**1.0 Deflationism**

If we are to believe some philosophers, we do not need the concept of truth, and there are no such things as facts. These ideas are by no means new, as we shall see; it is not just since the election of Donald Trump that ideas of a post-truth society have been bandied about.

In the introduction to his book “Truth, A Guide” Simon **Blackburn** thunders like this: “There are real standards. We must fight soggy nihilism, scepticism and cynicism. We must not believe that anything goes. We must not believe that all opinion is ideology, that reason is only power, that there is no truth to prevail. Without defences against postmodern irony and cynicism, multiculturalism and relativism, we will all go to hell in a handbasket.”[[1]](#footnote-1) “For the issue is a philosophical one. It is about the sources of reason, and the control of belief by fact.”[[2]](#footnote-2) – But he attributes this view to the “conservative half of us”, thus leaving it open whether he shares this sentiment.

I want to show that truth is an important concept, and that it can be explained. However, we must deal with what are called ‘deflationist’ concepts of truth first. Deflationism is the view “that there is nothing more to be said about truth once a semantic theory for the truth-predicate (such as Tarski's) has been provided. This is the view that leads philosophers to emphasize claims like '"Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white." Deflationism is the view that not much more can be said about truth than this.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

In “Language, Truth and Logic“ A. J. **Ayer** claims “that there is no problem of truth as it is ordinarily conceived. …For our analysis has shown that the word ‘truth’ does not stand for anything.”[[4]](#footnote-4) His analysis – in short – amounts to this: “We have shown that to say that *p* is true is simply a way of asserting *p*.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

W.V. O. **Quine** argues as follows: “Instead of saying that ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if it is a fact that snow is white, we can simply delete ‘it is a fact that’ as vacuous, and therewith facts themselves: ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white. To ascribe truth to the sentence is to ascribe whiteness to snow; such is the correspondence, in this example. Ascription of truth just cancels the quotation marks. Truth is disquotation.”[[6]](#footnote-6) It seems as if Quine got rid of the truth predicate and the term fact in one fell swoop. However, he admits that the truth predicate is useful if we want to say something like: ‘Everything that so-and-so said is true.’ He also points out that “the truth predicate is an intermediary between words and the world. What is true is the sentence, but its truth consists in the world’s being as the sentence says.”[[7]](#footnote-7) This latter statement does not seem to sit well with the stipulation that “truth is disquotation”. But then Quine does not say it is disquotation and nothing else. In view of this I do not want to commit myself to a reading of Quine that has him down as a deflationist; there seem to be the remnants of a more substantial theory of truth there.

Paul **Horwich** presents what he calls a ‘minimalist thesis’ about truth: “…the meaning of the truth predicate is fixed by the schema, ‘The proposition *that p* is true if and only if p’.”[[8]](#footnote-8) This equivalence schema (‹p› is true ↔ p) is all that is needed to understand the truth predicate. One reason Horwich gives for his minimalist account of truth is the thesis that the more traditional approaches have all failed. He characterizes those as follows: “The traditional view of truth […] involves the following three assumptions, (i) Truth is a property; some beliefs and statements exemplify it and some don't, (ii) It's a substantive property, in that we can reasonably expect an account of what truth is, of its underlying nature. And (iii) this account should provide explanations of various important things about truth: including, why the methods appropriate for its detection are what they are, and why we are well advised to pursue it—that is, to strive for true belief.”[[9]](#footnote-9) We will come back to this statement later.

W. **Künne’s** “modest account of truth” stipulates: “A proposition X is true, […] if and only if things really are *as* they are according to X.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

As far as **Tarski’s** semantic conception of truth is concerned, I tend to side with H. **Putnam**: “Whatever Tarski’s theory may do, it does not provide a relation C (of correspondence) such that a true sentence (in whichever language) is just one that stands in the relation C to certain extra-linguistic facts (or even linguistic facts, in the case of assertions which are about language). Nor does it imply or assume that such a relation C exists. But I believe it to be undeniable […] that correspondence theorists *were* (a) asserting that such a relation exists; and (b) sometimes (e.g. Russell) trying to say what that relation is, or at least what sort of relation it is.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

K. R. **Popper**, on the other hand, seems convinced that Tarski’s theory is a correspondence theory: “As soon as […] a metalanguage is available, a language in which we can speak about sentences *and* facts, it becomes easy to make assertions about the correspondence between a sentence and a fact.”[[12]](#footnote-12) – However, I still side with Putnam.

F. P. **Ramsey** maintains that there is no genuine problem of truth, but only “linguistic confusion”.[[13]](#footnote-13) Consider the two propositions (1) It is true that Caesar was murdered and (2) Caesar was murdered. It is easy to see that both confer the same empirical information. The same goes for (3) It is false that Caesar was murdered and (4) Caesar was not murdered. Neither predicate (true or false) has any influence on the meaning of propositions (2) or (4), they are therefore superfluous. To put it bluntly: They do not explain anything, and we are better off without them.

I will only remark at this point that Ramsey’s position can be summarized as the equivalence schema (‹p› is true ↔ p), and as such it can be read from right to left as well as from left to right. Read it from right to left, and you get something like: Whoever asserts p also asserts that p is true. Or in other words: Whenever I assert something (weird cases ignored) I claim that what I say is true.[[14]](#footnote-14)

P. F. **Strawson** follows Ramsey, but adds some theses of his own concerning the use of the expression ‘is true’ in ordinary language; according to him it has a purely performative role to play, such as agreeing with somebody; it is not a descriptive expression.[[15]](#footnote-15)

**2.0 Epistemic Theories of Truth**

C. S. **Peirce** envisages truth as the result of unlimited research and communication between truth-seekers: “So with all scientific research: Different minds may set out with the most antagonistic views, but the progress of investigation carries them by a force outside of themselves to one and the same conclusion. […] The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real. That is the way I would explain reality.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

B. **Russell** warns against what is sometimes called ‘alethic anti-realism’[[17]](#footnote-17) when he writes: “If we define truth in relation to knowledge, logic collapses, and much hitherto accepted reasoning, including large parts of mathematics, must be rejected as invalid. But if we adhere to the law of excluded middle, we shall find ourselves committed to a realist metaphysic which may seem, in the spirit if not in the letter, incompatible with empiricism.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

Quite apart from the fact that it is problematic to make truth dependent on knowledge, it can be shown that Peirce’s conception of truth presupposes a notion of truth as correspondence: Opinions, if true, represent reality, and under ideal conditions (the unlimited community of researchers) this can be achieved.[[19]](#footnote-19) But it is fairly obvious that by using ‘represent’ in his definition, Peirce implicitly admits that in the last analysis we are still relying on truth as correspondence. So, even if you are inclined to accept a position like Peirce’s, you would still have to define truth independently of the “opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate”.

A. **Beckermann** offers the following generalized version of epistemic theories of truth: “(ET) A belief is true if and only if it is justified under optimal conditions.”[[20]](#footnote-20) He then shows that “optimal conditions are exactly those conditions which make justified beliefs true or at least probably true.”[[21]](#footnote-21) That makes the circularity of epistemic theories so obvious that nothing else needs to be said.

Now that we have seen that deflationist theories of truth are very unsatisfactory and epistemic theories are at the very least misleading unless supported by an independent and substantial conception of truth, we should look at those conceptions of truth that Horwich deems failures.[[22]](#footnote-22)

**3.0**

Looking for a more substantial theory of truth usually implies leaning towards a correspondence theory, which as often as not goes hand in hand with a realist ontology.

“The typical realist will give truth important explanatory roles, for example, to explain the success of science or the success of people in meeting their goals, or to explain meaning, where meaning itself plays a role in the explanation of behaviour.”[[23]](#footnote-23) The typical realist also believes that knowledge is to be defined as justified true belief, in the manner of Russell, who says: “We could be said to ‘know’ a proposition if it is in fact true and we believe it on the best available evidence.”[[24]](#footnote-24) All this is not possible without a clear idea of what it means for a statement[[25]](#footnote-25) to be true.

I can, however, not quite see how B. **Rähme’s** argument against deflationism can help: “Deflationists overlook the fact that […] it would be legitimate to ask – for example – the following question: *Why* should we only claim that penguins can dive, if penguins can dive? Or, in different words: Why is it only correct, in a normative sense, to assert that penguins can dive, if penguins can dive? […] Deflationists cannot give the simple, but correct answer: Because the statement that penguins can dive is only true if penguins can dive.”[[26]](#footnote-26) To my mind, a ‘normatively correct assertion’ is nothing else but a true assertion (or statement), only worded differently, so that Rähme only seems to have stated the obvious.

**3.1 Correspondence – Russell**

What makes a statement true, and how is the relation between belief and reality to be characterized? Under the devilish influence of arch villain Iago, Othello finds himself convinced that his wife is in love with the dashing – and much younger – Lieutenant Cassio. B. Russell uses this example to illustrate his conception of truth: “If we take such a belief as 'Othello believes that Desdemona loves Cassio', we will call Desdemona and Cassio the object-terms, and loving the object-relation. If there is a complex unity 'Desdemona's love for Cassio', consisting of the object-terms related by the object-relation in the same order as they have in the belief, then this complex unity is called the fact corresponding to the belief. Thus a belief is true when there is a corresponding fact, and is false when there is no corresponding fact. It will be seen that minds do not create truth or falsehood. They create beliefs, but when once the beliefs are created, the mind cannot make them true or false, except in the special case where they concern future things which are within the power of the person believing, such as catching trains. What makes a belief true is a fact, and this fact does not (except in exceptional cases) in any way involve the mind of the person who has the belief.”[[27]](#footnote-27) – As all lovers of Shakespeare know, Othello is wrong. There is no fact corresponding to his belief.

Russell here clearly sees facts as truth makers, and he seems to hold that there is some structural similarity between belief and fact – if the belief in question is based on perceptual experience and is in fact true.

Russell returns to truth theories in “An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth”. First he deals with a typical logical positivist conception of truth. He criticises the coherence theory of truth championed by e.g. Hempel, Carnap or Neurath, which boils down to just comparing basic sentences (Protokollsätze) with theories. He says their approach is acceptable if all you aim at is put together an encyclopaedia.[[28]](#footnote-28) The scientists, however, whose direct observations supply the data to those basic sentences, “have made observations and conducted experiments, on the basis of which they have been prepared, if necessary, to reject previously unanimous opinions. The purpose of an observation or experiment is to give rise to a perceptual experience, as a result of which the percipient has new knowledge, at first purely personal and private.”[[29]](#footnote-29) Russell’s point is that we gain new insights primarily not by comparing basic sentences with the theories which have been built on them, but by having experiences. “The purpose of words, though philosophers seem to forget this simple fact, is to deal with matters other than words.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

Without going into the question whether there is “a discoverable relation between the structure of sentences and the structure of […] non-verbal facts”[[31]](#footnote-31), I think Russell makes a convincing case that relations have to be admitted “as parts of the non-linguistic constitution of the world”[[32]](#footnote-32), of which similarity is the most important one. He is also right when he insists that truth must not be defined in relation to knowledge.[[33]](#footnote-33) But how far the idea of a structural identity between statement and fact carries, seems doubtful to me.

**3.2 Correspondence – Wittgenstein[[34]](#footnote-34)**

In the Tractatus **Wittgenstein** says: “The existence and non-existence of atomic facts is the reality. (The existence of atomic facts we also call a positive fact, their non-existence a negative fact.)”[[35]](#footnote-35) And: “To understand a proposition means to know what is the case, if it is true. (One can therefore understand it without knowing whether it is true or not.)[[36]](#footnote-36) Truth conditions therefore are the meanings of sentences, and a sentence does not have to be true to be understandable or meaningful. Facts are independent of our sentences or statements, i. e. unknown facts may exist. Wittgenstein then goes on to explain how a sentence represents reality: “The proposition is a picture of reality. The proposition is a model of the reality as we think it is.”[[37]](#footnote-37) “At the first glance the proposition—say as it stands printed on paper—does not seem to be a picture of the reality of which it treats. But nor does the musical score appear at first sight to be a picture of a musical piece; nor does our phonetic spelling (letters) seem to be a picture of our spoken language. And yet these symbolisms prove to be pictures—even in the ordinary sense of the word—of what they represent.”[[38]](#footnote-38) “The gramophone record, the musical thought, the score, the waves of sound, all stand to one another in that pictorial internal relation, which holds between language and the world. To all of them the logical structure is common.”[[39]](#footnote-39)

Take the example: Charles loves Camilla. Both, fact and sentence (or proposition) have the same logical form: aRb. The problem with that is: “The relation between a true sentence and the fact that it expresses can be seen as structural identity. But the method of representation in language is not the picture-relation in Wittgenstein’s sense.”[[40]](#footnote-40) Russell’s example (Desdemona loves Cassio) makes use of the same “logical form” (aRb)[[41]](#footnote-41). Structural identity or at least similarity between sentence (or, if you want to be pedantic, logical form) and fact looks more plausible when you talk about certain basic personal relationships. If **Patzig** is right – and I think he is – then Russell’s theory does not fare any better.[[42]](#footnote-42) This view is supported by **Austin**: “There is no need whatsoever for the words used in making a true statement to "mirror" in any way, however indirect, any feature whatsoever of the situation or event; a statement no more needs, in order to be true, to reproduce the "multiplicity," say, or the "structure" or "form" of the reality, than a word needs to be echoic or writing pictographic.”[[43]](#footnote-43)

**3.3 Correspondence – Austin**

In his article about truth Austin offers the following definition: “A statement is said to be true when the historic state of affairs to which it is correlated by the demonstrative conventions (the one to which it "refers") is of a type with which the sentence used in making it is correlated by the descriptive conventions.”[[44]](#footnote-44) And he adds: “When a statement is true, there is, of course, a state of affairs which makes it true and which is toto mundo distinct from the true statement about it: but equally of course, we can only describe that state of affairs in words (either the same or, with luck, others).”[[45]](#footnote-45)

Austin’s use of the terms “demonstrative conventions” and “descriptive conventions” may – at least at first sight – obscure the fact that basically he is saying: A statement is true when the ‘historic state of affairs’ is as the statement says.

**3.4 Results so far**

It seems to me that a lot can be learned from these three philosophers. Russell is right when he insists on three important points:

(1) Truth must not be defined or explained in relation to knowledge.

(2) Truth is primarily concerned with the relation between perception and reality.

(3) Universals play an important role in the description of the world.

However, following Austin and Patzig, I think the idea that a true statement displays some structural similarity to the fact it refers to is not tenable. This also holds for Wittgenstein’s “pictorial internal relation”.

Austin’s definition of truth emphasizes the fact that what words and sentences mean is a matter of convention. In that way he sheds some light on how statements in natural languages connect to reality, but the tricky question how correspondence between statement and fact is to be explained remains mainly unanswered. But I agree with his final point that ‘true’ is a descriptive word, so that, if we say of some statement that it is true, we thereby mean that a certain relation exists between the statement and the world which is absent if the statement is false.[[46]](#footnote-46)

**4.1 Critics of correspondence theories**

Critics of correspondence theories of truth claim that every such theory must lead to epistemological scepticism.[[47]](#footnote-47) H. **Keuth,** one of those critics, writes: “In order to be guided by the ideal of truth as correspondence you have to be able to state the correspondence of a possibly true sentence with some real entity. […] But we can only find out whether there is a correspondence between a sentence and a real entity if both the entity and the possible relation between the sentence and the entity are accessible independently of the sentence itself.”[[48]](#footnote-48) And that, according to Keuth, is impossible.[[49]](#footnote-49) But is it? According to W. P. **Alston,** M. Schlick said: “I found, for instance, in my Baedeker the statement: ‘This cathedral has two spires.’ I was able to compare it with ‘reality’ by looking at the cathedral, and this comparison convinced me that Beadeker’s assertion was true.”[[50]](#footnote-50) W. Künne uses exactly the same example.[[51]](#footnote-51) A belief held by somebody can be compared with an observation made by somebody and the correspondence between the two can be experienced and, of course, stated. The latest and most impressive example is the observation of gravitational waves – predicted by Einstein a hundred years ago – by physicists R. Weiss, K. Thorne and B. Barish. “The Ligo detections finally confirmed Einstein’s century-old prediction that during cataclysmic events the fabric of spacetime itself can be stretched and squeezed, sending gravitational tremors out across the universe like ripples on a pond.” [[52]](#footnote-52) The extremely complicated nature of the sophisticated detectors needed to get results does not change the fundamental similarity of this discovery with Schlick’s finding that his travel guide was right about the two spires of the cathedral. If Keuth and others were right, such discoveries would not be possible. It seems to me that Keuth as well as Apel and Kant (and many others) knowingly or unknowingly think of truth in epistemic and criteriological terms, hence their reluctance to consider a correspondence theory and a realist ontology.

**4.2 Empiricism, Idealism and External Realism**

“No arguments are logically possible either for or against complete scepticism. […] It is, however, too short and simple to be interesting. I shall, therefore, without more ado, develop the opposite hypothesis, according to which beliefs caused by perception are to be accepted unless there are positive grounds for rejecting them.”[[53]](#footnote-53) I find myself in complete agreement with the great man, and also on this: The attempts by logical positivists to completely discredit any form of metaphysics, have fortunately failed. Russell is right when he says “that a man who is metaphysically agnostic must deny that he knows when he uses a word.”[[54]](#footnote-54) All this needs to be fleshed out a little more. I will start with what is of greatest importance to anybody who wants to defend any kind of empiricism, perception.

In “Seeing Things As They Are”, J. R. Searle lashes out against a lot of philosophers, very famous ones amongst them, who maintain “that we never directly perceive objects and states of affairs in the world, but directly perceive only our subjective experiences.”[[55]](#footnote-55) According to him, this ‘bad argument’ results from “a confusion between the **content** of an intentional state and the **object** of the intentional state.”[[56]](#footnote-56) The contents of my visual experience may be the same whether I see a fata morgana or a real oasis, but the object is not. In any normal situation we directly perceive an object simply because it is such that it causes certain visual or tactile experiences.

It is interesting to note that a medieval philosopher like **Duns Scotus** is not as sceptical with regard to the testimony of our senses as some moderns:

*“But how can a person be sure about those things which fall under the acts of the senses, for instance, that something outside is white or hot in the way that it appears to be? - I reply as follows: Regarding such an object, either the same things appear opposite to different senses or they do not appear so but rather all the senses apprehending such an object judge the same about it. If the latter is the case, then we have certitude regarding the item apprehended by the senses in virtue of the aforementioned principle, viz. that where something occurs in most cases as a result of something, the latter is the natural cause of the former, given the latter is not a free cause. Therefore, when the same change in the senses occurs for the most part if the object is present, it follows that the change or species produced is the natural effect of that sort of cause, and thus the external thing will be white or hot or such as it naturally appears to be in virtue of the species which the object for the most part produces.*

*But if the judgments of the different senses differ in regard to what is seen outside - for example, sight says that the stick which is partly in the water and partly in the air is broken; sight always says that the sun is smaller in size than it really is, and in general that everything seen from a distance is smaller than it is in reality — in such cases we are still sure of what is true and know which sense is in error. This we know by reason of some proposition in the soul, more certain than any sense judgment, together with the concurrent testimony of several of the senses. For there is always some proposition to set the mind or intellect right regarding which acts of the senses are true and which false, a proposition which the senses do not cause but merely occasion in the intellect.*

*For example, the intellect has the following proposition reposing in it: 'No harder object is broken by contact with something soft which gives way to it.' This proposition is so self-evident in virtue of its terms that the intellect cannot call it in doubt, even if the terms were derived from erroneous senses. Indeed, the opposite of this proposition includes a contradiction. Now both sight and touch say that the stick is harder than the water and that the water gives way to the stick. It follows, therefore, that the stick is not broken in the way that sight judged. Hence in the case of the "broken stick" the intellect judges which sense errs and which does not by something more certain than any act of the senses. Likewise in the other example. No matter how much the terms are taken from erring senses, the intellect knows that a size that is applied to something that has size is completely equal to itself. But both sight and touch tell us that the same size can be applied to what we see when it is near as is applied to it when it is far away. Therefore, the size that we see close up is equal to that which we see from far away. Thus sight in saying that the latter is smaller errs. This conclusion is inferred from self-evident principles and from the acts of the two senses that apprehend that something is for the most part the case. And so when reason judges that a sense errs, it does so in virtue of two kinds of knowledge. The first is knowledge for which the intellect requires the senses only as an occasion, not as a cause, a knowledge in which it would not be deceived even if all the senses were deceived. The other is a knowledge acquired from one or more senses telling us how things are for the most part, and this is known to be true by reason of the proposition often cited, viz. 'Whatever occurs in most cases—'”[[57]](#footnote-57)*

So, in normal circumstances we can trust our senses, but we can also see that man is *not* the prisoner of his senses.

Although I accept Searle’s defence of the relative reliability of our ordinary sense experiences, I still have to agree with Russell when he says “that empiricism, as a theory of knowledge, is self-refuting. For, however it may be formulated, it must involve some general proposition about the dependence of knowledge upon experience; and any such proposition, if true, must have as a consequence that itself cannot be known. While, therefore, empiricism may be true, it cannot, if true, be known to be so."[[58]](#footnote-58) Empiricism cannot be justified from ‘the inside’, but it can be supported from ‘the outside’, with the help of the metaphysics embedded in common sense and ordinary language.

U. **Blau** writes: “It is obvious that ordinary language and common sense have a metaphysic. It is fairly simple, everybody takes it for granted, but it should not be underestimated. I think it is a system of synthetic a priori judgments. By that I mean sentences which are not logically true, are not derived from experience, but are preconditions of logic and experience. The most fundamental one of these is the reality principle: (S1) There is one and only one reality. The correspondence conception ot truth is based on this. A is true if it corresponds with reality, otherwise it is false. […] (S2) I and other objects exist. (S3) I and other objects exist independently of my ideas and wishes. (S4) I can perceive, experience, know, imagine objects and their properties. (S5) There is interaction between objects and myself. (S6) I am here now.”[[59]](#footnote-59)

**Searle** argues in a similar vein when he states: “There is a real world which exists independently of us, our experiences, our thoughts and our language. We have direct access to this world through our senses (especially visual and tactile senses).”[[60]](#footnote-60) The question arises, of course, whether common sense ontology can be trusted. Russell discards it brusquely when he says: “Naïve realism leads to physics, and physics, if true, shows that naïve realism is false. Therefore naïve realism, if true, is false; therefore it is false.”[[61]](#footnote-61) But I do not think physics and common sense necessarily contradict each other. B. **Smith’s** theory of “ontological zooming” provides a framework which can accommodate both.[[62]](#footnote-62) Smith explains that different systems of categories can be of different “granularity”, and that the world can be analysed on different levels, from the microscopically small to the astronomically huge. Ontological zooming means that the different ways of analysing the world are “transparent”, they are all right in their own ways, and there is a path on which you can get from one to the other. We do not have to say that the astronomer’s sun is more real than the sun as seen by you and me one pleasant summer afternoon.[[63]](#footnote-63)

To understand better what is meant by ‘transparent’, consider the example of a poisonous mushroom, the Death Cap. Most people know that it would be foolish to cook and eat it. Some would even give you a description of what damage it would do to your liver and kidneys if you were unfortunate enough to have eaten one. A biochemist or a doctor familiar with poisonous fungi can give you a more exact scientific account of what makes it so lethal; the relevant toxin goes under the name of α-amanitin. She could also describe the chemical processes within your liver and/or kidneys and how they would be affected by the ingestion of the Death Cap. Scientific talk and everyday talk about the Death Cap both refer to the same organism, and they both agree that it is not fit for human consumption. The fine-grained scientific descriptions can – in principle – be understood by everybody, especially as it would not be impossible for anybody of able body and mind to study chemistry or biology and gain expert knowledge in these fields. What the expert understands is not exactly identical with what the layman understands, but there is a strong connection, and it is transparent.

Our Death Cap is useful in more ways than one. Not only does it help us understand ontological transparency, it also illustrates what knowledge is. The Death Cap has certain properties that cause death and destruction in other organisms, humans for example. If you eat it, you die. But if your hobby is gathering wild mushrooms to cook and eat, and you do not want to die, you have to learn to identify poisonous mushrooms. Whether you read reference books or take a course in identifying edible – and inedible – mushrooms, once you know your mushrooms, the sight of a Death Cap or a Destroying Angel will make you stay away from it. You avoid picking up a Death Cap because you can see it has the characteristics that your mushroom manual lists, or that the scientist describes. Your motive for avoiding the Death Cap is self-preservation, but your success in staying alive and well is knowledge – justified true belief.

So, following Smith, I believe that the metaphysics of common sense and the ontology of a nuclear physicist are compatible. If this is the case, it should be possible to arrive at a substantial conception of truth which has more explanatory value than deflationist theories. It should be in line with the intuitions of common sense, which means it has to be some kind of correspondence theory. It should try to elucidate the correspondence relation, and it must be based – as already indicated – on external realism. It must not define truth in terms of justifiability or assertability, as has already been made clear earlier,[[64]](#footnote-64) which means that it leaves it to experience and scientific rules of justification to determine the truth or falsehood of any given statement.

**5.1 Preliminary thoughts concerning a substantial theory of truth**

Russell’s approach to see facts as truth makers and as real entities is promising. **Mulligan/Simons/Smith**[[65]](#footnote-65) in many ways echo that approach by introducing moments as truth makers. Following Russell, they say that the statement ‘Socrates died … in Athens’ is made true by Socrates’ death … in Athens. Another example would be ‘the speedy arrival of the ambulance’, which would be the truth maker for ‘The ambulance arrived quickly’. Moments do not have the ambiguity that facts have. Facts are supposed to be something in space and time, but there are also timeless facts, such as ‘It is a fact that Socrates died … in Athens:’ In other words, even though Socrates’ death is something in time and space, it is still a fact today - and will be tomorrow - that Socrates died … in Athens.

But to characterize the relation between true statement and fact, as Russell does, as something like a structural identity between the complex state of affairs and the statement that describes it is, if at all, only plausible for a small range of statements. The same goes for Wittgenstein’s picture theory. Austin is right when he says that the rules governing the meaning of words used to make a statement are purely conventional.[[66]](#footnote-66) That rules out something like structural identity or even similarity between statement and state of affairs. Russell is right, however, when he insists that truth is not dependent on knowledge, that truth should be a wider concept than knowledge.[[67]](#footnote-67)

Some philosophers, among them G. **Patzig**, have tried to utilize the terms ‘truth conditions’ and ‘fulfilment’ to explain truth. “The sentence ‘x is a fact’ is […] true if and only if there is a sentence p in a language S, so that x fulfils the truth conditions of p.”[[68]](#footnote-68) In the given context Patzig is primarily concerned with facts, but it seems easy enough to transform this into a definition of truth: ‘A sentence p in a language S is true if and only if its truth conditions are fulfilled.’ If that sounds too circular and at the same time trivial, let us change it to: ‘A sentence p in a language S is true if and only if the state of affairs which it describes exists.’ But I find it hard to see that this gives us any more insight than the well-known and universally accepted biconditional (or equivalence schema) “’p’ is true iff p.”

It looks as if there was only the alternative of either accepting one of the various deflationist accounts of truth or following D. **Davidson**, who suggests seeing truth as an undefinable, but nevertheless fundamental concept. “For the most part, the concepts philosophers single out for attention, like truth, knowledge, belief, action, cause, the good and the right, are the most elementary concepts we have, concepts without which (I am inclined to say) we would have no concepts at all. Why then should we expect to be able to reduce these concepts definitionally to other concepts that are simpler, clearer, and more basic? We should accept the fact that what makes these concepts so important must also foreclose on the possibility of finding a foundation for them which reaches deeper into bedrock.”[[69]](#footnote-69)

And yet, the ordinary person’s (and the majority of philosophers’) understanding of what ‘true’ means is based on an intuition which is not exhausted by the truth-biconditional or equivalence schema. Is there any way in which the relation between statement (truth bearer) and state of affairs, situation, event, or moment (truth maker) can be made clearer? I think there is. Assuming that external realism and causal theories of perception are right, truth can be given an explanatory role.

**5.2 Truth as correspondence**

A statement or belief (truth bearer) is true if and only if it corresponds to the state of affairs, event, object, situation or moment (truth maker) it refers to. Correspondence means that the statement or belief in question is in the last resort *caused* by its truth maker. Depending on how theory-laden a perception, an experience or an observation is, the causal connection can be more or less straightforward.

**5.3 Some further explanations**

If you define truth as correspondence, you have to explain what you want correspondence to mean because taken on its own the term is not very precise. M. **Schlick** says that “‘correspondence’ only indicates the problem but does not solve it.”[[70]](#footnote-70) From what has been said so far, it should be clear that correspondence is not identity or similarity. This is where a causal explanation comes into play. I cannot give a thorough treatment of causation here; a few hints will have to do.

In legal matters the ‘but for’ rule is often used, as in: ”But *for defendant Drivewild's speeding, the car would not have gone out of control, and therefore the defendant is responsible.” [[71]](#footnote-71)* This is obviously a counterfactual conditional. “If the defendant had not been speeding, the car would not have gone out of control and would not have hit and killed a pedestrian.” The defendant will not get away by using a Humean analysis of causation, by saying, for example: “All right, I hit the man and then he was dead, but post hoc does not necessarily mean propter hoc.” Of course, not everybody swears by a theory of causation based on counterfactual conditionals, but for now it has to suffice.[[72]](#footnote-72) Take a very simple example: “If the surface of the white Ford in front of my house was not such that it is perceived as white in broad daylight, I would not see a white Ford in front of my house.” (That I also recognize the car in question as my own Ford Fiesta has to do with a number of other ceteris paribus conditions that need not be listed here.) In more general terms: “Whenever you consciously perceive anything, you take the cause of your perceptual experience to be its object.”[[73]](#footnote-73) (And you are generally right.)

So the truth of statements based on perceptual experience and observation can be made intelligible with the help of a non-Humean analysis of causation and a more precisely defined notion of correspondence.

Returning to Horwich’s characterisation of the traditional concept of truth[[74]](#footnote-74) we can now say that our definition fulfils his criteria (I) and (II) and partially (III). It is not the task of truth theory as understood here to suggest the best way of finding the truth. That is down to everyday know-how, experts in various fields and – of course – science. But there can be no doubt that the recommendation to “strive for true belief”[[75]](#footnote-75) is implied by a correspondence theory of truth. We believe in certain basic human rights, such as human dignity, self-determination and so on. To my mind, that also includes ‘the right not to be duped’ as I would like to call it. This can only be guaranteed if truth can be defined as something that does not depend on our private prejudices, and that can be checked and – if necessary – rejected or refuted by others. On this condition only is something like reason possible.

By emphasizing this I am not advocating a consensus theory of truth. Even in sociological circles people begin to see that reality is not just a social construct (certain aspects of it are, of course). “We speak of truth if everybody would experience the same if they turned their attention to the same object.”[[76]](#footnote-76) In other words: Not a possible consensus determines what truth is, but true beliefs make consensus possible.

In “The Ethics of Belief” W. K. Clifford asks us to follow a very simple maxim: „It is wrong in all cases to believe on insufficient evidence.“[[77]](#footnote-77) That it goes against reason to hold something to be true without good evidence is not only, but also, a moral imperative. That is why Clifford speaks of a ‘duty of inquiry’. A rational attitude to life is not possible without some moral foundation. “A speaker asserts a statement p in a normatively correct way only if he has evidence for it *and* if it is in fact true.”[[78]](#footnote-78) And: “By making an assertion and claiming truth for it I put myself under an *obligation* to provide evidence and to retract my statement if my evidence is proven insufficient.”[[79]](#footnote-79) The ‘minimal virtues’ required are honesty and veracity. Unfortunately, in this ‘post-truth’ age, this cannot be repeated often enough.

1. Simon Blackburn, Truth – a Guide, Oxford 2005, p. XIII [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Blackburn, p. XV [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A. Broadbent, Philosophy for Graduate Students, New York 2016, p. 102 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A. J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic, Harmondsworth 1974, p. 119 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ayer, p.119 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. W.V.O. Quine, Truth, in: M. P. Lynch (ed.) The Nature of Truth, p. 475 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Quine, Truth, p. 476 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Paul Horwich, truth – meaning – reality, Oxford 2010, p. 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Horwich, p. 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. W. Künne, Conceptions of Truth, Oxford 2003, p. 373 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Hilary Putnam, Do True Assertions Correspond To Reality? In: ders. Mind, Language and Reality, Philosophical Papers Volume 2, Cambridge 1975, p. 71 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Karl R. Popper, Ausgangspunkte – Meine intellektuelle Entwicklung, Hamburg 1995, p. 205 (my translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. F. P. Ramsey, Facts and Propositions, in: Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Suppl. Vol. VII 1927 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Cf. L Bruno Puntel, Wahrheitstheorien in der neueren Philosophie, Darmstadt 1978, p. 103: “The redundancy theory is literally the result of a one-way reading of the equivalence schema.” („Die Redundanztheorie ist […] das Ergebnis einer im buchstäblichen Sinn ein-bahnigen Lektüre der Äquivalenzformel.“) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. P. F. Strawson, Truth (1949); in: M. Macdonald (ed.), Philosophy and Analysis, 1954 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. C. S. Peirce, How to make our ideas clear, CP 5.407 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. „Truth is epistemically constrained: it does not outrun rational acceptability.“ (Künne, p. 375) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. B. Russell, An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, Harmondsworth 1973, p. 258 (IMT) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. But, as someone said: In the long run we’ll all be dead. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ansgar Beckermann, Wahrheit, in: Lexikon Philosophie, Stuttgart 2009, p. 290 (my translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Beckermann, p. 291 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Cf. p. 2 (Horwich, p. 13) [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Michael Devitt, The Metaphysics of Truth in: M. P. Lynch (ed.) The Nature of Truth, p. 591 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Russell, IMT, p. 243 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. I do not want to go into a debate of what counts as ‘truth bearer’. ‘Statement’ or ‘belief’ will do, as long as it is understood that “Non olet”, “Es stinkt nicht”, and “It does not smell” all express the same statement or belief. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Boris Rähme, Wahrheit, Begründbarkeit und Fallibilität, Heusenstamm 2010, p. 68 (my translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. B. Russell, The Problems Of Philosophy, Oxford 1998, p. 75 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Russell, IMT, p. 135 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. IMT, p. 136 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. IMT, p. 141 (I have not quoted any of the more polemical remarks Russell makes in this context, although it was very tempting to do so.) [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. IMT, p.322 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. IMT, p. 325 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Cf. p. 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. I admit I am not certain whether my reading of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus is right. – Despite its brevity, it is far from easy to understand. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus logico-philosophicus, London 1922 (Transl. C. K. Ogden) 2.06 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Tractatus, 4.024 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Tractatus 4.01 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Tractatus 4.011 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Tractatus 4.14 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. G. Patzig, Sprache und Logik, Göttingen 1970, p. 51 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. I leave it undecided whether the relation is supposed to be symmetrical or asymmetrical. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Cf. Künne, 2003, p. 121ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. J. L. Austin, Truth, in: Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Suppl.- Volume XXIV (1950) (Virtual Issue N0. 1, p.7) [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Austin, Truth, p.5 [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Austin Truth, p.6 – (I do not want to go into the controversy between Austin and Strawson concerning truth here.) [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. “One final point: if it is admitted (if) that the rather boring yet satisfactory relation between words and world which has here been discussed does genuinely occur, why should the phrase "is true" not be our way of describing it? And if it is not, what else is?” Austin, Truth, p. 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Cf. William P. Alston, A Realist Conception of Truth, in: Michael P. Lynch (ed.), The nature of truth, Cambridge (Mass), 2001, S. 51 ff. Alston successfully debunks these views. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Herbert Keuth, Realität und Wahrheit, Tübingen 1978, p. 73 (my translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. K. O. Apel argues in a similar vein: K. O. Apel, Fallibilismus, Konsenstheorie der Wahrheit und Letztbegründung, in: W. R. Köhler, W. Kuhlmann, P. Rohs (eds.) Philosophie und Begründung, p. 125 – So does Kant, e.g. in K r V, A 105 and Kant, Logik, (ed. Jäsche)Einleitung, IX50: “The question is: can there be a general, reliable and easy-to-use criterion of truth? For that is what the question ‘What is truth’ really means.” (my translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Cf. William P. Alston, A Realist Conception of Truth, in: Michael P. Lynch (ed.), The nature of truth, Cambridge (Mass), 2001, p. 53 ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Künne, p. 128f. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Cf. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/oct/03/nobel-prize-physics-discovery-gravitational-waves-ligo> [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Russell, IMT, p. 126 [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. IMT, p. 328 [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. J. R. Searle, Seeing Things As They Are, Oxford 2015, p. 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Seeing … p. 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. John Duns Scotus, Refutation of Henry and of Skepticism generally, Ordinatio I, In: Bosley/Tweedale (eds.) Basic Issues in Medieval Philosophy, Toronto 1996, p. 483f. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. IMT, p. 156 [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ulrich Blau, Wahrheit von Innen und Außen; in: L. B. Puntel (Hrsg.), Der Wahrheitsbegriff; Darmstadt 1987, p. 307 ff [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. John R. Searle, Geist, Sprache und Gesellschaft, Frankfurt a.M. 2001, p. 19 (My back-translation into English may not match the original exactly.) [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. IMT, p. 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. B. Smith, Aristoteles 2002, in: Th. Buchheim, H. Flashar, R. A. H. King (eds.): Kann man heute noch etwas anfangen mit Aristoteles?, Darmstadt 2003 p. 32f. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Cf. Smith, p. 32 [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Cf. p. 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Mulligan, Simons, Smith: Truth-Makers, in: Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 44, S.287 - 321 [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Cf. Footnote 44 [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Cf. IMT, p. 232 [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Patzig, p. 69 [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. D. Davidson, The Folly of Trying to Define Truth, in: M. P. Lynch (ed.) The Nature of Truth, Cambridge, Mass. 2001, p. 624 [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. M. Schlick, Allgemeine Erkenntnislehre, Frankfurt/M, 1979, p. 80 [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/%22But+for%22+Rule> [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Cf. Searle 2015, p. 123: “Every conscious perceptual experience, whether veridical or not, is experienced as a perception of the thing causing the experience.”

    A good introduction is in: A. Broadbent, Philosophy for Graduate Students, New York 1016, pp. 31 – 51 – See also: „Kausalität“ in: J. Speck (Hrsg.) Handbuch wissenschaftstheoretischer Begriffe Bd. 2, Göttingen 1980, pp. 317 ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Searle 2015, p. 109 [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Cf. p. 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Cf. p. 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Niklas Luhmann, Systemtheoretische Argumentationen – Eine Entgegnung auf Jürgen Habermas, in: Habermas/Luhmann, Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie, Frankfurt/M, 1971, p. 348 (my translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. William Kingdon Clifford, The ethics of belief (1879), ed. James Burger (2008) [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Rähme, p. 31 (my translation) [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Rähme, p. 30 (my translation, my italics) [↑](#footnote-ref-79)