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LEAD ARTICLE



The ‘Post-truth’ Crisis, the Value of Truth, and the Substantivist-Deflationist Debate

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ABSTRACT

What is the truth about truth? What is the truth about what truth is and where its importance for human life and human civilization lies? In this paper I suggest that the key to understanding what truth is is understanding its importance for human life and civilization, that to understand the latter we need to find a proper perspective from which to understand it, that the present crisis of truth—the ‘post-truth’ crisis—provides such a perspective, and that this perspective sets a new adequacy condition for the philosophy of truth.

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What is the truth about truth? What is the truth about what truth is and where its importance for human life and human civilization lies? Are deflationists right when they argue that truth is deflationary and its main importance lies in the fact that the truth predicate is a useful technical device for oblique endorsement and generalization? Or are substantivists right when they say that truth is substantive and its main importance lies in something altogether different? In this paper I suggest that the key to understanding what truth is is understanding its importance for human life and civilization, that to understand the latter we need to find a proper perspective from which to understand it, that the present crisis of truth—the ‘post-truth’ crisis—provides such a perspective, and that this perspective sets a new adequacy condition for the philosophy of truth. This adequacy condition, in turn, suggests a new answer to the question what truth is and where its importance lies: *truth is*, in the first place, *a human value* and its importance to our life/civilization lies, not exclusively, but principally, in *the centrality of this value to our humanity*. I investigate the ramifications of this answer to philosophical questions in contemporary analytic philosophy, and I end with a comparison of the substantivist and deflationist approaches in light of the new adequacy condition posed by the post-truth crisis.

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1 The 'Post-Truth' Crisis

Many philosophers prefer to 'play it safe' with truth. Even philosophers renowned for their unwavering commitment to tackling difficult philosophical problems avoid a thorough engagement with truth in their theoretical writings. A notable example is Kant. Early in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/7), Kant consciously decided to limit himself to a 'namenerklärung'¹ of truth (*ibid.*: A58/B82), and the *Critique* says very little about truth besides this, at least explicitly.² In the twentieth century, a number of scientifically inclined philosophers regarded not just the investigation of truth, but even the use of the concept of truth, as a return to 'forbidden' zones of philosophy, specifically metaphysics. Karl Popper describes this state of mind (prevalent prior to his and his colleagues' acquaintance with Tarski's semantic theory of truth) as:

[T]he task of elucidating [the Aristotelian correspondence notion of truth] seems hopeless; and as a consequence, we may become suspicious of the concept of truth, and prefer not to use it. (Popper 1959: 274 fn)

And Rudolf Carnap notes that some scientifically oriented philosophers persisted in shunning the concept of truth even after learning of Alfred Tarski's work:

Neurath believed that the semantical concept of truth could not be reconciled with a strictly empiricist and anti-metaphysical point of view. (Carnap 1963: 61)

Numerous contemporary philosophers still seek to play it safe with truth, at least outside the realm of the semantic paradoxes (where the opposite is the case). Deflationism, in particular, exemplifies this attitude: it aims at little and limits itself to simple, unriskey, tools—the equivalence schema, some basic logic, common sense, and (in Paul Horwich's case) a 'use' theory of meaning.

The deflationist attitude toward truth is partly due to disillusionment with attempts to construct substantive theories of truth. Referring to what he views as a paradigm of a substantive theory of truth—the traditional correspondence theory—Horwich says:

[I]t will be widely agreed that hardly any progress has been made towards achieving the insight [that correspondence theories of truth] seem to need. The common-sense notion that truth is a kind of 'correspondence with the facts' has never been worked out to anyone's satisfaction. Even its advocates would concede that it remains little more than a vague, guiding intuition. But the traditional alternatives ... have also looked unlikely to work. (Horwich 1990/8: 1)

In Sher (1999, 2004, 2016a) I suggested that philosophers' disillusionment with substantive theories of truth is partly due to their thinking about such theories in a wrong way. It is common to think of a theory of truth as consisting of a single and simple definition or necessary-and-sufficient condition of truth. The subject-matter of truth, I noted, is too rich, too complex, and too multi-dimensional to be theorized in this manner.

Another reason philosophers avoid wide-ranging investigations of truth is the obscurity of questions often associated with such investigations: questions like 'What is truth?' and 'What is the *nature* of truth?'. I sympathize with those who think that we should not waste our time on questions that are too vague or indefinite to be given an informative answer. Life, however, is not static, and in the course of

¹ Literal translation: 'name clarification'.

² For a discussion of Kant's treatment of truth in the first *Critique* see Sher (2017a) and references there.

history we sometimes arrive at junctures where questions that seemed unclear to the point of being pointless are brought into sharp relief. I believe that we have now arrived at such a juncture with respect to the questions ‘what is truth?’ and ‘where does its importance for human life and civilization lie?’.

What is this juncture? This juncture is associated with the widely-used term ‘post-truth’ (‘post-truth life’, ‘post-truth society’, ‘post-truth civilization’). I shall call it ‘the post-truth crisis’. This crisis is not new. The fall of truth can be traced to Nietzsche and the post-modernists. It was instigated by the Soviet, Nazi, and Argentinian junta regimes. It is made real by plagiarists, data-falsifiers, counterfeiters, demagogues, and trolls. It is manifested in tweets, speeches, and interviews by current heads of states and political organizations. It was fictionalized in Orwell’s *1984*, and it is the subject of many newspaper articles and popular books. But this does not reduce its philosophical significance. What distinguishes the current truth crisis from some of its predecessors is its ordinariness and universality. It arose under ordinary circumstances. It is not due to any specific corrupt regime or catastrophic event. Nor is it limited to a particular society or ideology. Ordinary, non-extreme life is losing hold on truth. ‘[T]ruth has fallen in the street’³, in the words of the ancient prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 59:14)⁴.

Today, the most conspicuous displays of this crisis are political. But the crisis extends beyond the political arena. It is the danger of truth disappearing from our life, disappearing as a factor or as something that matters, not just here or there but everywhere, that is the heart of the crisis. And it is the vivid realization that this *can* happen, that there is no external guarantee that it will not, that impels us to take note of this crisis, both as humans and as philosophers.

I am not the first to recognize the significance of the post-truth crisis for philosophy. Harry Frankfurt describes the post-truth crisis as follows:

We live at a time when ... many quite cultivated individuals consider truth to be unworthy of any particular respect. It is well known, of course, that a cavalier attitude toward truth is more or less endemic within the ranks of publicists and politicians Recently, though, a similar version of this attitude—or, indeed, a more extreme version of it—has become disturbingly widespread even within what might naively have been thought to be a more reliable class of people. Numerous unabashed skeptics and cynics about the importance of truth ... have been found among best-selling and prize-winning authors, among writers for leading newspapers, and among hitherto respected historians, biographers, memoirists, theorists of literature, novelists – and even among philosophers These [philosophers] ... deny that truth is worthy of any obligatory deference or respect. ... [T]he entitlements to deference and to respect that we ordinarily assign to fact and to truth ... is just up for grabs. It is simply a matter ... of how you look at things. (Frankfurt 2006: 17-20)

Frankfurt, however, believes that we are not in real danger of losing truth. That is because we cannot help ‘loving’ truth:

Practically all of us do love truth, whether or not we are aware that we do so. And, to the extent that we recognize what dealing effectively with the problems of life entails, we cannot help loving truth. (*Ibid.*: 47-8)

Simon Blackburn, who is also acutely aware of the significance of the truth crisis for philosophy, joins Frankfurt in affirming that there is no danger of losing

³ “כשלה ברחוב אמת”.

⁴ Suggesting the present form of the crisis is not new after all.

truth. At least on the deepest level, that of the *concept* of truth, truth is bound to survive:

This ... is not ... a crisis in the very concept of truth. It couldn't be ... , the concept of truth will never die ... , the concept of truth is a survivor. (Blackburn 2018: 9-11)

I, on the contrary, regard the specter of a truthless civilization as a real possibility. This is not a matter of pessimism vs. optimism. Factually, it is an open question what will transpire in our civilization with respect to truth.

Frankfurt's and Blackburn's attitude is based, first and foremost (though not exclusively), on the fact that we need truth for our survival. In Frankfurt's words:

[The] need to know ... a great many truths ... applies to each of us, as individuals. Individuals require truths in order to negotiate their way effectively through the thicket of hazards and opportunities that all people invariably confront in going about their lives. ... Our success or failure in whatever we undertake, and therefore in life altogether, depends on whether we are guided by truth or whether we proceed in ignorance or on the basis of falsehood. ... *Without* truth ... we are out of luck. (Frankfurt 2006: 34-6)

Blackburn, speaking in terms of 'objective fact', puts it as follows:

It is only insofar as I believe that there is a bus bearing down on me that I jump out of its path. Were there a bus bearing down on me ("objectively") but I could neither sense it directly nor receive clues about its coming, I would not bother to jump, and my fate would illustrate the advantage—nay, the necessity—of aligning personal belief with objective fact. (Blackburn 2018: 10)

But while all this is true, it does not capture what losing truth is primarily about. Losing truth is not the same thing as losing our survival instincts. In a post-truth world we, like the rabbits and squirrels in our neighborhoods, shall continue to jump away from hurtling buses. We shall continue to shun poisonous mushrooms; we shall continue to shop for food. The danger posed by a post-truth world is not, primarily, to our animal behaviour or to the most mundane aspects of our human behaviour.

What, then, is it a danger to? What would be lost in a post-truth world? What is the difference between life with and without truth? What is it that valuing truth contributes to human civilization, and what would human civilization be without it? These questions are, to a significant extent, philosophical. And they are questions that, due to their gravity, philosophy has a moral obligation to investigate. Philosophy, in every era, ought to address the main philosophical issues that arise in that era. And in the present era, where the anti-truth sentiment is widely spread, where politicians disregard the need for truth in dealing with human and natural disasters, where intellectuals are drawn to relativisms of various kinds, and where the prevalent mood among people in all walks of life is one of skepticism and indifference to truth—philosophy cannot ignore these issues.

Moreover, even if we are not convinced that there is a realistic danger of losing truth altogether, we have to recognize that there is an enormous difference between the presence of truth in, say, Stalinist society and its presence in contemporary liberal democracies. And even if we ignore these differences, we ought to recognize that the post-truth crisis introduces a new perspective on truth, one that has significant ramifications for its philosophical investigation.

I would thus like to suggest that in light of the post-truth crisis we need to pose a new *adequacy condition* for the philosophy of truth.⁵ This adequacy condition says that an adequate philosophy of truth has to give true and explanatory answers to questions like: ‘What is the difference between a life that does and a life that does not value truth?’, ‘What is lost in a post-truth civilization?’.

2 Truth as a Human Value

What is Truth? The question ‘What is lost in a life/civilization that does not value truth?’ suggests to me a new, straightforward answer to question ‘What is truth?’. The answer is: *truth is, first and foremost, a human value*. This suggests a related answer to the question, ‘Where does the importance of truth to human life and civilization lie?’. My answer is that *it lies, first and foremost, in the centrality of the value of truth to our humanity*. Another way to put it, in accordance with our initial considerations, is that the post-truth crisis suggests that truth is important to us because it is constitutive of our humanity, and this, in turn, suggests that truth itself is a human value, one of the human values constitutive of our humanity. These answers satisfy the new adequacy condition for the philosophy of truth. What would be lost in a post-truth world is a human value constitutive of our humanity, or that part of our humanity that is constituted by this value. Just as what would be lost in a post-justice world is that part of our humanity that is constituted by the value of justice, so what would be lost in a post-truth world is that part of our humanity that is constituted by the value of truth. The loss of these values would have far-reaching consequences for our life: think of all the suffering incurred by trampling on human values, of all the individuals who sacrificed their lives to defend human values.

The view that truth is a human value is not new. It is quite common outside academia, and a number of contemporary philosophers adhere to it as well. One of these is Bernard Williams. Williams describes his (2002) book, *Truth and Truthfulness*, as ‘concerned throughout with what may summarily be called “the value of truth”’ (*ibid.*: 6). And he presents the possibility of losing this value as a great loss: ‘to the extent that we lose a sense of the value of truth, we shall certainly lose something and may well lose everything’ (*ibid.*: 7). What is this value? Referring to it as ‘truthfulness’, Williams says that it ‘embraces the need to find the truth, to hold on to it, and to tell it’ (*ibid.*: 13):

Truthfulness ... [embraces] various virtues and practices, and ideas that go with them, that express the concern to tell the truth – in the sense both of telling the truth to other people and, in the first place, telling the true from the false. (*Ibid.*: 20)

The two main ‘*virtues of truth*’, according to Williams, are ‘Accuracy and Sincerity’ (*ibid.*: 44).⁶

But Williams does not see truth as a value in a ‘strict sense’. ‘[T]o speak of “the value of truth” in a ‘strict sense’, he says, is ‘a category mistake’. Strictly speaking ‘truth

⁵ I am speaking about the *philosophy of truth* rather than the *theory of truth* since the philosophy of truth may include a number of theories, each attending to different aspects of, or issues concerning, truth. I do not wish to say that every theory of truth ought to attend to, and satisfy, this condition, but that the philosophy of truth as a whole ought to do so.

⁶ In speaking of truth as a value and a cluster of norms, I do not distinguish between truth and truthfulness. Strictly speaking, the norms of truthfulness are those applying to humans rather than to truth-bearers, but the two subclusters of norms are interconnected (see below). Williams, too, seeks to connect the two (see *ibid.*: Ch. 1).

... [is] a property of propositions or sentences' and as such is not a value or 'the sort of thing that can have a value' (*ibid.*: 6-7).

In contrast to Williams I would like to suggest that truth is, strictly speaking, a value.⁷ Does this view conflict with the view that truth is a property (of sentences, propositions, assertions, beliefs, cognitions, or other truth-bearers)?—No. In fact, it gives precise content to this view. There is a fairly straightforward two-step connection between values and properties: a value gives rise to (or is associated with) a cluster of *norms*, and this cluster, in turn, gives rise to a property: the property of satisfying the norms. Take justice, for example. The human value of justice gives rise to a cluster of justice norms, and this cluster, in turn, gives rise to the property of justice, a property that some justice-bearers (human actions, intentions, procedures, social rules, judicial laws, political institutions, etc.) have and others lack. Similarly, the value of truth gives rise to a cluster of truth norms, and this cluster gives rise to the property of truth. A truth-bearer has the property of being true iff (if and only if) it satisfies the norms of truth. It is thus *not a category mistake* to say that truth is a *value*.

In arriving at the property of truth from the value and norms of truth, I turn the tables on the common philosophical approach, which views truth first and foremost as a property or at least starts with truth as a property. (For a recent example, see Edwards (2018).) Why do I do so? There are many properties. On one way of viewing properties, every collection of actual and/or counterfactual individuals determines/identifies/is-correlated-with a distinct 1st-level property, every collection of 1st-level properties determines a 2nd-level property, and so on. What is special (or one of the things which are significantly special) about properties like truth and justice is that they are associated with human values and it is possible to arrive at them through these values. This significant aspect of truth has gone largely unnoticed, so it is important to bring it to philosophers' attention. It is especially important to focus on it here, because it enables us to explain the significance of truth in light of the post-truth crisis: what we lose in losing truth is the value of truth rather than the property of truth or the collection of all true sentences.

Does my focus on the value of truth indicate that I view it as metaphysically prior to the (bare) property of truth?—No. But I do not view the (bare) property of truth as metaphysically prior to the value of truth either. As I explain below, my philosophical methodology is holistic (though not coherentist!), and in the case of truth this means, among other things, that I eschew metaphysical priorities. Furthermore, by treating truth as first and foremost a human value, I focus on the epistemic aspect of truth and I avoid the philosophical disagreements concerning the nature of the property of truth.⁸

Truth, then, is a genuine value, associated with a set of norms which, in turn, determine, or identify, the property of truth. What are the truth norms? To answer this question we need to better understand the human value of truth, and this, in turn, requires understanding certain points concerning human values and values more generally.⁹

⁷ Lynch (2004), too, seems to hold this view.

⁸ For a discussion of some of these disagreements, see, for example, Ferrari (2018). (From Ferrari's viewpoint my approach might be viewed as *extrinsic* to the nature of the property of truth.)

⁹ Clearly, I cannot offer a general theory of values here—this task is far too large for a single paper, let alone a paper focused on truth. And I cannot direct the reader to existent general theories of value, since these are for the most part focused on other issues than those central here. In particular, I shall not discuss in any detail the *ontology* of values here. Reasons: (i) ontological questions are not especially relevant for understanding the

Values (in General) and Human Values. Chase Wrenn (2015) considers five types of values: (i) ‘intrinsic’, (ii) ‘final’, (iii) ‘instrumental’, (iv) ‘constitutive’, and (v) ‘telic’. In the case of truth, they are tantamount to the views that (i) ‘It is good in itself for beliefs to be true’, (ii) ‘Truth is valuable insofar as rational beings care about it’¹⁰, (iii) ‘Truth is valuable because it makes beliefs more useful’, (iv) ‘Truth is worth caring about because caring about truth is a necessary part of living a good life’, and (v) ‘Truth is worthy caring about because we benefit from caring about it’ (*Ibid.*: 41). Wrenn is critical of all these accounts, mostly for good reasons. The upshot of his criticisms (as I understand them) is that all these accounts are not sufficient, by themselves, to explain the value of truth. Something more is needed.

Although my conception of value has some commonalities with some of the types articulated by Wrenn above, there are also significant differences. In particular, what is valuable, from my perspective, is not the property of truth as a metaphysical entity. What is valuable is certain *truth-attitudes/behaviour* by humans. It is valuable that *we be truthful*, that *we pursue truth in inquiry*, that *we regard truth as a value that is constitutive of our humanity*. And this value is a value we *choose* to represent our humanity rather than a value that is *forced* upon us (by nature, God, the property of truth, the principles of rationality, or what have you). This approach to the value of truth is one that Wrenn does not consider. (If you want to associate values with some objectual notion, then for the purpose of this paper you may think of them as mental-like, abstract artifacts that humans create to mark certain ideas as worthwhile.)

‘Human value’ is a subcategory of ‘value’. The category of human value divides the domain of values into three groups: *human* values, *inhuman* values, and values that are *neither human nor inhuman*. I use justice as a paradigm of human values, Nazi values as a paradigm of inhuman values, and values such as being financially cautious as a paradigm of values that are neither human nor inhuman.

Human values, thus, are not simply values held by humans. What kind of values are they? By ‘human values’ I mean here values that are *enshrined by our civilization as indicative of our humanity*. Without attempting to take on the tasks of defining ‘human civilization’ and ‘our humanity’, let me clarify that in this paper I use the everyday notion of human civilization, interpreted very broadly so as to encompass all geographical regions where humans live and a very long swath of history, say, from ancient Mediterranean and Eastern cultures to the present day.¹¹ Human values reflect ‘our humanity’ in a sense associated with the idea of goodness, as applied to humans, although this has very little to do with utterances of the word ‘good’. Human values are codified by our civilization through religious documents, constitutions, systems of laws, family teachings, individual reflections, philosophical theories, and so on. They are reflected in what humans choose to send to space in time capsules, in the selection of achievements for awarding the Nobel prize, and in many other diverse ways.

view that truth is a human value, (ii) a general ontological theory of values is largely shaped by considerations of *systematization*, which might detract from our understanding of the particular value of truth, and (iii) what I say about the value of truth here is likely to be compatible with different views on the ontology of values. But other issues concerning values, directly relevant to this paper, I discuss below.

¹⁰ This is Wrenn’s take on Korsgaard’s (1983: 169) notion of ‘ends’ or ‘final goods’ which she distinguishes from ‘intrinsic goods’ or ‘values’.

¹¹ This use excludes uses of ‘civilization’ that target a specific society and culture, such as ‘Mesopotamian civilization’.

The Objectivity of Human Values. Are human values objective or subjective? Are they relative to the contingencies of human civilization? Had our civilization enshrined Nazi values as representative of our humanity, would Nazi values be *human* values?—No. The term ‘human value’, as I use it here, is, in an important sense, a *rigid designator*. Recall Kripke’s discussion of proper names. Aristotle’s parents *chose* to call their son ‘Aristotle’. They did not have to call him ‘Aristotle’; they could have called him ‘Aristophanes’ and Aristophanes’s parents could have called their son ‘Aristotle’. But, given the parents’ choices, it is an *objective fact* that the name used by Aristotle’s parents to denote their son, ‘Aristotle’, refers to one particular person, and ‘Aristophanes’ to another. Although the case of values is very different from that of persons, the reference of ‘human value’ is *rigid*, or at least significantly rigid.¹² The origin of human values is contingent, yet this does not prevent them from being fixed and objective. Human civilization could have developed in a variety of ways. It could have enshrined Nazi type values as indicative of its ideal of a human being. But it did not. Instead it has enshrined other values, such as *truth* and *justice*, as indicative of our humanity. Those values, codified in multiple ways by our civilization, are the human values. And the idea of what it is to be a *human* human, reflected in these values, is what our civilization has enshrined as *our humanity*. The values reflecting our humanity are fixed (albeit evolving).¹³ If, in the future, human civilization enshrines Nazi values as capturing *its* idea of ‘our humanity’, it will enshrine *inhuman* values as dominant in *its* (inhuman) culture.¹⁴

Human values, thus, are objective. Not any value that humans might identify with their humanity would thereby become a human value. Human values are also mind-dependent, in the sense of being created by and for humans.¹⁵ Is there a contradiction between being mind-dependent and being objective? Does objectivity require mind-independence? Does mind-dependence imply subjectivity?—No. This point is explained by Peter Railton [1995]. Railton coins a new term, ‘subject-ive’, which he distinguishes from ‘subjective’:

[L]et us coin the technical term ‘subject-ive’ (with a hyphen) [as distinct from ‘subjective’] to express the notion of that which is essentially connected with the existence or experiences of subjects, i.e., beings possessing minds and points of view, being capable of forming thoughts and intentions. (*Ibid.*: 263)

‘Subject-ive’ does not have the connotations associated with ‘subjective’, of ‘a domain without standards, where arbitrary opinion takes the place of judgement’ (*ibid.*: 264).

¹² Why (only) ‘significant rigidity’ will be explained below.

¹³ See below.

¹⁴ Some authors, such as Charles Mills, might dispute the claim that our civilization enshrined values such as truth and justice as human values, arguing that it enshrined other values instead, values that discriminate or are biased against certain groups of humans. This is a large issue that I cannot do justice to here. But let me first cite Mills himself. Speaking about liberal values or principles, Mills says: ‘[L]iberalism’s founding principles—the rule of law, the moral equality of all individuals, the state as providing equal protection of our interests, the ideal of individual flourishing—are very attractive ones. ... [T]hey have all been systematically violated in practice ... But that doesn’t diminish their worth as ideals’ (Mills 2017). When I speak about human values such as truth and justice here I partly speak of them as ideals. This does not mean that they are not real. On the contrary, our ideals play a very real role in our lives. Second, some of Mills’s criticisms of the idea of human values are addressed by my conception of such values as evolving in time. (See below.) And third, Mills’s criticisms of ‘human’ values as egalitarian, discriminating, and/or biased are not directed at the value of truth.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, too, rejects the view that human values are external or God given, and he wants to find their source in us. But on my account human values are objective.

Many instances of objectivity are not subject-ive and many instances of subject-ivity are not objective. But some instances of objectivity are subject-ive. Moral values, according to Railton, fall under this category. They are subject-ive yet objective. So are, I would add, other human values, *truth* included. The human value of truth is objective rather than subjective, in the sense explained by Railton.

Likewise, the value of truth is objective rather than relative. Can truth be correspondence for you and mere coherence for me? Can presenting a colleague's work as one's own be truthful behaviour for one person and untruthful for another? Can saying that global warming is real be true for Democrats and false for Republicans? Can saying that his crowd was the greatest ever be true for Trump and his supporters and false for everyone else?—No. Although values are not mind-independent—values, like physical artifacts, are created by creatures with minds and affect their behaviour in ways that often engage their minds— they are objective rather than relative.

I said that on the present conception, human values reflect 'our humanity' in a sense associated with the idea of goodness, as applied to humans. This may suggest a connection between value theory and virtue theory (such as Aristotle's, Foot's, MacIntyre's, Sosa's, Zagzebski's, and others). Is the value account of truth a virtue account? I hesitate to answer this question at this early stage of the development of the value theory of truth. For one thing, there is no one virtue theory, and some virtue theories diverge quite radically from others. For another, my conception of truth as a human value has both characteristics that are similar and characteristics that are dissimilar to common features of virtue conceptions. Among the points of similarity are the connection of human values to our conception of goodness, the emphasis on humanity, intrinsicness, and non-relativity, the concomitance of the moral and epistemic spheres (there are both moral and epistemic virtues and values), the idea of a network of human virtues/values, and so on. Among the points of dissimilarity are virtue theory's emphasis on traits, character, and dispositions (something we have limited control over) vs. value theory's emphasis on *choice*, virtue theory's focus on the practical realm vs. value theory's equal focus on the theoretical and practical realms, virtue theory's distinction between virtues and duties vs. value theory's view of truthfulness as both a virtue and a duty, and so on. As the value theory of truth is further developed, its relation to virtue theory will become more definite.

Intrinsic and Instrumental Values. Is truth an intrinsic or an instrumental value? This issue is taken up by Williams (2002). Focusing on two areas where truth matters to humans—the epistemic and moral (social, political) areas—Williams explains why truth is important for humans in these areas by telling a fictional genealogical story, modeled after Nietzsche.¹⁶ Leaving the details of this story aside, the upshot is, roughly, that true knowledge has instrumental importance for humans; it is essential for their survival and flourishing. But to achieve the instrumental benefits of truth, humans have to cooperate, that is, play an active role in acquiring true knowledge and share it with others. Humans, however, are selfish. To invest their scarce resources in the acquisition of knowledge for the benefit of others, they have to view truth as important not just instrumentally but also intrinsically. This is the source of the intrinsic importance of truth for humans, according to Williams.

¹⁶ The idea is that such a story helps us to explain what truth is in its thick complexity.

Williams's explanation was criticized by Colin McGinn (2003) on the ground that intrinsic value cannot be established merely on the basis of instrumental function:

[S]howing the function that a virtue [here, truthfulness] serves can only give it instrumental value, not intrinsic value: we might learn what the virtue *produces* in the way of benefits, but we don't learn why it might be valued in itself. ... Williams's] ... functional story fails, by its own standards, to capture that intrinsic value; so it does nothing, really, to vindicate the intrinsic value of truthfulness. (*Ibid.*)

McGinn's criticism applies to other instrumentalist explanations of the intrinsic value of truth as well, including biological evolutionary explanations.

My own account of the intrinsic value of truth incorporates Williams's account but goes a step further. While the intrinsic importance of truth is adjoined to its instrumental importance, it adds something new to it, something that is valuable independently of it. What is the connection between the two? The human value of truth arises in a human environment, an environment that combines needs, desires, and choices. The different elements of this environment are interrelated, and some provide the occasion for the emergence of others, but the different elements preserve their independence and each adds something new. While the value of truth itself has both instrumental and intrinsic aspects, the challenge is to explain its intrinsic aspect.

Michael Lynch (2004, Chapter 8) explains the intrinsicness of the value of truth by connecting it to the intrinsic value of happiness (flourishing, good life): caring about truth for its own sake is a necessary part of integrity, authenticity, and self-respect, which are, in turn, necessary parts (or constitutive of) happiness in the Aristotelian sense of flourishing as human beings. To the extent that we all care about happiness and view it as something worthy of caring about for its own sake, we also care about truth for its own sake and view it as worthy of our care. What we lose in a post-truth world, on this view, is, then, our human happiness or flourishing. We lose the ability to live a worthy life. And in this sense we lose our humanity. On the social-political level, Lynch ties the value of truth with the possibility of disagreement with authorities: thinking 'that something might be correct even if those in power disagree. Without [the] idea [of truth], we wouldn't be able to distinguish between what those in power say is the case and what is the case' (*ibid.*: 162). What we lose in an Orwellian, post-truth, world is 'the very idea of speaking truth to power', 'the very possibility of dissent' (*ibid.*).¹⁷

Lynch's approach subsumes the epistemic dimension of the intrinsic value of truth to its (broadly) moral value. In what follows, I focus on the epistemic dimension of the intrinsic value of truth, leaving its moral dimension to another paper.¹⁸ My explanation of the intrinsic dimension of the value of truth is based on what I call 'the basic human epistemic situation'. Three significant elements of this situation are: (1) For some reason or another (or for no reason at all), human civilization developed in such a way as to enshrine our desire to know the world as it is and in all its complexity, not just practically but also theoretically, and not just for material benefits but for its own sake. (2) It so happens that the world itself is highly complex relative to our cognitive capacities or, what comes to the same thing, our cognitive capacities are seriously limited compared with the complexity of the world. (3) It also so happens that, our limitations

¹⁷ For Lynch's discussion of the value of truth along the above lines, see especially chapters 8 and 10 of his 2004 book.

¹⁸ This choice is partly motivated by the fact that recognizing truth as a human value is less common in the contemporary epistemic literature than in the moral literature.

notwithstanding, we do have faculties, from sensory perception to intellect, that enable us to cognitively reach some facets of the world. Furthermore, we have the ability (and inclination) to take active initiative with respect to the ways we go about acquiring knowledge, including the creation of new cognitive resources and the improvement of existent resources, thus expanding the range of facets of the world we can reach.

The combination of these and other circumstances explains why an intrinsic value of truth arose, and continues to be present, in human life. Had humans no intrinsic desire¹⁹ to acquire knowledge-for-its-own-sake of the world as it is and in its full complexity, or had they automatically acquired all the knowledge they intrinsically desired, without making any errors, meeting any obstacles, or having to expand any efforts, they would have no use for an (intrinsic) value or norms of truth. Had they no significant cognitive capacities at all, no ability to transcend at least some of their limitations and overcome some of their obstacles—a value and norms of truth would be of no use to them. But the combination of (1)-(3) means that they—we—have both a need for an intrinsic value and norms of truth, and the ability to makes use of such a value and norms. The intrinsic value of truth on the epistemic level is, partly, a reflection of human civilization’s view of knowledge for its own sake as a significant component of our humanity. And this value, along with the norms associated with it, plays a significant role in motivating and guiding our pursuit of knowledge.

Is this a reduction of one intrinsic value—truth—to another—knowledge?—No. To understand this answer, we need to make a short digression to methodology. The methodology I use to theorize about truth is *holistic*. ‘Holism’ means different things to different people. My own version of holism is *foundational holism* (see Sher 2016a, especially Chs. 2 and 9). Foundational holism affirms the goal of providing a foundation for knowledge, truth, logic, etc., but replaces the traditional ‘foundationalist’ conception of a philosophical foundation by a holistic conception. Unlike some conceptions of holism, it is neither coherentist nor indiscriminating (where by ‘undiscriminating’ I mean ‘treating everything as connected to everything else to the same extent’). Foundational holism is naturally represented by the *Neurath boat* metaphor, interpreted as saying that there is no need for an Archimedean standpoint to study truth, knowledge, and other philosophical subject-matters. To explain why and how truth is a human value, we start from where we stand at the moment, use available tools, draw connections to related subject-matters, and employ our critical faculties. Our theorizing involves sideways, upwards, and back-and-forth movement. Starting with truth and connecting it to knowledge, we arrive at certain results. We then use these results, together with other new resources (including new knowledge) that we have acquired in the meantime, to turn back, re-examine the elements we appealed to, replace, revise, or keep these elements in place, and go on. Truth and knowledge are interrelated—our desire to know the world as it is is related to our desire to find out the truth about it, and vice versa—but neither is reduced to the other or exhausted by its relation to the other. Truth’s relation to morality (which I do not discuss in the present paper) is another source of its intrinsic value, though this relation, too, is not reductive.²⁰

¹⁹ That is, a desire that flows from their humanity, in contrast to instrumental desire, which is geared toward material benefits.

²⁰ This holistic process may involve a certain measure of circularity, but the foundational holistic method renders most cases of circularity non-problematic. Indeed, sometimes circularity is constructive rather than destructive or trivializing. (See Sher 2016a: 30-4).

From the Value of Truth to the Norms and Property of Truth. Values in general give rise to norms. Intrinsic values give rise to intrinsic norms, human values give rise to human norms, and the intrinsic human value of truth gives rise to intrinsic human norms of truth. Norms stand at the intersection of *freedom* and *friction*.²¹ They are products of freedom but instruments of constraint. They emanate from us, but constrain our behaviour. Epistemic norms reflect our epistemic values and constrain what we do to obtain knowledge of the world as well as what our theories say about the world. Partly, it is because of the obstacles we face in seeking knowledge that we need epistemic norms to guide us, and because of our freedom that we need epistemic norms to constrain us. The epistemic norms of truth fall under this category.

What is the content of the epistemic norms of truth? The key to understanding the epistemic norms of truth is the basic human epistemic situation that gives rise to the value of truth.²² Given the root of the value of truth in our desire to *know the world as it is*, the norms of truth are, broadly speaking, *correspondence* norms (rather than coherence or pragmatist norms). Thus, using ‘theory’ and ‘sentence’ as examples of truth-bearers, one of the norms of truth is:

- (N1) Our theories/sentences about the world should attribute to the world, or to objects in the world, properties it/they have, rather than properties it/they do not have.²³

Given the importance we attribute to knowledge for its own sake, one of the norms applicable to us (human agents), rather than to truth-bearers, is:

- (N2) Search for truth. Not just for truths whose knowledge provides material benefits, but for truths which provide knowledge for its own sake. In particular, search for significant truths. Be willing to expand your energy, effort, and resources on searching for such truths.²⁴

Given our desire, need, and ability to overcome at least some epistemic obstacles, the norms of truth give us license to create new routes of correspondence from theories/sentences to the world—routes that enable us to overcome, or avoid, these obstacles:

- (N3) Search for effective routes of correspondence. Be willing to replace the standard routes of reference and correspondence by new, innovative routes, according to need.²⁵

These are not the only norms of truth, but they are especially relevant to the present discussion.²⁶

²¹ For the notions of friction and freedom, see Sher (2016a: Ch. 1). ‘Friction’ here is synonymous with ‘constraint’.

²² See above.

²³ Here ‘property’ encompasses relations.

²⁴ The determination of which truths are *significant* is based on other norms than truth. I shall not go into this here.

²⁵ For discussion of this norm and an example, see below.

²⁶ Some of the principles that C. Wright (1992) and others relate to as ‘platitudes’ also belong in the list of truth norms. (I myself do not regard them as platitudinous).

One significant difference between life with and without the value of truth is that in a life guided by the value of truth we care about satisfaction of the norms of truth, while in a post-truth life we do not. This difference is reflected in our actions, thoughts, decision, misgivings, sacrifices, and other significant aspects of our life. Indeed, this difference permeates our moral and political life as well. Sometimes, finding out how things actually are, and telling the truth about it, takes considerable courage. Still, commitment to truth means that we have an obligation to tell, and search for, the truth in the face of danger.

Turning from the norms to the property of truth, there is, as I have noted above, a straightforward route from the former to the latter. A truth-bearer has the property of truth iff it satisfies the norms of truth, or more precisely, those norms of truth that apply to truth-bearers (such as N1 above). Since those norms are correspondence norms, the property of truth is a *correspondence* property (rather than a coherence or a pragmatist property). Speaking in terms of ‘sentence’, a sentence has the property of being true iff it attributes to the world, or to objects in the world, properties it/they have, rather than ones it/they do not have.

The Immanence, Transcendence, and Normativity of Judgments of Truth. Consider the question: ‘What modes of thought are needed for truth to emerge as a factor in our cognitive life?’. My answer to this question²⁷ is: Truth requires three basic modes of human thought—*immanence*, *transcendence*, and *normativity*. To arrive at truth we need, first, to direct our cognitive gaze at the world, or at some thing in the world, and say something about it, or attribute some property (relation) to it. I call this the ‘immanent’ mode of thought, the mode of thought we use when we speak from *within* a theory. Immanent thoughts are the bearers of truth and falsehood.

But immanence by itself is not sufficient for truth. To arrive at truth we need to transcend our immanent thoughts and hold in view both these thoughts and their subject-matter, or those facets of the world they are directed at. We then arrive at a *transcendent* standpoint, a standpoint from which we can talk about our immanent thoughts in their relation to the world.²⁸

Transcendence by itself, however, is still not sufficient for truth. By assuming a transcendent standpoint we can ask many questions about our immanent thoughts, not just questions of truth. For example, we can ask whether a given immanent thought refers to its subject-matter using onomatopoeic figures of speech. To ask truth questions we need to assume a *normative* mode of thought. Questions of truth are critical questions concerning the relation between our immanent thoughts and the world: Do our immanent thoughts get the world right? Do objects in the world have the properties our immanent thoughts attribute to them? Etc. These are normative questions, and to say that a thought is true is to give a positive answer to these questions.

The realization that truth requires immanence, transcendence, and normativity has significant ramifications for both truth-bearers and judgments of truth: truth-bearers are immanent; judgments of truth are immanent, transcendent, and normative; their

²⁷ See Sher (2004: 24–7, 2016a: 162–175).

²⁸ Such a standpoint is *human* rather than *Godly*, and therefore the present conception of correspondence is not subject to Putnam’s (1983) objection that correspondence (allegedly) requires a *Godly* standpoint. One example of a *human* transcendent standpoint is that of a Tarskian metalanguage, which is more powerful than its object-language yet is still utterly human. I should note that a Tarskian metalanguage is also immanent, and as such its own statements raise the question of truth.

targets are immanent thoughts. Thus, the truth-judgment “‘snow is white’ is true’ is a judgment about an immanent sentence, ‘snow is white’. It is itself an immanent judgment: it targets an object in the world—a sentence—and attributes a property to it. It is a transcendent judgment: it has in view both the sentence ‘snow is white’ and its target in the world—snow and its colour. And it is a normative judgment: it says that the sentence ‘snow is white’ satisfies the correspondence norm of truth.²⁹

Freedom, Choice, and Decisions. Although our values are affected by our biology, practical needs, and means-ends rationality, we are *free* to choose our values. Our instinct of survival, for example, may force us to drink when thirsty, but not to choose drinking as an intrinsic value. We may choose to have no values, and we may have values without explicitly choosing to have them. But the freedom to choose or discard a given value is always there. This choice has existential import, though I would not say, with Sartre, that we are ‘doomed’ to make it. Our freedom to choose our values complicates our life, but it also gives significance to our life.

The freedom to choose and discard values is crucial for understanding the possibility of losing values. Losing a value is not like losing a finger. Evolution might cause humans to lose one of their fingers. An accident or a knifing may cause a human to lose a finger. But losing a value is not like this. I may be pressured by my parents, teachers, friends, political leaders, public opinion, to give up one of my values, but I am free to keep it all the same. Something chosen, however, is also something that can be lost. I cannot choose to eliminate the force of gravity and nothing can make me discard it. But I can choose to eliminate the values of truth and justice from my life, and people/things in my environment can pressure me to discard them. That is why we cannot take the values of truth and justice as given, why the danger of losing truth and justice is a real danger. It is especially possible to lose that part of the value of truth which is a matter of choice rather than a matter of physical necessity. And it is the loss of this part that would be most destructive to our humanity.

Conflicts and Competition between Human Values. Clearly, truth is not the only human value and the norms of truth are not our only norms. Sometimes, the value and norms of truth conflict, or compete, with other values and norms. And when this happens, we have to balance our values/norms or decide which has a stronger claim to guide our actions. The normativity of truth, therefore, is not an all-or-nothing affair. Under certain circumstances, saying what is false (telling a dying child that she is going to live) may be preferable to telling the truth, expanding your efforts on something other than truth (getting food for your family during a famine) may be preferable to seeking truth (engaging in research).

The fact that we need to balance our values/norms enables us to respond to possible objections to the normativity of truth, especially those modeled after Gilbert Harman’s (1986) objections to the normativity of logic. One objection of this kind is that it is generally desirable to avoid cluttering our minds with useless truths. Recognition of the need to balance our norms neutralizes such objections. We are not committed to following the norms of truth absolutely, all the time, without exception, and at the expense of all other human needs and norms. We are committed to treating the truth norms as our default norms in many cases and to following them to the best of our ability much of the time

²⁹ In contrast, the sentences ‘This sentence is true’ and ‘This sentence is false’ are neither immanent nor transcendent. As such, they are not proper truth-bearers. (For a solution to the Liar paradox along these lines, see Sher 2017b.)

and especially in circumstances involving our conscience. Yet we are also committed to exercising our critical faculties, to acting within reason, to making ‘all things considered’ decisions, and to re-examining our priorities both periodically and according to need. Our ability to *transcend* our present standpoint, whatever it is, evaluate our situation, and make decisions, makes this process feasible.

The Evolution of Human Values and Norms. Although human values are not relative, they are not static either. The dynamic character of human values takes various forms. Sometimes their scope changes. For example, some principles of justice were for a long time not applied to slaves. The content of some values changes with the introduction of new principles. For example, habeas corpus was not a principle of justice before the middle Middle Ages. We may say that human values *evolve in time*. But there are significant limits to how human values can change and still remain human values. The present value of justice cannot be changed to include the injunction ‘Exterminate Jews!’ or ‘Lynch blacks!’ yet remain a human value (or, for that matter, the value of justice). Human values are dynamic but not relativistic. This is what I meant earlier when I said (see entry on the objectivity of human values) that the reference of ‘human value’ is *significantly rigid*. The expressions denoting human values are significantly rigid in the sense that the values they denote can themselves evolve while retaining their identity.³⁰ One area where the value and norms of truth evolve in time is in the content of *truth-conditions*, understood as the conditions we set on true truth-bearers. Today, in science, the truth-conditions of sentences about water require that ‘water’ refer to molecules of H₂O. Prior to the discovery of the molecular structure of water they did not. (They might have required that ‘water’ refer to a transparent and tasteless liquid that, among other things, freezes in a certain temperature and evaporates in another, and so on.) We may say that the *content* of the conditions we set on true sentences evolves in time. As our understanding of the world changes, so do the (substantive) truth-conditions we assign to statements about the world.³¹

The value theory of truth has resources for solving problems that arise for existent theories of truth. Let me conclude this part of the paper with two such problems: the problem of naïve correspondence and the problem of scientific change (pessimistic meta-induction)³².

The Problem of Naïve Correspondence. Truth is a human value anchored, epistemically, in (i) our desire for, and the value we assign to, knowledge of the world as it in fact is, and (ii) the obstacles we face in pursuing such knowledge. Given the first anchor, the value of truth is a correspondence value. Given the second, it is a dynamic value, changing in response to changing circumstances. How does this value-theoretic approach to truth affect the traditional correspondence conception?

First, the traditional conception views correspondence as a mere *factual* relation while the new value theory regards it also as a *value* and a *norm* (cluster of norms). Second, the traditional conception views correspondence as a very *simple* relation—copy, picture, mirror, or direct isomorphism—while the new conception views it as a potentially *complex* relation. Third, the traditional conception views correspondence as a pre-fixed relation, while the new conception views it as a *task*, a *problem*, a

³⁰ An account of the identity conditions of values will have to balance their fixity and evolvement.

³¹ For further discussion of the evolvement of truth-conditions, see Sher (2017c).

³² The pessimistic meta-induction is the claim that since most past scientific theories up to now turned out to be false, current scientific theories are likely to turn out false (See, for example, Laudan 1981).

challenge, hence, as evolving in time. These differences enable the value theory of truth (correspondence) to overcome the main shortcomings of traditional correspondence—its naiveté, simplism, and inflexibility.

One result of these shortcomings is that traditional correspondence does not discern differences in our ability to reach different facets of the world. Some facets of the world are easy for us to reach, others difficult. Some things we want to say about the world are easy to express in our language, others not. When everything is simple and easy, we can use ready-made templates of reference and correspondence. In those cases we can follow simple *syntax-semantics parity principles*: a singular term must denote an individual in the world, a 1st-level predicate—a property (relation) of individuals. A 1st-level sentence of the form ‘ Pa ’ is true iff there are an individual a in the world and a property P of individuals, such that a is denoted by ‘ a ’ and P is denoted by ‘ P ’, and a has the 1st-level property P . Some facets of the world, however, are too complex to be adequately described using our standard semantic principles. In those cases we need to replace the standard parity principles and the standard patterns of correspondence by more complex ones. The point is that sometimes we have to adjust the reference and correspondence relations in order to balance the complexity of the world and our cognitive abilities.

Take arithmetic. Suppose there are no numbers in the world. There are no numerical individuals. In that case, we cannot use the usual syntax-semantics parity principles to truly say ‘ $7 + 5 = 12$ ’. These principles require that ‘7’, ‘5’, and ‘12’ denote numerical individuals; but, since no such individuals exist, ‘ $7 + 5 = 12$ ’ does not correspond to reality, hence is not true. But suppose there are finite cardinality properties in the world. That is, individuals in the world have properties that have finite cardinality properties.³³ Suppose, further, that finite cardinalities are governed by laws and, seeking to know finite cardinalities in their full complexity, we, humans, want to know these laws. To discover these laws we need theoretical machinery, including language. Suppose that our cognitive make-up is such that we figure out things better when we think in terms of individuals and their properties than in terms of properties and their (higher-level) properties. In that case we may put aside the traditional syntax-semantic parity requirement and devise a new route of reference and correspondence for the (1st-level) language of arithmetic. One way to proceed is to introduce an intermediate level of posits between numerals (language) and cardinality properties (world), for example, a level of posited numerical individuals. These numerical individuals would be systematically correlated with 2nd-level cardinality properties and directly referred to by numerals in our language. A similar level of posited (1st-level) arithmetical operations would connect (the 1st-level) ‘+’ to the (3rd-level) operation of disjoint union on (2nd-level) finite cardinality properties.³⁴ This would make ‘ $7 + 5 = 12$ ’ correspond to reality—not in the simple way demanded by traditional correspondence theory, but in a systematic way all the same, a way that reflects how we cognitively reach finite cardinalities in the world.

In this way we arrive at the idea of a plurality of *routes* or *patterns* of correspondence. Not every pattern is a correspondence pattern, but given the complexity of the world, our cognitive peculiarities, and the limits of our language, we are free to satisfy the correspondence-truth norm by non-traditional correspondence patterns

³³ For example, the property of being a moon of Earth has cardinality ONE.

³⁴ See Sher (2016a, Ch. 8, Section 4).

when the traditional patterns are inadequate to the task. The license to use, and devise, multiple routes of correspondence can be viewed as a form of *correspondence pluralism* (see Sher 2013, 2016a).

The new correspondence theory of truth, with its openness to the need for new, non-traditional forms or patterns of correspondence, is, thus, neither naïve nor simplistic nor inflexible. How true theories correspond to reality is an open question, susceptible to complex answers.

Let me now turn to my second example of a problem that the present theory enables us to solve, or at least make progress toward solving.

The Puzzle of Truth and Scientific Change (or The Absoluteness of Truth and the Changeability of Judgments of Truth). The view that truth is a human value, that this value evolves in time, and that its application requires immanent, transcendent, and normative modes of thought, enables us to deal with resistant obstacles to correspondence and realism. An especially unsettling problem of this kind is the problem of scientific change (pessimistic meta-induction).

Science is constantly undergoing changes: radical changes ('scientific revolutions', in Kuhn's [1962] terminology) and incremental changes ('normal science'). A theory accepted as true at time t_1 is shown to be false at a later time, t_2 . Worse still, it is highly likely that our current theories will be found false in the future (pessimistic meta-induction). This raises the question whether there is *absolute truth* in science at all. Some philosophers say that science *approximates* truth. But the notion of approximate truth is so vague and indiscriminating³⁵ that its explanatory power is in doubt.

The view that truth is a human value enables us to resolve the difficulty by distinguishing the *absoluteness of truth* from the *changeability of judgments of truth*. And this it does in a way that captures the subtleties of this duality. Consider the following triangle, where A is the world (a target in the world), B is a theory of, or a sentence about, A, and C is a transcendent standpoint from which we view both A and B and make a judgment about the truth-value of B.

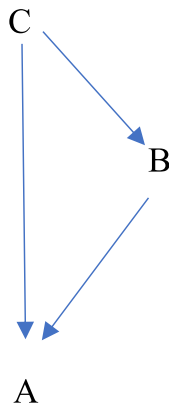


Figure 1. The Truth Triangle

³⁵ It treats science as always further approximating the truth, failing to discriminate between steps that bring it closer to the truth and steps that take it away from the truth.

Scientific change is often a change in B and C, rather than a change in A. The world (A) is as it is. This is the hard rock—absoluteness—of truth. But our theories of the world (B), as well as our judgments of their truth-value (C), are affected by our cognitive circumstances. These include both our cognitive limitations and the steps we take to overcome/circumvent these limitations. Indeed, it is the gap or tension between the fixity of the world and the enduring changeability of our cognition of the world that makes the value and norms of truth so critical. Our changeability has several dimensions: making and correcting errors, progressing from ignorance to discovery, changing the questions we ask about the world, changes in our understanding of the truth-conditions of sentences (truth-bearers), changes in our background knowledge and cognitive resources, and so on. The present theory is adept at explaining the subtleties of truth partly because it is attentive to the tension between the absoluteness of the world and the changeability of our theories and truth-judgments.

To see the dynamics of scientific change ‘in action’, consider the following example which, for the sake of clarity and brevity, is significantly simplified (so it becomes largely a toy example).

(Simplified) Example: Early Astronomical Change.

Symbolization Key (based on the ‘truth triangle’ diagram):

A: Solar-system reality.

B1: Ptolemaic astronomy.

B2: Copernican astronomy.

B3: Galilean-Keplerian astronomy.

B4: Contemporary astronomy.

C1-C4: Transcendent standpoints (for judging truth-values), following the development of B1-B4.

Claims:

(a) Sun revolves around Earth.

(b) Earth revolves around Sun.

(c) Revolution is circular.

(d) Revolution is elliptical.

Claims Accepted by B1-B4:

B1: a, ~b, c, ~d.

B2: ~a, b, c, ~d

B3: ~a, b, ~c, d

B4: ~a, b, ~c, d

C1-C4 Truth-Judgments:

C1: True(a,c), False(b,d).

C2: No sufficient basis for truth-judgments.

C3: True(b,d), False(a,c)

C4: True(b,d), False(a,c).

Explanations of C1-C4 Judgments:

- C1: At C1 scientists do not have sufficient cognitive resources for detecting the falsehood of B1. Since there is no major competitor to B1, they judge that B1 is true (a, c are true).
- C2: At C2 there are two alternative theories, but there are no sufficient cognitive resources to judge which one is true and which one is false. This explains why (at least some) scientists suspend judgment.
- C3: At C3 there is a significant increase in our cognitive resources. Reasoning based on telescopic observations and other astronomical data enables scientists to judge that (a) and (c) are false, while (b) and (d) are true.
- C4: At C4 there are many significant increases in our cognitive resources. But these still support the truth-judgments made at C3. This explains why at C4 scientists conjecture that (b) and (d) are absolute truths and (a) and (c) absolute falsehoods. But even at C4 we cannot rule out future changes in our understanding of the solar system.

Should we say that, in general, absolute truth is the truth determined at C-God (Godly transcendence)?—No. Truth is a *human* value, and human values are *human*, not Godly. They arise in circumstances, and answer to needs, that belong to human, not Godly, life. Although values could, in principle, arise in non-human civilizations (actual or counterfactual), the very ideas of a Godly civilization and Godly needs make little sense.

This concludes my outline of the value theory of truth. The value theory construes truth as a value, a cluster of norms, and a property, all related to each other. By construing truth as a human value, the value theory offers an informative answer to the resistant question ‘What is truth?’—Truth is an intrinsic human value, central to our humanity, and associated with (non-traditional) correspondence norms and property. This answer satisfies our adequacy condition for the philosophy of truth: the difference between a life with and a life without truth is the difference between a life that retains a significant aspect of our humanity and a life that has lost it.

3 Ramifications for the Substantivist-Deflationist Debate

How do the post-truth crisis and the adequacy condition it gives rise to affect the substantivist-deflationist debate?

For the purpose of the present paper, I identify deflationism and substantivism³⁶ with the following views, based on Horwich (1990/8)³⁷ and Sher (2004, 2016a,b):

Deflationism:

- (DEF1) The subject-matter of the philosophy of truth is trivial. There is no need for rich, deep, complex, highly explanatory theories of this subject-matter.

³⁶ Sometimes called ‘inflationism’, although it is an open question whether the two terms refer to exactly the same approach.

³⁷ In Horwich’s terms, the view I present here characterizes the deflationist ‘conception’ of truth, rather than its ‘theory’ of truth, which consists of the equivalence schema and/or its instances.

- (DEF2) There is just one deflationist theory of truth, and it consists of the equivalence Schema
 (E) $\langle p \rangle$ is true iff p
 (where ' p ' stands for a truth-bearer and ' $\langle p \rangle$ ' for an expression referring to this truth-bearer) and its instances.
- (DEF3) There is nothing more to truth than the equivalence schema. Everything that philosophers need to say about truth can be said based on this schema. No resources beyond this schema (together with basic logic, common sense, and the 'use' theory of meaning) are available for the philosophy of truth.
- (DEF4) The main contribution of truth to human life and civilization is the use of the truth predicate as a technical device of oblique endorsement and generalization, as in:
- (i) Everything that General Relativity says is true,
 - (ii) No truth-bearer of the form ' $P \ \& \ \sim P$ ' is true.

Substantivism:

- (SBT1) The subject-matter of the philosophy of truth is substantive, that is, rich, complex, important, and non-trivial. This subject-matter requires substantive, that is, rich, deep, complex, and highly explanatory, theories.³⁸
- (SBT2) There is no unique substantivist theory of truth (one that shares the view expressed in SBT1). The value-theory developed in this paper is an example of a substantivist theory of truth, as are various versions of the correspondence, coherence, pragmatic, pluralist, and truth-maker theories of truth.
- (SBT3) It is an open question, that cannot be decided in advance, what resources are needed for an adequate theory of truth. As our understanding of truth advances (or at least changes), as new questions about truth arise, new resources may be needed.
- (SBT4) The contribution of truth to human life and civilization is an open question. (substantivism by itself does not favor one substantive answer to this question over another, or, for that matter, one substantive theory over another).³⁹

What are substantivism's and deflationism's views about the value and normativity of truth? Many substantivists (for example, C. Wright (1992), Engel (2001), Lynch (2004)) affirm the value and/or normativity of truth, which are the main themes of the present paper. But at least some deflationists affirm them as well. In some of his writings (Postscript to 1990/8, 2006, 2013), Horwich supports the views that truth is a human value and that truth is normative in a sense related to the one discussed here, which he traces to Michael Dummett (1959). In his (2018) paper Horwich claims that truth is not normative. But there he understands normativity in a different sense, less relevant to us here, which he calls 'functional', and according to which a normative concept is one that functions like the (non-specific) concept 'ought'.

Deflationism's Criticisms of Substantivism. Horwich does not discuss substantivism directly, but some of the things he says in motivating the deflationist conception can be

³⁸ All the adjectives in SBT1 are used in their everyday sense (rather than as philosophical terms-of-art). Note that 'substantive' applies both to the subject-matter of theories and to theories themselves, with slight variations in meaning, as indicated in the text of SBT1.

³⁹ A useful way to think about the difference between a substantivist and a substantive theory of truth is that a substantivist theory aims at being substantive and a substantive theory is one that succeeds in achieving this goal.

naturally construed as criticisms of substantivism. Three such criticisms are: (a) substantivism is responsible for the mistaken impression that truth is a mystery, (b) all substantivist theories of truth have failed, (c) substantivist theories of truth are incapable of explaining why the E-schema and its instances are true. How does substantivism, and in particular, the substantivist value theory of truth, inspired by the post-truth crisis, respond to these criticisms?

- (a) *The Mystery of Truth*. Horwich says that non-deflationary theories of truth seek to unravel ‘the underlying nature of truth’ (Horwich 1990/8: ix). But since the underlying nature of truth is ‘a mystery’ (*ibid.*), they are bound to fail. It is impossible to explain a mystery. In this sense, substantivists perpetuate the mystery of truth. (Deflationists, in contrast, do not attempt to explain the underlying nature of truth. They claim that truth is fully accounted for by a non-mysterious schema – the equivalence schema – or its instances, which, being primitive, do not require an explanation.)

The substantivist response to this claim is that Horwich confuses two distinct senses of ‘mystery’: ‘mystery’ as something that defies a rational explanation (allows at most *magical* explanations) and ‘mystery’ as something that requires, and allows, a rational explanation. When substantivists talk about the mystery of truth they use ‘mystery’ in the second sense. They mean what scientists mean when they say that, say, the origin of the universe is a mystery or that the structure of DNA used to be a mystery. They mean that the task of explaining what truth is is a difficult task, yet can be done. They say that truth is open to rational investigations, investigations that will solve, hence remove, the mystery of truth. The present paper argues that the post-truth crisis offers a new perspective on the question ‘What is, or what is the nature of, truth?’, a perspective that enables us to give a non-mysterious (non-magical, rational) answer to this question, and that such an answer is given by the value theory of truth.

- (b) *Failure of Theories of Truth*. According to Horwich, all substantivist theories of truth have failed. Treating the traditional correspondence theory of truth as a paradigm of a substantivist theory, he says that the correspondence insight ‘has never been worked out to anyone’s satisfaction’ (Horwich 1990/8: 1; see full citation above), and that the (substantivist) alternatives to this theory have not done better. This claim is too non-specific to warrant a response. But we have seen that at least as far as the naïveté criticism of the traditional correspondence theory is concerned, not all substantivist theories of truth are subject to this criticism.
- (c) *Explanation of the E-schema and its instances*. According to Horwich, substantivist theories of truth fail to provide ‘a good account of why it is that instances of the equivalence schema are true’ (Horwich 1990/8: 11-2). But whether or not other substantivist theories of truth meet this challenge, the value theory of truth developed in this paper, which is a special correspondence theory, does. By associating the correspondence character of truth with the human value and norms of truth, it offers a straightforward explanation of the truth of instances of the E-schema. Consider the instance “‘Snow is white’ is true iff snow is white”. ‘Snow is white’ has the property of being true *because* it satisfies the *norms* associated with the *value* of truth, specifically, those norms that apply to truth-bearers, such as the *correspondence* norm N1 above. It is because ‘Snow is white’ attributes to an object

(stuff) in the world—snow—a property—being white—that this object has in the world that it is true. That is, it is *because snow is white* that ‘snow is white’ is true. A generalization of this explanation explains why for any truth-bearing sentence p ⁴⁰, ‘ $\langle p \rangle$ is true iff p ’ is true.

This explanation ties the truth of E-sentences with the *correspondence norm* of truth, which is tied up with the content of the *human value* of truth, which is grounded in the *human* desire to know the world *as it is*, which is enshrined by our civilization as reflective of a significant part of our *humanity*.

Substantivism’s Criticism of Deflationism. There are many substantivist criticisms of deflationism.⁴¹ Two of my own earlier criticisms (Sher 1999, 2004, 2016a) were directed at DEF1. One of these says that deflationism fails to recognize the complexity of truth. The other, reformulated in terms introduced in the present paper, says that deflationism is blind to the fact that *substantiveness is a central epistemic value*, that worthwhile theories, in all fields, are substantive.

The post-truth crisis and the questions it gives rise to lead to additional criticisms, centered on DEF3 and DEF4. These criticisms focus on (i) the extreme restrictions set by deflationism on the resources available to the philosophy of truth, (ii) deflationism’s explanation of the importance of truth for humans, and (iii) deflationist’s failure to satisfy our adequacy condition for the philosophy of truth.

(i) *Deflationism’s extreme restrictions on the resources available to the philosophy of truth.* Deflationism’s severe restriction of the resources available to the philosophy of truth has been the focus of many criticisms. Some of these (for example, Gupta 1993, Shapiro 1998, Halbach 1999, Soames 1999, and Armour-Garb 2012) are directed at deflationism’s ability to achieve its own narrow goals (for example, provide a tool for oblique reference and generalization) given its limited resources. Others (for example, Engel 2001 and Lynch 2004) argue that deflationism is incapable of explaining the normativity of truth due to its limited cognitive resources. I cannot address the attempts to defend deflationism against these criticisms (by, for example, Field 1999 and Ferrari 2018) here due to limitations of space. Instead, I would like to add two new (but related) criticisms based on the discussion of truth in the present paper. These criticisms are directed at

- (a) deflationism’s ability to give *true* answers to questions about truth, and
- (b) deflationism’s *openness* to new questions concerning truth.

(a) *The correctness of deflationist answers to questions about truth.* Deflationism’s strict limits on the resources available to the philosophy of truth affect its ability to give *true* answers to questions about truth. The point is general: you cannot be committed both to *true* answers and to *extreme restrictions* on the resources available for such answers. This is the case with respect to the deflationist answer to the question ‘What is the main importance of truth for human life/civilization?’, for example, as we shall see in (ii) below.

⁴⁰ For non-truth-bearing sentences, see fn. 29 above.

⁴¹ In addition to the works mentioned below, see, for example, C. Wright (1992) Engel (2002), Lynch (2009), Bar-On and Simmons (2006, 2007), C.D. Wright (2018), and D. Edwards (2018).

(b) *Deflationism's openness to new questions about truth.* Another way to view deflationism's strict restrictions on the resources available to the philosophy of truth is as limiting the questions we can ask about truth. We can only ask those questions that can be answered by extremely limited resources. However, it is unreasonable to think that all significant questions about truth—past, present, and future—are answerable using very limited resources. And just as it is irrational to limit science or mathematics in advance to questions that can be answered using a very narrow set of scientific/mathematical tools, so it is irrational to limit philosophy, including the philosophy of truth, to asking only questions that can be answered using the narrow resources sanctioned by deflationism. It is questionable whether 'post-truth' questions, questions about the modes of thought required for truth to emerge as a factor in our cognitive life, questions about the multiple forms (routes, patterns) correspondence does/can take in diverse fields of knowledge, questions about the challenges of scientific change (pessimistic meta-induction) to truth and the challenges of truth to science, and so on, can be seriously considered by deflationist theories of truth.

(ii) *Deflationism's explanation of the importance of truth for humans.* According to deflationism, the main importance of truth for humans lies in the use of the truth predicate for *indirect* reference/endorsement and generalization, as explained in DEF4 above. But the truth of this claim has been questioned by a number of philosophers. For example, John Collins (2007) and Gurpreet Rattan (2016) argue that not just indirect uses of the truth predicate, but also *direct* uses play an important role in our life. For example, Rattan argues that direct 'truth-conditional analysis' helps us to 'acquir[e] or improv[e] knowledge' (*ibid.*: 235). To know whether '*a* is dry or *a* is not dry' is logically valid, we have to reflect on the direct truth-conditions of sentences with vague predicates, such as 'dry'; in particular, on whether their truth-conditions are bivalent or not.⁴²

The post-truth perspective leads to an additional criticism of the deflationist claim that the main importance of truth lies in the use of the truth predicate as a technical device of oblique endorsement and generalization. This claim implies that the main difference between a person/society that affirms the importance of truth and one that denies it is that the former licenses a certain technical device of endorsement and generalization involving the predicate 'true' and the latter does not. But it is quite unreasonable—shall I say 'absurd'—to say that what is lost in Orwell's dystopian society is the ability to use this technical device, that the problem with having a post-truth president is his lack of mastery of this device, that the danger to human life/civilization of rejecting truth is the disappearance of this device (forcing us to make do with other, possibly less convenient, devices, such as substitutional quantification).⁴³ So the deflationist answer to the question 'What do we lose by losing truth?', hence to the question 'Where does the main importance of truth for humans lie?', is in all likelihood *false*. Now, suppose that true answers to these questions require resources that go beyond the E-schema (or its instances). Then, due to deflationism's extreme restrictions on the resources available to the philosophy of truth, deflationism is barred from giving true answers to these questions. Deflationism blocks us from telling the truth (or at least a significant part of the truth) about truth.

⁴² In Sher (2017c), I point to another significant use of direct truth-conditions in scientific contexts (hinted at in the subsections *the evolution of human values and norms* and *the puzzle of truth and scientific change* above).

⁴³ See Horwich (1990/8: 4).

(iii) *Deflationism's failure to satisfy the new adequacy condition for the philosophy of truth.* The new adequacy condition says that an adequate philosophy of truth has to give true and explanatory answers to questions like: 'What is the difference between a life that does and a life that does not value truth?', 'What is lost in a post-truth civilization?', 'What do humans lose by losing their appreciation of truth?' etc. The problem with deflationism is both deficiency and omission. We have seen above that the one answer deflationism gives to these questions is deficient. And it fails to consider any other answer to these questions (omission).

Of course, deflationists do not have anything like the post-truth crisis in mind when they ask and answer their questions about truth. But this is just the problem. Deflationism adopts such a narrow view of the significance of truth, limited to linguistic uses of the truth predicate, that it distorts our understanding of truth. Truth is so much more than a technical linguistic tool. The post-truth perspective pulls us away from the deflationist straightjacket. To understand what truth is, we must be open to new questions and new perspectives on truth. Most importantly, we must be ready to use any rational resources within our reach to conduct thorough investigations of this deep, complex, multi-dimensional, critical, and fundamental subject.

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