MIDWEST STUDIES IN PHILOSOPHY, XII

# Pragmatism, Phenomenalism, and Truth Talk

ROBERT BRANDOM

This essay offers a rational reconstruction of the career of a certain heroic approach to truth—the approach whose leading idea is that the special linguistic roles of truth ascriptions are to be explained in terms of features of the ascri*bings* of truth, rather than of what is ascri*bed*. The explanatory emphasis placed on the *act* of calling something true, as opposed to its descriptive content, qualifies theories displaying this sort of strategic commitment as 'pragmatic' theories of truth, by contrast to 'semantic' ones. The starting point is an articulation of a central insight of the classical pragmatist theories of truth espoused in different versions by James and Dewey. Developing this insight in response to various objections yields a sequence of positions ending in contemporary anaphoric semantics: prosentential theories of 'true' and pronominal theories of 'refers'. These theories articulate an antirealist position about truth and reference, of the sort here called 'phenomenalist'. Insofar as theories of this sort offer adequate accounts of the phenomena they address, they assert relatively narrow and clearly defined limits to the explanatory ambitions of theories couched in traditional semantic vocabularies.

## I

The popular conception of the theory of truth of classical pragmatism is summed up in the slogan 'The truth is what works.' According to this view, the pragmatists were trying to give a theory of truth in the sense of offering necessary and sufficient conditions for possession of that property. Their innovation is then seen to consist in taking the possession of this property by a belief to consist in a relation not simply to what is believed, but also to what is desired. Working, or being satisfactory, in-

volves a further argument place beyond the standard representational or correspondence notion, for it is relative to preferences, purposes, interests, needs, or some such satisfiable states. A theory of truth, according to this line of thought, is generically a pragmatic one if it treats truth as the property of conducing to the satisfaction of some state associated with the believer, paradigmatically, desire. Specific versions of this genus of explanation will be distinguished by how they understand the state, its subject, and the sort of satisfactoriness. Thus, within the pragmatic genus, truth might be identified with properties as various as evolutionary adaptiveness for a species and optimality for felt-preference maximization by a time-slice of an individual agent.

This sort of understanding of truth as a property of utility for some end, a matter of how useful, in some sense, it is to hold the belief that is a candidate for truth, may be called 'stereotypical pragmatism'. It is important to notice what sort of a theory it is. Pointing out the apparent appropriateness of questions such as 'I believe that the theory works (for instance, makes correct predictions), but how do I know it is true?' already shows that this sort of pragmatism is very implausible if it is conceived as elucidating our concept of truth.[1] As Dewey was well aware, views of this stripe can best be maintained as revisionary proposals—not as accounts of what we mean by 'true', but suggestions that we stop using that concept and get along instead with the pragmatist's notion of utility. Any assessment of the merits of such a proposal depends on an account of what the role of our present concept of truth is, what explanatory uses we currently put the property of truth to. For only in that context can it be argued that some utility notion better serves those ends or plays that role. It is from their contribution to that antecedent question, of what work is done by our truth concept, that the significance of the classical pragmatists in the present story derives. Although their account of the role of truth talk cannot, as we shall see, in the end be counted as correct, it nevertheless provides the central idea around which an adequate account can be constructed. The answer that eventually emerges regarding the role of 'true' will make it difficult to see how stereotypical pragmatism, even as revisionary proposal, can be anything other than changing the subject, sharing only a homonym with ordinary truth talk.

There is no question that the classical American pragmatists at times commit themselves to what I have called 'stereotypical pragmatism about truth'. But there is a deeper and more interesting explanatory strategy that the pragmatists pursued as well. According to this way of setting out their account, concern for what 'works' or is satisfactory is only the final move in an innovative rethinking of the nature of truth and belief. We can and should be interested in the early moves, even if the final one does not seem satisfactory. The essential point of a theory such as James's is to treat calling something true as doing something more like praising it than like describing it.[2] Five separable theses can be distinguished in the elaboration of this approach. First is the performative, antidescriptive strategy, emphasizing the *act* of calling something true rather than the descriptive content one thereby associates with what is called true. Next is an account of that act as the personal taking up of a certain

sort of normative stance or attitude. Taking some claim to be true is endorsing it or committing oneself to it. Third is a particular understanding of that stance or attitude. Endorsing a claim is understood as adopting it as a guide to action, where this, in turn, is understood in terms of the role the endorsed claim plays in practical inference, both in first-person deliberation and in third-person appraisal. Fourth, and least important, is the view that an advantage of understanding the appropriateness or correctness of adopting an attitude of endorsement in terms of its role in guiding action consists in the possibility for some sort of not merely subjective measure of that appropriateness, namely, the success of the actions it leads to. This is the only strand of the argument acknowledged or embraced by stereotypical pragmatism.

Finally, and I want to argue, most significantly, the theory claims that once one has understood acts of *taking-true* according to this four-part model, one has understood all there is to understand about truth. Truth is treated, not as a property independent of our attitudes, to which they must eventually answer, but rather as a creature of taking-true and treating-as-true. The central theoretical focus is on what one is doing when one takes something to be true, that is, our *use* of 'true', the acts and practices of taking things to be true that collectively constitute the use we make of this expression. It is then denied that there is more to the phenomenon of truth than the proprieties of such takings. I call theories of this general sort 'phenomenalist', in recognition of the analogy with the paradigmatic subjective phenomenalism concerning physical objects, whose slogan was "esse est percipi." We consider these five theory-features seriatim.

The pragmatists start with the idea that in calling something true one is *doing* something, rather than, or in addition to, *saying* something. Instead of asking what property it is that we are describing a belief or claim as having when we say that it is true, they ask about the practical significance of the act we are performing in attributing that property. We accomplish many things by talking, and not all of them are happily assimilated to describing how things are. One ought not to conclude that because truth ascriptions are expressed in the same subject-predicate grammar as descriptions, they must for that reason be understood to function as descriptions. The pragmatic approach, centering on the act of calling something true rather than the content one thereby characterizes it as displaying, has much to recommend it. It has been seized upon by a number of authors who would not go on to accept the account of the act in question that the pragmatists offer. For, stripped of those further commitments, the recommendation is for a *performative* analysis of truth talk. In Fregean terms it is the suggestion that 'true' is a force-indicating, rather than a sense-expressing, locution.

Wittgenstein notoriously warned against thoughtless assimilation of sentence-use to fact-stating, and of term-use to referring. In the wake of Austin's discussions, theorists such as Strawson offered accounts of 'true' as a performative.[3] Its use was to be assimilated to other sorts of commitment-undertaking, in a way parallel to that expressed by the explicit performative 'I promise . . . '. In the same spirit, other contemporary accounts were offered of 'good' as expressing a kind of commenda-

tion, as taking up an attitude or expressing one's own relation to something, rather than as describing it by attributing some objective property. This is the sort of assimilation James had been urging in saying that truth is 'what is good in the way of belief'. Such remarks are often misinterpreted as claiming descriptive equivalence, or coextensiveness of the predicates 'true' and 'what it is good for us to believe'. On such a reading, the allegedly uncontroversial claim 'It is good for us to believe the truth', that is, the truth is among the things it is good for us to believe, is turned on its head. Necessary conditions are treated as sufficient, and truth is defined as what*ever* it is good for us to believe. James's intent was, rather, to mark off 'true', like 'good', as a term whose use involves the taking up of a nondescriptive stance, the undertaking of a commitment that has eventual significance for action.

What motivates such a performative analysis, for the pragmatists no less than for later theorists, is the special relation that obtains between the force or practical significance of an act of taking-true (which we might, before the performative possibility has been broached, uncritically have called an act of 'describing as' true) and the force or significance of a straightforward assertion. In asserting 'It is true that p', one asserts that p, and vice versa. The force or significance of the two claims is the same. On the face of it, this redundancy or transparency of force, the fact that adding the operator 'It is true that . . . .' to what one is going to assert does not change the force or significance of that assertion, might be explained in either of two ways. One might take it that the content expressed in a truth ascription is special, and that the redundancy of force of truth claims arises out of features of the property a claim or belief is said to exhibit when it is described as true. One must then offer an account of why attributing that property has the consequences that it does for the force of one's attribution. Compare treating claims using 'good' or 'ought' as describing properties of actions, and then needing a theory to explain the special motivational role that attributions of these properties must be taken to have for the attributor. The pragmatic theories being considered adopt the more direct path of taking the transmitted force of truth claims as the central phenomenon, one that is merely obscured by the misleading grammar of property ascription. Dewey's assertibilist theory of truth develops these ideas along explicitly performative lines using the model of utterances of 'I claim (or assert) that p'.[4] The claim that the force of freestanding utterances of this type and of 'It is true that p', are equivalent is especially liable to misinterpretation as the claim that the contents expressed by these utterances are the same. As will be seen, it is easy to show that that is not so. In any case, as a revisionist, Dewey did not even claim equivalence of force, though that was the dimension along which he assessed the relationship between his views and the tradition. Accordingly, he has often been 'refuted' on the basis of misunderstandings of theories that he did not subscribe to in the first place.

To this performative, antidescriptive explanatory commitment, the pragmatists add a particular sort of account of the act of taking-true as adopting a normative stance toward the claim or belief. In treating something as true, one is praising it in a special way—endorsing it or committing oneself to it. The stance is normative

in involving what the claim to which one has taken up a truth-attitude is *good* for, or *appropriately* used for. For treating something as the truth is plighting one's troth to it, not just acknowledging that it has some property. Truth undertakings are taken to be personal in that the proprieties of conduct one thereby commits oneself to depend on one's other commitments—commitments to choose (representing preference, desire, interest, need, and so on) as well as commitments to say (assert and believe). One is expressing or establishing one's own relation to a claim, in taking it to be true, rather than recognizing some independent property that claim already had. Again, the model of promising is important. This important emphasis on the normative character of cognitive undertakings was a central Kantian legacy (rejuvenated for us by Wittgenstein). Its expression is often obscured (Peirce is, as so often, an exception) by the pragmatists' further commitment to the sort of naturalism about the norms involved that gives rise to the attribution to them of stereotypical pragmatism.

Their understanding is that the commitment undertaken in taking-true is to rely on the belief or claim in question in guiding practical activity. This in turn is understood as a commitment to using the claim as a premise in practical inferences. These are inferences whose conclusions are not further claims, but actions, that is, performances under a description that is privileged by its relation to deliberation and appraisal. Relative to the truth-taking commitment, one ought to reason practically in one way rather than another. The proprieties of practical inference concerning whether to bring an umbrella are different for one who takes-true the claim that it is raining than for one who does not. The force of such proprieties is normative, in that although they may be ignored, the significance or force of the agent's commitment is to the effect that they *ought* not to be. It is these prudential 'oughts' that appraisal of actions assesses. The stance or attitude that one adopts in treating something as true is to be understood by its role in orienting action when activated by a contextualized attempt to satisfy the desires, preferences, and so on, that the agent exhibits.

## II

Pragmatism in the stereotypical sense becomes relevant when one conjoins the ideas of a performative analysis of taking-true, of the relevant performance as undertaking a personal commitment, and of the commitment as specifying the appropriate role of a claim in action-orienting deliberation, with the further idea that the measure of the correctness of the stance undertaken by a truth-attributor is the success of the actions it guides. The explanatory role played by this most notorious of the pragmatists' tenets ought to be understood in the light of the larger strategy for relating the concepts of truth and belief that it subserves. From a methodological point of view, perhaps the most interesting feature of the pragmatic approach is its commitment to phenomenalism about truth. Only in the context of a phenomenalist explanatory strategy can commitments of the first three sorts be seen as illuminating the no-

tion of truth. For what they really supply is a theory of **taking**-true. It is in the overarching commitment to the effect that once one understands what it is to take or treat something as true, one will have understood as well the concept of truth that the phenomenalism of this strategy consists. The force-redundancy approach to truth emphasizes the practical equivalence of taking something to be true and believing it, so another way of putting it is this: Instead of starting with a metaphysical account of truth, such as that of the correspondence theorists by opposition to which the pragmatists defined themselves, and employing that in one's account of beliefs, which are then conceived as representations that could be true, that is, have the property previously defined, the pragmatists go the other way around. They offer an account of believing or taking-true, characterized by the three sorts of commitments already canvassed, that does not appeal to any notion of truth. Being true is then to be understood as being *properly* taken-true (believed).

What I find of most interest about the classical pragmatist stories is not stereotypical pragmatism, but the dual commitment to a normative account of claiming or believing that does not lean on a supposedly explanatory antecedent notion of truth, and the suggestion that truth can then be understood phenomenalistically, in terms of features of these independently characterized takings-true. The sort of explanatory strategies here called 'phenomenalist' in a broad sense treat the subject matter about which one adopts a phenomenalistic view as **supervening** on something else. Their paradigm is classical sensationalist phenomenalism about physical objects. The slogan of this narrower class of paradigmatically phenomenalist views is that to be is to be perceived. The characteristic shift of explanatory attention enforced by these approaches is from what is represent*ed* to represent*ing*s of it. The representeds are explained in terms of the representings, instead of the other way around. Talk ostensibly about objects and their objective properties is understood as a code for talk about representings that are interrelated in complicated but regular ways. What the naive conservatism implicit in unreflective practice understands as objects and properties independent of our perceptual takings of them now becomes radically and explicitly construed as structures of or constructions out of those takings. Attributed existence, independence, and exhibition of properties are all to be seen as features of attributings of them.

The general structure exhibited by this sort of account is that the facts about **having** physical properties are taken to supervene on the facts about **seeming** to have such properties. Or, in the vocabulary to be preferred here, the facts about what things **are** Ks, for a specified sortal K, supervene on the facts about what things are **taken** to be Ks. According to such an explanatory strategy, one must offer first an independent account of the takings—one that does not appeal in any way to what it is to be a K in order to explain what it is to take something to be one. Thus, classical phenomenalism concerning physical properties such as *red* found itself obliged to account for states of the attributing subject in which things *look-red* or *seem-red* without invoking the redness that is attributed in such takings. Once that obligation is satisfied, it can further be claimed that there are no facts about what things are

red, or what it is for things to be red, over and above all the (possible) facts about what things look or seem red.

Classical subjective phenomenalism regarding physical objects and properties notoriously failed in both component explanatory tasks. Cartesian mental acts seemed ideal candidates for the takings in question. This ontological category had been given an epistemic definition in terms of the privileged access (in the sense of transparency and incorrigibility) subjects have to the class of takings that includes perceptual seemings. That something could not seem red to a subject who did not by virtue of that very taking know that it seemed red, and that something could not merely seem to seem red without really seeming red, made this class of takings appear well suited to provide the independently characterized base of a supervenience relation. Their special epistemic status seemed to guarantee for these subjective takings or attributings the possibility of a characterization independent of what they take or attribute. For one knows all about these states just by having or being in them, apart from any relation to anything but the knowing subject and the known mental state. But this is a mistake. As various authors have shown (the locus classicus is Sellars's "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind"),[5] 'looks'-talk does not form an autonomous stratum of language, a game one could play though one played no other. When one understands properly how the 'seems' operator functions, one sees that the incorrigibility of such claims essentially arises from their withholding of the endorsements involved in unqualified claims about how things actually are. The very incorrigibility that recommended them as a basis in terms of which everything epistemically less certain could be understood turns out to be an expression of the parasitic relation that these withholdings of endorsement have to the risky practices of endorsement from which they derive their meaning, and by contrast to which they exhibit their special status. Whatever their role may be in the order of justification, in the order of understanding *seems-red* presupposes *is-red*.

For these reasons the classical phenomenalist basis of takings as subjectively certified seemings could not be secured with the autonomy from the properties taken to be exhibited, which is requisite for the subsequent framing of phenomenalist supervenience explanations. Those explanations had troubles apart from those regarding their basis, however. Generic phenomenalism has been characterized here in terms of supervenience. The sense intended is that one vocabulary supervenes on another just in case there could not be two situations in which true claims (that is, facts) formulable in the supervening vocabulary differed, and the true claims formulable in the vocabulary supervened on do not differ. More neutrally put, once it is settled what one is committed to as expressed in the one vocabulary, then it is settled what one is committed to as expressed in the other. Classical subjective phenomenalism about physical objects and properties typically made stronger, reductionist claims that involve further commitments beyond supervenience. These regarded the equivalence of sentences, or in the most committive cases, individual terms and predicates, in physical-object talk to sentences or terms and predicates constructible in the language of takings-as-seemings. Again, the equivalence in question might

vary from the extreme of definitional and translational equivalence to mere coextensiveness. In none of these forms are phenomenalist claims of this reductionist variety plausible today (see, for instance, Quine's "Epistemology Naturalized").[6] Attempts to work out these reductive phenomenalist strategies have shown that the conditions under which there are reliable connections between how things seem perceptually and how they are can themselves be stated only in terms of how things are. The inference from things seeming red to their being red depends on there being *in fact* no filters, strange lights, retina-altering drugs, and so on. That there not *seem* to be such is far from sufficient.

These explanatory failures of phenomenalism in the narrow sense ought not to be taken to impugn the prospects of phenomenalist strategies in the broad sense. For those difficulties arise from the way its general phenomenalist commitments are specialized: in applying to perceivable physical properties, in offering an account of the relevant sort of takings as incorrigible, subjective perceptual seemings, and in insisting on reduction rather than just supervenience as the relation between them. Phenomenalism, in general, is a structure that antirealist accounts of many different subject matters may exhibit. It elaborates one way of taking seriously what Dummett calls the issue of 'recognition transcendence'. To detail a specific version of this sort, one must specify three things: what it is that one is taking a phenomenalist approach to (for example, physical objects, mental activity, semantic properties, the past, and so on), how one conceives the takings or attributings on which talk of such things is taken to supervene, and how in particular the supervenience relation is conceived. Corresponding to each specific phenomenalist claim will be a class of claims that qualify as **realist** in the sense of denying the phenomenalist's "nothing but" account of the subject matter in question. For the classical pragmatist, the facts about what is true supervene on the facts about taking-true, that is, on the actual action-guiding roles of beliefs. In order to appreciate the significance of the pragmatists' phenomenalist strategy, one must first consider the development of the basic idea that truth locutions are force-indicating, rather than content-specifying. We will reconstruct the subsequent trajectory of this idea, and then return to the issue of phenomenalism about truth.

Before we go on to see what is wrong with pragmatic phenomenalism about truth, it is worthwhile to indicate briefly what can make it attractive. Consider the account of knowledge that this sort of approach makes available. Phenomenalism about truth permits phenomenalism about knowledge as well. So the primary interest is not in knowledge itself, but in attributions of knowledge. The pragmatist must ask: What are we **doing** when we say that someone knows something? According to a phenomenalist reconstruction of the classic justified-true-belief account of knowledge, in taking someone to know something, one first of all *attributes a commitment*, that is, takes someone to believe. One further *attributes entitlement* to that commitment, that is, takes the committed subject to be justified. What is the function of the truth condition on knowledge, then? Conventionally, taking the claim that the subject is committed to as true is understood as attributing some property to it, charac-

terizing it or describing it. But as we have seen, the pragmatist's account of taking the claim to be true is *undertaking a commitment* to it. The truth condition does not qualify the entitled commitment that is attributed, but simply undertakes it on the part of the attributor. Knowledge claims have their central linguistic status because in them commitment to a claim is both attributed and undertaken. This phenomenalist distinction of social perspective, between the act of attributing and the act of undertaking a commitment, is what is *mis*taken for the attribution of a descriptive property (for which an otiose metaphysics can appear to be required). A pragmatic phenomenalist account of knowledge will accordingly investigate the social and normative significance of acts of attributing knowledge. The account of taking-true being considered is what makes possible such a way of thinking about knowledge claims.[7]

## III

On the pragmatic line being considered, it is the practical significance or force of asserting that defines taking-true, and this sense of taking-true accounts for our use of 'true'. In spite of all there is to recommend such a hypothesis, this conjunctive thesis cannot be correct. A familiar point of Frege's shows the inadequacy of the basic pragmatic claim. Truth talk cannot be given a purely pragmatic rendering, because not all uses of ' . . . is true' have assertoric or judgmental force. The force-based approach can at most account for a subset of our uses of truth-locutions. Frege drew attention to the use of sentences as components of other sentences. Assertion of a sentence containing another sentence as a component is not, in general, assertion of the embedded sentence. That is, the embedded sentence does not occur with assertional force, does not express something the assertor of the containing sentence is thereby committed to. Thus, as the antecedent of a conditional, for instance, 'It is true that *p*' cannot have the significance of taking-true if that is understood as the expressing of assertional force. In this sense one does not take-true the claim that *p* in asserting 'if it is true that *p*, then it is true that *q*'.

The pragmatic approach, then, offers an account only of the freestanding uses of sentences formed with ' . . . is true', not the embedded ones. This is the same rock on which, as Geach[8] has shown, performative accounts of the use of 'good' have foundered. It is precisely because one cannot embed, say, questions and imperatives as antecedents of well-formed conditionals, in which they would occur without their characteristic force, that their significance as askings and commandings is associated with their force, and not to be understood as features of the descriptive content they express. If the essence of calling something good consisted in doing something rather than saying something, then it should not be possible to say things like 'if that is good, then one ought to do it'. That one can sensibly say things like this shows that 'good' has descriptive content that survives the stripping away by embedding of the force associated with freestanding describings. Thus, an embedding test can be treated as criterial for broadly descriptive occurrences of expressions. According to this test,

'It is true that *p*' has nonperformative uses that the pragmatists' approach does not account for. And it is not open to the pragmatist simply to distinguish two senses of truth claims, one freestanding and the other embedded, and proceed from ambiguity. For then one would be equivocating in inferring from the freestanding 'It is true that *p*' and the conditional 'If it is true that *p* then it is true that *q*', in which it occurs embedded, that it is true that *q*, by detachment. So the pragmatic theory must be rejected and the phenomena it points to otherwise explained.

This sort of objection surfaces in many forms. Those who incorrectly take Dewey to have offered an analysis of 'true', rather than a candidate replacement notion, must thereby treat his assertibilism as the assertion of an equivalence of content between the sentence 'It is true that *p*' and the explicit performative 'I (hereby) claim that *p*'. The most such a made-up thinker would be entitled to claim is that the *force* of the freestanding utterance of these sentences is the same. The stronger theory is refuted by noticing that 'It is true that *p*' and 'I claim that *p*' behave differently as embedded components. For instance, they are not intersubstitutable as the antecedents of conditionals, saving the inferential role of the resulting compound. Thus, an account such as is often attributed to Dewey is subject (as Putnam[9] has pointed out in different terms) to a version of Moore's naturalistic fallacy argument. Not everyone who is committed to the conditional 'If it is true that *p*, then it is true that *p*' is committed also to the conditional 'If I claim that *p*, then it is true that *p*'. If we like, we can put this point by saying that there is nothing self-contradictory about the claim 'It is possible that I claim that *p* and it is not true that *p*'. The naturalistic fallacy point is thus just another way of putting the objection from embedding.

## IV

Pointing to the sentential embedded uses of ' . . . is true,' shows the inadequacy of the pragmatists' attempt to make do with a notion of taking-true as asserting. Analyzing and identifying uses of truth locutions by means of *redundancy of force*, that is, by a formal property of the pragmatic significance of acts of asserting freestanding truth claims, is not a sufficient explanatory strategy. It is not that freestanding force redundancy is not a central phenomenon of truth talk. But not all uses of truth locutions take this form. The pragmatic account cannot, for this reason, be the whole truth. Rather than simply discarding that approach, it is possible to amend it to retain the pragmatic account for the freestanding uses to which it properly applies. For there is a more general redundancy view that has the force-redundancy of freestanding truth-takings as a consequence. Embedded uses can be explained by a notion of *redundancy of content* according to which (apart from niceties having to do with type/token ambiguities) even in embedded contexts 'It is true that *p*' is equivalent to *p*. For even their embedded occurrences are equivalent as antecedents of conditionals, in the sense that anyone who is committed to 'If it is true that *p* then *q*' is thereby committed to 'If *p* then *q*', and vice versa. Furthermore, intersubstitutability of 'It is true that *p*' and *p* in *all* occurrences, embedded or not, is

sufficient to yield force redundancy in freestanding uses as a consequence. If two asserted contents are the same, then the significance of asserting them in the same pragmatic context should be the same. According to such a content redundancy view, the pragmatists have simply mistaken a part for a whole.

Redundancy views such as Ramsey's accordingly provide a generalization of the pragmatist's point, one that permits an answer to the otherwise decisive refutation offered by the embedding objection. Accounts that generalize to the intersubstitutability of 'Snow is white' and 'It is true that snow is white' are clearly on the right track. They show what is needed to supplement the pragmatists' account, in order to deal with some embedded occurrences. But they do not yet account for all the contexts in which the taking-true locution ' . . . is true' occurs. Such simple redundancy accounts will not offer a correct reading of sentences like 'Goldbach's conjecture is true'. For this sentence is not interchangeable with 'Goldbach's conjecture'. For instance, the former, but not the latter, appears as the antecedent of well-formed and significant conditionals. So content redundancy, though relaxing the limitations constraining the original pragmatic account, will not apply correctly in all the contexts in which truth locutions occur.

Such cases show that the content-redundancy view must, in turn, be revised to include the operation of some sort of disquotation or unnominalizing operator. In the cases to which the simple content-redundancy theory applies, the additional operation will be transparent. But in the case of sentences such as 'Goldbach's conjecture is true', the claim with respect to which the truth-taking is content redundant must be determined by a two-stage process. First, a sentence nominalization is discerned. This may be a description, such as 'Goldbach's conjecture', a quote-name, such as 'Snow is white', a 'that'-clause sortal such as 'the claim that snow is white', or some other sort of nominalization. Next, a sentence is produced that is nominalized by the locution picked out in the first stage. This is a sentence expressing Goldbach's conjecture, named by the quote name, one that says *that* snow is white, and so on. It is this sentence that is then treated by theory as intersubstitutable with the truth-attributing sentence, whether occurring embedded or freestanding.

A content redundancy account with disquotation or unnominalization is more satisfactory and deals with more cases than does a simple content-redundancy account, just as content-redundancy accounts represent improvements of theories acknowledging only redundancy of force. But even disquotational views will not account for all the uses of ' . . . is true' that might be important. They will not deal correctly, for instance, with occurrences such as 'Everything the policeman said is true', in which a *quantified* sentence nominalization is employed. For here what is nominalized is a whole *set* of sentences, and there need, in general, be no single sentence that is equivalent to all of them. A further refinement of content-redundancy accounts is required if they are to deal with this range of cases.

## V

The most sophisticated version of the redundancy theory, one capable of handling quantificational truth idioms, is the remarkable anaphoric analysis undertaken by Grover, Camp, and Belnap in their essay "A Prosentential Theory of Truth."[10] For the original redundancy and disquotational theories, each use of ' . . . is true' is associated with some sentence on which it is redundant, or with which it shares its content. Whatever else this may mean, it at least includes a commitment that the intersubstitution of the sentence containing 'true' and its nonsemantic equivalent, in some privileged range of contexts, preserves assertional and inferential commitments. The difficulty in extending this intersubstitutional account to the quantificational case is that there the use of the sentence containing 'true' is determined not by a single sentence, but by a whole *set* of sentences, those expressing whatever the policeman has said. Of course, disquotation or unnominalization may produce sets of sentences as well, as more than one sentence may express Goldbach's conjecture. In such cases, the sentences must all share a content or be redundant on each other, that is, must be intersubstitutable with each other in the relevant contexts, whereas there is no requirement that any two sentences that express things the policeman has said be in any other way equivalent. So what is it that the sentence containing 'true' shares its content with, or is redundant upon, in the sense of intersubstitutability? What is distinctive of the anaphoric development of redundancy theories is its use of the model of *pronouns* to show how, in spite of this difficulty, the quantificational cases can be treated as *both* redundant in the same way nonquantificational cases are, *and* as deriving their content from a whole *set* of nonintersubstitutable sentences.

It has been noticed that pronouns serve two purposes.[11] In their *lazy* use, as in 'If Mary wants to arrive on time, she should leave now', they are replaceable by their antecedents, serving merely to avoid repetition. In the *quantificational* use of pronouns, as in 'Any positive integer is such that if it is even, adding it to one yields an odd number', such replacement clearly would change the sense. 'If any positive number is even, adding any positive number to one yields an odd number' is not a consequence one becomes committed to by undertaking the original claim. In such cases, the semantic role of the pronoun is determined by a *set* of admissible substituends, which is in turn fixed by the grammatical antecedent (here 'Any positive number'). In virtue of uttering the original sentence, one is committed to *each* of the results of replacing the pronoun 'it' in some occurrence by some admissible substituend, that is, some expression that refers to a positive number.

The prosentential theory of truth is what results if one decides to treat ' . . . is true' as a syncategorematic fragment of pro*sentences*, and then understands this new category by semantic analogy to other proforms, in particular to pronouns functioning as just described. So 'Snow is white is true' is read as a prosentence of laziness, having the same semantic content as its anaphoric antecedent, perhaps the token of 'Snow is white' that it contains. The prosentence differs from its antecedent in explicitly acknowledging its dependence upon an antecedent, as 'She

stopped' differs from 'Mary stopped', when the pronoun has some token of the type 'Mary' as its antecedent. Otherwise, the lazy uses are purely redundant. The advance on earlier conceptions lies in the availability on this model of *quantificational* uses of prosentences containing 'true'. Thus 'Everything he said is true' is construed as containing a quantificational prosentence, which picks up from its anaphoric antecedent a set of admissible substituends (things he said). Expanding the claim in the usual way, to 'For anything one can say, if the policeman said it, then it is true', exhibits 'it is true' as the quantificationally dependent prosentence. Each quantificational instance of this quantificational claim can be understood in terms of the lazy functioning of prosentences, and the quantificational claim is related to those instances in the usual conjunctive way.

By analogy to pronouns, prosentences are defined by four conditions:[12]

(1) They occupy all grammatical positions that can be occupied by declarative sentences, whether freestanding or embedded.
(2) They are generic, in that *any* declarative sentence can be the antecedent of some prosentence.[13]
(3) They can be used anaphorically either in the lazy way or in the quantificational way.
(4) In each use, a prosentence will have an anaphoric antecedent that determines a class of admissible sentential substituends for the prosentence (in the lazy case, a singleton). This class of substituends determines the significance of the prosentence associated with it.

There are many philosophical virtues to explicating each occurrence of 'true' as marking the occurrence of a prosentence in this sense. Quite varied uses, including embedded ones, of expressions involving 'true' in English are accounted for by means of a unified model. That model is in turn explicated by appeal to the familiar, and closely analogous, pronominal anaphoric reference relation. Not only is the semantics of such uses explained, but their pragmatic features as well—acknowledgment of an antecedent and the use of truth locutions to endorse or adopt someone else's claim. Tarski's biconditionals are appropriately underwritten, so the necessary condition of adequacy for theories of truth that he establishes is satisfied. A feature dear to the hearts of the prosententialists is the metaphysical parsimony of the theory. For what in the past were explained as attributions of a special and mysterious *property*, truth, to equally mysterious bearers of truth, namely, propositions, are exhibited instead as uses of grammatical proforms anaphorically referring only to the sentence tokenings that are their antecedents. A further virtue of the prosentential account is that anaphora is a relation between linguistic expression *tokenings*. Consequently, the use of tokenings of types such as 'That is true' as a response to a tokening of 'I am hungry' is construed correctly, just as 'he' can have 'I' as its antecedent without thereby referring to whoever uttered 'he'. An incautiously stated, content redundancy theory would get these indexical cases wrong. Finally, the uses of 'true' falling under the elegant, anaphorically unified treatment include quantificational ones such

as 'Everything the oracle says is true,' which are recalcitrant to more primitive redundancy and disquotational approaches.

The pragmatists' insistence that in calling something true one is not describing or characterizing it is respected. For one does not describe a cat when one refers to it pronominally by means of an 'it'. This point is further broadened to accommodate embedded uses where the account of the describing alternative as endorsing does not, as we saw, apply. 'True' functions anaphorically and not descriptively even in such cases. And anaphoric inheritance of content explains equally why freestanding or force-bearing uses of 'It is true that *p*' have the pragmatic significance of endorsements of the claim that *p*. The prosentential account shows how the pragmatists' insights can be preserved, while accounting for the uses of 'true' that cause difficulties for their original formulation. It is thus a way of working out the content-redundancy rescue strategy.

## VI

The treatment of quantificational prosentences represents an advance over previous redundancy theories. As the theory is originally presented, however, the treatment of lazy prosentences in some ways retreats from the ground gained by disquotational developments of redundancy theories. The explanatory costs associated with the original theory arise because it treats *most* occurrences of 'true' as quantificational. Thus, the official version of 'The first sentence Bismarck uttered in 1865 is true' construes it as a quantified conditional of the form 'For any sentence, if it is the first sentence Bismarck uttered in 1865, then it is true', in which 'it is true' is a prosentence of quantification. Now, one of the strengths of the prosentential account is its capacity to use the logical structure of quantification to explain the use of complicated sentences such as 'Something John said is either true or has been said by George'. There should be no quarrel with the author's treatment of these sentences that "wear their quantifiers on their sleeves." And it is clear that any sentence that has the surface form of a predication of truth of some sentence nominalization can be construed as a conditional propositional quantification. But it is not clear that it is a good idea to assimilate what look like straightforward predications of truth to this quantificational model. To do so is to reject the disquotational treatment of these lazy prosentences, which has no greater ontological commitments and stays closer to the apparent form of such sentences. Otherwise, almost all sentences involving 'true' must be seen as radically misleading in terms of their underlying logical form. The account of truth talk should bear the weight of such divergence of logical from grammatical form only if no similarly adequate account can be constructed that lacks this feature. It would be preferable to follow the treatment of sentence nominalizations suggested by disquotational generalizations of redundancy theories.

In fact, there is no barrier to doing so. The original motivations and advantages of the prosentential account carry over directly to a disquotational or unnominalizing variant. According to such an account, 'The first sentence Bismarck uttered in 1865'

is a sentence nominalization, a term that picks out a sentence tokening. In this case it describes the sentence, but it could be a quote-name, demonstrative, that-clause sortal, or any sort of nominalization. Its function is just to pick out the antecedent on which the whole prosentence formed using 'true' is anaphorically dependent, and from which it accordingly inherits its content. Ontological commitment is only to sentence tokens and to anaphoric dependence, which prosententialists require in any case.

A brief rehearsal of the considerations leading the authors of the prosentential theory to do things otherwise will show that their reasons ought not to discourage us from adopting a disquotational variant of the prosentential account. They say:

> This account differs radically from the standard one since on (what we have called) the subject-predicate account 'that' in 'that is true' is always treated separately as referring by itself to some bearer of truth, whether it be a sentence, proposition, or statement. On our account cross-referencing—without separate reference of 'that'—happens between the *whole* expression 'that is true' and its antecedent.[14]

Another way to put this point is that, where the classical account takes a subpart of the sentence as a referring term, and ' . . . is true' as a predicate that forms a sentence from that term by characterizing its referent, according to the prosentential theory the only expression standing in a referential relation is the whole sentence, which refers anaphorically to an antecedent. There are accordingly *two* innovations put forth concerning reference in sentences like 'That is true'. The sentence is seen as an anaphoric proform, *and* 'that' is no longer seen as a referring term. We are told:

> Reference can involve either (or both) anaphoric reference or independent reference, and since people have not seriously considered the former, the possibility that **the** relation between 'that is true' and its antecedent may be that of anaphoric reference has not occurred to them. In ignoring anaphoric reference philosophers have assumed that **the** reference involved in 'that is true' is, through 'that', like that between a pronoun (say 'she' used independently) and its referent (say Mary). Once this picture dominates, the need for bearers of truth begins to be felt, and it is then but a small step to the claim that in using 'is true' we are characterizing those entities. [emphasis added][15]

But why should we think that we have to choose between treating the whole expression 'that is true' as a prosentence anaphorically referring to a sentence tokening from which it inherits its content and treating 'that' as a referring expression, in particular a sentence nominalization, that picks out the tokening on which the whole prosentence depends? Instead of seeing ' . . . is true' as a syncategorematic fragment of a semantically atomic generic prosentence 'that is true', we can see it as a *prosentence forming operator*. It applies to a term that is a sentence nominalization or that refers to or picks out a sentence tokening. It yields a prosentence that has that tokening as its anaphoric antecedent. To understand things this way is not to fall back into a

subject-predicate picture, for there is all the difference in the world between a prosentence-forming operator and the predicates that form ordinary sentences. Nor does it commit us to bearers of truth, apart from the sentential antecedents without which no anaphoric account can do.

There is a further reason to prefer the account that treats ' . . . is true' as a prosentence-forming operator as recommended here, rather than as a fragment of the single prosentence recognized, 'that is true', functioning almost always quantificationally, as the original theory has it. For conceived in the former way, the treatment of 'true' has an exact parallel in the treatment of 'refers'. Elsewhere[16] I have argued in detail that 'refers' can be understood as a pronoun-forming operator. Its basic employment is in the construction of what may be called **anaphorically indirect** definite descriptions. These are expressions such as 'the one Kissinger referred to [or described] as "almost a third-rate intellect," understood as a pronoun whose anaphoric antecedent is some utterance by Kissinger. A full-fledged pronominal or anaphoric theory of 'refers' talk is generated by first showing how other uses of 'refers' and its cognates can be paraphrased so that 'refers' appears only inside indirect descriptions, and then explaining the use of these descriptions as pronouns formed by applying the 'refers' operator to some antecedent-specifying locution. Treating 'true' as an operator that applies to a sentence nominalization and produces a prosentence anaphorically dependent on the nominalized sentence token, and 'refers' as an operator that applies to an expression picking out a term tokening and produces a pronoun anaphorically dependent on it, permits a single theory form to explain the use of all legitimate semantic talk about truth *and* reference in purely anaphoric terms.

## VII

To sum up: The pragmatists' approach to truth introduces a bold phenomenalist strategy – to take as immediate explanatory target the practical proprieties of *taking-true*, and to understand the concept of truth as consisting in this use that is made of a class of expressions, rather than starting with a truth property and then seeing what it is for us to express a concept that attributes that property. Their implementation of this strategy is flawed in its exclusive attention to taking-true as a variety of force, as a doing, specifically an asserting of something. For 'true' is used in other contexts, for instance, embedded in the antecedent of a conditional, and what it expresses is not exhausted by freestanding assertional uses. We have seen how content-redundancy theories can incorporate the insights of these force-redundancy accounts, and in their most sophisticated, anaphoric form account for the wider variety of uses of 'true'. Indeed, starting with an analogous pronominal account of 'refers' or 'denotes', it is possible to generate Tarski-wise the truth-equivalences that jointly express the content redundancy of ' . . . is true'. The pragmatists' strategy has been vindicated at least this far: It is possible to account for truth talk without invoking a property of truth that such talk must be understood as answering to.

Anaphoric semantics gives aid and comfort to semantic phenomenalists. Although the possibility of such an account does not enforce or entail phenomenalism about truth and reference, it enables such a view. It is tempting to conclude, in line with such a phenomenalism, that there are no semantic facts. Facts are simply true claims (and the prosententialist knows how to talk noncommittally about *these*). What look like semantic claims are assertions whose function, though complex, we can now see how to specify. When that is done, we see that these utterances ought not to be assimilated to property ascriptions, and so the temptation to look for a property of truth corresponding to 'true' talk, and a relation of reference corresponding to 'refers' talk, is seen to be misbegotten—one more disreputable metaphysical urge better outgrown than indulged. This is a view one can be entitled to only by possession of an adequate account of the use of the expressions involved. Although such an account is necessary for phenomenalism, it is not sufficient.

There are two related reasons for caution in adopting phenomenalism of an anaphoric sort about truth talk. To begin with, it is not quite true that all sorts of truth talk are recoverable by such theories. Specifically, talk in which the substantive 'truth' appears in a way not easily eliminable in favor of 'true' will receive no construal by such theories. Philosophers do say things like 'Truth is one, beliefs are many' and 'Truth is a property definable in the vocabulary of some eventual physics', which are illegitimate according to the account of 'true' offered here. The phenomenalist is not permitted to say things like this, denies that ordinary people do, and so counts it no defect of the account that it fails to generate readings for this sort of fundamentally confused remark. But this is hardly decisive. At most, the phenomenalist is entitled to claim that the burden of proof has shifted to the antiphenomenalist, to show that this kind of 'truth' talk has anything other than its sound in common with the expression that is given a use by everyday linguistic practice.

This brings us to the second reason for according a limited significance to the possibility of a phenomenalistically acceptable account of ordinary truth talk, namely, that the motivation for a realistic approach to truth may not be part of a project of reconstructing ordinary usage, but rather part of a theoretical explanatory effort. Truth is not, as it were, a property confronted in everyday discourse, but rather one that must be postulated by an explanation of certain features of that discourse that are not exhausted by talk *about* truth. For instance, a phenomenalist who offers a content-redundancy account of truth talk is obviously barred from an explication of the sort of content involved that appeals to a notion of *truth conditions*. The phenomenalist may be right in claiming that it is only by misunderstanding the role of 'true' that one could have been misled into thinking that explanatory ground could be gained by such an appeal, but this is not established simply by showing that one *can* understand truth talk in a way that condemns such talk as confused. One must show that the explanatory tasks that truth properties and reference relations have been invoked to help with are better served by other explanatory primitives.

The phenomenalist's claim is always of the "nothing-but" variety; the opposing realist insists that something more is needed. It seems good Popperian methodology

to adopt the most easily falsifiable of these strategies. Methodological phenomenalism about truth would not be an ontological position, but a revisable commitment adopted for its salutary effects on the course of inquiry. On those adopting such a commitment, it imposes the task of explaining in phenomenalistically acceptable terms whatever linguistic phenomena a realistic theory claims require the invocation of taking-transcendent properties and relations. One might offer an inferential account of sentential contents,[17] and a substitutional account of what it is for such a content to purport to represent a state of affairs. Providing such a substantive account is the real work of the phenomenalist program – not criticizing realists, but providing detailed nothing-but theses for realists to respond to and discover the specific inadequacies of. Semantic phenomenalists must show how to do without truth and reference in theoretical explanation, as well as in casual discourse. This cannot be accomplished by studying the grammar of 'true'. It requires a full-blown account of linguistic practices.

Such a methodological stance leaves the realist an equally important task. Antiphenomenalists about truth, those who claim that there is more to truth than its appearance in truth talk, not only must show what is left out by a phenomenalist account, how truth transcends proprieties of taking-true, that is, show the crucial explanatory work done by the notion in some substantive theory; they must also show how that theoretical concept is related to the ordinary use of 'true' that is capturable in anaphoric terms. Only so can they vindicate their use of words that already have familiar uses, to express theoretical constructs that outrun everyday talk. For it would not suffice to settle this dispute about truth or reference to show that physical properties and relations need to be invoked to account for the use of linguistic expressions such as 'red' or 'This stone has a mass of one gram'. (In any case, surely no one could deny this much.) The challenge presented by a phenomenalistic account such as the anaphoric one whose antecedents have been traced here is to connect the theoretical concepts with our ordinary takings. Phenomenalist and antiphenomenalist each owe theories of discursive practice, which either show how to do without taking-transcendent notions of truth and reference, or show how essential these are. The anaphoric account of 'true' and 'refers' confers on the latter the additional responsibility of showing how that theory in some way elaborates on ordinary practices of taking-true. To that extent, and insofar as it is acceptable to apply here a legal concept born of a practical necessity philosophers ought not admit, namely, the necessity that all deliberations conclude with a verdict, the anaphoric account shifts the burden of proof to the antiphenomenalist camp. But what is important in the end is not what 'true' means, but how language works.

## Notes

1. The point here does not concern merely the senses of the contrasted expressions, but the extensions they determine. The appropriateness of this question would have to be defended by adducing cases in which a belief apparently "worked" and was not true, or vice versa. Such cases are not far to seek. This sort of argument is considered more carefully in what follows.

2. *Pragmatism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), bound with its sequel, *The Meaning of Truth*, which as here interpreted ought to be titled "The Meaning of Taking-True." For an important assessment on a larger scale, see R. Rorty's "Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth," in *Philosophy of Donald Davidson: A Perspective on Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, edited by E. LePore (Oxford, 1986), to which this essay is a tangential response.

3. For instance, in "Truth", reprinted in *Truth*, edited by G. Pitcher, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1964), 32–53. Strawson's view is often also referred to as a 'redundancy account,' in the sense of an account focusing on redundancy of *force*.

4. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York, 1938).

5. Reprinted in Sellars, *Science, Perception, and Reality* (London and New York, 1963).

6. In Quine, *Ontological Relativity and other essays* (New York, 1969).

7. For some further prerequisites, see my "Asserting", *Nous* 17, no. 4 (November 1983): 637–50.

8. "Ascriptivism" and "Assertion," reprinted in Geach's *Logic Matters* (Berkeley, 1972), 250–53 and 254–69.

9. "Reference and Understanding," in *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (London, 1978), 108.

10. Grover, Camp, and Belnap, "A Prosentential Theory of Truth," *Philosophical Studies* 27 (1975): 73–125.

11. See P. Geach, *Reference and Generality* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1962), 124–43. For some complications, see B. Partee, "Opacity, Coreference, and Pronouns," in *Semantics of Natural Language* edited by Harman and Davidson (Dordrecht, 1972), 415–41.

12. "Prosentential Theory of Truth," 87.

13. The authors of the original theory may believe that for any syntactic prosentence type (paradigmatically 'That is true') and any declarative sentence tokening, there is potentially an anaphorically dependent prosentence tokening of that type that has the declarative tokening as its antecedent. On the disquotational account of lazy prosentences offered in emendation below, that formulation would not hold.

14. "Prosentential Theory of Truth," 91.

15. "Prosentential Theory of Truth," 109.

16. "Reference Explained Away," *Journal of Philosophy* (September 1984).

17. For a general discussion and a particular example, see the author's "Varieties of Understanding," in *Reason and Rationality in Natural Science*, edited by N. Rescher (Lanham, Md., 1985) 27–51.