

A PRAGMATIC VIEW OF TRUTH

LUIZ HENRIQUE DE A. DUTRA
Federal University of Santa Catarina, and CNPq

Abstract

This paper proposes an alternative view of the connection between knowledge and truth. Truth is traditionally seen as a semantic notion, i.e. a relation between what we say about the world and the world itself. Epistemologists and philosophers of science are therefore apt to resort to correspondence theories of truth in order to deal with the question whether our theories and beliefs are true. Correspondence theories try to define truth, but, in order to do so, they must choose a truth bearer, i.e. something capable of being true, for instance, propositions, sentences or statements. According to the analysis here proposed, none of these truth bearers can be defined without reference to the others. The pragmatic, alternative view here presented, in its turn, is unaffected by this kind of conceptual difficulty. According to this view, one must focus on the use of truth terms – such as ‘true’, ‘false’, ‘correct’, ‘appropriate’, etc. – and the methodological role such terms play in the investigative practices and research programs to be found both in the sciences and in other, everyday investigative activities, such as forensic and journalistic investigations.

1. Introduction: A New Pragmatic Turn?

To begin with, let me quote some brief passages from the last, posthumous book by Donald Davidson (2005b), *Truth and Predication*. It is well known that, in the past, Davidson was a sort of supporter of Tarski’s theory (see Davidson 1990), and intended to employ Tarski’s methods in the analysis of fragments of ordinary language. Now, in his last work, Davidson disapproves of all available theories of truth, including Tarski’s; and he writes as follows:

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I reject all these kinds of theories. In the third chapter I propose an approach that differs from the rest, one that makes the concept of truth an essential part of the scheme we all employ for understanding, criticizing, explaining, and predicting the thought and action of creatures that think and talk. (Davidson 2005b, pp. 2–3.)

Nevertheless, Davidson's third chapter in that book still relies on Tarski's methods. But differently from Tarski's approach, Davidson's is based on the assumption that truth is not to be defined. Tarski explained truth in terms of satisfaction; and Davidson explains satisfaction instead in terms of truth. Davidson uses truth to solve this and other problems, such as predication (see Davidson 2005b, pp. 160ff).

At the end of the first chapter of that book, after Davidson reviews the essentials of some of the most discussed conceptions of truth, including Tarski's, he also argues as follows:

The concept of truth has essential connections with the concepts of belief and meaning, but these connections are untouched by Tarski's work. It is here that we should expect to uncover what we miss in Tarski's characterizations of truth predicates.

What Tarski has done for us is show in detail how to describe the kind of pattern truth must make, whether in language or in thought. What we need to do now is to say how to identify the presence of such pattern or structure *in the behavior of people*. (Davidson 2005b, p. 28; emphasis mine.)

What Davidson is apparently doing in his last work on truth is to formulate a new program, which seems to be essentially pragmatic. According to the perspective he adopts, the problem regarding theories of truth in general is that they fail in connecting truth to language users. In the last passage I will quote here from Davidson, he writes as follows:

If we knew in general what makes a theory of truth correctly apply to a speaker or group of speakers, we could plausibly be said to understand the concept of truth; and if we could say exactly what makes such a theory true, we could give an explicit account – perhaps a definition – of truth. The ultimate evidence, as opposed to a crite-

tion, for the correctness of a theory of truth for a language must lie in available facts about how speakers use the language. (Davidson 2005b, p. 37.)

I do not intend to discuss here in detail the fundamentals of Davidson's possible new program. In fact, the last chapter of his book suggests that he is just extending this previous program. I only mention it because of his emphasis on the relation between truth and language use, even though Davidson seems to me still to restrict himself to a semantic stance.

However, in addition, Davidson argues also for a methodological thesis according to which truth is not eliminable (see Davidson 2005a, essay 2, and 2005b). He thinks particularly of Ramsey and Quine. I agree with him in this connection, even though I disagree with him on other points. I also agree with him that truth is essentially connected with knowledge, particularly the knowledge speakers have of their own language. This is the main point why I began quoting from him.

In this paper, I will try to develop the fundamentals of an alternative pragmatic approach, which is designed to deal with the epistemological aspects of truth. My approach is also alternative to traditional theories of truth, but different from Davidson's. In order to explain my position, I will focus instead on a particular issue, which is one of the most disputable questions as regards theories of truth, namely truth bearers.

In the next section, in order to characterize what I call the *semantic view of truth*, I briefly review the fundamentals of a number of correspondence theories, such as Russell's and Austin's. I also add some brief comments on other theories, such as Tarski's semantic theory and Popper's and Davidson's attempts to construe it as a correspondence theory. Finally, I briefly comment on two elimination theories of truth, namely Ramsey's and Quine's. In section 3, I argue for the difficulties of defining each one of the most common truth bearers, namely sentences, statements and propositions, without resort to the other notions mentioned. In section 4, I expound the essentials of my alternative, pragmatic view of truth as accordance. Finally, in section 5, beginning with a pragmatic interpretation of Aristotle's dictum, I argue for a pragmatic rehabilitation of the truth bearers, such as state-

ments, sentences, and propositions, in addition to theories, hypotheses and models, etc., in the specific contexts of the investigations where such notions occur.

2. The Semantic Stance

Let me review first some essential aspects of traditional theories of truth. The problem of truth is currently conceived of as a semantic problem, i.e. a problem concerning the meaning of the sentences of a given language. In other words, it is a problem concerning the connection between what we say about things and things themselves. Epistemologists and philosophers of science are concerned with this problem when they want to know whether a piece of knowledge – beliefs in general, but especially scientific theories – is true or false.

Thus, from the beginning, the epistemological problem of truth is raised as a question of correspondence between knowledge (or the sciences), on the one hand, and the world, on the other. Correspondence theories are therefore the primary concern of those who are interested in the truth of human knowledge. Among the most discussed theories of truth by philosophers and logicians are Russell's (1996 [1918]) and Wittgenstein's (1961 [1922]) theories, which stem from the stance they adopted during their period of adherence to logical atomism (see also Haack 1978, chap. 7). Russell and Wittgenstein conceived of correspondence as the congruence between a given proposition and a state of affairs (or fact) – the one making the proposition true.

Nevertheless, there is also a different sort of correspondence theory, namely Austin's (1979 [1961]). According to this theory, correspondence is not a kind of relation between language and world, but the correlation between two sorts of conventions, descriptive and demonstrative. Descriptive conventions connect sentences to sorts of circumstances, things, events, etc., in the world. Demonstrative conventions in turn connect statements to historic (real) circumstances, which are also to be found in the world. Of course, there is a certain connection between language and the world, but this connection is indirectly established, by means of the practice of speakers of a given

language. According to Austin's theory, a statement is true if the historic (or real) state of affairs connected with that statement by means of the demonstrative conventions belongs to a kind connected with the employed sentence by means of the descriptive conventions.

I use here the words 'sentence', 'statement' and 'proposition' in the most ordinary sense among logicians and philosophers of language. A *statement* is the use of a given *sentence* (a string of symbols belonging to a certain natural or formal language) in order to communicate or refer to a *proposition* (meaning, idea or concept). Of course, those definitions are disputable, and I will get back to them later, when I discuss the problem of truth bearers. As for Austin's theory, for me, it is important exactly for introducing pragmatic considerations. From an epistemological point of view, as I will discuss later, the problem is not correspondence proper, but the way correspondence is construed. If correspondence is taken in connection with language practice, as Austin does, it is a notion well suited for epistemological analyses, indeed.

In addition to these theories of truth, epistemologists and philosophers of science are also usually concerned with Tarski's semantic theory (1970 [1944], 1983a, and 1983b), and some of its interpretations as a correspondence theory, such as Popper's (1960; 1972) and Davidson's (1990). Tarski's paper "The Semantic Conception of Truth" (1970 [1944]) is a less technical, more intuitive presentation of the theory, whereas a formal, rigorous presentation is found in "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages" (1983a). In these two papers, Tarski is rather cautious as to possible applications of his theory to non-formalized languages and to epistemological problems. However, he seems more optimistic in this connection in "The Establishment of Scientific Semantics" (1983b). The question is very disputable, indeed, and notably Popper and Davidson famously argued that it is possible to use Tarski's methods in the field of an analysis of knowledge and of sentences belonging to ordinary language.

Let us call both the above-mentioned theories of truth and the so-called epistemic theories (such as the coherence theory and the pragmatist theory) *material* theories of truth. They are all directed to define truth and to point out what things can be taken as truth bearers. Certain theories propose also a criterion by means of which we can discern between true and false propositions, statements or sentences. These

are the most common truth bearers, i.e. the things supposed to be true or false.

In addition, there are also *methodological* theories of truth, say, such as Ramsey's (1931 [1927]), taken to be an elimination theory of truth. Likewise, as Davidson points out (2005a, essay 2), Quine's theory is also viewed as an elimination theory, even though Quine (1986, 1990) himself would like it to be inspired by Tarski's approach. According to such theories, truth is a methodological tool, i.e. something not connecting language with the world, as the issue is put by correspondence theories. Rather, truth is a problem concerning language proper (see Davidson 2005a, essays 2 and 5, for details).

In addition to the semantic approach adopted by such theories, there are also pragmatic approaches, such as Davidson's, which I referred to above. I'd like to comment on pragmatic approaches after I add a last brief remark on material theories of truth. The approach to be developed in this paper is not directly connected with the pragmatism of American philosophers such as Peirce, Dewey and James, even though it is connected with Davidson's stance, and Davidson begins his discussions on truth in his last book by an explicit reference to Dewey.

My pragmatic approach to truth, in its turn, is related to the pragmatic aspects of language (in addition to its syntactical and semantic aspects). I intend to deal with usage, i.e. our use of the notion of truth and other related notions, such as confirmation, accordance, compatibility, etc. The main difference between my pragmatic approach and material theories of truth, especially correspondence theories and Tarski's theory, is that they are concerned with the semantic problem of truth, i.e. the connection between a proposition or sentence, for example, and the fact that makes it true. In this case, what is in question is the content of speech, not the way we speak.

Of course, there is also some similarity between my approach and Quine's and Ramsey's and the theories I referred to as methodological theories. I intend to clarify this point later. However, there is still an important difference between the point of view adopted by Quine and Ramsey and mine. After all, elimination theorists maintain that we use the notion of truth as an indirect way of pointing to a fact or event in the world. In this connection, I agree with Davidson, according to

whom truth is not eliminable. According to elimination theories, if I say, for instance, “it’s *true* that the sky is blue,” I do not mean anything else but that *the sky is blue*.

Ramsey deals with truth in this way. Ramsey’s elimination theory is apparently more radical than Quine’s, but according to Quine, when I use the term ‘true’ in connection with a given sentence, I mean exactly the content of the sentence itself. In this case, our talk about speech is just a way of talking about things indirectly. We can use this methodological tool in accordance with our needs. According to Quine, Tarski’s theory give us the bases of such strategy, by means of which we can talk of things again, after the phenomenon Quine calls semantic ascension, i.e. to talk of language instead of talking of things. In the remainder of this paper, I argue that the notion of truth is indispensable, just as some related notions, especially the notion of accordance.

3. Truth Bearers

There is a lot to say about material theories of truth, of course, and important issues to discuss in this regard, but I will focus on just one of them – truth bearers. Each theory chooses something to be given the property of being true. Talking like that is certainly somewhat weird, but it is the case, since material theorists of truth say exactly that there are certain things to be called true or false. Russell, for one, maintains that propositions may be true or false. Austin, for another, does not discuss propositions but statements as to their truth. For Tarski, truth is a problem concerning sentences belonging to a formalized language; and Quine and Davidson talk about truth and falsehood of sentences of natural languages.

A rigorous distinction between propositions, statements and sentences might not currently be made but, in this case, it is necessary to do it. Apart from some disagreements I will not discuss here, there is a certain agreement that a *sentence* is a string of symbols belonging to a given language, which except for some anomalous cases ordinarily has a complete sense and that is therefore connected with a state of affairs, or a given event or fact, etc. For example, the sentence ‘the sky is

blue', inside the quotation marks, may be connected with and stand for an actual state of affairs, the fact that the sky is blue (without quotation marks).

However, it is possible that many sentences be connected with a given state of affairs, sentences belonging to the same language or to different languages. For instance, in addition to 'the sky is blue', the same state of affairs may be referred to by means of 'le ciel est bleu', belonging to French. In this case, the two sentences are said to have the same meaning, i.e. they both stand for the same *proposition*. This is why translations are possible, indeed. The proposition is supposed to be the meaning shared by different sentences. On the other hand, there are different tokens of the same string of symbols belonging to a given language. If I say once more "the sky is blue," I use the same sentence – i.e. the same string of symbols – in a new *statement*. A statement, in its turn, is an event where a sentence is used.

Therefore, discussing the truth of a proposition is different from discussing the truth of a sentence of a given language or the truth of a statement made. This is a further important difficulty when different theories of truth are compared. Some philosophers say then that each theory of truth deals with a quite different problem. Tarski argued like that to avoid some criticisms to his theory. This is why we could say that theories of truth are not to be treated in groups. However, if each one of them is examined in isolation, everything can be all right, except for some minor internal problems we can cope with more or less easily.

This is not the view I share. There are certain internal problems of each theory of truth I referred to above that seem to invite the collaboration with other theories. Let me then discuss briefly some points as to the truth of propositions, sentences, and statements. The question is how to define as clearly as possible each one of these truth bearers so as not to mix them up. If I discuss sentences, for instance, I am supposed not to get confused and not to deal finally with propositions or statements. The point I seek to make is that the mentioned theories of truth are not able to do so accordingly. I present my pragmatic approach as a means to cope with this difficulty, among others.

What exactly is a sentence belonging to a given language? The definition given above is currently acceptable in this field. I said that a

sentence is a string of symbols belonging to a given (natural or formalized) language. I mean the strings of symbols considered grammatical according to the rules of a certain language. 'The sky is blue' is an example of an English sentence, like 'the house is white' and 'the cat is on the mat'. In defining sentence like that, I use the notion of symbol. Apart from some divergences as to this point, the same authors that are willing to take for granted that definition of sentence are also willing to take for granted that a symbol is an object supposed to represent another one, i.e. an object that replaces another. For instance, the word 'house' plays this role for those who speak English as to the very physical object the word stands for. Perhaps, at this juncture, it is not worthless to remember that the connection between the symbol and the object it represents is just a convention made by those who speak the language; and this already suggests a pragmatic account.

The nature of symbols is not so clear, however. There is some controversy between those who maintain that a symbol is a *physical* object and others who deny it. For them a symbol cannot be merely a physical object supposed to replace another. According to this viewpoint, those who think of a symbol as a physical object miss the point importantly. Something very significant about our intuitions as to the nature of symbols seems to be lost in that kind of definition.

Nevertheless, in fact, a symbol is a physical object that replaces another. The question is that it is also necessary that somebody be conscious of such an event. There must be a certain mind conscious that a given physical object replaces another. However, in order to be recognized by us, a symbol must be a physical thing, i.e. something given to our senses, such as ink on paper, or chalk on the board, which can be seen, or some acoustic vibrations we can heard, and so on.

Those who deny such a *physical* definition of a symbol seem to bear in mind something similar to *an idea*, which is connected with that object that replaces another. However, the related idea stems from the role played by the speakers who speak a given language and make the conventions. In this case, what is at stake is not the symbol itself anymore, but the behavior of those who use it. This is a point I agree with both Austin and Davidson.

If a symbol is not to be identified with a physical object, then a sentence cannot be a class or collection of physical objects either.

However, a sentence is still a composition out of symbols, i.e. an arrangement of physical objects – marks of chalk on a board, or marks of ink on paper. A sentence is therefore a physical object, or, generally speaking, a physical event. A sentence must be something physical, if it is to be a means of communication. I do not mean cases where we recognize just the same patterns, such as Chinese characters for someone who does not know any Chinese; for in this case there is no communication. I mean cases where we recognize different tokens of the same sentence or cases where different sentences convey the same information. Here, again, if one is not willing to accept such a *physical* definition of a sentence, then one is not thinking of a sentence anymore, but of the idea associated to it. In this case, it is the meaning of the sentence that is at stake, i.e. the proposition referred to by the sentence.

In order to have an acceptable definition of truth, I think it is not necessary to go that far. Let us then get back and consider the possibility of taking a symbol as a physical object and a sentence as a physical object or event. However, the physical object before our eyes or that stimulates our ears is not a sentence belonging to a given language either. The sentence now written (or uttered) ‘the sky is blue’ is not exactly an English sentence, but an event where I use that sentence. It is rather a statement. This might be a good argument for the thesis that symbols and sentences are physical objects. It seems that, at this juncture, we are dealing with linguistic events, and not merely physical events. We are dealing with a certain arrangement of things, namely the kind of event referred to as a statement. A speaker uses a sentence in order to communicate with others. We deal here with speakers and the ideas they connect with symbols and sentences they use. However, again, we are outside the specific domain of sentences.

Likewise, I think that this same kind of difficulty arises when we start by examining statements or propositions; and we end up discussing sentences. But I am not going to discuss here these other possibilities in detail. Supposing that the above argument is sound, we cannot have independent definitions of sentence, proposition, and statement, so as to view one of them without any reference to the other notions.

Perhaps, this is not a problem related to the theories of truth, but rather to the theories of language, at least those ones available now.

Anyway, this difficulty is present in the semantic approach to truth. In the next section, I will argue that there is no comparable difficulty in the pragmatic approach I adopt.

4. Truth as Accordance

Why is a pragmatic approach protected from the problem of truth bearers I discussed above? In the first place, because by adopting a pragmatic approach we refrain from defining truth. Therefore, from a pragmatic point of view, it is not necessary to point out something capable of being true or false, strictly speaking. Rather, by adopting a pragmatic approach we try to study the way we currently use certain terms such as 'true', 'correct', 'coherent', 'appropriate', etc. in certain contexts, for instance, contexts of scientific investigation. I will call such terms *accordance terms*.

Suppose a given scientist say "my hypothesis is true," or "my hypothesis was correct," or "I confirmed my hypothesis," or simply "I was right." He is just saying that there is a sort of agreement or accordance between two different parts or elements of a setting. One of them is the scientist's hypothesis itself; the other one is certain experimental or observational data, for instance. The issue we are dealing with in this case is the scientist's linguistic behavior and his behavior during the investigative work to be done. Thus, it is necessary to account for the scientist's actions, including his action of pointing out agreements, as when he reports that there is an agreement between two parts, such as his hypothesis and certain data.

An example of the sort of action I am talking about is the act of *verifying* hypotheses or theories. In such circumstances, the notion of truth is to be used, indeed. In addition, if we identify theories with classes of propositions, we can say also that propositions can be true or false. However, there are other possibilities of interpreting theories, and so truth and falsehood can be predicated of other things, such as statements, sentences, models, and so on.

In addition, from a pragmatic point of view, we can say also that there is no strict difference between *verifying* and *confirming* hypotheses or theories, even though some philosophers of science, like Popper and

the logical positivists, emphasize the difference between the two procedures. The technical details are not so important in this connection, and I will not examine them here. Even if, being motivated by some epistemological theories and an analysis of induction, we consider that a methodological difference between verifying and confirming hypotheses is important, in all cases we are pointing out a kind of agreement. Thus, from a pragmatic point of view, accordance and verification come first, and truth comes later, in a certain sense.

Let me explain this point more accurately. From a pragmatic point of view, we can say that truth is something related to inquiry in the first place, not a property of truth bearers, such as theories, propositions, sentences and statements. Inquiries are, in their turn, events or series of actions accomplished by an investigator. During an investigation, the notion of truth is an indispensable tool, i.e. a means to accomplish certain tasks. I do not mean truth ideally or abstractly. By truth as an instrument of investigation I mean the very terms like 'true', 'false', 'correct', 'incorrect', etc. – i.e. *accordance terms* – used by the investigator at some juncture, exactly where certain things are connected and their agreement or disagreement is pointed out. I am talking about linguistic tools necessary to accomplish a task, namely the action of telling that *there is accordance between certain parts*, for instance, a theory and certain data.

In order to know what is the role *accordance terms* play in inquiry, it is therefore necessary to analyze the development of a given investigation. Of course, in this case, inquiry is not to be defined as *the search for truth*. Rather, it is necessary to account independently for some ordinary sorts of inquiry, such as scientific, forensic or journalistic investigations, in addition to the way we currently investigate ordinary issues.

It is quite clear that it is the investigator who sets up the aim of his investigation. This anticipates the moment an agreement will be in order. Consider a scientist at work in his research program. The most obvious examples in this connection are the search for an unobservable entity, or trying to determine the value of a constant, or to disclose a fact that is supposed to confirm a hypothesis, and so on. In order to accomplish these tasks, a number of *anticipations* are in order, which stem from an accepted theory, even if it is provisionally ac-

cepted, because it is suggested by a number of previous observations and experiments.

The anticipations referred to above are made by means of the theoretical and experimental resources the investigator is given by a research program. In this case, a hypothesis is raised based on a number of theoretical, observational and experimental data, taken for granted in order to try some strategies for testing the hypothesis itself. New experiments and observations are then necessary, in addition to possible improvements in theory. Eventually, the scientist notices that there is some agreement (or disagreement) between his hypothesis and the obtained data. This is where the scientist must have at his disposal a methodological and linguistic tool to accomplish the task, i.e. to point out that agreement. This is where accordance terms such as 'true' and 'correct', or its opposites 'false' and 'incorrect', come to stage.

Forensic and journalistic investigations exhibit the same pattern. The notion of truth is useful not only to investigate, but also to find out that a given suspect is guilty (or not guilty), and responsible or not for something. Truth is necessary also to connect evidence with verdict. Even though philosophers have always given us an intellectualized, non-practical image of scientific investigation and truth, as regards forensic investigation we adopt a practical stance. It is also a pragmatic stance, in the sense referred to above. Consequently, to say "it is true that Mr. X is guilty," seems much clearer than to say "it is true what scientific theory Y says." I think that we have a lot to learn from truth as to the *sentence* – the *verdict* – pronounced by a judge about Mr. X in order to understand truth as to the sentence about scientific theory Y – pronounced by a scientist or a philosopher.

5. Rehabilitating the Truth Bearers

As other truth theorists, let me revert to Aristotle's ever repeated dictum: *To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true.*

I agree with Davidson (2005a, pp. 21ff) that Aristotle's formulation is superior to others, including Tarski's. Davidson argues that

Aristotle's formulation is not to be necessarily construed as related to a correspondence conception of truth; and I agree with Davidson in this connection as well. Aristotle's formulation is so general that it expresses nothing but the idea of an agreement or an accord between different parts. This is not Davidson's conclusion, but mine. Thus Aristotle's dictum supports also a pragmatic interpretation, similar to the one I argue for here.

The pragmatic bias in Aristotle's dictum is made clear by the use of a verbal – as opposed to a nominal – formulation. Instead of saying, for instance, “*truth* is an agreement between what we say about a certain thing and that thing itself,” which would be a sort of definition of ‘truth’ (the noun) compatible with Aristotle's view, his dictum just says that “...*to say* of what is that it is, ... *is true*.” But what exactly *is true* in this case? Now, it is clear that it is *to say* that something is in agreement with something else that *is true*. Apparently, it is the action of saying something in order to report a certain agreement between certain parts that can be said to be true (or false).

It is, however, disputable whether truth can be predicated of actions, and it is somewhat misleading to say that a certain action is true. This consequence of my analysis of Aristotle's dictum seems to be counter-intuitive and rather unlikely in the same way as the definitions of proposition, sentence and statement I discussed above. In addition, it could be argued that *the action of saying something* might be a *speech act*, as discussed in the related literature, or just a *statement*, to revert specifically to one of those notions discussed earlier. Thus, it could be argued that, according to my analysis, Aristotle's dictum is concerned with truth as a property of statements. In this case, it wouldn't be so general as Davidson and I argue it is. It would just be a correspondence theory of sorts, merely anticipating Austin's theory.

From my pragmatic point of view, as I will argue below, it can also be said that statements are true, indeed. But I am not arguing that Aristotle gave us a theory of the truth of statements. I am just saying that Aristotle's dictum call our attention to the pragmatic aspect of our use of truth predicates, such as ‘true’ and ‘false’. And this is why we can say that such dictum can also be taken as expressing the idea that truth is a feature related to the action of reporting agreements in the first place. But truth can be pragmatically extended to certain

truth bearers as well.

Thus, we can also rehabilitate the above-mentioned truth bearers, among others; and we can say that statements, sentences, propositions, hypotheses, theories, models, and so on, are true (or false) as well. Pragmatically, all of them are true (or false) by courtesy of the investigation where they occur, and where an agreement has been reported between them and other parts. In the context of a scientific investigation where a certain theory is under test, for instance, we can say that such a theory is true. It is true if there is an agreement reported between it and certain data.

Of course, it is easier to say, from this point of view, that a certain theory is true than to say that certain sentences or propositions are true. For, in this case, we have first to construe a theory as a class of sentences or propositions or models or whatever. I think that theories of truth referred to above, such as Russell's, Austin's and Tarski's, can help us in this connection. It is where all of them show their value. Each one of these theories deals with a truth bearer in a specific context. Russell's theory is probably the most complicated case, because of its metaphysical vein; but Tarski's and Austin's theories are much easily understandable in this connection.

Let us take Tarski's approach, which is explicitly designed to deal with the problem of how to say that a given sentence – of a certain formalized language obeying the formal constraints imposed by the theory – is true. No matter how difficult it is to define 'sentence' independently of other, related notions, such as proposition and statement, as I discussed above, Tarski's theory gives us an acceptable solution to that problem. In the context of dealing with formalized languages, supposing we know what a sentence is, or taking for granted that the investigators in that domain do know what a sentence is, we can say that sentences can be said to be true or false.

From a pragmatic point of view, it is not so important whether truth can be defined this or that way. It is, however, fundamental to point out the conditions under which a certain sentence can be declared true. It is well known that from Tarski's own point of view, this is the important work to do, and it is the reason of its success, even though a general definition of truth might be inferred from this account. As I said above, a general definition of truth could also be in-

ferred from Aristotle's dictum, but this is not what matters the most.

In Austin's case, given the pragmatic concepts he proposes in order to deal with speech acts and statements, we can say also that we are given a theory that clearly states the conditions under which a statement can be declared true or false. And given the metaphysical presuppositions of Russell's theory, we can say that his theory gives us the conditions under which a proposition can be declared true or false.

A problem remains, however, which is the possibility of bringing such different theories to unity. But this is a problem to be dealt with by those who are convinced that it is obligatory to have a unified theory – and definition – of truth. Of course, from a pragmatic point of view, no adherence to a principle of unity of truth is necessary.

If my arguments in this section are acceptable, then the most common truth bearers – such as statements, sentences and propositions – cannot be fully rehabilitated, for no necessary connection between the related theories of the truth of statements, sentences and propositions is in view; and no unification theory of truth is in order, either. But such truth bearers are pragmatically rehabilitated, by courtesy of our notion of truth as accordance, in the specific contexts of investigation where they all can be coherently used.

6. Concluding Remarks

A pragmatic approach – and I daresay *practical* approach – to truth seems to give us an increasingly less complicated, more profitable way to understand the connection between knowledge and truth than traditional theories of truth gave us by adopting a semantic stance. My approach is pragmatic because it is concerned with the usage of accordance terms in the first place. In addition, from this point of view, truth is essential to construct scientific theories and human knowledge in general, and to develop any kind of inquiry.

This approach is also practical, since it is based on an examination of our practice of investigating within the field of a number of normalized and improved investigative activities, such as scientific and forensic investigation, but also in ordinary cases of investigating something, whatever it is. Traditional theories of truth are well adapted to deal

with the logical and metaphysical aspects of language, but they are rather deceitful as to the epistemological aspects of our use of language. Human knowledge is primarily a class of inquiries by humans, or the products of such inquiries. Thus, in order to achieve a deep understanding of truth as to human knowledge, it is necessary to account for truth first in connection with inquiry.¹

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Keywords

Truth, truth bearers, theories of truth, pragmatics of truth.

Department of Philosophy
Federal University of Santa Catarina
C.P. 5176, Florianópolis
SC, Brazil, 88040-970.
lh Dutra@cfh.ufsc.br

Resumo

Este artigo propõe uma concepção alternativa da relação entre conhecimento e verdade. A verdade é tradicionalmente vista como uma noção semântica, isto é, uma relação entre o que dizemos do mundo e o próprio mundo. Os epistemólogos e filósofos da ciência tendem, pois, a recorrer a teorias da verdade como correspondência para lidar com a questão se nossas teorias e crenças são verdadeiras. As teorias da verdade como correspondência procuram definir a verdade, mas, para fazer isso, elas devem escolher um portador de verdade, isto é, algo que possa ser verdadeiro, por exemplo, proposições, sentenças ou enunciados. De acordo com a análise aqui proposta, nenhum desses portadores de verdade pode ser definido sem referência aos outros. A concepção pragmática e alternativa aqui apresentada, por sua vez, não é afetada por esse tipo de dificuldade conceitual. De acordo com essa concepção, devemos nos concentrar no uso dos termos veritativos – como ‘verdadeiro’, ‘falso’, ‘correto’, ‘apropriado’, etc. – e no papel metodológico que tais termos desempenham nas práticas investigativas em programas de pesquisa encontrados tanto nas ciências quanto em outras atividades investigativas do dia-a-dia, como as investigações policiais e jornalísticas.

Palavras-chave

Verdade, portadores de verdade, teorias da verdade, pragmática da verdade.

Notes

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