

# Is Correspondence Truth One or Many?\*

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## Abstract

On the correspondence theory of truth, a proposition is true if and only if it corresponds to fact. Criticisms of the correspondence theory of truth have argued that such a strict interpretation of the correspondence relation will not be able to account for the truth of statements about fiction or mathematics. This challenge has resulted in the introduction of more permissive correspondence relations, such as Austin's correspondence as correlation or Tarski's correspondence as reference satisfaction. Recently, some mediated correspondence theorists of truth have proposed that the correspondence relation holds not only between thought and world but also between thought and language. In this paper, I argue that correspondence truth, direct or mediated, is not a monistic theory of truth, the view that there is one and only way for a proposition to be true. To argue for this position, I will have to show that each of the correspondence theories accept direct and indirect ways of understanding the correspondence relation as well as address potential objections to the view that correspondence theory is not singular and monolithic.

Keywords: correspondence theory of truth; indirect correspondence; pluralism about truth

## 1. Introduction

Orthodox correspondence theories of truth, or what I call "direct correspondence theories" in this paper, have accepted that there is exactly one correspondence relation, but on alternative mediated correspondence views there is not one-and-only-one relation but many different correspondence relations. Composite, indirect, or mediated correspondence argues for more than one correspondence relation that holds between a truth-bearer and its truthmaker.<sup>1</sup> Proponents of both direct and mediated correspondence theories of truth have

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Barnard and Terence Horgan. "Truth as Mediated Correspondence." *The Monist* 89, no. 1 (2006): 28-49, <https://doi.org/10.5840/monist200689132>; Robert Barnard and Terence Horgan, "The Synthetic Unity of

taken themselves to be advocates of alethic monism, that is, there is exactly one truth property. I contend in this essay that it is a mistake to view the correspondence theory of truth as a monistic theory because the different varieties of correspondence truth-relations supported in the literature reflects the formation of a family of views which may more appropriately be ascribed the term weak alethic pluralism.<sup>2</sup> First, I will summarise direct correspondence theories of truth and the different ways in which such theorists interpret the correspondence-relation. Given that there are a multiplicity of correspondence-relations, there is not one direct correspondence theory of truth. Then, I will turn to the mediated correspondence theory of truth proposed by Terence Horgan and his collaborators who claim that they are able to preserve a monistic conception of correspondence truth. I show that their effort is unsuccessful and that mediated correspondence is not monistic. Next, I will show that given that neither direct nor mediated correspondence is singular and monolithic, there are good reasons for believing that the correspondence theory of truth is pluralistic. I do so by means of generating some counterexamples that show even the most defensible and flexible mediated correspondence theory cannot be singular and monolithic. Following that, I contend with a potential challenge that my main argument rests upon mistaking a point about pragmatics for a semantic conception of truth. Ultimately, however, I conclude that the correspondence theory is not singular and monolithic but heterogeneous

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Truth," in *Truth and Pluralism: Current Debates*, edited by Nikolaj J.L.L. Pedersen and Cory D. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 180-216, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195387469.003.0009>; Terence Horgan, "Contextual Semantics and Metaphysical Realism: Truth as Indirect Correspondence," in *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, edited by Michael P. Lynch (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001): 67-95, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/4884.003.0009>; Terence Horgan and Matjaž Potrč, "Bobjectivism and Indirect Correspondence," *Facta Philosophica* 2, no. 3 (2000): 249-270, <https://doi.org/10.5840/factaphil20002214>; Terence Horgan and Matjaž Potrč, "Abundant Truth in an Austere World," in *Truth and Realism: New Essays*, edited by Michael P. Lynch and Patrick Greenough (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 137-167, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199288878.003.0008>; Terence Horgan and Matjaž Potrč, "Particularist Semantic Normativity," *Acta Analytica* 21, no. 1 (2006): 45-61, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12136-006-1014-x>; Terence Horgan and Matjaž Potrč, *Austere Realism: Contextual Semantics Meets Minimal Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 33-68, [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9213.2011.685\\_5.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9213.2011.685_5.x); Gila Sher, "On the Possibility of a Substantive Theory of Truth," *Synthese* 117, no. 1 (1998): 133-72, <https://doi.org/10.15173/russell.v41i1.4810>; Gila Sher, "In Search of a Substantive Theory of Truth," *Journal of Philosophy* 101, no. 1 (2004): 5-36, <https://doi.org/10.5840/jphil200410113>; Gila Sher, "Forms of Correspondence: The Intricate Route from Thought to Reality," in *Truth and Pluralism: Current Debates*, edited by Nikolaj J.L.L. Pedersen and Cory D. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 157-79, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195387469.003.0008>; Gila Sher, "Truth as Composite Correspondence," in *Unifying the Philosophy of Truth*, edited by Theodora Achourioti, Henri Galinon, José Martínez Fernández (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 191-210, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9673-6>; Gila Sher, *Epistemic Friction: An Essay on Knowledge, Truth, and Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 121-157, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2018.1435700>.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I set aside complex correspondence views like Ruth Millikan's correspondence-friendly theory of truth and Alvin Goldman's fittingness theory of truth. See Ruth Garrett Millikan. "On Truth" in *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Michael P. Lynch, Jeremy Wyatt, Junyeol Kim, and Nathan Kellen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021), 57-70; Ruth Garrett Millikan, "The Price of Correspondence Truth," *Noûs* 20, no. 4 (1986): 453-68; Alvin Goldman. *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); David Resnik, "The Fittingness Theory of Truth," *Philosophical Studies*, 68, no. 1 (1992): 95-101.

and plural.

## 2. A multiplicity of direct correspondence theories of truth?

A *logically atomic* proposition<sup>3</sup> is true in virtue of correspondence when things are in the world as the proposition claims for them to be.<sup>4</sup> For example, ⟨the cat is on the mat⟩ is true if and only if there is a cat, a mat, and the “on top of” relation holds between the cat and the mat, such that the cat sits on the mat. Elsewhere, correspondence truth has been defined in similar ways:

A proposition is true just when it corresponds to reality.<sup>5</sup>

Truth is the correspondence (or “fit” or “agreement”) of a claim to reality.<sup>6</sup>

To be true is to accurately describe—match, picture, depict, express, conform to, agree with, or correspond to—the real world or parts of it.<sup>7</sup>

True beliefs and statements correspond to facts.<sup>8</sup>

A proposition or a sentence is true when it corresponds to an appropriate fact, which is something in the world that makes a proposition or a sentence true.<sup>9</sup>

with what exists in the world under the following conditions,

(1) there are objects  $o_1, \dots, o_n$  in the correct ontology that are respectively denoted by the respective singular constituents of the thought/sentence, (2) there is a monadic or polyadic relation  $R$  in the correct ontology that is expressed by the predicative constituent thought/sentence, and (3)  $R$  is jointly instantiated by  $o_1, \dots, o_n$  in that order.<sup>10</sup>

According to the correspondence theory of truth, a proposition is true if and only if it agrees with reality or corresponds to fact. In this case, for example, ⟨kiwis are flightless birds⟩ is true if and only if kiwis are flightless birds. Should Frodo come to believe that kiwis soar through the New Zealand sky because kiwis are able to fly, on the correspondence view, ⟨kiwis are flightless birds⟩ would turn out false. For any truth-bearer, if the correspondence

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<sup>3</sup> For purposes of this paper, I will assume that all relevant truth-conditional expressions are ‘propositions’. My hope is that nothing will turn on this assumption. If there is a reason to be suspicious of this in this paper, then I will try to flag it and have a discussion of it.

<sup>4</sup> For the remainder of this essay, propositions will be designated using obtuse-angled brackets: “⟨⟩”.

<sup>5</sup> Michael P. Lynch, Jeremy Wyatt, Junyeol Kim, and Nathan Kellen, “Introduction,” in *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Michael P. Lynch, Jeremy Wyatt, Junyeol Kim, and Nathan Kellen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021), 9, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/12112.001.0001>.

<sup>6</sup> Chase Wrenn, *Truth* (New York: Polity, 2014), 73, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819115000261>.

<sup>7</sup> Joshua Rasmussen, *Defending the Correspondence Theory of Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415102.003>.

<sup>8</sup> D.J. O'Connor, *The Correspondence Theory of Truth* (New York: Hutchinson, 1975), 128, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003226833>.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Newman, *The Correspondence Theory of Truth: An Essay on the Metaphysics of Predication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511497971>.

<sup>10</sup> Barnard and Horgan, “Truth as Mediated Correspondence”, 29.

theory is correct, then there is something that corresponds with the content of the truth-bearer. Call this the “direct correspondence” view of truth. Hence, direct correspondence, generally, supposes that a proposition is true if the content of the proposition corresponds to mind-independently existing objects that form an *actual* state of affairs.

Proponents of direct correspondence theories of truth assume that truth-bearing items, such as propositions, have a subject-predicate structure and require that the truth-bearer be linked with a fact. Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore, two staunch defenders of the correspondence theory of truth, have said:

When a belief is true, there is another complex unity, in which the relation which was one of the objects of the belief relates to the other objects. ... On the other hand, when a belief is *false*, there is no such complex unity composed only of the objects of the belief. [...] Thus a belief is *true* when there is a corresponding fact, and is false when there is no corresponding fact.<sup>11</sup>

To say that this belief is true is to say that there is in the universe *a* fact to which it corresponds; and to say that it is false is to say that there is *not* in the universe any fact to which it corresponds.<sup>12</sup>

Even a later commentator Henry Acton acknowledges that there is a deep structural connection between the proposition and the world. He writes:

When we believe [...] we apprehend a set of symbols, and our belief is true when the symbols (a) are used correctly, and (b) have the same structure as the relevant fact, *i.e.*, correspond to it.<sup>13</sup>

When the truth-bearer corresponds with fact, it is said to be true. If the truth-bearer fails to correspond with fact, then there is no correspondence relationship between the two and the truth-bearer is false.<sup>14</sup>

It is this direct structural relation between truth-bearers and the world that lead us to think of counterexamples against accepting that the correspondence theory of truth is correct. Think of sentences containing fictional characters or mathematical facts. When we consider whether the proposition “the number six is even” or “Sherlock Holmes lives on Baker Street” is true, the referring expressions of each sentence fail to refer. There is no fact that corresponds to “six” or “even” or “Sherlock Holmes.” There may be a Baker Street in one’s town, but no such luck for finding Sherlock Holmes living there. The proposition cannot be made true by any objects that are mentioned in it. Instead, an alternative explanation of

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<sup>11</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1912/1999), 129, <https://doi.org/10.15173/russell.v41i1.4810>.

<sup>12</sup> George E. Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1910/1953), 277, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315830537>.

<sup>13</sup> Henry B. Acton, “The Correspondence Theory of Truth,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 35, no. 1 (1934), 177-94, 187, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aristotelian/35.1.177>.

<sup>14</sup> One might recommend that reference to Aristotle be added to the list of historical definitions of the correspondence theory of truth. While there is reason to believe that Aristotle’s view of truth is compatible with correspondence theory, recent commentators have suggested, with which I agree, that it is consistent with deflationary theories of truth, such as Horwich’s minimalism or Tarski’s semantic conception of truth. Therefore, I have refrained from mentioning Aristotle’s view in the main text.

the truth of fictional and mathematical statements must be forthcoming. Thus, propositions about numbers or fictional characters cannot be correspondently true.

Direct correspondence theory of truth is subject to this criticism, so the challenge is to come up with a correspondence relation that permits one to make true claims about fictional characters or mathematical facts. This criticism suggests that correspondence theorists must expand their philosophical toolkit to include a correspondence-relation that holds between truth-bearers and a more abstract world, one in which fictional characters and mathematical facts may serve as truthmakers.

Direct correspondence theorists of truth have devised alternative means of understanding the correspondence-relation to account for mathematical and fictional truths. Russell and Moore cleave to correspondence as congruence, Austin to correspondence as correlation, and (possibly) Tarski and others to correspondence as reference satisfaction. Austin and Tarski present their modifications of correspondence truth to show how the challenge raised above concerning statements about fictional characters and mathematical facts need not undermine a correspondence theory. The addition of correspondence as correlation does not mean that Austin, for example, gives up on correspondence as congruence. Instead, his alternative formulation of correspondence truth is meant to contend with the thorny criticism some have leveled against the correspondence theory. This suggests that the correspondence relation is not one singular and monolithic notion applicable to all truth-bearers but a family of views that all agree upon a guiding principle: *the truth of a proposition corresponds to fact*, where the correspondence relation is more flexible than its critics have conceived it to be.

### 3. Is mediated correspondence a *singular* correspondence relation?

Even more permissive than alternative formulations of direct correspondence is mediated correspondence. According to the indirect or mediated correspondence theory of truth, truth is always correspondence, but correspondence comes in many different forms.<sup>15</sup> The different forms of correspondence share a common core: *truth corresponds to the world*, but direct correspondence does not exhaust all forms of correspondence. For example, Horgan writes: “Correspondence, as I construe it, is very often an indirect relation between language (or thought) and denizens of an independently existing world”.<sup>16</sup> This indirect or mediated form of correspondence is more permissive than direct correspondence because not only is a proposition true when its subject refers directly to something in the world but

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<sup>15</sup> For the remainder of this paper, I will refer to this alternative as “mediated correspondence”. I should also note that Gila Sher’s composite correspondence theory is not directly relevant to this discussion because she has admitted that her view is pluralistic. Horgan and company, however, have remained staunch holdouts for their view being a strict correspondence view.

<sup>16</sup> Horgan, “Contextual Semantics and Metaphysical Realism: Truth as Indirect Correspondence,” 69.

also when certain contextually operative standards are upheld by those trying to determine the truth or falsity of a proposition. On Horgan and company's view, referentialism and metaphysical realism need not be accepted nor rejected together. It is possible to accept that mathematical or fictional statements are true without accepting that these statements are true in virtue of their reference to mind-independent physical objects.

In the case of a logically atomic thought/sentence, the idea is that correspondence between this thought/sentence and the world does not consist in their being objects  $o_1 \dots, o_n$  respectively denoted by the thought/sentence's constituents and a (monadic or polyadic) relation  $R$  expressed by the thought/sentence's predicative constituent, such that  $o_1, \dots, o_n$  jointly instantiate (in that order)  $R$ . [...] Instead, correspondence is a relation between thought/language and the world that is mediated by one's conceptual scheme.<sup>17</sup>

Horgan and company believe correspondence comes in different forms: generic, direct and mediated. The generic notion of truth consists in recognizing that truth is one unified genus, which means that the correspondence relation is fundamental to any correspondence theory of truth.<sup>18</sup> For direct correspondence, truth functions in a direct way when a referring expression refers to

1. objects in the *correct ontology*,
2. the relational expressions of the statement express or refer to relations in the correct ontology, and
3. the relation is instantiated by the objects in the correct ontology.

A proposition is correspondently true in a mediated way if

4. there are contextually operative semantic standards that guarantee semantic correctness, and
5. there is an actual distribution of properties that result in an *actual ontology/state of affairs*.

Mediated correspondence requires principles (4) and (5) to successfully produce semantic correctness, i.e., truth. Mediated correspondence theorists uphold the semantic correctness principle in which a statement depends on the objects instantiated in the world by the properties and relations.

Mediated correspondence relations encapsulate a notion of truth that may be derived from one's conceptual scheme. Truth is conceptually mediated when (1), (2), and (3) do not directly link an expression to the world. Correspondence is mediated if (1) for a given proposition semantic correctness is *reached* under contextually operative semantic standards, and (2) semantic correctness of a proposition depends on which objects in the world instantiate which properties and relations. Barnard and Horgan, for example, have in

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<sup>17</sup> Barnard and Horgan, "Truth as Mediated Correspondence," 30.

<sup>18</sup> Rasmussen, *Defending the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, 12-16, calls this *basic correspondence*. The notion of basic correspondence is different from Barnard and Horgan direct correspondence. Certainly, there are ways in which the correspondence relation must always find a link to the world but it must also be general enough so that it allows for Barnard and Horgan's mediated correspondence to count as part of the generic correspondence.

mind the “specific kind of mediated correspondence that counts as truth, in a given context of thought/discourse, [as] semantic correctness under the specific semantic-correctness standards at work in that context”.<sup>19</sup> The truth of some propositions is at least partially obtained from those standards and principles operating within a certain context.

[T]ruth is *semantically correct affirmability, under contextually operative semantic standards*. We also maintain that most of the time, the contextually operative semantic standards work in such a way that semantic correctness (i.e., truth) is a matter of *indirect* correspondence rather than *direct* correspondence between thought or language on the one hand, and the world on the other. When correspondence is indirect rather than direct, a given statement (or thought) can be true even if the correct ontology does not include items answering to all the *referential commitments* ... of the statement.<sup>20</sup>

On this view, semantic correctness is truth.

Lynch summarises Horgan and company’s view nicely: there is “a certain flexibility about truth: statements of different sorts can be true in different ways depending on the degree to which they directly correspond to the WORLD”.<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere, Lynch writes of mediated correspondence:

In Horgan’s view [...] truth in any discourse is determined jointly by the world and the semantic standards of the discourse. In short, truth is semantic correctness. Semantic correctness is a realist notion of truth, since it involves a type of correspondence with the world [...]. Nonetheless, the type of correspondence can vary according to what we are talking about. This is because the semantic norms governing truth vary with the context. Thus, there is a spectrum of ways in which statements can correspond to the world. On one end of the spectrum are statements governed by maximally strict semantic standards. Such statements are true just when they directly correspond, via causal/referential relations, to mind-independent objects and properties. On the other end are statements whose truth is determined almost entirely by the semantic standards alone. In between sits the majority of statements we make in life, such as those about corporations and works of art, which indirectly correspond to entities and attributes that are in many cases mind-dependent.<sup>22</sup>

For Barnard and Horgan, there are two ways in which the generic correspondence notion of truth is met, first, when a proposition directly corresponds to the world and, second, when truth is mediated via semantic correctness. They claim that correspondence is a single unified genus. The genus is composed of the generic correspondence at its core, which is later developed into different forms of correspondence.

The generic version of correspondence can be understood as the idea that truth is linked to reality. The proposition ‘*the cat is sitting on the mat*’ states something about the *cat*

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<sup>19</sup> Barnard and Horgan, “Truth as Mediated Correspondence,” 31.

<sup>20</sup> Horgan and Potrč, “Particularist Semantic Normativity,” 137.

<sup>21</sup> Michael P. Lynch, “The Truth in Contextual Semantics,” *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 63, no. 2 (2002), 183, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18756735-90000763>.

<sup>22</sup> Michael P. Lynch, “Introduction,” in *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Michael P. Lynch (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 13, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/4884.001.0001>.

where it *is sitting on the mat*. The proposition is true in virtue of the parts that form the real world. Generic correspondence is the connecting point for direct and mediated correspondence.

A statement is true if and only if (i) the semantic norms or rules that govern that statement and (ii) how things are with the mind-independent world (“WORLD”). Statements may be governed by maximally strict semantic standards, such that they require direct word-to-world relations. So, statements governed by maximally strict semantic standards are true just when they directly correspond to mind-independent OBJECTS and PROPERTIES.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are statements whose truth-values are determined by semantic standards alone. Such statements would be true independent of any features of the mind-independent world but in accordance with one’s conceptual scheme. In between these two extremes are most statements whereby these statements indirectly correspond to the WORLD.

In the case of a logically atomic thought/sentence, the idea is that correspondence between this thought/sentence and the world does not consist in there being objects  $o_1, \dots, o_n$  respectively denoted by the thought/sentence’s constituents and a (monadic or polyadic) relation  $R$  expressed by the thought/sentence’s predicative constituent, such that  $o_1, \dots, o_n$  jointly instantiate (in that order)  $R$ . The correct ontology need not include any such objects or any such relation, and hence also need not include any such state of affairs. Instead, correspondence is a relation between thought/language and the world that is *mediated by one’s conceptual scheme*.<sup>23</sup>

Statements like “There are twenty-four movements in Beethoven’s fifth symphony” are true not because they directly correspond to mind-independent OBJECTS but because of connections that exist between the statement and a wide range of human activities and practice.

Mediated theories of correspondence truth accept that when a proposition does not directly correspond to facts, it may be semantically correct given certain contextual standards. The mediated correspondence relation is still correspondence but it is distinct from direct correspondence insofar as it settles difficult cases, such as the truth of propositions about fictional characters or mathematical facts.

#### **4. Is the correspondence theory of truth monistic?**

The correspondence theory of truth belongs to a family of truth theories that align with the principle that there is exactly one way of being correct. On the correspondence theory, a proposition is true if and only if it corresponds to fact. What we have seen from §§2 and 3 is that correspondence theorists, whether they believe in direct or mediated forms of the

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<sup>23</sup> Barnard and Horgan, “Truth as Mediated Correspondence,” 30 (italics in original).



correspondence relation, accept that there are distinct ways for a proposition to be correspondently true. If there are distinct ways for a statement to be true and if these distinct ways of being true show how a statement may be correspondently true, then the variety of correspondence-relations suggest against correspondence theories being monistic.

In contrast with alethic monism, pluralism about truth is the view that there is more than one way of being true. This rather imprecise definition of pluralism about truth is ambiguous between two readings. On one reading, it may be read as saying that there is more than one way for a single proposition to be true. If this is correct, then relativism follows. A proposition, e.g., may be true for Americans but false for Canadians. On a different reading, propositions may be categorized into different linguistic discourses, e.g., moral, aesthetic, empirical, scientific, or psychological, and for each of these discourses there is a way for the proposition to be true. This is view that pluralists about truth support.

The primary challenge for correspondence theory is to account for the truth of propositions whose objects fail to correspond to facts. Physics and mathematics, for example, do not necessarily have as objects those items that may be taxonimized in an empirical domain. The objects of physics and mathematics are not confined to an earthly plane. If correspondence is some sort of abstract mapping between language and the world, to account for these kinds of truths, then there is no unique, determinate correspondence relation since there could be many ways to map language onto the world. Here is Gila Sher on the problem:

[O]n the one hand philosophers have set up extraordinarily high standards of generality for our truth theories, culminating in the common-denominator (single-definition, necessary-and-sufficient condition) principle. On the other hand, the concept of truth is extraordinarily broad, complex, and diversified, interwoven in different ways in different areas of our cognitive life, and applicable to sentences of different kinds: physical, psychological, mathematical, ethical, etc. As such it resists any attempt at a simple, sweeping characterization.<sup>24</sup>

This is the problem of the common denominator, which suggests a correspondence truth-predicate operates in some domains but fails to operate in others, like a domain of linguistic discourse for physics and mathematics. For medium sized dry goods that make up the furniture of the world, correspondence theory of truth wins the day. ⟨The cloth swatch is mauve⟩ is true if and only if the swatch of cloth is coloured mauve. But ⟨the sum of the interior angles of a triangle is 180 degrees⟩ is not made true by anything true that consists of the furniture of the world. That proposition is true, regardless of whether it corresponds to fact in any direct sense. Here is F.H. Bradley on the matter:

Disjunctive, negative, and hypothetical judgments cannot be taken as all false, and yet cannot fairly be made to conform to our one type of truth. And in general the moment we leave perceived facts and seek explanation—which after all is implied in the desire for truth—we find that we are moving away from the given. Universal and abstract truths are not given facts, nor do they merely

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<sup>24</sup> Sher, *Epistemic Friction: An Essay on Knowledge, Truth, and Logic*, 142-143.

reproduce the given, nor are they even confined to the limits of actual perception.<sup>25</sup>

The introduction of mediated truth, along with the different forms of the correspondence relation, suggest that the correspondence theory of truth is not limited to one monistic relation. There are a multiplicity of correspondence-relations that account for truths well beyond those where the relation needs to exemplify a language-world connection.

[N]ot *all* true propositions are true because they correspond to facts. Such propositions as “two contradictory propositions cannot both be true” do not correspond to facts in the way in which “Jack killed Jill” might.<sup>26</sup>

Acton’s conclusion was that truth is ambiguous; however, the theorist who is willing to extend the truth relation beyond the language-world correspondence may still adhere to a correspondence theory of truth but the nature of that correspondence-relation extends beyond correspondence as congruence to one of correlation or of mediation.

For truth pluralism, different truth-predicates operate in different linguistic discourses, e.g. aesthetics, morality, and empirical matters, and these truth-predicates must be preserved by a story of how all these predicates share in or adequately reflect an overarching concept of truth.<sup>27</sup> An analogous problem presents itself for the indirect correspondence theorist. If what the mediated correspondence theorist argues is correct, and if the orthodox correspondence theorist of truth is monistic, then mediated correspondence must be a proxy for traditional correspondence.

Nowhere else does this come up than in successful communication between individuals who operate with different truth-concepts. Communication between individuals who share a conceptual scheme can judge whether a proposition is true in a mediated way and have no trouble discerning when a proposition is true in virtue of what it denotes in the world. There are on some occasions missing pieces of meaningful semantic information which do not permit a rich exchange of ideas. Nonetheless, truth in everyday contexts is to function as a mechanism for determining whether a proposition about the world is true or false and enhances, in some way, the ability to communicate across contextual schemes. The ability to communicate across contextual schemes does not relieve Horgan and company from providing a principle which grants the opportunity to discover when direct or mediated correspondence might be at play.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Francis H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914/1963), 109, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139136525>.

<sup>26</sup> Acton, “The Correspondence Theory of Truth,” 191.

<sup>27</sup> See also Crispin Wright, “A Plurality of Pluralisms,” in *Truth and Pluralism: Current Debates*, edited by Nikolaj J.L.L. Pedersen and Cory D. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 123-153, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195387469.003.0007>.

<sup>28</sup> See William P. Alston, “Illocutionary Acts and Truth,” in *Truth and Speech Acts: Studies in the Philosophy of Language*, edited by Dirk Greimann and Geo Sigwart (London: Routledge, 2007), 9-30, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203940310-7>.

Imagine two people, a father and his five-year-old son, carrying on a conversation about what gifts it is that the child wants to receive from Santa Claus for Christmas. When the child uses the term “Santa Claus,” he believes that there is a referent, an object, to which that term refers. According to the child, when someone utters the sentence “Santa Claus has a white beard,” it is made true by Santa Claus who has a silvery-white beard. The child is incapable of escaping his restrictive direct correspondence worldview because on his conceptual scheme Santa Claus exists; his evidence for Santa Claus’ existence consists of the gifts that are delivered on Christmas morning, and the belief that they were delivered by someone and that someone is Santa Claus. If we were to ask the child whether Santa Claus refers to an actual object, the child would respond affirmatively. There is no reason for the son to believe that Santa Claus does not exist.

The father, however, operates under a different conceptual scheme, which is driven by a particular counterfactual or subjunctive conditional that the son fails to accept. If Santa Claus was a real person, then one would refer to him when employing the term “Santa Claus” in an utterance. Santa Claus is not a real person, so the term “Santa Claus” fails to denote any existent object. Thus, when the father says, “Santa Claus has a white beard,” the father operates within a conceptual scheme where Santa Claus does not exist, even though he might admit that the proposition, “Santa Claus has a white beard,” is true. The father would reason that if there were a Santa Claus, he would bear a white beard and because this would be the case under such conditions the proposition that declares such facts of the non-existent Santa Claus should be treated as true. Truth would be mediated by the father’s conceptual scheme about Santa Claus, and his view is distinct from his son’s conceptual scheme regarding Santa Claus.

The conversation between father and son exemplifies an interesting problem with Horgan and company’s mediated correspondence truth. The trouble is in deciding when and in what context direct correspondence or mediated correspondence is operative. If it is possible, as it appears to be in the cases presented above, that the two forms of correspondence might be operative at the same time in one conversation, then one interlocutor might adopt direct correspondence while the other embraces mediated correspondence. In a later work, Barnard and Horgan have acknowledged this problem but dismiss it quite quickly. They say, “Once one acknowledges that conceptual mediation takes place... worries about how to distinguish the ‘degree’ of mediation from one discourse context from another becomes secondary”.<sup>29</sup> Knowing how to individuate the true claim that “Krampus is a malevolent demon seeking to devour the souls of children” from the false claim that “Santa Claus is a malevolent demon seeking to devour the souls of children” seems difficult to do on Barnard and Horgan’s view if we have not got a clear sense of the contextually operative standards that apply in certain circumstances or to what ‘degree’.

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<sup>29</sup> Barnard and Horgan, “The Synthetic Unity of Truth,” 186.

Thus, there seems to be a need for Barnard and Horgan to provide a bridging principle between the two notions of correspondence and an account of when these notions apply.

A defender of mediated correspondence might suggest that there is no need to worry about contextual operative semantics matching semantic correctness if within one conversation two contexts are operative. The underlying function of the nature of truth in everyday contexts is its ability to function as a mechanism for determining whether a proposition about the world is true or false. On their view, individuals can communicate across contextual barriers and thus can *generate semantic correctness by identifying what the state of affairs is*. However, if there are two different contextual operative semantic standards within one conversation (about a proposition) it is unclear how semantic correctness is produced if there is no way in which mediated correspondence rests on the actual state of affairs.

Horgan and company need to provide a solution that allows for the ability to *identify under which context an interlocutor is operating* so as to account for semantic correctness. Since their view rigidly sticks to a theory of truth which is monistic, they cannot provide such a principle, and the burden is on their view to defend which correspondence-relation, direct or mediated, is operating in the father-son story. Horgan and company's mediated correspondence would be able to circumvent the concern raised here if it accepted that correspondence-truth, particularly mediated correspondence, was pluralistic and that the linguistic domain in which both the father and son were operating is the fictional Christmas domain where supernatural beings reign supreme..

## **5. Pragmatics ain't semantics: A counterargument**

A defender of Horgan and company might argue that the two notions, directed and mediated correspondence, are intimately connected in virtue of the fact that they are both correspondence theories. If this is what unifies the two, then Horgan and company not only owe us a bridging principle between the different correspondence relations but also they need to respond to the usual objections that correspondence theories face. This does not seem to be the most promising defense of truth as mediated correspondence.

Still, Horgan and company might argue in response that there are circumstances where we could either be employing direct correspondence or mediated correspondence, and it is up to us when one of the two applies. Certainly, it seems confusing to permit an individual to decide whether direct or mediated correspondence applies. We seem incapable of reaching these sorts of judgments appropriately without some proper guidelines. There is a missing or implied bridging principle that the view assumes is operative between direct and mediated correspondence. Unfortunately, we cannot explain the pragmatics of communication between interlocutors who operate under different contexts.

Finally, Horgan and company likely believe that the way language functions is clearly and easily distinguishable from the semantic content of the truth notion. But, as I have tried to show, it is not clear just how distinct pragmatic implicature and contextually operative semantic standards are; the borderland region between the two might be quite blurry and vague. If individuals operate under different contextually operative semantic standards of truth, then the ability to communicate clearly might be impeded. Failure to communicate gives rise to a violation of normative standards of communication, when individuals do not know or fail to understand the appropriate time at which to operate within one or the other context.

Consider a final example. When a theist utters the term “God,” he believes the term denotes a specific divine entity with certain features or properties only that God possesses. The atheist, on the other hand, speaks *as if* that entity exists, even though the term “God” for the atheist fails to denote anything. Even if the atheist admits that “God” denotes something, it’s not likely the same particular thing that has the properties the theist attributes to God. Thinking specifically about truth as mediated correspondence this is an instance where contextually operative standards are not shared between interlocutors.

Given that the theist and atheist do not share contextually operative standards, it seems to show a deficiency with mediated correspondence. Truth as mediated correspondence cannot get at the nature of the truth concept as Horgan and company have suggested. In fact, it becomes evident that Horgan et al either need to provide a bridging principle between direct and mediated correspondence within the same operative context or their view falls flat in recognizing the pragmatic features of communication between interlocutors. It may be the case that the multiplication of discourses and contexts needn’t demand a real pluralism about truth. Merely having more than one kind of semantic correctness standards may be insufficient for pluralism about truth since the different semantic standards could be tracking the same underlying property or relation. However, Horgan and company’s core claim is committed to multiple, contextually determined, semantic standards not entailing the multiplication of truth properties or relations required by pluralism about truth.<sup>30</sup> The counterexamples raised here seem to give us reason to pause about whether that core claim is stable.

Horgan and company may contend that the kind of commitment being asked about in the father-and-son and theist-and-atheist examples is ideological rather than ontological commitment. Various forms of discourse, despite their distinctive and ideologically diverse deployments of the positing apparatus of language, typically interpenetrate one another

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<sup>30</sup> Michael P. Lynch, *Truth in Context* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/6926.001.0001>; Michael P. Lynch, *Truth as One and Many* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199218738.001.0001>; Douglas Edwards, *The Metaphysics of Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198758693.001.0001>.

smoothly, working together as an integrated whole. Ideological mediation may take on many forms, depending on the contextually operative semantic standards governing the use of linguistic positing apparatus, but ontological mediation takes on one-and-only-one form. This response seems relatively baseless since in the father-and-son example we may replace Santa Claus with the kookaburra. Whereas the father's conceptual scheme includes kookaburras, which implies saying "the kookaburra's call resembles human laughter", the son's conceptual scheme does not because the kookaburra is something to which he may have been just introduced.

## 6. Conclusion

I have shown that direct and mediated forms of correspondence theories of truth must accept that the correspondence relation is multiform to address the primary problem of accounting for truths about, for example, fictions and mathematical facts. First, direct correspondence theory comes in different varieties, correspondence as congruence, correspondence as correlation, and correspondence as reference satisfaction just to name a few. If a statement is true in virtue of correspondence with fact, then given that the correspondence-relation is multiply realisable we have good reason to think that direct correspondence is not monistic. Second, correspondence theory has been taken to be the intuitive view and, because it is the most intuitive, it has been believed that all other views must somehow explain how their view is able to accommodate the correspondence intuition.<sup>31</sup> If what I have shown here is anywhere near correct, then such an accommodation is nothing more than a game of whack-a-mole. There is no need for, say, a minimalist conception of truth to accommodate the correspondence intuition because there is no one intuition that it is trying to explain away. Finally, for Horgan and company, a contextually operative semantic framework enables us to decide which propositions are semantically correct under a specific context from those propositions that are not. However, even mediated correspondence theory If my analysis is correct, then the core relation of direct correspondence theories, such as those delivered by Russell, Moore, and Austin, among others, as well as mediated correspondence theories, by Horgan and company, is not singular and monolithic but many and varied. The correspondence theory of truth is not one but many.

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Paul Horwich, *Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 111-12 and Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 25-27.

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