

## 18.

### Truth: What is 'truth' for?<sup>1</sup>

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'Truth' is arguably one of the most important notions in Western culture, and probably in most other cultures too. It is used in innumerable contexts to designate the correct state of affairs and something as authentic or genuine. "Is this true?", "speak the truth", "it is true that it happened so and so", "this is a true theory", "that is not the true meaning of the word", "is it true that you went out last night" and so on. We hear and use these and similar phrases practically every day. In the context of historiography, the use of 'truth' appears to be similar. For example, we may ask and state: "is it true that European powers sleep-walked to the Great War?" and "it is true that the Weimar Republic collapsed because of hyper-inflation".

Philosophically, the interest in truth has traditionally focused on the question whether truth designates some genuine and substantial property and whether the word 'truth' in sentences therefore refers to this substance. To put this alternatively in the form of a question: what does 'truth' add to what is said about the state of affairs in the world? The traditional theories of truth – the correspondence, coherence and pragmatist theories of truth – assume that there is a specific truth property, although they naturally disagree as to what exactly truth consist in.

In this chapter, I approach the question of truth from a specific meta-linguistic perspective. This inquiry penetrates into the role that the word 'truth' plays in our language and language games. Understanding this role is important, because it paves the way for understanding what truth philosophically is; to put it alternatively: the discursive role of 'truth' explains what truth is and what 'truth' is for. Or this is I what I argue.

In this approach, I follow Wilfrid Sellars's strategy to analyse the functional roles of words and specifically of philosophical abstract terms. He suggested that much of philosophical discourse is bewitched by Platonism, entailing that these kinds of terms refer to abstract entities and universals.<sup>2</sup> Sellars rejected Platonism and wanted to demystify philosophical talk by

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<sup>2</sup> Wilfrid Sellars, *In the Space of Reasons: Selected Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*, edited by Kevin Sharp and Robert B. Brandom (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 97.

replacing references to abstract entities and universals with linguistic tokens and their functions in talk. Through this analysis, I suggest similarly that the function of 'truth' is to provide an endorsement for a claim. 'Endorsement' in this context licenses or encourages others to accept a claim, a theory, a belief and so on to which 'truth' refers to. Truth does not thus designate any distinct property and 'truth' can be treated as redundant in most contexts in the following familiar way: "it is true that skiing is fun" is equivalent to saying "skiing is fun". Naturally, more must be said, but this is the main idea.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. First I introduce the rudiments of the main theories of truth, beginning with truth as a triviality, and then proceed with analysing the correspondence, coherence and deflationary theories of truth. After that I concentrate on spelling out what the pragmatist theory of truth amounts to. It can take two forms: the pragmatist theory as a substantial theory of truth and the pragmatist theory as a deflationary theory of truth which emphasises that the use of the term 'truth' in sentences is (merely) indicative of *doing* something, such as asserting and endorsing.

In the third section of the chapter, I move on to the application of truth in the context of historiography. We are faced with two challenges here. The one is that there must be something that is potentially true, which is called "truth-bearer" in contemporary metaphysical theories about truth.<sup>3</sup> The other challenge is that there must be some tools and ways in which to evaluate whether that something is true. Typically, justification of a truth-bearer is assumed to give a reason to think that the truth-bearer is true. A central question in the context of historiography is, then, whether its main cognitive units, such as narratives, are qualitatively different from other kinds of cognitive entities, such as individual statements, so that this difference has consequences for determining and evaluating their truth-functional semantic features. Equally important questions are whether these two levels are, and can be, epistemically connected. I discuss the narrativist option, according to which narratives are not truth-apt, because of a gap between these levels. According to narrativism, individual statements that are part of a narrative can be true or false, but their truthfulness or falsity has no bearing on the veracity of the narrative itself. While specifically a correspondence theorist in historiography understands the truth-value

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<sup>3</sup> See Fraser, MacBride, "Truthmakers", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/truthmakers/>.

of a higher-order cognitive entity as distinct from its justification, an intermediary approach between the narrativist and the correspondence theorist links the lower- and higher-order levels argumentatively and comprehends truth as ideal justification. Finally, I present an alternative option called “deflationary pragmatism” in the context of historiography, which locates all (kinds of) claiming in historiography on the same level in cognitive communities. The key question regarding truth is whether historians’ claims are semantically assertible in the community.

### **Truth as triviality, correspondence and coherence**

A good starting point for an exploration of different notions of truth is the trivial understanding of truth. It expresses the most unexceptionable use of ‘truth’. Aristotle’s famous dictum “To say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true”<sup>4</sup> is sometimes understood as the first known formulation of the correspondence theory. However, it may be still better to comprehend this dictum expressing the idea that *saying what is true is just saying what is*: saying that “‘snow is white’ is true” is just saying that “snow is white”. In this sense, it could be said that truth and being are the same thing.<sup>5</sup> So a sentence is true, if and only if things are as it says they are. This provides ingredients for the view that Aristotle’s definition was, in fact, a precursor of deflationary theories of truth. The word ‘true’ merely seems to express what the case is, and it is very nearly just a manner of speaking about what *is*. The matter gets more complicated when we consider whether truth or true is something more substantial, and specifically, whether they designate a worldly property referred to by propositions and sentences.

If we take seriously the grammatical form of sentences containing ‘true’, it looks like ‘true’ ascribes some sort of property, and therefore, understanding what truth is requires a *substantial* theory of truth. Compare these two sentences: “This ball is red” and “this sentence that ‘...’ is true”. In both cases, it seems that the subject of the sentence, ‘ball’ and ‘sentence’, is ascribed a property, red and true respectively. If the predicate ‘true’ is functionally like ‘red’ in

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<sup>4</sup> Metaphysics Γ, 7.27; see W. D. Ross (ed.), *The Works of Aristotle Translated into English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1928).

<sup>5</sup> See Pascal Engel, *Truth* (London: Routledge, 2014), 14-15.

the sentence, then it denotes a certain property that the subject possesses. Does the property truth therefore distinguish the sentences that refer to it from the sentences that lack a reference to it (and are thus false or lack a truth-value altogether) in a similar way that red balls differ from green, blue, yellow and so on? In other words, what does truth consist in? As it is well-known, there are three traditional theories of truth and answers to what truth consists in: correspondence, coherence and pragmatist.

*The correspondence theory of truth* is often seen as the most intuitive. It relies on a common sense notion that it is the world, reality, the facts or something else independent of us, that makes our claims true. The claim “snow is white” is made true by the fact out there *that* snow is white. In other words, the world, reality or a fact is a *truth-maker* of this claim. Perhaps the most popular formulation of the correspondence theory says that a proposition is true when it corresponds to the facts. This theory requires that ‘fact’ is defined independently from the judgment that a proposition is true, but that is exactly what seems difficult to determine. Let me explain. The first option is to think with Russell that all truths are made true by facts, which entails that all negative statements are made true by negative facts. If it is true that I am not sleeping (because I am writing), is it because it corresponds to an equivalent negative fact? But how could something that *is not* be a constitutive part of reality? The world would become populated by an infinite number of non-existent entities. If we go along with the early Wittgenstein’s view that only true propositions are made true by facts, and negative statements would fail to correspond to facts, it still seems difficult to identify relevant facts, or indeed, understand what additional a commitment to fact might bring. If any proposition is made true by its corresponding definitive, as if a “personal”, fact what exactly is the job that “fact” is supposed to do here? It seems that ‘fact’ becomes idle in the words of David Armstrong: a “tautological accusative” of true propositions.<sup>6</sup>

Engel summarises the problem with the correspondence theory as follows: it “stumbles always on the difficulty that we cannot say much more than that: a thought or statement is true

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<sup>6</sup> David Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 19). Consider also the Frege-Gödel slingshot, which shows that an alleged truth-making fact can be conjoined with any other fact to create One Great Fact that makes true all true propositions. ‘Fact’ seems to become equally useless in this way (Engel, *Truth*, 152). See also Peter Strawson, “Truth,” in his *Logico-Linguistic Papers* (London: Methuen, 1950), 190-213.

when the way the world is happens to be just as it says it is.”<sup>7</sup> If this is all that the correspondence theory does, then it does not seem to do that much, because this kind of correspondence realist intuition is uncomfortably near the notion of truth as a triviality and the deflationary theories of truth. The latter avoid various metaphysical complications that the correspondence theory is marred with because of its commitment to the correspondence relation between a truth-bearer and truth-maker.

A key motivation for *the coherence theory of truth* is the difficulty to characterise facts or reality independently of our thoughts and judgements. To put this alternatively, if an appeal to facts takes us nowhere but to our statements about the world, then it looks that the truth of claims can be supported only by other judgments and thoughts. Engel writes that “If the facts ‘of’ the world cannot be articulated apart from the way *we* structure the world, how can we tell what they are apart from a perspective from *within* our thoughts?”<sup>8</sup> In brief, the idea of the coherence theory of truth is that a proposition is true if it coheres with other proposition that form our system of beliefs.

A well-known criticism of the coherence theories of truth is that mere coherence cannot be sufficient of truth, as it is very easy to conceive of various sets composed of mutually supporting fictional beliefs, which are intuitively false. One can consider some description of some fantasy or fabricated world, such as C. S. Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia*, which may be very nuanced so that an entire coherent world is created.<sup>9</sup> Further, such a system of beliefs can be made ever more coherent by adding any number of intuitively false beliefs as long as they can be positioned through inferential and explanatory links within the system.

In order to understand this criticism more clearly, it is instructive to consider Bertrand Russell’s argument against the coherence or “monist” theory of truth: “It may be perfectly possible to construct a coherent whole of *false propositions* in which ‘Bishop Stubbs was hanged for murder’ would find a place”<sup>10</sup>. Naturally, the claim that “Bishop Stubbs was hanged for murder” would not be regarded false, if there was such supporting network of beliefs. But this is

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<sup>7</sup> Engel, *Truth*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Engel, *Truth*, 26: original emphasis.

<sup>9</sup> *The Chronicles of Narnia* contain seven books and they have been widely adapted for film, television, radio and theatre.

<sup>10</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Philosophical Essays* (London: Routledge, 2009), 128-129.

exactly Russell's point. Truth and falsity should not be determined by coherence but by some coherence transcendent and independent way, and further: that coherence itself must be defined by reference to truth (that is, impossibility of a statement and its contradiction being true). It was well established that Bishop William Stubbs died in 1901, in fact, in his own bed and did not commit a murder and was not hanged as a punishment for this heinous crime. But if the statement "Bishop Stubbs died in his own bed" is accepted as true independently and irrespective of the network of other beliefs, then its truth must be established in some other way too.

Therefore, it has often been suggested that coherence might be a criterion or a form of justification, which can be used to indicate whether a system of beliefs is true but not a definition of truth.<sup>11</sup> It may also be thought that coherence must be qualified by restricting the ways in which beliefs must be justified. For example, by discarding any beliefs formed by observation, it is very easy to construct fictional coherent sets of beliefs. In sum, the objection to the coherence theory says that truth must be presupposed in some form, when the evaluation of coherence is applied. One way to connect coherence to correspondence is the Peircean idea that ideally coherent, absolute justification, would ensure that a system of beliefs is true in the sense of *correspondence*.

### **The deflationary approach to truth**

It thus looks that both the correspondence and coherence theories are riddled with problems. Before attempting to outline a pragmatist theory of truth, let us consider the deflationary intuition about truth. To a large extent, it is motivated by the disillusionment with the traditional theories of truth. Ramsey's ladder, as coined by Simon Blackburn, is one of the best expressions why the talk about truth, and facts, seems superfluous. Consider some statement that is believed to be true, such as "I am writing." We can go up Ramsey's ladder and say that "it is true that I am writing", and then that that "it is true that it is true that I am writing", and further that "it is true

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<sup>11</sup> Laurence Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 88, 157-158, 169-179, 239 n 1; Nicholas Rescher, *The Coherence Theory of Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 23-24, 39-40; Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, Jouni-Matti, "Kuhn, the Correspondence Theory of Truth and Coherentist Epistemology," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 38 (2007): 555-566.

that it is true that it is really a fact that I am writing” and so on. But what do ‘true, ‘fact’ and ‘really’ add to the original statement that “I am writing”? They do not seem to add anything substantial but are more or less equivalent expressions and endorsements of this original statement that I am writing. Indeed, the “ladder” is not a ladder in which one moves higher up to finer abstract philosophical points, but the movement is rather horizontal: as if one is running on the spot!<sup>12</sup> Ramsey himself concluded that to say that “it is true that p” is in effect equivalent to just asserting that “p”; to say that it is evident that “it is true that Caesar was murdered” means no more than that Caesar was murdered.<sup>13</sup>

The family of deflationary theories of truth is surprisingly large. In general, all agree that truth is not a genuine property or relation with a worldly property, and further, that understanding what truth is, does not require a deep metaphysical theory. To say that “It is true that there is an apple tree in my backyard” is, in effect, just saying that “there is an apple tree in my backyard”. Beyond this, the deflationary theories disagree about the function and usefulness of this concept. It is not necessary to go too much into the details about their differences. There are excellent general introductions available that explain the intricacies of various truth theories.<sup>14</sup> It is sufficient for the purposes of this contribution to mention a few deflationary theories and their main characteristics as well as their main differences.

Perhaps the most radical, the redundancy, theory states that ‘truth’ is redundant and could well be eliminated because it does not add any cognitive content to what can be stated otherwise anyway. Other deflationary theories accept that, although truth is not a real substance of any kind, ‘truth’ is still a useful predicate and linguistic device. For example, the performative theory of truth says that the function of the truth-predicate in clauses is to endorse some specific statement, that is, to urge others to believe it, as in “It is true that Ramsey was a promising philosopher” one endorses the statement that “Ramsey was a promising philosopher”. Further,

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<sup>12</sup> Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 78, 295-296.

<sup>13</sup> Frank Ramsey, “Facts and Propositions,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society the Virtual Issue* NO. 1 (2013). Originally published in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume VII* (1927):1-14.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Engel, *Truth*; Richard Kirkham, *Theories of Truth. A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992). Engel’s book *Truth* has been useful for writing this paper too, and particularly regarding the traditional theories of truth. For a specific minimalist notion of truth that belongs to the family of deflationary theories of truth, see Paul Horwich, *Truth, Meaning, Reality* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

the disquotational theory holds that ‘truth’ can be used to refer to what is said, to the sets of sentences themselves, like when someone says that “it is true what you said,” in which case the reference is made to what is said. For example, if it said that

“there is an apple tree in my backyard” is true

one can disquote the statement and say just that

there is an apple tree in my backyard.

This is the way in which sentences are dis/quoted and ‘truth’ as a semantic device enables moving between language and the world.<sup>15</sup> More generally, semantic ascent is used to turn the talk of objects to the talk about words:

We do recognise a shift from talk of objects to talk of words ... How can we account for this? Amply, I think by proper account of a useful and much used manoeuvre which I shall call *semantic ascent*.

It is the shift from talk of milers to talk of ‘mile’.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, there is Tarski’s famous semantic theory of truth and his T-convention, which defines the rule of the application of the truth-predicate in formal languages based on a relation between a sentence of an object language and a sentence of a meta language. The latter determines semantics, truth-conditions, for the former. Tarski’s theory typically takes the form ”S” in L is true if and only if P, where “S” is a sentence in a formal object language and P states what it is to be true in L. Characteristic for both Quine and for Tarski is switching between antecedently understood languages and meanings. In Tarski’s case truth-predicate is never applied and definitions given within a language but in a metalanguage that is assumed to be already understood. This creates an open-ended hierarchy of meta-languages. Since Tarski meant that

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<sup>15</sup> W. V. O. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 79-82.

<sup>16</sup>W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), 271-2.



this conception of truth is applicable in formal languages and to its sentences, it is unclear whether it could even in principle explain the concept of truth used in natural languages in general.

### **The pragmatist theory of truth**

I move on to the third classical theory of truth: the pragmatist theory of truth. It is necessary to distinguish two versions of it: the traditional substantive pragmatist theory and a more recent pragmatist theory that is a variant of deflationary theories. I will defend the latter kind of pragmatist theory,

The key insight of the classical pragmatist theory is that truth is something like a utility or a benefit of belief in practice. What is, then, a sign that a belief or a theory is true? It is that it *works* and, by using it, one can achieve the goal desired. For example, the theory of gravitational force is true because it predicts correctly how objects behave (they fall down towards the earth). Wittgenstein's characterization of the pragmatist idea of truth is also illustrative:

When I say "There is a chair over there", this sentence refers to a series of expectations. I believe I could go there, perceive the chair and sit on it, I believe it is made of wood and I expect it to have a certain hardness, inflammability etc. If some of these expectations are disappointed, I will see it as proof for retaining that there was no chair there.

Here one sees how one may arrive at the pragmatist conception of true and false. A sentence is true as long as it proves to be useful.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps the clearest expression of truth in this pragmatist spirit was put forward by William James when he wrote that "Truth for us [pragmatists] is simply a collective name for verification-process".<sup>18</sup> On one occasion, James even offered a definition of truth as something

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<sup>17</sup> As quoted by Cheryl Misak, *Frank Ramsey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 365).

<sup>18</sup> William James, *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth*. Introduction by A. J. Ayer (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 104.

that works. He said that “‘The true’”, to put it very briefly, is the only expedient in the way of our thinking, just as ‘the right’ is only the expedient in the way of our behaving”.<sup>19</sup>

Yet it should be noted that not even the classical pragmatists William James, John Dewey and C. S. Peirce shared a common conception of truth. For example, Peirce and Dewey after him were inclined towards a definition of truth as something that is agreed at the end of “the ideal limit”,<sup>20</sup> that is, as a result of scientific investigations if they would go on indefinitely. At the ideal limit, it is not necessary to change the status of a belief (that is true) no matter what other changes of belief there will be. This is how Dewey put it: “The best definition of *truth* from the logical standpoint which is known to me is that of Peirce: ‘The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented by this opinion is the real’.”<sup>21</sup> It is notable that Dewey talked about truth and falsity as independent substantial properties and not as linguistic properties, quite like other classical theories of truth: truth and falsity are “*properties* only of that subject-matter which is the end, the close, of the inquiry by means of which it is reached”<sup>22</sup>. The pragmatist truth theory as a substantial theory of truth thus says that truth is a property of either utility or the ultimate agreement.

However, it has been pointed out that usefulness poorly characterizes what truth consists in, as many useful beliefs (if “usefulness” is liberally interpreted) are in fact false. It may be useful for my productivity to believe that I am the best philosopher in the world, but this belief is false nonetheless. And of course, all beliefs are not equally useful to all, and as a consequence, the pragmatist definition risks being relativistic and perhaps subjectivist too. For a person not interested in philosophy or writing, this belief (that “I am the best philosopher in the world”) may not be useful at all or is useful in some different way at most. Perhaps the main criticism of the pragmatist theories is the question, whether it gets utility and truth the wrong round. In other

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<sup>19</sup> James, *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth*, 106.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, “Truth and Falsity and Error”, in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Volumes V and VI), edited by Charles Hartshorne, and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 5.565.

<sup>21</sup> John Dewey, *Logic. The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1938), 345; fn. 6)

<sup>22</sup> John, Dewey, *The Essential Dewey. Ethics, Logic and Psychology*, Vol. 2, edited by Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander (Bloomington, Indiana University Press 1988), 205. My emphasis.

words, is it useful to believe something, because it is true; or is a belief true, because it is useful? Realistically minded have insisted that my beliefs are useful, indeed, but that is because they are true in virtue of matching with reality. For example, why is it useful to believe that lions are dangerous; or why does this belief work for me? The critics say that this belief works, because it is true in the sense that lions *really are* dangerous; that this belief is true, because it represents reality correctly. And the same would go with Wittgenstein's example about the chair above. It counts to believe that there is a chair, enabling all kinds of chair-related functions, because there is, in fact, a chair. Finally, philosophers of the realist persuasion remark that, quite like with coherence, usefulness may be a good criterion for determining whether a belief is true but not an adequate definition of truth.

### **Semantic assertibility and truth as performative**

A number of philosophers have emerged after classical pragmatism who draw on the deflationary intuition about truth. They are commonly called neo-pragmatists. I focus in the rest of the paper on the ideas of the two of them: Wilfrid Sellars and Robert Brandom, and will also comment briefly on Richard Rorty.

To begin with, despite what was said about the pragmatist theory of truth above, it is contentious whether pragmatists suggest that truth is a property in the same sense as in the traditional theories of truth. Neo-pragmatists typically question this kind of metaphysical reading. In other words, while pragmatists emphasize purposes, needs, preferences, interests and satisfying criteria of application, it is not clear, whether the essence of truth for pragmatists is something like the property of utility captured in the slogan "truth is what works". They are interested in the question of what we are doing, when we say that something is true. So instead of asking what property we ascribe and attempting to provide a pragmatist metaphysical account of truth "the recommendation is for a *performative* analysis of truth talk".<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Rorty thought that it is best to understand James arguing for a negative point about truth: that no theory of truth had managed to explain the relation between language and the world satisfactorily and

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<sup>23</sup> Robert, Brandom, *Making it Explicit. Reasoning, Representing & Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 288.

that, therefore, James attempted to dissolve the “the traditional problematic about truth”. According to Rorty, it is best to understand ‘true’ as “a term of praise used for endorsing, rather than one referring to a state of affairs”.<sup>24</sup>

Brandom concentrates his analyses on the role that ‘truth’ plays, and more specifically, on the question of what expressive and explanatory functions ‘truth’ serves. His approach entails, not that ‘truth’ refers to a property of utility, but that pragmatists’ suggestion is that it is *indicative* of the utility of a belief. Although Brandom denies that this suggestion gets it exactly right either, he thinks that this reading is solid in its core: “The pragmatists start with the idea that in calling something true, one is *doing* something, rather than, or in addition to, *saying* something. Instead of asking what property it is that we are describing a belief or claim as having when we say that it is true, they ask about the *practical significance* of the *act* we are performing in attributing a property”.<sup>25</sup> Although truth-talk looks like any descriptive talk, in truth-talk we are not describing or postulating a property. In other words, when someone says that “it is true that World War II began 1939”, she is not ascribing a worldly property ‘true’ to this sentence, which would require correspondence to the facts, for example. Instead, she is merely saying that “World War II began 1939” while also taking a specific attitude to this assertion, that is, endorsing its acceptance. To express this in Fregean terms, the idea is that ‘true’ is a “force-indicating, rather than a sense-expressing, locution”.<sup>26</sup>

Brandom thus commits to the deflationary and performative analyses of truth. When asserting that something is true, one endorses the claim with the illocutionary function *that* also others should believe it. Making a truth-claim means taking a normative stance. As we have seen, the deflationary theories in general put this typically as follows: In asserting that “It is true that p” one asserts simply that “p”. Now, Brandom’s own view is that truth is, in effect, *taking something as true* and that it is *acknowledging* an assertional *commitment*. When a commitment to a belief is acknowledged, the interlocutor of truth-talk accepts it herself too. To put this differently, “the truth condition [of knowledge] does not qualify the entitled commitment that is

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Rorty, *Objectivism, Relativism and Truth. Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 126–127)

<sup>25</sup> Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 288.

<sup>26</sup> Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 288.

attributed but simply indicates that the attributor of knowledge must endorse it”.<sup>27</sup> Truth-clauses as endorsement can be compared to other endorsements, like sentences “I promise” or “trust me. I am able to do this”. When ‘true’ is added to a sentence, its point is to assure that something is so and so. Whether or not this assurance is worthwhile must be decided by considering whether or not an assertion that is endorsed should be accepted or not, which in turn depends on its inferential warrant. The predicate ‘truth’ as such does not help in this endeavor, but functions as a recommendation of a sentences’s acceptability.

In Sellars’s account, assertibility and the rules that determine when a sentence is assertible, are pivotal. Sellars states that ‘truth’ is a nickname for correct assertibility.<sup>28</sup> More explicitly he says that

[F]or a proposition to be true is for it to be assertible, where this means not *capable* of being asserted ... but *correctly* assertible; assertible, that is, in accordance with the relevant semantical rules, and on the basis of such additional, though unspecified, information as these rules may require... . ‘True’, then, means *semantically* assertible (“S-assertible”).<sup>29</sup>

Let us consider a conditional. For example: “if snow is white is true, then snow is white”. We can see clearly that the inference on the right hand side from the left-hand side is legitimate, and that the predicate ‘true’ is dropped. What takes place here, according to Sellars, is “a performance of the kind authorized by the truth statement on the left”.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> More specifically, Brandom’s theory of truth is called “the prosentential theory of truth,” which means that “...is true” claims are treated as prosentences in an analogy to other proforms and, in particular, to pronouns. It means that truth-clauses have the same semantic content as their “anaphoric” antecedents, such as “Snow is white is true” means “snow is white”. A prosentence recognizes dependence on its antecedent expression, such as “she stopped” depends on “Mary stopped”, when the latter is an antecedent clause. Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, 297.

<sup>28</sup> Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes*, The John Locke Lectures for 1965–66 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967) Reissued (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing, 1992).], 101. The reference are to the reissued 1992 edition.

<sup>29</sup> Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics*, 100-101.

<sup>30</sup> Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics*, 100-101.

The stress is on correct or legitimate inferrability, which is determined by semantic and perhaps by other kinds of rules too. It is not possible to focus here in any detail on what those rules are, but the emphasis is very clear here: the accent is on the conditions under which a specific sentence is legitimately assertible and a mention of truth in claims merely expresses and endorses this assertion. In other words, the focus is on what, and in what circumstance, is asserted; on correct *claiming*. Peregrin even states that the rules of inference are more basic than truth in that truth is constructed as that what is preserved by valid inferences, and not the other way around.<sup>31</sup>

In sum, there are two features in the pragmatist and inferentialist approach to truth that are particularly important and will be taken on board when truth is discussed in the context of historiography. The one issue is that ‘truth’ in sentences is indicative of doing, an endorsement to accept what is claimed. The other issue is that truth means correct application, that is, it is suggestive of a situation in which a sentence containing ‘truth’ is correctly asserted.

### **Are cognitive contributions of historiography truth-evaluable?**

Truth is sometimes understood as an aim of inquiry. It would be therefore important to be able to know how to direct our inquiries towards the truth. In any case, truth as a highly valued notion in our culture would be much less valuable if we did not have any hunch of the kinds of criteria that inform us about the truthfulness of our beliefs. Typically, theories of justification are assumed to provide those criteria. Kirkham writes that “the motivation for epistemology is concern over whether and how our beliefs can be justified as true”.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Bonjour has said that because we do not have direct access to truth “it is for this reason that justification comes into the picture.”<sup>33</sup> It is therefore necessary to ask in the context of history as a discipline, too, whether (a) its main cognitive contributions are truth-evaluable and (b) in what ways their truth-value can be assessed, if any.

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<sup>31</sup> Jaroslav Peregrin, *Inferentialism. Why Rules Matter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), 161.

<sup>32</sup> Kirkham, *Theories of Truth*, 47.

<sup>33</sup> Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, 7.

I tackle the first question first. Before it is possible to say, whether the cognitive contributions of historians are truth-evaluable, it is necessary to know what those contributions are. It is not my purpose here to enumerate all possible cognitive products, or all that have, in actuality, been identified as such. In philosophy in general, investigations have analysed, whether sentences, statements, propositions, beliefs, theories and so on can have truth-values. In philosophy of history, it has become customary to identify text, and often narrative too, as the main cognitive contributions and to distinguish these higher-level cognitive entities from lower-level cognitive entities, such as singular sentences or statements. One line of reasoning is that while individual sentences or statements have truth-values, and thus are true or false, a text and a narrative or narratives it contains have no truth-values. This was the original position put forward by Ankersmit<sup>34</sup> and it was later applied in various constructivist and postmodernist theories about historiography. One way to put it is to say that historians' texts produce meaning, which are non-epistemic entities by nature.<sup>35</sup> In this situation, the problem (b) about the ways in which the truth-value of a text could be evaluated dissolves itself. Historians' main products are simply neither true nor false; they are fundamentally some other type of object, perhaps "mere" ways of expressing or meaning entities, and possibly evaluable by some other criteria than truth-functional.

However, if it is accepted that texts and other more specific higher-order cognitive entities, such as narratives, representations<sup>36</sup> and "colligatory and synthesising notions" like theses about the past,<sup>37</sup> are *truth-evaluable*, in principle, then we are faced with the problem (b) how their truth-value is determined. For example, the later Ankersmit appears to accept that also whole texts can be true. He writes that "we are justified in speaking of historical truth. Not only are a historical text's individual sentences typically true of the past ... the same can be said of

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<sup>34</sup> Frank R. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers: The Hague, Boston and London, 1983).

<sup>35</sup> Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking History* (London: Routledge, 2008), 40; Alun Munslow, "Preface to the Routledge Classics Edition," xi–xv, in Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, xii; *Narrative and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 100-101.

<sup>36</sup> E.g. Frank R. Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Frank R. Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2012).

<sup>37</sup> Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

that text *as a whole*".<sup>38</sup> Elsewhere I argued that colligatory and synthesising notions can be truth-bearers.<sup>39</sup>

However, some have argued that there is no appropriate justificatory link between the lower-order entities and the higher-order entities. The best expression, and the classic in philosophy of history, is (the early) Ankersmit's rejection of "translation rules", which means that there are no rules to translate the past or its traces into a narrative<sup>40</sup>. He states equivocally that "Whatever concrete content we may give to the translation rules, they will never be more than *arbitrary* selection rules, acceptable to some historians but to be rejected by others",<sup>41</sup> and yet more bluntly, that "there are no translation rules".<sup>42</sup> This means that no matter how well-justified and true some singular statements are, they give never any support to a higher-order entity. In other words, even if one had collected, say, a great amount of factual statements about Napoleon's life, this collection would not entail the truth of a narrative or thesis, for example, that "Napoleon was a great liberator". These two levels of cognition simply are distinct. Or, as I have put it elsewhere, there are no "truth-makers for the integrative theses on history".<sup>43</sup> Historiographical theses are thus truth-bearers without corresponding truth-makers. A good way to think about this is to perceive any one of them as one possible textual configuration. If something is configured, it does not make sense to state that the configuration is true or false, but it can be said that the configuration is well, fittingly, pleasingly, perhaps beautifully put together. If a house is built out of smaller elements, it would not make sense to state that it represents some antecedent state of affairs, because there is nothing that precedes it. There can, of course, be sketches and blue prints for how to build this artefact, although the existence of them in historiographical construction is exactly what Ankermit denies.<sup>44</sup> This is to say that

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<sup>38</sup> Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation*, 124.

<sup>39</sup> Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*, 144, 133.

<sup>40</sup> Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, 76–82, 190, 216–217.

<sup>41</sup> Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, 81.

<sup>42</sup> Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, 87; similarly 216, 226.

<sup>43</sup> Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*, 151; similarly e.g. 11, 133, 142–143.

<sup>44</sup> Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, 75–76. It is interesting to note, both in terms of substance and terms used, that also Imre Lakatos denied that there is a representational "Blueprint of the Universe". Imre Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes: Philosophical Papers Vol. 1*, edited by John Worrall and Gregory Currie (Cambridge: Cambridge University



historiographical theses are fully meaningful but as textual configurations construct something new rather than represent something pre-existing in the past.

Naturally, it is possible to insist on adopting a more optimistic line of reasoning and assume that a large number of factual statements make more comprehensive views more likely. This means trying to solve the translation problem above by finding a way in which evidence can have bearing on assertions. That factual individual statements are relevant to a narrative or a thesis about the past may be closer to a common sense intuition on the matter than what the translation problem entails. For example, if we collect a large set of factual information, storable in true and referring individual statements about World War I, perhaps this information enables a generalisation on this basis. More specifically, if we gather piecemeal information that World War I is composed of events of great suffering, destruction, and distress, perhaps it is legitimate to conclude *on this basis* that World War I itself was a tragedy. As a consequence, we could perhaps say that it is true that World War I was a tragedy. Further, this would mean that the two levels of cognition are linked so that the lower-level may provide evidence for the higher-level (the thesis that “World War I was a tragedy”), and perhaps this piecemeal evidence even justifies this comprehensive view as true.

However, the problem of underdetermination by evidence, widely discussed in philosophy of science, poses an insurmountable problem. It says that no amount of evidence is able to prove any one theory, or in this case narrative, representation or thesis, as uniquely correct or true in the absolute sense.<sup>45</sup> To put it slightly alternatively, the same amount of data can be logically used to support infinite number of theoretical constructions. We can hit upon a good-sounding thesis, but then there is an infinite number of other well-supported theses available too. It is impossible to judge, whether any is *uniquely correct or true* on the basis of

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Press, 1978) 101, 154. He says that evaluation can be given only from a perspective of some existing theory or within the framework of one, not in any absolute sense: “Only God could give us a correct, detailed estimate of the absolute reliability of all by checking them against his blueprint of the universe”. Imre Lakatos, *Mathematics, Science and Epistemology: Philosophical Papers Vol. 2*, edited by John Worrall and Gregory Currie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 185.

<sup>45</sup> W. V. O. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953); Kyle Stanford, "Underdetermination of Scientific Theory", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/scientific-underdetermination/>.

evidence. The problem is logical and cannot be done away by empirical research.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, if the aim was to find a way to justify *one* high-order level cognitive product as true in historiography, the hopes are frustrated.

### **Truth as ideal justification in historiography**

The discussion above results in a conclusion that, although we can generate an innumerable number of warranted individual statements about the past, we can never justify any higher-order thesis or narrative about the past on this basis.<sup>47</sup> As was discussed above, there is an intermediate suggestion that *identifies* justification with truth. In other words, the option is to define truth as an epistemic notion, thus, as that belief, theory, narrative, thesis or other kind of truth-bearer that is very highly justified. Applied to historiography, this is premised on the idea that the bridge from the lower-level cognition to the higher is not broken, which then enables inferences between the two levels. In other words, it is assumed that, on the basis of detailed knowledge, or the knowledge of the details, it is possible to determine what narratives, for example, are more feasible than others, and perhaps even discount some altogether as false.

However, even if we could establish that one such higher-order knowledge entity is more justified than some other, it would still seem unwise to say that it is a true. Underdetermination establishes, why attempts to find one uniquely justified narrative are bound to fail. Further, the degrees of justifications of epistemic entities have altered, and are bound to change in the future too, and so truth would become a volatile notion. For example, people in the past were justified

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<sup>46</sup> Contrastive underdetermination thesis, as the form of underdetermination in question here can be called, is sometimes illustrated as follows: consider a finite group of data points, say, drawn on a paper. No matter how many additional points one adds, it will always be possible to connect data points in infinitely different ways. Undoubtedly, some curves will be very cumbersome, but possible. Although adding data cancels some curves, there will always be an infinite number of possibilities left. For more, see Stanford, "Underdetermination of Scientific Theory".

<sup>47</sup> A forceful alternative interpretation is provided by Collingwood, who would not accept this kind of distinction. His famous dictum says that all history is the history of thought and that it is possible re-think the thoughts of the past people. By rethinking the thoughts of people and understanding their practical rationales, we can "really" come to know how the past was. (Jonas, Ahlskog, *The Primary of Method. The Philosophy of History and the Perspective of Meaning* (London: Routledge, forthcoming), 104,-106, 112, 123.

in thinking that the sun revolves around the earth, as there was no evidence to the contrary. Looked by bare eyes, the sun really appears to traverse through the sky. It would sound silly, and certainly highly relativistic, to say that earlier it was true that the sun revolves around the earth, but now it is false. Further, a minor but still inconvenient problem is that this epistemic notion of truth would also run the risk of confusing justification with truth conceptually. My suggestion is that it is better and clearer to talk about justification, when justification is at stake, and keep it separate from truth.

A slightly more promising approach is to link truth to something like an ideal justification, as Peirce did (see the quotation above). In this situation, a truth-bearer would be true only when all possible evidence has been gathered. In other words, no matter how other beliefs change, it is not necessary to change the ideally justified one. Here we would not have two problems, truth and justification, but only one. However, a drawback is that there is reference to an ideal situation and perhaps to an ideal community, which keeps researching the world eternally. Truth is what it is (= ideally justified belief), but it is readily admitted that we may never reach this state. Naturally, in this situation, truth would not be volatile and relativistic. The problem is that it would be practically impossible to exclaim that anything is true, since we are currently far from this ideal epistemic situation. Further, the humanity might not even reach it ever. In addition to the fact that this relies on a mystical notion of ideal community and its practices, one wonders, whether we really cannot acquire and state truths in more mundane situations too, like that that there is a cup of coffee in front of me. And if we can, then truth would not mean, at least not exclusively, an ideally justified belief.

### **Deflationary pragmatism in historiography**

It should be noted that epistemic theories of truth above, even Peircean, are old-style substantial theories of truth. Kirkham considers whether an epistemic theory of truth could be a deflationary theory of truth, as some have suggested. He hits the nail on the head when he writes that “If truth is not a property at all, then it certainly is not an epistemic property”.<sup>48</sup> Fortunately, there is

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<sup>48</sup> Kirkham, *Theories of Truth*, 329.

another kind of pragmatic definition of truth that fits the deflationary bill. In the rest of this chapter, I explain what it is and consider how it functions in historiography.

Elsewhere I have defended the view that the entire text matters, and more, that texts amount to the main cognitive contributions of historians.<sup>49</sup> This I call the “narrativist insight”. All the hundreds of pages explicate the historian’s view or thesis that the book proposes and that the historian argues for. Of course, the historian may argue for several views or theses too in one book. A key consequence of the narrativist insight is thus that different standards of evaluation are applied to narratives and other higher order knowledge constructs as to individual statements and other lower order knowledge entities. There are excellent reasons to hold this view about their different status of justification, which is that these two types of knowledge are assumed to be fundamentally qualitatively different and stand in different relations with the world.

However, now I adopt a different perspective on the discipline of history, which dilutes the difference between the two. This may be called post-narrativism, perhaps also pre-narrativism, but in both cases the approach is *pre-* or *post-* in a new way. If we focus on what historians intend to do, it is my suggestion that they aim to make well-justified claims about the past. These claims can be very exact and limited in terms of their scope of application, like a birth date of a historical figure, and they can be very abstract or general and apply to extensive geographical areas and temporal periods, like an attempt to capture the spirit of an epoch (e.g. “The Thaw” in the history of the Soviet Union). However, viewed from the practical point of view, *they are all of the same kind: claims*. Now the common question applicable to all claims is, whether they are justified. In other words, the theses of whole books are like (any) other claims in that they have been put forward and that a community of historians must assess, whether they are acceptable as claims or not. To be clear, by “acceptable” I mean rationally acceptable or accepted with good reasons. If a claim is accepted for good reasons, then it is justified too. It should be noted that in the Sellarsian inferentialist *parlance* the question is whether claims are correctly or appropriately inferred, and therefore, acceptable.

This basic idea is to understand truth in historiography, not as an epistemic notion, but as a specific deflationary, performative notion of truth, which emphasizes that the function of truth-clauses is to claim that something is so and so. We saw above that Sellars defined truth as

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<sup>49</sup> Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*.

semantical assertibility, or as something that is correctly assertible in accordance with the relevant semantical rules. Sellars's account has a clear advantage over most traditional theories of truth, which presuppose a view of the kinds of entities that can and cannot have truth-values. For example, traditionally, aesthetic and moral judgements are thought to be neither true nor false, because they are not thought to be fact-stating. By contrast, Sellars's analysis of truth enables attribution of truth even to moral judgements.<sup>50</sup> This raises the question that, if moral judgments can be considered as being true, according to their semantic assertibility, why not narratives and other higher-order historiographical knowledge entities? In *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography* I excluded higher-order cognitive entities from truth-functional evaluations because of my commitment to the correspondence theory of truth: the higher-order entities do not seem to have truth-makers in the object world that would make them true or false.<sup>51</sup> Now it is very important to remember that with the notion of semantic assertability, this kind of representationalist model is rejected entirely, both regarding the lower and the higher order levels of cognition. In other words, now I think that one and the same, deflationary, principle regarding truth can be applied more comprehensively, thus, generalised to hold for any assertible statement.

Sellars's idea of semantical assertibility underlines two things: the conditions, and specifically, rules under which a specific claim is warranted or correctly assertible. It is worth emphasising already now that this says nothing, and I intend to say nothing, general about these conditions and rules that make claims assertible. It is conceivable that those conditions vary from case to case and that the assertibility conditions of some narrative claims, for example, are different from the assertibility conditions of some other narrative claims, depending perhaps on their scope of application. Nevertheless, this approach signposts how correct claiming can be assessed. In historiography, it is hardly ever the case that observational conditions play a role in determining assertibility conditions, unlike in many sciences. Instead, it is almost always the case that the historiographical discourse and the rules that govern it determine, whether a claim is acceptable or unacceptable.<sup>52</sup> The key words regarding the assessment of legitimate claiming are

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<sup>50</sup> Willem A. Devries, *Wilfrid Sellars* (Chesman: Acumen, 2005), 252.

<sup>51</sup> See Paul Roth's contribution, "Analytical Philosophy of History", in this volume.

<sup>52</sup> Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, "Historiography as claiming correctly," in J-M Kuukkanen (ed.), *Philosophy of History for Twenty-first Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 44-66.

inference and inferrability: has a specific claim been inferred correctly and in accordance with appropriate rules? Is a specific claim appropriate in a given historiographical context? For example, what makes a claim that “Faced with the power of the masses, the Russian Tsar trembled” in 1905<sup>53</sup> correctly asserted?

What is *deflationary* in this suggestion then? It has to do with the specific role of ‘truth’ in statements. The idea is that, substantially, the claims that “It is true that faced with the power of the masses, the Russian Tsar trembled” and “Faced with the power of the masses, the Russian Tsar trembled” are equivalent. Their warrants hinge on the both current state of knowledge in historiography and on the general rules that govern academic debate. For example, it is based in part on the assumptions that because of the general strike of 1905 the Russian Tsar was *forced*, fearing violence and the consequence for his rule, to agree to the establishment of a Duma with legislative powers and various kinds of civil rights for the Russian people.<sup>54</sup> The network of claims makes this statement warranted through their inferential links. The imposition of ‘truth’ does not add any substantial property or specific quality that would require a deep metaphysical theory. Instead, it is an endorsement of the claim that follows, urging people to accept the claim. Naturally, following Sellars’s idea of semantic assertibility, this endorsement should be accepted only if it is correctly asserted. In other words, a claim is true only when it can be accepted as semantically assertible, but even then the “ascent” of “truth” means only that that the sentence in question is accepted because of its warrant in light of the rules of inferring in the context. And, now, this is where the circle closes and we need to refer back to the context-specific conditions that determine correct assertibility, thus to the historiographical context of the Russian revolution.

This kind of pragmatist-deflationary theory places practice to a central role also with regard to the notion of truth. Epistemology and claiming that something is true becomes, not a matter of getting it right with regard to an external object to this practice, but a matter of being a correct practice in a community and in the given circumstances. The rules according to which truth-claiming communities, like historians, operate are pivotal. This topic overlaps many both philosophical and potentially empirical issues: What are the rules that govern the discourse of historians? Are there generally shared rules in scientific communities or are rules discipline-

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<sup>53</sup> Seppo Aalto, *Kapina Tehtaila. Kuusankoski 1918* (Helsinki: Siltala, 2018), 41.

<sup>54</sup> Kuukkanen, “Historiography as claiming correctly,” 60.

specific? Are they perhaps specifiable by means of theories of critical thinking and logic? Further, what is their normative force based on? Is it at all possible to talk about universal rationality or universal rules of reasoning?<sup>55</sup> Should we rather think that there are many communities, whose life forms, including the rules of reasoning, differ?

None of these questions is easily assessed and answered, and I won't attempt it here either. Nevertheless, if we think that historians create their own community, albeit partially virtually, designed to evaluate whether claims about the past can be accepted or not, then this suggests that there is some set of shared rules. For how could any community function without them? Further, we must assume some shared set of rules, unless we are prepared to accept that, literally, anything can be claimed and accepted about the past, contrived in any way, like through reading tea leaves in a pot. In other words, we must think that there are shared rules that put a limit to or constrain what can be justifiably claimed about the past. It should be noted that it is unimportant whether claims about the past are made by formally professionally educated historians or by popular and public historians. In the end, they are part of the same historiographical discourse and their tenability should be assessed by the same (kinds of) means and criteria.

A perceptive reader has probably remarked that assertibility conditions, quite like justification, typically change in history. Once it was correctly assertible that the sun revolves around the world, but not anymore. But, then, it should also be noticed that all that changes in transitions is exactly that: assertibility conditions, which evolve together with the knowledge of the world and the rules of argumentation. Further, 'truth' does not do any "heaving lifting" here, but its role is to function as a linguistic predicate urging acceptability of what is claimed. To claim that "it is not true that the sun revolves around the world" means that one should not think that the sun revolves around the earth and that it is not correct to claim (= is not assertible) that the sun revolves around the world

Further, one should also remark the difference between an inference from a truth-claim to the claim itself, on the one hand, and the assessment of the assertibility conditions of the claim on the other hand. In other words, it is one thing to say, on a meta-level, that it is correct to infer

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<sup>55</sup> For more, see Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, "Normativity and the Problem of Naturalism: The Case of Historiography", *Philosophy of Social Sciences* 49 (2019), 331-363.

from the truth-statements to the statement itself without a truth predicate, and it is quite another thing to consider the conditions in which the statement itself is correctly assertible. It has been suggested in this paper that an inference from “It is true that faced with the power of the masses, the Russian Tsar trembled” to “Faced with the power of the masses, the Russian Tsar trembled” is always warranted. However, the evaluation of the warrant of the claim like “Faced with the power of the masses, the Russian Tsar trembled” itself is more complicated and contingent upon historiographical practice and knowledge.

### **Why rules matter**

The idea of a community of scholars whose discourse and inferences are governed by rules is very important. The notion of correctness in claiming presupposes a reference to rules: if something is correct, it entails that something else is incorrect. A claim may be correctly inferred, but it could perhaps have been incorrectly inferred or another kind of (incorrect) claim could have been inferred instead of it. In brief, rules determine what is correct and what is incorrect.

Now these rules can naturally be conceived of as formal, like in logic, or as informal or communally based on the practice of a community. Yet the main point is that it is not the actual practice but the communally embedded rules that determine correctness and incorrectness. A transition from the description that “x is wood of such and such shape” to “x is a knight” reveals the role that the grammar of concepts and rules play in determining what can be legitimately moved and stated. While the moves of a piece of wood are not regulated, the moves of a knight are very strictly regulated in chess, although materially the object is the same. While there may be several moves available for a knight, enabled by the rules, no actual move taken in a game dictate the appropriateness of practice. Communally upheld rules do. Sellars says that “to play the language ... is to know what would constitute a good reason for making it [move] in one way rather another ... [R]easons *are always positions within in a frame*”.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Sellars, *In the Space of Reasons*, 54.



In the case above, the frame is chess and its rules determine correct and incorrect moves. But the idea of frame is analogous with what I called “argumentative context”<sup>57</sup> and what could also be called historiographical discourse. More practically, let us think about the historiographical discourse about the Russian revolutions. There are certainly some communal rules that determine what is assertible. They are, in part, based on the general rules of argumentation, and in part on the rules of historiographical practice, like archival work. Further, there are permissible inferences that are determined by the web of beliefs of historians and lay people, that is, what is generally accepted as correct about the period in question. One can make mistakes, and the rules can change too, although I suspect that very slowly only. This is to say that claims involving truth can be translated as endorsements to accept a specific claim. The acceptance itself is then to be assessed against rules governing the discourse and against the rule-based practice itself.

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<sup>57</sup> Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*, 157-158.

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