

**Review of Joshua Rasmussen, *Defending the Correspondence Theory of Truth* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014). ISBN-13: 978-1-107-05774-6**

JOSEPH ULATOWSKI

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Many books and articles on the nature of truth have appeared over the last six or seven years, and one might contend that because of this the market for any new texts would have reached a saturation point. Yet, there appears to be no end in sight motivating further discussion of theories of truth. Whether defending traditional correspondence (Vision 2009), mediated correspondence (Horgan and Potrč 2009), alethic pluralism (Lynch 2009; Wright and Pedersen 2014), an axiomatic theory of truth (Halbach 2014), a primitive theory of truth (Asay 2013), a variant on relativism about truth (MacFarlane 2011; Richard 2004) or providing a general survey of the philosophic terrain (Glanzberg forthcoming; Wrenn 2014), proponents of a variety of theories of truth have continued to improve upon well-established views.

Among the contributions are further elaborations of the group's eldest member: the correspondence theory of truth. Dating back at least to the time of Aristotle (if not before), the correspondence theory has enjoyed not only what seems to be a long history but a deep following motivating some philosophers to believe that the correspondence theory is the view that any person naturally may find most appealing (cf. Horwich 1998a). In *Defending the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, Joshua Rasmussen (2014) has penned a novel contribution to the discussion. Rasmussen's book is chock full of arguments, is highly informative, is clearly written, and is an important resource for both the novice and expert, alike.

The traditional correspondence theory of truth has it that there is a relationship of correspondence between a truth-bearer, such as a posit, sentence, proposition, or assertion and its truth-maker, the facts or state-of-affairs that make the truth-bearer true. A general or sweeping conceptual definition of the correspondence theory is: *a claim is true if and*

*only if it agrees with the way the world is.* For example, the proposition that 'the cat is on the mat' is true if and only if there is a cat and there is a mat where the cat bears the factual relation of 'on' to the mat. Of course, traditional correspondence theories run into significant difficulties because, for example, they cannot explain how a proposition says anything about some non-existent thing. Whereas 'the cat is on the mat' is about a cat and its relationship with a mat, 'the unicorn has one horn' fails to refer to anything and cannot be about a non-existent unicorn or its non-existent single horn. There cannot be a correspondence relation without two relata, the truth-bearer and its truthmaker.

Rasmussen skilfully argues for a correspondence conception of truth using a property-arrangement theory of propositions that sets out to challenge and quash well-known criticisms of correspondence truth. For Rasmussen's correspondence theory, a proposition, *p*, corresponds with an arrangement, *A*, if and only if (i) for each exemplifiable part of *p*, there is a part of *A* that exemplifies it, (ii) the proposition that *A* exists entails *p*, and (iii) every part of *A* is part of a composition that overlaps exactly those things that exemplify part of *p* (Rasmussen 2014, §5.4). One might wonder how on this view propositions are *about* entities or abstracta. According to Rasmussen, a proposition is about a thing or entity if and only if that proposition contains a property necessarily unique to the entity, and this 'aboutness' relation applies not only to entities of sense experience but abstracta, too. A proposition is true when and only when it is about a unique arrangement of properties.

Rasmussen's theory yields at least four desirable consequences (cf. §5.6). First, since a proposition corresponds with an arrangement of properties and its constituent parts, it can be true or false when it is intuitively about an empirical matter of fact, a fiction, or abstracta. Second, his view circumvents the problem of matching a world with a linguistic element by analysing the correspondence relation using an arrangement of properties which people intuitively understand. Third, while correspondence theories have had a difficult time explaining how a true proposition has to do with existing things, Rasmussen's modifications allow propositions to reflect a relationship with the arrangement of properties rather than existent or non-existent things. Finally, it appears that Rasmussen's modified correspondence theory can explain the equivalence schema

deflationists about truth adopt because the conditions of correspondence in the property-arrangement theory satisfy the semantic demands of deflationism. A theory of truth that depends upon the special notion of arrangements, as Rasmussen's view does, avoids the trickiest problems that confront correspondence theories.

There are relatively few problems with the technical details of Rasmussen's modified correspondence theory. In fact, so far as I can tell, no part of the syntactical or logical apparatus in Rasmussen's arrangement of properties view deserves to be challenged; rather, what one might question is whether Rasmussen's theory is representative of a correspondence theory at all. When I mentioned Horwich earlier, I did so deliberately because he is someone who goes out of the way to show how his minimalist view accommodates what he calls the 'correspondence intuition'. According to the minimalist view, the equivalence schema:  $\langle p \rangle$  is true if and only if  $p$  is conceptually, explanatorily, logically, and epistemologically fundamental, such that all of its instances are wholly underived and the overall use of the predicate ' $\dots$  is true' is best explained by the equivalence schema. Horwich accommodates the so-called 'correspondence intuition' by elaborating a deflationary account of reference (Horwich 1995, 1998b; cf. Leeds 1978). If Horwich's minimalism is able to capture the 'correspondence intuition' and there is reason to believe that the fundamentality of minimalism also captures Rasmussen's property-arrangement view, then the distinction between minimalism and correspondence theories seems to evaporate. After all, one of the benefits of Rasmussen's view is that it can explain the equivalence schema of deflationary accounts of truth. Perhaps it can do so because the theory just is a deflationary account. Generally, then, perhaps Rasmussen should defend his view against the idea that it just collapses into a deflationary account.

Second, maybe what Rasmussen has offered us is an alternative correspondence account aligned with the indirect or mediated correspondence theory (Barnard and Horgan 2013; Horgan 2011; Horgan and Barnard 2006; Horgan and Potrč 2000, 2006, 2009). While the primary aim of the indirect or mediated correspondence view is to argue that truth just is semantic correctness under contextually operative semantic standards, Rasmussen's correspondence theory revitalises our understanding of propositions and facts as arrangements of things or properties, respectively. If arrangements of things or

properties are just a matter of appreciating the background context, then there seems little distinction between the two views. When we contrast Horgan and colleague's notion of indirect correspondence with Rasmussen, we find that the only way in which we might distinguish the two has to do with the ontological commitment involved in defending their respective theories. On one hand, Horgan and colleagues tend to lead toward an austere realism, one inhabited by a single extant object known as the 'bobject'. Rasmussen, on the other hand, has relatively little to say about ontological commitment. Given his focus on facts, propositions, and properties, Rasmussen avoids talk of an austere or robust realism. But that avoidance should hardly justify us in thinking that there are relatively few overlaps between mediated correspondence and Rasmussen's view.

Despite these two minor quibbles, Rasmussen deftly anticipates a number of potential criticisms his exemplification view of correspondence might face. His articulation of responses to the problem of funny facts, including the issue of negative existentials, the slingshot argument and the liar paradox circulate around how the arrangement of properties or the arrangement of facts disables these objections to correspondence theories of truth. Rasmussen's book is a pleasure to read and anyone interested in coming to understand the state of the debate over the correspondence theory of truth should take the time to digest Rasmussen's fine addition to the truth literature.

Lecturer  
Philosophy Programme  
University of Waikato  
Hamilton, New Zealand  
julatos@waikato.ac.nz

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