New Frontiers in Truth

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

Although philosophers have been concerned with truth since at least the age of Plato, the last thirty years have witnessed a veritable explosion of the philosophical debate on this topic. The touchpaper which lit the fuse for this was undoubtedly the *Deflationist Renaissance* (half a century after the seminal work of Ramsey) due, in the Seventies, to the development of the prosentential theory of truth by D. Grover, J. Camp and N. Belnap (1975) and the Quinean disquotational interpretation of the Tarskian truth definitions (Quine 1970) and, from the second half of the Eighties onwards, to the forceful defences of deflationary conceptions provided by H. Field (1986, 1994) and P. Horwich (1990).

The philosophical struggle on deflationism has been thought-provoking: by arguing on the merits and shortcomings of such a conception, philosophers have come to broaden and deepen the discussion on truth beyond the boundaries of deflationism. An outstanding example thereof is C. Wright's *Truth and Objectivity* (1992) which, starting from a critical discussion of deflationism, opened the door to two central focuses of the current debate on Truth: truth-pluralism (advocated for the first time by Wright himself) and truth-relativism. One of the central issues of Wright's book was in fact how to better account for the truth of sentences belonging to so-called non-factual discourses, e.g. discourses (such as those concerning moral, aesthetic or personal taste matters) where truth, if any, seems not to depend on the existence in the world of objective facts whose discovery would allow for the settlement of disputes between people holding opposite views. Two different responses to this question are on the one hand the pluralist stance, according to which truth in these areas of discourse is of a different stuff than truth for sentences concerning, for instance, the physical features of reality, so that we must recognize the existence of different truth-properties in different domains of discourse, and, on the other hand, the relativist approach, revived by the works of M. Kölbel (2002) and J. MacFarlane (2005), according to which truth is one but it must be relativized to standards of evaluation, so that one and the same truth-evaluable content may be true relative to one of such standards and not true relative to a different one.

Another example of how the debate on deflationism stimulated and deepened the investigations on truth is provided by the fruitful intertwining

of metaphysical approaches, concerned with the nature, if any, of truth, and formal theories of truth, mainly interested in the construction of definitions, or axiomatic treatments, of non-paradoxes-engendering truth-predicates. This development was due mainly to two problems deflationists had to face. Firstly, given that a theory that embraces the general validity of T-biconditionals (sentences of the form "'p' is true if and only if p") and classical logic is inconsistent, as Tarski showed, and that the deflationism's core idea is that such biconditionals *exhaust* the theory of truth, how can a deflationary theory escape inconsistency? Secondly, S. Shapiro (1998) claimed that a sensible way to give a determinate content to the deflationist slogan that truth is an *insubstantial* property, is to resort to the concept of a theory being *a conservative extension* of another one (where, roughly, a theory A is a conservative extension of a theory B when there is nothing expressible in the language of B which is provable in A and not in B; that is to say when A does not provide us with any *new* knowledge concerning the things B is about). Truth would be, in this sense, an insubstantial property if and only if the theory of truth for a language in which a given theory B is expressed is a conservative extension of B. Shapiro noticed, in the meantime, that Tarski's and Gödel's works provided a blatant proof that a theory of truth for the language of arithmetic is *not* a conservative extension of arithmetic: in fact, as Gödel showed, arithmetic cannot prove its own consistency (although it can, in some sense, *express* it) and, as Tarski showed, a theory of truth for the language of arithmetic *can* prove such a consistency. Shapiro stressed moreover that a theory of truth made only by an infinite list of Tarskian biconditionals, though being a conservative extension of its base theory, is not able to prove the consistency of arithmetic. So, to Shapiro's lights, the deflationist is forced to give up either the claim that truth is insubstantial or the claim that an adequate theory of truth should be able to prove sentences like "All the theorems of arithmetic are true". The non-conservativity argument, besides burning the discussion between friends and enemies of deflationism, opened, in very recent times, an interesting new field of investigation concerning the best way to understand the presumed *insubstantiality* of truth.

The problem of the normative status of truth provides another case where the philosophical discussion has profited from the debate on deflationism. Dummett (1959) had pointed out that the role of truth as a goal of our cognitive life poses a potential problem for any conception of truth that sticks uniquely to the T-schema: the instances of the latter seem in fact to be silent on the role that truth has as a guidance of our action and a central norm of our cognitive behaviour. Are deflationists able to give a

satisfactory account of the normative role of truth? And what this normative role actually amounts to?

The essays collected in this book provide new and enlightening ideas on each of the aforementioned topics.

To begin with the last topic, Pascal Engel's "The Norm of Truth: a Dialogue" is an exciting dialogue between Pilate and the Epicurean philosopher Aelius Lamia concerning the role of truth as the main norm of belief. After having pointed out the shortcomings of truth and justification in playing such a role and having gone through the question of the kind of normativity that is involved in our epistemic attitudes, the two interlocutors converge on the claim that knowledge should better be taken as the main norm to which our beliefs are subjected.

Boris Rähme claims, in "An Explanatory Role for the Concept of Truth", that the role of truth as a norm of belief poses a threat to deflationary theories that is more serious than advocates of such conceptions have thought. In particular such a role offers counterexamples to the claim, central to deflationism, that truth has no genuine explanatory role. Deflationists in fact typically explain away the normative role of truth using a truth-free schema such as "One ought to believe that p only if p". But, according to Rähme, the concept of truth is inescapable when one comes to explain why the instances of such a schema hold.

A second group of essays deals with relativism about truth.

Annalisa Coliva and Sebastiano Moruzzi focus, in "Faultless Disagreement and the Equal Validity Paradox", on what they call the *equal validity paradox* engendered by the putative phenomenon of *faultless disagreement* of which contemporary truth-relativists aim at giving an account. When two people are engaged in so-called disputes of inclination (those concerning what is morally right, beautiful, tasty) one can in fact have the feeling that, although they believe contradictory propositions, none of them is *at fault*, that is to say none of them is to blame for believing something false. The paradox engendered by the phenomenon is that it seems to force us into admitting that both a proposition and its negation are true, *contra* the principle of non-contradiction. Coliva and Moruzzi deploy eight alternative solutions to the paradox, some of which correspond to the main opposite camps in the contemporary discussion on truth-relativism, and argue (contrary to what advocates of such solutions usually think) that they all amount to taking a revisionary stance toward the concept of faultless disagreement, a stance according to which this concept is internally incoherent and needs, for this reason, either to be abandoned or to be revised in some respect.

Carlo Filotico's "Weak Indexical Relativism" is a defense of a moderate form of so-called *indexical relativism* (better known as *contextualism*) which has been one of the main competitors to truth-relativism in the recent debate. According to indexical relativism, speakers' assertions within non-factual areas of discourse implicitly refer to a feature of the speaker, so their content depends on the context of utterance. For instance, utterances of a sentence such as "Matisse is better than Picasso" must be read as assertions of "Matisse is better than Picasso *according to my own aesthetic standards*" or "*I prefer* Matisse to Picasso". So two different assertions of this sentence can get different truth-values just because they can express different propositions in different contexts. Therefore indexical relativists are ready to accept that, in a dispute of inclination, nobody is at fault; they think however that in such disputes there isn't a real disagreement: in fact people involved in them aren't really holding mutually incompatible beliefs. The weak version of this view advocated by Filotico, which consists of the claim that indexical relativism properly describes just *some* cases of disputes of inclination, aims at answering the standard objections that have been raised by truth-relativists against stronger versions of indexical relativism.

Filippo Ferrari and Dan Zeman's focus, in "Radical Relativism, Retraction and Being at Fault", is the phenomenon of *retraction*, the speech act an agent performs when she takes back a previously made assertion whose content she currently considers false, although she does not blame herself for having being at fault in making the retracted assertion. After providing an analysis of this kind of speech act, Ferrari and Zeman claim that MacFarlane's (2011, 2014) explanation of the *faultless* dimension of it fails to account for an asymmetry between retraction of assertions with moral content and retraction of assertions on matters of personal taste. In order to account for this asymmetry they put forward a new dimension of evaluation of assertions, called "circumstance accuracy".

Samule Iaquinto's "Contradictions, Disagreement and Normative Error" compares two different ways of allowing for the possibility of a faultless disagreement, namely the relativist approach and the approach consisting in both the negation of the principle of bivalence and the subsequent adoption of a three-valued logic. His main point is that the first approach is preferable to the second on two grounds: firstly, it most easily accounts for the possibility of true *semantic*, and not just syntactic, contradictions; secondly, it is less metaphysically demanding than the three-valued approach.

Both the essays of Frederik Stjernberg ("Do We Have a Determinate Concept of Truth?") and Michele Lubrano ("Alethic Pluralism and Logical Paradoxes") centre on alethic-pluralism.

Stjernberg offers a powerful defence of alethic pluralism against what many have considered a knockdown objection to it. The objection (called "Instability Challenge") is that once a plurality of truth predicates ($T_{1 \ldots} T_n$) is admitted one can readily define a new predicate by the *disjunction* of T_1 …. T_n. Since this disjunctive predicate applies only to all of the sentences to which the former predicates apply, the result is that it is the universal truth predicate whose existence pluralists deny. The strategy Stjernberg opposes to such an objection is twofold. On the one side, he mounts a diagonalizing argument showing that for any given truth-predicate T_i one can introduce a *further* truth-predicate which applies to the sentence saying of itself that it is not T_i; but, if this is true, then there is no *finite* list of truth-predicates whose disjunction one can identify with the unique, universal truth-predicate. On the other side, he claims that neither formal axiomatic treatments of truth nor commonsense intuitions concerning it provide us with a determinate concept of truth. Stjernberg's conclusion is that the pluralists who want to escape the *instability challenge* should apply to the concept of truth Waismann's (1945) views about the "open texture" of concepts.

Lubrano's paper tackles the problem of how a pluralist about truth can deal with the Liar paradox. After having criticised Cotnoir's (2013) solution to this problem, he puts forward his own proposal that amounts to a Tarskian, hierarchical version of pluralism. Lubrano firstly provides a formal treatment of this approach enlightening some constraints a pluralist hierarchical account of truth must satisfy in order not to fall prey to the Liar and, finally, shows how his treatment can escape not only the classical Tarskian liar-paradox, but also Kripke's (1975) and Yablo's (1993) paradoxes which are not based on the mechanism of self-referentiality.

Lubrano's paper, with its intertwining of formal treatments of truth with metaphysical questions concerning its nature, sets the stage for the last group of essays which are devoted to topics to which this intertwining of formal and metaphysical matters is central.

Ciro De Florio's "Deflation and Reflection. On Tennant's Criticism of the Conservativity Argument" is a critical examination of the debate between N. Tennant and J. Ketland on the *conservativity argument* mounted against deflationism by Shapiro (1998) and Ketland (1999) himself. De Florio's main point is that Tennant's way out from the Conservativity argument, based on the use of schematic principles such as

"if 'p' is a theorem of T then p", is after all committed to substantial notions that a deflationist should not be happy to buy. In fact, according to De Florio, the epistemic justification of the aforementioned schematic principle requires the exclusion of the non-standard models of arithmetic; the characterization of the *standard* model however requires in turn second order arithmetic; but the notion of logical consequence for second order logic may turn out to be a robust notion. So Tennant is chargeable for the same trick for which Shapiro blamed the deflationist who embraces the second-order manoeuvre: he is "hiding the robustness of truth in the second-order consequence relation" (Shapiro 1998, p. 510).

The proper way of giving a precise content to the deflationist idea that truth is an *insubstantial* property is the focus of Andrea Strollo's "How Simple Is the Simplicity of Truth? Reconciling the Mathematics and Metaphysics of Truth". Strollo argues, in the first place, that the *insubstantiality-claim* (the idea that truth is an insubstantial property) is the real mark of deflationism, and that it is not entailed neither by the *intersubstitutibility-claim* (that "it is true that p" and "p" are conceptually equivalent) nor by the *logical role-claim* (that the truth-predicate serves only an expressive-logical role), also typically endorsed by deflationists. Then he tackles the endeavor of giving a precise content to the insubstantiality-claim, starting from Edwards' (2013) and Asay's (2014) idea that the substantial/insubstantial divide among properties may be understood in terms of the distinction between *sparse* and *abundant* properties famously put forward by Lewis (1983). Strollo's central point is that the best way to exploit the sparse/abundant divide in giving a content to the notions of substantiality/insubstantiality of a property is to explain these notions *via* a model-theoretic concept which is closely related to that of conservativity: this is the concept of *expandibility of models*. According to Strollo this notion provides an invaluable tool for ordering in a precise way different theories of truth on a scale from a higher to a lower degree of substantiality.

The last paper of this group, and the concluding one of the book, Elia Zardini's "The General Missing of the Hierarchy", centres on the *locus classicus* around which formal theories of truth have developed, notably the problem of semantic paradoxes. Making use of the notion of a *schematic assertion*, Zardini provides a way by which hierarchical approaches to paradoxes can account for some of the generalising uses of the truth-predicate (exemplified by the famous Dixon-Dean example put forward by Kripke (1975)) that pose a problem to such approaches. He also argues, however, that hierarchical approaches cannot account for another kind of generalising use of truth, which consists in using truth to characterise all

instances of a certain kind of sentences, as happens when we are willing to express logical principles (such as the law of non-contradiction or the law of excluded middle) or to explain logical notions such as *negation* or *conjunction*.

We believe that the variety of problems tackled by the essays in this book and their thought-provoking insights highlight how the land of Truth is still far from having been totally explored and how, in this intellectual endeavour, real progresses can be achieved.

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Chapter One

The Norm of Truth: a Dialogue

Pascal Engel

1. Introduction

In his short story *The Procurator of Judea* (1893)[1] Anatole France imagines a dialogue between Pontius Pilate, retired in Naples, and the Epicurean philosopher Aelius Lamia. Their exchange happens in the year 50 of our era, near Pompeii. At that time the volcano had not given any sign of the activity which would destroy the city thirty years later. They talk about Pilate's office in Judea, and about how difficult it was then to rule Syria, especially with the Jews. Pilate complains that he had a hard time coping with their laws while trying to tear their unfortunate victims away from death. At the end of their exchange, Lamia asks Pilate whether he remembers a young "thaumaturge from Galilea", whose name was Jesus of Nazareth. Pilate answers:

— "Jesus? Jesus, from Nazareth? I don't remember."

The tale suggests that the most important episode of the history of humanity slipped out of the memory of its main protagonist.

I took up the story at this point, and try to give it a sequel. It may be a surprise to some readers that Pilate had philosophical ideas, but he lived then among a community of trained philosophers, and probably knew Philodemus.[2]

2. The lost dialogue

The next day Lamia meets again Pilate in his villa on the beautiful slopes of the Vesuvius.

Aelius - So, Pontius, you still do not remember this Jesus from Nazareth?

Pontius - Now, the episode came back to my mind. Those Jews wanted him to be crucified because he called himself "King of the Jews". He

seemed to me to have committed no crime, and to be just one of those lunatic prophets of whom I had heard about from time to time, and he was not dangerous. But I had to accept their verdict. There had been several seditions among them, and I did not want to have another uprising.

A. So, did you see this man Jesus at all?

P. Yes, I did. I asked him: "So you are the King of the Jews". To which he answered: "You just said it". He added that his kingdom was not of this world, and that he had come to this world to testify for truth. So I jested: "What is truth?"

A. And you wouldn't stay for an answer, I suppose?

P. No, I wouldn't. Everyone knows what truth is. If what he said was true, then things were as he said they were, and if he said he was the King of the Jews, what he said was, by his own lights, true, for when one says something one says something that one represents, *ipso facto*, as true. If he said he was the King of the Jews, then he said that it was true that he was the King of the Jews. So if he said that he was the King of the Jews, and if what he said was true, then he had spoken the truth. I had nothing to add, and nothing to complain about this. Actually he could just as well have whistled it. The issue is not of what truth *is*, and this is why I asked this question—"What is truth?"—rhetorically. My question was not about the nature of truth, or about the definition of this too obvious notion. It was about the role of truth in our lives. My question was: what is truth *good for*? Is it good to believe the truth? Even if he had said the truth—and was the King of the Jews, or the one who brought them Truth, the problem was: was there for me any good motive to believe this? I found no reason to believe it.

A. Nevertheless you sent him to death! And you did not believe that he was guilty.

P. No, I thought he was innocent. I just took up the Sanhedrin's decision. They deferred to me for their own decision. But I ask you to imagine the consequences of my taking the opposite decision.

A. So you did not believe that it was *true* that he was the King of the Jews? That he was guilty?

P. No, I did not believe that. But sometimes you do not act on your beliefs, and you even have to act against your beliefs. Sometimes also you want to believe that something is true. The Jews wanted to believe that this man Jesus was guilty. I did not accept that this Jesus was, as he said, the incarnation of Truth on earth. But I decided to believe that he was guilty nevertheless, in order to avoid greater evils for Rome. Why should we always believe the truth? Isn't it good sometimes at least, to believe what is false, even when one knows that it is false? Don't you, Lamia, like most

people in this city, prefer to believe that the volcano will not erupt, in spite of the fact that it frequently emits smokes? The cost of believing otherwise would be great. And most likely, you are right.

A. No, Pontius, I do not agree. As Epicurus said: "Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not". You should always believe the truth, because truth is the aim of belief. The truth is what you ought to believe. The truth of a proposition is the best reason one has for believing it. For isn't it a *fatal* objection to a belief to say that it is false? You may have had reasons to want to believe that Jesus was guilty. But these were not reasons *to believe*, these were reasons to *want to believe*. Even though it could be rational or useful in the prudential sense to believe that Jesus was guilty, it was not epistemically rational. It is not *the right kind of reason* to believe. Truth is the norm of belief.

P. That is not so clear to me. What is this norm? I agree that to believe something is to believe that *it is true*. But that's trivial. If I believe that the Capitol is between the Field of Mars and the Palatine, I believe that it is true. This may show that perhaps all our beliefs aim at truth because truth is the object of our beliefs (*formaliter*—forgive me for using a Latin word!—or as the *formal object* of belief).[3] But why does this show that our beliefs aim *at truth*? Our imaginings also «aim at truth» in this sense. For if I imagine that I am Caesar Augustus, I imagine that it is true that I am Caesar Augustus. If I hope that I shall become a senator, then I hope that it is true that I shall be a senator. But that does not mean that imaginings or hopes "aim at truth". Indeed I may imagine or hope something which is actually false. So to say that what one believes is what one believes true does not show that belief aims at truth or that truth is the norm of belief. It is not a good argument

A. *Concedo*. That was not my claim when I said that truth is the aim of belief. What we want to say, when we say this, is that we have, in general, the goal of believing truths and of not believing falsehoods. In other words it is our epistemic goal to believe what is true and to disbelieve what is false.

P. Come on! To believe *everything* that is true? Are we to believe anything whatsoever which is true? That there are 351 bricks in this wall? That the Vesuvius is a mountain? That Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon? Must I believe *that*? There is no reason for me to believe these things either because they are useless or because I *know* them already. Why should I believe something which I already *know*? I suggest that the maxim that we ought to believe the truth has to be restricted. Why not say that our epistemic goal is to believe truths which are interesting or important for us? That would be better.

A. I am not very happy with your suggestion, Pontius. What is interesting or not may vary according to circumstances, individuals, etc. Might not our epistemic maxim become empty or completely contextual: believe the truths which are important and interesting for you at the appropriate time or place? Or: believe what is important, unless it is unimportant, as the case may be? What kind of advice is that? I prefer to stick to my original formulation. Perhaps *every truth*, however trivial, is interesting and important. Our cognitive resources are limited, and better have few beliefs on important matters than a lot on unimportant ones. Nevertheless we never know when trivial or uninteresting beliefs are going to become important. It can be prudentially useful—but *prudentially for our epistemic aims*—to get as many beliefs as possible, interesting or not.

So I suggest a maxim of Epistemic Consequentialism, which we might call the rule of truth maximisation:[4]

 (EC) We must maximise true beliefs and minimise false ones.

P. Can you tell me how this gets us out of the previous difficulty? For instance, should we believe all the consequences of our beliefs (if we could do so)? Perhaps we ought to believe the truths from which we can infer a maximum of other beliefs, such as the most general truths (*e.g.*, the laws of basic sciences or axioms). And avoid the too complex ones. But it would be absurd to say that, for instance, we ought only to believe propositions which express axioms or fundamental truths in a domain, and not those about simple matters of fact.

What is worse, Epistemic Consequentialism prescribes that we believe everything that is true and avoid believing what is false. But it does not sort out those of our maximised true beliefs which we might have on the basis of false beliefs, and for bad reasons, from those which are true and based on true beliefs and for good reasons. We can think of two kinds of situations of this sort. The first one would be cases like the following. The mathematician Euclid is victim of a fatal illness and knows it. He has only a few weeks to live. He would need a year to be able to finish his *Elements*. But he knows that if he can manage to believe that he will live enough to finish his *Elements*, he will recover and live at least one more year. This belief, although false and based upon very little evidence, is epistemically useful, since publishing *The Elements* is going to maximise a lot of true beliefs for the future of humanity. But Euclid *ought not* to believe that he will live, since it is contrary to evidence. This is a case where a false belief, based on poor evidence—therefore a belief which one ought not to believe—is also to be had because it maximises true beliefs;

hence it satisfies the norm of true belief maximisation. Here is another counterexample. One can infer a proposition which, by sheer luck, happens to be true from a false proposition: for instance, from the proposition that I have visited Carthage, which is false, you can infer that I visited a city in North Africa, but this proposition is true by sheer luck: as it happens, although you have no evidence for it, I have visited Alexandria. Clearly you ought not to believe that I have visited Carthage, since it is false, but since the proposition that can be inferred from it is true, you ought to believe the latter.[5] Indeed these situations are in principle rare, but they show, like the previous case, that it can sometimes be good to believe truths which are not justified or which are based on weak or no evidence. The problem is that (EC) does not say anything about our *reasons* for believing, and it seems as important to have proper bases for our beliefs as to have true beliefs.

    A. I agree with you Pontius. But perhaps it shows also that there is something wrong with truth as a *goal* or aim of belief. Even in the cases of true beliefs held for bad reasons, nobody disputes what Epicurus said in this *Canon*, that our beliefs (*hypolepseis*) are correct or incorrect, and that a belief is *correct* if true, incorrect otherwise. That is, we have this *Condition of Correctness*:

    (CC) A belief is correct iff it is true.

    Now this might seem like a definition of belief, as above: if one believes that P, then what one believes is supposed to be true. In other words, the condition of *satisfaction* of a belief is fulfilled when a belief is true, and not fulfilled when it is false. But saying that a belief is correct when it is true says more. "Correct" indicates a normative property of our attitude of believing: a belief, to be correct, *ought to* be true. If one identifies a belief as true, the correct attitude towards this belief is to adopt it. So the *Condition of Correctness* of a belief is that it is correct when it is true, and this condition can itself be translated as a prescription, the *Norma Veritatis*:

    (NV) One ought to believe that P iff P,

which itself can be decomposed into an *if* part and an *only if* part:

    (NVa) One ought to believe what is true (if P one ought to believe that P);
    (NVb) One ought not believe what is false (one ought to believe that P only if P).

P. I do not see why this is better than (EC) and the idea that truth is our main epistemic goal. For (NVa) just says that we ought to believe any truth whatsoever, trivial or interesting, which is absurd, and (NVb) is vacuously satisfied when one does not believe that P or does not form any belief at all: for instance stones and people asleep satisfy it.[6]

You see Aelius, I know what a *norma* is: in our language it means a rule, a standard, as when we use a measuring instrument. Something is a norm not only if it has a condition of satisfaction and a condition of correctness, but also if it *governs* or *guides* our attitudes or our practices. Let us call this a condition of *guidance*. A norm is not a norm if it does not tell us how to comply with it. *A norm, to be a norm, has to have motivational power, normative force*. And neither (NVa) nor (NVb) have any motivational power, for they prescribe conditions which are either impossible to fulfill (believe all truths whatsoever) or conditions which are too easy to fulfill (if you fail to believe you obey the norm). Not only it is a law of the normative realm that *ought* implies *can*, but also that the norm ought not to be trivially satisfied.

A. Don't you agree, nevertheless, that (NVb) sounds to have some bite? When you entertain a certain proposition, and it appears to you true, you are disposed to assent to it, and when the proposition appears to you false, confused or unlikely to be true, you refrain from assenting to it. This picture should be familiar to you, Pontius, from the work of Chrysippus and other Stoics, when they talk about assent or *katalepsis* or what we call in our language *assensio.* So perhaps one can reformulate (NVa) and (NVb) thus:

> (NVC) If one *considers* P and asks oneself whether P,
>   (i) If P is true, one ought to believe P;
>   (ii) If P is false, one ought not to believe P.

We thus avoid having epistemic obligations with respect to truths that one has never considered.

P. I am not sure that it can work, Aelius. (NVC) tells you that you ought to believe that P only if you consider P and P is true. But how can one consider P without *assenting* to it as true? As soon as you consider a winged horse, you believe that it exists. But if this is the case, then in order to apply the norm (NVC) you must already believe P. But if, in order to apply the norm for belief (NVC) and see whether you ought to believe P, you need to believe P, the norm is useless.[7]

Moreover, are you sure that (NVC) is without exceptions? For there are certain "blindspot", propositions that one can consider, but which it is impossible to judge as true or false, such as

(B) P is true and nobody believes it.

If you believe the first conjunct then the second conjunct falsifies the first.[8]

A. I agree that there are propositions which are hard to believe, hence hard to subject to a norm of truth. But even if that were correct, that would threaten only some of our believings.[9] I am not impressed by the objection that the norm is useless. In the first place, it is not evident, *pace* Epicurus,[10] that as soon as we consider a proposition we assent to it. There is such a thing as suspending judgment without assenting to a proposition, as the Stoics made clear, in my view. In such cases it makes sense to ask oneself whether we should follow an epistemic norm, be it that of truth or another one, for instance that one ought to believe what one finds highly probable. In the second place, it is not clear that when we are guided by epistemic norms, we are always guided by *explicit prescriptions* or by imperatives, either of an hypothetical form ("if condition C holds, believe P") or of a categorical form, as if, when we consider a belief, we considered the positive prescription "You ought to believe the truth" or the negative one: "You ought not to believe the false". Actually we almost never follow such prescriptions when we have to *form* a belief, although we may consider them when we have to *maintain* a belief that we already have. When such maintenance or conservation of belief is at stake, antecedent conditions can be taken into account.[11] In the other cases it is far from clear that the norm of truth governs us in the manner of a deontic prescription or as an imperative, as if we had to perform some kind of mental action (judging, or accepting). It is far from clear that the *Norma Veritatis,* if it is the expression of a duty or an obligation, is the expression of an *ought-to-do*, or of some sort of moral prescription of the kind: "It is wrong, always, everywhere and for everyone not to believe what is true". If the norm involves an *ought*, it seems that it involves an *ought-to-be*, rather than an ought to do. As when we say such things as "The world ought to be a better place", or "Politicians ought to be honest". Such *oughts-to-be* need not even imply that their realization is possible or possible in the short run. Similarly with beliefs. When we say that they ought to be true, we do not imply that we ought to believe any truth whatsoever, or than we can do so. We do not imply either that we know how and when we can believe the truth, and what kind of epistemic conditions have to be realized for us to believe the truth. I submit that when we say that belief is governed by a norm of truth, we express an ideal, the ideal condition that belief ought to satisfy. Ideals are such that we need not know how to realize them or how they

can be reached. So I propose to interpret the *Norma Veritatis* thus, as an *ideal of truth*:

> (NVI) Truth is what one ought to believe, whether or not one knows how to go about it or whether one has reached it.[12]

The *Norma Veritatis* is an *ideal of reason*, in the sense that it tells you what you ought to ideally believe, namely the truth, and thus it belongs to the category of the *ought-to-be* rather than to the category of the *ought to do* (Kornblith 2001, p. 238; Millar 2005, p. 76; Chrisman 2008). The truth norm for belief does not give us any prescriptive—or even permissive—guidance. We can also say that it is a *constitutive norm*. An ideal is meant to describe an abstract situation which holds only "in principle" or a kind of conduct which only certain imaginary beings endowed with powers which are distinct from ours could follow (logical saints, believing all the consequences of their beliefs; perfectly rational agents). The status of the truth norm for belief is of this sort: it tells us what believing requires, but neither what kind of beliefs one must have before applying the norm, nor what kind of beliefs one must have once one has applied it. It is blind to the actual psychology of the agents. In this sense, it need not explain or guide our belief formation.

P. This is all good to me, Aelius. We Romans, like Horatius Cocles or Regulus, know where duty is, whatever the consequences. Still, it does not tell me why and how we should apply the norm of truth. We need to be given *a reason* to follow the norm. And what reason do we have to believe all truths and avoid all falsehoods? Actually, do we have any reason at all to believe truths? Isn't our primary reason to believe anything the *evidence* and the justification that we have for it? For truth, by definition, is inaccessible to us. Most of the time, we do not know it, and *cannot* know it. So how could there be for us a norm to follow the truth? Why should you believe the truth when you do not know it? In such cases, it is mandatory to suspend your judgement, because you do not have enough evidence. So it is much more plausible to say that our actual norm is the *Norm of Evidence*:

> (NE) For all P, one ought to believe that P if one has sufficient evidence for P.

One believes for good reasons, and these good reasons are most of the time the evidence that we have for our beliefs. But if it is a necessary condition, it can hardly be a sufficient one. For very often our evidence for believing is not sufficient, although we do not know that it is not. How

many times do we take ourselves to be justified in believing something while we are not? We have evidence for our beliefs because we have evidence that these are *true*. Evidence is evidence for truth. Truth is our master norm. It dominates the evidential norm (NE). Moreover, how do you apply (NE)? It says that you ought to have *sufficient* evidence. But when do you know that you have sufficient evidence, or are justified in believing something? As soon as you epistemicize, so to say, your reasons for believing things become unmanageable.

A. But can't we say that there are actually two norms, one of truth (NV) and the other of evidence (NE)? The former tells us what we ought to believe, so to say, absolutely, independently of our justification or evidence, whereas the latter tells us what we ought to believe, given our evidence.

P. I am not so sure. For actually the two norms can conflict. Suppose that a doctor believes, for good reasons and on the basis of what he takes to be sufficient evidence, that he must prescribe a certain drug to a patient. Unbeknownst to him, the drug may be fatal because the patient suffers from a certain illness which is presently unknown to medicine.[13] Ought the doctor to believe that the drug will cure his patient? If he follows the norm of evidence, the answer is yes. But according to the norm of truth, he ought not to believe this, for the drug will actually kill the patient. So which norm are we to choose? If you say that it is the norm of evidence, the one that the doctor has from his epistemic perspective, so to say—call it the *subjective norm*—the doctor will certainly have done all that there is in his power to save his patient. But he will fail miserably, for on the objective side—let us call this the *objective norm*—he actually ought not to prescribe the drug.

Once you realize this, Aelius, there are three possibilities, provided you accept the distinction between the objective and the subjective norm. Either you say that the objective norm (NV) is the only norm. But you then face such situations as the doctor's one. Or you say that the subjective norm is primary, but you are equally at a loss, for in such cases as the doctor's, one norm tells you to believe something, and the other tells you not to believe it. Indeed you could say that there is but one norm of truth, but that it is ambiguous, and has an objective side, which says what, in the absolute, one ought to believe (i.e., the truth), and a subjective side, saying what, relative to the information and the actual capacities of the believer, is to be believed. You could also say that the norm is contextual, telling you, in certain circumstances, to believe one thing, and in other circumstances to believe something else. But what kind of norm would this be? Does it make sense to say that there is a norm, which sometimes

prescribes you something and at other times something else? Or that its instructions are systematically ambiguous or subject to exceptions? If (NV) or (NE) are to be norms, they cannot be *systematically hypothetical*. They have to be imperative in the categorical sense.[14] Actually, if there is a conflict between the norm of truth and the norm of evidence, or if there are equal evidential reasons to believe that P and to believe that not P, the correct thing to do would be, as I said above, to suspend one's judgment— i.e., not to believe the propositions in question. Or, as I did with Jesus, to decide to believe one of the propositions for practical purposes.

A. It would be foolish and desperate, Pilate, to adopt such a rule. Beliefs are not like actions, which one can take indifferently when there is no reason to prefer an option rather than another. If you are indifferent to eating an apple or a pear, nothing serious ensues if you decide to choose one rather than the other. But in the case of belief, it is utterly unwise to adopt this policy. If it is all important for you to go to Rome and you have the choice between a road which will lead you there and another to Naples, but do not know which, it would be crazy to take one rather than another. From the previous discussion I conclude that the norm of truth is not a good candidate alone for being the norm of belief, and that the norm of evidence is not a good candidate either. A purely objective norm like (NV) is not enough because we need to appeal to the fact that our beliefs have to be epistemically constrained. If your belief is false, it does not show that there is something wrong with your belief. A purely subjective norm like (NE) would not do either because we need to appeal to the fact that our beliefs must not be only epistemically constrained, but also true. If your belief is justified but not true, it shows that there is something wrong with it. There is actually a simple solution, Pilate, to these problems.

P. Which one? It seems that we have exhausted the possibilities.

A. It consists in saying that the norm for belief is actually the norm of *knowledge*. When we discover that one of our beliefs is false we reject it. When we discover that one of our beliefs is unjustified, we try to revise it. But we would not revise it unless we hoped that in doing so we could get a true belief, and not simply one which would be better justified. We hope at one point to stop inquiring and get the truth. This speaks for the priority of the norm of truth over the norm of evidence. But the norm of evidence is not enough to rule our believings, for what we want is not simply evidence, but evidence for truth. It would be wrong, however, to say that we want truth alone, without justification, as when we guess. As Marcus Tullius Cicero says in his *De Fato*, what use would be divination if it aimed only at truth, without evidence? This is why astrologers are actually looking to evidence and signs of what they guess. The conclusion is that a

good guess is not blind, it needs an epistemic justification. Hence I propose that the right norm is a norm of knowledge:

(NK) One ought to believe that P iff one knows that P.

Knowledge is the perfect norm for belief. For if you do not know that P, but believe that P, aren't you in a predicament comparable to the one in which you are in Moore's paradox, when someone says: "P, but I do not believe that P"? For "P and I do not know that P" seems even more hard to assert. And given that knowledge is factive, that it entails truth, by definition what is known is true, hence the norm (NV) is a direct consequence of (NK). So the two norms are not incompatible: the one entails the other (Engel 2003, 2014; Smithies 2012).

P. So, Aelius, you tell us that one must believe something because one knows it? But that's stupid. If I know that P, why should I care about believing it? I believe it already, and moreover in the mode of knowledge. Ought I to believe that $2 + 2 = 4$? That Rome is the capital of the *Imperium Romanum*? That Caesar was our first *imperator*? That Capri is an island? Moreover, how do we avoid the previous difficulties of the objective norm of truth? If I ought to know that P in order to believe it, our problem reproduces: for most of the time, I do not know that P, hence it is absurd to require of me that I know P in order to believe it.

A. The answer, Pilate, is that the norm of knowledge does not require you to have *actual* knowledge of P. As I said before, a norm is first and foremost an ideal. It states what kind of condition you must be in, ideally, in order to believe. It does not say that you are actually in that condition, for it would be trivial or impossible, and it does not say how you have "to go about it". In other words, the norm prescribes *in general* what it is to believe correctly, but it does not give you the details about "how to go". How could it? There are so many different kinds of belief, so many different kinds of knowledge, that it would be useless to require of the norm that it told you how to go, even in rough outline. One thing is sure, however. The norm does not presuppose that it is possible to know that P. But it presupposes that, in order to believe that P, you must be *in a position to know* that P.

P. Your are clever, Aelius. But aren't you, like those Galenic doctors, someone who says that knowledge is *epistemically constrained*? Aren't you a *verificationist*?

A. I say that you must be so placed, cognitively and epistemically, that knowledge that P is at least possible. But that does not entail that everything that is true is known. There are indeed things that are true and that we do not actually know, and also perhaps things that we shall never

know. For instance about the Gods, or about the limits of the universe. But if we are to believe anything about these, we must, even in an idealized sense, be in a position to know. Even if we would never know, the posture of a believer must be such that he takes himself to be in a position to know.

P. But Aelius, with this guy Jesus, I wasn't even in a "position to know". I could not even figure out how to know whether he was the King of the Jews or some crazy impostor.

A. I agree. But then you should have suspended judgment, and released him.

P. I don't know. But I agree with you that I should not have asked him "What is truth?". I should have asked him simply: "What is knowledge?"

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Notes

1 Anatole France*, Le procurateur de Judée*, in *L'Etui de nacre*, *Œuvres*, Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1984, tome I, pp. 877 ff.

2 See M. Gigante, *Philodemus in Italy. The books from Herculaneum*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995; and Pierre Vesperini, "«Que faisaient dans la baie de Naples Pison, Philodème, Virgile et autres Epicuriens?» Pour une approche hétérotopique des pratiques philosophiques romaines", *Melanges de l'Ecole française de Rome,* 121, 2, 2009, pp. 515-543.

3 Cf. Teroni (2007), Engel (2013).

4 See Berker (2013) for a statement, and a rejection of (EC).

5 The informed reader will notice that Pontius Pilate anticipates here, remarkably, Edmund Gettier.

6 Bykvist and Hattiangadi (2007).

7 Sosa (2001, p. 54), Glüer and Wikforss (2009, p. 44).

8 If you believe a conjunction then you believe each of its conjuncts, so if you believe (B) then (B) is false. Now, suppose (B) is true and you have a doxastic attitude to it (this would be an attitude of withholding or of disbelief). By (NVCi) you ought to believe (B). But if you believe (B) then it is false, and so by (NVCii) you ought not believe it. So, in the case where (B) is true and you form a doxastic attitude to it, (NVCi) entails that you are subject to a requirement that you cannot satisfy, in the sense that you cannot do what the requirement requires you to do while the requirement is in place. Indeed, if you did what the requirement requires you to do, you would thereby do something the requirement requires you not to do. This violates the plausible principle that you cannot be subject to oughts that are impossible to satisfy (Bykvist and Hattiangadi 2007).

9 About the blindspot objections, see Bykvist and Hattiangadi (2013).

10 The view would become later associated with the names of Spinoza and Hume.

11 Steglich-Petersen (2010).

12 Boghossian (2003).

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[13] The example comes from Gibbard (2003), and is taken up by Hattiangadi (2010).

[14] The options are well discussed in Gibbons (2013).

CHAPTER TWO

AN EXPLANATORY ROLE
FOR THE CONCEPT OF TRUTH

BORIS RÄHME

1. Introduction

Deflationism about truth (henceforth, deflationism) comes in a variety of versions [1] Variety notwithstanding, there is widespread consensus among advocates of different stripes of deflationism (disquotationalism, minimalism, prosententialism, etc.) with respect to the following no-explanatory-role claim concerning the concept of truth:

> (NER) The concept of truth has no *explanatory* role to play in philosophical explanations (nor, for that matter, in non-philosophical explanations).

Versions of (NER) can be found in Armour-Garb (2012), Brandom (2002), Dodd (2013), Field (2001), Grover (2002), Horwich (1998, 2010), Soames (1999) and Williams (2002, 2007), to give just a few examples. In one way or another, all of these authors seem to hold that (NER) follows from their respective deflationary accounts of truth. To be sure, they do not intend to deny that truth talk is sometimes useful (or even indispensable) for the purposes of formulating and expressing explanations of, say, our epistemic practices, meaning and propositional content, practical success or the success of scientific theories. But, they insist, truth talk does not and cannot contribute any genuinely *explanatory* content to the explanations which we formulate with its help. Its contribution to them is, as Michael Williams puts it, "*wholly* expressive, thus *never* explanatory" (Williams 1999, p. 547).

In what follows I argue that (NER) is false. My argument begins with the question of why the following conditional holds:

An assertion of <some dogs are vicious> is correct only if some dogs are vicious.[2]

My contention is that the best available answer to this question—the best available explanation of why the conditional holds—is in terms of an explanatory "because"-statement whose explanans-clause contains truth talk that is both inaccessible to standard deflationary treatment *and* explanatory.[3] I take this to amount to a counterexample against (NER). Of course, nothing in what follows hinges on the peculiarities of assertions of <Dogs>.

Michael Williams (2002, p. 157) suggests that an example of a genuinely explanatory use of the concept of truth, i.e. a counterexample to (NER), would amount to a refutation of deflationism—not just of this or that specific deflationary account of truth but of the deflationary outlook on truth quite generally. I will be cautious with regard to the question of whether Williams is right. Maybe a counterexample to (NER) should not *per se* be taken to amount to a refutation of deflationism because, maybe, there is no good reason for deflationists *qua* deflationists to commit themselves to (NER) in the first place—contrary to what many of them seem to think. In fact, the claim that deflationism entails or in some other, logically weaker, way requires acceptance of (NER) has recently come under criticism. Nic Damnjanovic (2005, 2010), for instance, points to a way in which, arguably, one can be a deflationist about truth without committing oneself to (NER), and Leon Horsten, in outlining his inferentialist version of deflationism, suggests that "perhaps we should divorce deflationism from the claim that the concept of truth has no explanatory function in specific philosophical disciplines" (Horsten 2011, p. 92; see also 2009, 2010).

The next two sections prepare the ground by rehearsing the standard deflationary account of the role and function of truth talk. In the fourth section I present a counterexample to (NER). The fifth section discusses various objections that my line argument is likely to provoke. The final one contains a very brief discussion concerning the question of whether my counterexample to (NER) should be taken to show the deflationary outlook on truth to be mistaken.

In what follows the focus is on deflationary accounts of truth for propositions. However, what I have to say carries over, *mutatis mutandis*, to deflationary accounts of truth for (utterances of) sentences.