

## The Metaphysics of Truth

By DOUGLAS EDWARDS

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*The Metaphysics of Truth* is a wide-ranging defense of metaphysical inquiry into the nature of truth. Edwards' primary targets of critique are deflationary and primitivist theories of truth. He develops his own pluralist theory of truth (as well as a pluralist theory of existence), arguing that it fares better than deflationism, primitivism, and traditional inflationary theories of truth (correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic views). The book covers substantial ground—including theories of truth, the ontology of properties, truthmaking, social ontology, among others—and is full of stimulating arguments. Philosophers of many stripes will find something of interest in Edwards' well-written and fascinating book.

Chapters 1 through 3 take aim at deflationary approaches to truth. In chapter 1, Edwards rejects various versions of 'ultra-deflationism,' which deny that there is a property of being true. The chapter is primarily a ground clearing chapter that aims to quickly dispatch ultra-deflationary views. In chapter 2, Edwards focuses on deflationist views, e.g., Horwich 1998, that admit that truth is a property but claim that it is an 'insubstantial' property. He argues that the best interpretation of this claim is that truth is not a sparse, but rather an abundant property. Edwards conceives of abundant properties as mere extensions of predicates; for every well-behaved predicate, there is a property. Sparse properties, on the other hand, are kinds or universals that ground objective similarities in the world, and which play an important explanatory role. The sparse/abundant property distinction figures centrally in the rest of the book, both with regard to his critique of deflationism as well as Edwards' own positive view.

Chapter 3 is home to Edwards' central attack on deflationist views about truth. He argues that truth deflationists are actually committed to a global deflationism about all language/world connections (52-59). But global deflationism deflates most metaphysical debates. This includes, Edwards notes, the debate about the nature of properties. But this is a problem for truth deflationism. For the view crucially depends upon a metaphysical distinction between sparse and abundant properties, as Edwards argued a chapter earlier. If there is no substantial distinction between sparse and abundant properties, then the deflationist cannot even state their central claim about truth, viz. that it is an abundant property. The upshot, claims Edwards, is that the deflationist about truth cannot claim that their view is a neutral, default theory that should be the methodological starting point for debates about truth. Rather, truth deflationism entails a controversial view about language and world connections in general. This argument is both provocative and helpful insofar as it connects debates about truth with wider questions about deflationism in meta-metaphysics.

Chapter 4 explores how predicates relate to properties. Edwards aims to show that some parts of our language *respond* to the world whereas other parts actually *generate* the world. Some predicates, e.g., scientific predicates like being magnetic, function to pick out sparse properties (he calls such predicates 'responsive'). Others generate abundant properties (he calls such predicates 'generative'), e.g., social and institutional predicates like being a woman and being the mayor of New York City.

A person's being white, or black, or a man, or a woman, on Edwards' view, is dependent upon truth. This view will strike some social ontologists as problematic. One recurring theme from the social constructionist literature is that there is widespread ignorance about the true nature of gender and race. *False* beliefs, for instance, beliefs about the naturalness of these categories or the essential properties of their members, can help produce gender and race categories and systems (see Haslanger 2012; Mallon 2016). Others have argued that actions, practices, laws, and material

conditions play a larger role than belief in producing race and gender (see Sundstrom 2003, Thomasson 2003, Haslanger 2012, Epstein 2015, and Mallon 2016). The worry is that Edwards has oversimplified these complex issues by treating social and institutional properties as grounded merely in true beliefs.

In chapter 5, Edwards connects the discussion of predicates and properties to the nature of truth. Here he motivates a pluralist approach to truth: there are different ways of being true in different domains. According to Edwards, in some domains, truth is representational, whereas in others it is not. In representational domains, truth is explained by property instantiation, i.e., truth is dependent upon and responsive to the instantiation of sparse properties. In such domains, correspondence is the nature of truth. In non-representational domains, truth generates being, i.e., what abundant properties are instantiated is dependent upon what is true. In such domains, truth is superassertability (durable warrant) claims Edwards.

Chapters 6 through 8 develop Edwards' truth and existence pluralisms. Both forms of pluralism are 'determination' pluralisms. Edwards holds that there is one generic property of truth and one generic property of existence. However, there are different ways in which sentences come to be true or objects come to exist. With respect to truth, in each domain there is a property, e.g., correspondence or superassertability, the possession of which will determine that the sentence has the generic truth property. With respect to existence, in each domain there is a property, e.g., being causally efficacious, being perceived, being the referent of a term in a true sentence, the possession of which will determine that the object has the generic existence property. Chapters 7 and 8 distinguish Edwards' truth and existence pluralisms from others on offer and address various challenges to both forms of pluralism.

Two issues crop up regarding Edwards' central view. First, the relation between the generic truth and existence properties and the plurality of truth and existence determining properties is unclear. On the one hand, truth and existence are not supposed to be derivative from their determiners (pp. 130; 151). But on the other hand, Edwards says (pp. 126; 154) that truth/existence are instantiated because of or in virtue of the specific determining properties. I'd like to hear more about how Edwards understands the relation between truth/existence and their determiners given that these claims seem to be in tension. Second, for both truth and existence, sentences and objects across different domains can have multiple truth/existence determining properties, respectively. For example, the same truth—'something exists'—can both correspond and be superassertable. Social entities are both constructed and causally efficacious (two properties that are existence-determiners for Edwards). It is not clear how to specify the unique truth/existence determining property in each domain. Edwards does not give much guidance about this beyond providing some intuitive associations between the various domains and the truth/existence determining properties stipulated to hold sway in those domains. Moreover, Edwards' claim that truth is not correspondence in the social and institutional domains is open to challenge. Of course, there is no pre-existing or mind-independent reality in these domains that true beliefs correspond to. But that is not necessary for some sort of correspondence relation to obtain between our beliefs and social reality. We can hold, for example, that '*S* is a woman' is true in virtue of corresponding to certain social facts involving *S*, e.g., like those spelled out by Haslanger's (2012) definition of being a woman. For Haslanger, what is key for *S*'s being a woman is not true beliefs anyone has about *S*, but about how *S* is socially positioned.

In chapters 9 and 10 Edwards responds to primitivism about truth. According to primitivists, there is no substantive or informative theory of truth to be found, yet truth plays an important explanatory role. In chapter 9, he counters Merricks' (2007) argument that because some truths have no truthmakers, truth cannot be a relational property, something to which traditional theories of truth are committed. Edwards rejects Merricks' assumption that all truth depends upon

being. So, even if there are some truths that do not have worldly truthmakers, that doesn't entail that there is no explanation for these truths or that there is nothing substantive to say about the nature of truth.

The remainder of the chapter attempts to show how truth pluralists might explain truth in the various domains that Merricks denies have truthmakers, e.g., modal truths, truths about the past, and negative existential truths. The discussion of these cases is somewhat truncated and there is little interaction with the existing literature on truthmaking beyond Merricks' critique. In the end, Edwards suggests that the truthmaker principle—every truth is made true by some thing—can be salvaged if 'some thing' is taken in a broad sense to include our beliefs, proofs, laws of nature, etc. It is curious, however, that Edwards does not connect his ontological pluralism to the question of what explains various truths. One might have thought an appeal to different ways of being would play an important role in explaining how different classes of truths are made true. (Edwards does, I should note, discuss different ways of existing in his discussion of negative existential truths, but doesn't clearly indicate what their truthmakers are.) All that said, Edwards' discussion is interesting and begins to connect truth pluralism with truthmaking, something lacking in the literature.

In chapter 10, he responds to Asay's 2018 view that a theory of truthmaking can supplant a theory of truth. According to Asay, there is no need to postulate a plurality of ways of being true once we have truthmakers for truths. Edwards responds, correctly in my view, by arguing that truthmaking without a theory of truth is ultimately self-defeating. He argues that we cannot explain what kind of entities serve as truthmakers for what kinds of truths or why some particular entity is a truthmaker for a particular truth without understanding the nature of truth itself. Edwards concludes that either primitivism or truthmaking has to go; we can't have both.

Edwards' book is crisply written and offers many innovative and stimulating arguments. One feature of the book that made it so enjoyable to read is that it is clear and rigorous without being gratuitously technical. While there were topics the reader would wish to hear more about from Edwards, the main positions are well motivated and defended. He deserves credit for drawing together, thus far, disparate literatures. I expect *The Metaphysics of Truth* to draw a fair bit of attention from those working on truth. The book is a welcomed addition to the field.

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