Truth: Some preliminary considerations*

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Among the many things I have learned from Ernesto Napoli over about twenty years of intense intellectual exchange with him, one is certainly that *reference*, conceived as a *direct*, conventional, relation which most single words (not only proper names but also common nouns, verbs, and adjectives) have with certain worldly entities (for this construal of reference, see especially Napoli 1995), is central to the *explanation* of many linguistic phenomena and properties. One of the latter, no doubt philosophically interesting, is *truth*. Indeed, Ernesto never tired of claiming that it is not that reference depends on truth, as in the course of the twentieth century many philosophers of different tendencies (e.g., Quineans, Davidsonians, and arguably at least some Fregeans) have contended. On the contrary, it is truth that depends, in a way that obviously needs to be

specified, on reference.[1] Unfortunately (but perhaps wisely, for reasons that will become clear at the end of this paper), Ernesto did not develop this claim into a *theory* of truth. In what follows, I aim to make some preliminary, and not especially original, considerations looking ahead to such a theory, and to show why it is so difficult to complete the task.

As a starting point for my considerations, I shall use two simple, perhaps even trivial, observations. The first comes from J.L. Austin, who, in a footnote to his famous article on truth, blames "'coherence' (and pragmatist) theories of truth" for failing to appreciate "the trite but central point that truth is a matter of the relation between words and world" (1950: 130n). The second is what, in his weighty investigation on truth, Wolfgang Künne calls a *truism* that philosophers have often taken as "a preparatory step on their way towards more demanding accounts of truth" (2003: 334). As Künne writes, in fact, "[a]ll philosophers ... would most cordially agree that what you say or think is true if and only if *things are as you say or think they are*" (*ibid.*). I'm not completely certain that all philosophers would really cordially agree on this – what about sympathizers with the coherence or pragmatist theories mentioned by Austin? – but Austin's and Künne's simple observations seem to me to be two firm standpoints. The challenge, then, is to make a theory out of them. Unfortunately, it is not an easy challenge, and all the attempts that have been made in this direction are, for one reason or another, unconvincing. Elsewhere I have criticized, for example, Künne's articulation of his truism into what he has called the *Modest Account* of truth – in symbolic notation, "$\forall x(x$ is true $\leftrightarrow \exists p(x = [p] \land p))$", with the non-standard existential quantification into sentence position being objectual over propositions and the square brackets forming, "from a sentence which expresses a particular proposition, a singular term which designates that proposition" (2003: 337).[2] And correspondence theories,

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[1] In Ernesto's writings, this issue pops up in various places, but only in scattered remarks concerning semantics, e.g. as the claim that reference precedes and is at the basis of evaluation (Napoli 1995: 326, 334; Leonardi and Napoli 1995: 256; Bianchi and Napoli 2004: 175, 179–181, 202 n. 15, 222–224). My focus in this paper will be on the metaphysical side of the issue (which is touched upon in Napoli 2010: 295–299). For elaboration on the semantic aspect, see Joseph Almog's contribution to this volume.

[2] See Bianchi 2010. In particular, I expressed perplexities concerning the appeal to propositions in the account and the (consequential?) 'obliteration' of reference from

towards which, although with some reservations, Austin was leaning, face well-known problems. What are the entities that would correspond to true (but not to false) truth(-value) bearers? Appealing to *facts*, as many did in the twentieth century, under the influence of G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, seems to me to lead to pseudo-explanations only, as facts appear to be no more and no less than *shadows* of true truth(-value) bearers. As W.V. Quine famously wrote, if we say that "a sentence is true if it reports a fact",

> we have fabricated substance for an empty doctrine. The world is full of things, variously related, but what, in addition to all that, are facts? They are projected from true sentences for the sake of correspondence. (1987: 213)

Donald Davidson has put the objection in the following way:

> Truth as correspondence with reality may be an idea we are better off without .... The formulation is not so much wrong as empty .... The trouble lies in the claim that the formula has explanatory power. The notion of correspondence would be a help if we were able [to] say, in an *instructive* way, which fact or slice of reality it is that makes a particular sentence true. No one has succeeded in doing this. If we ask, for example, what makes the sentence "The moon is a quarter of a million miles away" true, the only answer we come up with is that it is the fact that the moon is a quarter of a million miles away .... [W]e must, I think, accept the conclusion: there are no interesting and appropriate entities available which, by being somehow related to sentences, can explain why the true ones are true and the others not. (2000: 5-6)

Thus, Davidson concludes, "correspondence theories are without explanatory content" (2000: 8; for some converging considerations, see Strawson 1950). I agree.[3] But then, what kind of theory should Austin's and Künne's simple observations incline us to accept?

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it. I shall return to both issues here. See, however, Künne 2010: 89–98 for a reply (focused on the first perplexity more than on the second).

[3] Ernesto agrees too (see Bianchi and Napoli 2004: 189–191). I should note here that some might classify even the theory I shall look ahead to as a correspondence theory. Künne probably would, Michael Devitt certainly does (see footnote 7 below). See also Glanzberg 2014: secs. 3.1 and 3.2, and David 2015: sec. 7.2. Although there is perhaps a vague sense according to which such a theory may be said to take true truth(-value) bearers to *correspond to reality*, I believe that this classification is seriously misleading, insofar as it suggests that the theory claims that there are entities to which true, but not false, truth(-value) bearers correspond. For the same reason, I would resist the classification of the theory among realist ones, if realism about truth consists in holding that "truth involves an appropriate relation between

Before moving on, some clarification is needed. Unfortunately, "theory of truth" is an expression that has been used to cover very different "projects", as Richard Kirkham (1992: ch. 1) has convincingly argued. Thus, to avoid misunderstanding, it is important that I make clear what I take a theory of truth to be. First of all, I do not take it to be a theory about the uses or even the semantic properties of the English noun "truth" and adjective "true", although it may have some indirect bearing on them as well (especially, with regard to the semantics of certain predicative uses of the adjective). Secondly, I do not take it to be an *analysis* of the *concept* of truth, or anything that can be gotten through linguistic understanding or any other *a priori* activity.[4] Rather, I take it to be an empirical investigation into the *nature* of a *property*.[5] Certain entities – we shall discuss in a moment which ones – have the property of being true, and the aim of a theory of truth in this sense is to establish, in general, what it is for them to have it, and in virtue of what they do have it. Thus, in a nutshell, the theory must take the following form:

(1) $\forall x(x \text{ is true} \leftrightarrow Px)$,

with "x" ranging over truth(-value) bearers and "P" being a signpost for a compound predicate whose non-logical constituents express properties

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a truthbearer and some portion(s) or aspect(s) of *reality*" (Burgess and Burgess 2011: 68). It would be far better, in my opinion, to call it a *representational theory of truth*, as Michael Lynch (2009: 22–35; 2014: 8–13) does with regard to similar ones (which he criticizes).

[4] As for the concept of truth, as opposed to the property of being true (see immediately below), my own view is that, like any other lexical concept, it is atomic, hence not susceptible to any analysis. See Bianchi 2005 for a defense of this view, and Bianchi 2011 for some reflections on its consequences on how we should conceive of *philosophical theorizing*

[5] The assumption that truth is a property and that (as such, I am tempted to say) it has a nature seems to be quite natural, and so a good starting point, but it is by no means unchallenged. That truth is a property has been denied for example by P.F. Strawson ("Truth is not a property of symbols; for it is not a property" (1949: 84)), while more recently Paul Horwich (1998: 1–2, 5, 37–40, 141–144) has advanced the startling claim that truth is a property with no "underlying nature". I shall not take issue with them here, but let me note that Strawson himself changed his mind on this and came to recognize that truth is a "genuine property" after all (see Künne 2003: 62–63). For some interesting considerations on these matters, see Devitt 2001.

and relations that are more basic than truth, and by which truth can be explained.[6] If truth is a *relational* property, as it is natural to believe ("It takes two to make a truth", says another of Austin's telling footnoted remarks (1950: 124 n. 1)), it should be expected that at least one of these constituents be a relational symbol. In order for the theory to count as an account of the *nature* of truth, it has to be *necessarily* (although not, as I have just said, *a priori*) true. Only in this case, in fact, could we say that being *P is*, or *constitutes*, being true. What is important to notice in this context is that, contrary to what Alfred Tarski (1933: 153) did and notwithstanding my sympathies for his physicalist scruples, I am not requiring that no unreduced semantic expression should occur in the compound predicate by which truth is explained. Indeed, as I wrote a moment ago, I aim to develop Ernesto's (and others', of course) claim that truth depends on reference, and any theory developing this claim will have to use the semantic verb "refer", or some equivalent of it. There can be no objection to this, provided only that there is a relation called "reference" and that this relation is more basic than truth, at least in the sense that the explanation of it does not appeal to truth. This is so if reference either is primitive or can be explained in other terms (e.g., in causal or historical ones). For obvious reasons, philosophers who have naturalistic inclinations will favour the second option (see Bianchi 2015: 95), as I do, but this is beside the point here: in both cases, in offering a theory of truth one is allowed to appeal to reference and does not need to explain it (in the same way as, say, in offering a theory of water one is allowed to appeal to oxygen and does not need to explain it).[7]

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[6] For similar considerations with regard to theories of reference, see Bianchi 2015: 93–95.

[7] See Field 1972 for criticism of Tarski on this point. The claim that reference is "the basic semantic relation" is advanced, for example, in Leonardi and Napoli 1995: 264. In recent years, the need to appeal to reference to account for truth has been highlighted, among others, by Devitt (1997: ch. 3; 2001) and Hilary Putnam (2015). Devitt, for example, writes: "A correspondence theory of the sort I am proposing explains what it is for a sentence to be true in terms of its syntactic structure and referential relations – which each require in turn substantial theories – and, of course, the way the world is" (2001: 168 n. 17). As will become clear later, except for the qualification of the theory as a *correspondence* theory (about which, see footnote 3 above), I am in broad agreement with this, and I am sure that Ernesto is too. Unfortunately, however, Devitt did not offer any such theory.

Well, then, what is truth? Or, better, given what we have just said: What is it for certain entities to be true, and in virtue of what are they so?

In order to answer these questions and hence to reach a theory of truth by finding something to take the place of "P" in (1), it seems to me all important to be clear about the issue of the truth(-value) bearers: if we want to say what kind of property truth is, we had better say what kind of entity may have it.

In the passages by Quine and Davidson I have quoted above, truth is ascribed to *sentences*. This is hardly surprising: we are certainly all used to saying that some sentences are true and some others are false. However, in recent times a different view has become more and more popular among philosophers. According to this view, which has a long history, it is certain abstract and non-linguistic entities, *propositions*, that are the truth(-value) bearers, and as a consequence it is *propositional truth* that needs to be explained in some way. As we saw, this is, for example, what Künne does with his Modest Account.[8] But he is undoubtedly in good company.[9]

Now, to consider truth as a property of propositions seems to me to dangerously lose sight of the two simple observations by Austin (who, indeed, didn't consider truth as a property of propositions) and by Künne (who, on the contrary, has proposed a perplexing 'propositionalist' articulation of his truism). The "central point" is that "truth is a matter of the relation between words and world", says Austin. And even Künne's truism appeals to language, albeit more indirectly, since it ascribes a truth-value to *what one says*, and to say something we do need words. But where do *words* end up, in Künne's Modest Account or in any other theory of truth that takes propositions to be the truth(-value) bearers?

There is, of course, an answer that propositionalists can give to this question. We are not denying, they can say, that certain linguistic expres-

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[8] See Künne 2003: 249–269 for his defense of the claim that propositions are the primary truth(-value) bearers. The first of the two perplexities I mentioned in footnote 4 concerned precisely this (Bianchi 2010: 66–71). See Künne 2010: 89–95 for a reply.

[9] Just to give only a few almost randomly chosen examples, see Strawson 1950: 147–149, and 1964: 166–170; Horwich 1998: 16–17, 86–103, 129–135; Soames 1999: 18–19; Lewis 2001: 276. Even a first, and otherwise excellent, introduction to the theories of truth such as Volpe 2012 takes this view almost for granted, without seriously considering any alternative (see pp. 13–19).

sions, sentences, are true, or false. But everyone should agree that they are true, or false, only *derivatively*. In fact, they are true, or false, only because they have certain *semantic properties*, namely only because, relative to a context, they *express* a proposition. Moreover, they are true, or false, only insofar as they express true, or false, propositions. It is propositions, then, that are the *primary* truth(-value) bearers. A nice dividend of this way of putting things, which is ubiquitous in the literature,[10] is a useful division of labor. A *theory of meaning* will account for the linguistic expressions' semantic properties, telling us which proposition a sentence expresses relative to a context. In contrast, a *theory of truth* will tell us what it is for a proposition to be true. By combining the two theories, the propositionalists can conclude, we get a theory of truth for sentences, thus vindicating, so to speak, Austin's and Künne's simple observations.

Everything all right, then? Not exactly. This line of reasoning could work, perhaps, if it were true that an account of the linguistic expressions' semantic properties will lead us to identify certain abstract *objects* – the propositions – as what is expressed by sentences relative to contexts. Only in this case, in fact, would we really have some candidates other than sentences for the role of truth(-value) bearers. But that an account of the linguistic expressions' semantic properties will lead us to this, is, in my opinion, quite dubious, and certainly cannot be taken for granted.

As a matter of fact, I find the insistent appeal to propositions that is fashionable nowadays among analytic philosophers extremely perplexing. Not, I hasten to add, because I endorse a more or less Quinean form of semantic skepticism. On the contrary, I take it for granted that linguistic expressions have semantic properties, and that their semantic properties induce a partition of sentences, or of sentence/context pairs,

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[10] This is, for example, Scott Soames' version: "In addition to propositions, utterances, eternal sentences, and occasion sentences taken in contexts (sentence/context pairs) can all be construed as truth bearers. However, the truth of a sentence or utterance depends on the truth of the proposition it expresses. A sentence or utterance cannot be true if it says nothing or expresses no proposition. Rather, it is true because it expresses a true proposition" (1999: 18). And this is David Lewis': "I take our topic to be, in the first instance, the truth of propositions. Sentences, or sentences in context, or particular assertions of sentences, or thoughts, can derivatively be called true; but only when they succeed in expressing determinate (or near enough determinate) propositions" (Lewis 2001: 276).

into equivalence classes.[11] Perhaps, to simplify matters, one may even go so far as to call these classes "propositions".[12] But if this were all that propositions boil down to, then obviously their elements rather than they themselves ought to be conceived as the primary truth(-value) bearers (as the quotation from John Perry in the last footnote suggests).

Actually, there are two kinds of arguments that are appealed to by those who claim that propositions are something more robust than suggested above. The most common one consists in individuating some theoretical roles (for example, being the semantic value of a sentence relative to a context, being the object, or the content, of a propositional attitude, being the referent of a that-clause, and, of course, being the primary truth(-value) bearer) and calling the entities that play these roles, whatever they are, "propositions". Such an argument has always seemed to me quite weak. Although this is not the place to go into this, the theoretical roles that are usually called upon seem to me either ill-defined – are we sure that the that-clauses are referential expressions?[13] – or incompatible with each other – no kind of entity can play all of them. A perhaps less common, but in my opinion more interesting, argument consists in highlighting how pervasive our pre-philosophical commitment to propositions is. As Künne put it, "[t]hose who are keen to ban talk of propositions often seem not to realize how many general terms which are common coin in non-philosophical discourse do 'specialized' duty for

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[11] Interestingly, this way of seeing things is adumbrated by Quine himself. In 1948 he wrote: "The useful ways in which people ordinarily talk or seem to talk about meanings boil down to two. The *having* of meanings, which is significance, and *sameness* of meaning, or synonymy . . . . The problem of explaining these adjectives 'significant' and 'synonymous' with some degree of clarity and rigor – preferably, as I see it, in terms of behavior – is as difficult as it is important. But the explanatory value of special and irreducible intermediary entities called meanings is surely illusory" (1948: 11–12). With a more skeptical ring, the point is repeated much later: "The doctrine of propositions seems in a way futile on the face of it, even if we imagine the individuation problem solved. For, that solution would consist in some suitable definition of equivalence of sentences; why not then just talk of sentences and equivalence and let the propositions go?" (1970: 10).

[12] More or less in this spirit, I believe, John Perry has contended that propositions are "abstract objects that we use to classify states and events by the requirements their truth (or some other form of success) impose on the rest of the world"; as such, they "are a bit analogous to weights and lengths" (2001: 20–21).

[13] For my negative answer to this question, see Bianchi 2010: 67–69.

'proposition'" (2003: 252). Künne's list includes verbal nouns such as "allegation", "belief", "conjecture", "contention", "judgement", "report", "statement", "supposition", and "thought", all of which "have readings under which they are used to refer to propositions", as well as non-verbal nouns such as "axiom", "dogma", "tenet", "theorem", and "thesis" (pp. 249–252). The point is certainly well taken: what else could phrases such as "Goldbach's conjecture" or "Pythagoras' theorem" single out, if not abstract entities that may be expressed by different sentences belonging to different languages? I must admit that I do not have an answer, but in any case this does not seem to me to be a sufficient reason for considering propositions as the primary truth(-value) bearers (cf. Bianchi 2010: 70).

This said, I know by experience that it is very difficult to induce a propositionalist to doubt the existence of propositions, and I shall not even try here. I would like, however, to suggest the adoption of a different starting point for the elaboration of a theory of truth, a starting point nearer, so to speak, to Austin's and Künne's simple observations. Since, as we saw, the propositionalists, too, are ready to acknowledge that certain linguistic expressions, sentences, can be said to be true, or false, as well, why not attempt to develop a theory that takes sentences themselves as truth(-value) bearers? If this will then force us to appeal somehow to propositions, so much the worse (and so much the better for the propositionalist).

There are at least three types of objections that can be moved against such an approach. The first is tied to considerations we have already encountered. Sentences, we saw, can be said to be true, or false, only in virtue of the fact that they have semantic properties. But then, it could be claimed, it is not sentences, but their semantic properties (or better, for the propositionalist, the propositions that the latter determine relative to a context) that are properly true, or false. This is, however, clearly a *non sequitur*.[14] Compare: Ernesto is a voter in Italy only in virtue of the fact that he is an Italian citizen, that is to say, for an

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[14] Alas, Ernesto as well seems to have fallen prey to it. He wrote: "If sentences are true or false in virtue of what they say, it does not take much to think that it is not the sentence but what the sentence says to be true or false; if you prefer, it does not take much to think that the sentence's truth or falsity is none other than the truth or the falsity of what the sentence says" (Napoli 2010: 295, translation mine).

objectifier, only in virtue of the fact that he possesses the thing that we call "Italian citizenship". Nonetheless, the voter is Ernesto, not his civil properties (his being an Italian citizen), or, worse, that strange abstract object his Italian citizenship would be.

A second objection that is very often raised (see for example the passages quoted in footnote 10) against the idea that sentences are the primary truth(-value) bearers is that sentences are not true, or false, *absolutely*, but only *relatively*. Indeed, they are true, or false, only relative to a language, and/or an interpretation, and/or a context, and/or what have you. There are, however, at least two replies that can be given to this objection. On the one hand, that something has a property only relative to something else implies neither that it does not have the property nor that something else (say, an abstract object) has that same property absolutely rather than relatively (as is the case, according to the propositionalist, with propositions in relation to truth). On the other hand, and this is what I want to stress here, it is not at all clear that the linguistic expressions of which we can predicate truth, or falsity, are true, or false, only relatively. In fact, the objection depends on considering linguistic expressions in abstract, as *types*, that can be used in various contexts and with varying interpretations and whose tokens can even belong to different languages. But it is not mandatory for someone aiming at developing Austin's and Künne's simple observations into a theory of truth to look at linguistic expressions from this perspective. On the contrary, what I would like to suggest is that we should develop a theory of truth that takes as truth(-value) bearers a subclass – the subclass of *sentence tokens* – of what I like to call "linguistic particulars" (see Bianchi 2015): physical entities of some type (usually, sounds or marks) that are produced by someone at some particular time, usually to communicate something to someone else. Similarly, Austin takes as the truth(-value) bearer the *statement*, namely "the words or sentence *as used by a certain person on a certain occasion*" (1950: 119). Indeed, he takes care to specify that the making of a statement is "an historic event, the utterance by a certain speaker or writer of certain words (a sentence) to an audience with reference to an historic situation, event or what not" (119–120).[15] It seems to

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[15] There is actually some ambiguity in Austin's way of phrasing his point, so that it is not completely clear whether he takes statements to be *acts* or the 'products' of acts of a certain kind. By "linguistic particulars" I mean the latter.

me that to consider those linguistic particulars that are sentence tokens, or what Austin calls "statements", as the (primary) truth(-value) bearers is quite reasonable. On the one side, it is commonsensical (think once again of Austin's and Künne's simple observations);[16] on the other, it does not appeal to entities that are ontologically dubious. And, to come back to the objection we were discussing, we can say of a sentence token, or of a statement in Austin's sense, that it is true, or false, absolutely, not only relative to something else (a language, an interpretation, a context, or what have you), although it is still true that it is true, or false, only in virtue of its semantic properties.

But haven't I been too hasty in arriving at this conclusion? Künne gives us some grounds to think so:

> Suppose a speaker is talking on the phone to his worst enemy while looking at his best friend: in a single utterance of 'You are my best friend' he might address both persons simultaneously and thus express two propositions ... with different truth-values. Surely confusion would result if we were to call the utterance (or the token) true and not true. Or suppose you utter a grammatically and/or lexically ambiguous sentence, intending your utterance to be understood both ways. (Perhaps you are making a joke, and the point of the joke depends on the sentence being given both readings by the person you are addressing.) Then it may very well be the case that you express a truth and a falsehood at one stroke. Again, confusion would result if we were to call the utterance (or the token-sentence) true and not true. (Künne 2003: 266–267)

> Let me round this off by adding an interlingual example . . . . Annabella, a business woman in Milan, has two telephones on her desk . . . . An American colleague and a British friend rang her simultaneously wanting to know how much

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[16] Or at least *I* find it commonsensical. Horwich and Künne think otherwise. This is Horwich: "I shall follow ordinary language in supposing that truth is a property of propositions. Thus, if we agree with Oscar, we attribute truth to *what he said*, to the proposition he asserted. Evidently the *sentence-type of English* that he used is not true; for that very sentence-type is used on other occasions to make false statements. Nor would one normally characterize the noises he made, or his belief state, as true" (1998: 16). This is Künne: "In our everyday employment of 'true', we normally, if not exclusively, take propositions to be the things that are susceptible of truth . . . . An account that aims to be faithful to our workaday concept of truth cannot afford to turn its back on propositions: they are the *primary truth-value bearers* . . . . But don't we ascribe truth (without relativization) to *utterances* in our daily transactions? I don't think we do" (2003: 263–264). However, as a teacher I know by experience how difficult it is for a (philosophy!) student to even entertain the thought that there are abstract entities that are the content of our mental acts and states, what is expressed by sentences in context, and what truth and falsity are properties of.

> profit her firm made last year. She wanted only her friend to know the truth. So picking up both receivers she said, 'One billion lira. But excuse me, I have a visitor in my office. Let's talk tomorrow.' And then she hung up. Annabella intended her American colleague to understand that the profit amounted to 10^9 lira, and her British friend to understand that it amounted to 10^{12} lira. A falsehood as well as a truth were conveyed by just one utterance . . . . Therefore, if utterances . . . were themselves truth-value bearers, some bearers would be both true and not true. All this is certainly unbearable. (268)

What these, admittedly ingenious but undoubtedly far-fetched, cases might suggest is that sentence tokens are true (at most) only relative to a context ("You are my best friend"), an interpretation (the ambiguous sentence), or a language (the "one billion lira" example). However, it seems to me that there are good reasons to resist this conclusion, which depends on a bad understanding of what a sentence token is.[17] Linguistic particulars are not *mere* sounds or marks, to which an interpretation needs to be somehow attached. On the contrary, they have their semantic properties absolutely, so to speak: their *origin* – the history of their production – makes them have them (see Bianchi 2015: 100–103 for a development of this point in relation to referring linguistic particulars). From an epistemological point of view their semantic properties may sometimes be difficult to discern, and this is a fact that the speakers exploit in Künne's cases, but they are metaphysically determinate nonetheless. Consider the "one billion lira" case, for example. Either on that occasion Annabella is speaking British English, in which case by producing a true sentence token she probably succeeds in leading her American colleague to acquire a false belief, exploiting the fact that he will probably take her to be speaking American English and as a consequence misunderstand the token; or she is speaking American English, in which case by producing a false sentence token she probably succeeds in leading her British friend to acquire a true belief, exploiting the fact that he will probably take her to be speaking British English and as a consequence misunderstand the token. And which language Annabella is speaking is perfectly determinate, by her cognitive history, although in this case irrelevant from a practical point of view, since no matter which language she is speaking she will probably achieve what she wants

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[17] Just for the record, let me register here that Kirkham (1992: 67–69) discusses an interlingual case similar to Künne's, but concludes that it does not *force* us to accept that sentence tokens are true only relative to a language.

to achieve, having "only her friend ... know the truth" (but notice that only in the second case could Annabella be charged with *lying* to her American colleague). In my opinion, Künne's other cases can be dealt with in a similar way, *mutatis mutandis*.[18]

There remains to be considered a third objection to the claim that sentences (or, better, given what we have just said, sentence tokens) are the primary truth(-value) bearers.[19] In fact, isn't the claim too reductive? Even Künne's truism may suggest that this is so, insofar as in it a truth-value is ascribed not only to what one says, but also to *what one thinks*. And in our discussion of the "one billion lira" case we talked of acquiring a *true*, or a *false*, *belief*. Now, to say something we do need words, but at least *prima facie* we do not need them to think or believe something. If this were so, a theory of truth taking sentence tokens as the truth(-value) bearers would not be able to account for certain significant truth-ascriptions we are all used to making. Consider, however, that we are all trained in the linguistic game of ascribing truth and falsity in relation to certain simple linguistic particulars (what is uttered by mom, or suchlike). If we come to extend our ascriptions to certain mental acts and states as well, we probably do so because they are relevantly similar to what we have been trained to ascribe truth or falsity to. This might seem to be grist for the propositionalists' mill, since they may claim that the mental acts and states at issue are similar to utterances precisely in that like them they have a proposition as their *content*. It is also because of this, they might conclude, that we need to develop a theory of truth for propositions rather than for sentence tokens. But it can also be the case that the points of similarity are different. For example, it is possible

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[18] As Giuseppe Spolaore has pointed out to me, however, even if, in contrast to what I have said, it were maintained that sentence tokens such as those involved in these cases are actually *equivocal*, no interesting general conclusion would follow. In fact, it would still be the case that most of the sentence tokens that we produce are not equivocal. Hence, the resulting relativity would not pose insurmountable difficulties to the claim that truth is a property primarily of sentence tokens.

[19] Actually, there is a further objection that is sometimes raised against the claim. It is difficult, it is contended, to account for logical truth and logical consequence if we take sentence tokens as the pertinent truth(-value) bearers. See Kaplan 1989: 522, 546; Kaplan 1989a: 585 n. 40, 586–587; Künne 2003: 265–266. I cannot deal with this here, as the discussion would take us too far afield. As should be clear, my focus in this paper is plain truth, not logical truth.

that the mental acts and states to which we ascribe truth or falsity involve *vehicles* that are sufficiently similar to linguistic expressions, as the language of thought hypothesis may suggest.[20] It is also to shed light on these issues, then, that it seems useful to me to try and develop a theory of truth for sentence tokens. If we understand what it is for a sentence token to be true, it is possible that we gain a better understanding of why we ascribe truth or falsity to certain mental acts and states as well.

As for the issue of the truth(-value) bearers, I shall stop here. Now, the really difficult part. What is it for a sentence token to be true? That is, what should we put in place of "*P*" in our theory of truth? Let's go back once again to the two simple observations that we have chosen to use as our starting point. Austin tells us that "truth is a matter of the relation between words and world", while Künne appeals to how things are. But how can we develop this generic mention of the *world* or of the *way in which things are* into a theory without 'fabricating' strange entities – *facts* – that would correspond to those sentence tokens that are true? Künne gives us a little help when he writes that "what you say or think is true if and only if *things are as you say or think they are*". When by producing a linguistic particular – a sentence token – we make a statement, to use Austin's terminology, we *say that things are in a certain way*. And this is so because the linguistic particular we produce *represents* things as being that way. What's more, in order to say that things are in a certain way, we have to *talk about* certain things. There is no *saying that* without *talking about*. And we cannot *talk about* without using linguistic particulars that *refer* to something. Briefly, we can say that things are in a certain way only because we can combine in a certain way linguistic particulars that refer to certain things, so as to obtain linguistic particulars that represent things as being that way. (Moreover, if my speculations in the last paragraph are on the right track, the same holds for thinking: we can think that things are in a certain way only because we can combine in a certain way (quasi-)linguistic particulars that refer to certain things, so as to obtain (quasi-)linguistic particulars that represent things as being that way). Here, then, emerges the crucial link between truth and reference, which has more than once

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[20] On the language of thought hypothesis, see Fodor 1975 and Field 1978. In Bianchi 2005 and 2007 I have argued for the claim that we think by means of the language that we speak. This, obviously, would make the similarity even more marked.

been highlighted in the course of the twentieth century (by Ernesto as well, as I said) but which those who take truth to be a property of propositions tend to lose sight of.[21] In a nutshell, the truth-value of a sentence token depends on the way things are with regard to those entities that certain linguistic particulars by which it is constituted refer to.

Let's consider an example to clarify things. If I now say that Ernesto is insightful, I produce a structured linguistic particular – a sentence token. The sentence token that I produce is true, because it is constituted by a linguistic particular (a token of the name "Ernesto") that refers to a specific individual and by a linguistic particular (a token of the adjective "insightful") that refers to a specific property, and the individual that the first particular refers to, Ernesto, has the property that the second particular refers to, insightfulness.[22] In this way, we have explained the truth of a certain structured linguistic particular – a sentence token – in terms of the *reference* of the linguistic particulars by which it is constituted and the *way in which things are.* Moreover, we did this, so it seems, in line with Austin's simple observation that "truth is a matter of the relation between words and world" and, in the end, with Künne's that "what you say ... is true if and only if *things are as you say ... they are*" as well. And, last but not least, we did so without postulating the existence of ontologically dubious entities such as propositions or facts.

Was it all so easy? Not at all, of course. We neglected a fundamental aspect: the truth of a sentence token depends not only on the reference of the linguistic particulars that constitute it and the way in which things are, but also on its structure, or *form.* If all true sentence tokens had the same form as the one that I produced when I said that Ernesto is insightful, it would not be difficult to offer a satisfactory theory of truth. Simplifying a bit, here it is: $\forall x(x$ is true $\leftrightarrow$ the individual that x's first constituent refers to has the property that x's second constituent refers to). By such a theory, we could for example account for the truth of the

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[21] This was my second perplexity concerning Künne's Modest Account (see footnote 4).

[22] That adjectives (as well as verbs and common nouns) are referential expressions and that they refer to entities other than individuals are basic tenets of Ernesto's philosophy of language. See for example Napoli 1995: 329; Leonardi and Napoli 1995: 263–264; Bianchi and Napoli 2004: 223–225.

linguistic particular that I produce when I say that Paolo is generous, of the one that I produce when I say that Diego is austere, and of the one that I produce when I say that I am male. But obviously, as soon as we consider the linguistic particular that I produce when I say that Ernesto is younger than Paolo, we are in trouble. Actually, it would not be difficult to extend our theory so as to cover linguistic particulars having the same form as this as well. But, again, it would not be difficult to then find linguistic particulars with a different form that put us in trouble. And so on and so forth.[23]

In the first half of the twentieth century, Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* on the one hand and Tarski's meta-mathematic work on the other highlighted the role of form in accounting for truth.[24] However, neither of their proposals seems to me satisfactory, for different reasons. Wittgenstein demanded too much of form, so to speak. In his picture theory, he postulated the existence of non-linguistic entities (facts!) *isomorphic* to certain linguistic expressions (his "elementary propositions") to account for the truth of the latter. Tarski, instead, in his truth definitions focused on linguistic forms (although only in relation to certain very simple formal languages) but failed to take reference seriously, as Hartry Field has convincingly shown in his 1972 article.

It is this dependence of truth on form that makes the development of a theory of truth a peculiarly complex, if not impossible, task: unfortunately, there is no compact way to characterize the dependence of truth on reference, form and the way in which things are. There are no shortcuts (except for *recursion*): as Tarski realized, we need to produce a *complete* catalogue of possible sentential forms, and then to explain how the truth of the linguistic particulars having each of these forms is determined by the reference of their constituents and the way in which things are. Sad to say, until we have this catalogue and all the relative explanations, we shall not have a theory of truth. In the meantime, we

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[23] This is basically a version of what Künne (2003: 111) has called "the Procrustes Problem".

[24] It can be argued that they were somehow anticipated by Aristotle, who famously claimed that "to say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true". According to Davidson, in fact, "Aristotle's characterization ... makes clear ... that the truth of a sentence depends on the inner structure of the sentence, i.e., on the semantic features of the parts" (1997: 23).

have to content ourselves with some fragments, relative to linguistic particulars having simple sentential forms, which will at least give us an idea of the way to go, and with a couple of simple observations (which, unfortunately, are ways too often blatantly ignored).

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