

# The History of the Concept of “Truth-Making”

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The conception of truth-making, albeit in a rudimentary form, could already be discerned in the writings of G. E. Moore and E. Husserl in the early 1900s. A few years later it was more extensively exploited by William James. It was Wittgenstein, however, who gave the concept a precise meaning. In 1913/1914 Wittgenstein advanced a theory of possible worlds, only one of which was real. Every proposition suggests a part of a possible world which does or does not correspond to parts of the real world. In the first case the proposition is true, in the second case false. Moreover, the part of the real world *makes* the sentence true. This part is a truth-maker, and the sentence is a truth-bearer. Surprisingly enough, Wittgenstein’s concept of truth-making had its family resemblance with William James’s conception of truth. In 1915 Wittgenstein stopped using the concept of truth-making—it was also not mentioned in the *Tractatus*. Unfortunately, Russell did not notice this and in 1918 he adopted the concept of truth-making. In the 1930s, it was used by some second generation analytic philosophers (Schlick, Stebbing, and Wisdom). However, it became rather popular among analytic philosophers only in the 1980s.

*Keywords:* James, Russell, truth, truth-making, Wittgenstein

## Introduction

The concept of “truth-making” has a bad press. Despite the fact that such a prominent philosopher as David Armstrong devoted much time to its study, in the 10 volumes of the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Craig 1998) it is not even on the Index, let alone having an article specifically dedicated to it. One reason for this negligence, we believe, is that till the present day its historical roots have not been traced in the writings of the founding fathers of analytic philosophy.

The thesis we advance in this paper is that, similar to many other concepts in analytic philosophy, the concept of truth-making has its true history in the philosophical development of Bertrand Russell in relation to his friends G. E. Moore and Wittgenstein. Our next claim will be—one that may seem rather surprising—that it was also introduced under William James’s influence. Indeed, James was the first to extensively speak of “making true”. At the same time, the setup of the theory of truth-making was prepared by Hermann Lotze, Franz Brentano, and Gottlob Frege.

Here are two preliminary remarks in this respect:

(1) Some keen commentators have rightly noted that Russell can be profitably seen as a Platonic dialogue with himself (Coffa, 1980). He often adopted and developed concepts and theories only in order to give them up a couple of years later. In another couple of years, though, he would turn back to the primary concepts with an innocent air, as if he never rejected them. A typical example in this respect is the concept of sense-data (Milkov, 2001b). Russell employed it in some papers of his in 1896-1898, after which he abandoned it so flatly that he forgot that he had ever made use of it. So, in 1911, when preparing his “shilling shocker”, *The Problems*

of *Philosophy*, he saw the concept of sense-data in Moore’s lectures (later published as *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, 1953); it appeared to him as a revelation. Subsequently, the concept became central to Russell’s writings. After 1940, however, he abandoned it for the second time and spoke about sensations instead.

As we are going to see in the present paper, this picture of Russell, as a philosopher who often accepted concepts and theories, then abandoned them only to adopt them a few years later, and then to reject them again, manifested itself in a clearest form in the way in which he came to first reject, then embrace, and finally reject again the concept of truth-making.

(2) One of the theses of this paper that Russell borrowed the concept of truth-making from William James, is to be seen in the context of the general influence of James on Russell. As no other author, William James served Russell as a source of new terms: In this connection the already cited terms of “sense-data”, “knowledge by acquaintance”, and its opposition to “knowledge by description” should be mentioned. Again, like some other conceptions of James’s, for example, that of “natural monism”, Russell finally adopted elements of the truth-making program of the pragmatist, after arguing against it for years.

### Prehistory of the Conception of “Truth-Making”

As a matter of fact, the term “truth-making” was used sporadically before James and Russell, for example in G. E. Moore’s “The Nature of Judgment” (1899, p. 64) and in F. H. Bradley’s “On Truth and Coping” (1907, p. 166). Special attention deserves Edmund Husserl’s position. In his *Logical Investigations* he spoke about “a truth-making state of affairs” (*wahrmachende Sachverhalt*) (1900/1901/1992, Part VI, § 39). However, in contrast to Bradley and Moore, Husserl did not adopt the correspondence theory of truth but the “evidence theory of truth” (1900/1901/1992, ii: 646-656).

Our guess is that these accidental uses of the term were connected with the introduction of the concept of content of judgment by Hermann Lotze (Milkov, 2002; 2023, Chapter 4), further developed by Franz Brentano.<sup>1</sup> In short, Brentano’s new theory of judgment set the judging subject and the object judged in radical opposition (G. E. Moore adopted this tack following his tutor in Cambridge, G. F. Stout). In the light of this conception, philosophers were inclined to say that one of them “makes” the other one true. It, however, was still not a *theory* of truth-making. As we are going to see in the lines to come, the theory of truth-making, as different from the term, was first introduced to philosophy by Wittgenstein in 1913 but only to be soon (in the *Tractatus*) abandoned by him. The true champion of the concept of truth-making, however, was Russell who made it popular among the first and the second generation of analytic philosophers (see pp. 10 f.).

### The Standard Theory of Truth-Making

Before starting our review of the history of the theory of truth making, we are going to throw some light on the standard theory of truth-making. This will help us explicate who exactly introduced it and in what context.

Roughly, the standard theory of truth-making requires four things:<sup>2</sup>

(1) *Autonomous truth-makers—Facts, or states of affairs*: This requirement was denied by the reists of the Kazimierz Twardowski school, the Polish logicians Tadeusz Kotarbiński and Alfred Tarski—they were committed to set-theoretical entities. Tarski, for example, maintained that sentences did not correspond to facts but

<sup>1</sup> Husserl was a student of Brentano and was also influenced by Lotze and Bolzano (Husserl, 1939).

<sup>2</sup> In discussing these four points we follow Simons (1992; 2001).

to sequences of objects. Other philosophers “unfair to facts” were: Moore and Russell between 1898 and 1905 with their identity theory of truth; Russell of 1905-1913, who, as we are going to see in § 4.2, replaced facts with complexes and sets of entities; Peter Strawson of 1949-1950, who defended the “performative theory of truth”, according to which facts were “what statements (when true) state, not what they are about” (1971, p. 196); Quine, who, in *Word and Object*, resolutely rejected the conception of truth-making (1960, 246 f.)—we falsely believe, Quine maintained, that there are special entities (facts) that make our propositions true and, correspondingly, there are also true sentences that lack factual content (analytic propositions). At the same time, however, Quine widely used the terminology of truth-bearers, or “truth-vehicles”.

(2) *Autonomous truth-bearers or propositions*: Authors who held that there are no propositions (Bradley was among them), or that the propositions were not structurally developed (this view was supported by Russell before he discovered for himself the technique of quantification and the material implication after August 1900—see pp. 3 f.), or that the primary unit of language is words, not propositions, did not have a consistent truth-making theory either. This was also true of Frege, with his conception that propositions are names of facts (see pp. 6 f.).

(3) *The correspondence between facts and propositions is conceived from the perspective of language*: As we are going to see on p. 4, in 1910-1911, Moore maintained that there were autonomous facts and autonomous propositions. However, he did not make any effort to explain the relation of correspondence between them and, correspondingly, cannot be considered a supporter of the theory of truth-making.

(4) *The rejection of the ontological import of the logical constants*: In fact, this was the “fundamental idea” of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* (1922, 4.0312). It also held that there were no negative, disjunctive, or implicative objects. In the “Introduction” to the second edition of *Principia Mathematica* (Russell & Whitehead, 1925, i, p. xv), Russell explicitly claimed that there were no negative, conjunctive, or disjunctive truth-makers. In this way, Russell and Wittgenstein paved the way for accepting what today is called “truth-making maximalism” which claims that all truths have truth-makers. Indeed, if we reject negative, disjunctive, or implicative objects, “we do not need to postulate truth-makers for logically complex statements. They are not negative, conjunctive or disjunctive truth-makers. No moments of universality, existence or identity” (Simons, 1982, p. 160).

Those who deny one of these four points reject the standard theory of truth-making.

## Russell’s Truth

### Russell Presents Propositions as Truth-Bearers (1900)

Up to August 1900, Russell’s logic followed the “relational theory of judgment” first elaborated by Moore (1899). According to the latter, judgments and propositions were composed of complexes consisting of concepts and relations between them. This was a program for part/whole “logic”, or mereology, in which logical implication was possible both between terms and between propositions. Russell’s doctrine was also in conformity with the logic of classes and with Boole’s algebra of thought. However, at the International Philosophy Congress in Paris (August 1900), Russell learned from Peano—something the latter had learned from Frege—that besides the relations between parts and whole, there is also a relation of implication which held between propositions only, not between individuals, and that this second relation is more fundamental. Propositions (and also detouring phrases) were now understood as unanalyzable units. It was in accordance with Frege’s context principle that Russell now subscribed to the view that proposition’s terms are employed within the frame of the whole proposition, not as autonomous, discrete units. In this way the paradigm unit in Russell’s

logic now became the proposition (1903, § 135; Stevens, 2005). He thus secured the autonomous truth-bearers that are, as we already know, indispensable for the standard theory of truth.

### **Russell Embraces the Correspondence Theory of Truth (1905-1913)**

Until 1905, Russell and his friend Moore held the so called “identity theory of truth”. According to it, a true proposition was identical with a “fact”, or a “complex”, in the real world.<sup>3</sup> In addition, it had an indefinable property, that of being true, which false propositions lacked. Note, however, that this was only a kind of *relative* “identity” of *two* things, proposition and complexes, that are opposed in a Brentanesque way. Russell insisted on this “difference of identicals” which followed the belief, accepted in 1898, that human knowledge is a relation between subject and object. In contrast, in his “neo-Hegelian years” before that, he believed that there is no substantial difference between matter and mind.

Incidentally, this crypto-dualism of Russell’s identity theory of truth led him to adopt the correspondence theory of truth after 1905. To be sure, after Russell elaborated his theory of descriptions, he, and Moore after him, abandoned the identity theory of truth. Now the two philosophers saw world and language as two radically different things—the world of language was the world of descriptions, whereas the world itself was known by acquaintance. An implication of this position was that they embraced the correspondence theory of truth. They did this, however, in two different ways:

(1) Russell refused to embrace the belief that propositions corresponded to facts. This conception was clearly wrong, maintained Russell at this point of time, when our belief is false, for example, when we believed facts about non-existent entities such as golden mountains, or the present King of France. Instead, Russell claimed that what we knew are complexes of terms with which we had become acquainted at some point in time in the past. In more detail, according to Russell’s “multiple relation theory of judgement” he now embraced, truth is a relation of the knowing subject to a complex, not to a single object, or a fact. This complex, in turn, is consisted of different objects of the judgement that are connected in a certain way. A belief, or a proposition, is true when there is such a complex in reality and false when there is not such a complex. Apparently, the motivation for embracing this conception was Russell’s endeavour to be a true realist in logic.

(2) Moore adopted the correspondence theory of truth in another form. In his lectures *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, he claimed that the truth of the proposition is the fact to which it referred (1953, p. 261). This conception gave some authors reason enough to assert that the truth-making theory was first formulated by Moore (Hochberg, 1999, p. 476; 2001, p. 156). Unfortunately, this claim is scarcely true—Moore’s view was not a *theory*. To be sure, he failed to exactly specify the relation between propositions and fact. His conception of truth, as William James rightly noted, was too abstract—it simply assumed that they correspond. Moreover, Moore did not conceive propositions as truth-value bearers (Künne, 2003, p. 118). As we are going to see in a while (see pp. 6 f.), the question of how exactly propositions and facts corresponded was first answered by Wittgenstein in 1913.

### **Russell’s Discussion with William James (1908-1910)**

Significantly, Moore and Russell’s discussion of the problem of truth in 1908-1912 was stimulated by the looming influence of William James’s works at the time, above all, his book *Pragmatism* (1907/1975), which had an immediate *succès de scandale*. As a result, for the first time in the history of philosophy a dozens of

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<sup>3</sup> In Russell’s own words, “truth lies not in the correspondence of our ideas with facts, but in the fact itself” (1905, p. 492).

authors discussed, in a very short period of time, one very specific subject—the nature of truth. Also in these months Harold Joachim’s book *The Nature of Truth* was published (Joachim, 1906) which made the radical discrimination between correspondence and coherence theory of truth. To it Russell now added the pragmatist theory of truth of James. This was how the “triangle” correspondence, coherence, and pragmatist theories of truth were set out which was at the centre of attention of many publications on the theory of truth in the next hundred years.

In particular, in that book James claimed that an idea “*becomes true, is made true by events*” (1907, p. 97). This expression was widely cited and discussed by a squad of critics: Moore in his paper “William James’s ‘Pragmatism’” (1908/1922), and Russell in “William James’s Conception of Truth” in which he expressly spoke of James’s “making of truth” (Russell, 1910b, p. 123). In 1908-1910, Russell rejected the concept of truth-making. He also rejected it in *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912/1932), but he was already toying with the idea of using it. In particular, arguing against James, Russell maintained that “what makes a belief true is a *fact*”, not a mind (1912a, p. 203). Significantly, Russell’s use of the term “making true” was only rhetorical here—in an effort to refute James. Be this as it may, here we meet again Russell’s inconsistency when he spoke about his own theories (just discussed on pp. 1 f.). His official theory in 1911-1912 was that what made a belief true was a complex, not a fact.

### **Wittgenstein’s Intervention**

#### **The 1912 Joint Program of Russell and Wittgenstein and Frege’s Criticism**

Assigning “knowledge by acquaintance” a primary role in epistemology in “On Denoting” (see p. 4), Russell partly restored to his philosophy the realistic mereology (i.e., part/whole “logic”) of complex and simples that was an ingredient in his philosophy prior to August 1900. Russell’s turn of 1905 to the position that the objects of judgment is a complex of autonomous entities reached its pinnacle in his thesis that logic is a study of the complexes in which the truth has no place. It was articulated in Russell’s short paper “What Is Logic?” (1912b), written in the days after 13 October 1912, a piece merely of two pages in length. Its premise was that “logic is the study of the forms of complexes” (Russell, 1912b, p. 55). Logic, it declared, does not deal with judgments, something it consigned to psychology; neither does it concern propositions, which could be false and hence, in Russell’s view, could not be anything objective but merely forms of words. Indeed, “*true and false*”, asserted Russell, “are extra-logical” (Russell, 1912b, p. 55). At this point in time, this was also Wittgenstein’s position.

So far so good! The problem came when Wittgenstein visited Frege in December 1912. In their extensive discussion, Frege severely criticized the joint program of Russell and Wittgenstein (Milkov 2013). The only place where Wittgenstein explicitly acknowledged what he took from his meeting with Frege in December 1912 was in a fragment published both in *Philosophical Remarks* and in his *Philosophical Grammar*. Frege attacked Russell’s and Wittgenstein’s move to identify complexes with facts, pointing out that a “complex is not like a fact. For I can, for example, say of a complex that it moves from one place to another, but not of a fact” (Wittgenstein, 1974, p. 199). Frege also asked Wittgenstein that if an object were a part of a fact about it,

the fact would be larger than the object. Frege obviously wanted to underline that whereas “a complex is a spatial object, composed of spatial objects” (Wittgenstein, 1974, p. 200),<sup>4</sup> a fact was not.

Instead, Frege argued that in such cases, we understand *one* thing which is not spatial, namely, the *sense* (*Sinn*) of the proposition that we grasp which can be either true or false. It radically differs from the spatial complex which is segmented—it has parts. We find an echo of these considerations in Frege’s paper “Thoughts” where he defined “fact” as “a thought that is true” (1918/1919, p. 368).

### **Wittgenstein’s Theory of Truth-Making (1913/1914)**

Wittgenstein was quick enough to draw the right conclusion from this lesson. In “Notes on Logic” (1913) he maintained that facts (later Wittgenstein spoke about “states of affairs”), not complexes, are the elements of what Russell used to call the “ultimate furniture of the world” (Russell, 1919b, p. 146) and that these are the ontological ground which secured the epistemological justification of the truth of the propositions. At the same time, Wittgenstein found a mistake in Frege’s conception that propositions are names of facts. Propositions and names radically differ in this respect since there is one-to-one correspondence between name and object, whereas to a fact correspond two propositions—one positive, and one negative. In fact, Frege’s confusion of propositions and names was partly an implication of his lack of interest in the problem of *criterion* of truth—in the question as to how we could find out that a proposition is true. It, in turn, was a consequence of the fact that Frege did not embrace the epistemology of two worlds. His problem was in what a truth consisted; and his answer was that it was an *acceptance*, or *rejection* of the truth of a statement (*Wahrheitsanerkennung*) (Gabriel & Schlotter, 2013, p. 33).

In contrast, Wittgenstein continued to stick to the two-world conception and to the correspondence between them. He insisted at that that propositions and facts are something wholly different from one another. It is true that propositions have the same structure (the same multiplicity) as facts. In this sense they are facts too (1913, p. 97).<sup>5</sup> At the same time, however, propositions pertain to a world entirely different from that of the facts of reality—they pertain to the world of language. An indication of this is that whereas propositions can be true or false, facts cannot be. In that sense propositions are autonomous entities—and as we already know (from p. 3 (2)), this is a condition for supporting the standard theory of truth-making.

In another respect, though, the world of language *depends* on the world of facts. To be more specific, to the idea of the autonomy of language, Wittgenstein now added the conception of language as a second reality by accepting that “in the proposition we—so to speak—arrange things experimentally” with the aim of modelling reality (1979, p. 13; 1922, 4.0311). Practices such as using dolls for modelling a motor-car accident function this way. In a sense, the whole of language is a concatenation of such models, or, as Wittgenstein would have it, a concatenation of pictures. To be more explicit, Wittgenstein maintained that when we speak or write sentences, we *produce* a second world. Indeed, “we *make* to ourselves pictures of facts” (*Tractatus*, 1922, 2.1; italics added). This is the world of language (of models) with the help of which we communicate thoughts as information-units.

<sup>4</sup> We find an echo of this critical remark of Frege’s in Wittgenstein’s “Notes on Logic”: “the idea of a complex is taken from space” (Wittgenstein, 1913, p. 93).

<sup>5</sup> This point was very well articulated in Russell’s paper “On Propositions”: “Propositions are facts in exactly the same sense in which their objectives are facts. The relation of a proposition to its objective is not a relation of something imagined to something actual: it is a relation between two equally solid and equally actual facts” (Russell, 1919a, p. 315).

The “experiments” we make all the time when producing and grasping sentences can be seen as parts of possible “worlds” or of truth-possibilities, only a fraction of which is “real”.<sup>6</sup> In this connection we can say that parts of the real world—some of its facts and states of affairs—*make* parts of a possible world—propositions—true, or false. This is nothing less than the theory of truth-making that Wittgenstein launched in “Notes on Logic” (1913, p. 95), in “Notes Dictated to G. E. Moore” (1914, p. 15) and also in the first pages of his *Notebooks 1914-1916* (1979, pp. 15, 55).

### **Wittgenstein’s Conception of Truth in Relation to That of James**

The conclusion we reached in the previous section pushes us to compare Wittgenstein’s conception of truth to that of William James.

Main problem in William James’s theory of truth is that it is difficult to be interpreted unambiguously. And it is not a surprise. In fact it is nothing but a summary of different themes that James discussed over the years (Putnam 1997, p. 166). Be that as it may, some of James’s claims can be well interpreted in the sense of Wittgenstein’s theory of truth of 1913/1914. Here are two such cases:

(1) James repeatedly maintained that his theory of truth was a correspondence theory of truth (Putnam, 1997, p. 170). In other words, he was convinced that what *made* our beliefs true was the reality and nothing beyond it—it was not the human mind, as Moore and Russell understood that James claimed.

(2) In his theory of truth, James held something rather similar to what Wittgenstein did in 1913/1914. According to James, we store extra truths of merely possible situations

away in our memories and with the overflow we fill our books of reference. Whenever such an extra truth becomes practically relevant to one of our emergencies, it passes from cold-storage to do work in the world, and our belief in it grows active. (1907/1975, p. 98)

The idea, or the proposition, is fulfilled—it is verified or made true. Similarly, as already seen on pp. 6 f., Wittgenstein’s conception was that we build up in our language parts of possible worlds—we store propositions which we have produced, such as “The present King of France is bald”, only a fraction of which are actually made true by the states of affairs/facts of reality. Putting this conception in James’s idiom, the statements which are made true are those that are practically relevant—that is, relevant to our language practice.

Unfortunately, to this conception of truth, James adds the idea of usefulness. He claims that when a fact “verifies”, or makes true an idea, or a proposition, the proposition is “useful”: “You can say of it either that ‘it is useful because it is true’ or that ‘it is true because it is useful’” (1907/1975, p. 90). It was exactly this notion of “usefulness” that realists Russell and Moore fiercely opposed. It was in strong opposition to Moore’s and Russell’s radical realism. But it was also in opposition to Wittgenstein’s logico-philosophical intuitions.

We shall conclude this section with the remark that with the innovations that Wittgenstein introduced into the correspondence theory of truth, it fell into the gravitational field of the pragmatic theory of truth to their mutual confusion.<sup>7</sup> Wittgenstein’s insistence that language is a product of our “activity to construct languages capable of expressing every sense” (1922, 4.002) automatically allots pragmatist qualities to reality: Reality

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<sup>6</sup> In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein discriminated between “world” and “reality”. The “world” describes any possible world while “reality” the existing world.

<sup>7</sup> This explains the ease with which Frank Ramsey, the closest pupil and friend, but also an opponent of both Russell and Wittgenstein, embraced pragmatism.

*determines* if these particular language products are true or false. In other words, the act of depicting entails an act of truth-making.

Be that as it may, we are not to disregard great disagreements between James, on the one hand, and Wittgenstein of 1913/1914, on the other. Above all, (1) James was not interested in philosophical logic; (2) he was also not a philosopher of language and had no interest in propositions; (3) for James, verification was a process that took time—something unthinkable for Wittgenstein. In a word, James was still a “continental”, not an analytic, philosopher.

### **Wittgenstein Abandons the Concept of Truth-Making (1915)**

Soon, however, Wittgenstein substantially changed his conception of truth. And he had two sound reasons for this:

(1) After May 1915, he ordered the six cardinal propositions of the forthcoming *Tractatus* into a hierarchical “logical tree” (Stern, 2016, p. 205):

- The *world* is all that is the case;
- What is the case, the *fact*, is the existence of states of affairs;
- A logical [living] *picture* of facts is a thought;
- A *thought* is a proposition with a sense;
- A proposition is a *truth-function* of elementary propositions;
- The *general form* of a truth-function is ...

In the next two years, the text of the book-project evolved in six different orders—in different chains of propositions following the six cardinal propositions as presented in MS104.

Most importantly, Wittgenstein now claimed that in the act of copying (modelling) states of affairs through propositions (pictures), the structure of states of affairs is simply articulated in a new, strictly determined *way*: “The proposition expresses what it expresses in a definite and clearly specifiable way [*Art und Weise*] which can be set out clearly” (1922, 3.251). The concept of *way* became thus the new element that the act of modelling (articulating, projecting) states of affairs introduced. It can also be called the *form* of picturing (“pictorial form”), or of the form of projecting, or simply the way in which the picture is articulated in time and space.

An important implication of this new position was that Wittgenstein now saw the world of language/thinking not as autonomous as he had believed earlier. It is just a *way* of arranging the world of facts (Milkov, 2020a). This conception automatically made the concept of truth-making problematic—it undermined the autonomy of language and its propositions. As a result, in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein refused to speak about truth-making.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> According to the Pears/McGuinness and Beaney translations (1961, 2023), however, Wittgenstein spoke in the *Tractatus* (5.101) of truth-making. They namely translated “Diejenigen Wahrheitsmöglichkeiten seiner Wahrheitsargumente, welche den Satz bewahrheiten, will ich seine Wahrheitsgründe nennen” this way: “The truth-functions of a given number of elementary propositions can always be set out in a schema of the following kind: I will give the name truth-grounds of a proposition to those truth-possibilities of its truth-arguments that *make it true*” (italics added). Ogden and Ramsey, in contrast, speak about “truth-arguments, which verify the proposition” (1922), not about truth-making. We maintain that this translation is the accurate one.



(2) At the same time Wittgenstein stopped speaking about *theories* altogether, for example about picture-*theory*. Philosophy does not produce theories (Milkov, 2020b). The implication was that the *theory* of truth-making was a non-starter.

The conclusion we can draw is that Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* “does not involve truth-making relation between the fact depicted and the true sentence. There is a relation of correspondence, yet it is the relation of depicting”, not of truth-making (Glock, 2006, pp. 347, 360).

### **Russell Adopts the Theory of Truth-Making and Then Rejects It (1918/1940)**

In May and June 1913, when Russell showed Wittgenstein the first parts of his new book-project *Theory of Knowledge*, Wittgenstein had the opportunity to criticize his multiple relation theory of judgment directly. In light of the analysis we made on pp. 5 f., it is reasonable to assume that the gist of Wittgenstein’s criticism was directed against taking the ontology of complexes as fundamental in epistemology and logic. Indeed, Wittgenstein was in effect arguing that Russell’s theory of knowledge was built on the ontology of complexes, according to which, for example, “‘C’s belief that A hates B’ is a complex in which *belief* combines A and B and C and hatred into one whole” (Russell, 1911/12, p. 4). And this theory is clearly mistaken.

In “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism” (1918/1988), Russell himself suggested an interpretation in this direction. He stated that what Wittgenstein showed him in 1913 was that we could not make a geometrically articulated map of a belief since we could not present a belief in Euclidean space. This is the case since in propositions such as “Othello believes that Desdemona loves Cassio” the subordinate verb (“loves”) does not function as a verb when the judgment happens to be false, as in this example. Russell concluded that “you cannot get in space any occurrence which is logically of the same form as belief” (1918/1988, p. 225).<sup>9</sup>

In a sense, Russell was right—we cannot make a map of a belief. Still, this interpretation shows that he failed to grasp the full force of Wittgenstein’s argument with all its consequences. It is not just of beliefs that we cannot make maps; we cannot make maps of any fact whatsoever—in December 192 Frege maintained exactly this. This is because maps are monotonously articulated in space and so cannot communicate facts. Facts can be only pictured (“modelled”); they cannot be mapped. We can map only complexes.

After more than five years of deliberations, in 1918 Russell agreed with Wittgenstein’s argument. This shift produced radical alterations in Russell’s philosophy in general. First of all, he was urged to abandon his multiple relation theory of judgment, embracing the conception that when judging, we are related to one thing (to a fact), not to many things (to the terms of a complex). This position helped Russell embrace the theory of truth making in “Philosophy of Logical Atomism” (1918/1988, pp. 182, 187). In *The Analysis of Mind* he continued to use the conception of truth-making (Russell, 1921/2005, pp. 141, 143) and, as already mentioned (on p. 3, (4)), also in the “Introduction” to the second edition of *Principia Mathematica* (Russell & Whitehead, 1925).

It deserves notice, however, that Russell assumed that “the occurrence that makes the belief [the proposition] true is the *cause* of the belief acquisition” (Künne, 2003, p. 147; italics added). In contrast, Wittgenstein never believed that the relation between facts and proposition was causal. The Tractarian pictures, these successors of his truth-bearers of 1913-1914, “present a state of affairs ... like a tableaux vivant” (1922, 4.0311).

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<sup>9</sup> Russell was explicit that “the discovery of this fact is due to Mr. Wittgenstein” (1918a, p. 226).

The picture just “reaches right out to [reality]. It is laid against reality like a measure. Only the end-points of the graduating lines actually touch the object that is to be measured” (1922, 2.1511-1521).

It was only after 1940, however, that Russell, being now increasingly critical of Wittgenstein, realized that the concept of truth-making he adopted from his former student is heavily pregnant with pragmatism. Instead of facts as truth-makers, now he spoke of “verifiers”, apparently, failing to realize that this term, too, was introduced by William James, the pragmatist. He did this for the first time in *An Inquiry Into Meaning and Truth* (1940, p. 227). Ten years later, in his lectures published as *The Impact of Science on Society*, he explicitly repudiated it (1951/1952, p. 75). Russell also continued to use the term “verifiers” in his later works—in *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (1948, 166 ff.), and in *My Philosophical Development* (1959/1975, 138 ff.). The terminology of *verifiers* was taken over by some other philosophers in the early 1980s (Wolniewicz, 1982, p. 381; Fine, 1982, p. 54).

### Later History of the Theory of Truth-Making (1930-2000)

After Russell published his lectures “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism” in 1918, the term “truth-making” became rather popular. Three stages in the assimilation of the theory of truth-making can be discerned:

(1) *1930s-1950s*: In the 1930s, the theory of truth-making was gradually accepted by what today are called the middle analytic philosophers. They were, above all, among those who stood close to Russell’s philosophy of language. Among others, it was employed by Moritz Schlick and Susan Stebbing, before the World War Two, and by John Wisdom during or immediately after it (Schlick, 1979, ii, 311, 361; Stebbing, 1933, p. 85; Wisdom, 1952, p. 162).<sup>10</sup> J. L. Austin applied it as well, but in a form that precluded its causal interpretation (1961/1970, p. 161).

At the same time, however, a group of influential philosophers, such as Carnap and Popper, switched their interest from philosophy of language to philosophy of science, changing at the same time the exploration of the truth with that of confirmation (*Bewährung*) of whole scientific theories. There remained, of course, no place for truth-making in their studies.

(2) *1950s-1970s*: In these years, some analytic philosophers of second generation transported the term to their pupils. In Australia, John Wisdom’s pupil C. B. (Charlie) Martin conveyed the concept of truth-making to David Armstrong (2001, 15 f.). The latter formulated it in the so called *truth-making principle*: “For every contingent truth at least (and perhaps for all truths contingent and necessary) there must be something in the world that makes it true” (1989, p. 88). This principle actually reflects the fact, elaborated by the standard theory of truth-making, that the meaningful propositions we construct are merely possible. They are made true by, as Armstrong has put it, “something in the world”.

At the beginning of the 1960s, the neo-Brentanist Roderick Chisholm,<sup>11</sup> who had also attended lectures delivered by Moore and Russell during the Second World War as they were in America, revived the concept of truth-making in a discussion with Donald Davidson (Chisholm, 1964, p. 615). Chisholm, to be sure, being close to Brentano and so to Husserl (cf. p. 2), had no problems with it. In fact, in his discussion with Chisholm Davidson criticised the theory of truth-making. He maintained that our language “happens” as a result of the interaction of the *beliefs* of the speaker and the listener. Davidson also rejected the correspondence theory of truth.

<sup>10</sup> Wittgenstein himself used the term in *Philosophical Grammar* (1974, Part I, § 112), but not in a positive sense as a theory.

<sup>11</sup> On the connection between the Brentanists and the term of truth-making see p. 2.

Nevertheless, the replacement of the theory of meaning of propositions with Tarski’s theory of truth turned attention to the conception that the propositions were made true.

Of course, at that point in time, Davidson did not hold that there were truth-makers. A couple of years later, however, he adopted it, but in a very specific form. He namely maintained that the truth-makers were events. His point, developed for the first time in his celebrated paper “The Logical Form of Action Sentences” (1967), was that sentences about actions were made true by ontological entities such as events caused by humans. Fifteen years later, Davidson already insisted that “it is the whiteness of snow that *makes* ‘Schnee ist weiss’ true”. Moreover, it “depends ultimately on certain causal relations between speakers and the world” (1984, p. xiv).

This conception was obviously informed by pragmatism. Indeed, primary in its ontology was human action and also such natural phenomena as causes and states. Further, Davidson insisted that sentences about both human actions and causal processes could be analyzed to events which were their truth-makers (1980, p. 166). Of course, in *An Inquiry Into the Meaning and Truth* Russell also spoke about events as “verifiers” (truth-makers). These events, however, were exclusively natural, not those caused by agents.

(3) *1980s and later*: In 1980, Donald Davidson’s seminal collection of papers, *Essays on Actions and Events*, was published and that also included “The Logical Form of Action Sentences” in which, as just seen, the concept of “truth-making” was widely used. This did not go unnoticed. In 1982, Elisabeth Anscombe read a paper on the truth making (only published in 2000) and Peter Simons put in print a paper on it (Simons, 1982). Two years later, Kevin Mulligan, Barry Smith, and Peter Simons published a celebrated paper on truth-making (Mulligan, Smith, & Simons, 1984). In fact, it has been mainly responsible for the popularity of the term in the last 40 years.

Mulligan-Smith-Simons’ paper was influenced not only by Davidson, but also by Franz Brentano and especially by his student Husserl. Following the latter, these authors maintained that truth-makers are tropes, or moments of substances (or substances’ ontological dependents) (Simons, 1982, p. 159). Moments embrace states and conditions, as well as processes and events, not facts. It is important, however, that among them events take priority, and it is exactly this point that displays Davidson’s influence on these authors.

After these pioneering studies, the problem of truth-making started to be discussed large-scale.

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