



Can Truth Be Defined?

Michael Blome-Tillmann

Queen's College, Oxford (UK)

<Michael.Blome@philosophy.oxford.ac.uk>

The paper argues that the concept of truth takes an extraordinary position among our concepts and is most likely to be simple and unstructured. To establish this claim it is firstly argued that standard conceptual complexity goes with certain constraints on concept possession: if a concept *c* is complex, then there usually is a concept *d* such that one can possess *d* without possessing *c*, but not *vice versa*.

For instance, the complex concept /brown round table/ ('/' indicates reference to concepts) has /brown/ as its constituent: one can't possess the former without possessing the latter, but not *vice versa*. By analogy, if /truth/ were a complex concept, one would expect there to be a concept *d* such that one can't possess /truth/ without possessing *d*, but not *vice versa*. I argue that there is no concept *d* satisfying this constraint.

To establish this point I argue that the possession of any concept whatsoever presupposes the ability to have certain beliefs. For instance, possession of /brown/ presupposes the ability to believe that something is (or isn't) brown. Next I argue that the ability to have beliefs entails the possession of /truth/. Developing a line of thought of Davidson's, I claim that an individual that is able to believe some proposition must also be able to think that it might be wrong. As Davidson puts it: "Error is what gives belief its point." However, since the ability to think that one might be wrong arguably requires possession of /truth/, the possession of any concept whatsoever requires possession of /truth/. I conclude that no concept whatsoever can be a constituent of /truth/ in the standard way: /truth/ seems truly simple.