without* construing the relation as an isomorphism. Perhaps the most famous proponent of this approach is J. L. Austin, who analyzes the relation of correspondence in terms of the *reference* of our words.[13] A more recent proposal is that a proposition corresponds to an obtaining state of affairs.[14] Other options are possible, too.[15]

Third, the term "correspondence" might be primitive and undefinable. According to G. E. Moore (1953, pp. 276–7), "correspondence" is a name we may give to a familiar relation of which we have all been acquainted when entertaining seemingly true propositions.

[11] See Kirkham 1995, pp. 119–20.
[12] See, for example, Russell 1912; Wittgenstein 1961; Newman 2002; Fumerton 2002.
[13] Austin 1950, pp. 154–5.
[14] Kirkham 1995, p. 132; see also Chisholm 1966, p. 138; David 2009.
[15] See, for example, Englebretsen 2006, pp. 123–4.