

Truth matters: Normativity in thought and knowledge¹

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ABSTRACT. If language and thought are to be taken as objective, they must respond to how the world is. I propose to explain this responsiveness in terms of conditions of correction, more precisely, by taking thoughts and linguistic utterances to be assessible as true or false. Furthermore, the paper is committed to a form of quietism according to which the very same thing that can be (truly) thought or expressed is the case: 'soft facts' as opposed to hard, free-standing facts, independent of any possible rational activity of grasping them.

Keywords: normativity, thoughts, truth, rule-following, quietism, facts.

1. Introduction

Stanley Cavell, with characteristic elegance, argued that Kant's rejection of psychologism in the theory of knowledge and Frege's rejection of psychologism in logic was followed by Wittgenstein's rejection of psychologism in psychology. After Wittgenstein, not only it is open to suspicion to propose a reduction of the justification of knowledge or of deductive processes to psychological, causal, mechanisms; the reducibility of psychological processes to psychological *mechanisms* is also put into question. The opposition to these varieties of psychologism has a common starting point: the project of accounting for the normative aspect of knowledge, logic, thought and language.

In this essay I will focus on the normative character of thought and knowledge (a normativity that I will take for granted), and I will relate it to the intrinsic evaluability in terms of truth or falsity that the contents of our judgements and the meanings of our utterances share: the purpose of this paper will be to link normativity to a conception of truth as a value (or, in a less extreme version, to the idea that being true is positively evaluable). Our thoughts about the world and the concepts that make them out are themselves norms; not norms that individual thinkers impose to the world, neither norms that merely reduce to the acceptance of the language community to which the thinker belongs, but norms that are at least partially dependent on how the world is. By defending the idea that concepts are both features of thoughts and features of the world, the normative/factive split loses some of its attraction. Furthermore, norms cease to be psychological projections onto the world.

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This will have another desirable effect: to silence a variety of sceptical doubts with respect to our entitlement to speak about meaning, mental content or epistemic justification. The sceptic can set two kinds of problems. On the one hand, he can ask how we know that our thoughts are in touch with the world. In its more traditional form, the sceptical question can be phrased like this: “how can you be certain that the objects and persons which your beliefs are about actually exist?” On the other hand, a more modest sceptic can question the certainty of any one of our beliefs. After conceding that there is a world populated by objects and persons, he will ask “how do you know that a is F ?”

Our answer to the first (global) sceptic starts by pointing out that scepticism is not entitled to pose questions from nowhere, that is, that it needs a ground, a set of assumptions, from which to challenge our world-view. Doubt, not less than belief, requires justification.² Answers to this form of scepticism have, in the last twenty years, synthesized around the notion of normativity or normativeness. Several authors, inspired by Kripke’s controversial interpretation of Wittgenstein (and, more often than not, clearly opposing his conclusions) have united under the idea of normativity the properties which arguably make impossible any form of causal theory of meaning and content. A discussion about the correct interpretation of Wittgenstein’s considerations about rule following is the ideal place to test, not only our ideas about normativity, but also about realism. After this discussion I will oppose attempts, such as Paul Horwich’s, to separate intrinsic normativity from normative import and their complementary argument that the search for truth can be fully accountable as a mere instrumental strategy for the satisfaction of desires.

Finally, and to avoid that an evaluative reading of truth, meaning and content may be understood as relegating them to a secondary, non factive, level, I will defend that correct predications of truth identify truth-bearer with truth-maker: a true thought (content, meaning, proposition) is a fact. This position has been called ‘identity theory of truth’. I prefer to speak about an identity *thesis* about truth, as I believe such a thesis is neutral with respect to the variety of logico-semantic theories concerning the role of “is true”, even if it tells against correspondentist and coherentist conceptions. Holding an identity thesis forces one to explain what sorts of entities facts are if they must be, simultaneously, thinkable, expressible and the case. I will briefly appeal to the notion of ‘soft facts’ to answer some of these questions. By doing so, I will have to answer a worry concerning the compatibility of taking truth to be a value, of endorsing an iden-

² The local sceptic accepts that doubts require justification, but finds himself entitled to challenge any given specific belief. I won’t take issue with this sort of scepticism: I think that accepting the fallible nature of our knowledge is commendable and that there are promising lines of argument to reduce the anxiety we may feel in the face of these sorts of doubts. I sympathize with the part of the Davidsonian project that claims that the only way to make sense of something as a system of beliefs is by appeal to a public world common to the believer and the interpreter (in this case, the challenger) which works as the tribunal for the adequacy of such a system. A radically misguided world-view or system of beliefs is uninterpretable and, hence, not a world-view at all. If beliefs cannot be ascribed in isolation but only within a network, it is safe to assume that any belief is more likely to be true than false if it is properly justified within the system in which it belongs.

tivity thesis about truth and of accepting a “quietist” reading of Wittgenstein’s philosophy. If truth is the value of thoughts and propositional contents in general, and we value a content as true if it is the case, it could seem that we are offering an account of thoughts in terms of something else, namely facts. This would be too constructive a move to fit well with the quietism defended in section II. However, no such a reduction is in view if facts themselves are seen as conceptually articulated. Neither facts are accounted for in terms of thoughts, nor thoughts in terms of facts. Rather, the identity thesis highlights the mutual dependence of both.

2. *Rule-following*

A certain way of understanding Kant’s formulation of the categorical imperative is in line with much recent defence of particularism in ethics: if one must act in such a way as to be committed to the maxims that can be inferred from our actions, then the emphasis would be not in general rules or principles that guide our actions but rather on the actions themselves. The principles have derived normativity, at least insofar as we consider the unfolding of our practical life. A virtuous person, to use a very unKantian term, is not a person of principles, but a person attuned to the practical demands of particular situations, a person able to perceive, so to speak, what line of action would be correct in the given circumstances. An alternative, generalist, approach would have it that the virtuous person is one capable of entertaining the correct general rules for action and to deduce from them what must be done in particular occasions. However, the promise of adopting this strategy to explain ethical deliberation seems to be cut down by something like Kripke’s reading of Wittgenstein’s remarks about rule-following. To infer general norms from a particular token of behaviour is in danger of an infinite regress: an indefinite number of rules can be proposed to account for any given action. More precisely, any rule can be so reinterpreted as to fit with the action (in fact, with any finite series of actions).

Kripke centres on mathematical rules. This is doubly apt: on the one hand we tend to think of mathematical rules as especially independent of our mathematical practices. Our thinking about mathematics is prone to the Platonist temptation of imagining that they deal with eternal, unchangeable, objects. On the other hand, and as a consequence of that, we have clear ideas as to what is the correct way to proceed in doing mathematics: anyone trained in mathematics would surely agree about the outcome of most mathematical problems involving, say, addition of natural numbers. However, not even in such clear cut cases are we entitled to claim correctness. Kripke insists: any rule can be made to fit any actual (i.e., finite) pattern of addition. Because the question is not one about what I will, in fact, say if I am asked to add 7 and 5, but about what I *should* say. A “should” like that cannot be grounded either on finite practices or on universal rules: the former underdetermine the action, the latter can always be reinterpreted and no final interpretation is accessible to us. Hence, Kripke concludes, the most we can hope for is the support of our peers. “Should” is to be accounted for in terms of communal agreement: we cannot answer the sceptic, who

demands not just a distinction between it seems right to me and it is right, but also between it seems right to us and it is right.

All this would make Kant very unhappy. He oscillates between the particularism outlined above and a noumenally based generalism and both seem to be undermined by Kripke's considerations. Our ethics, but also the very possibility of thinking about the world, is precluded if we are convinced by Kripke. This is so because the deployment of concepts in our thoughts about the world must be understood in terms of commitments to norms of correct use, on pains of falling back on a mere 'causalist', dispositionalist conception of thought, one where there is no way to answer the "should" question in terms other than "is". It is not just scepticism that lurks here. The very idea of having thought, of being directed to the world, seems in danger. We are cut off from the world since there is no way to have our concepts resonating normatively to how things are. "How things are" cannot be verification independent. The world is, as it were, as our community agrees that it is (and a person is virtuous if her actions accord the publicly sanctioned rules). But this is giving up the idea of a world and giving up the idea of virtue.

The sections following the present incursion on Wittgensteinian exegesis and closing this essay try to develop the idea that meaning (content) and truth are unavoidably normative and also that their normativity is interrelated. Being more precise: *understanding* of meaning, possession of content, should be responsive to its evaluation as correct or incorrect (the response being reassertion or retraction). An important part of the discussion of such normativity takes as its starting point Wittgenstein's ideas about rule-following such as they appear in paragraphs §§ 185-242 of his *Philosophical Investigations*. As the topic is well known, I will be brief. My aim is not so much to be faithful to the variety of positions but to offer a bird-eye view of the possible options. Here is Kripke introducing the debate: "Suppose I do mean addition by '+'. What is the relation of this supposition to the question how I will respond to the problem '68 + 57'? The dispositionalist [*or, in general, the naturalist*] gives a *descriptive* account of this relation: if '+' means addition, then I will answer '125'. But this is not the proper account of the relation, which is *normative*, not descriptive. The point is *not* that, if I meant addition by '+', I *will* answer '125', but that, if I intend to accord with my past meaning of '+', I *should* answer '125'" (Kripke 1982, p. 37). What would constitute a normative explanation of such a relation? What conditions must be fulfilled in order to be entitled to say that someone is following a rule? What kind of obligation characterizes the correct obedience to a norm, the adequate use of a word, a true judgement? Five lines of response have been given to these questions:

1. When we speak of the normative character of a rule we are actually referring to a series of mechanisms that compel the alleged subject to follow it (naturalist).
2. Such conditions cannot be fulfilled and, hence, any talk of obligation is misplaced (sceptical). There is no guarantee that in following a rule I am respecting my past understanding of the rule. This is so because any 'understanding' of a rule can be reinterpreted in such a way that any action could agree with it and any action could be in disagreement. There is only the

community to appeal to in order to give sense to the idea of a rule being correctly followed. But, alas, the problem reproduces in the case of the community. Therefore, Wittgenstein offers us a sceptical paradox to which he gives a sceptical solution. This is, *grosso modo*, Kripke's proposal.

3. There is only room to speak about rule-following when the subject belongs to a community which can approve or assent to the behaviour; the meaning and extension of concepts is gradually constructed by their use (communitarianist/ constructivist). Crispin Wright could be seen as a proponent of this strategy if it were not unfair to ascribe to him such a simplistic version of it.
4. The capacity to follow rules is to be understood in terms of the subject's grasp of free-standing principles, i.e., principles that are prior and independent of actual practices of rule-following (Platonist).
5. The normative character of rules (and, in particular, of words and concepts) is unanalysable. Each instance of a rule-following practice has the same regulating character as the abstract formulation of the rule (quietist/pragmatist).

The naturalist option, by refusing to incorporate a prescriptive element in the evaluation of practices, gives up on normativity altogether and leaves the doors wide open for scepticism. The communitarianist option, as Kripke himself points out, only manages to transfer the problem from the individual to the community, leaving the questions without answers (and, ultimately, not silencing the sceptic either). I will come back to these. The Platonist answer cannot be an interpretation of Wittgenstein being as it is one of the main targets against which Wittgenstein's discussion is directed.³ According to the Platonist, the correct use of a concept, the correct grasping of a meaning amounts to adapting oneself to an extension determined previously to its acquisition and use. It is one of the central theses of the quietist/pragmatist answer that the Platonic option shares with the others the idea that the correctness of an action and the conditions that make it correct can be characterized independently of one another, as if the first were a train perfectly fitting some tracks set up in advance, to use Wittgenstein's image. The sceptical paradox is only apparent; in fact, paragraph § 201 (the starting point used by Kripke to develop the paradox) rejects the existence of such a paradox. Rather, what Wittgenstein does is to place us facing a dilemma, one of horns of which is the paradox and the other Platonism; Kripke attaches too much importance to Wittgenstein's arguments against the Platonist horn, the communitarianist answer avoids them both by making correctness dependent upon the ratification of the community. However, both interpretations leave aside Wittgenstein's emphasis on the need to avoid the regress of interpretations: understanding a rule is not the same as interpreting it. Each act which manages to follow a rule correctly is, at least, as normatively fundamental as the rule itself. One understands a rule by making use of it and using a rule is not interpreting it (if this was so, believing that one is following a rule—or receiving the approval of the community— would be the same as following

³ Wittgenstein 1953, § 218.

it, what would open the way for a private following of rules —or for a contractualist relativism without underlying normativity). The quietist option avoids commitment to any of the horns by pointing out that the dichotomy is only apparent and that fidelity to Wittgenstein involves philosophical unmasking of dichotomies and opposition to any form of constructive theory of meaning. This is not negating that there is meaning or content but negating that they can be reduced or explained in terms of something else. Sections III to VI of this essay try to articulate a way of organizing these ideas.

The sceptical and quietist readings are freely based on Kripke 1982 and McDowell 1984 respectively. An interesting comparison of both readings (and also of the communitarianist or constructivist one offered by Wright) with a clear bias towards the second, can be found in Thornton 1998.

More recently, McDowell has made explicit some important consequences of his quietist reading of Wittgenstein in the context of what he has called ‘second nature naturalism’, that is, a minimal naturalism which does not depend on the natural sciences for its definition. McDowell uses an analogy from Aristotle’s ethics to explain his conception of the relation between the two logical spaces, that of reasons and that of laws. The epistemological worries do not touch Aristotle, and that is why, in his conception, the idea that the features of ethics are real is not a result of defending the idea that ethical facts can be studied independently of people’s participation in ethical life. This is so, because for Aristotle nature cannot be identified with the realm of law:

To focus the way this conception can serve as a model for us, consider the notion of second nature. (...) Second nature could not float free of potentialities that belong to a normal human organism. This gives human reason enough of a foothold in the realm of law to satisfy any proper respect for modern natural science. (...) [W]e arrive at the notion of having one’s eyes opened to reasons at large by acquiring a second nature (McDowell 1994, p. 84). [Ortega y Gasset expressed this idea by insisting that culture is merely a special direction we give to the cultivation of our animal potencies.]

The notion of second nature allows us to keep nature partially “enchanted” without returning to pre-scientific superstition. According to McDowell, Kant gets very close to this conclusion. However, given that he does not contemplate second nature naturalism, he has no option but to place the connections between intuitions and concepts outside nature, in the framework that distinguishes between the phenomenal and the noumenal. McDowell also calls his naturalism of second nature, “naturalized Platonism”. It is Platonism because it confers certain autonomy to the sphere of reason, but it is naturalized in that this space is not in isolation from anything “merely” human, as in “rampant Platonism”.

McDowell explains how rampant Platonism can be said to be the object of Wittgenstein’s criticism and naturalized Platonism the alternative picture at which he is driving. This is a very different reading of Wittgenstein’s to that offered by Kripke (see Kripke 1982). In the reading that McDowell rejects we cannot speak of subjects having their eyes open to the requirements of reason, unless these requirements can be reconstructed out of independent facts, namely in terms of social interactions: we cannot see meaning and understanding as autonomous. A consequence of the idea that any independence of meaning is rampant Platonism is that “how things are (...)”

cannot be independent of the community's ratifying the judgement that things are thus and so" (*ibid.*, p. 93). According to McDowell, this reading contradicts Wittgenstein's "quietism", his rejection of any constructive ambition. McDowell agrees that this discussion presupposes a deeper type of dualism, between nature and norm, but claims that, while Kripke's Wittgenstein tries to reconstruct one side of the dualism from the terms of the other, his own proposal of a naturalism of second nature is more Wittgensteinian in that it is not constructive philosophy: it does not claim that meaning is constructed socially but rather that

[h]uman life, our natural way of being, is already shaped by meaning. We need not connect this natural history to nature as the realm of law any more tightly than by simply affirming our right to the notion of second nature. [*and, earlier on the same page*] This leaves no genuine questions about norms, apart from those that we address in reflective thinking about specific norms, an activity that is not particularly philosophical (*ibid.*, p. 95).

3. *The value of truth*

The idea that meaning and mental content are normative is the idea that a theory of meaning and content is forced to give an account of facts like the following: if a subject S believes that p and that $p \rightarrow q$, S ought to think that q or, if S says that p and that $p \rightarrow q$, S ought to answer yes to the question q ? This is not the most common way to understand the task of a theory of content. Within the functionalist tradition in the philosophy of mind, a theory of content is thought to be a search for causal (dispositional, teleological) conditions to explain why someone who thinks that $p \rightarrow q$, and wants that q , will do p . In other words, the aim of naturalist theories of content is to give an account of the relationship between mental states, perceptual episodes and behavioural *output* in plainly factive terms. The naturalist looks for the *laws* of thought; an evaluative theory of content looks for *norms*. The question to ask to the defender of such a project is whether the logic of factive relations can account for the normativity of mentality and language. A nomological story finds itself in difficulties doing justice to the intuition that to have this or that belief or to say this or that thing, can be *correct*. The key to these difficulties is the very concept of truth, essential for the defence of any explanatory project, of any theory.

A conception of truth that does not incorporate its evaluative character opens the door to scepticism. On the other hand, an account of truth which merely points out that truth is an unanalysable value could lead to a fatal separation of the rational and normative sphere from the factive and nomological one. The proposal I make to avoid such a desperate dualism is to claim that the predicate "is true" calls our attention towards a very special form of correspondence: identity. According to this proposal truth bearers are identical to truth makers. In other words, a proposition is true when it is the case. The identity thesis, like the evaluative theory of truth, is not self-sufficient. If the facts identical to true propositions do not include normative facts, it is difficult to see how to avoid a different fatal result, Bradley's predicament: we say about something that it is true if it is the case, but we cannot reach that which is the case and, hence, truth is unreachable. But, if the impossibility to reach facts is the in-

superable hiatus between the normative and the factive, the dichotomy could be diluted by simply making manifest that facts rest on a conceptual and, hence, normative mattress. This gambit is traditionally related to moral realism, and a non-Platonist form of it is needed to properly understand the role of content and meaning.⁴

Both elements of my proposal about truth, value and identity, have been defended by other authors. Both Michael Morris and Michael Luntley have recently offered a theory of truth as value, the latter using the Prussian name ‘disciplinary theory of truth’. On the other hand, and also recently, Jennifer Hornsby and Julian Dodd have argued for an identity theory of truth. Of course, the roots of both proposals can be found much earlier. The idea that truth is a value has its origin in Plato’s philosophy and a broad repercussion on the medieval discussion about the True, the Good and the Beautiful. The most direct way to dispense with the capital letters from these concepts is to highlight that, in the same way as beautiful is predicated of objects and good of actions, true is predicated of propositions, identifying them, in that case, with facts. This is what the identity thesis about truth does, a thesis that also has historical predecessors such as Hegel, Bradley, Frege or early Heidegger. I am not aware of any attempt at joining both theories but it is worth noting that both Luntley and Hornsby draw inspiration for their respective defence of value and identity in an account of truth from the philosophy of John McDowell.

What is the relation between truth and content? Why is the notion of truth so central for content? The two authors who explicitly defend an evaluative theory of truth, Morris and Luntley, coincide on their diagnosis. Whatever a state with content might be, it must be a state subject to evaluation (for instance, evaluated as true or false in the case of cognitive states). But, to think of something as true or correct is motivation enough to believe it: one *ought to* believe those things which one takes to be true. Knowing of a proposition that it is true is all the justification needed to believe it (of course, this also applies to cases where the proposition known to be true is not fully understood, as in deferential uses; in cases where the proposition is understood, to say that knowing that it is true is motivation enough to believe it is trivial). Knowing what

⁴ The deep link between moral realism and a defence of the normative character of truth is explicit in Michael Morris’s evaluative theory of truth, which I will presently review, and in McDowell’s discussion of rule-following. Morris’s worry is that, if the normativity of truth and content is not complemented by a rejection of the dualism fact/value, “ought”/“is”, ascriptions of truth and content may be relegated to mere convention. McDowell also starts off by rejecting the Humean dualism of reason and passion and the non-cognitivist conception of morality according to which the motivation to behave correctly comes from two separate factors, one cognitive, the other volitive. The non-cognitivist, like the communitarianist about rule-following, demands that we are capable of recognizing instances of, say, kind actions from a perspective which does not assume familiarity with the evaluative concept “kind”, that is, from a perspective external to the practice of evaluating actions as kind or unkind. Once that this sort of demand stops putting pressure on us it is possible to cease searching for a solid and external foundation for our evaluations. This search leads to Platonism, scepticism, naturalism or communitarianism, all of them examples of constructive philosophy which aim at explaining norms in terms of something else.

a statement means determines the circumstances where it would be correct or incorrect to use it.⁵

Luntley's argument for a disciplinary conception of truth can be summarized as follows. There are contentful states and events, including speech acts and mental states. Contentful states (at least judgements, beliefs and other cognitive states), no matter what their other characteristics are, are essentially correct or incorrect, true or false: "The very idea of content ascription involves then a notion of rational systematicity of content that underwrites the idea that contents are the sorts of things that can be incorrect" (Luntley 1996, p. 70). It is possible to ascribe contents because it is possible to assume that anyone who makes meaningful statements or possesses contentful mental states is rational, i.e., *ought to* be ready to modify the content of her mental states or retract her statements if she was shown that they are incorrect, false or inconsistent with other contents or assertions of hers. This is why, according to Luntley, the truth or falsity of content must depend on something exterior to the mere use of the faculty of judging: "It is the idea of our judgements being disciplined by something independent of will" (*ibid.*, p. 72). However, there are proposals to explain this discipline external to our will which do not appeal to states of the world but rather to the intersubjective agreement of the linguistic community to which the subject belongs. I have suggested before, while discussing rule-following, that the normativity needed for something to count as "a rule being *correctly* followed" cannot derive from the consensus of the community, from a kind of contract between them. Luntley agrees on this point: the community can account for the systematic character of content attribution (that is, it can account for the fact that someone who judged that *p* and *q* would be committed, obliged, to judge that *p*) but not for the fact that those contents must respond to how the world is. The appeal to community consensus translates the problem from the individual to the group: the world ceases to be the shadow of the subject's thought to become the shadow of intersubjective agreement. We need something that is not only independent of the subject's will but also independent of the community's will.⁶

⁵ There is an obvious objection waiting for us here. It is not sufficient that a proposition be true to believe it, because it may be completely uninteresting to us: nobody can be blamed for refusing to have beliefs, no matter how truthful, about, say, the average level of lactose in Armstrong's blood during the last Tour of France. Parallel to this, the truth of a proposition is not sufficient to express it: it may be irrelevant or, even worse, the consequences of making it public may be dreadful (and, hence, the obligation to keep silent overcomes the obligation to tell the truth). The easiest way to avoid this objection is to place value not in believing or giving expression to everything which is true, but rather in demanding that everything which is believed or expressed be true (besides being relevant, discrete, etc.). By making truth a necessary but not sufficient value for something to be thought or expressed we can avoid, not only the "fact-sucker" conception rejected in this footnote, but also the possibility of considering valuable to say the truth even if it is irrelevant or, worse, used to lie (for instance, answering the question "Who killed grandma?" with "Either I did or the butler did"). Thanks to Michael Morris and Tobies Grimaltos for calling my attention to these issues.

⁶ A contractualist proposal must explain in virtue of what the need to distinguish between "it is correct" and "it seems correct to me" in order to be entitled to talk about correction (as Wittgenstein points

But it would be to fall back into the Platonist horn to expect that we could establish what the world is like independently of our theory of meaning. Luntley summarizes such mutual dependence with two slogans: “semantics exhausts ontology” and “ontology disciplines semantics”. The second slogan, which underlines the idea that the very notion of semantic error involves the subject’s obligation to retract a content in virtue of how things are, points towards a radically externalist individuation of contents. Thus, it is possible to explain the relationship between the normative character of truth and the essential link between semantics and ontology by using an identity thesis about truth.

4. *Intrinsic normativity vs. Normative import*

Any defence of the interdependence between content and truth-value which serves as a premise in the argument for the normativity of truth and meaning must answer the following objection: let’s accept that language and thought are normative and that they are so in virtue of the impact that truth and meaning have in our understanding of them. From that it does not follow that truth and meaning are intrinsically normative; it only follows that they have normative consequences, normative import, for language and thought. This dichotomy allows for a non-normative analysis of truth and meaning. This kind of criticism has been labelled by Paul Horwich, who defends a minimalist conception of truth and an analysis of meaning in terms of use, more precisely, in terms of *regularities* of use. In “Norms of Language” (chapter 8 of his book *Meaning* [1998]) he offers some examples of concepts which can be naturalistically analysed without questioning their normative import. His examples, I believe, are slightly tendentious. Even though killing is *prima facie* wrong, explains Horwich, it does not follow that a purely dispositional and non-normative account of “*x* kills *y*” cannot be offered (likewise, from the fact that “the kid ought to take his umbrella” does not follow that “*x* takes his umbrella” cannot be explained non-normatively). It could be objected that killing *y* is *not prima facie* wrong (imagine that *x* opens the window and the Sun’s reflection blinds a driver who dies as a consequence). What is wrong is murdering *y*, which is killing *y* “intentionally”, “in cold blood”, “deliberately”, “for *x*’s benefit”, etc. Yet, for that reason, there is no possibility of giving a non-normative description of “*x* murders *y*” (likewise with respect to “*x* takes his umbrella”: the normativity of “the kid should take his umbrella” is derived from that of “the kid should avoid being harmed (by getting wet, for instance)”; but no non-normative account of that seems possible).

The Wittgensteinian notion of use applied to define meaning has to be robust enough to explain the normative import of meaning and it is doubtful that a non-normative conception of use can do the task. Wittgenstein insists that use is as fundamental as any interpretation (in order to avoid a regress of interpretations), that we can grasp meaning *in a flash*, that normally we don’t need more justification, more ap-

out at the end of the famous paragraph § 258) does not apply as well to the case “it is correct” vs. “it seems correct to the community”.

peal to interpretations, to use words the way we do. This highlights a conception of use according to which any reduction of meaning to it translates the discussion of normativity from meaning to use. (Mere regularity cannot be enough because an infinite number of rules can accord with any series of uses.) Furthermore, the reduction of meaning to regularities of use seems too substantial to fit within Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical conception of philosophy, with which Horwich sympathizes.⁷ After all, Wittgenstein does not offer us a reduction of meaning to use, but an identification of both. Use is an unanalysable primitive, as we have seen with respect to rule-following: it can be argued that the normativity of meaning is the normativity of use because use is something intrinsically semantic. The definition of meaning as use that Horwich derives from Wittgenstein in order to account for meaning in non-semantic terms has a serious danger: it could make meaning itself non-semantic because Wittgenstein's identification goes both ways: linguistic meaning is use! The identification of meaning and use, if it has an impact on the debate concerning the normative character of meaning, it does so by emphasizing such a character. It is precisely uses of words that are correct or incorrect. Horwich himself gives a very clear expression to this thought in his discussion of Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical development: "(...) a vital constraint on how the term 'use' must be understood in the context of Wittgenstein's account of meaning is that there be the possibility of appreciating that we have been saying (and thinking) false things —i.e., applying words incorrectly" (Horwich 1998, p. 9). Notice that the normative aspect of "use" is explicitly linked to truth, suggesting that truth is the norm that (assertive or judgemental) uses of words and concepts have to answer to.

A different way to tackle the claim that meaning and truth are normative, one that Horwich also resorts to, is to insist that the preference for true beliefs is merely pragmatic. The norm for thoughts and assertions isn't really their being true, but their maximizing the chances of, say, the satisfaction of our desires. The more useful a belief, the truer. This line, also championed by neo-pragmatists such as Rorty in their attempt at escaping from the metaphysical tradition that places truth and things-as-they-really-are in a sublime realm of their own, constructs a philosophical theory that flies in the face of a commonsensical idea: to have true beliefs places you in the world in a way that false ones don't and, because of that, they are more useful if we want to have an impact on the world (for instance, changing it so that it satisfies our desires). Here is Rorty spoiling the insight:

(...) our obligation to be rational is exhausted by our obligation to take account of other people's doubts and objections to our beliefs. This view of rationality makes it natural to say, as James does, that the true is 'what would be better for people to believe' [*Pragmatism*]. But of course what

⁷ I completely agree with Horwich's claim that what is central to Wittgenstein's philosophy are his metaphilosophical considerations rather than his accounts of meaning. I also agree with his diagnosis of the shift from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*: the change is not one of moving from a theory of meaning to another, from one that identifies meaning with reference to one that identifies it with use. The shift is rather a consequence of realizing the inconsistency between the anti-theoretical commitment of his philosophy and an excess of theoretical baggage in the *Tractatus*.

is good for one person or group to believe will not be good for another person or group (Rorty 1997, p. 149).

Why not? James's quote makes the truth-value connection explicit. But "what is better to believe" can be glossed in terms of believing what is the case (if relevant to my and others' rational desires, if one wants) and so improving the odds of finding our way around the world. To reduce the value of truth to usefulness in furthering desires may be motivated by a laudable negative to separate the realm of truth from the realm of particulars and experience. However, the separation still works beneath proposals such as Horwich's or Rorty's. A complete rejection of the separation has no use for any of the two sides of the dualism. And still Rorty and Horwich want to define truth in terms of satisfaction of desires, but this assumes that we can make a neat distinction between the satisfaction of desires and the disinterested, contemplative, search for truth, in such a way that the only sense that can be made of the latter is its contribution to the former. This move goes against the quietism recommended in section II and ignores the possibility of an identity thesis about truth, that will be defended in the following section, according to which there is no principled difference between what can be thought and what can be the case.

Furthermore, it demands an analysis of desires as opposed to the one of beliefs: in a belief it is valued that it fits the world, in a desire it is valued that the world fits itself to the desire's content. For instance, the desirability that our beliefs be true seems to have the same direction of fit that beliefs have: what is desired is not that the world fits our desires, but rather that our beliefs fit the world. We need a separation between satisfied desires and apparently satisfied desires that matches the separation between "is correct" and "it seems correct to me". Let's think about someone who wants pink walls in her house and hires a lazy but chemically competent painter who, secretly, inserts an LSD patch on his costumer's skin managing to make her think that the walls are pink. It seems unavoidable to appeal to intrinsic normativity when thinking about such a story. The LSD-induced state of affairs is not one that satisfies the initial desire; after all, the walls are not pink no matter how they look like to the costumer. And, valuing the desire as an unsatisfied one must be done in terms of what the world is like, not merely in terms of how the world appears to the agent.

5. True thoughts and facts

A normative and realist theory of truth leads to a defence of the identity between truth bearers and truth makers. If truth is to play a motivating role with respect to the making and expressing of judgements, and that motivating role is played by mundane facts (instead of the community assent, for instance), there is only a short step before claiming, with Frege, that a true thought is a fact.

Hornsby calls a theory according to which a true thought and a fact are identical an identity theory of truth. The most traditional form to express the thesis is to say that truth bearers (propositions, contents, thoughts in the sense of contents of acts of thinking rather than the acts themselves) are identical to truth makers (candidates to this role: facts understood as states of affairs, facts understood as combinations of

Fregean senses). The identity thesis about truth can be seen as a limiting case of a correspondentist theory of truth, a thesis according to which the correspondence between idea and thing is one of identity.

But, it is important to point out, as most defenders of the thesis do distancing themselves from the idea of correspondence, that the identity thesis avoids the traditional commitment of correspondentism to the notion of a relationship between ideas, meanings, concepts or thoughts with something external to them in virtue of which truth can be understood. This way, as Hornsby explains, the identity thesis escapes the famous slingshot argument according to which it is not possible to isolate which facts correspond to which thoughts without a circular appeal to the individuation conditions of the thoughts. The notion of fact we end up with is one that makes all true thoughts identical with the same fact (versions of this argument can be found, amongst others, in Frege, Gödel, Strawson and Davidson).

I will dwell on Hornsby's proposal which, as I have mentioned, is inspired by some comments on idealism made by McDowell in *Mind & World*, the same series of talks that Michael Luntley mentions as connected with his disciplinary conception of truth. McDowell writes:

Although reality is independent of our thinking, it is not to be pictured as outside an outer boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere. (...) [*before, in the same page*] In a particular experience in which one is not misled, what one takes in is *that things are thus and so*. *That things are thus and so* is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgement: it becomes the content of a judgement if the subject decides to take the experience at face value. So it is conceptual content. *That things are thus and so* is also, if one is not misled, an aspect of the layout of the world: it is how things are (1994, p. 26).

In order to explain the idea that the content of an experience or of a judgement can simultaneously be an aspect of the world is immune to the accusation of idealism, McDowell refers to an assertion that Wittgenstein found paradoxical: "When we say, and *mean*, that such-and-such is the case, we —and our meaning— do not stop anywhere short of the facts; but we mean: *this-is-so*." (Wittgenstein 1953, § 95). The paradox, as Wittgenstein explains, is due to our being capable of thinking what is not the case. However, the paradox disappears if we consider the ambiguity in "thought". "Thought' can mean the *act* of thinking; but it can also mean the *content* of a piece of thinking: what someone thinks. Now if we are to give due acknowledgement to the independence of reality, what we need is a constraint from outside *thinking* and *judging*, our exercises of spontaneity. The constraint does not need to be from outside *thinkable contents*" (McDowell 1994, p. 28).⁸

⁸ Perhaps this should be the way to understand Heidegger's suggestive thoughts about truth in section 44 of *Being and Time*. By calling attention to the dual aspect of thought, as disclosing reality and covering it up, Heidegger highlights that thought can be distanced from the world by being false, but that there is no distance from the world implicit in the very idea of thought. We can also find in Heidegger a commitment to an identity thesis about truth sustained in the distinction between the act of thinking and what is thought, as well as in a criticism of correspondentism. See Heidegger 1927, especially p. 260.

Hornsby makes use of this disambiguation to offer her identity theory in terms of “thinkables”. I have been faithful to propositions as truth bearers, but it is of interest to look closely at Hornsby’s argument to replace proposition, content or thought by “thinkable”:

‘Thinkable’ is a word for a sort of things to which a person can be related in various modes. I say that the Labour Party will win the next election. I have just said something (that Labour will win) which many now believe [1996], which a good few hope, which John Major fears. The example then shows that thinkables can be beliefs, hopes and fears. They are called beliefs when thought of in connection with one psychological attitude towards them; they are called hopes or fears when thought of in connection with other attitudes. They are thought of as propositions when thought of as propounded. A modal term, like ‘thinkable’, may serve to remind one of the variety of relations here: it is not only thought which relates to *thinkables*, because a thinkable can be believed and hoped, for instance (Hornsby 1997, p. 11).

Of course, the same person may have several attitudes towards the same thinkable. She can also have opposing attitudes to the same thinkable at different times. More than one has moved in six years from an attitude of hope to one of desperation with respect to Labour’s triumph. Even though it could be argued that it is epistemically censurable to *expect* to win the lottery, in general epistemic censorship limits itself to cognitive attitudes toward thinkables. It is precisely this possibility, the possibility of believing something that isn’t the case, the one that provokes Wittgenstein’s perplexity in the last quote from the *Investigations*. In order to confront this possibility, Hornsby suggests, with Frege⁹ and McDowell, that “true thinkables are the same as facts” (*ibid.*, p. 2).

A serious difficulty emerges for a proposal such as Hornsby’s and McDowell’s: are facts mundane entities or rather inhabitants of the realm of Fregean senses? It seems that any answer would lead to a dead end: if facts are mundane entities —Russellian propositions constituted by objects and their properties and relations— then true thinkables would cease to be Fregean thoughts, which are constituted by senses and only senses. But, if facts are Fregean propositions, constituted by senses, then we go back to the beginning: we need a theory that explains the *correspondence*, not the identity, between true thinkables/ facts on the one hand and states of affairs on the other.

Let us stop to consider what this difficulty is, and see what conception of facts leads to it. We have seen that an identity conception of truth can be understood in two ways, depending on whether we take propositions, thoughts, to be identical to states of affairs or to facts. Julian Dodd (1995) has distinguished between a modest and a robust form of identity and accused McDowell of trying to defend both simultaneously. The distinction relies on the two conceptions of facts summarized in the previous paragraph. McDowell, according to Dodd, holds that facts are true thoughts, which would place facts within the realm of Fregean senses (which make out thoughts). On the other hand, McDowell uses such an identity to argue that there is

⁹ “A fact is a thought that is true” (Frege 1918, p. 35).

no principled separation between thought and the world,¹⁰ but this would involve thinking of thoughts as mundane entities, that is, entities composed of objects and properties. But, concludes Dodd, this second identity is incoherent.

Max de Gaynesford (1996) has called our attention to this dilemma in similar terms: if McDowell opts for a robust theory (he calls it strong), he is in danger of spatializing the faculty of understanding; if he opts for a modest theory (weak) he risks idealizing the world. De Gaynesford offers a way out: the notion of *de re* or object-dependent sense allows to hold the thesis of our openness to the world (i.e., the thesis according to which there is no separation between thought and world) and, simultaneously, to avoid the dilemma. Given that senses are modes of presentation of objects and that there are indefinite ways for an object to present itself, no sense is identical to its object. However, in the *de re* conception, the identity of each sense depends on the existence and identity of its object. This way, the rejection of a separation between thought and the world (thoughts depend for their existence and identity on the existence and identity of facts) does not imply an identity between thoughts and facts (see de Gaynesford 1996, pp. 503-7).

In an earlier version of this paper I argued that, thinking of objects as the common background of a variety of senses (with pride of place for *de re* senses), there should be no difficulty in taking the world to be the totality of ways things could present themselves. The rejection of the separation between thought and the world could be, against de Gaynesford's and Dodd's critique, combined with an identity between thinkables and facts. However, discussions with Hilan Bensusan (see Bensusan & Pinedo, submitted 2) have made me realize that the notion of *de re* sense involves an unwelcome distinction between meaning and belief. If some senses are especially glued to their objects, some of the materials of our thought would infuse their meaning from outside the sphere of thinking practices, making room for a residual given, conceptual but still independent of our judgements. The identity thesis and the thesis of our thought's openness to the world do not demand a clear separation between understanding and experience, and this paper remains neutral regarding this issue.¹¹ It should suffice with a conception of mundane facts that does not involve any sort of mediating entity between them and our thoughts.

De Gaynesford's recommendation to give up a separation between thought and objective reality without commitment to a strong identity thesis relies on making thoughts' identity conditions dependent upon objects' identity conditions. Clearly, the identity thesis holds something stronger: not only are senses object-dependent, objects are also sense-dependent. The existence and identity of a fact also depends on the true thought that would capture it: of course, the dependence is slightly weaker, as the de-

¹⁰ “[T]here is no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can mean, or generally the sort of thing one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case. When one thinks truly, what one thinks *is* what is the case. So since the world is everything that is the case (...), there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world” (McDowell 1994, p. 27).

¹¹ For a clear rejection of the separation, see Brandom 1999.

mand is not for actual thoughts capturing the fact, but for the thinkability of the fact. A proper rejection of the separation between thought and reality cannot allow for the possibility of unthinkable facts, on pain on returning to Kantian noumenalism. Hence, facts are not to be identified with collections of bare objects and bare properties. This fits nicely with the idea that our understanding of the world does not allow for a fact / value dichotomy, as the world itself provides the objective discipline required for thought (as I have argued in proposing to understand truth as a value). But, furthermore, if we accept that the world has a saying on the correctness of our thought, this is only one step short of accepting the need for external reasons, i.e., the acceptance that the world such as it is independently of what we actually think, may contain evaluative features. If we give up on the search for 'hard facts', facts which are at best causally responsible for our thoughts, the idea of something in the world having genuine rational impact on our thoughts starts to look more attractive. I have argued somewhere else (see Bensusan & Pinedo, submitted 1), that this is the only conception of facts available once we abandon the notion of free-standing, noumenal entities affecting our thought from outside. We have called them 'soft facts': for the world to be thinkable, for it to provide objectivity to our thought without resorting either to a reduction of 'ought' to 'is' or a dichotomy of fact and value, it must be composed of soft facts. Soft facts do not need to be contents of actual thoughts, but they must be, in principle, thinkable. The alternative account of facts depends on considering a purely intuitive, non-discursive intellect conceivable and on thinking of concepts as external, contingent, garments of objects (the rejection of such an account is, for instance, at the core of Hegel's criticism of Kant's phenomenon/noumenon dichotomy).¹² I believe that the almost truisitic character of the identity thesis about truth, and the idea that truth is a value are antidotes against any principled separation between concepts and objects.

But, will all this really silence the sceptic? I think that the problem may rather be whether we have overdone it. Because it could seem that we have done it twice and that one of the responses is actually stronger than it needs to be. On the one hand, we have told the sceptic that he also needs justification for his challenge, and that the justification he needs must be given by a background of true beliefs from which to shoot doubts. This first line of response, offered by the normative conception of truth, is also possible without relating justification with any system of true beliefs: it should be enough to point out that scepticism cannot be free-floating. On the other, by closing the gap between thought and reality (as the identity thesis about truth does), by defending that the world is its own best representation and that there are no entities (Platonic, socially constructed, causal, etc.) mediating between both, it is no longer open to him to question our entitlement to appeal to any such entity to explain knowledge, truth or meaning.

And yet, the sceptic strikes back: which are the facts? How do you know which propositions are the case, which thoughts are true? Perhaps these questions help to

¹² I have discussed this issue in Pinedo 2004.

remind us that it comes a time when doing philosophy ceases to be necessary, when what is left to do is to look around, to check the credentials of our thoughts, to ask an expert. But this is not an specifically philosophical task. Everyone should do it.

6. Conclusion

In this essay, in order to account for the normativity of language and thought, I have explored the relationship between meaning and truth and concluded that truth is a value. More precisely, when we say of the content of a judgement or the meaning of an utterance that it is true, we do two things: we endorse the content and do so by asserting that it is the case. If truth allows to identify thoughts and facts, the kind of authority that permits to evaluate a proposition as true or the following of a rule as correct is derived from what the world is like, rather than, for instance, from the agreement of the community. Of course, what the world is like cannot be established independently of which propositions are true. The identity goes both ways; a fact is both something which is the case and a true proposition. By this claim of identity I have tried to make explicit the idea that neither thought can be built in terms of reality (as the naturalist wants) nor reality can be constructed in terms of thought (as the idealist wants; or Thoughts, in the case of the Platonist). By seeing truth simultaneously as a value and as something constitutive of facts, one could reject the fact/ value distinction and accept the existence of evaluative facts. Reality, under this conception, is not reducible to a structure of bare referents, but it is already something meaningful, endowed with (Fregean) sense.

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