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An Identity Theory of Truth

By J. Dodd

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When one thinks of theories of truth, nowadays one normally thinks of versions of correspondence, coherence, pragmatist, epistemic, and deflationist theories of truth. A book developing an identity theory of truth, versions of which were already held by Moore, Russell, and Bradley, is a welcome addition to the literature.

But it must be noticed that the identity theory of truth defended by Dodd, which he calls a “modest identity theory” (p. 1), is more a theory of truthbearers and facts, than a theory of truth. For Dodd’s modest identity theory is simply the claim that facts are true propositions, where propositions are understood along Fregean lines, namely as thoughts, entities composed of senses (p. 19).

How did Dodd come to this conclusion? The first five chapters of the book contain the answer. Indeed Dodd thinks that correspondence theories of truth err in postulating truthmakers. For Dodd the belief in truthmakers is a philosophical dogma that lacks motivation (pp. 9-14). So facts are not required to be truthmakers and so the motivation for thinking facts to be states of affairs vanishes (p. 14). Dodd, on the other hand, believes in propositions. This is because Dodd believes propositions are the best candidates to be the bearers of truth (pp. 35-45) and also because what he believes the best account of the logical form of propositional attitude ascriptions, Dodd’s own version of Davidson’s paratactic account, is committed to propositions (pp. 21-34). Furthermore, Dodd argues that the best account of the nature of propositions is a roughly Fregean one, namely as complex entities whose constituents are senses, though Dodd’s notion of sense is McDowellian rather than Fregean (pp. 50-77). Then, basically for reasons of ontological economy, Dodd argues that facts are not states of affairs (whose constituents belong to the domain of reference) but propositions (whose constituents belong to the domain of sense) (pp. 81-6). So according to Dodd the error in correspondence theories is to suppose that there is correspondence where there is identity: true propositions do not correspond to facts – they are identical to facts (p. 111).

Thus Dodd’s modest identity theory makes no claim as to what truth consists in, and in this sense it is difficult to see how it qualifies as a theory of truth. Dodd is

aware of this and insists that this does not make his modest identity theory philosophically uninteresting (pp. 126-7). Philosophically interesting it is, but it is misleading to call it a theory of truth because it does not do any of the things that truth theories usually try to do, like defining truth or telling us what truth consists in.

So what are Dodd's views on what truth consists in? On this score Dodd's adopts Horwich's minimalism, which Dodd defends from several objections in chapter 6. Chapter 7 closes the book, where Dodd argues against alternative identity theories of truth, like those of Moore, Russell, Bradley and Hornsby. These are 'robust identity theories' because they take true propositions to be identical with states of affairs: "things from the realm of reference whose constituents number worldly objects and properties" (p. 159).

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