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## **KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF**

In this article, I oppose the view that knowledge is a species of belief, and argue that belief should be defined in terms of knowledge, instead of the other way round. However, I reject the idea that the concept of knowledge occupies a primary or basic position in our system of mental and logical concepts, because I reject the hierarchical conception of philosophical analysis implicit in this idea. I approach the topic of knowledge and belief from a discussion of Richard Holton's views about facts and factive verbs.

**1.** During the last few decades of the twentieth century, most philosophers regarded factual knowledge as a species of belief, and therefore assumed that the way to define knowledge is to identify the characteristics which distinguish belief that qualifies as knowledge from belief that does not.

When we consider this idea, it is important to bear in mind that we use the term 'knowledge' in two ways. We use it both to refer to something known and to refer to the intellectual state of knowing something, just as we use the terms 'belief' and 'statement' both to refer to something believed or stated and to refer to the state of believing or the act of stating something. For example, if we describe the statement that 'people in this country have had enough of experts' as true or false, we are referring to *what* was stated, that is, to a proposition; whereas if we describe it as timely or opportunistic, we are referring to the act of stating it. So, is the doctrine that knowledge is a species of belief about the things we know and believe, or is it about the mental states of knowing and believing?

The answer is that philosophers have not always drawn this distinction assiduously, but as epistemology and the philosophy of science gradually separated, in the course of the twentieth century, a theory of knowledge was increasingly seen as being concerned with the mental state of knowing. In Russell's *Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, a 'theory of knowledge' means a systematic exposition of the logical structure of what a person believes or knows (Russell 2010, pp. 4f). But within fifty years it had come to mean a theory about the nature of a mental state, and the great majority of philosophers who pursued the theory of knowledge in this sense held that believing is a generic state, of which knowing is a species.

This is an attractive doctrine because it provides a simple explanation of two facts (if indeed they are facts) about knowledge and belief. The first is that knowledge and belief tend to have the same mental and physical effects. For example, as Plato pointed out, a guide who has never travelled from Athens to Larissa, and does not know the way, but has the right opinion or belief about the route purely by chance, will take the same road as a guide who *does* know the way, and has made the journey many times. Thus, if knowledge and belief are dispositional states of mind, they appear to be dispositions to think and act in the same ways. This is what we should expect if knowledge is a species of belief, distinguished perhaps by its source or accreditation, and it is difficult to explain otherwise.

The second fact, or supposed fact, is that believing that something is the case is necessary but not sufficient for knowing it. For example, it seems plausible that one cannot know that the earth goes round the sun unless one believes that it does, whereas one can of course believe that the earth goes round the sun without knowing that it does. Copernicus himself was in this position. If knowledge is a species of belief, we can see why this asymmetry exists. For if X is a species of the genus Y—as *homo sapiens* is a species of *homo*, and as trotting is a species of equine gait—then being a case of Y is necessary but not sufficient for being a case of X.

2. For these reasons, the doctrine that knowledge is a species of belief held epistemology captive for many years. But eventually its grip loosened, not

because someone published a decisive argument against it, but because no one succeeded in defining knowledge in terms of belief, despite several decades of intensive work. And as its grip loosened, philosophers became interested in the dissent from the orthodoxy. For there had been dissenting voices, although they had not had a significant influence on the mainstream. Richard Holton's article 'Facts, Factives, and Contra-Factives' reflects this trend in returning to an argument originally advanced by Vendler.

Vendler points out that philosophers who hold that knowledge is a species of belief take it for granted that 'knowledge (at least in the sense of knowing that) can have the same object as belief—that is, that it is possible to believe and to know exactly the same thing' (Vendler 1972, p. 90). But, he argues, this assumption is false. For what one believes is a proposition, whereas what one knows is a fact, and a fact is not a proposition. For example, the proposition that snow is white is one thing and the fact that snow is white is quite another thing, although of course we use the same sentence, 'Snow is white', to refer to both. A proposition, Vendler explains, is a 'subjective, thought-dependent entity', a representation, not unlike a picture. If it 'conforms' or 'corresponds' with the facts, then it is true; if not, it is false. Whereas a fact, he explains, belongs in 'the objective realm'. Facts are not true or false; they 'are "there," objectively given, to be found or discovered' (1972, pp. 82-84).

It is hard to know how much of this Holton accepts. He says little about propositions, apart from acknowledging that they may be true or false, and little about facts, beyond the important claim, to which I shall return, that 'a theory of facts is a theory that there are things that correspond to the true sentences, but no things that correspond to the false' (Holton 2017, p. 000).<sup>1</sup> But he agrees with Vendler that the objects of belief are propositions,

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<sup>1</sup> Holton describes both sentences and propositions as true and false. This is not objectionable as such, but it should be borne in mind that it is not, primarily at least, the sentences we utter that are true or false, but the things we say when we utter them, in other words, the propositions they express. On this topic, see Horwich 1998, ch. 6; Küne 2003, 5.1.

whereas the objects of knowledge are facts, and that 'knowledge and belief take different objects' (Holton 2017, p. 000)<sup>2</sup>

If Vendler and Holton are right, it is not possible to believe and to know exactly the same thing. But *are* they right? Both support the claim that knowledge and belief have different objects with linguistic arguments concerning the *that*-clauses which complement 'know' and 'believe'. But Vendler explores how these relate to the names, noun-phrases and *wh*-clauses that we also combine with 'know' and 'believe', whereas Holton focuses more narrowly on the factivity of 'know'.

Holton begins with the observation that there are several factive psychological verbs in English, such as 'know', 'see', 'discover', and 'remember'. They are factive in the sense that the statement that someone knows, sees, discovers, or remembers that something is the case entails or presupposes that it *is* the case. But Holton claims that there are no *contrafactive* psychological verbs in English, that is, verbs such that the statement that someone {verb}s that something is the case entails or presupposes that it is *not* the case. Furthermore, he claims that the same is true of other Indo-European languages: several factive psychological verbs, and no contrafactive ones.

Holton acknowledges that there are plenty of contrafactive psychological verb *phrases*, such as 'believe falsely': 'Tom believed falsely that Lucy was at home' entails that Lucy was not home. He also accepts that there are psychological verbs that carry a cancellable implicature of this kind. For example, 'Tom imagined that Lucy was at home' suggests that Lucy is not at home, but he maintains that the suggestion is cancellable, i.e. that 'Tom imagined that Lucy was at home, and in fact she was' is not a contradiction. But Holton denies that Indo-European languages include any strictly contrafactive psychological verbs, or at least any which are stative and, as he puts it, 'atomic, not composed out of parts' (2017, p. 000), though he concedes that this may not be true of Turkish or Chinese.

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<sup>2</sup> Surprisingly, Holton considers and does not reject the idea that the object of a true belief may be a fact (2017, p. 000), which contradicts the claim that knowledge and belief take different objects, at least in the case of true beliefs.

Holton's proposal is that this feature, or supposed feature, of Indo-European languages—the absence of 'atomic', stative, contrafactive psychological verbs—can be explained by the hypothesis that the *that*-clauses that complement factive verbs in English, and the corresponding syntactic units in other Indo-European languages, refer, or purport to refer, to facts. But what exactly are these things, these *facts*, and how does the proposal that the *that*-clauses complementing factive verbs refer to them explain the absence of contrafactive verbs?

As I have said, Holton is reticent about the nature of facts, but he does say this:

The whole point about facts is that they involve an asymmetry [...]: a theory of facts is a theory that there are things that correspond to the true sentences, but no things that correspond to the false. (2017, p. 000)

As for the absence of contrafactive verbs, Holton argues that if his hypothesis is true, if it is true that the *that*-clauses that complement factive verbs refer to facts, there could not be a legitimate use for a contrafactive verb. Because a *that*-clause complementing a contrafactive verb would refer, or purport to refer, to a 'contra-fact', that is, to something that corresponds to a false sentence in the way that a fact is supposed to correspond to a true sentence. And the 'whole point about facts' (or half of the whole point) is that there are no such things. Perhaps there are *negative* facts, facts that are stated by negation. This has been a matter of dispute. Russell, for example, thought at one time that there are negative facts, whereas Wittgenstein disagreed. But contra-facts are not negative facts. For example, snow's *not* being red might be regarded as a negative fact, whereas snow's *being* red would be a contra-fact, if there were such a thing.

In sum, Holton's explanation for the absence of contra-factive verbs in English and other Indo-European languages is that the *that*-clauses that complement factive verbs in these languages refer to facts. From this it is supposed to follow that if there were contrafactive verbs in these languages, they would refer to contra-facts. But Indo-Europeans do not believe in contra-facts. 'Noone [i.e. no Indo-European philosopher] has seriously suggested that there are such things', he says (2017, p. 000). So Indo-Europeans do not have contrafactive verbs.

3. Holton's argument is imaginative, but I do not find it convincing, for two main reasons.

First, suppose the *that*-clauses which complement factive verbs in English and other Indo-European languages—at least stative, 'atomic', psychological factive verbs—invariably refer, or purport to refer, to facts. Why does it follow that if there were also stative, 'atomic', psychological *contrafactive* verbs in these languages, the *that*-clauses which complemented them would have to refer, or purport to refer, to contra-facts? Why could they not refer to false propositions instead? There seem to be non-stative *contrafactive* verbs, such as 'pretend', 'lie', and 'disprove', stative *contrafactive* verb phrases, such as 'believe falsely', and non-stative factive verbs, such as 'prove', all of whose complements refer to propositions.<sup>3</sup> For example, consider the statements that Andrew Wiles proved Fermat's Last Theorem, and that Euler disproved the conjecture that all Fermat numbers are prime. In both cases, what is proved or disproved is a proposition, the first true and the second false. Why could there not be stative *contrafactive* verbs whose complements also referred to propositions? In the absence of a convincing reason, it is hard to see why the existence or non-existence of different sorts of *contrafactive* verbs has any bearing on the question of whether a *that*-clause complementing the verb 'know' refers to a fact, or whether 'knowledge and belief take different objects.'

The second reason why I find Holton's argument unconvincing is quite different, and perhaps more interesting. The main weakness in his reasoning, as I see it, is his lack of clarity about the nature of facts. His reticence is deliberate, designed to avoid controversy, but it is fatal.

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<sup>3</sup> Notice that a *that*-clause complementing 'disprove' needs to be coupled with a noun phrase, such as 'the hypothesis' or 'the claim', whereas one complementing 'prove' does not. This does not appear to have anything to do with the factivity of 'prove', since the same asymmetry occurs with some non-factive verbs, such as 'attest' and 'contest'. The reason may be that 'disprove' and 'contest' carry the suggestion that the proposition in question is already in circulation.

Briefly, there are two main conceptions of facts in twentieth-century philosophy. According to one, facts are the concrete entities—such as occurrences or events, situations, or states of affairs—which true propositions ‘fit’ or ‘correspond to’, and which, in Russell’s terminology, ‘verify’ propositions, or make them true.<sup>4</sup> According to the other conception, facts are abstract entities—possibly, but not necessarily, the true propositions themselves—which can be stated, contested, conceded or denied.<sup>5</sup> The conception of facts as concrete includes the idea that they exist or occur at a particular time and place, and is compatible with the idea that they are causally efficacious; whereas the conception of facts as abstract excludes the idea that they exist or occur at a particular time and place, and is *incompatible* with the idea that they are causally efficacious. If we conceive of facts as occurrences or events, we are bound to regard Socrates’ being dead and Plato’s teacher’s being dead as the same fact; whereas if we conceive of facts as propositions, we are bound to regard them as distinct.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Situations and states of affairs are held by some philosophers (such as Austin) to be concrete and by others (such as Strawson) to be abstract. I shall speak as if they are concrete, for ease of exposition, without endorsing either view. Notice that the claim that facts are truth-makers does not entail that they are concrete, but it is hard to see why the truth of an empirical proposition should depend on the existence of an abstract truth-maker, so the two doctrines, viz. that facts are truth-makers and that they are concrete, are generally combined.

<sup>5</sup> There are of course also various conceptions of propositions. In *Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, a proposition is officially a declarative sentence or a *that*-clause, although Russell does not consistently use the term in this sense. However, ‘proposition’ is now generally used to mean either the meaning of a sentence or something capable of being said or believed. I use the term in the last-mentioned sense throughout.

<sup>6</sup> The view that facts have both abstract and concrete constituents belongs with the view that they are concrete for the purposes of this argument. On this topic, see Lowe 2001, 11.5.

The trouble with Holton's argument is this. The absence of stative, psychological contrafactive verbs in English and other Indo-European languages is supposed to be explained by the combination of two ideas. One is that the *that*-clauses that complement stative, psychological factive verbs such as 'know' refer to facts; and the other is that there are no contra-facts. But these ideas are inconsistent, whichever conception of a fact is preferred. The inconsistency is masked by Holton's reticence about which conception of facts he believes in, but once we distinguish between them, it is not hard to see. For the first idea—the idea that the *that*-clauses that complement factive verbs such as 'know' refer to facts—depends on the conception of facts as abstract entities, and is incompatible with the conception of facts as concrete entities, whereas the second idea—the idea that there are no contra-facts—depends on the conception of facts as concrete entities, and is incompatible with the conception of facts as abstract entities. I shall explain this in a little more detail now.

Some philosophers have suggested that we can legitimately acknowledge two distinct *senses* of the word 'fact'. For example, Fine and Searle have both made this suggestion (Fine 1982, pp. 51-52; Searle 1998, p. 397). But regardless of whether these two senses, or alleged senses, of 'fact' are equally legitimate, it is clear that both *conceptions* of a fact have had distinguished adherents.

Thus, Russell and Austin think of facts in the first way, as concrete entities:

When I speak of a fact [...] I mean the kind of thing that makes a proposition true or false [...] If I say 'Socrates is dead,' my statement will be true owing to a certain physiological occurrence which happened in Athens long ago. (Russell 2010, p. 7)

Phenomena, events, situations, states of affairs, are commonly supposed to be genuinely-in-the-world [...] Yet surely of all these we can say that they are facts. The collapse of the Germans is an event and is a fact—was an event and was a fact. (Austin 1979, p. 104)

Whereas Frege and Strawson think of facts in the second way, as abstract entities:

'Facts, facts, facts' cries the scientist [...] What is a fact? A fact is a thought that is true. (Frege 1977, p. 25)



A proposition, an intensional abstract item, may have many properties: it may be simple or complex; it may entail or be incompatible with this, that, or the other proposition. It may also have the property of being true; and then it may properly be called 'a truth'; and this is what a fact is—a truth. (Strawson 1998, p.403)

Now what do these two conceptions of a fact imply about the reference of a *that*-clause complementing a factive psychological verb such as 'know'? Consider first the conception of a fact as a concrete entity that makes a proposition true—such as the death of Socrates or the collapse of the Germans. If we conceive of facts in *this* way, then it should be obvious that there is no such fact as *that Socrates died*, or *that the Germans collapsed*. There are the *propositions* that Socrates died, and that the Germans collapsed, which are made true by the corresponding facts, but the facts themselves—the death, the collapse—do not have the form: that *p*.

Russell makes this point clearly:

'That Socrates is alive', 'That two and two are four', 'That two and two are five', anything of that sort will be a proposition. (Russell 2010, p. 10)

There is not, outside language, a fact 'that there is a square in a circle', and another fact 'that there is a red figure in a blue figure'. There are no facts 'that so-and-so'. [...] Facts are not to be conceived as 'that grass is green' or 'that all men are mortal'; they are to be conceived as occurrences.

(Russell 1940, pp. 154 & 284f)

Russell allows that it is possible to know a 'matter of fact' which is stated with a *that*-clause, such as that Socrates is dead. But this 'matter of fact' is not itself a fact, on this conception of a fact, it is a proposition.

When we turn to the conception of facts as abstract objects, the situation is quite different. For if a fact is an abstract object, such as a true thought or proposition, or a truth, then it is precisely what we should expect a *that*-clause to refer to. So it is no surprise to find Strawson, one of the most influential advocates of this conception of a fact, associating facts with *that*-clauses:

'Fact', like 'true' and 'states' and 'statement' is wedded to 'that'-clauses; and there is nothing unholy about this union. Facts are known, stated, learned, forgotten, overlooked, commented on, communicated, or noticed.

(Each of these verbs may be followed by a ‘that’-clause or a ‘the fact that’-clause.) (Strawson 1971, pp. 195f)

Thus, the idea that the *that*-clauses which complement factive psychological verbs such as ‘know’ refer to facts is perfectly compatible with the conception of facts as abstract entities, but it is incompatible with the conception of facts as concrete entities—occurrences or events such as the death of Socrates or the collapse of the Germans—which ‘verify’ propositions, or make them true.

Consider now what the two conceptions of a fact imply about the existence of contra-facts, beginning with the conception of a fact as a concrete entity that makes a proposition true. If we adopt this conception of a fact, it is not hard to see why Holton finds the idea that there could be such things as contra-facts absurd. For if the fact that ‘corresponds’ to a proposition is an entity that makes it true, then by definition there is no fact ‘corresponding’ to a proposition that is false. Take the proposition that snow is red. The contra-fact consisting in snow’s being red, if there were such a thing, would have to ‘correspond’ to the proposition that snow is red in just the same way as the fact that consists in snow’s being white ‘corresponds’ to the proposition that snow is white. This does not mean that it would make the proposition that snow is red *false*. Either the fact that consists in snow’s being white is supposed to do that, or, if negative facts are allowed, the fact that consists in snow’s not being red. It would have to make the proposition that snow is red *true*. But the proposition that snow is red is *false*. So there can be no such thing.

Now, finally, consider the conception of a fact as an abstract object, such as a true thought or proposition, or a truth. According to *this* conception of a fact, there is no reason to be sceptical about the existence of contra-facts. On the contrary, a contra-fact is simply a false thought or proposition, or a falsehood. Thus it appears that the doctrine that there are no contra-facts is a trivial consequence of the conception of facts as concrete entities that make propositions true, but it is incompatible with the conception of facts as abstract entities, such as true thoughts or propositions.

To recap, Holton wishes to explain the absence of psychological contrafactive verbs in English and other Indo-European languages by means of a combination of two ideas: first, that the *that*-clauses that complement

psychological factive verbs such as 'know' refer to facts; and second, that there are no contra-facts. But the first idea is congenial to the conception of facts as abstract entities, and repugnant to the conception of facts as concrete, whereas the second is the reverse. Hence, whichever conception of facts we choose to adopt, we cannot adhere to both ideas at once.

4. For these reasons, I do not find Holton's argument convincing. But of course it does not follow that facts *are* true propositions, or that Holton's conclusion, that 'knowledge and belief take different objects' is mistaken.

As a matter of historical fact, the conception of facts as abstract objects became much more prevalent as a result of Strawson's 1950 article, 'Truth'. Wittgenstein's famous assertion that the world is the totality of facts, and Russell's doctrine that a fact is an entity that makes a proposition true, are still widely believed. But it has become common for philosophers who champion these ideas to employ another word or phrase in place of 'fact'. For example, when Armstrong claims that 'the world is a world of states of affairs', he explains that he is 'saying the same thing as those who have held that the world is a world of facts not things', but he prefers the phrase 'state of affairs', because "'fact" is much too closely tied to the notions of statement and proposition' (Armstrong 1993, p. 429). Strawson's observation that "'fact", like "true" and "states" and "statement" is wedded to "that"-clauses' evidently lies behind this remark, coupled perhaps with the oddness of the idea that facts can be located in space and time, to which Strawson draws attention on the same page (Strawson 1971, p. 196).

It is therefore understandable that facts are commonly identified with true propositions. For the single point about facts that commands the broadest agreement is that there is a fact that  $p$  if, and only if, the proposition that  $p$  is true.<sup>7</sup> So, if the fact that  $p$  is not a concrete entity that makes the proposition that

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<sup>7</sup> In deference to Leibniz' distinction between truths of fact and truths of reason, or Hume's distinction between matters of fact and relations of ideas, the proviso is sometimes entered that the proposition must be contingently true.

*p* true, the obvious thought is that it simply *is* the proposition. However, several arguments have been thought to show that facts cannot be propositions.

The first is advanced by Russell.

It is obvious that there is not a dualism of true and false facts; there are only just facts. It would be a mistake, of course, to say that all facts are true. That would be a mistake because true and false are correlatives, and you would only say of a thing that it was true if it was the sort of thing that might be false. A fact cannot be either true or false. (Russell 2010, pp. 9*f*. See also Vendler 1972, pp. 83 & 112*f*; Künne 2003, pp. 10*f*.)

If facts were true propositions, they would, trivially, be true: true as opposed to false, in the same way and in the same sense as true statements or assertions or hypotheses are true. Hence, to describe a fact as true might be redundant, as it would be redundant to describe the Pope as a prelate, but it would be perfectly correct. But describing a fact as true, in this sense, is not merely redundant, it is wrong. Thus compare the following:

The hypothesis that starlings migrate is true.

The hypothesis that starlings migrate turned out to be true.

\*The fact that starlings migrate is true.

\*The fact that starlings migrate turned out to be true.

We might say, for example, that the true facts of the case were finally revealed in court. But 'true' in this kind of sentence does not mean true as opposed to false, it means true as opposed to alleged. As Vendler points out, '*true* can be replaced by *real* without any loss of meaning' (Vendler 1972, pp. 112*f*). Moreover, it is doubtful whether the facts *are* being described or characterized as true in any sense at all, when the phrase 'the true facts' occurs.

Vendler's comparison between 'true' and 'real' is apt, because in some cases 'real' and 'true' still characterize or qualify the referent of the noun when they are in attributive position, as in 'I bought real (as opposed to artificial) flowers' or 'He made a true (as opposed to a false) claim', and in other cases they do not, as in 'Tom is a real friend' or 'Mary is the true heir to the throne'. The test is whether the adjective can be moved from attributive to predicative position or not: if it cannot be moved, it does not characterize or qualify the referent of the noun. Thus 'I bought real (as opposed to artificial) flowers' implies 'The flowers I

bought are real', and 'He made a true claim' implies 'The claim he made is true'. But 'The true facts of the case were revealed in court' does not imply 'The facts revealed in court were true', any more than 'He married the true heir' implies 'The heir he married was true'.

In some cases, an adjective that is restricted to attributive position simply has an intensifying effect, as in 'a true scholar' or 'a real fool', in other cases it is used to characterize something other than the referent of the noun. For example, in the phrase 'an old friend', it is the friendship that is being characterized as old, not the friend, and old here is the opposite of new, rather than young.<sup>8</sup> 'True heir' and 'true facts' are not exactly like either of these cases, but the function of 'true' in these phrases is like the function Austin attributes to 'real': 'not to contribute positively to anything, but to exclude possible ways of being *not* real' (Austin 1964, p. 70). When we speak about the true facts, we do not mean true as in 'true proposition', i.e. true as opposed to false: we mean true as opposed to alleged, pretended, or assumed.

This argument has been contested. Dodd claims that a fact *can* now be defined as a true proposition, but this definition reflects a shift in the use of the word 'fact', which formerly meant a deed or an event:

The reason why [...] we do not describe a fact as true is, most likely, an historical accident and nothing more: the fact that this part of our discourse concerning 'fact' is stained with its old meaning. (Dodd 2000, p. 84)

Dodd does not offer any evidence for this hypothesis, and it is surely quite implausible. First, the OED records the use of 'fact' in the sense of truth in the sixteenth century, and records the use of 'fact' in the sense of 'circumstance *that* something is the case', and the combination of 'fact' and *that*-clause, in the early seventeenth century. So our linguistic habits have had at least four centuries to settle into a consistent pattern. Second, if the hypothesis were true, we should

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<sup>8</sup> Adjectives are said to be inherent when they are used to characterize the referent of the noun, and non-inherent when they are not. Accordingly, 'old' is inherent in the phrase 'an old man', whereas it is non-inherent in 'an old friend'. See Quirk 1985, 7.32.

expect to find the same phenomenon in the use of other words, but there is no evidence that we do. For example, the earliest recorded use of 'assertion' to mean something asserted, as opposed to the act of asserting something, also dates from the sixteenth century, and yet it is perfectly normal to describe an assertion as true. Third, there is ample evidence that we adapt to new meanings more rapidly than Dodd's hypothesis implies. For example, it would have been strange to ask whether a typewriter was male or female in the 1870s, as it would be today, since the word referred at that time to the machine rather than the person using it. But in the 1890s one could mention the marriage of a typewriter to her employer without raising an eyebrow, at least for grammatical reasons.<sup>9</sup>

The second argument against the doctrine that a fact is a true proposition is due to Moore. Suppose, Moore says, that he has the true belief that a certain tree is an oak.

The proposition that the tree is an oak is something which is and equally is whether the belief is true or false. [...] But the fact that the tree is an oak is something which is, only if the belief be true; and hence it is quite plain that [...] the fact that the tree is an oak is quite a different thing [...] from what I believe, when I believe that it is one. (Moore 1953, p. 308)

In other words, a fact cannot be a true proposition, because propositions and facts have different counterfactual conditions for their existence. To take another example, if France had won the 2006 World Cup instead of Italy, the proposition that Italy won would still have existed, but the fact would not. So the proposition cannot be identical with the fact.

Moore's argument is rejected by Cartwright, who asks, in effect, what is wrong with insisting that the fact that Italy won the 2006 World Cup *would* still have existed if France had won instead, while acknowledging that it would not have been a fact in those circumstances, and therefore would not have been correctly described as the fact—as opposed to the proposition—that Italy won the 2006 World Cup (Cartwright 1987, 78). But this does not seem to be a viable proposal. We can see this if we retreat for a moment to

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<sup>9</sup> OED, **typewriter** 2. **1895** *How to get Married* 86 The marriage of the typewriter and her employer is so frequent that it has passed into a joke.

the question of when a fact *obtains*. For if France had won instead of Italy, then the fact that Italy won would certainly not have obtained. But when a fact is said to obtain, this does not mean that it is true. Whether it is attitudes, customs, laws or facts that are said to obtain, this means that they are prevalent or in force or exist. For example, if perfect equality obtains when everyone has the same benefit level, it follows that it does not obtain when everyone does not have the same benefit level.<sup>10</sup> But this does not mean that although perfect equality still exists in these circumstances, it lacks a property it would require in order to obtain. It means that it does not exist. And the same is true of the fact that Italy won the 2006 World Cup. Hence, the idea that this fact would still have existed if France had won instead cannot be right.

The final arguments I shall mention concern what we do with facts, how they are related to each other, and our attitudes to them.<sup>11</sup>

First, facts are discovered, learned, known, communicated, forgotten, ignored. But the discovery (etc.) of a fact is not the discovery (etc.) of a proposition. For example, Eratosthenes is credited with discovering the fact that the Earth is round. But he did not discover the proposition, the hypothesis, that the Earth is round. That had been in circulation for some time. Hence the fact is not identical to the proposition. It might be said in reply that what he discovered is that the proposition or hypothesis that the Earth is round is true, and that is certainly correct. But again, he did not discover the proposition that the proposition that the Earth is round is true. For that had been in circulation for equally as long.

Second, explanation is a relation between facts, not propositions. For example, suppose the street is wet because it has been raining. The fact that it has been raining accounts for the fact that the street is wet, and the fact that the street is wet is due to the fact that it has been raining. But the proposition that it has been raining does not account for the proposition that the street is wet, and the proposition that the street is wet is not due to the proposition that it has been raining. If the fact that *p* explains the fact that *q*, the existence (not the

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<sup>10</sup> See OED, **obtain** 7b.

<sup>11</sup> Arguments of these kinds appear in Slote 1974, pp. 99f.

truth) of the fact that  $p$  explains the existence (not the truth) of the fact that  $q$ , but the truth (not the existence) of the proposition that  $p$  explains the truth (not the existence) of the proposition that  $q$ . This is not to say that we cannot explain propositions. But to explain a proposition is to explain its meaning—or the meaning of a sentence that expresses it—which is not what is meant by the explanation of a fact.

Finally, facts have various properties relating to the effect that learning or recalling them has, or ought to have, such as being regrettable, deplorable, surprising, shocking, or sad. For example, it is deplorable that the female literacy rate in Afghanistan is below 20%. But of course what this means is that the *fact* is deplorable. It is doubtful whether a proposition, as opposed to the act of propounding a proposition, can be deplorable in any circumstances at all. Again, it is a sad fact that more than 50% of cases of sexual abuse of children in the US are by family members. But being saddened by a fact is not the same as being saddened by a proposition, even if there are mere propositions that are sad as well.

5. We seem to face a dilemma. For on the one hand, if we are using the word 'fact' to mean the kind of entity that can be discovered, known, forgotten, and ignored, then it is 'wedded to "that-clauses"', as Strawson pointed out; and a fact, in this sense of the word, must be an abstract object, ineluctably intensional, an object of thought. This remains true even if there is also a sense of the word in which a fact is a concrete object, such as an occurrence or event, which 'verifies' a proposition, or makes it true. On the other hand, the arguments against identifying facts and propositions advanced by Russell, Moore and others seem compelling, and I am not aware of any convincing attempts to refute them.

The only escape from this dilemma is to accept that a fact, in the sense we are concerned with—the sense in which a fact is a kind of entity that can be known, stated, denied, etc.—is an abstract object *other than* a proposition. But is there a plausible proposal for what this could be? The answer, I think, is that there is. It is that a fact is a truth—combined, of course, with the claim that a truth is not the same thing as a true proposition.



The distinction between a truth and a true proposition is not new. Moore draws it explicitly, and insists that a fact is a truth, rather than a true proposition (Moore 1953, p. 308). Yet it remains common to claim without argument, or else assume, that a truth *is* simply a true proposition (e.g. Dodd 2000, p. 86). Indeed Strawson, who defended the doctrine that facts are truths for some fifty years, makes this claim in the passage quoted earlier:

A proposition, an intensional abstract item, may have many properties: it may be simple or complex; it may entail or be incompatible with this, that, or the other proposition. It may also have the property of being true; and then it may properly be called 'a truth'; and this is what a fact is—a truth. (Strawson 1998, p.403)

But there is a simple and intuitive alternative to the idea that a truth is a true proposition, namely, that is that it is the truth *of* a proposition, such as the truth of the proposition that the Earth is round. The truth *of* a proposition is not a true proposition, any more than the beauty of a place is a beautiful place, or the goodness of a man is a good man. It is an abstract particular, a trope or mode, albeit with an abstract bearer, an instance of the property of being true. But of course if the fact that *p* is the truth of the proposition that *p*, then there *is* such a fact if, and only if, the proposition that *p* is true.<sup>12</sup>

The proposal that a fact is the truth of a proposition therefore provides a way of escaping from the dilemma outlined above. Or to put the same point differently, it allows us to concede a share of the truth to both parties in the dispute about whether facts are abstract or concrete. For if a fact is the truth of a proposition, then Frege was right in claiming that facts are abstract, but Russell and Moore were right to deny that they are propositions.

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<sup>12</sup> See Slote 1974, pp. 98ff; Fine 1982, p. 52. Fine attributes the proposal that a fact is the truth of a proposition to Moore, but although Moore insists that a fact is a truth, and not a true proposition, he does not define a truth in this way. He says that he does not know how to define 'the property common and peculiar to all truths', but that a truth is 'one sort of thing that is expressed by a sentence' (Moore 1953, p. 310). As far as I know, the proposal is originally due to Slote.

The proposal that a fact is the truth of a proposition is also immune to the various arguments against identifying facts and propositions considered above. First, the truth of a proposition, unlike a proposition, cannot be either true or false. Hence, Russell's objection to identifying a fact with a true proposition, namely, that a fact cannot be either true or false, does not apply to this proposal. Second, Moore's argument, that the proposition that a certain tree is an oak, unlike the fact that it is an oak, 'is something which is and equally is whether the belief is true or false', does not count against identifying a fact with the truth of a proposition either, since there is such a truth as the truth of the proposition that *p* if, and only if, the proposition that *p* is true. Third, if we credit Eratosthenes with discovering the fact that the Earth is round, we mean that he discovered the truth of the proposition that the earth is round. Fourth, as already noted, if the fact that it has been raining explains the fact that the street is wet, then the truth of the proposition that it has been raining explains the truth of the proposition that the street is wet. Fifth, if the fact that the female literacy rate in Afghanistan is below 20% is deplorable, this means that the truth of the proposition that the female literacy rate is below 20% is deplorable. And finally, if it is a sad fact (or truth) that more than 50% of cases of sexual abuse of children in the US are by family members, this means that the truth of the proposition is sad, not the proposition itself.

**6.** The merits of the proposal that a fact (in the relevant sense) is the truth of a proposition should now be sufficiently clear without further elaboration. So I shall return to the larger question of how belief and knowledge are related.

If what a person knows, who knows that something is the case, is the fact that it is the case, whereas what a person believes, who believes that something is the case, is the proposition that it is the case, and if facts are not propositions, then knowledge cannot be a species of belief. Knowing a fact cannot be a specific way of believing it—e.g. believing it with a special kind of justification, or as a result of a special kind of process—if there is simply no such thing as believing a fact.

It might be objected that if what a person knows, who knows that something is the case, is the fact that it is the case, whereas what a person

believes, who believes that something is the case, is the proposition that it is the case, and if facts are not propositions, then statements like 'I always believed Philby was a traitor; now I know it' must be false. But in fact this does not follow. For 'it' need not be used anaphorically, it can also be used simply to avoid the repetition of a clause or phrase, as in 'Tom is longing for the war to end and Lucy is praying for it'. 'I always believed Philby was a traitor; now I know it' is true if, and only if, I always believed Philby was a traitor, and now I know Philby was a traitor, i.e. if, and only if, I now know the truth of the proposition that Philby was a traitor, and this is a proposition I always believed.

So it appears that we should abandon the doctrine that knowledge and belief are related as species and genus. How then *are* they related? We can approach this question from the observation that believing something to be the case tends to influence thought and behaviour in the same way as knowing it to be the case.<sup>13</sup> In some cases, the influence of a belief can be diminished by the knowledge that one's evidence is weak or that one is affected by prejudice. In this sort of case, the extent to which one is influenced by the belief will depend on the extent to which one controls what one thinks and does by reminding oneself of such facts. But even so, if one would do X or believe Y or feel Z if one knew that *p*, then one will be disposed to do X or believe Y or feel Z if one believes that *p*.

As I mentioned earlier, this is one of the principal observations the hypothesis that knowledge is a species of belief is designed to explain. But if we reject this explanation, we can instead regard it as an explanation of the nature of belief itself. In other words, instead of defining knowledge in terms of belief, e.g. as true belief with a particular kind of source or justification, we can define the belief that *p*, i.e. the mental state of believing that *p*, as the disposition to act (think, feel) as one would if one knew that *p*. This is certainly more plausible than the traditional claim that the belief that *p* is the disposition to act (think, feel) 'as if *p*' or 'as if *p* were true', since the mere fact that something is the case need not have any influence on us at all. How would I be disposed to act if there

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<sup>13</sup> In the next few paragraphs I draw freely on my treatment of this question in Hyman 2015, pp. 172f.

were an odd number of stars in the galaxy? If the number *is* odd, then the answer must be: exactly as I *am* disposed to act. And if it is even, then the answer must be the same, since the extinction of a star a moment ago would not affect the way I am now disposed to act, unless the event happened relatively nearby. And yet I do not believe that there is an odd number of stars in the galaxy, or believe the opposite.

Braithwaite, who introduced the phrase ‘disposition to act as if *p*’, explains that it is to be treated as an abbreviation for ‘disposition to act in ways that would be conducive to the satisfaction of one’s needs if *p* were true’ (Braithwaite 1932, p. 134). But this is not a plausible theory of belief, since plants and primitive animals have the disposition to act in ways that are conducive to satisfying their needs without having beliefs. The phrase is now generally treated as an abbreviation for ‘disposition to act in ways that would be conducive to the satisfaction of one’s desires if *p* were true’. But this cannot be right either, because it ignores the fact that believing subjects are not perfectly rational. Furthermore, both of these theories are unacceptably behaviouristic, since belief, like knowledge, affects thought and feeling no less than behaviour.<sup>14</sup>

The hypothesis that to believe that *p* is to be disposed to act (think, feel) as one would if one knew that *p* is therefore preferable to some of its traditional rivals. It also has the merit of explaining the fact, or supposed fact, that believing that something is the case is necessary but not sufficient for knowing that it is the case, which I identified earlier as the second main observation the hypothesis that knowledge is a species of belief is thought to explain. For if one knows that *p*, it follows trivially that one will be disposed to act (think, feel) as one would if one knew that *p*. Furthermore, if there are exceptional cases in which a person knows that *p* without believing that *p*, as some philosophers maintain, then the hypothesis proposed here can be adjusted

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<sup>14</sup> The hypothesis proposed here is preferable to Williamson’s proposal that ‘believing *p* is, roughly, treating *p* as if one knew *p*’ (Williamson 2000, p. 43) for a similar reason. Treating is active, whereas the consequences of belief are also passive or receptive.

to accommodate these cases without difficulty.<sup>15</sup> For we can define the belief that *p* as the disposition to act (think, feel) as one *normally or generally* would if one knew that *p*. (One normally states a fact one knows without much diffidence or doubt, one does not normally check the facts one knows repeatedly, and so on.) Indeed, it might be considered an advantage of the approach defended here that it allows us to regard the opposing views about the controversial cases—the cases that are thought by some to show that it is possible to know that *p* without believing that *p*—as reflecting subtly different conceptions of belief, neither of which, perhaps, can be definitively shown to be correct.

Thus, it may be possible to explain or analyse the concept of belief in terms of the concept of knowledge, instead of the other way around, although some beliefs, such as ones whose contents are necessarily false, or true but unknowable, present particular difficulties that a comprehensive defence of the proposal would need to address. But if an analysis of this kind is feasible, we should not infer that the concept of knowledge is in some sense a basic or primitive element in the system of mental and logical concepts we use to think and reason about the intellectual aspect of our lives. This would be a mistake for two reasons, one concerning the analysis of concepts in general and the other concerning the concept of knowledge in particular.

First, the idea that our mental and logical concepts belong to a hierarchical system, which it is the task of philosophical analysis to reveal, by identifying the simple or elementary concepts, and exhibiting the structure of the complex concepts they compose—this model of the aim and the object of philosophical analysis is no more realistic than the empiricist model of concept acquisition from which it is derived. It encourages the mistaken notion that an analysis of concept A cannot involve concept B if the analysis of concept B directly or indirectly involves concept A.<sup>16</sup> It supports the dogma that an analysis of a concept must be in terms of ‘simpler’ or more ‘basic’ concepts. And it licenses the spurious distinction between analyzable and

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<sup>15</sup> See Radford 1966.

<sup>16</sup> See Grice and Strawson 1956, pp. 147ff; Strawson 1992, pp. 18f.

unanalyzable concepts.<sup>17</sup> In reality, no concept is reducible to a concatenation of absolutely simple or elementary concepts, because there are no such concepts, and the concepts of knowledge, belief, reason, etc. belong to a system or family of intensional concepts—a network rather than a hierarchy—each of whose members can be satisfactorily defined in terms of the others, and an account of whose mutual relations provides the only analysis of any of them we can reasonably aspire to, or can need.<sup>18</sup>

Second, if the concept of knowledge cannot be analysed or defined in terms of the concept of belief, it does not follow that it cannot be analysed or defined at all. The discredited doctrine that knowledge is a species of belief still exerts such a powerful grip on epistemology that even philosophers who reject it still commonly equate the question of whether it is possible to define knowledge in terms of belief with the question of whether it is possible to define knowledge at all. But we should by now have reached the point where we can free ourselves sufficiently from the doctrine that knowledge is a species of belief to discard this equation too.<sup>19, 20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> I do not mean to deny that one concept may be ‘simpler’ or more ‘basic’ than another in the sense that it is possible to grasp the more basic concept without grasping the less basic one, but not the other way around. For example, the concept of division is more basic than the concept of a prime number, in this sense.

<sup>18</sup> In place of the hierarchical model, Strawson proposes a ‘connective’ model of philosophical analysis, which abandons the distinction between analyzable concepts and unanalyzable ones, and aims to exhibit a category or ‘family’ of concepts, ‘not as a deductive system, but as a coherent whole whose parts are mutually supportive and mutually dependent, interlocking in an intelligible way’ (Strawson 1985, p. 23.) The fullest exposition of Strawson’s views about ‘reductive’ and ‘connective’ analysis is in Strawson 1992, ch.2.

<sup>19</sup> I defend an alternative approach to the theory of knowledge, which is based on the thought that knowledge is a species of ability, rather than a species of belief, in Hyman 2015, ch.7.

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