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SUCCESS SEMANTICS

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I TRUTH: WHAT IT IS AND WHY WE WANT IT

TRUTH is the property we most want our beliefs to possess: and not because truth is beauty and we want our beliefs to be beautiful; nor for any other especially noble reason. We want our beliefs to be true simply because, when they are, we get what we want by acting on them. The truth of beliefs explains the success of the actions they cause. Although obvious, this is the most interesting fact about truth, because it tells us not only why we want our beliefs to be true but also what truth is. Truth just *is* the property of a belief that suffices for your getting what you want when you act on it.

And, of course, we already know what property that is. It's the property of being a belief that things are thus-and-so when they *are* thus-and-so. For clearly, you will get what you want if you act on a belief that represents things as being as they actually are. Plumpton will succeed in becoming thin by acting on his belief (B1) that dieting will make him thin, just in case dieting *will* make him thin.

So, thinking of truth in this way simply delivers a *redundancy* conception, according to which

(RT) a belief B is true iff $(\exists p)$(B is the belief that p & p).

Which is fine, as far as it goes, but that's not far enough for those of us who think there must be more to truth than (RT) gives us. Even if the redundancy conception is right we still need to say what makes any belief the belief it is. What, for example, makes Plumpton's belief B1 the belief that dieting will make him thin and thus true if and only if dieting will make him thin? The substantial part of a redundancy account of truth lies in saying what gives beliefs their truth conditions.

And this is where the connection between truth and success becomes genuinely interesting. For taking truth to be the guarantor of successful action delivers, not only the redundancy conception, but also an account of truth conditions. For suppose we pretend that we don't know the truth condition of Plumpton's belief B1, but do know that combined with the desire to be thin, B1 makes Plumpton diet. Now beliefs, we've said, are true just in case they suffice to get you what you want when you act on them.

So, B1's truth condition is what suffices for Plumpton's action getting him what he wants: namely, that Plumpton's dieting *will* make him thin. *That* is B1's truth condition.

Thus we arrive at the following account of truth conditions, which I'll call (R), after Ramsey, who thought of it first (see F. P. Ramsey 'Facts and Propositions' in his *Foundations: Essays in Philosophy, Logic, Mathematics and Economics* edited by D. H. Mellor, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978):

(R) A belief's truth condition is that which guarantees the fulfilment of any desire by the action which that belief and desire would combine to cause.

Since (R) defines truth conditions in terms of the content of desires (their fulfilment conditions), it doesn't itself reduce truth conditions to anything non-semantic. And clearly if we want such a reduction, and want to stick with (R), then we will have to give a 'truth independent' account of the content of desires. That can be done, but isn't what I'm concerned to show here. The aim of this paper is simply to show that, taking the content of desires for granted, (R) gives the right answers regarding the truth conditions of beliefs.

II Truth Conditions for Individual Beliefs

You might think that (R) will work only for beliefs, like Plumpton's B1, which are about means to ends. Why should (R) work for beliefs whose content isn't instrumental in this sense, and which therefore don't, on their own, combine with desires to cause any actions?

The answer is that *all* beliefs are instrumental in the required sense. Certainly, not all are made true by facts about what will happen if something is done (instrumental facts), but that doesn't matter. All (R) needs — and gets — is that all beliefs have distinctive causal properties: having a belief systematically affects what you do, or at least what you would do if relevant circumstances arose.

Indeed, beliefs can be identified, without assuming anything about truth conditions, with their causal properties by the following conjunctive characterization (call it CAB — short for 'causal account of beliefs'):

(CAB) Bi is the state-type that (if combined with the desire D1 and beliefs Bj, Bk, . . .) would cause the action A1 and (if combined with D2 and Bn, Bm . . .) would cause A2 and . . . [and so on, listing all the actions that Bi would cause if combined with other beliefs and desires.]

CAB identifies beliefs dispositionally. Being dispositions is what makes all belief states instrumental, even ones about how many

toes you have on your right foot. All beliefs will cause you to act in a certain way given certain other beliefs and desires. Plumpton's B1 is more obviously instrumental only because it can be characterized causally without referring to any other beliefs: because it can combine with a desire to cause an action on its own.

But how can (R) give the right truth conditions for beliefs that need other beliefs (as well as desires) to make them cause actions? Here's how. Suppose that Plumpton (who has given up his diet) now wants some chocolate and believes (B2) that there is chocolate in the fridge. B2 won't on its own make Plumpton act on his desire for chocolate by going to the fridge. He won't, for example, go to the fridge if he thinks that it's locked. To get Plumpton to the fridge B2 needs to combine with other beliefs: if not beliefs about the fridge not being locked etc., at least beliefs whose truth entails such things. Suppose then, that B2 does combine with some other such beliefs, say B3 and B4, to make Plumpton go to the fridge (call this action A2). What can (R) tell us about B2's truth condition?

What it tells us directly is the truth condition for the conjunction of beliefs B2 & B3 & B4. This is a condition (or conjunction of conditions) sufficient for Plumpton's getting chocolate by going to the fridge: there being chocolate in the fridge, no impediments to Plumpton's making it to the kitchen, and so on. But we want an account of the truth conditions of individual beliefs, not just of conjunctions of them. But that isn't hard to extract, via the fact that any one belief will combine with many other beliefs and desires to cause equally many different actions.

Let's stick with Plumpton's belief B2. How can we pick out the part of the A2's success condition to which B2 answers for its truth (namely, there being chocolate in the fridge)? Very simply. Take an action caused by B2, but not B3 and B4, and see what that action's success condition shares with A2's success condition. Suppose, for example, that Plumpton wants to go and buy any confectionery he doesn't already have in his fridge. B2 will play its role here: it will stop Plumpton from buying chocolate. But B3 and B4 — the beliefs about Plumpton's kitchen (etc.) that were required to get into it — will have no effect on Plumpton's purchases; and their truth will have no effect on whether those purchases succeed. But B2's truth will affect that; since if it is false Plumpton will not buy some confectionery that isn't in his fridge. And so, in short, what makes B2 the belief that there is chocolate in the fridge is that wherever B2 is part of the cause of an action A, part of A's success condition is that there is chocolate in the fridge.

So far so good. But what about conditions that are part of every action's success condition? Or those which are part of the success conditions of all actions caused by beliefs about certain things: for example, the condition of the earth's gravitational field, which is

part of the success condition of all actions caused by beliefs about masses on the earth?

The problem these ever-present success conditions presents is obvious. Wherever any belief (or belief of a certain type) B causes an action A, these conditions will be part of A's success condition; but they need not be part of B's truth condition. For example, almost no action would succeed if you exploded whenever you tried to perform it. But clearly that doesn't make the truth conditions of our beliefs include our not exploding. B2 is not Plumpton's belief that there is chocolate in the fridge *and* that he won't explode if he does anything. So perhaps (R) is in trouble. Perhaps it is committed to the ludicrous view that 'stability conditions' (conditions required for the success of all actions) are part of the truth conditional content of all beliefs.

Not so. This trouble only seems to arise because we are overly concerned with how things actually are. Of course, the *actual* success of our actions depends, as a matter of fact, on certain regularities. But (R) is not restricted to *actual* success. Recall how we removed the fridge not being locked from the truth condition of Plumpton's belief B2: by considering hypothetical actions caused by B2 whose success would be independent of whether the fridge was locked. And as for the fridge not being locked, so for more general stability conditions. We need only consider what would remain part of the success conditions of actions partly caused by B2 if the stability conditions were different.

For example, terrestrial gravity no doubt plays a part in the success of all Plumpton's actions involving fridges. But that doesn't commit (R) to making all Plumpton's beliefs about fridges (including B2) also beliefs about terrestrial gravity. For if there were no gravity, and thus no true beliefs about its obtaining, B2 could, and sometimes would, still be part of the cause of successful actions. Gravity is no part of B2's truth condition because even though it is part of the success condition of every action it *does* cause, it is not part of the success condition of every action it *would* cause if things were different.

On the other hand, no matter how things differed, so long as B2's causal dispositions remained fixed, the success condition of any action it caused would include chocolate being in the fridge. For example, if Plumpton were in outer space and wanted chocolate, then combined with some other beliefs, B2 could make him perform an action whose success required the *absence* of gravity: such as wafting gently towards the fridge hovering at the ceiling of his space-ship. But however he were to get to the fridge, there would still have to be chocolate in it for Plumpton to get what he wants.

So, to single out a belief's truth condition we only need counterfactuals about what would suffice to make all the actions it would cause succeed if only things were different, provided, of course, its causal dispositions remain fixed.

But doesn't this reveal at least one kind of regularity which we *can't* peel away from a belief's truth condition: namely, the very causal regularities of CAB that we used to characterize the belief in the first place? For they, at least, will be present wherever the belief they characterize is. But they aren't in its truth condition. How can we stop (R) making them so?

Again, quite simply. First we note that no such causal regularities will be part of the success condition of *all* the actions caused by the beliefs they define. For the success condition of an action is what suffices for it to fulfil the desire that caused it. And that will *very rarely* include the regularities that define the beliefs that also caused it. What those regularities explain is the actions performed, not why, once performed, those actions are successful.

Consider again Plumpton's belief B2 and his expedition to the fridge. The regularities that link B2, B3, B4 and D2 to Plumpton's going to the fridge do indeed partly explain that action of his; but they are irrelevant to its success once it's done. So even though beliefs must always be accompanied by the casual conditions they depend on for their identity, those conditions aren't what the beliefs are about, because they aren't always part of the success conditions of the actions caused by the beliefs they identify.

But there is another objection to consider. This appeals to the fact that the counterfactual strategy for singling out a belief's truth condition requires assuming the world to be different and seeing what would suffice for the success of the actions it would then cause. And if the world were different in some such ways, in particular in some of its regularities, then it would differ in many other ways, including other regularities. But if lots of our regularities were different then, since we have defined beliefs (in CAB) by way of the regularities that govern them, our beliefs would have to differ too. And I can't talk about what B2 would cause if there were differences in the regularities on which B2 depends for its very existence.

But there's no real problem here either: because we don't need to consider situations which vary so radically from actuality that our beliefs couldn't exist in them. In particular, we need not deny all the regularities that we want to exclude from the truth conditions of our beliefs all at once. We can peel them away one at a time, by considering, for each such regularity, what would suffice for the success of actions caused by the belief in question if only that one regularity were different or irrelevant. And by also keeping other differences to a minimum (as you always do with counterfactuals) there will be no problem in talking about what actual beliefs would cause if things weren't as they actually are.

But won't even this cautious approach sometimes require us to consider what would happen in situations extremely unlike reality: for example, situations where acting *does* make us explode and in which case the regularities of CAB, which characterize our beliefs, will surely not hold?

No it won't. For to get something out of one belief's truth condition, it is good enough to get it into another's, as follows. We've already noted that the success conditions of the actions a belief causes generally include conditions that aren't part of its truth condition, and that this presents no problem because such beliefs only cause actions when combined with other beliefs. For example, the fridge's not being locked is not in B2's truth condition because it is part of the truth conditions of B3 and B4, the other beliefs with which B2 combined to cause A2. Similarly, that acting won't make you explode, needn't be in the truth condition of B2 because it can be in — indeed can be — the truth condition of another belief, B5, without which you would never act at all.

But how are we to distinguish the truth-conditional content of B2 from that of B5, given that B2 only causes actions when combined with B5?

Easily. For even if B2 cannot cause action independently of B5, the converse doesn't hold: B5, but not B2, is part of the cause of most actions. And that is what makes it, and not B2, the belief that acting won't make you explode: that acting won't make you explode is part of the success condition of all the actions that B5 would cause. And in order to single out *that* truth condition we needn't consider situations in which acting does make you explode, but merely situations in which the other beliefs, with which B5 combines to make you act, aren't true; such as there being no chocolate in the fridge. And nothing in those situations need threaten the regularities on which the existence of any of our beliefs depends.

There's an easier and perhaps less artificial way to show that employing (R) doesn't make us consider overly bizarre situations. Beliefs about things as peculiar as your not exploding seem very rarely to play any part in causing actions. We act all the time, but we hardly ever (at least consciously) believe that acting won't make us explode. In addition to B2 and the desire for chocolate, it's probably enough to get Plumpton to the kitchen that he believes (B6) that there's nothing to stop him getting there; the truth of which *implies* that acting won't make him explode. By implying B5, B6 can make B5's causal contribution without Plumpton having to have B5. Now as we know, in various conjunctions of beliefs and desires, B2 can make Plumpton perform many different actions. But unlike B5, B6 won't often be one of the conjuncts. There will, however, almost always be one belief that implies that he won't explode.

It is now clear how we can avoid having to consider situations which threaten CAB. Since many different beliefs imply B5, to single out B2's truth condition I need never consider what would happen if B5 were false (if acting did make you explode), but only what would happen if the particular beliefs that imply B5 were

false. And, unlike B5, to be false (or irrelevant to the performance and success of actions) such beliefs don't need to be held in situations where acting will make you explode. The falsity of B6, for example, requires nothing more exotic than the kitchen door being locked.

Enough has been said, I think, to show how (R) can single out truth conditions for individual beliefs. Before moving on, however, we should note that this strategy will single out even more fine grained contents: namely, the references of individual concepts. Suppose we not only have truth conditions for all our beliefs but also that their causal inter-relations given them a sub-propositional structure. Then the referents of concepts — the mental correlates of words — can be singled out in the same way as the truth conditions of whole beliefs. If an entity E occurs in the truth conditions of all beliefs that include a concept C, then C refers to E. For example, if one of B2's sub-propositional components, C1, is also a part of other beliefs, all of whose truth conditions involve Plumpton's fridge but have nothing else in common, then C1 refers to Plumpton's fridge.

That completes my brief explication of (R) and how it works. Of course, I can't here deal with many of the issues (such as semantic reduction) raised by (R), but I will say something about two possible grounds of objection to it: the role validity plays in (R), and the way we can be caused to act by partial beliefs.

III Does (R) Need Validity?

You might think that (R) gives a circular account of truth because it requires beliefs to cause actions by way of valid inferences. After all, if Plumpton invalidly inferred from B2 that if he wants chocolate he should go to the washing machine, (R) would give B2 the wrong truth condition: namely, that there is chocolate in the washing machine. So perhaps (R) needs to be augmented with a validity stipulation:

> (R′) A belief's truth condition is that which guarantees the fulfilment of any desire by the action which that belief and desire would combine to cause by way of valid inferences.

But validity is defined in terms of truth: valid inferences are those that are necessarily truth preserving. So adding a validity stipulation would make (R) give a circular account of truth. But there's no problem here because (R) doesn't actually need to appeal to validity. All (R) needs is some psycho-physical laws, such as those described by CAB. Since they are what determine the truth conditions of beliefs, they will indeed characterize valid inferences between intentional states: but that is a consequence, not an assumption, of (R).

But how then can people make invalid inferences, and fail to believe all the consequences of their beliefs? Of course, they sometimes do, but this is perfectly compatible with (R): like other dispositional or functional states, beliefs needn't always have the effects that characterize them. For one thing, most of the laws described in CAB will be probabilistic, and people needn't always do what a law says they only usually do. For another, dispositional states are typically states of systems governed by many laws besides the laws which characterize those states. All sorts of things could happen to your body to stop you acting in accordance with the laws that characterize your mind. But that doesn't refute the dispositional account of states of your mind. Being physically unable to do sums, because the activity of your brain makes you sleep, doesn't stop the conclusion you would arrive at if you had a better brain from partly fixing the content of that calculating state that in fact only sends you to sleep.

So (R) doesn't imply that mistakes are impossible. But you may still think that (R) only looks plausible if the laws of CAB do characterize valid inferences between intentional states. Otherwise why should a belief's truth condition be linked to the success conditions of the actions it causes? Why shouldn't (R) let B2 send Plumpton to the washing machine for his chocolate if (R) doesn't presuppose validity? The answer is that if B2 did that (and did so in accordance with psycho-physical law), it wouldn't be the belief it is: it wouldn't be the belief that there is chocolate in the fridge; it would be the belief that there is chocolate in the washing machine.

IV Partial Belief

So much for validity. What about partial belief? We do, after all, often act on beliefs that we hold with less than absolute certainty. But then the truth of those partial beliefs doesn't guarantee the success of some of the actions they cause. Suppose, for example, that Plumpton's degree of belief in B2 is only 50%. That partial belief could combine with, say, a desire not to expend energy on a fruitless trip to the fridge, to cause Plumpton to stay seated in front of the television. But it isn't part of the success condition of Plumpton's sitting either that there is chocolate in the fridge or that there isn't. How can (R) allow truth and success conditions to come apart as they clearly do in these cases?

Easily: by not applying to them. A belief's truth condition is that which suffices for the success of the actions it would cause *if it were a full belief*. It doesn't matter to (R) that beliefs are often only partial. Since coming to England, for example, I have never fully believed (B7) that tomorrow will be sunny. And my partially believing B7 has indeed made me do things whose success

condition doesn't include the next day being sunny. But B7 is still the belief that tomorrow will be sunny, because tomorrow's being sunny is part of the success condition of all the actions it would cause if I believed it fully; even though, not being that stupid, I never will.

In short, we don't need the whole of modern decision theory to fix the truth conditions of our beliefs. We only need the limiting case, which tells us how full beliefs make us act. That will suffice to fix their truth conditions; and we can then use the rest of decision theory to tell us how beliefs with those truth conditions will make us act when they are only partial beliefs. That's another story; but not one that need concern us here, since far from contradicting (R), it ultimately presupposes it.[1]

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[1] I am grateful to Hugh Mellor for helpful comments.

VAGUE IDENTITY YET AGAIN

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GARETH EVANS'S article on vague identity [1] has been the subject of many criticisms. Despite these criticisms, however, I believe that fundamentally (despite some confused remarks on Evans's part about S5 and over-brevity in his explanation of his determinacy operator 'Δ'), Evans's attack on the notion of indefinite identity is sound. In what follows I first present what seems to me the most powerful version of Evans's argument and then respond to the recent criticisms of Over [6], Garrett [2] and Johnsen [3]. In doing so I attempt to make it clear that there is, in essence, only one reply to Evans available to the defender of indefinite identity, and that a most uninviting one, namely the defence of indefinite identity as a kind of *relative identity* (which I call 'mere indistinguishability in non-delta properties') and the rejection of a principle I shall refer to as 'the principle of the Diversity of the Definitely Dissimilar'.

As David Lewis has stressed in his [4], Evans is not against the idea that there can be identity *statements* which are indeterminate in truth-value. Since there are obvious examples of this (like Lewis's 'Princeton = Princeton Borough') that would be mere foolishness. Evans's target is rather the view that there can be identity statements which are indeterminate in truth-value not because of any semantic indeterminacy but rather because of