

Contents

1	The Minimal Theory	1
	A Sketch of the Minimalist Conception	1
	The Space of Alternative Theories	8
	Summary of Alleged Difficulties	12

The following is a list of the questions and problems regarding minimalism to which replies and solutions will be proposed in the course of this essay

2	The Proper Formulation	15
	1. 'Of what kinds are the entities to which truth may be attributed?'	16
	2. 'What are the fundamental principles of the minimal theory of truth?'	17
	3. 'It seems unlikely that instances of the equivalence schema could possibly suffice to explain all of the great variety of facts about truth.'	20
	4. 'The minimal theory must be incomplete, for it says nothing about the relationships between truth and affiliated phenomena such as verification, practical success, reference, logical validity, and assertion.'	23
	5. 'Even if the minimal theory is, in some sense, "adequate" and "pure", it is nevertheless unsatisfactory, being so cumbersome that it cannot even be explicitly formulated.'	25

6. 'If there were really no more to a complete theory of truth than a list of biconditionals like "The proposition *that snow is white* is true if and only if snow is white", then, since one could always say "*p*" rather than "The proposition *that p* is true", it would be inexplicable that our language should contain the word "true": there would be no point in having such a notion.' 31
7. 'The minimal theory fails to specify what are *meant* by attributions of truth. It fails to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for the applicability of the truth predicate.' 33
8. 'Is the minimalist conception concerned with *truth itself* or with *the word "true"*?' 36
9. 'Even if we grant that, as predicates go, the *truth* predicate is highly unusual—even if we grant that its function is to enable us to say certain important things while avoiding new forms of quantification—it surely does not follow that *being true* is not a genuine property.' 37
10. 'If the equivalence schema is relied on indiscriminately, then the notorious "liar" paradoxes will result.' 40

3 The Explanatory Role of the Concept of Truth 44

11. 'Truth has certain characteristic effects and causes. For example, true beliefs tend to facilitate the achievement of practical goals. General laws such as this call for explanation in terms of the nature of truth. Therefore there must be some account of what truth is, going beyond the minimalist story, that provides a conceptual or naturalistic reduction of this property.' 44
12. 'Another lawlike generalization is that beliefs obtained as a result of certain methods of inquiry tend to be true. Again this suggests that the minimalist conception overlooks truth's causal/explanatory nature.' 46

13. 'A further explanatory role for truth lies in the fact that the truth of scientific theories accounts for their empirical success.' 48
14. 'Even if all our general beliefs about truth are deducible from the minimal theory (suitably augmented), this does not imply that no deeper analysis of truth is desirable; for one might well hope to find something that will show *why it is* that the equivalence schema holds.' 50
- 4 Methodology and Scientific Realism** 52
15. 'Doesn't the deflationary perspective—the renunciation of a substantive notion of truth—lead inevitably to relativism: to the idea that there is no such thing as objective correctness?' 52
16. 'Isn't the minimalist perspective in some sense anti-realist? Does it not deny that scientific theories are intended to correspond to a mind-independent world?' 53
17. 'Is it not obvious that the nature of truth bears directly on the structure of reality and the conditions for comprehending it? Surely, "truth" and "reality" are semantically inextricable from one another; so how could one's position in the realism debate be divorced from one's conception of truth?' 56
18. 'If, as the minimal theory implies, "truth" is not *defined* as the product of ideal inquiry, why should we believe that an ideal inquiry would provide the truth?' 60
19. 'How is it possible, given the minimal theory, for truth to be something of intrinsic value, desirable independently of its practical utility?' 62
20. 'How can minimalism accommodate the idea of science progressing towards the truth?' 63
21. 'From the perspective of the minimalist conception of truth, it is impossible to produce an adequate justification of scientific methods.' 64

5 Meaning and Logic

68

22. 'As Davidson has argued, understanding a sentence, say, "Tachyons can travel back in time", is a matter of appreciating what must be the case for the sentence to be true—knowing its *truth condition*. That is to say, one must be aware that "Tachyons can travel back in time" is true if and only if tachyons can travel back in time. Therefore it is not possible to agree with the minimalist claim that this knowledge also helps to constitute our grasp of "is true". For in that case we would be faced with something like a single equation and two unknowns. Rather, if knowledge of the truth conditions of "Tachyons can travel back in time" is to constitute our understanding that sentence, then this knowledge would presuppose some pre-existing conception of truth.'
- 68
23. 'What about falsity and negation?'
- 71
24. 'As Frege said, logic is the science of truth; so surely our accounts of truth and logic should be, if not identical, at least bound up with one another. Yet the minimal theory does not even enable one to prove that the principle of non-contradiction is true.'
- 73
25. 'Minimalism cannot be squared with the role that the notion of truth must play in the foundations of logic—in justifying one logic over another.'
- 74
26. 'How can truth-value gaps be admitted?'
- 76
27. 'Doesn't philosophy require truth-value gaps in order to accommodate such phenomena as non-referring names, vagueness, the emotivist conception of ethics, etc.?'
- 78
28. 'It is obvious that many predicates—for example, "blue", "small", "bald", "heap"—do not have definite extensions; and when such predicates are applied to certain objects the result will surely be propositions with no truth value.'
- 78

29. 'There is a substantive issue in meta-ethics as to whether evaluative utterances purport to assert truths or whether they are merely expressions of feeling; but this question would be trivialized by minimalism.' 84
- 6 Propositions and Utterances** 86
30. 'Propositions are highly dubious entities. It is unclear what they are supposed to be, and their very existence is controversial. Would it not be better, therefore, to develop a theory of truth that does not presuppose them—by assuming, for example, that *utterances* are the primary bearers of truth?' 86
31. 'The case for propositions assumes the adequacy of a certain logical analysis of belief—one that construes the state of belief as a relation between a person and a kind of entity, the *content* of the belief. But this assumption is plagued with familiar difficulties and appears to be mistaken.' 90
32. "'The proposition *that p* is true iff *p*" can be thought to capture our conception of truth only if truth is not already presupposed in the very idea of a proposition. But this requirement may well be violated. For a central component of the notion of *proposition* is lodged in the statement of identity conditions for propositions—the conditions for two utterances to express the same proposition. But this is an idea one might plausibly explain in terms of the *intertranslatability* of the utterances, which, in turn, must be construed as their having the same *truth* conditions. And if the concept of truth is needed to say what propositions are, then a theory of truth cannot take propositions for granted.' 93
33. 'The "use theory" of meaning implies that propositions don't exist. For if *translation* is a matter of resemblance in use, then it is not a transitive relation, and so there can be no such things as "what intertranslatable utterances have in common".' 95

34. 'Many philosophers would agree that if propositions exist then *propositional* truth would be covered by something like the equivalence schema. But they might still maintain that the truth of an *utterance* consists in its "correspondence with reality", or some other substantive thing. Thus, it is for *utterances* that the deflationary account is controversial, and this position has received no elaboration or defence.'

98

7 The 'Correspondence' Intuition 104

35. 'Is it not patently obvious that the truth or falsity of a statement is something that grows out of its relations to external aspects of reality?' 104
36. 'Is it not equally clear that, contrary to minimalism, statements are made true by facts to which they correspond?' 105
37. 'Certain cases of representation (e.g. by maps) clearly involve a correspondence—a structural resemblance—to what is represented. So is it not reasonable to expect some such relation in linguistic representation also?' 108
38. 'The minimal theory fails to show how the truth of a sentence depends on the referential properties of its parts.' 110
39. 'The great virtue of defining truth in terms of reference is that the account may be supplemented with a naturalistic (causal) theory of the reference relation to yield, in the end, a naturalistic and scientifically respectable theory of truth.' 113

Conclusion 118

Postscript 120

Bibliography 147

Index 155