

1

We do not seek truth. We seek more beliefs, more adequate beliefs, more coherent beliefs, more beautiful beliefs, more effective beliefs.

2

In 1892, Frege wrote the following.

One can, indeed, say: *The thought that 5 is a prime number is true*. But closer examination shows that nothing more has been said than in the simple sentence *5 is a prime number*.

This “redundancy theory of truth” was a breakthrough. Aspects of the same insight are found in Ayer, Wittgenstein, Ramsey, and Brandom.

3

We can also go back to Peirce in 1887.

Our beliefs guide our desires and shape our actions....

The irritation of doubt is the only immediate motive for the struggle to attain belief. It is certainly best for us that our beliefs should be such as may truly guide our actions so as to satisfy our desires; and this reflection will make us reject every belief which does not seem to have been so formed as to insure this result. But it will only do so by creating a doubt in the place of that belief. With the doubt, therefore, the struggle begins, and with the cessation of doubt it ends. Hence, the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion. We may fancy that this is not enough for us, and that we seek, not merely an opinion, but a true opinion. But put this fancy to the test, and it proves groundless; for as soon as a firm belief is reached we are entirely satisfied, whether the belief be true or false.

Peirce still uses “true” and “false”, but his insight puts us beyond them. Inquiry is an adjustment of opinion. People like to *talk* about inquiry as a search for truth, but the “truth” involved is one more opinion, that may itself be adjusted later.

Peirce also offers us a psychology of belief (equivalent in this context with opinion.) Beliefs tend to be adjusted when they lead us into

trouble. *He sees the difference between the belief itself and what tends to establish it.*

4

Why isn't the redundancy theory of truth more popular ? More appreciated ? At least among critical, secular thinkers ?

5

First a poem by WC Williams.

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox
and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast
Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

6

Part of the problem seems to be that the perception of a situation gets taken as a truth-maker for an assertion of that situation. *There are plums in the icebox*, you tell me. I open the icebox and see them. Your claim, some say, is made true.

There are a couple of problems with this approach. As Ayer describes with admirable detail in *Language, Truth, and Logic*, empirical propositions are never beyond revision. I might decide that I hallucinated the plums in the icebox, that they were fake plums, etc. So the assertion that was "made true" is now "made false."

The other issue is that we don't need "true" here. When I open the icebox and see what looks like plums, I adjust my opinion. I "live in" this new belief that there are indeed plums in the icebox. I look forward to eating them. I am grateful to so-and-so for buying them, etc.

Realism in philosophy might be (generously) put this way: *the world is the way it is independently of what anyone believes about it.*

I reject such realism, but I can understand why it is appealing. It gets something right about the “passivity” of perception. It’s hard to complain about a pre-theoretical realism, because I argue elsewhere that J.S. Mill’s phenomenalism is a “recovery of the lifeworld.” The objects that “pre-theoretical realists” have in mind are “the objects of experience.” I can misremember or speculate, but the mountain is not going to shrink or expand much for my sake.

This “sane” (and blurry) realism is still grounded, though, however tacitly, in the mountain as potentially perceived. What pre-theoretical talk *means* by “mountain” is that large rocky structure, covered with trees and snow. A thing that *could* be climbed.

Why reject such realism then? First, this pretheoretical realism is only plausible in a context of the straightforwardly perceived. Is it true or false *now* that a particular Turing machine will halt? Is the world as described by Platonism? So much of life is lived in a kind of irreducible fog. As James emphasized, we tend to *identity* the perceptual object with the way it shows itself in ideal conditions —ideal for our own human physiology. Which encourages us to imagine an ideally determinate world. But this fantasy falls to pieces as we get into the realm of talk about talk about talk. High theoretical claims are not resolved by an easy perception of “the truth.”

Second, (theoretical) realism is almost always indirect realism. Sentient organisms have private *representations* of the world which are basically independent of the world’s being. So the story goes. Our “phenomenal consciousness” is sometimes just denied (paradoxically) as an illusion. But even those awkward dualists who accept it understand it as a mediation, as something “mental” that emerged from a determinate but obscure non-mental basis. They don’t see their own hard problem of

this non-mental basis, which can't be given a meaning. Pious nonsense.

Some realists think that statements are made true or false by this non-mental basis. I'm not sure which version of this is more confused. The version with the scientific image as this basis. Or the version with a fetishized clump of negations.

10

I note in passing that the thing-in-itself (the clump of negations) is possibly a misreading of the logical intending of the thing, which is a temporal and interpersonal synthesis. Sartre opens *Being and Nothingness* with a nice recapitulation of Husserl's revolution. The object is not hidden behind its appearances. It is beyond them in a different way. It is never finally given. It is not identifiable with any of them. But it has its being only through them. Though aspects are only aspects because they are grasped as parts of a whole. Unclarity on this issue might be a cause for dreaming of some residue of the object beyond all possible experience.

11

Two related opponents have been emphasized. So-called realism. And "truth inflationism." What they have in common is the denial of the "first-personal-ness" of reality.

The adjustment of belief toward a consensus of the wise is laudable. There is indeed something "transpersonal" in our time-binding ontological tradition. But I "have the world" in or through or as a "private streaming" associated with this body, the one always at the center of that stream, as if at the origin of a coordinate system that moves with me. It's as if I don't really walk, but the moving world slides under my dangling, dutiful legs.

12

I "live in" *my* belief. It is the "liquid logic" that pervades and forms my life, constantly updated, a channel or aspect of the-world-for-me. Which I know is also *our* world, *the* world. But "our world" is finally the-world-for-her and the-world-for-him and so on. And, to be fair, the world-for-who-ever, the tradition of the generic subject, a valuable

tradition. “Anyone can see that....” But this is game that *actual* subjects learn to *play*.

13

And here we have the “one” of Heidegger and Dreyfus. Which even shows us the connection between inauthenticity and an opposing semantic phenomenism that demystifies truth. The so-called truth is what *one* believes. Here we have “the care for already known knowledge.” We have a theological obsession with certainty and consensus driving our ontology into confusion.

14

The evidence suggests a dramaturgical ontology —that the world is given in I-centered streams. And the personality of these “I-centers” in all of its inherited complexity is entangled with the simplest perceptions. The world is given “to” or “through” entire personalities. The phenomenal stream is structured by this personality. The world “has” the personalities of its inhabitants. This conversation, to which I add right now, is real. Or, if it is not, ontology itself is a dream, a joke.