Truth and Identity

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According to a classical *correspondence theory* of truth, a proposition is true iff it corresponds to a fact. The approach has its competitors. One of them, the *identity theory* of truth, pushes for a surprising simplification. It says that true propositions do not correspond to facts, they *are* facts. Some find this view too bizarre to be taken seriously. Some are attracted to it because they worry that the correspondence theory opens a gap between our thoughts and reality--a gap that, once opened, will turn out to be unbridgeable, thus making it impossible for our thoughts to come into contact with reality and for us to attain knowledge. They think the identity theory will avoid these nasty consequences because it does not open *the gap* to begin with. The no-gap theme will play a role in the background of the present paper. It will surface at times. But the paper is more concerned with a different theme, the collapse-charge. Opponents of the correspondence theory sometimes charge that the theory is unstable, that it must collapse into the identity theory, because there is not enough play between true propositions and facts to leave room for a genuine relation to hold between them. Those who regard the identity theory as absurd might see this a *reductio* of the correspondence theory. Others might see it as an argument for the identity theory. After some exploration of the identity theory, I will present one form of the collapse-charge, then I will discuss what a correspondence theorist has to offer by way of a response.

I

At the beginning of the 20th century, G. E. Moore contributed an article on truth to Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*. In this article, he claimed that

there is no room between truth and reality for any relation other than identity:

> It is commonly supposed that the truth of a proposition consists in some relation which it bears to reality; and falsehood in the absence of this relation. The relation in question is generally called a 'correspondence' or 'agreement', and it seems to be generally conceived as one of partial similarity; but it is to be noted…that it is essential to the theory that a truth should differ in some specific way from the reality, in relation to which its truth is to consist...It is the impossibility of finding any such difference between a truth and the reality to which it is supposed to correspond which refutes the theory…Once it is definitely recognized that the proposition is to denote, not a belief or form of words, but an object of belief, it seems plain that a truth differs in no respect from the reality with which it was supposed merely to correspond…[1]

Moore does not mention facts, he talks about reality instead. However, since facts are the (bits of) reality that true propositions are typically supposed to correspond to (by correspondence theorists), I take the central claim of the identity theory to be that true propositions are (identical with) facts. But this claim offers only a necessary condition for a proposition's being true. Other theories of truth typically provide sufficient conditions as well. Since the identity theory seems intended as an alternative, or rather a competitor, to other truth theories (especially to the

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[1] Moore 1901-02, 20-21. The real father of the identity theory may have been Hegel (1830, §213): "Truth in the deeper sense consists in the identity between objectivity and the notion." Compare also: Bradley 1893, 150-52, and 1907, 110-13; Moore 1899, 4-5; Russell 1904, 74-6; Meinong 1910, chap. 3; Frege 1918, 74, 60-61; Ducasse 1940; and Chisholm 1976, chap. 4. For more recent discussions, see: Candlish 1989, which introduces the label "identity theory"; Baldwin 1991; McDowell 1994, 27; and Hornsby 1997.

correspondence theory), we should strengthen it into an equivalence claim, so that it is formally on a par with its peers. We could try the following as a first-shot formulation:

(IT*)   For every *x*, *x* is a true proposition iff *x* is a fact.

Advocates of the identity theory often express their view in terms of the weaker claim that covers only the left-to-right direction of (IT*).[2] This is convenient because the weaker claim is easier to put into ordinary words and is already strong enough to bring out the intended contrast with the correspondence theory.

(IT*) does not actually mention the concept of *identity*. Why, then, refer to it as the identity theory? One could of course expand its right-hand side so that it says '*x* is identical with a fact'. But then again, one could expand the right-hand side of the correspondence theory so that it says '*x* is identical with something that corresponds to a fact'--and this would not make us think that the correspondence theory is really an identity theory. The point of referring to the identity theory as the identity theory is not so much to emphasize the *presence* of the concept of identity, which can be inserted into every predication anyway, it is rather to emphasize the *absence* of the concept of correspondence. This absence marks the contrast with the correspondence theory. The contrast, incidentally, can be described in two ways. If one holds that the meaning of 'corresponds' already entails the non-identity of the corresponding items, then the identity theory is incompatible with the claim that a proposition is true iff it corresponds to a fact. If, on the other hand, one holds that the meaning of 'corresponds' does not by itself entail the non-identity of the corresponding items, then the identity theory is not incompatible with the claim that a

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[2] Compare, for instance, Hornsby (1997, 2): "The identity theory is encapsulated in the statement that true thinkables are the same as facts."

proposition is true iff it corresponds to a fact. There is still disagreement though, for the identity theory implies that identity is the only correspondence relation that can fill the bill, which goes very much against what the correspondence theorist wanted to say. The latter way of describing the contrast fits better with the charge that correspondence must collapse into identity. The former way is suggested by Moore in the passage quoted above. As far as I can see, it does not matter much which way we choose.

Our formulation of the identity theory is not quite satisfying: it does not cover *falsehood*. At first, one might think that falsehood is handled easily by simply negating the right-hand side of (IT*): For every x, x is a false proposition iff x is not a fact. But No—combined with (IT*), this would entail, absurdly, that everything there is is a proposition. Some might be tempted to "go Meinongian" and to say that a false proposition is identical with a fact that does *not exist* (and a true one is identical with a fact that does exist). But there are no facts that do not exist. To handle falsehood, the identity theorist has to say that a proposition is false iff it is identical, not with any old thing that is not a fact, but with a *proposition* that is not a fact. This avoids the unwelcome consequence that anything there is is a proposition. It also suggests that we should make a parallel adjustment in the clause for truth, so that the complete formulation now says: For every x, x is a true proposition iff x is a proposition that is a fact, and x is a false proposition iff x is a proposition that is not a fact; or equivalently

(IT)   For every proposition x, x is true iff x is a fact;
        For every proposition x, x is false iff x is not a fact.

One might wonder whether (IT) is properly called a 'theory'. Isn't this a rather grand-sounding label for what is little more than a one-liner? It is, but the label

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comes in handy, and mini-theories of this sort are already familiar to philosophers. Moreover, one can think of (IT) as a core-theory that can be enriched in various ways by saying more about propositions and facts. One may also wonder whether (IT) is intended as a definition, or as an axiom, or as a principle governing truth and falsehood for propositions. My inclination is to set such issues aside: if the correspondence theory collapses into (IT), then the correspondence theory is in trouble--never mind whether (IT) is intended as a definition, or an axiom, or a principle, or whatever. Some will subscribe to the clauses under (IT) merely because they use 'fact' as a handy label for true propositions. Should they count as (genuine) advocates of the identity theory? I think they are better regarded as advocating an identity theory of *facts* rather than truth; for they want to emphasize that facts are true propositions, whereas the identity theorist wants to emphasize that true propositions are facts. Or better, they hold that calling something a 'fact' amounts to saying that it is a true proposition, whereas the identity theorist holds (if her view is to be put into meta-linguistic terms at all) that calling a proposition 'true' amounts to saying that it is a fact. The identity theory is supposed to be a novel theory about truth, not a novel theory about facts and not a stipulation concerning the usage of the term 'fact'. Moore seems to express a similar sentiment in the passage quoted earlier. His words suggest that the identity theorist starts with some rough antecedent fix on the reality to which a truth is *supposed* to correspond (by the correspondence theorist) and that she then goes on to claim that a truth does not differ from this very reality to which it was antecedently supposed merely to correspond.[3]

Although it is not really my intention to defend the identity theory, I want to discuss some more worries and/or objections one might have. This should help bring

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[3] Thanks to Andrew Cortens for reminding me of the view that subscribes to the clauses under (IT) because it wants to advocate an identity theory of facts. Note that Frege sounds more like an identity theorist about facts rather than an identity theorist about truth: "'Facts, facts, facts' cries the scientist if he wants to bring home the necessity of a firm foundation for science. What is a fact? A fact is a

the theory into sharper focus. Moreover, the question whether the theory is tenable is interestingly related to the collapse-theme: if it is tenable, and correspondence collapses into identity, then that is not good for the correspondence theorist; if it is untenable, and correspondence collapses into identity, then that is even worse for the correspondence theorist.

First a rather general worry concerning propositions. The identity theory, as I understand it here, takes propositions seriously. It has no qualms quantifying objectually over propositions; and it is not one of those views that help themselves to proposition-talk while maintaining that they do not incur any ontological commitments to propositions. The worry is that propositions are problematic: their existence is contentious; they are said to be creatures of darkness; their identity conditions are said to be obscure; and so on. Indeed, if there are no propositions then the identity theory, as I understand it, is a theory without a subject matter; however, it still would not be false, for (IT) does not affirm the existence of propositions. The same, by the way, goes for the correspondence theory of truth for propositions, which is the brand of correspondence theory that is primarily relevant to our discussion.[4] But what are propositions? Well, the identity theory, as I understand it, is committed to the traditional propositional analysis of belief, *the PA* for short. The PA characterizes propositions. It does not actually tell us what propositions are; at least, it does not tell us what proposition are made of. Rather, it characterizes propositions in terms of the role they are supposed to play. The characterization is fairly familiar, so I will be brief.

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thought that is true" (Frege 1918, 74).

[4] I should note that it is misleading to speak of *the* correspondence theory. There is no such thing. Instead, there are various groups of such theories for different categories of truthbearers: e.g., sentences, utterances, statements, beliefs, thoughts, propositions. When I talk of *the* correspondence theory, I should be taken to mean one that applies to propositions. The danger of collapse exists first and foremost for this brand of correspondence theory because the identity theory is a theory of truth for proposition.

The PA: (i) If you believe that flies are insects, then w*hat you believe* is the proposition *that flies are insects*. Your belief state is a relational state; it involves a relation to a proposition. The proposition is the *object* of the belief relation and the *content* of the belief state: propositions are "content-objects". Moreover, propositions can be shared. If you and I both believe that flies are insects, then we believe the same proposition. In general, the same proposition can be believed by the same person at different times and by different persons at the same time. The PA extends to many other states and acts; here I will usually talk about beliefs and thoughts. (ii) Propositions are primary bearers of truth and falsehood. That is, truth and falsehood as applied to beliefs (thoughts, statements, etc.) are parasitic on truth and falsehood as applied to propositions: a true belief is a belief that has a true proposition as its content; a false belief is a belief that has a false proposition as its content. This is the point where theories of truth for propositions connect with larger issues concerning belief and thought. Propositions are also bearers of broadly logical properties and relations, for these are all tied up with truth and falsehood. (iii) The 'that'-clause in 'John believes *that flies are insects*' refers to the proposition expressed by its embedded sentence. It is a special "perspicuous" name of the proposition, for it allows us to specify the proposition referred to while referring to it. Unlike a proper name, or a label, or a description (like 'Frege's favorite proposition'), the 'that'-clause tells us which proposition it is that is being referred to. 'That'-clauses are often abbreviated schematically, as in 'John believes that p', where the dummy-letter 'p' can be replaced by any arbitrary declarative sentence that makes sense.

These are some of the salient features by which the PA characterizes propositions in terms of their role. One can then have different views about the nature of propositions, i.e., about what sort of thing, ontologically speaking, can play that role (and one can have the view that nothing can play the role, which would take us back to the worry that there might not be any propositions). Taken by itself, (IT)

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does not imply much about the nature of propositions; and the question how the PA constrains possible views about their nature is a notoriously tricky one. Similarly, taken by itself, (IT) does not imply much about the identity conditions for propositions; and the question how the PA constrains possible views about their identity conditions is again a notoriously tricky one. Of course, one would hope that a more fully worked out version of the identity theory will have something to say on these subjects. (All this holds equally for the correspondence theory.) However, even our rather undeveloped identity theory does imply a little bit about identity conditions. For example, one might wonder whether, according to (IT), the true proposition that Rome is south of Vienna might be identical with the fact that the capital of Austria is north of the capital of Italy (cf. Cartwright 1987, 74). (IT) does at least give a conditional answer. It says that the proposition is identical with that fact, only if that fact is identical with the fact that Rome is south of Vienna; that much, at least, follows from (IT). By implication (IT) also offers some conditionals about identity conditions for propositions: x and y are the same/different propositions if and only if x and y are the same/different facts.

Objection. Assume the proposition that p is contingently true. The proposition exists whether it be true or false. But the *fact* that p would not have existed, if the proposition had been false. Hence, the proposition that p is not identical with the fact that p--*reductio*. This might seem devastating at first. But it assumes that 'the fact that p' functions like a *rigid designator*. The identity theorist will and must respond that, on the contrary, 'the fact that p' is *not* rigid, i.e., it refers to the proposition that p only in those worlds in which the proposition is true. According to the identity theorist, to say of a contingently true proposition that it is identical with a fact is to say that the proposition is (necessarily) identical with something, namely itself, that happens to be a fact--it is a bit like saying that Aristotle

is identical with the author of the *Metaphysics*.[5] I remark in passing that most advocates of the PA will hold that expressions of the form 'the proposition that p' *are* rigid (although I do not remember anyone mentioning this explicitly). They will think that there is no reading under which "the proposition that p might have failed to be the proposition that p" comes out true. This is because a 'that'-clause is usually supposed to specify the essential nature of the proposition it refers to.[6]

Objection. The identity theory is committed to the claim that facts are true, which is absurd. The identity theorist will have to take this in stride. She will have to say that "facts are true" is literally true; it merely sounds odd because it amounts to the redundant claim that true propositions are true.

The identity theory is committed to the principle of *bivalence* for propositions (every proposition is either true or false). But bivalence is problematic. On the face of it, it seems to fail for vague propositions (maybe also for propositions that are referentially indeterminate and for propositions that suffer from complete reference failure). Bivalence is a tricky issue. I can do little more here than to register that its failure will create serious difficulties for the identity theory (but also for various other theories of truth, including some correspondence theories). It is sometimes asserted, flatly, that all propositions are either true or false--the idea being that, while bivalence does fail for declarative sentences, it never fails for propositions. Note that this move does not sit at all well with the PA. For it seems that we do have, say, vague beliefs and that we typically utter our vague sentences to

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[5] The objection is raised by Moore (1953, 308) and repeated by Kit Fine (1982, 46-7). The response is due to Richard Cartwright, see his 1987, 76-8.

[6] What might a view look like on which 'the proposition that p' is not rigid? Well, someone might hold, for instance, the following: the that-clause in 'S believes that p' refers to a brain sentence that has the content that p, and brain sentences do not have their contents essentially. This would allow him to say that the proposition that p (i.e., the brain sentence with the content that p) might have failed to be the proposition that p (i.e., might have failed to have the content that p). Most advocates of the PA will think that this view uses 'proposition' very oddly and that the term would have been used more appropriately to refer to the content that p rather than to the brain sentence that happens to have the

express our vague beliefs. Since the PA introduces propositions as possible contents of our beliefs and thoughts, it suggests that there are vague propositions after all. There may be arguments to the effect that, contrary to appearances, bivalence never fails (neither for propositions nor for meaningful declaratives); but such arguments have to go far beyond mere assertion. An identity theorist might want to get around the problem by simply restricting (IT) to those propositions that are bivalent. But this is not satisfying either. Consider the first clause of (IT); it is equivalent to: For every *x*, *x* is a true proposition iff *x* is a proposition that is a fact. If we replace 'proposition' with 'proposition that is either true or false', the result will be explicitly circular.

I want to close this section with some remarks about the no-gap *motif* that is so close to the heart of some identity theorists. A friend of facts will hold with Wittgenstein (1921) that *the world* is the totality of facts. Of course, facts have further constituents, viz., things and properties and relations; but, in the first instance, the world divides into facts. Now, combined with the PA, the identity theory tells us that, when you think what is true, then what you think, the content of your thought, *is* a fact--not some stand-in or representative of a fact, but a part of the world itself. So, when you think what is false but might have been true, then what you think is not a fact, but it may well have been a fact. False thoughts, according to the PA, have the same kind of content as true thoughts (namely, propositions). So, if the contents of true thoughts are facts, then the contents of false thoughts must be made from the same kind of worldly stuff that facts are made of; they must be just like facts, only *not* facts--unfacts. It is helpful to talk of *states of affairs* in this context. Unlike facts, states of affairs are "bipolar"; i.e., they can obtain or fail to obtain. The ones that obtain are facts. The ones that fail to obtain still exist of course (pace Meinong); they just are not facts. We could reformulate the identity theory as suggested by Chisholm (1976, chap. 4): true propositions are states of affairs that obtain (facts); and false

content that p.

propositions are states of affairs that do not obtain (unfacts). Propositions are states of affairs--it is just that, when we think of them as contents of beliefs and thoughts, we tend to call them 'propositions', whereas when we think of them as facts or unfacts, then we tend to call them 'states of affairs'.[7]

The upshot of this is that we have to distinguish between *the world*, i.e., the totality of facts, and *the big-wide world*, i.e., the totality of states of affairs. (The term 'reality' could be used to refer to either one: to the world, on the grounds that reality should be everything that occurs or obtains; or to the big-wide world, on the grounds that reality should be everything there is.) One may now ask: What is the point of the no-gap *motif*? And the answer to this question is not easy to discern. Although there is no gap between thought in general and the big-wide world (states of affairs), and no-gap between true thought in particular and the world (facts), there is ample space for talk about a gap between false thought and the world. Take the big-wide world and divide it into the world and the remainder: behold the gap. Unfortunately, many of our thoughts are on the wrong side of this gap, namely the ones whose contents are false propositions.[8] And what philosophical *Angst* might be assuaged by the two no-gap theses (no gap between thought in general and the big-wide world; no gap between true thought and the world)? It is hard to tell. Surely, they do not assuage the fear that, for all we know, lots and lots of our beliefs might be false.[9]

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[7] Terminology varies. Chisholm and many others, including myself, use 'state of affairs' to refer to bipolar entities for which non-obtaining, or non-occurring, does not coincide with non-existence. Wittgenstein (1921) and Armstrong (1997) use 'state of affairs' to refer to *facts* which are of course "unipolar"; so for their states of affairs non-obtaining does coincide with non-existence. (Actually, in the *Tractatus* things are a bit more confusing because there are indications that Wittgenstein had Meinongian inclinations at times, cf. 1921, 4.25.)

[8] McDowell says: "When one thinks truly, what one thinks *is* what is the case. So...there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world" (1994, 27). He does concede right away that thought can be "distanced from the world by being false." Still, the initial no-gap conclusion seems to rely on a fallacious inference from what holds only for *true* thought, as such, to thought as such. When one thinks falsely, what one thinks *is* what is *not* the case; so there is a gap between thought (false thought as such) and the world after all.

[9] Note also that the identity theory does not imply that it is somehow easy to attain knowledge. Say, S

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If the correspondence theory for propositions were to collapse into the identity theory, Would that be bad? Well, on the face of it, the identity theory does seem a bit bizarre. Combined with the PA, it evokes the picture of the mind stepping out of the head and into the world--the mind seems oddly externalized.

What the identity theory amounts to will depend very much on the underlying view of the nature of propositions and facts. Let us look at facts first. The facts, taken together, make up the world. Facts themselves are naturally thought of as composed of worldly objects, properties, and relations. But this must be qualified right away. Facts cannot be "composed" of their constituents in the same sense in which the world is composed of facts. The world is just the facts taken together; it is just the sum of facts. But a fact is more than its constituents taken together. John, Mary, and the relation of loving can enter into two facts at the same time: the fact that John loves Mary and the fact that Mary loves John. Consequently, each fact must be more than the sum of its constituents. Facts are complexes that are not reducible to their constituents: they enjoy a non-mereological mode of composition from objects, properties, and relations.

What about propositions? I will set aside Lewis's (1986) view that propositions are sets of possible worlds--given a natural view of facts, Lewis-propositions do not go with the identity theory, but they do not go well with the correspondence theory either.[10] Instead, let us think of propositions as having internal structure. Like facts, they will be composed in some non-mereological manner. But

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believes that p, and it is a fact that p. This does not even begin to suggest that S knows that p--to think otherwise would be to confuse knowledge with true belief.

[10] Given a natural view of facts, Lewis-propositions yield a *reductio* of the identity theory. A Lewis-proposition is a set of possible worlds. It is true at our world (i.e., true) iff our world (i.e., the world) is a member of the set. Since a fact is a part of our world, the identity theory would end up identifying a set with a part of one of its members.

what are their constituents? What are propositions made of?[11] Let us look at some options and see what emerges when we combine them with the identity theory. If propositions are ordinary sentences, then, on the identity theory, the world is a text. If propositions are sentences in the mind/brain, then, on the identity theory, the world is in our heads. If propositions are (sequences of) immaterial ideas à la Descartes, then, on the identity theory, the world is a modification of our souls. Each one of these options yields a quick *reductio* of the identity theory.[12] Actually, propositions as sentences in the mind/brain or as Cartesian ideas are not even options according to the PA. They are private and cannot be shared, but the PA requires that different persons can believe one and the same proposition. Malebranche had an answer to this "privacy problem". The contents of our thoughts, he held, are God's thoughts. Propositions are divine ideas, and we think all things in God. Combine the identity theory with this and you get the view that the world is made of divine ideas, namely the ones He assents to (as opposed to the ones He merely considers which would comprise the big-wide world). Malebranche, I take it, would have rejected this as pantheistic heresy. The positions of Hegel and Bradley, however, appear to be of this general sort. They advocated an identity theory but replaced God with *the Absolute*: propositions are the ideas of the Absolute and, since truth is identical with fact, the world is made of the Absolute. (But this neglects the existence of falsehoods. The Absolute ought to be the big-wide world. The world had better be made of something like "the positive aspect" of the Absolute--I am unable to tell how the absolute idealists wanted to handle falsehood).

Frege (1892) and Moore (1899) addressed the privacy problem in a slightly different manner. They held that propositions are composed of *concepts*--where a

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[11] Remember that the PA does not tell us anything about the inner makeup of propositions. It only provides us with relational properties of propositions: they, or at least very many of them, must be possible contents of belief states.

[12] If propositions are "abstractions" from mental states, à la conceptualism, then the identity theory

concept is construed as an objective way of conceiving of things and properties.[13] Frege-Moore concepts are rather similar to *types* of Cartesian ideas: different persons can have different token ideas of the same type. Since idea-types, or concepts, are neither mental nor physical, are not easily localized in space or in time, and exist independently of individual thinkers, concept-propositions are often called 'abstract'. With a view like this, one can hardly object to the identity theory on the grounds that it makes the contents of our thoughts *external* to our heads. Concept-propositions (like, incidentally, Descartes's idea-propositions and Malebranche's divine-idea-propositions) are surely not *in* our heads. Still, if the identity theory is combined with this view, the result is a peculiar conception of facts and the world. Facts will be composed of objective concepts of objects and properties rather than being composed of the objects and properties themselves. There will be as many facts surrounding an object (property) as there are different ways of conceiving of the object (property). Concept-propositions à la Frege and Moore are individuated along the lines drawn by our patterns of thinking: different ways of thinking, different propositions. Combined with the identity theory, it follows that there cannot be different ways of thinking of the same scene, different perspectives, that are both accurate: different accurate perspectives are already different scenes. Intuitively, this is a far too mind-infected way of individuating facts, playing into the hands of the common complaint that philosophers tend to read the features of thought and language back into the world.

Unlike the Frege-Moore view, a Kripke-Putnam-Kaplan inspired view makes thought contents dependent on the objects and properties in the thinker's spatio-temporal environment.[14] On this view--let us call it "strong externalism" (though it isn't entirely clear how it is stronger than Frege-Moore externalism)--propositions

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says, absurdly, that the world is an abstraction from the mind.

[13] Frege would have talked of "modes of presentation" or of the "senses of words" instead; he used 'concept' ('Begriff') in a different and somewhat strange way.

[14] Cf. Kripke 1972; Putnam 1975; and Kaplan 1976.

can be composed of objects and properties themselves, rather than concepts of objects and properties. Strong externalism seems made to order for the identity theory of truth. Strongly external propositions that are true must be facts (states of affairs that obtain); and strongly external propositions that are false must be states of affairs that do not obtain. The idea that Mount Everest with all its snow-fields, as well as Aristotle, fleas, avocados, and the like, are in some sense constituents of the contents of our thoughts may initially appear bizarre--still, there it is, vindicated by powerful arguments in the theory of content. But not so fast. Externalist arguments do not fully vindicate the identity theory, not by a long shot. Colin McGinn has reminded us that the arguments supporting strong externalism apply only to those propositional constituents that correspond to proper names, natural-kind terms, and indexicals. They do not work for artifact-concepts and other functional concepts; nor do they work for phenomenological and qualitative concepts. They do not even work for *complex* concepts of natural kinds.[15] In short, the arguments for strong externalism work only for some types of contents. They provide only a very partial vindication of the identity theory which says, after all, that *every* true proposition is a fact (and every false proposition is made of worldly fact-stuff). The limited reach of externalist arguments leaves two options in the theory of content. (i) Hold that strong externalism applies to contents of all types, even though for most types it is not supported by externalist arguments. (ii) Hold that strong externalism applies only as far as externalist arguments reach; where they do not reach, contents ought to be individuated in the traditional manner, i.e., along the lines of Frege-Moore concept-propositions. The first option goes well with the identity theory, but it requires advocating a surprising view about content that remains largely unsupported. The

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[15] If they have Hydrogen and Oxygen on Twin-Earth, and if they can do some rudimentary mental chemistry, then they can *make* thoughts about water even before they make water; see McGinn's discussion of externalism in his 1989, chap. 1, from which I have borrowed the term 'strong externalism'.

second, and by my lights more plausible option offers a mixed view of content, but for many types of contents it does not go well with the identity theory.[16]

It looks like the identity theory will have unpalatable consequences no matter what theory of content is in play. The correspondence theory had better not collapse into the identity theory. But what is the nature of the threat anyway? I think, it is this.

The identity theory emerges quite naturally from the way in which truth-talk and fact-talk interact with the use of 'that'-clauses--it emerges quite naturally, that is, provided one has embraced the PA. According to the PA, 'that'-clauses occupy *referential position* (subject position) even in contexts where surface grammar does not make this intuitively obvious, viz.: 'S believes that p' and 'it is true that p'. The PA has it that we should take surface grammar to be misleading here, for we want to capture valid inferences involving such contexts by quantifying into 'that'-clause positions: "She believes that p; It is true that p; therefore: She believes something that is true, i.e., for some x, she believes x and x is true"--where the objectual variable 'x' ranges over propositions. So the form 'it is true that p' gets recast into subject-predicate form, 'x is true', which allows quantifying over propositions. Once this treatment of 'that'-clauses is in place, there is a smooth transition from the use of 'that'-clauses in truth-and-fact-talk to the identity theory:

(a)   it is true that p iff it is a fact that p,

(b)   that p is true iff that p is a fact,

(c) x is true iff x is a fact,

(IT)   for every proposition x, x is true iff x is a fact.

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[16] Thanks to Delia Graff for pointing out that there are indeed two options. Maybe I should be less dismissive of the first one. But note that even Twin-Earth arguments seem to presuppose that qualitative thoughts are individuated along traditional lines. The Earthling's and Twin-Earthling's qualitative thoughts are the same because they conceive of (experience) water/XYZ in the same way; their qualitative thoughts would have been different if they had conceived of (experienced) water/XYZ in different ways.

I do not want to maintain that one will find this derivation actually laid out somewhere. But I do want to maintain that it makes explicit the natural progression of thought that underlies the collapse-charge and leads to the identity theory of truth.[17]

Our "derivation" of the identity theory assumes that the 'that'-clauses in (b) stably refer to propositions. More precisely, the step from (b) to (c) assumes that in each substitution instance of schema (b) both 'that'-clauses refer to the same thing. The step from (c) to (IT) assumes that the thing in question is a proposition. The assumption is a natural one to make for subscribers to the PA--they may even find themselves embracing the more general principle that *all* 'that'-clauses refer to propositions (provided their embedded sentences make sense). However, it seems the correspondence theorist has to reject the stability assumption if she is to avoid seeing her theory collapse into the identity theory; she ought to argue that, in substitution instances of (b), the 'that'-clauses shift reference from propositions to facts.

To see how this might go, compare expressions of the form 'the proposition that p' and 'the fact that p' with expressions like 'the planet Jupiter' and 'the god Jupiter' (and 'the man Descartes' and 'the town Descartes', etc.). The latter are definite descriptions, but they are not quite like ordinary definite descriptions. The ordinary description 'the planet beyond Jupiter' refers to a thing *other* than Jupiter by relating it to what the embedded name 'Jupiter' refers to. But 'the planet Jupiter' refers to the *very same* thing as the embedded name 'Jupiter' refers to (in the embedding context). The embedded name is referentially ambiguous and the description serves to disambiguate it: 'the planet...' and 'the god...' tell us how to take the ambiguous name 'Jupiter'. Let us call such descriptions *disambiguating*

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[17] Those who take the identity theory to be absurd might use this progression of thought in the course of a *reductio* of the correspondence theory.

descriptions. They have a second interesting feature. Unlike ordinary descriptions, they can be turned into subject-predicate sentences without much ado. Simply take the embedded name and use it as the subject: 'the planet Jupiter' turns directly into 'Jupiter is a planet', in which the predicate serves to disambiguate the name retroactively. Now, expression of the form 'the proposition that p' and 'the fact that p' can be understood as disambiguating descriptions of this sort.[18] The 'that'-clause, 'that p', is ambiguous; it refers to one type of thing when preceded by 'the proposition', namely to a proposition, and to another type of thing when preceded by 'the fact', namely to a fact. 'The proposition that p' refers to the proposition expressed by the sentence embedded in the 'that'-clause. 'The fact that p' refers to whatever fact is the truthmaker for the proposition expressed by the sentence embedded in the 'that'-clause. Since 'the fact that p' is a disambiguating description, the embedded ambiguous 'that'-clause refers to the very same thing, if any, as the whole description, namely to the fact that p. Remember that disambiguating descriptions can be turned into subject-predicate sentences in which the predicate has to do the disambiguating work retroactively. Our two descriptions are readily transformed into 'that p is a proposition' and 'that p is a fact', in which the 'that'-clauses refer to different things. This is the form in which they appear in schema (b). Since the 'that-clause in 'that p is a fact' refers to a fact iff its embedded sentence expresses a true proposition, 'that p is a fact' is equivalent to 'that p is a true proposition'. This takes care of schema (b).

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[18] But are they definite descriptions at all? 'The proposition that p is F' does not seem to dissolve neatly, in Russellian manner, into 'there is exactly one proposition *x* such that *x* is *a* proposition that p and *x* is F'. The paraphrase is odd because it's unclear what to do with '*x* is *a* proposition that p'; surely, we don't want it to read '*x* is *the* proposition that p'. Timothy Williams reminded me that we get a similar situation with 'the tallest spy is F', which seems to turn into 'there is exactly one *x* such that *x* is *a/the* tallest spy and *x* is F'. I think the comparison suggests the solution. In case of the tallest spy, one uses an analysis of tallness: 'there is exactly one spy *x* such that *x* is taller than every other spy and *x* is F'. So we could use the PA to help us with our case: 'there is exactly one proposition *x* such that for every *S*, *S* thinks that p iff *S* thinks *x*, and *x* is F'.

So the correspondence theorist can give an account of why and how 'that'-clauses can switch referents from propositions to facts. This blocks the derivation of the identity theory: the step from (b) to (c) fails because it relies on the mistaken assumption that the 'that'-clauses occurring in truth-and-fact-talk must have stable reference to propositions.

So far, this is primarily a defensive move. It would be nice if we had some idea of how the correspondence theorist might go on from here. She might subscribe to the *atomistic* program, first proposed by Wittgenstein (1921) and Russell (1918), and later modified and developed by David Armstrong (1997) and others. Let me try to give a very condensed sketch. *First*, uphold what Armstrong calls the *truthmaker principle*: for every truth there must be something in the world that makes it true, i.e., every true truthbearer must have a truthmaker.[19] *Second*, reject the tempting idea that correspondence is a one-one relation between truthbearers and truthmakers. Adopt a *sparse* theory of truthmakers instead. For example, a disjunctive proposition is true iff either one, or both, of its disjuncts are true; different disjunctive propositions can be made true by the same truthmaker: no need for disjunctive facts. Ideally, all molecular (logically complex) propositions should be handled in some such manner, so that there is no need for any facts but *atomic* facts (and aggregates of atomic facts). *Third*, reject the tempting idea that there is a one-one correspondence between predicative concepts and genuine universals. Adopt a *sparse* theory of universals instead. Most predicates we use express concepts rather than genuine universals. Genuine universals (properties and relations) are objective features of the world that ground the objective resemblances among particulars and explain their causal powers. What universals there are will have to be decided on the basis of total science. It is not to be decided by looking at what concepts there are: universals are

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[19] Cf. Armstrong 1997, chap. 8. In what follows I will often use Armstrong's terminology; however, where he talks of *states of affairs* I talk of *facts*--I use 'state of affairs' to refer to bipolar entities.

not concepts. *Fourth*, atomic facts, the truthmakers, are composed of fundamental particulars and genuine universals.[20] Working out the atomist program is non-trivial and concessions may have to be made along the way. In particular, negative and/or universal truths cause difficulties. Atomists may be forced to count some negative and/or universal facts among the truthmakers. In general, they will try to keep things as sparse as possible--see Armstrong (1997) for a recent defense of atomism.

An atomist can subscribe to the PA view about 'that'-clauses, but with a rider. 'That'-clauses are perspicuous names of propositions, *provided* they are used in believe, truth, and proposition contexts. When used in fact contexts, say, 'that p is a fact' and 'the fact that p', they are typically all but perspicuous. In such contexts, 'that'-clauses will often have messy reference, referring to whatever atomic facts make true the proposition that p. Only when the proposition that p is elementary will the 'that'-clause in 'the fact that p' have a nicely perspicuous reference to the atomic fact in question. In this case, 'that p' in 'the fact that p' will refer to the fact that p (remember that 'Jupiter' in 'the planet Jupiter' refers to Jupiter.)

If some types of contents are strongly externalist, then propositions may be a varied lot. One may have to distinguish between three different types: (i) Pure strongly-externalist propositions, composed entirely of particulars and genuine universals; e.g., the proposition that Fido is a dog, and maybe the proposition that there is water on Mars. (ii) Pure concept-propositions, composed entirely of Frege-Moore concepts; e.g., the proposition that beverages are usually kept in containers, the proposition that doorknobs are cheaper than carburetors, the proposition that the tallest spy is a university professor. (iii) Mixed propositions, e.g., the proposition that water is a beverage, the proposition that Aristotle is a famous philosopher. Now, assuming there really are thought contents that are pure cases of strongly externalist

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[20] Note that the fact corresponding to a proposition *about* a concept might contain that concept as its object-component, but only if concepts turn out to belong to the ultimate constituents of the world.

propositions, the atomistic correspondence theory must make a concession to the identity theory. After all, pure strongly-externalist propositions that are *true* must be facts (at least the ones that are taken to be elementary must be facts). So, in this case, correspondence must shrivel to identity, which is not a genuine relation (relational universal) according to a sparse theory of universals. Once more the correspondence theory turns out to be a somewhat messy affair. The relational concept *x corresponds to y* must be a generic concept that refers to (or is realized by?) a number of different setups. In some cases, namely when *x* is a pure and true externalist proposition, all it takes for *x* to correspond to a fact *y* is for *x* to exist, for in such cases *x* is identical with *y*. In other cases, namely when *x* is a pure and true concept-proposition, correspondence is a genuine relation between wholly distinct items. In yet other cases, namely when *x* is a true mixed proposition, correspondence is in part identity and in part a relation between distinct items; for, when *x* is a true mixed proposition, it shares at least one constituent with the fact that makes it true. As far as I can see, the "messiness" of correspondence does not provide ammunition for an objection. It does make life difficult for the correspondence theorist; but life is difficult.

There are two basic forms of correspondence-to-fact theories for propositions. Let *x* range over propositions:

(CF)   *x* is true iff *x* corresponds to a fact;

        x is false iff *x* does not correspond to any fact.

(CS)   *x* is true iff *x* corresponds to a state of affairs that obtains;

        x is false iff *x* corresponds to a state of affairs that does not obtain.

An advocate of (CS) will hold that a fact is just a state of affairs that obtains (and a state of affairs that does not obtain is an unfact). So, like the identity theorist, he will distinguish between the world, i.e., the totality of states of affairs that obtain, and the

big-wide world, i.e., the totality of states of affairs. But, unlike the identity theorist, the CSist will be an atomist about states of affairs, or at least, he will try to advocate as sparse a theory of states of affairs as possible. (CF) could be intended, and maybe sometimes is, as a condensed version of (CS). However, a significant number of correspondence theorists (including Russell and Armstrong) would want to be "genuine" CFists, embracing (CF) while rejecting (CS). They would hold that false propositions do not correspond to anything, especially not to non-obtaining states of affairs.[21]

(CS) tends to be regarded with a fair amount of suspicion. It is criticized because it invokes a new primitive, the concept of *obtaining*, which must be as fundamental to states of affairs as instantiation is to universals.[22] It is also criticized on the grounds that non-obtaining states of affairs do not go at all well with a "vivid sense of reality" (Russell 1918, 223), that they are not worldly enough, too abstract.[23] (CF) may have advantages over (CS), but it also has some disadvantages. Like the identity theory, it is committed to bivalence, whereas (CS) is not: propositions that do not correspond to any state of affairs are neither true nor false. Also, (CF) tends to have difficulties finding atomic truthmakers for negative propositions; non-obtaining states of affairs might help with this. Also, we have seen earlier that for pure externalist propositions, correspondence will reduce to identity. We have seen that

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[21] Concerning 'the fact that p', I think the genuine CFist should hold that such descriptions are rigid: the fact that p could not have failed to be the fact that p. The CSist, on the other hand, must hold that such descriptions are non-rigid whenever the state of affairs in question is contingent: the fact that p (i.e., the obtaining state of affairs that p) could have failed to be the fact that p (i.e., could have failed to obtain).

[22] Note that CF-facts and CS-states are made of very different types of "glue." Applying CF-glue to an object *a* and the universal being-*F* entails that it is true that *a* is *F*. Applying CS-glue does not; it merely results in the existence of the state of affairs that *a* is *F*. Obtaining, although fundamental to (CS), is not an ingredient of CS-glue.

[23] Then again, it seems that facts, containing universals, are not all that concrete in any case. The CFist might say that his atomic facts, at least the ones involving physical objects, have spatial location: the fact that *a* is *F* is where *a* is (and the fact that *a-R-b* is where *a* and *b* are). Could the CSist maintain that the state of affairs that *a* is *F* is where *a* is, even if the state does not obtain?

the identity theory has to identify false propositions with states of affairs that do not obtain. So it looks like any correspondence theory has to accept non-obtaining states of affairs anyway, provided it acknowledges pure externalist propositions.

A question can be raised about the response to the collapse-charge. I want to close with a brief discussion of how the two versions of the correspondence theory handle this question. Remember, I said that a correspondence theorist ought to block the derivation of (IT), and hence the collapse-charge, at the step *from* (b) *to* (c). The idea was that the 'that'-clauses in schema

 (b)   that p is true iff that p is a fact

do not refer to the same thing: the one on the left refers to a proposition, while the one on the right refers to a fact. Now, assume that the proposition that p is false. Does it not follow, on this account, that the 'that'-clause on the right-hand side suffers from reference failure? If so, would that not mean that the correspondence theorist cannot really account for (b)? After all, it seems he cannot evaluate it as true, since its left-hand side is false while its right-hand side comes out as neither true nor false.[24]

I think both types of correspondence theorists should respond that, if the proposition that p is false, then (b) is true because its right-hand side is false too. The CSist has virtually no explaining to do here. He already reads (b) as equivalent to 'that p is true iff that p is a state of affairs that obtains', where the 'that'-clause on the left refers to a proposition and the one on the right to a state of affairs. The problem does not even arise here--although the CSist ought to rephrase our earlier account of how the derivation of (IT) is to be blocked in terms of states of affairs and obtaining. The CFist has a bit of explaining to do. He should say that, when the proposition that

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p is false, the right-hand side of (b) is false too, because it implies a false existence claim. I pointed out earlier that the disambiguating description 'the fact that p' turns easily into the subject-predicate sentence 'that p is a fact'. Based on this, the CFist could hold that the 'that'-clauses in (b) are truncated descriptions, so that (b) is a variant of 'the proposition that p is true iff the fact that p is a fact', where the right-hand side is false if there is no such fact. Alternatively, he could read (b) as a variant of 'the proposition that p is true iff the fact that p exists', where the 'exists' could be absorbed into the description in the usual manner. This account seems workable, although it is rather less smooth than the one available for (CS).

I do not know how to decide between the two versions of the correspondence theory. For the moment I would be satisfied to have shown how both can respond to the charge that the correspondence theory will collapse into the identity theory.[25]

Campbell et al., eds., *Meaning and Truth* (Seven Bridges Press 2002): 124-41.

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