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# **Truthmakers?**

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## Truthmakers?

When ‘S’ is replaced with any true sentence, there is a sharp intuitive contrast between instances of (1a), which are apt to seem obviously correct, and instances of (1b), which are patently ridiculous.<sup>1</sup>

- 1a. The claim that S is true because S.
- b. S because the claim that S is true.

However, this apparently innocent distinction has been the starting point of philosophical arguments that are far from innocent. Here, is one, which identifies (2a) – understood as equivalent to (3a) -- as the, or a, natural lesson to be drawn from (1a).

- 2a. If the claim that S is true, it is because something makes it true.
- 3a. If the claim that S is true, it is because something exists that makes it true.

When one asks, for a given true sentence S, what this truth maker is, in many cases the answer given by (4a) seems ready-made.

- 4a. If the claim that S is true, it is because something exists – the fact that S – which makes it true.

However, now we are in trouble. What is this thing – designated by [the fact that S] -- that makes the claim expressed by S true? Obviously, if (4a) is to be true, then the claim and the fact can’t be identical. The problem is that the two are so closely related that it is hard to tell them apart.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, in numbered examples, ‘S’ will be used as a schematic letter, whereas in the text it will be used as a metalinguistic variable.

<sup>2</sup> Much fact-talk is innocent, and interchangeable with talk of truths, as when the claim that all facts are determined by the physical facts is cashed out as the claim that all truths are necessary consequences of the physical truths. What is not innocent is the distinction between facts and truths enforced by (4a).

A natural reaction is to dispense with one of the two. All too often, the natural truth bearer has been the one to be dumped. By the natural truth bearer, I mean, of course, the sort of thing that can be (necessarily or contingently) true or false, that can, in principle, be believed, asserted, assumed, or conjectured, and that can also be the content of a sentence (relative to a context). In short, propositions. These are the things so fashionably found to be objectionable. Whereas facts are supposed to be undeniable parts of the world, propositions are routinely taken to be pseudo-theoretical posits. Best to abandon them in favor of sentences, or utterances.

So, famously, thought Middle-Russell, and many others. To me, this position has always seemed backwards. It is facts that are mysterious, and propositions that are obviously real. Isn't it obvious that there are things I have believed, asserted, and conjectured? That among these things some have been true, and some false? That I have used sentences to express them? That others have done the same, sometimes using the same sentences, and sometimes using different sentences of my language, or even of languages I don't understand? If, as I maintain, these things are obvious, then it is obvious that there are propositions, in my sense. So, if there is no room in reality for countless pairs of (numerically) distinct but (qualitatively) identical twins – true propositions and the facts that make them so – then it is facts, rather than propositions, that must go. In Trenton Merricks, I find a kindred spirit who shares my belief in propositions, and much of my skepticism about facts – understood as truth makers. However, his focus in *Truth and Ontology* is primarily on the latter. The aim of the book is not to defend propositions, but to undermine the claim that facts are needed to make truth bearers – whatever they may be -- true.

He begins with the making-true relation. Details aside (not all of which I accept), he arrives at the sensible conclusion that for the believer in philosophically significant truth makers, the truth maker for a given claim -- the thing that makes it true -- is something that both

necessitates the claim, and is that which the claim is about. Thus, he cashes out (2a) and (3a), as (2b) and (3b), respectively, while understanding (4a), in the case of some true sentences, as (4b).

2b. If the claim that S is true, it is because something it is about necessitates its truth.

3b. If the claim that S is true, it is because there exists something it is about which necessitates its truth.

4b. If the claim that S is true, it is because there exists something it is about – the fact that S – that necessitates its truth.

But now we are already in deep water. It's true that Socrates and Plato are both dead, and so no longer exist. What about the facts that Socrates no longer exists, and that Plato no longer exists? Must those *facts* exist in order for it to be true that Socrates and Plato don't? Surely not. What are these facts anyway, if not structured complexes differing only in that one contains Socrates, while the other contains Plato? But since neither Socrates nor Plato exist, neither fact does either – given that they must be distinct, if they are to be at all. Thus (4b) is false, and (3b) dubious.

So, at any rate, I say. Surely, it is obvious that when I say 'Socrates no longer exists' I refer to Socrates, and assert that he doesn't exist. Since I believe what I say, Socrates now has the properties of *being the referent of 'Socrates'* and of *being said, and believed, by me not to exist*. Since he doesn't exist, this means that objects can have properties when they don't exist.<sup>3</sup> Not every property is like this. Socrates *is* the referent of my use of 'Socrates', he *is* the one I'm talking about, he *is* my inspiration, and he *is* dead. However, he *was*–not *is*–a man, a philosopher, and a resident of Athens. For some properties – e.g. *being a man*, *being a philosopher*, and *being a resident of Athens* -- an individual can have that property at a time only if the individual exists at the time. For others – e.g., *being the referent of a use of a word*, *being the subject of*

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<sup>3</sup> See Nathan Salmon, "Existence," *Philosophical Perspectives* 1, 1987, 49-108 for discussion. For my use of these ideas, see the appendix to chapter 3 of *Beyond Rigidity* (New York: Oxford University Press) 2002.

*conversation*, and being *one's inspiration* – possession of the property at a time does not require existence at the time. For still others – e.g. *being dead* – it requires *not* existing at the time.

I have made these points using Socrates as my example. Similar points can be made about the proposition that Socrates no longer exists. Since its constituent, Socrates, doesn't exist, it doesn't either – which doesn't stop me from asserting and believing it. Just as I can refer to something that doesn't exist, so I can assert and believe something that doesn't exist. Some of these results, including the legitimacy of quantification over objects that no longer exist, may seem mildly surprising. But they are hardly cause for alarm, being little more than modest generalizations of the commonsense observations on which they are based.

Not everyone agrees. One kind of metaphysician – the four-dimensionalist with a commitment to truth makers – accuses me of cheating. Surely, he says, it is obvious that anything that is true now is made true by something that now exists. For him, (3a,b) and/or 4a,b) are non-negotiable. I disagree. Either they are lazy and overhasty generalizations of (2a,b), or they are philosophically motivated consequences of a contentious metaphysical theory that require justification in their own right. At a minimum, the friend of facts needs to explain why (2a,b) can't be accepted without (3a,b), and why, in the relevant cases, (4a\*, b\*) isn't a viable replacement for (4a,b).

4a\*. If the claim that S is true, it is because something – the fact that S – makes it true.

b\*. If the claim that S is true, it is because it is about something – the fact that S – that necessitates its truth.

After all, if the issue is whether things can have properties when they don't exist, then -- even if it is granted that facts are truth makers -- some argument is needed to show that a fact must exist in order to have the property of making something true.

This is not to say that we should be sanguine about getting even as far as (2a,b). It is, however, to insist that we must guard against reading metaphysically contentious doctrines into what are claimed to be undeniable, pre-theoretic observations about truth. I take this to be Merricks' main message. Though he doesn't address the little argument just given, or go in for quantifying over the nonexistent, his central thesis is that the use of truth makers to do philosophically significant work always involves reading highly contentious, and ultimately implausible, philosophical doctrines into our most confident commonsense convictions about truth. On this we are together, despite our apparent divergence on issues of semantics and philosophical logic.<sup>4</sup>

His central critical thesis is illustrated by what he says about the strategies advocated by metaphysically minded truthmaker-theorists for dealing with negative existentials. In chapter 3, he argues that the best version of these strategies identifies something called "the totality state of affairs" -- a kind of giant fact about the universe -- as the single truth maker for all true negative existentials. This fact consists of the having, by a very large object (the universe, thought of as containing all existing objects as proper parts) of all the positive intrinsic properties truly ascribable to it -- including the properties of containing entities as proper parts having their own positive intrinsic properties, and standing in relations to one another -- *plus* the having, by the universe, of the negative property *of being such that there is nothing more in the universe*. This mysterious entity is supposed to be the genuinely existing truth maker for all true negative existentials, and all true universal generalizations.

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<sup>4</sup> As my remarks about Socrates indicate, my views don't fit very well into either the view that Merricks calls 'presentism' (to which he devotes much attention) or to the view he calls 'eternalism'.

To me, as to Merricks, this monstrosity is far too great a weight for the intuitive contrast between (1a) and (1b) to bear. However, he goes further, pointing out that in order to do its work, (i) every object that is actually a part of the totality state must be an essential part of it, and no other object could have been part of it, and (ii) every property had (or not had) by the universe, or any part of the universe, in the totality state is such that the having (or not having) of that property by the object in the totality state is essential to the state. In effect the totality state consists of all “positive” facts about the universe and its parts, plus the “negative” fact that there are no other positive facts, somehow bound together so as to make the inclusion of each constituent fact essential to the existence of The Great Fact. In addition to the staggering implausibility of the claim that this is what makes all negative existentials true, Merricks offers a series of objections – one of them nicely pointing out that the Great Fact doesn’t even satisfy the conditions for being a truth maker. Remember, the truth maker for a given claim must not only necessitate the truth of that claim, it must also be what the claim is about. But whatever the claim that there are no white ravens is about, it is not about a something that couldn’t have existed if I hadn’t written this paper. Thus, even allowing themselves considerable metaphysical extravagance, the friends of truth makers have not found reasonable candidates for entities the existence of which make certain claims true.

In chapter 4, Merricks examines a variant of truthmaker theory that abandons The Great Fact, and seeks to ground the alleged “dependence of truth on being” in another way. The new thesis to be explored is that *truth supervenes of being*, dubbed “TSB.” The version of TSB identified as best capturing the relevant kind of dependence states that “necessarily, each true claim is such that, necessarily, given all the entities that exist, and the properties that each of those entities has, then that claim is true.” (pp. 72-3) Later, this is amended to make clear that the

clause “given all the entities that exist” is understood as including a truth maker for each truth.<sup>5</sup> This thesis is said to capture the idea that *truth locally supervenes on the whole of reality*. Assuming possible world-states, we are told that the thesis is true iff no matter which world-state *w* is actual (obtains), every proposition *p* that is true at *w* is a true at all world-states at which all the things existing at *w* (including the truth maker for *p*) exist, and have every property they have at *w*. Depending on what exists, and what counts as a genuine property, this thesis may be nontrivial, and have philosophically significant consequences. Consider, for example, the actual-truth, *that Socrates was a philosopher*. If, as I do, you think that Socrates does not exist, and if in counting the properties relevant for evaluating the “worldwide local” version of TSB we don’t include “suspicious” properties (of mine for example) like that of *being such that Socrates was a philosopher*, then we may find that the principle is violated. For if we restrict ourselves to the things that (now) exist, and to the genuine properties they (now) have, there would seem to be possible world-states *w* that are like the actual world-state in all these respects, even though the claim *that Socrates was a philosopher* isn’t true at *w*. For a certain type of metaphysician, this just proves that “reality is four-dimensional,” with time being analogous to space. On this view, Socrates really *does exist* -- only at a different temporal “location” from our present one. Since he also has the property of *being a philosopher at that location*, the worldwide local version of TSB is supposed to be satisfied. I, of course, am not convinced. Instead, I run the argument the other way. Since Socrates doesn’t exist, this version of the truth-supervenies-on-being thesis

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<sup>5</sup> See page 92-3. When modified in this way the view discussed in chapter 4 differs from the one criticized in chapter 3 only in not maintaining that for certain truths – e.g. the proposition that Fido is brown – there is a fact – *that Fido is brown* -- of which Fido and *being brown* are essential constituents. Whereas the view in chapter 3 takes the truth of this proposition to require the existence of this fact (which the proposition is said to be about), the view in chapter 4 takes it to require only the existence of Fido, in all his brownness (which the claim is said to be about).



(restricted to non-suspicious properties) is false. One can, of course, agree or disagree with me about the underlying logical, semantic, and metaphysical issues. What one can't do is resolve them by appealing to worldwide local TSB, as if it were an innocent philosophical principle reflecting obvious pretheoretic intuitions about truth.

Merricks also rejects this principle. As in chapter 3, he focuses on negative existentials. As before, the chief objection is that the view implausibly takes true negative existentials to be about, and necessitated by, the positive existence of something (and its possession of nonsuspicious properties). Again, this seems not to be so. At any rate, there is no non-question-begging reason to believe it. The susceptibility of both the chapter 3, and the chapter 4, versions of the thesis that truth depends upon being to essentially the same objection illustrates the essential interchangeability of these theses for Merrick's purposes. Thus, the next three chapters are devoted to identifying various modal truths, temporal truths, and subjunctive-conditional truths as counterexamples to both of them. In the interest of not beating dead horses, I will pass over his discussion of these cases, and turn to his criticism in the final chapter of the correspondence theory of truth.

By the correspondence theory, he means the view that *the truth of a proposition consists in its correspondence to some existing fact or state of affairs that the proposition is about*. Since this is *what it is* for a proposition to be true, whenever the proposition that S is true, it is true *because* there exists a fact, or state of affairs, that S which makes the proposition true.<sup>6</sup> Merrick's objection is that true negative existentials, and other truths about the non-, or no-longer, existent falsify this claim. Again, I agree, but with reservations. My chief reservation is what I take to be the unduly narrow characterization of the correspondence theory as requiring the *existence* of a

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<sup>6</sup> Here, I use 'S' as a schematic letter.

fact, or state of affairs, that the truth is about. This, it seems to me, stacks the deck against the correspondence theory. Thus, I would characterize the correspondence theory as the view that *the truth of a proposition consists in its correspondence to some fact or state of affairs that the proposition is about*. For Merricks, the two characterizations are equivalent, since he takes the particular quantifier to just be the existential quantifier. I don't. Thus, I believe that there is a version of the correspondence theory that is not refuted simply by appealing to the truth of (5).

5. Carthage does not exist.

Whether or not one takes the correspondence theory to be refuted by Merrick's main example, (6), depends on one's views about fictional entities.

6. Hobbits don't exist.

This example differs from (5). Unlike Carthage, which clearly doesn't exist, it might be argued that hobbits, being fictional characters, do. Surely, *the Lord of the Rings*, which is a work of fiction, exists – as do its constituent parts, including the characters, Bilbo and Frodo.<sup>7</sup> Since the names 'Bilbo' and 'Frodo' designate these characters (which are the semantic contents of the names), (7) is strictly and literally true (in addition to being true according to the story).

7. Bilbo and Frodo exist.

In the story, these characters are portrayed as members of a certain natural kind, designated by 'hobbit' – which is a different sort of fictional character. If it could be shown that Bilbo and Frodo are *really* instances of this kind – i.e. that the predicate 'is a hobbit' really applies to them (as opposed to merely being applied to them in the story) then there would be a strict and literal reading of

7. The hobbits, Bilbo and Frodo, exist.

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed working out this view, see Nathan Salmon, "Nonexistence," *Nous*, 32, 1998, 277-319.

in which (7) was true and (6) was false – in which case Merricks’ use of (6) would be undermined.<sup>8</sup> As it happens, I suspect that this account of ‘hobbit’ is not quite right, and that Merricks’ example fails in a different way. On the view to which I incline, the fictional character that is the semantic content of ‘hobbit’ (a certain kind of abstract object) is merely portrayed in the story as being something (a natural kind) having instances. In reality, it can no more have genuine instances than the characters Bilbo and Frodo can. If this is right, then although (6) is literally true (as opposed to being true according to the fiction), its truth poses no more of a problem for the correspondence theory than that posed by the truth of ordinary negative existentials like (8).

8. Carnivorous cows don’t exist.

Of course, the analysis of fictional characters I have sketched – according to which examples involving them pose no special threat to the correspondence theory of truth – is contentious. However, since this is true of alternative analyses as well, it is best not to rest one’s critique of the correspondence theory on one’s views of such characters.

If negative existentials provide a reason to reject the theory, it ought to be possible to make the case using examples like (8). On certain analyses – e.g. those of Frege and Russell -- the proposition expressed by (8) is the negation of one that attributes the property of being instantiated to the property of *being both carnivorous and a cow*. Though such analyses of the proposition do not bring with them a commitment to a corresponding fact in virtue of which (8) is true, they do open the door for friends of facts to rebut the claim that the truth of (8) shows the

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<sup>8</sup> Even if this could be shown, there would also be a use of (6) to say something true – along the lines of (i) – just as there is a use of “Bilbo and Frodo don’t exist” to say something true -- along the lines of (ii).

(i) Hobbits are merely characters – nothing has the properties they are portrayed as having in the story.

(ii) Bilbo and Frodo are merely characters – nothing has the properties they are portrayed as having in the story.

(See pp. 94-95 of *Beyond Rigidity* for related cases.) Examples like (i) – (ii) pose problems for the correspondence theory only if ordinary negative existentials do.

correspondence theory to be false. It is one thing to claim, as I do, that we have been given no compelling reason to suppose that *any* propositions are made true by facts corresponding to them. It is quite another to maintain, as Merricks does, that negative existentials clearly *falsify* the corresponding theory. Since, on the Frege-Russell analysis of (8), there is no reference failure, proponents of the correspondence theory who accept the analysis may claim that (8) is made true by the fact that the property *of being both carnivorous and a cow* isn't instantiated. What's wrong with that?

Although Merricks doesn't tell us in his chapter on the correspondence theory, he does consider the Fregean analysis of existence claims in chapter 3, when arguing against metaphysically-minded truthmaker theorists intent on using doctrines about truth to establish far-reaching ontological claims. (pp. 45-46) His point there is that the strictures on what count as genuine properties and facts, needed to derive the desired metaphysical conclusions, rule out appealing properties like *failing to be instantiated*, and facts of the sort *the property of being so-and-so failing to be instantiated*. However, when the correspondence theory of truth is at issue, this is not enough. As useful as the point may be in the debate with ambitious metaphysicians, it doesn't show that there is any special objection to such properties, and facts, once the revisionary metaphysical program has been set aside, and we are simply assessing the correspondence theory. In chapter 3, Merricks insists the even if the Fregean analysis is correct – and hence, by implication, even if the proposition expressed by (8) is about the property of *being both carnivorous and a cow* not being instantiated – still that proposition is not made true by the fact

that the property *has the property of not being instantiated*. (p. 46) There is, I think, no basis for this claim (outside his criticism of metaphysically motivated versions of truthmaker theory).<sup>9</sup>

I suspect that what Merricks really thinks is that the Frege-Russell analysis of existence claims is incorrect. The noninstantiation of the property of *being F* is not the analysis of what it is for there to be no Fs, rather there being no Fs is the analysis of what it is for the property of *being F* not to be instantiated. Thus, if the proposition that there are no Fs is true, its truth is not *explained* as resulting from its correspondence with the fact that *being F* is not instantiated.<sup>10</sup> Instead, the explanation is simply that there are no Fs. Not, I think, an unreasonable view. The problems with it are (i) that Merricks doesn't argue against the Fregean analysis, and (ii) he wrongly says that his point is independent of that analysis.

If my diagnosis is correct, then he could shore up his case against the correspondence theory by arguing against the Fregean analysis, and offering an alternative. There may even be a shortcut to his desired conclusion. Surely we could introduce, by stipulation if necessary, an existence predicate 'exists\*' applying to all and only things that exist, and a singular term-forming operator, 'the\*', such that [the\* G] designates, the unique thing that satisfies G, if anything does, and otherwise designates nothing. Given a negation operator, '~', that turns [the\* G exists\*] into a truth whenever the singular term either designates something that doesn't exist, or fails to designate at all, we could form truths like (9), which are, arguably, neither about any nonexistent thing, nor about the property of *being a ghost in my basement*.

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<sup>9</sup> Note also that the truth-making fact needed for this analysis of (8) by the correspondence theorist is not the fact that a certain property *has the property of not being instantiated*. Rather, it is the fact that a certain property *isn't instantiated*. Putting aside the general observation that the positive case for facts has not been made, Merricks hasn't shown that this putative fact is problematic in any special way.

<sup>10</sup> 'F' is here used as a schematic letter.

9.     ~ the\* ghost in my basement exists\*

Having gotten this far, one would be hard put to specify something that (9) is about that makes it true. Examples like this are, I think, the best candidates we are likely to get for falsifying both the correspondence theory of truth, and the claims (2a,b) -- which initially seemed to be obvious generalizations of what Merricks takes to be the trivial and uncontroversial dependence of truth on being illustrated by (1a).<sup>11</sup>

The contrast between (1a) and (1b) brings us back to our starting point. Why do we think that the claim (assertion, belief) that Mt. Rainier is in Washington is true *because* Mr. Rainier is in Washington, while rejecting as absurd the suggestion that Mr. Rainier is in Washington *because* the claim (assertion, belief) is true. Initially, the answer seems obvious. In order for the claim (assertion, belief) that Mr. Rainier is in Washington to be true, two things are needed: (i) it must be claimed (asserted, believed) that Mr. Rainier is in Washington, and (ii) Mt. Rainier must be in Washington. Given this, we can explain the contrast between (10a) and (10b).

10a.   The claim (assertion, belief) that Mt. Rainier is in Washington is true *because* Mt. Rainier is in Washington.

      b. Mr. Rainier is in Washington *because* the claim (assertion, belief) that Mt. Rainier is in Washington is true.

Since someone's claiming (asserting, believing) that Mt. Rainier is in Washington is no part of the explanation of why Mt. Rainier is in Washington, (10b) is properly judged to be absurd. By contrast, given that it has been claimed (asserted, believed) that Mr. Rainier is in Washington, Mt. Rainier's being in Washington is precisely what is needed to make that claim (assertion, belief) true. Thus, (10b) is true.

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<sup>11</sup> See page 1, and pages 186-87.

Although this reasoning is correct, the intuitive contrast between (11a), which seems true, and (11b), which seems false, suggests that it doesn't go far enough.

- 11a. The proposition that Mr. Rainier is in Washington is true *because* Mt. Rainier is in Washington.
- 11b. Mt. Rainier is in Washington, *because* the proposition that Mt. Rainier is in Washington is true.

A proposition is, of course, the sort of thing that can be asserted or believed. However, in calling something a proposition, we are not saying that it has been, or ever will be, asserted or believed. Indeed, we are not saying that it has been, or ever will be, the object of any attitude. Thus, we can't explain the apparent contrast between (11a) and (11b) by simply rehearsing the reasoning offered for (10a.b). Perhaps, if it were part of the *analysis* of truth that for the proposition that Mt. Rainier is in Washington to be true just is for Mt. Rainier to be in Washington, this might provide an explanation. However, it's not obvious that truth has an analysis, and, in any case, Merricks doesn't think it does. On the contrary, he maintains that *being true* is a simple, unanalyzable property. In addition, he endorses what he calls "realism about truth," which is just the familiar series of (necessary) biconditionals gestured at in (12).

- 12a. The proposition that Mt. Rainier is in Washington is true iff Mt. Rainier is in Washington.
- b. The proposition that Merricks is a philosopher is true iff Merricks is a philosopher,
- c. The proposition that the earth is round is true iff the earth is round.

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But the primitiveness of truth, and the necessity of these biconditionals, do nothing to explain why (11a) is true, and (11b) is not. On pp. 186-7, Merricks cites as an advantage of his theory that "it is *consistent* [my emphasis] with truth's depending on being in an uncontroversial way" – by which he means the sort of dependence indicated by the truth of examples like (11a). However, his positive theory of truth is also *consistent* with being's depending on truth – in the sense that

would be indicated if (11b) were true, and (11a) false. This is just to say no explanation of the intuitive contrast between (11a) and (11b) is offered. I am puzzled by this. What is the explanation of the contrast – which Merricks takes to be genuine -- and why doesn't he give it?

Though I won't hazard a guess about the second of these questions, I will make a stab at the first. Propositions are, I think, best conceived as abstract, structured complexes, the constituents of which are objects and (n-place) properties. To say that certain constituents make up a complex is to say that, in the complex, the constituents stand in certain relations to one another. The complex is, in effect, the standing of the constituents in those relations. So, a proposition is an entity in which its constituent parts stand in certain relations to one another. What these relations are depend on the specific type of abstract object we take propositions to be. For present purposes, identification of the type doesn't matter. Suffice it to say, for example, that the proposition that Fido is brown is a complex entity in which Fido and the property of being brown stand in a certain relation R. How does it come about that this entity – Fido's standing in R to this property -- *represents* Fido as being brown? The answer, I suggest, rests not on anything intrinsic to R itself, but on the interpretation we agents place on R. Our use of R is such that for Fido and the property *being brown* to stand in R is for Fido to be represented as being brown. Similarly for other cases.

Though abstractly put, the idea is intended to be a generalization of something commonplace. Take maps, for example. On my map, the dot labeled 'Los Angeles' is (roughly) two inches below and \_ an inch to the right of the dot labeled 'San Francisco'. The standing of these dots in this spatial relation on the map *represents* the city Los Angeles as being (roughly) 320 miles south and 80 miles east of the city San Francisco. It does so, in part, because of the interpretation we give to the relation *being two inches below and half an inch to the right of* when



interpreting the map. It is this kind of interpretation that we provide the propositional relation R, when interpreting the structured complex in which Fido stands in R to *being brown*.<sup>12</sup> In both cases -- the map and the proposition -- our interpretation of a relation that the constituents of a structure stand in is what endows the structure with its representational properties. *On this picture, a proposition – which may be the interpretation of a sentence – is itself something we interpret*. Since its representational properties depend on this interpretation, its truth does too.

If this is right, then the style of reasoning applied to (10) can be extended to (11). In order for the structured complex which is the proposition that Mr. Rainier is in Washington to be true, two things are needed: (i) we must interpret it as representing Mr. Rainier as being in Washington, and (ii) Mt. Rainier must be in Washington. Since our interpreting it in this way is no part of the explanation of why Mt. Rainier is in Washington, (11b) is false. By contrast, given that the structured complex (i.e. proposition) has been interpreted as representing Mt. Rainier as being in Washington, Mt. Rainier's being in Washington is precisely what is needed to make it true. Thus (11a) is true. This is compatible with the proposition that Mr. Rainier is in Washington being true at a world-state in which there are no agents to interpret it, since a proposition p is true at a world-state w iff the way we actually interpret p as representing the world to be is a way the world would be if w obtained. Thus, the explanation does not threaten the necessity of (12a).

'Explanation' is, of course, too grand a word. The little story I have told is far too sketchy and underdeveloped to count as an explanation. Think of it, instead, as an idea about where to

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<sup>12</sup> The idea of interpreting relations comes from Wittgenstein's theory of propositions, and picture theory of meaning, presented in the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1922. Though my conception of propositions is different from his (which was more like that of an interpreted sentence), I have come to think that his account contains an important insight that must be preserved by any correct theory. See pp. 215-16

look for one. The idea is a response to the main remaining puzzle I have about Trenton Merricks' admirable book. Perhaps he has a different explanation of the contrast between (11a) or (11b), or perhaps he doesn't think that the contrast requires explanation. Here's hoping he tells us.

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of volume 1 of my *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press), 2003 for a brief discussion of the Tractarian view.