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REALISM AND CORRESPONDENCE: REPLY TO ARNO AURÉLIO VIERO

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Abstract: In §1 I suggest that although my theory of truth as identification is not a correspondence theory of truth in the sense of these terms used by the logical positivists, it can nevertheless be naturally interpreted as a correspondence theory of truth. In §2 I argue that whereas a correspondence theory of truth need not be a realist theory of truth, any sufficiently elaborate realist theory of truth should be interpretable as a correspondence theory of truth. I illustrate this with Frege's denotational theory of truth.

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Arno points out that I do not distinguish clearly between a realist theory of truth and a correspondence theory of truth and argues that if we interpret 'correspondence theory of truth' along the lines of the logical positivists, then the theory of truth that I propose in my book – truth as identification – is not a correspondence theory of truth. I agree, and I will try to comment on some of the underlying issues.

1. CORRESPONDENCE

I always assumed that a correspondence theory of truth is a realist theory of truth, and I took the basic formulation of the correspondence idea to be that a truth bearer is true because it (or what is expressed by it) corresponds to (some aspect of) reality. Evidently there are a number of variations that one can do here by specifying which truth bearers are allowed, what is the appropriate notion of correspondence, and with what in reality is the correspondence. Some people restrict the truth bearers to sentences; others restrict them to propositions; yet others restrict them to statements; still others restrict them to inscriptions; and so on. The same thing happens with the reality side. Some people say that the correspondence is with facts; some that it is with states of affairs; some that it is with situations; others that it is with objects and properties; still others that it is with reality as a whole; and so on. Finally, there is the question of how to interpret the correspondence relation itself. Is it some sort of matching? Describing? Picturing? Pointing? Denoting? Aside from these variations, one can produce other variations by holding that some of the allowed truth bearers correspond to some aspect or other of reality, and that other allowed truth bearers do not correspond to such aspects but derive their truth (or falsity) from certain “structural” connections with the former. Thus, as Arno points out in p. 36, one may hold that atomic sentences correspond to facts and that molecular sentences are truth-functions of these.

Something like this set-up is what I suggest in Chapter 12 – though not with complete generality – and I try to situate views by Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Tarski as well as my own within this scheme. Since I discussed some of these views in great detail earlier in the book, I summarize my conclusions in the more general setting of Chapter 12. In particular, I point out at the beginning of the discussion that the formulation of the correspondence theory suggested above does not tell us how to deal with the problem of falsity and with the possibility

of truth bearers that are neither true nor false. As Arno also mentions, I consider this to be a crucial issue for any correspondence theory, and important aspects of my own approach were molded by it. So how does my approach fit into the general scheme that I described above?

I am extremely liberal about the bearers of truth, and I allow all reasonable candidates. For example (and not exclusively): Propositions, statements, assertions, sentences, judgments, thoughts, beliefs, opinions, utterances, inscriptions. Evidently the analysis of truth may vary from case to case, and as I say in pp. 241-42 in connection with Tarski's analysis of truth for sentences "whether or not one can apply Tarski's structural approach to [some of these] things will depend on having some sort of analysis of their nature and structure". And after presenting my account for propositions in p. 417, I say in the next page:

Of course, at the most abstract level this is not an account of truth for sentences, or beliefs, or opinions, but an account for senses, including propositions, that is entirely independent of language and mind. It is an account of certain connections between abstract aspects of reality with certain other aspects of reality which need not have anything to do with us. However ... the account can be brought to bear on language – although this is an aspect that has to be developed much more fully.

Concerning the reality side of the formulation, I settle for states of affairs that I conceive (and characterize) as combinations of a property with suitable arguments that instantiate the property. As opposed to Russell's notion of fact (and to various other notions of state of affairs), my notion of state of affairs is extremely general and powerful because I allow higher-order properties and properties of infinite arity. I also hold that all truth bearers can be analyzed as predications, which means that the relation of correspondence between truth bearers and reality is *of the same kind* for all the truth bearers in a given category (propositions, sentences, etc.). This means, in turn, that there will be no distinctions in kind between singular predications, negative predications, disjunctive predications, universal predications, etc.

And finally now, what is the correspondence relation? Here is the crux of the matter – at least with respect to the points that Arno is making. I start Chapter 1 saying that true statements describe aspects of the world, but I immediately raise some problems about this. In what sense do true statements *describe* aspects of the world? If I state that I am now in my study, am I *describing* an aspect of the world or *referring* to an aspect of the world? In note 4 (p. 68) I make a comparison with the case of definite descriptions and argue that definite descriptions are not typically used to *describe* things, but to *identify* things – the chair in the corner, the third word in this paragraph, etc. So when I refer to an aspect of the world successfully – be it by means of a definite description or by means of a statement – what makes my referring *successful* is that there is *something* in the world (an object, a property, an event, a state of affairs, etc.) that is identified by my description or by my statement. That is why I take the relation of correspondence to be a relation of *identification*¹. The relation between a *true* truth maker and reality is that it corresponds to a state of affairs in the sense that it *identifies* that state of affairs. But what about *falsity* now? And what about truth makers that are neither true nor false? What does the correspondence theory have to say about these cases?

The easiest and simplest solution is to restrict the truth makers so that the false ones are precisely the ones that are not true, and therefore are those that do *not* have the correspondence relation to reality. Some people say, for example, that *sentences* may be neither true nor false (for one reason or another) but that *propositions* must be either true or false, and that their correspondence theory applies *directly* only to propositions. Other kinds of truth bearers are true or false to the extent that they *express* a true proposition or a false proposition. This seems to me an *ad hoc* solution for two reasons. One is that my intuition is that any kind of truth maker may be neither true nor false for a wide variety of well-

¹ The original version of Chapter 1 was titled “Truth as denotation” but then I decided to emphasize the identifying character of denotation.

known reasons. In particular, I think that truth makers that involve “parts” that do not connect appropriately with reality may be neither true nor false. I might believe (state, think, assert, etc.) that Sherlock Holmes lived in London in the late Nineteenth Century and yet reality will not determine this, one way or the other, because the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ does not refer to anything in it. And I do not see any reason why such a belief (statement, thought, assertion, etc.) does not express a proposition. The other reason is that it is never quite clear to me what sort of entities propositions are supposed to be according to these accounts, and why they *must* be either true or false.

I propose a different account – which is inspired by my reading of Plato. I analyze every truth maker as a predication and say that a truth maker is false when its predicate negation is true – *i.e.*, when it identifies a state of affairs – and is truth-valueless when neither it nor its predicate negation are true. Hence, true truth makers are those that correspond to (identify) a state of affairs; false truth makers are those whose predicate negation corresponds to (identifies) a state of affairs; truth-valueless truth makers are those such that neither them nor their predicate negation corresponds to a state of affairs.

Although my theory is not the logical positivist’s correspondence theory of truth, as Arno emphasizes, I think that on the basis of what I said above I can reasonably claim that *it is* a correspondence theory of truth.

2. REALISM

One of my objections to Tarski (in Chapter 7 and in Chapter 12) is that he wants to hold that his semantic theory of truth is both a correspondence theory of truth and is neutral with respect to metaphysical issues such as the issue of realism *versus* idealism. I think that this is one of the many attempts in logic and philosophy to eat one’s

cake and have it too². But in pp. 413-414 I consider a certain kind of interpretation according to which one can have correspondence without realism. Let me give a more abstract version of what I say there. Suppose that L is a “well-defined” language – *e.g.*, first-order arithmetic – and let Γ be a maximal consistent set of sentences of L . Let a sentence S correspond to Γ if and only if $S \in \Gamma$, and let S be true if it corresponds to Γ and false if it does not. We can say that this is a correspondence theory of truth that is not a realist theory of truth, because membership in Γ may have nothing to do with reality. Since one can come up with all sorts of examples like this, we can conclude that correspondence does not imply realism – as Arno also suggests in connection with his examination of the positivist’s correspondence theory of truth. What about the other way around?

Arno discusses this question at the end of his paper and argues that whereas the conceptions of truth that we find in Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas are clearly realist conceptions of truth, we cannot say in any definite sense that they are correspondence theories of truth – one main reason being that they do not formulate, or even suggest, any kind of correspondence relation. Although I agree with Arno, I think that there might be a sense in which realism about truth implies correspondence. For it seems to me that given any sufficiently detailed formulation of a realist theory of truth, it should be possible to extract from it in a reasonably natural way a relation of correspondence such that the theory can be formulated as a correspondence theory of truth. I suggest something like this for Frege’s theory of truth in Chapter 12.

Frege was a sharp critic of the notion of correspondence, and in p. 91 (note 18) I quote his arguments from “Thoughts” against a correspondence conception of truth. He was also a strong realist about truth, as can be seen from the quotation in p. 40 (note 35). He postulates the objects the True and the False, and argues that the true thoughts (or

² See also §6 of my reply to Guillermo Rosado Haddock in this connection.

sentences) denote the True and that the false thoughts (or sentences) denote the False. How can we extract a correspondence theory from Frege's theory? By interpreting his objects the True and the False and the kind of denotation in question. This is an issue to which I come back time and again in my book³, and in p. 417 I suggest a correspondence interpretation of Frege's theory.

Evidently, this will only be possible for theories that have a certain amount of development. If someone's realist conception of truth consists merely of the claim that truth is in reality, and there is no articulation at all of language and thought in relation to reality, then it might be impossible to extract anything from it. This would apply, for example, to someone who *simply* uses such "formulas" as Aristotle's "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true", or Aquinas' "*Veritas est adequatio rei et intellectus*", without elaborating them in any way.

³ There is a sense, in fact, in which one could read the *entire* book as a long commentary on this question.