Relativism of Truth vs. Dogmatism about Truths
A False Dichotomy

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RESUMEN

Una comprensión adecuada del funcionamiento de las adscripciones de verdad, en el contexto de la filosofía del lenguaje contemporánea, permite la asunción de diferentes aproximaciones pragmatistas al tema de la verdad que parecen, a primera vista, incompatibles. En particular, algunas de las tesis defendidas por Haack pueden sostenerse conjuntamente con algunas de las afirmaciones de Rorty. En un contexto pragmático que respeta la Máxima Pragmatista, el artículo se propone disipar parte de la confusión que rodea a la noción de verdad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *verdad, Haack, Blackburn, Rorty, pragmatismo, pro-oración*

ABSTRACT

A correct understanding of the functioning of truth ascriptions, in the context of the contemporary philosophy of language, permits the assumption of different pragmatist approaches to truth that seem, at first glance, incompatible. In particular, some theses defended by Haack can be maintained together with some claims made by Rorty. Using a pragmatic background that respects the Pragmatist Maxim, the paper attempts to dispel part of the confusion that surrounds the notion of truth.

KEYWORDS: *Truth, Haack, Blackburn, Rorty, Pragmatism, Pro-Sentence*

I. THE PLAYGROUND

Truth is the subject matter of hundreds of papers and books in Western philosophy. However, there is still a great deal of confusion about the notion, its definition and its connections with other notions. In the Philosophy of Science, the context in which this discussion will be placed, the notion of truth ─ as opposed to the criteria of its application ─ is involved in the debate of realism *vs.* antirealism and in the related issue of truth as an epistemic value.

Haack and Blackburn have stressed the relevance of truth for science and philosophy ─ they both urge that truth matters ─ and take pride in their

defence of truth against relativism and cynicism. Rorty, in contrast, has rejected that the notion of truth plays any relevant role in philosophy, politics or science [(2000a), p. 2]. This will be our playground, where we will focus on the meaning of truth-ascriptions in epistemic contexts. Our aim will be to dispel a muddle about (the notion of) truth and its relations with realism, dogmatism, objectivity and relativism and to offer some technical arguments in support of the general views on truth held by the two British philosophers, views that on the other hand are not incompatible with some of Rorty's claims.

Blackburn, in *Truth: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2005), uses the phrase "Truth Wars" to characterize the situation in the philosophy of past and present times, and shares with Haack a conception of the battle against relativism not simply as a philosophical enterprise but as a moral duty.

In this battle, some of Haack's and Blackburn's enemies are also our enemies. But real enemies are not always easy to identify under their more or less harmless aspect. Take the case of pragmatism as defended for instance by Rorty. Rorty's brand of pragmatism has been dubbed by Haack, followed here by Blackburn, as cynicism, and although Rorty rejects the label, his pragmatism is sometimes identified with relativism. In [(1979), p. 166], Rorty says "'Relativism' is the view that every belief on a certain topic, or perhaps about any topic, is as good as every other. No one holds that view". True, no one has defended this view as it stands. But there are related views that Rorty does defend and that also deserve the title "relativism". One of them, that we might call "relativism about truths" is the view that assumes that the only constraints to enquiry are the conversational rules. In [(1979), p. 165], Rorty says: "Let me sum up by offering a third and final characterization of pragmatism: it is the doctrine that there are no constraints to inquiry save conversational ones". That there are conversational constraints to enquiry is not in dispute. Nevertheless, if by this claim one wants to defend that there is nothing in the "external world" that offers resistance to enquiry, then it is false. A second view, which might be dubbed "relativism about truth", would be characterized by the thesis that *truth* is an empty notion. If by this claim, one understands that truth does not represent a property of objects, then it is true. But if by this claim one also wants to suggest, as Rorty does, that there are no objective circumstances that justify the ascription of truth to a content, then it is false.

Pragmatism/Relativism, as it has been attributed to Rorty, James and Dewey, is then an equivocal position; different theses are distinguishable under the same name. Applied to truth, the claim that there is no fact of the matter *in the ascription of truth to a proposition* is one of the consequences of relativism. The relativist explanation would go as follows: a truth ascription does not express any hard fact since ascribing truth to a proposition does not derive from any set of unbiased criteria. Pragmatism in this sense of the word opposes realism, either metaphysical or epistemological.

According to a different, although related, interpretation, the basic claim of relativism/pragmatism is that there is nothing interesting in the notion of truth itself. "My first characterization", claims Rorty in [(1979), p. 162], "of pragmatism is that it is simply anti-essentialism applied to notions like 'truth', 'knowledge', 'language' 'morality' […]". The notion of truth is thus empty for there is no property which is shared by the diverse contents that on one occasion or another are characterized as true.

In all cases, the basic claim associated with pragmatism/relativism has an interpretation in which it is true (although quite trivial and possibly different from the one intended by its proponents) and another one in which it is false and discouraging for the philosophical enterprise. Ordinarily, the right (and trivial) interpretation has to do with the fact that truth is not a first order property; it does not represent a property of objects at the same level as *being an English sentence* or *being a conservative politician*. One of the wrong suggestions is that truth has no meaning; another is that the truth predicate can be ascribed to a content at will; still another is that truth matters neither in science nor in philosophy.

Opposite to relativism allegedly lies dogmatism. A philosopher's first duty is probably to escape dogmatism but fortunately this is a fictitious scenario. The honest effort to avoid dogmatism does not throw one into cynicism's arms. The opposition *relativism vs. dogmatism*, as it is typically used among cynicists, is one of the false dichotomies to which Haack has been alert throughout her work.

"There is one truth, but many truths", says Haack in her (2008b). The distinction between the notion — truth — and the items to which it applies — truths — is crucial to clarify what is at stake, as the Truth Wars can be fought at the level of truth and at the level of truths. At the level of truth, the way of contesting relativism is by showing that the notion of *truth*, far from being empty or fishy has a precise and accessible meaning. Dogmatism, the attitude of those who defend the absolute truth of some truths, stands at the level of *truths*. It does not oppose relativism/pragmatism but fallibilism, pluralism, and intellectual modesty.[1] In the Introduction of her (2008a), where she distinguishes between the unity of truth and the plurality of truths, Haack asks: "Isn't this, you may wonder, too obvious to need saying?". Her answer is "No. For only by gradually unravelling first the densely tangled arguments that have persuaded some philosophers that there are many truth-concepts, and others that there is no viable truth-concept at all, and then the densely tangled arguments that have persuaded some philosophers that there are no truths, or that only The Whole Truth About Absolutely Everything is really-and-truly true, can we appreciate both the simplicity of the idea of truth, and its subtleties" [(2008a), p. 16]. What Haack says is of course true, but it is still not the whole truth. For apart from the notion of truth and the multiplicity of propositions to which the notion applies, the set[2] of truths, there is also an ambiguity in

the abstract noun "truth" that complicates matters even more. "Truth" sometimes refers to the semantic notion, and sometimes to the final and complete set of all its instances. This second sense allows James to consider truth as convergence in the long run and Peirce to look for it at the end of enquiry, a time and a place too far away to find the semantic notion. The semantic notion is what is dimly hinted at when one assumes the unsophisticated slogan of correspondence. Some version or other of the correspondence slogan, *that truth is accordance with what it is*, is assumed by Peirce, James and Dewey, and also by Haack, and all of them correctly understand that the slogan is empty.

II. THE BACKGROUND

We will adopt a pragmatist attitude *towards inquiry* — any kind of inquiry — that in the present case means *towards the procedure of inquiring about truth*. Nevertheless, a pragmatist theory of truth is not to be proposed. The *Pragmatist Maxim*[3] advises us to identify the meaning of a notion with its practical effects; following this, we regard what speakers do with words as the point of departure of the enquiry. This attitude requires going back to the speakers' actions in order to assess the theory, an attitude similar to that baptized by Rawls as "reflective equilibrium". The actions that define the communicative behaviour of rational beings are our raw facts; they are the phenomena to be explained. Together with the Pragmatist Maxim, our attitude to enquiry also respects Critical Commonsensism and can be characterized as synechist. We need to say something about these general attitudes in order to outline the pragmatic background in which the view on truth to be proposed here will be settled.

"Facts", "behaviour", "the world", the expressions that we use to represent the subject matter of theoretical enquiry, refer to a reality that is continuous. Communicative behaviour does not come apart either. Looking for distinctions is the theorist's duty, but this duty should not obscure the fact that the distinctions, that define a particular theory, are not *really* out there: they are projected by the theory itself and thus are "theory laden". "Synechism" is the term used by pragmatists to refer to the continuity of levels of being or, alternatively, to the continuity of levels of inquiry. Adapting the synechist attitude to the study of language, Synechism amounts to saying that the diverse levels in which linguistic theory have been divided at least since Peirce and Morris — those of Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics — do not represent objective levels of reality but are instead methodological distinctions that respond to diverse theoretical purposes.[4]

In its origin, Synechism was an essentially anti-dualist position, as it was Critical Commonsensism. Synechism, as Peirce characterizes it, "can never abide dualism, properly so called (...) dualism in its broadest legitimate

meaning as the philosophy which performs its analyses with an axe, leaving as the ultimate elements, unrelated chunks of being, this is most hostile to Synechism. In particular, the synechist will not admit that physical and psychical phenomena are entirely distinct ─ whether as belonging to different categories of substance, or as entirely separate sides of one shield ─ but will insist that all phenomena are of one character, though some are more mental and spontaneous, others more material and regular" (*CP* 7.570, 1892). The standard characterization of Synechism ─ how not to philosophize with the axe ─ is a perfect counterbalance of the analytic *slogan*: divide and conquer.

Peirce's Critical Commonsensism, on the other hand, originates in his rejection of the dichotomy between common sense, as defended by Thomas Reid, and critical philosophy, as defended by Kant. Haack applies Critical Commonsensism to the relations between philosophy and science; in Haack's case her Scylla and Caribdis are the pair *Old Deferentialism* vs. *New Cynicism*. We apply Critical Commonsensism to the alleged dilemma that would force philosophers to choose between relativism, as a position on truth, and dogmatism, as a position on truths.

Synechism and *Critical Commonsensism* are terms (and attitudes) that stem from Peirce, and have been custom-made by Haack as essential aspects of her approach to science.

III. THE POINT

Beneath the details, the account of truth that we put forward in these pages is not revisionist in the least. We defend, with Haack, that there is one truth but many truths and also, as can be read in her *Defending Science*, that

(i) "[G]enuine inquiry is a good-faith effort to arrive at the truth of the matter in question, whatever the color of that truth may be" [Haack (2007), p. 96; (2008b), p. 50], and that

(ii) "Scientists are in the business of seeking true answers to their questions" (*loc.cit.*).

The strategy will be to disclose the content of claims such as those quoted in (i) and (ii). Claims (i) and (ii) ─ and simplifications of them such as (α) *truth is the aim of science* or (β) *scientists seek the truth* ─ are neutral claims regarding most of the traditional problems related to the notion of truth and its definition. In particular, they do not imply that truth is correspondence with reality or that truth is a value, either epistemic or moral. *Justification* is an epistemic value; *truthfulness* and *honesty* are moral values. Truth is neither; it is an intra-systemic higher-order notion with very precise tasks to perform in the general

communicative goal of natural language use. Nor does supporting claims such as (i) and (ii) imply taking sides in the debate between realism vs. anti-realism.

The reason of this neutrality, simply stated, is that (i), (ii), (α),(β) and many others of similar kind are general claims about propositions whose instances are quite trivial assertions that do not involve any of the controversial issues in epistemology.

To take stock and combine this section with the previous two, we need to say something about what we have called "the playground" and "the background". Regarding the background, we consider pragmatism — which we identify with (1) the thesis that the speakers' actions are the phenomena to be explained, together with (2) the Pragmatist Maxim — to be the correct methodological and metaphysical perspective. Regarding the playground, the thesis is that some of the most publicized controversies in epistemology and metaphysics are independent of the notion of truth.

The point for which we will argue is that truth ascriptions — sentences by means of which truth is ascribed to a propositional content — work as propositional variables. Among other functions, variables are signs of generality.[5]

Generality can be about every kind of item. General claims about propositions call for propositional variables, and some truth ascriptions act as variables of this kind. The details of the theory will not be offered in this paper, only the aspects required to understand the point. And the point is that the sentences quoted above are generalizations, i. e. they do not express particular propositions but general rules. Let us call this claim "T1",

[T1] Truth ascriptions (of a certain kind) codify general thoughts.

Different strategies can be followed to bring about support for [T1]. There is a collection of arguments that belongs to logic, and that arises when the aim is to give a suitable translation of (i), (ii), (α) and (β). The logical form of these sentences involves quantification over propositions. Other arguments stem from linguistics and semantics. Our strategy belongs to pragmatics instead. In the Philosophy of Language there is an ongoing discussion about the relative boundaries between semantics and pragmatics. The debate has become a substantive topic in itself, and has acquired traces of scholasticism. Where the divide between the two theoretical approaches to meaning and content should be drawn is something that directly depends on definitions internal to the theories in dispute. Thus, even though there are genuine philosophical questions behind the debate, a substantial part of it is a question of theoretical preferences. The position within pragmatics taken in these pages intends to be neutral about the theoretical debate just mentioned; the only constraint is that the intuitions of the speakers are taken as the facts to be explained.

What information is transmitted by claims (i) and (ii)? What do we understand when we understand (i) and (ii)? Let us first see what information is

not transmitted by (i) and (ii). By claims such as (i) and (ii) speakers do not express "a belief of the primary sort".[6] The statement "scientists are in the business of seeking true answers to their questions" does not rule out any truth definition. Similarly, the opposite claim, that

(iii) "Truth is not a goal of enquiry",

as made by Rorty in his [(2000b), p. 262] is compatible, its author notwithstanding, with a theory of truth as correspondence. Rorty's claim rests on the assumption that truth represents the highest degree of justification, and his strategy is to stress that complete certainty is unrealizable — this is an epistemological claim. Truth, Rorty thinks, is among the "impossible, indefinable, sublime objects of desire" [(2000a), p. 2]. At this point he coincides with metaphysical realists in that truth is too high an ideal to be included among human goals. This point has been debated endlessly both among epistemologists and metaphysicians. Whatever the relative merits of the contrasting positions might be, the notion of truth — which is neither metaphysical nor epistemic — is not involved. It is put to work as a tool to produce the propositional variables required to discuss such general topics, but its definition and characterization is not at stake.

Scientists seek answers that are *true*, it is said in (ii). They seek answers that really represent things the way they are, answers that imply an advancement of knowledge, that help human beings understand how the world is, answers that offer scientists an accurate representation of reality, etc. All this is correct — we might have said "true" instead of "correct" without begging the question — but these different formulations do not embody a further step in the understanding of claim (i); in no case are they analyses, not to say definitions, of the notion of truth. Instead, they are alternative ways of saying the same thing, mere rewordings of the original truth-sentence. None of the different alternatives permits a theory of truth to take off, as the history of the issue shows. Thus, our proposal takes the general principles of pragmatism seriously and faces the real practices.

All those who, for one reason or another, are in the business of seeking true answers to their questions are in the business of seeking true answers to *particular* questions, questions such as

1. What is the structure of DNA?

2. Is there life on Mars?

3. How are prime numbers distributed among integers?

4. What is the effect of inflation on the rise of unemployment?

If scientists are in the business of seeking true answers for the question of what is the structure of DNA, then they want to know whether

     5. DNA has a double helix structure,

i.e, they want to know that DNA has a double helix structure in the case that DNA has a double helix structure, and that DNA does not have a double helix structure if this were the case.

     In question 2, scientists are in the business of seeking true answers, to know whether

     6. There has been bacterial life in Mars,

if this has been the case.
     One of the true answers for question 3 would be

     7. Every even integer greater than two is the sum of two primes,

if it is the case that every integer greater than two is the sum of two primes. And so on…
     In general, for some p, scientists are in the business of seeking whether p; the end of their search is either p, if p, or else not-p, if not-p.
     The European pragmatist F. Ramsey saw this point with complete clarity. Following his suggestions, the logical form of general truth ascriptions should be identified with variable hypotheticals, i.e. universally generalized formulae; thus a truth sentence such as *science pursues truth* is analyzed as

     (γ) For all p (in a certain domain[7]), if p, science wants to be in the position to assert p.

Singular truth ascriptions have, according to Ramsey, a conjunctive logical form. A truth-ascription such as "She told the truth" can be rendered in a semi-formal language with propositional variables as

     (δ) She said that p and p.

     The thesis that we share with Ramsey is that in order to carry out the tasks performed by truth ascriptions, speakers require truth terms or their synonyms, unless the language in question is enriched with propositional variables (and in the case of general truth ascriptions, with quantifiers too). In natural languages, truth terms perform the task performed in some artificial languages by propositional variables and the quantifiers binding them. Truth

ascriptions express general propositions whose content is acquired from their particular instances. Sentences such as (γ) and (δ) are compatible with many different contents. Nevertheless, this does not mean that (γ) and (δ) are ambiguous sentences. They are rather semi-formal complex variables, expressions that while keeping their linguistic meaning constant are able to express different contents depending on the context. These variable-like kinds of expressions are sometimes known as "pro-forms".

IV. THE CODA

Here we will make use of the survey on truth offered so far in the explanation of the general thesis with which we started this paper, i.e., that the notion of truth is not involved in the metaphysical, epistemological and ethical discussions about realism, justification or the honest way of conducting inquiry.

Truth ascriptions are expressions that out of a context of use possess linguistic meaning but lack content. Strictly speaking, this claim applies to any sentence whatsoever. Nevertheless, context affects content in a different way depending on whether the sentence uttered is a descriptive ordinary or a pro-form sentence. In the former case, content is somehow related to the linguistic meaning of the words used, even though content is (or could be) enriched by unarticulated constituents; in the latter case content *is* completely independent of meaning. A singular truth ascription such as (iv),

(iv) He wants to know the truth,

has a definite meaning, if by "meaning" we understand *linguistic meaning* or *character*. And this meaning is up to a certain point independent of context.[8] Nevertheless, what is said by means of (iv) in a particular context is completely *dependent* on the context at issue. This circumstance is a defining mark of proforms. By (iv), one might want to say (v), (vi), (vii), and many other things,

(v) He wants to know whether the butler was the murderer,

(vi) He wants to know whether the alleged proof of the last Fermat's theorem is valid,

(vii) He wants to know whether Homer really existed.
Similarly, a singular truth ascription such as (viii),

(viii) She told the truth to the police,

possessing an unambiguous precise character, is compatible with infinitely many different contents in different contexts. It might mean that,

> (ix) Victoria said that she was at home last night, and she was at home last night,

that

> (x) Victoria said that she saw Pablo running down the street, and she saw Pablo running down the street,

or that

> (xi) Victoria said that Joan was with her the whole night, and Joan was with her the whole night.

And the point here is that whenever one is entitled to assert (ix), (x) or (xi), one is entitled to assert (viii).

The same happens with general truth ascriptions, such as (xii),

> (xii) Everything that Benedict XVI says is true.

The sentence in (xii) is perfectly meaningful, but it does not depict a particular situation or state-of-affairs in any sense of the expression, not even in a particular context. The ascription in (xii) is a general truth ascription, which in its logical form includes a quantifier. Its canonical translation into a semi-formalized quantified propositional calculus would be something like (xiii),

> (xiii) $\forall p$ (if Benedict XVI says that $p \rightarrow p$).

And the instances of (xii) and (xiii) are ordinary propositional complexes, all with a conjunctive structure, (xiv), as Ramsey saw,

> (xiv) Benedict says that *so-and-so*, and *so-and-so*.

There are no traces of relativism, indeterminism, subjectivism or dogmatism in these examples. And they illustrate the thesis that the application criteria that answer for the ascription of truth to a content are exactly the same as the assertion criteria for this content. And thus, if the context is appropriate for asserting (xi), (x) or (xi), then the same context is equally appropriate for asserting (viii). If one is entitled to assert (5), one is entitled to

assert that (5) is true. There is no philosophical mystery here.[9] Let us call this claim [T2],

> [T2] The criteria of the application of truth to a content are identical to the assertion criteria for this very content.

What then is the level at which the discussions about realism and anti-realism, fallibilism and dogmatism emerge? A correct, although not very specific, answer is: at the level of assertion. The realism vs. anti-realism and fallibilism vs. dogmatism debates belong to different domains; the first to metaphysics; the second to epistemology. The metaphysical debate has two poles; one of them is the general philosophical question of whether there is a ready-made world independent of mankind; the other has to do with the debate about whether the fundamental nature of meaning is representation. Independent of the answers we give to them, one thing is clear: nobody rejects the possibility of assertion, nobody rejects the utility of language to express propositional contents. This minimal acknowledgement of the role of some uses of language is enough to "ascend" a level, or to move to a second step and endorse the content of an assertive act in an explicit manner by means of a truth ascription. The situation is as follows:

ACT OF ASSERTION 1:

  Speaker A: Hillary was the winner of the super-Tuesday.

  Speaker B: What speaker A has said is true.

ACT OF ASSERTION 2:

  Speaker A: Science has proved the immortality of the soul.

  Speaker B: What speaker A has said is true.

ACT OF ASSERTION 3:

  Speaker A: Every even integer is the sum of two primes.

  Speaker B: What speaker A has said is true.

Truth-ascriptions only appear once an act of assertion has occurred. Then, (singular) truth ascriptions behave as a means to endorse the content of the previous act. Of course, this can be justifiedly or unjustifiedly done, but the misuse of a resource is something that should be explained by its mean-

ing. In the same sense in which a theory of artwork has to account for good and bad pieces, a theory of the meaning of truth has to explain its incorrect usages. In both correct and incorrect uses, the meaning and role of truth ascription is invariant.

In the case of truth ascriptions with a general content, the function is either the endorsement of packs of propositions, as in (xv),

(xv) The Theory of Relativity is true,

or else the display of a rule for asserting contents, conditioned to particular circumstances, as in (xii) above.

Endorsement of particular or general contents, or of general rules, is the activity that explains the meaning of truth terms. This activity is independent of the theoretical debates about the ultimate nature of reality. And it is also independent of the epistemological debate of when and under what circumstances one is justified in accepting a content as a safe piece of knowledge. Be that as it may, truth comes later. The epistemological difficulty stands at the level of particular contents, in one case, or at the level of the theory, in the other. If a truth ascription is used to endorse a non-quantified content, as

(xvi) Victoria said that she was at home last night, and she was at home last night,

the epistemological difficulty lies in determining the filters or tests that the content needs to have passed to be safely asserted. Once this difficulty is left behind, their endorsement by means of a truth ascription does not add any further epistemological constrain to the assertion level.

The situation in the case of theories is basically the same. Think of real scientific practices; once a scientific community relies on a theory and uses it in their experimental and inferential processes, the further step of lending to it explicit support by means of a truth ascription, such as (xv), does not add any further epistemological traits.

The related discussion about whether truth is a value, either epistemic or of any other kind, also hides a large amount of misunderstanding. It involves interpretations in which it is true and trivial ─ we follow here Haack's philosophical style ─ and others in which it might be interesting but in fact is false. Besides, rejecting that truth is a value ─ which follows from a trivial piece of conceptual analysis ─ is sometimes identified with relativism, anti-realism or cynicism. Ascribing truth to a content is to prize it in some way; this is true. We ascribe truth to those contents we are willing to assert. And the ascription of truth now adds to the mere act of assertion the explicit information that we are engaged in this particular kind of act, with all its consequences. By asserting a content, a speaker commits himself to the consequences of his assertion; both

with the consequences that follow from the content asserted and with the consequences of having asserted it. A speaker has to answer for the content of his acts of assertion. The ascription of truth to a content already asserted inherits the commitments of the mere assertion and makes the commitment and the inheritance explicit. A content either asserted or inherited in a truth ascription is a valuable content; so valuable that the speaker assumes it and allows others to assume it as part of an inferential chain. In this sense and only in this sense can it be said that truth is a value. The value aspect of truth can be expressed with a constructive purpose, as when Strawson declares that truth is a mark of illocutionary force, or with a discouraging effect, as when Rorty says that it is just a pat on the back of a content, but in no way is it a feature that characterizes truth by its essence or that exhausts the definition of truth. There are many expressions that have in their broad meaning a non-descriptive mark that suggests approval. If that truth is one of those is what is meant by the thesis that truth is a value, then it is correct. What it does not mean however is that truth is a sort of standard that has to be met by our theories, claims, or acts. We do not assert a claim because it is true; in fact it is the other way around: because we are prepared to assert it, we are allowed to describe it as true. We do not lend support to a theory because it is true; it is the other way around: because the scientific community involved considers it as safe, it is characterized as true. If a theory, hypothesis, proposal etc. works, it does not work because it is true. There is no internal ingredient in a true theory that answers for its truth value; discovering that what we took to be a true theory is false, or that what we took to be a false theory is true, does not change the nature of the theory. Truth is not a property of contents and it does not have any causal effect. It is because it works that we are entitled to ascribe truth to it. And all this is by no means a sign of relativism or of disrespect for truth; it is simply a semantic issue. Truth denotes approval since it reveals that the speaker accepts the content of the truth ascription; this is the true-but-trivial side of the thesis of truth as a value. Nevertheless truth is neither an epistemic value ─ and thus is not identifiable with certainty or with justification ─ nor a moral value ─ and thus is not identifiable with honesty or truthfulness. Identifying truth with a value is the interesting-but-false side of the claim.

In sum, truth is a higher order notion that has complex syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects. There is just one notion of truth, applicable to common life and astrophysics, to mathematics and ethics, but there are many truths. And the lack of ambiguity of the truth notion is independent of the degree of certainty that human beings are able to attach to particular propositions. It is possible to be fallibilist about truths while conceding the notion a precise meaning and role. The precise meaning of truth has to be found in the use that real speakers make of it in real communicative exchanges. The value

aspect stands in the tones that truth words add to the meaning and force of the speech acts in which truth talk is appropriate.

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NOTES

[1] I, with Blackburn and Haack, declare myself an absolutist about the notion and a fallibilist about its instances, a position left in the dark by the familiar false dichotomy.

[2] The term "set" is used here in an informal sense. Strictly speaking, there cannot be the *set* of all truths. The union of all truths constitutes an inconsistent multiplicity that gives rise to the Cantor paradox if considered as a single object. See Grim (1991).

[3] Peirce answered the question of meaning in the following way: "Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" [CP 5.2, 1878/1902].

[4] I owe to Susan Haack having directed my attention to the notion and its application to this topic.

[5] Frege was the first to understand this. In *Begriffsschrift*, he says: "I therefore divide all signs that I use into those by which we may understand different objects and those that have a determinate meaning. The former are letters and they will serve chiefly to express generality" [(1879), p. 11].

[6] Ramsey used this expression in (1929). He applies it to general propositions such as "All men are mortal". Of this proposition Ramsey says that "[i]t expresses an inference we are at any time prepared to make, not a belief of the primary sort" [(1929), p. 146]. Truth-sentences such as the ones analyzed in this paper express general propositions too.

[7] Science is not interested in every content that can be rendered in propositional form. It is not interested in particular contents, contents such as whether I ate fish yesterday, for instance; nor even in any general content. Presumably, it is not interested in the dietary habits of blond people who vote conservative.

[8] Although there are reasons to defend that no level of meaning is immune to context. This is also a basic tenet of contemporary contextualism. For such an approach, see Recanati (2003).

[9] As Ramsey said, "There is no separate problem of truth, but merely a linguistic muddle" [(1927), p. 38]. The stress here is on "separate".

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