Abstract: Recent critics of the coherence theory of truth (notably Ralph Walker) have alleged that the theory is incoherent, since its defence presupposes the correctness of the contrary correspondence theory of truth. Coherentists must specify the system of propositions with which true propositions cohere (the specified system). Generally, coherentists claim that the specified system is a system composed of propositions believed by a community. Critics of coherentism maintain that the coherentist's assertions about which system is the specified system must be true, not because they cohere with a system of beliefs, but because of facts about what a community believes. I argue that coherentists can admit that there are facts about what systems of beliefs communities accept, without being committed to the claim that these facts are the truth conditions of sentences about what communities accept.

I

Although the coherence theory of truth has few contemporary advocates, it has recently come in for a spate of fresh criticism. This essay is a rejoinder to some of this recent criticism. Perhaps because the case for the coherence theory of truth has seldom been satisfactorily stated, most criticisms of the theory do not take issue with specific arguments for the position. Rather, the critics of coherentism have tried to show that it is incoherent or that it has absurd consequences. This essay does not provide a complete argument for the coherence theory of truth. Instead, it demonstrates that recent attempts to show that the coherence theory is incoherent are unsuccessful. I
believe that the coherence theory has been unwisely neglected. Once we see that it is not incoherent, perhaps it will receive the serious attention that it deserves.

This essay is divided into four sections. Section I describes the coherence theory of truth and sketches the case for the theory. Although the arguments for coherentism need to be developed in greater depth, this section should at least suffice to dispel some common misconceptions about the theory. This section describes the coherence theory’s account of truth conditions, and indicates that coherentists are not committed to any form of idealism. Section II presents the case for thinking that the coherence theory is incoherent. This case has been presented most convincingly by Ralph Walker. Section II also outlines some unsuccessful attempts to defend coherentism against the charges it faces. These charges are refuted in Section III. The version of the coherence theory of truth sketched in Section I is proof against recent efforts to show that coherentism is incoherent. Section IV provides a conclusion.

A complete theory of truth has three essential components. Such a theory begins by indicating which sort of items are truth bearers. That is, a theory of truth indicates which items can have truth values. The next and crucial element of a theory of truth is its account of the conditions under which truth bearers are true. That is, it must give an account of truth conditions. Finally, a theory of truth needs to provide an account of the relations between truth bearers and truth conditions, or what may be called semantic relations. For present purposes we can, in large part, ignore the first and third components of a complete theory of truth.

Coherentists and their opponents can (to a large extent) agree about which items are truth bearers, and about the relation between truth bearers and truth conditions. Various candidates have been proposed as truth bearers, including judgments, sentences, statements, beliefs, and propositions. In this essay, for the sake of convenience, I will speak of propositions (by which I understand declarative sentences) as the bearers of truth values. Nothing in the argument of this essay will, however, turn on the acceptance of declarative sentences as truth bearers. Correspondence theorists can happily accept this account of truth bearers.

Coherentists and advocates of other theories can also agree, at least in large measure, about the nature of the semantic relations between propositions and truth conditions. The speakers of a language (explicitly or implicitly, by the use they make of propositions) adopt rules that establish relations between propositions and particular conditions. Once these rules are adopted, a proposition stands to its truth conditions in the relation of being true if and only if the conditions obtain. (There will be disagreement about whether a proposition is false if and only if its truth conditions fail to obtain. Whether or not one accepts this depends on whether one subscribes to the principle of bivalence, according to which all propositions are either true or false. Some versions of the coherence theory lead to the rejection of this principle.)

Coherentists and their opponents part company when they come to give accounts of truth conditions. The account of truth conditions provided by
coherentism is best understood in contrast to the account given by the correspondence theory of truth. According to the correspondence theory, propositions have objective truth conditions. To say that the truth conditions of a proposition are objective is to say two things. First, objective conditions may obtain independently of whether users of the proposition are able to tell that they obtain. Second, objective conditions are, in general, external to a system of beliefs, or extrasystemic. An exception to this second rule will be propositions about beliefs. On the one hand, correspondence theorists believe that propositions are true if and only if such objective conditions obtain. Coherentists, on the other hand, maintain that the truth conditions of any proposition consist in beliefs held by speakers of the proposition. In particular, the truth conditions of a proposition consist in the beliefs that warrant assertion of the proposition. So, from the coherentists' perspective, a proposition in some speakers' language is true if and only if the speakers' system of beliefs includes the beliefs that warrant assertion of the proposition. When a system contains the beliefs that provide the truth conditions for some proposition, the proposition may be said to cohere with the system. Notice that coherentism rejects the view that truth conditions are objective. The difference between the coherence and the correspondence theories can be summed up by saying that coherentists believe that truth conditions are internal to a system of beliefs (or intrasystemic), while their opponents hold that truth conditions are external to systems of beliefs.

A variety of arguments have been given for thinking that truth conditions are intrasystemic. Here I can only sketch what I take to be the strongest line of argument available to coherentists. It is, however, essential to have some idea of the arguments for coherentism and the position that results from these arguments. Only then are we in a position to evaluate the objections to coherentism. Needless to say, the line of argument adopted here is designed to entail a version of the coherence theory of truth that is proof against recent attempts to show that the theory is incoherent.

The argument for the coherence theory of truth begins with the observation that propositions do not just happen to stand in semantic relations to certain conditions. Semantic relations between propositions and certain conditions must be established by speakers. Speakers establish a semantic relation between a proposition and certain conditions by making a practice of asserting the proposition only when the conditions obtain. Next, coherentists need to argue that the conditions under which speakers make a practice of asserting sentences are the conditions the speakers recognise as warranting assertion of the sentence. Coherentists will argue that speakers can scarcely make a practice of asserting sentences under objective conditions that they cannot recognise as obtaining. (In this respect, the argument for coherentism resembles an argument for antirealism. Indeed, coherentism as it is presented here is a species of antirealism, as will be noted below.) The next step in the argument appeals to a coherence theory of knowledge. This theory of knowledge states that the only warrant speakers can have for asserting a proposition
is provided by other beliefs the speakers have. The coherence conception of warrant leads to the conclusion that the only thing speakers can recognise as warranting the assertion of a proposition is its coherence with their system of beliefs. Coherentists conclude that speakers establish semantic relations between propositions and the conditions under which the propositions cohere with a system of beliefs.

The argument for the coherence theory of truth can be summed up in these terms:

1. The truth conditions of propositions are the conditions under which speakers regularly assert propositions.

2. Speakers regularly assert propositions only under conditions that the speakers recognise as warranting the propositions.

3. The conditions under which propositions are warranted by a system of beliefs are the only conditions that speakers can recognise as warranting propositions.

4. The truth conditions of propositions are the conditions under which they are warranted by a system of beliefs.

Opponents of the coherence theory can object to this argument on at least two grounds. They can deny premiss 1 and maintain that there are other ways to fix the truth conditions of propositions. Alternatively, they can take issue with the coherence theory of knowledge, which is presupposed in premiss 3. The present issue, however, is whether the coherence theory is incoherent. The argument for coherentism just sketched, although controversial, seems to lead to a defensible conclusion, but perhaps appearances are misleading.

Before we begin to examine the arguments against coherentism, a few comments on the theory are in order. The coherence theory of truth, as presented here, is a variety of antirealism. Antirealism is the view that if a proposition is true (or false), it can be known to be true (or false). An antirealist account of truth involves the rejection of the principle of bivalence and the principle of transcendence. According to the principle of bivalence, all propositions are either true or false. According to the principle of transcendence, propositions have their truth values independently of speakers' capacity to determine these truth values. The point that coherentism is a variety of antirealism plays a crucial role in the rejoinder to one standard sort of objection to the coherence theory. Opponents of the coherence theory of truth often object that truth can transcend what can cohere with any system of beliefs (except the system of an omniscient being). In so arguing, they simply assume the principle of transcendence, but this principle is in need of defence.

The coherence theory of truth, as it is characterised here, does not involve commitment to idealism, or any other metaphysics. Early versions of the coherence theory, presented by F. H. Bradley, Brand Blanshard, and others
were combined with idealism. Idealists were led to the conclusion that truth conditions consist in beliefs since they denied that anything mind-independent exists. After all, propositions cannot have objective truth conditions if nothing is objective. Nothing in the argument just given, however, commits coherentists to denying the existence of objective conditions. Coherentism is metaphysically neutral. Coherentists simply maintain that the truth conditions of propositions do not consist in objective conditions. Even if objective conditions exist, speakers cannot establish semantic relations between propositions and these conditions.

II

Ralph Walker has provided the most sophisticated version of the argument designed to refute the coherence theory of truth. His position is a development of an old line of argument against the coherence theory. This line of argument presents what I will call the specification problem. All coherentists want to maintain that truth does not consist in coherence with just any system of propositions. The specification problem is the problem of identifying the system (or systems) with which true propositions cohere. I will call a system of beliefs with which true propositions are supposed to cohere a specified system. According to Walker's objection to the coherence theory of truth, it is impossible for coherentists to identify a specified system without compromising their theory.

Walker's argument is a development of an unsuccessful objection to coherentism, first presented by Russell. Russell argued that truth cannot consist in coherence with a system of propositions since there are any number of possible coherent sets of propositions, some of which are complete fictions. It would be quite easy to assemble a consistent set of propositions with which "Bishop Stubbs was hanged for murder" coheres. (The blameless prelate apparently died in bed.) No one supposes, however, that this proposition is true, and Russell concludes that truth does not consist in coherence. Walker recognises that Russell's argument is unsuccessful. Coherentists can simply reply that they do not hold that truth consists in coherence with just any consistent set of propositions. Rather, they hold that truth consists in coherence with a system of propositions held to be true, or beliefs. According to Walker, however, when coherentists make metastatements about systems of beliefs, they begin to run into difficulties.

Walker charges that in their efforts to specify the system of beliefs with which true propositions cohere, coherentists embark upon a vicious infinite regress. Coherentists say that truths are propositions that cohere, not with some arbitrarily selected set of propositions, but with a system of beliefs. The coherentist account of what it is for a proposition \( p \) to be true seems, then, to be that the proposition "\( p \) is believed" is true. (Coherentists can give other accounts of the truth of \( p \). They can hold, for example, that for \( p \) to be true is
James O. Young

for “p is rationally accepted” to be true. According to Walker, however, the same sort of problem will arise for the coherence theory. The question of what it is for “p is believed” to be true then arises. According to Walker, the coherentist can only say that “p is believed” is true. Plainly, an infinite regress is in the offing. If they are trapped in a regress, coherentists never explain what it is for a proposition to be true. The coherentists’ troubles are complicated by the fact that any number of arbitrarily chosen sets of propositions can include propositions about what is believed. So, for example, there will be a system that contains “Bishop Stubbs was hanged for murder,” “Bishop Stubbs was hanged for murder’ is believed,” and so on.7

According to Walker, if coherentists try to stop the regress in which they are trapped, they compromise their position and adopt the correspondence theory of truth. Coherentists could try to end the regress by saying that “p is believed” is true because there is some fact about what speakers believe. In other words, this is to answer the specification problem by saying that the specified system is the one that in fact is adopted. The trouble is that this move accepts that a proposition about which system is the specified system is true if and only if (in fact) speakers have certain beliefs. In other words, propositions about which systems are specified systems seem to have objective truth conditions. To admit this is to abandon the coherence theory and adopt the correspondence theory of truth. If a defence of the coherence theory must appeal to a contrary theory, coherentism is incoherent.

There can be no doubt that, in attempting to identify a specified system, several historical advocates of the coherence theory of truth seem to have compromised their position in just the way Walker says they must. The strategy that Carl Hempel, for example, uses to tackle the specification problem seems to play into Walker’s hands. He attempted to find an extrasystemic criterion of a specified system. Hempel holds that the specified system “may only be characterized by the historical fact, and that it is the system that is actually adopted by mankind, and especially by the scientists of our culture circle.”8 In so characterising the specified system, Hempel suggests that the truth conditions of the proposition “The system adopted by the scientists of our culture circle is a specified system” consist in the objective fact that the system is adopted by the scientists of our culture circle. If the truth conditions of the proposition in question consist in an objective fact, then Hempel has presupposed the truth of the correspondence theory in defending coherentism.

If coherentists like Hempel deny that the truth conditions of the proposition in question consist in an objective fact, their position does not seem to fare much better. They are saying only that the proposition coheres with a system. That is, they hold that the proposition “This system is adopted by the scientists of our culture circle” is an internal feature of a particular system. This proposition can, however, cohere with any number of systems. (A similar point could be made about any other proposition, such as the proposition “This system is caused by reality.”) Whether he is seeking an external or an
internal mark of a specified system, Hempel apparently does not have an answer to Walker.

Once could respond to Walker's challenge by adopting a hybrid account of truth. That is, one could argue that the coherence theory provides the best account of the truth conditions of all propositions, except propositions about which systems are specified systems. The correspondence theory could provide the best account of the truth conditions of these propositions. This response to Walker is unsatisfactory, since coherentists would then have to explain how some propositions can have objective truth conditions while others cannot. If speakers can establish semantic relations between some propositions and certain objective conditions, coherentists will be hard pressed to explain why speakers cannot do the same in the cases of other propositions and objective conditions. Another solution to Walker's version of the specification problem must be found.

III

It might seem as though coherentists should despair at this point. They must identify a specified system if they are to give an account of truth. If they try to do so by appeal to internal features of a system, they are apparently trapped in a regress. If they try to end the regress, they presuppose the correctness of the correspondence theory. Before despairing, however, we should consider a response to Walker's argument that is considered by Crispin Wright. Although Wright rejects the response that he considers, it provides the basis of a satisfactory solution of the specification problem.

According to Walker, coherentists get into difficulties once they allow that there is a fact about which propositions are believed. This concession seems to commit coherentists to the conclusion that the truth conditions of propositions about what is believed consist in facts about what is believed. Wright suggests that coherentists, in an effort to avoid this conclusion, draw a distinction between the truth of propositions and the obtaining of facts or states of affairs. They could then argue that they give an account of the truth of propositions and say nothing about the obtaining of facts or states of affairs. Coherentists will grant, if they adopt Wright's suggestion, that the fact that \( p \) is a member of system \( S \) does not consist in "\( p \) is believed" being a member of \( S \). Instead, this fact is a fact because of what people believe. Coherentists would insist, however, that any proposition is true if and only if it coheres with \( S \). This distinction appears to provide coherentists with a response to Walker's objection. They can appeal to facts about what people believe in identifying a specified system, but deny that this compromises their account of truth.

Wright holds that this defence of the coherence theory faces two problems. The first alleged problem is that in granting the existence of objective facts, coherentists grant the existence of the sort of objective conditions...
needed by the correspondence theory. That is, in adopting Wright's strategy, coherentists grant that facts consist, not in the coherence of propositions, but in the obtaining of objective conditions. According to Wright, once coherentists have granted that objective conditions exist, they cannot avoid the conclusion that these conditions are the truth conditions of propositions. Wright's second problem with the strategy he considers is that the proposed distinction cannot be drawn. His reason for this is that all worlds in which "I believe that p" is true are necessarily worlds in which, in fact, I believe that p.

Wright's first objection to his proposed response to Walker fails. Defenders of the coherence theory can allow that facts do not consist in the coherence of propositions without in any way aiding or abetting the correspondence theory. Wright seems to think that, unless coherentists are idealists who hold that facts consist in the coherence of propositions, they implicitly allow the existence of extrasystemic objective truth conditions. As we have seen, however, one need not adopt idealism in order to deny that propositions have objective truth conditions. Coherentists can allow that there are objective facts or states of affairs, but deny that these are the truth conditions of propositions. Objective facts are not the truth conditions of propositions, since they are not the conditions speakers recognise when they assert propositions, and not the conditions to which propositions stand in semantic relations. Nevertheless, a system of beliefs can involve ontological commitment to all sorts of objective facts. Coherentists can believe that facts are not constituted by the coherence of propositions without in any way compromising their position.

Perhaps, however, Wright's second objection is more successful. He writes that "[w]orlds in which the proposition that I believe that P is true are, necessarily, all and only the worlds in which [in fact] I believe that P." He concludes from this that different analyses cannot be given of the truth of the proposition "I believe that p" and the fact that I believe that p. It seems to follow that the distinction that Wright suggests that the coherentist might draw cannot be made, and cannot be used to defend coherentism.

Wright's second objection to the proposed defence of the coherence theory also fails. Coherentists can object to Wright's position by maintaining that worlds where the fact that p is the case are not necessarily worlds where the proposition p is true. If coherentism is correct, there can be worlds where the fact that p obtains, but p does not cohere with a system of beliefs and, in consequence, is not true. Coherentists can allow, for example, that there is a fact about whether there is an odd or even number of stars in the universe. At the same time, they will deny that there is a true proposition about whether the number of stars in the universe is odd or even, since no such proposition coheres with any system of beliefs. (This position involves the rejection of the principle of transcendence and the principle of bivalence. Since coherentists can be antirealists, this need not worry them.) Coherentists could argue that, similarly, it is possible that the fact that I believe that p is the case but "I believe that p" is not true.
This reasoning might seem dubious since there appears to be a more intimate connection between the fact that I believe that \( p \) and the truth of the proposition “I believe that \( p \)” than there is between facts about stars and the truth of propositions about stars. Coherentists divorce what is true from what is real; it is possible that a fact is the case but that there are no truths about this fact. They maintain that this gap between what is true and what is the case (that is, the facts) will exist whenever speakers of a language are unable to determine the truth values of some propositions. Under these circumstances a fact can obtain, but no truths about it cohere with a system of beliefs. Wright could argue that this sort of gap between what is true and the facts cannot open up in the case of the fact that I believe that \( p \) and “I believe that \( p \).” If I believe that \( p \), I can always know that “I believe that \( p \).” For any proposition \( p \), if I can know that \( p \), then \( p \) is true. Consequently, it is not possible that in fact I believe that \( p \), but “I believe that \( p \)” is false.

Even if, however, worlds in which in fact I believe that \( p \) are necessarily worlds in which “I believe that \( p \)” is true, it does not follow that the truth conditions of “I believe that \( p \)” consist in the fact that I believe that \( p \). Worlds where “7+5=12” is true are necessarily worlds where, in fact, triangles have three sides. No one supposes, however, that the truth conditions of “7+5=12” consist in the fact that triangles have three sides. Coherentists have an argument for believing that the truth conditions of “I believe that \( p \)” are the conditions under which it coheres with a specified system of beliefs and not the fact that I believe that \( p \). If they are right, the truth conditions of this proposition do not consist in facts about what I believe. Even if “I believe that \( p \)” is true in all and only the worlds where the fact that I believe that \( p \) is the case, the truth conditions of the proposition do not consist in the fact. Wright fails to undermine his proposed defence of the coherence theory.

Once we see that Wright fails to undermine his proposed response to Walker, the solution to Walker’s version of the specification problem becomes apparent. Coherentists will say that any proposition \( p \) is true if and only if \( p \) coheres with a specified system of beliefs (that is, one that is adopted by a community of speakers). Coherentists can happily admit that there is a fact about what system is accepted, but their position is in no way threatened by this concession. Even though this fact obtains, the truth conditions of propositions, including propositions about which systems are specified systems, are the conditions under which they cohere with a specified system and not any objective facts.

This account of truth gives rise to a regress, but it is not a vicious regress and the correspondence theory of truth faces a similar regress. If we say that \( p \) is true if and only if \( p \) coheres with a specified system of beliefs, we may be asked about the truth conditions of “\( p \) coheres with a specified system of beliefs.” The coherentist can only reply that this proposition is true if and only if it coheres with a specified system of beliefs. Plainly, this is the start of a regress, but not one to worry about. It is just what one would expect, given
that the coherence theory states that it gives an account of the truth conditions of all propositions. The correspondence theory faces a similar benign regress. The correspondence theory states that \( p \) is true if and only if \( p \) corresponds to certain objective conditions. The proposition "\( p \) corresponds to certain objective conditions" is also true if and only if it corresponds to certain objective conditions, and so on.

All of this said, we still do not have a complete answer to Walker. We still need to say which propositions about which systems are specified systems are true. The short answer is simply to say that the coherence theory will give the same account of the truth of these sentences as it gives of any other sentences. A problem still seems to lurk, however, for the coherence theory. There will, after all, be propositions about which systems are specified that cohere with systems no one wants to say are specified systems. The key to solving this last difficulty is the recognition that all decisions about the truth or falsity of propositions about which systems are specified are made from the perspective of some system or other.

From the perspective of any system, no other system is a specified system. Suppose we are considering whether or not some system is a specified system. While doing so, we adopt the perspective of some system, call it \( S_1 \). When other systems are regarded from the perspective of \( S_1 \), there are two possibilities. The first possibility is that, from the perspective of \( S_1 \), some system of propositions is simply a fiction that is held by no one. The alternative is that another system is believed by some speakers, but mistaken. In neither case is another system a specified system.

The following argument shows that, from the perspective of any system, no other is a specified system. Imagine that we have two systems, \( S_1 \) and \( S_2 \), where \( S_2 \) contains at least some propositions that are inconsistent with propositions in \( S_1 \). Let us suppose that \( S_1 \) is a system of propositions that amounts to a comprehensive picture of the world. \( S_1 \) will include some propositions about \( S_2 \). Perhaps \( S_1 \) contains the proposition that \( S_2 \) is a work of imagination, not believed by anyone. Alternatively, \( S_1 \) includes a proposition according to which some of the propositions in \( S_2 \), although they are believed by some speakers, are inconsistent with available evidence, the product of a faulty methodology, or otherwise mistaken. In either case, the proposition that \( S_2 \) is a specified system fails to cohere with \( S_1 \). True, the proposition that \( S_1 \) is a specified system does not cohere with \( S_1 \). True, the proposition that \( S_1 \) is a specified system fails to cohere with \( S_2 \), but this is beside the point. \( S_1 \) was, as it were, on the ground first, and assessments are made from its perspective.

A possible objection to this line of reasoning needs to be considered. Someone might claim that one can simply adopt the perspective of various systems, including the perspective of a collection of fictional propositions, \( S_2 \). If this were possible, there would be no way for the coherentist to say that "\( S_2 \) is a specified system" is false, while "\( S_1 \) is a specified system" is true. I have suggested that we can say that \( S_2 \) is not a specified system, since from the perspective of \( S_1 \) it is a collection of fictions, or otherwise not to be believed.
However, from the perspective of $S_2$, $S_1$ is a perfectly respectable system. It contains, say, the proposition that it is the result of scientific investigation. In order to establish that $S_2$ has a claim to being a specified system, we need only adopt the perspective of this system. The reply to this line of argument is that speakers cannot simply pick and choose systems of beliefs.

In order to see that speakers cannot adopt systems of beliefs at will, we need only reflect that from the perspective of one system, another system is inevitably assigned a certain content. $S_2$ may include a proposition to the effect that the propositions in the system are the product of sound methodology and, as such, believed. From the perspective of $S_1$, however, the propositions in $S_2$ are either rank fictions or the product of flawed inquiry. Anyone who holds the perspective of $S_1$ will maintain that $S_2$ should contain, say, the proposition “$S_2$ is a collection of fictions and not believed.” Consequently, from the perspective of $S_1$, $S_2$ contains inconsistent propositions: the proposition that its component propositions are believed and the proposition that they are not believed. Consistency is a necessary condition of being a specified system, so $S_2$ is not a specified system.

It is perhaps needless to point out that this argument cannot be circumvented simply by saying that one could give up $S_1$ before adopting $S_2$ and thus avoid including in the former system a proposition that would render it inconsistent. We are, as Neurath noted long ago, “like sailors who have to rebuild their ship on the open sea, without ever being able to dismantle it in dry-dock.” It is psychologically impossible for speakers to divest themselves of all of their beliefs. Moreover, if they could, they would not be in a position to adopt any system of beliefs, having ceased to have beliefs and thereby ceased to be rational agents. If we were floating systemless, as it were, above a collection of systems of propositions and were still somehow about to adopt a system of beliefs, we would have a problem. We would have no grounds for saying that it is false that a collection of fictional propositions is a specified system. At any rate, we could have no grounds unless we appealed to extrasyystemic facts and accepted the correspondence theory of truth. We are not without a system of beliefs, however, and the specification problem can be solved.

IV

Walker cleverly updates the specification problem and presents a version that is more difficult to refute than earlier versions. Once we distinguish, however, between facts and truth conditions propositions, the problem is easily solved. The specification problem, in the form Walker presents it, arises only because the truth of the correspondence theory is subtly presupposed. Walker covertly assumes that objective facts are the truth conditions of all propositions. Once we accept that there is a fact about what people believe, that is, a fact about which system they adopt, we appear constrained to accept
the correspondence theory of truth. The coherence theory of truth just is, however, the view that objective facts are not the truth conditions of propositions.

Given that the coherence theory of truth is correct, there is no way to say, absolutely, which systems are specified systems. This would be possible only if a correspondence theory of truth were correct. Once we recognise that all true propositions—including propositions about which systems of propositions are specified systems—are true only in the context of system of propositions, the difficulties for the coherence theory disappear. Once we recognise that the claims of systems to be specified systems are always evaluated from the perspective of some system or other, it is clear that coherentists can maintain that no system but their own is a specified system without compromising their position.

The coherence theory of truth is not incoherent. If its opponents wish to refute it, they will have to take seriously the arguments in favour of the theory. On the other hand, the mere fact that coherentism is coherent should not, by itself, provide much comfort to the theory’s friends. A great deal of work remains to be done if advocates of the coherence theory are to show that theirs is the most satisfactory account of truth.

ENDNOTES

1In addition to the criticisms of the coherence theory cited below, see three recent surveys of theories of truth, all of which give coherentism short shrift: Johnson, Kirkham, and Schmitt.

2The argument presented here is indebted to that provided in chapter 2 of Young (1995).

3This over-simplifies the matter by ignoring semantic compositionality and the fact that the meanings and truth conditions of propositions are a function of the meanings of their component words. A fuller account of the process would indicate how, by using some propositions in certain ways, speakers endow words with meanings, and thereby fix the truth conditions of propositions composed of these words.

4See “On Truth and Coherence” in Blanshard, chap. 26, and Bradley.

5See Russell, 33ff.

6Versions of this argument are found at several points in Walker, 99–100, 143–4, and 210. Walker’s argument is endorsed in Kirkham.

7For an argument very similar to Walker’s, see Fumerton. This essay is sympathetically discussed in BonJour.

8See Hempel, 57. For a discussion of the coherentism of the logical positivists, see Young (1991). A strategy similar to Hempel’s is adopted by Dauer.

9Wright, 284.

10Ibid.

11Neurath, 92.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


