CHAPTER 6

Truth and assertion

To know the immediate argumental role of an asserted sentence is not enough in order to understand the assertion of that sentence. It is also necessary to know the assertoric force, which is common to all assertions. In this chapter I shall argue that assertoric force establishes a connection between the two notions distinguished in the preceding chapter: understanding and correctness of a language. My conclusion will be that by understanding the assertoric force we understand that our language and its present argumentation rules, in order to justify the truth-claim which is raised by the act of assertion, can be changed and enriched in a rational way so as to comply more and more with the different criteria of correctness.

1. Truth and assertoric force.

When we assert a sentence we take the responsibility that the asserted sentence is true and we (implicitly) demand that it be accepted as true. In this sense we can say that by the act of asserting a sentence we implicitly raise the claim that the uttered sentence is true in the circumstances of utterance. The truth-claim which we raise constitutes the force that we attach to the asserted sentence.

If the truth-claim is challenged by an opponent, then we should justify our act of assertion, i.e. we should give a correct argument for the asserted sentence, an argument which shows – conclusively or not – that the asserted sentence is true. Our assertion in a given circumstance of utterance is correct or justified, i.e. we have the right to raise the truth-claim concerning the asserted sentence, if, and only if, we in that circumstance know a correct argument for the asserted sentence. Of course, it has to be allowed that in some circumstances it may be improper and even unreasonable to demand a justification of an assertion: it would be stupid to ask a doctor who is trying to save somebody's life to justify on the spot his/her assertion "this is brain hemorrhage"; the doctor's assertion can be correct, if he/she knows a correct argument for the former sentence, even if he/she does not give such an argument immediately. But in suitable...

1 This view of assertion is present in Frege (1884) §3; cf. also Frege (1918) and Dummett (1973) ch. 10. Also Peirce endorses this view in writings which date back to 1903, cf. Peirce (1931-35) 2.252 and 5.29-5.31; cf. also Peirce (1958) 8.337. Among the various supporters of this conception cf. Habermas (1979), Apel (1981), Martin Löf (1983), first lecture.

2 We have to add "in the circumstances of utterance" in order to take account of sentences containing indexical expressions.
circumstances, if we don't give a correct argument for the asserted sentence when
the hearer asks for a justification, the hearer can criticize our assertion because it
is not a correct assertion. In this case the hearer can rightly say that we did not
have the right of making the assertion. The assertion was not justified. However,
if the hearer agrees that the asserted sentence is true because he/she knows a
correct argument for the sentence in question, we are satisfied because then the
claim we have raised is right and this is what matters to us, even if we at the
moment were not able of showing it. If another person gives for the sentence
asserted by us good grounds which we were not capable of giving, then, though
we were not entitled to make the assertion and thus deserve to be criticized, the
incorrect assertion is not withdrawn. That is why the claim raised by an assertion
is not that the assertion is correct or justified, but only that the asserted sentence
is true.

However, the view of assertion that I have just summarized is open to many
different interpretations because the notion of truth of a sentence and the notion
of correct argument could be interpreted in many different ways. We want to
understand what a speaker does when he/she asserts a sentence. Thus we have to
explain what one claims when one claims that a sentence is true.

2. Two conceptions of truth which are not defended in this study, but are
compatible with the theory of sense centred on immediate argumental role.

In the present chapter I shall adopt an epistemic conception of truth. But I shall
do it on the basis of some considerations, which, though they are in agreement
with the general spirit of the explanation of sense that I gave, are not
consequences in a strict sense of the description of a theory of sense centred on
immediate argumental role contained in chapter 3. The content of the preceding
chapters does not imply any particular conception of truth.

2.1. The equivalence thesis and the redundancy theory of truth.

In the first place, there is no contradiction, as far as I can see, if we combine the
explication of sense in terms of immediate argumental role with the so-called
redundancy theory of truth. The redundancy theory of truth was formulated in
many ways, but the common core of all such different formulations is the idea
that the complete explanation of the notion of truth is given by an explicit

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3 An unequivocal endorsement of the redundancy theory of truth is in Wittgenstein (1956) Part
statement of the general correctness of the thesis that, following Dummett, I shall call "the equivalence thesis", i.e. the thesis that

E) it is true that A if, and only if, A.

In his recent book *Truth*, Paul Horwich gave a detailed defence of a formulation of the redundancy theory which he calls "the minimalist conception of truth". According to the minimalist conception of truth, a complete explication of the notion of truth is given by the minimalist theory of truth. Roughly, the minimalist theory consists of infinitely many axioms which are instances of the equivalence thesis (E). As Horwich rightly emphasizes, the equivalence thesis is a fundamental principle concerning the word "true", on which a very important aspect of the use of this word is based. We use the word "true" in order to express indirectly our attitudes towards sentences which we, for different reasons, cannot specify directly and explicitly. For example, by saying: "Some of Nixon's statements about Watergate are not true", we deny some statement that Nixon made, without specifying directly which. Or if we say: "Every sentence of the form '(A → ¬¬A)' is true", we assert indirectly, by means of a single sentence, all the infinitely many sentences of the aforementioned form, which we cannot assert all directly.

It is unquestionably right to describe the use of the word "true" in arguments on the part of an English speaker by saying that the speaker performs inferences of the forms

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5 The importance of the equivalence thesis was underlined in different ways by Frege, Wittgenstein, Ramsey, Tarski and Quine. Frege in "Der Gedanke" formulates the equivalence thesis in the context of his doctrine that truth is undefinable; cf. Frege (1918) p. 34. Ramsey and Wittgenstein defended different versions of the redundancy theory; cf. Ramsey (1927) and Wittgenstein (1956). Tarski took "true" to be a metalinguistic predicate of sentences and considered the corresponding version of the equivalence thesis a condition of material adequacy on a definition of "true" for a particular object-language; cf. Tarski (1935). Quine regards the Tarskian version of the equivalence thesis as the crucial principle on which the role of the predicate "true" – as "a device of disquotation" indispensable for "semantic ascent" – is based; cf. Quine (1970).
7 This is rough because Horwich prefers to employ the notion of propositional structure and a special notation involving angled brackets in order to deal with propositions that are not expressible in current English; cf. Horwich (1990) pp. 18-22, in particular footnote 4.
it is true that A

A

it is true that A

"A" is true

A

"A" is true

So, from the point of view of a theory of sense centred on immediate argumental role, the sense of the word "true" in English could be completely given by some set of argumentation rules which constitute an appropriate version of the equivalence thesis.

One might adopt the theory of sense described in chapter 3 and explain the sense of "true" by means of some version of the equivalence thesis. After this explanation of the sense of "true", one might say that *nothing more about truth has to be added*. This would amount to accepting the redundancy theory of truth. I don't see any contradiction in such a combination of the redundancy theory of truth and the argumental conception of sense, but I think that it is unsatisfactory, because it does not explain the nature of the truth-claim involved in the act of assertion.

In the first section of the present chapter I endorsed the principle that by the act of asserting a sentence we raise the claim that the uttered sentence is true (in the circumstances of utterance). However, if we want to explain what we do when we make an assertion, this is only the first step, and it is a step of little value if we don't explain what a truth-claim is. The task of explaining the nature of the truth-claim involved in an assertion goes beyond an explication of the meaning of the word "true" (or "wahr", or "vrai", or "sann") in a particular language by means of the equivalence thesis, because we make assertions which don't contain the word "true", and we can imagine languages in which there is no word corresponding to "true" and nevertheless assertions can be made.

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8 This combination of the redundancy theory of truth and the conception of meaning centred upon immediate argumental role seems to agree with the tendency manifested by Horwich when he writes "the general conception of meaning and translation to which I wish to appeal is the so called use theory of meaning articulated in various ways by Wittgenstein (1953), Sellars (1954), Quine (1960), Harman (1982), (1987), Peacocke (1986) and many others"; cf. Horwich (1990) p.97. Also the view expounded here in chapter 3 is a way of articulating "the so called use theory of meaning".
The redundancy theory of truth is perfectly compatible with the thesis that to assert a sentence is to claim that such a sentence is true. But it doesn't explain what in general a truth-claim is. The redundancy theorist will agree that when we assert "Oliver Tambo was chairman of the African National Congress" we claim that it is true that Oliver Tambo was chairman of the African National Congress. Such a claim is explained by the redundancy theorist merely by saying that it is the claim that Oliver Tambo was chairman of the African National Congress. Moreover, when we assert "there are even perfect numbers", we claim that it is true that there are even perfect numbers, but this – according to the redundancy theorist – is simply to claim that there are even perfect numbers. This is unquestionably right, but the two acts have something in common. What is it? Is there a general property that they share? Well, – the redundancy theorist will answer – they are assertions. But this is precisely what we want to understand. We want to understand what an assertion is. The redundancy theory does not help us at all.

The redundancy theorist might reply that to explain the nature of the act of assertion is not the task of a theory of truth, it is the task of a theory of assertion. But the philosophical discussion about the notion of truth has always concerned at the same time the nature of assertion or of the inner and tacit counterpart of assertion called "judgement". Many philosophers from Plato to our times have been aware that it is essential to assertions or judgements their being subject to an objective notion of correctness – an objective notion of correctness which philosophers have usually distinguished from the more subjective notion of correctness concerning the ways in which assertions and judgements are justified by the speakers. The philosophical problem of truth has been understood by these philosophers as the problem of clarifying in what general sense assertions or judgements can be objectively correct, and since this possibility of being objectively correct has been considered essential to the very notions of assertion and judgement, the problem of truth has not been considered separate from the problem of the nature of assertion and judgement. Indeed even Ramsey, who is counted among the supporters of the redundancy theory of truth, in his article "Facts and Propositions", published in 1927, on the basis of the equivalence thesis, maintained that "there is really no separate problem of truth" and that

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9 In Plato's *Sophist* one can find the first philosophical analysis of truth in the shape of an explanation of the possibility of false statements (λογος). This analysis almost coincides with Plato's explanation of what a statement is. Very roughly, a statement – according to Plato – is a connection of a name (ονοµα) and a verb (ρηµα) which is correct if it corresponds with an objective connection between ideal forms.

10 Plato already makes this distinction in *Theaetetus*.

what is difficult to analyse [...] is ‘he asserts aRb’. It is, perhaps, also immediately obvious that if we have analysed judgement we have solved the problem of truth.\textsuperscript{12}

So, it seems to me that even Ramsey in some way thought that the problem of truth and the problem of assertion and judgement cannot be separated. Nothing prevents the redundancy theorist from dismissing the problem of the nature of assertion by saying that it has nothing to do with truth. But our problem here is exactly this: what a speaker does when he/she asserts a sentence. What we are looking for is a general answer. I think we can give such a general answer, which begins in the following way: when we assert a sentence we take the responsibility that the asserted sentence is correct in an objective sense, we implicitly demand that it be regarded as objectively correct and we claim that it is correct in this objective sense. The notion of objective correctness which is involved in the meaning-theoretical explication of the act of assertion is what I here, following the philosophical tradition, call "truth". The use of the word "true" in the object language in conformity with the equivalence thesis is in agreement with this way of understanding the meaning-theoretical notion of truth. But the equivalence thesis by itself does not explain what such a notion of objective correctness is and how it is related with the sense of the asserted sentence. Therefore I think that the equivalence thesis by itself is not sufficient for a complete explanation of the notion of truth. What I here call "the notion of truth" goes beyond the use of the word "true" in a particular language and in a particular epistemic situation, which use is governed by the equivalence thesis.

2.2. Realistic conceptions of truth.

If one rejects the redundancy theory of truth, one can choose between two general approaches to the problem of truth: the realistic and the epistemic approach.\textsuperscript{13} The concept of ‘realism’ is defined in many different ways by different authors, but I shall use it in the following sense: the realist takes as primitive some notion belonging to the ontologic family, like ‘being’, ‘reality’, ‘object’, ‘state of affairs’, ‘cause’, ‘world’, ‘truth’ etc. As to the notion of truth in particular, the realist will either take it to be a primitive, undefinable or inexplicable notion, like


\textsuperscript{13} Here I do not intend to give a picture of all the alternative conceptions of truth. I just want to concentrate on the crucial metaphysical problem of the relation between truth and epistemic practices, which is the matter at issue between the realistic conception of truth and the epistemic conception of truth.
Moore, Russell, and Frege in various ways did, or will try to explain the notion of truth in terms of some other ontologic notion taken as primitive, for example by describing truth as ‘correspondence’ with reality, with states of affairs, or with things, and taking the notion of ‘reality’ or ‘state of affairs’, or ‘thing’ as primitive, in the footsteps of the traditional correspondence theory of truth, a conception which can be traced back to Aristotle and Aquinas and which was revived in our century in many different ways by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, by Popper and by many other authors.

The realist might perhaps allow that in order to explain what the entities are to which truth may be attributed – utterances, beliefs, sentences, statements, propositions, thoughts etc.: the so-called "truth-bearers" – one has to employ some epistemological or pragmatic notion. But once the notion of ‘truth-bearer’ is given, an explanation of what it is for a truth-bearer to be true – according to the realist – does not employ epistemological or pragmatic notions. So, the realist will maintain that the notion of truth is conceptually independent of any pragmatic or epistemological notion, that it is independent of our use of language and in particular of our practice of justifying assertions by giving arguments in support of them. An epistemological notion may depend on the notion of truth, but not vice versa. For example, the realist might agree that a correct argument must show the truth of its conclusion, and that, therefore, the notion of correct argument presupposes the notion of truth. But he/she will maintain that the notion of truth does not depend on the notion of correct argument.

Since what characterizes a realist in my sense is the idea that the notion of truth does not depend on epistemological or pragmatic notions, the realist interprets the objectivity of truth in such a way that truth is completely independent of our epistemic practice of giving arguments. There is no guarantee that, if a sentence is true, then there is an argument which would show us that the sentence is true, if we were to find such an argument. According to the realist the

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14 Cf. Moore (1899).
15 Cf. Russell (1904).
16 Cf. Frege (1918).
17 Cf. *Metaphysics*: "he who thinks the separated to be separated and the combined to be combined has the truth, while he whose thought is in a state contrary to that of the objects is in error", Aristotle (1960) (1051b 1-5); cf. also 1011b 26-29. The influence of Plato's *Sophist* is evident: cf. footnote 9 in this chapter.
18 Cf. *Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate*, Aquinas (1964) q.1, a.1: "Convenientiam vero entis ad intellectum exprimit hoc nomen verum [...] Prima ergo comparatio entis ad intellectum est ut ens intellectui corrispondeat: quae quidem correspondentia, adaequatio rei et intellectus dicitur".
19 Cf. Wittgenstein (1921) 2.21.
notion of ‘true sentence’ transcends the notion of ‘sentence for which there exists a correct argument’, thus the realist is willing to maintain that:

T) we are not entitled to rule out that a sentence S be true even if no correct argument for S exists.

I call (T) the transcendency thesis. A different thesis is:

T*) we are not entitled to rule out that a sentence S be true even if its truth is not even in principle knowable.

The willingness to endorse (T) distinguishes a realist in my sense from a nonrealist. In the literature (T) and (T*) are not sharply distinguished, and both are often considered essential part of a realistic conception of truth. But from the so-called "paradox of knowability", a formal modal argument first published by Frederic Fitch in 1963, we can learn that (T) and (T*) are not equivalent. Fitch's formal reasoning shows that the truth of a sentence of the form

(Ω) q and nobody will ever know that q

is unknowable, even in principle. Therefore, if we know that there are truths which will remain unknown, by the paradox of knowability we know also that there are truths which are unknowable, and a fortiori we know that (T*) is right.

An informal counterpart of Fitch's reasoning is the following. Assume that it is known that (Ω) is true. Well, in order to know that (Ω) is true one must know that q – the first conjunct – is true; but in such a case the second conjunct – "nobody will ever know that q" – would be false, and thus also (Ω) would be false, which is contrary to the assumption that (Ω) is (known to be) true. Our assumption that the truth of (Ω) be known implied a contradiction. Thus it is logically impossible to know that a sentence of the form (Ω) is true: if such a sentence is true, it is unknowable.

In fact, we know that there are sentences which can be substituted for "q" so that the result is a true instance of (Ω), though we cannot exhibit any of these sentences in particular. For example, I am going to throw all the matches in this box into the fire and they will be burnt away. I have not counted the matches, nor has anybody else. Thus nobody will ever know whether the sentence that I am uttering "there are more than twenty matches in this box now" is true, or its

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21 Cf. for example Dummett (1975a) and Dummett (1976).
negation is and in either case there is a truth which will remain unknown. If "S" is an abbreviation of "there are more than twenty matches in this box now", we know that either S and nobody will ever know that S, or not-S and nobody will ever know that not-S. So, we know that there is an X such that X and nobody will ever know that X, though we cannot tell whether X is S or its negation. Therefore, we know that there is an instance of (Ω) which is true, and thus – by Fitch's reasoning – we know that there are truths which we cannot know, and a fortiori we know that (T*) holds.

However, one can consistently accept (T*) and reject (T): a non-realist might maintain that if an instance of (Ω) is true, then there is (in an abstract sense of ‘is’) an ideal argument for it, though this argument cannot be constructed by us. Such an argument would be composed of an argument for the first conjunct (the sentence replacing "q") and an argument for the second conjunct (i.e. an empirical argument which shows that nobody will ever know the first conjunct). The non-realist might advocate an epistemic conception of truth which identifies the truth of a sentence with the existence of an ideal argument for it (which for axioms or observational sentences is a one-step argument). Such a non-realist would of course deny the transcendency thesis (T) above, according to which a sentence may be true even if there is no correct argument for it. But – in view of the "paradox" of knowability – he/she could consistently accept (T*) (i.e. that a sentence may be true, though its truth is not even in principle knowable). That is why it is the transcendency thesis (T) which is crucial for a discrimination between realistic and non-realistic – epistemic – conceptions of truth. On the other hand, (T*) is a consequence of (T), because we can know that S is true only if an argument for S exists; thus the realist who accepts (T) ought to accept (T*) too.

The realistic idea that truth is conceptually independent of any pragmatic or epistemological notion implicitly involves the transcendency thesis, because a denial of the transcendency thesis would establish a conceptual dependence of truth upon the existence of a correct argument, which is an epistemological notion. Sometimes transcendency is also explicitly endorsed by the realist. Frege endorsed the transcendency thesis explicitly in Grundgesetze. Hilary Putnam, in 1967, when he was a "metaphysical realist", after remarking that the truth value of the continuum hypothesis may be undiscoverable by rational

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25 I mean both the two above mentioned theses (T) and (T*), which, as I said, are not clearly distinguished in the literature.
26 Cf. Frege (1903) p. 69.
27 This is Putnam's terminology, cf. "Realism and Reason" in Putnam (1978).
beings, extended his acceptance of the transcendency thesis to non-mathematical sentences with the following words:

The existence of propositions whose truth value we have no way of discovering is not at all peculiar to mathematics. Consider the assertion that there are infinitely many binary stars (considering the entire space-time universe, i.e. counting binary stars past, present and future). It is not at all clear that we can discover the truth value of this assertion. Sometimes it is argued that such an assertion is ‘verifiable (or at least confirmable) in principle’, because it may follow from a theory. It is true that in one case we can discover the truth value of this proposition. Namely, if either it or its negation is derivable from laws of nature that we can confirm, then its truth value can be discovered. But it could just happen that there are infinitely many binary stars without this being required by any law. Moreover the distribution might be quite irregular, so that ordinary statistical inference could not discover it.

In "Reference and Understanding" (1976) Putnam wrote that a realist might hold at the same time a theory of understanding based on use and a realistic theory of truth. According to Putnam's suggestions, the realist might adopt the view that to understand a sentence is to know some rules governing the use of the sentence and, at the same time, a realistic theory of truth, for example – Putnam suggests – a correspondence theory of truth where correspondence is explained in terms of causal interactions between the speakers' linguistic behaviour and the physical world. For such a realist, the theory of truth is separate from and independent of the theory of understanding, because the notion of truth does not play any role in our understanding language, though it is relevant for an explanation of our relation to the physical world:

one can use one's language, at least on an ‘object language’ level, without any sophisticated notion of truth. Of course one has to be able to assent and dissent; but [...in order to have such an ability we have to follow rules of use which] do not presuppose notions of the order of ‘true’; [...] But the success of the ‘language-using program’ may well depend on the existence of a suitable

28 Cf. also Hellman (1989) p. 3: "Of course, it must not be assumed that all true mathematical assertions are knowable, even in principle".
29 Putnam (1967), reprinted in Putnam (1975a) p. 53. The example concerning binary stars occurs again in Putnam (1975c) p. 238: "suppose there are infinitely many binary stars. Must we be able to verify this, even in principle?".
30 This paper is now in Putnam (1978), but – according to the "Preface" – it was written in 1976. The above described view was in a sense foreshadowed by Putnam's previous criticism of the idea that what constitutes a speaker's understanding of a term determines its extension; cf. Putnam (1974) and Putnam (1975c). Analogous is Field's attitude towards conceptual role semantics and truth theoretic semantics in Field (1977) (see chapter 2 of this book).
correspondence between the words of a language and things, and between the sentences of the language and states of affairs.\textsuperscript{31}

Putnam illustrates his idea through an enlightening comparison:

the instructions for turning an electric light on and off – "just flip the switch" – do not mention electricity. But the explanation of the success of switch-flipping as a method for getting lights to go on and off certainly does mention electricity. It is in this sense that reference and truth have less to do with understanding language than philosophers have tended to assume, in my opinion.\textsuperscript{32}

As this comparison shows, Putnam's idea is that the notion of truth is important in explaining the relation of language to the world and "the contribution of our linguistic behaviour to the success of our total behaviour"\textsuperscript{33}, but truth does not play any role in an explanation of understanding and of use. On the other hand, the theory of understanding does not determine the theory of truth. In particular, the rules of use for a sentence which – in the light of the theory of understanding – fix what counts as an understanding of that sentence do not determine the truth condition of the sentence, which is (should be) specified by the theory of truth. According to this picture of the workings of language, a speaker can understand a sentence without knowing its truth condition.

At the time of "Reference and Understanding" Putnam's philosophical standpoint was shifting from "metaphysical realism" towards "internal realism", which involves an epistemic conception of truth (and thus is not realism in my sense). The term "internal realism" is introduced in "Realism and Reason", which was written shortly after "Reference and Understanding",\textsuperscript{34} but the term is introduced in order to refer to the kind of realism defended in "Reference and Understanding". Thus, there is reason to believe that the notion of truth Putnam is thinking of is already in the latter paper an epistemic notion of truth.

However, a realist in my sense (i.e. what Putnam calls "a metaphysical realist") may adopt Putnam's idea of separating the theory of truth from the theory of understanding. Such a realist would distinguish two separate theories: a use theory of understanding and a realistic correspondence theory of truth in terms of causal interactions between the speakers' behaviour and the physical

\textsuperscript{31} Putnam (1978) p. 100. In the same place Putnam describes the rules of use as follows: "they are instructions for assigning high weights to certain sentences when one has certain experiences, instructions for uttering, instructions for carrying out syntactic transformations, instructions for producing non-verbal behaviour".

\textsuperscript{32} Putnam (1978) p. 99.


\textsuperscript{34} Cf. Putnam (1978) p. viii.
world, which would involve the transcendency thesis (Hartry Field's views are an example of this kind of realistic position with respect to sentences about the physical world).\textsuperscript{35} Such a realist, of course, means "physical world" and "causal interactions" as they are \textit{in themselves}, not as they are described by our current (or ideal) theories, which – from the realist's point of view – may be false or incomplete.

A detailed critical examination of such a view lies beyond the scope of the present study, but I think that there are at least two objections to it. First, the idea that truth consists in some appropriate causal connection between linguistic behaviour and physical things leads into great difficulties if it is applied to the case of sentences about entities with which we do not have any causal interaction. For example, arithmetical sentences deal with natural numbers, and it seems reasonable to say that natural numbers are not causally efficacious. Thus, the supporter of the causal theory of truth is placed in the following dilemma: either to reinterpret arithmetical sentences so that they can be taken to refer to causally efficacious entities, in spite of what they seem to mean on the surface, or to deny that sentences like "2+2=4" be true, as Field does.\textsuperscript{36} I think it is much better to abandon the causal theory of truth and to take arithmetical truths at face value.

The second, deeper and more general, objection is that a theory of truth which is entirely separate from the theory of understanding cannot serve as an answer to the fundamental question concerning the nature of assertoric force, which motivates the further question concerning truth. We started by saying that in order to understand an assertion it is not enough to know the specific sense of the asserted sentence, because it is also necessary to know the assertoric force, which is common to all assertions. A competent speaker has to know what it is to assert a sentence. Well then, what does one do when one asserts a sentence? A first incomplete answer is: by the act of asserting a sentence one implicitly raises the claim that the uttered sentence is true. In order to have a full answer, we have to explain in general what it is for a sentence to be true. But we ought not to forget that a competent speaker must \textit{know} the assertoric force and thus must somehow understand what a truth-claim is. If we keep this in mind, the trouble with the idea that a notion of truth might be completely independent of our understanding

\textsuperscript{35} Field's distinction between truth theoretic semantics and conceptual role semantics in Field (1977) (which was considered in chapter 2) is a particular development of Putnam's general idea of separating the theory of truth from the theory of understanding.

\textsuperscript{36} Cf. Field (1989) p. 3. The idea that abstract entities are not causally efficacious has been used by many philosophers who adhere to causal theories of knowledge, reference and truth as the starting point of an argument against abstract entities in general and against mathematical platonism in particular. Cf. Benacerraf (1973), Lear (1977), Kitcher (1983) ch. 6. For a critical examination of such views cf. Wright (1983) pp. 84-103.
becomes clear: a knowledge of assertoric force is part of the understanding of an assertion and hence also the truth-claim must be understood in some way. In what does an understanding of the truth-claim consist?

A plausible answer is: to understand the truth-claim is to know what the commitment is to which one is bound by the truth-claim. If we take the responsibility that the asserted sentence is true, then -- if challenged -- we have to show that it is true by giving a good argument for it. We commit ourselves to giving such an argument. So, an understanding of the truth-claim consists in our mastering the practice of giving and assessing arguments for the asserted sentence.

But if we adopt the causal realistic view, we cannot give such an answer, because a transcendent truth (which depends on a causal connection with things in themselves) and our practice of giving and assessing arguments may be entirely unrelated. Thus, an understanding of the truth-claim in this realistic sense cannot be explained in terms of our practice of giving arguments. (And, of course, to opt for the other realistic view that the notion of truth is primitive and undefinable would not help at all).

So, the realistic view leads into perplexities which cannot be easily dismissed. If truth is a causal connection with things in themselves, independent of our epistemic practices of justifying assertions by giving arguments, how can a speaker grasp the truth-claim which constitutes assertoric force? What would be the difference between a speaker who understands a truth-claim as it is interpreted by the realist and another speaker who does not understand it, but shares with the former speaker all the practices of accepting and rejecting arguments and assertions in every relevant conceivable epistemic situation (a possibility which cannot be ruled out if the transcendency thesis is accepted)? Clearly, the difference would not be manifestable in the speakers' practical abilities, and thus the requirement of manifestability would be violated with respect to assertoric force.37

The upshot seems to be that, in order to follow the realistic line of thought which we are considering, one should abandon not only the idea that the sense of a sentence consists in its truth-condition, but also the explanation of assertoric force in terms of the notion of a truth-claim. But if the connection between truth and assertoric force is severed, what do we need the notion of truth for? Putnam's tenet is that we need truth for an explanation of the contribution of our linguistic behaviour to the success of our total behaviour. For example: we want to build a

37 This may be viewed as an adaptation for this context (where assertoric force and the truth-claim are concerned) of Dummett's antirealistic argument against a transcendent notion of truth (which concerns sense and truth-conditions): cf. for example Dummett (1975a) and Dummett (1976).
bridge on a river, we make a plan, which contains sentences about the physical world, we build the bridge according to our plan, and the bridge does not collapse. So we succeed in having a good bridge which enables us to cross the river.38 The explanation of the fact that we succeeded is that the sentences in the plan, which guided our actions, are (approximately) true.

In my opinion, the thesis that we need the notion of truth only for an explanation of the success of our behaviour wrongly diminishes the real importance of this notion. Now Putnam would agree that the role of truth is more important than this. In *Reason Truth and History* (1981), where he advocated an epistemic conception of truth as "idealized justification",39 he wrote that without a notion of truth we could not "make any sense of the distinction between asserting or thinking on the one hand, and making noises (or producing mental images) on the other".40

However, it is certainly right that we use the notion of truth also for explanations of the success of our behaviour. But it seems clear that the notion of truth which we use in such explanations is not (or at least not necessarily) a transcendent notion of truth. Roughly, the explanations of the success of our behaviour which exploit the notion of truth have the following (over-simplified) form:

1) P believes that S₁,...,Sₙ are true, and thus acts according to S₁,...,Sₙ.
2) S₁,...,Sₙ are true.
3) Therefore P succeeds.41

In order to give such an explanation, we must establish the premise (2), and thus we must establish that S₁ is true, that S₂ is true,..., that Sₙ is true. But this means that we must have arguments for S₁,...,Sₙ. In other words the truth of S₁,...,Sₙ must be epistemically accessible. If the truth of S₁,...,Sₙ were a transcendent truth beyond our recognitional capacities, it would be unknown, and thus we could not use it for any explanation. Indeed, in "Realism and Reason" Putnam repudiated "metaphysical realism".

So, I think that great difficulties beset the realistic view. But, though I am not in sympathy with it, there is no contradiction, as far as I can see, between the realistic view and the theory of sense in terms of immediate argumental role described in the previous chapters. A realist could adopt the argumental theory of sense described in chapter 3 as a theory of understanding, and defend a separate

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38 This is Putnam's example, cf. Putnam (1978) pp. 100-101.
40 *Ibidem*.
41 Actually, the word "true" could be eliminated from the explanation. Cf. Horwich (1990).
TRUTH AND ASSERTION

and independent realistic theory of truth. Thus, the theory of sense described in chapter 3 is compatible with a realistic conception of truth.

The defect of the realistic conception of truth is that it takes for granted primitive ontological notions like ‘state of affairs’, ‘physical world’, ‘cause’, or the very notion of ‘truth’, without requiring any explanation of these concepts in terms of other less problematic non-ontological concepts, as if the ontological concepts in question were completely clear, unproblematic, and immediately acceptable. There is a striking contrast between this realistic attitude, which is common among philosophers, and the opposite attitude which other philosophers and also many lay persons often express nowadays by the words "there is no such thing as truth" or "there is no such thing as the real world". It seems to me that if so many people doubt the acceptability of ontological notions like ‘truth’, or ‘real world’, there are grounds for not taking for granted that they are immediately acceptable as primitive notions. This does not mean that one ought to reject such notions, but that we need some explanation which connects the ontological notions with some notions with which we are more familiar, or which one might be more willing to accept, some notions which are more directly connected with what we do everyday. The acknowledgement of this need is the basic reason – I think – for adopting an epistemic conception of truth.

3. An epistemic conception of truth.


The supporter of the kind of epistemic conception of truth which I have here in mind thinks that the notions of ‘justification of an assertion’ or ‘correct argument’ are nearer and clearer to us than the bare notions of ‘truth’ or ‘real world’. The reason is that the notions of justification and correct argument relate to our linguistic practice. We all are engaged in linguistic practice every day. We all make assertions, and when our assertions are challenged, we all give arguments in support of those assertions. If the argument we give for an asserted sentence is correct, the assertion is correct and justified. So, the supporter of an epistemic conception of truth tries to explain what truth is by connecting truth with the notion of correct argument.

However, the connection between the notion of truth and the notion of correct argument ought not to be too close. If the connection is too close, and we say that an asserted sentence is true if, and only if, the speaker who makes the assertion gives a correct argument for the sentence in question, we lose the possibility of
making an important distinction between two different ways in which an assertion can be wrong.

If a speaker who makes an assertion does not give a correct argument for the asserted sentence when an opponent asks for a justification, the assertion is wrong in a first sense of ‘wrong’, which I expressed in section 1 by saying that the assertion is not correct. In this case the opponent can rightly criticize the assertion because it is not justified. But if later the opponent gives a correct argument for the sentence which the speaker asserted, then, though the speaker's assertion was wrong, what the speaker asserted was right, the claim that he/she raised was right: the speaker did not show that it was right, but the opponent has shown that it was, and this is what ultimately mattered to both of them.

A very different case is when the opponent does not criticize only the speaker's assertion because it is not justified, but also the asserted sentence, because it is not true. In order to show that the asserted sentence is not true, the opponent has to show that no correct argument for the asserted sentence exists, not only that the speaker has not given such an argument. In this case the assertion is wrong in a second and deeper sense: it is wrong because the asserted sentence is not true, and the claim raised by the speaker by making the assertion was wrong. In the first case the speaker might say to the opponent: "Okay, I didn't justify my assertion, but after all you have shown that what I asserted was true. This is the important thing." In the second case the speaker has to admit: "Okay, it isn't true, forget what I said."

In order to distinguish the two ways in which an assertion can be criticized, the supporter of an epistemic conception of truth has to discriminate between failure to say what is justified and failure to say what is true, and thus he/she has to distinguish between the correctness of an assertion and the truth of the asserted sentence. A speaker's assertion is correct if, and only if, the speaker knows a correct argument for the asserted sentence. The asserted sentence is true if, and only if there exists a correct argument for such a sentence, even if this argument is not known and has not been given. Truth is the objective notion of correctness I was referring to in subsection 2.1 of this chapter.

The supporter of an epistemic conception should also take account of the pretheoretical intuition that a sentence may be true even if no correct argument for it will ever be found. If ‘S is true’, or ‘there exists a correct argument for S’ were defined as ‘a correct argument for S has been given or will be given’, we should conclude that there are no true sentences which are never in fact correctly asserted. This would lead us to many counterintuitive consequences. For example, one could maintain that a mathematical sentence is not true on the basis of an empirical argument to the effect that for some empirical reason nobody will ever prove the sentence in question. Also for a non-mathematical sentence S one
could have some empirical argument concerning the physical world completely unrelated to S, for example an argument to the effect that the end of the universe is imminent, from which it would be right to draw the consequence that nobody will ever give a correct argument for S, and then one ought to conclude that S is not true without exploiting in any way the specific content of S. According to our pretheoretical intuitions about the acceptable ways in which one can justify the claim that a sentence is not true, a mere argument to the effect that the end of the universe is imminent, even if correct, would not be an acceptable refutation: it would perhaps show that by that time it wouldn't be worth caring about the truth of the sentence, not that the sentence is not true.

Thus, if the supporter of an epistemic conception of truth wants to defend the principle that a sentence is true if, and only if, there exists a correct argument for that sentence, he/she has to interpret the phrase 'there exists a correct argument' differently from 'a correct argument has been given or will be given'. This point was specially stressed by Prawitz.

Moreover, the considerations on the paradox of knowability in the previous section showed that the supporter of an epistemic conception of truth ought not to interpret ‘there exists a correct argument’ as ‘a correct argument can be given’, because there are true sentences of the form "q and nobody will ever know that q" for which a correct argument exists, but cannot be given.

As Prawitz wrote, ‘there exists’, in the epistemic thesis must be taken in an abstract sense of "exists". A comparison with the notion of existence of a derivation in a formal system may be helpful. To say that a formula is a theorem of a formal system Σ, means that there exists a categorical derivation in Σ of the formula in question in an abstract sense of "exists". A derivation in Σ is defined as a finite concatenation of formulae (for example a sequence or a tree, or some other finite structure) in which every formula is added to the preceding formulae according to the inference rules of Σ. The definition of a theorem of Σ as a formula for which such a derivation exists does not employ the notion of a subject who can discover the derivation in Σ. What it employs are the notion of rule of Σ and the appropriate notion of finite concatenation. The concept of theorem is clear to us in so far as these two notions are clear. We take the derivations as being already there in an abstract sense, once the rules of Σ are given. Analogously, for the supporter of an epistemic conception of truth, a sentence is true if, and only if, there exists (in an abstract sense of "exists") a

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42 Cf. also the different example about the sentence "there are more than twenty matches in this box now" in subsection 2.2.
correct argument for that sentence, and a correct argument is a concatenation of sentences according to argumentation rules. In giving this explanation we do not employ the notion of the argument's being possibly known or discovered by a subject. What we employ is the notion of argumentation rule, and it is the dependence upon this notion of argumentation rule which gives to our explanation of truth its epistemic character. This view is clear in so far as the notion of argumentation rule is clear. As we saw in chapter 3 – argumentation rules are not inference rules of a formal system, because they are mostly implicit and because they have to do with non-linguistic evidence. But the question arises: in the epistemic explanation of truth, should we take into account only the fixed set of argumentation rules accepted in a particular language or should our epistemic notion of truth go beyond such a fixed set?

In other words: how should one interpret the notion of correct argument which we need in this context? All our previous considerations suggest the following approach to the problem: in order to choose the right interpretation of the notion of ‘correct argument’ we have to look at the kinds of criticisms which would make a speaker withdraw an assertion.

A first view which can be considered is that the relevant notion of correct argument is the notion of an argument which does not depend on any assumption, and which is correct relatively to the language \(<L,A,≥>\) in which the assertion is made, in the sense of definition xxviii.45 Such an argument – by an appropriate articulation of its non-immediate argumentation steps – could be transformed into another argument for the same conclusion which is also independent of assumptions, and consists only of applications of argumentation rules in \(<L,A,≥>\), i.e. is correct and fully articulated relatively to \(<L,A,≥>\).46

A sentence S is assertable in \(<L,A,≥>\) independently of assumptions 47 if, and only if, there exists an argument for S (possibly starting from some non-linguistic evidence) which does not contain undischarged assumptions, and is correct and fully articulated relatively to \(<L,A,≥>\). The assertion of S on the part of a speaker in a certain circumstance is correct relatively to \(<L,A,≥>\) if the speaker in that circumstance knows an argument which is correct relatively to \(<L,A,≥>\). According to the interpretation of ‘correct argument’ as ‘argument which is correct relatively to \(<L,A,≥>\)’, a sentence S in \(<L,A,≥>\) asserted by a speaker in a given circumstance is true if, and only if, S is assertable in \(<L,A,≥>\) independently of assumptions and the assertion is correct if it is correct relatively to \(<L,A,≥>\).

45 See definition xxviii in chapter 4, section 1.
46 See definition xxvii in chapter 4, section 1.
47 See definition xxix in chapter 4, section 1.
This view is wrong for at least two reasons. *First*, an argument resulting from applications of the argumentation rules in \( A \) may turn out to be incorrect because an opponent of the speaker who makes the assertion shows that some of the relevant argumentation rules belong to a *fragment of language which is not correct* – in the sense of chapter 5. For example, the opponent might show that the rules used by the speaker are paradoxical and that by applying those rules in a similar way one could equally prove any other sentence. In this case, the rational speaker would withdraw his/her argument and his/her assertion. *Secondly*, the speaker may extend the language by adding some new word \( W \) not belonging to \( L \), and some new argumentation rule \( R \) not belonging to \( A \). \( R \) may concern the new word \( W \) without concerning the asserted sentence \( S \), so that the immediate argumental role, i.e. the sense, of \( S \) remains the same. Let us suppose that \( S \) is *not* assertable in \( <L,A,\geq> \): by exploiting the new rule \( R \), the speaker could nevertheless be able to give an argument for \( S \) (we saw that this is possible in chapter 4, section 2, through the example of Peirce's law). Moreover the speaker could show that the extended language \( <L\cup\{W\}, A\cup\{R\}, \geq^W> \) is correct in that epistemic situation. In this case, even if the opponent insisted that the speaker's argument employs a rule that does not belong to \( A \), this criticism would not do, because the new language would be correct in that epistemic situation. Therefore, the speaker would be entitled to make his/her assertion.

The foregoing considerations show that one should distinguish between the notions of correctness of an argument and of an assertion *relatively to a language* \( <L,A,\geq> \), and the notions of argument-correctness and assertion-correctness *in a non-relativistic sense*. A proper account of our practice of accepting and rejecting arguments and assertions requires the non-relativistic notions of correctness. The non-relativistic notions of correctness for arguments and assertions involve the idea that we should try to improve the languages in which arguments are constructed and assertions are made, in order to attain to an ideal balance between the different criteria of language-correctness mentioned in chapter 5. Rational inquiry passes through many modifications of the languages in which the investigation is carried on. These modifications will involve modifications of the accepted argumentation rules and therefore changes in the set of assertions which are considered correct in the different resulting epistemic situations. Following Peirce, we might say that an *ideal epistemic situation for* \( S \) is a situation which *would be reached in the long run* if an inquiry concerning \( S \) were to be pursued in the best way, by employing enough time, collecting all relevant

\[48 \text{ Where } \geq^W \text{ is an extension of the presupposition relation } \geq \text{ preserving the presuppositions between words of } L \text{ which hold according to } \geq, \text{ but involving new statements of presupposition about the new word } W.\]

\[49 \text{ Cf. Peirce (1931-35) 5.405-5.410.}\]
information, exerting enough thought, performing enough experiments etc., so
that after having reached such an epistemic situation no further investigation
concerning S could bring about a rational change of our attitude towards S.\footnote{50}

An ideal argument for S can be defined as an argument for S on the basis of
which we would accept S in an ideal epistemic situation for S. For example, a
mathematical proof (if it is really a proof, i.e. if it is not mistaken) is an ideal
argument for its conclusion. "Ideal" is here meant in the same sense in which we
say that the weather to day is the ideal weather for a holiday: it is not contrasted
with "real". The ideal weather is often real. Ideal arguments are often found
(though we cannot be absolutely certain that they are ideal), and when they are
found, they are real arguments.

The practice of accepting and rejecting arguments and assertions described
above shows that an argument for S is considered correct only to the extent that it
is considered an ideal argument for S (even if the course of future investigation
can subsequently show that the epistemic situation in which we are is not really
an ideal epistemic situation for the asserted sentence). Moreover, an assertion
is considered correct only to the extent that the argument which is given to justify
that assertion (given directly or indirectly, by hinting how to find such an
argument) is considered an ideal argument.

This leads to the conclusion that the notion of truth involved in the assertoric
force is the following: a sentence S \textit{is true} if, and only if, \textit{there exists an ideal
argument for S}.\footnote{51} To some extent, this is a generalization of Prawitz's idea that
mathematical truth consists in the existence of a proof (in an abstract sense of
"existence").\footnote{52} even if an ideal argument in my sense is not necessarily reducible
to a canonical or direct argument in Prawitz's sense. That there exists an ideal
argument does not mean that such an argument has been or will be constructed,
but only that if we could carry the investigation far enough, without obstacles
depending e. g. on the time at our disposal, on the lack of perseverance and
intelligence, or on the size of the physical universe, then, by pursuing the
investigation, we would reach an ideal epistemic situation where we would
accept some argumentation rules and our argument would be a finite
concatenation of applications of such rules.

\footnote{50}{\textbf{However, from the paradox of knowability we learnt that some ideal epistemic situations
(though they are clearly describable) cannot be reached by us. See subsection 2.2, pp. 155-156.}}
\footnote{51}{\textbf{Cf. Putnam (1981) p.55, where Putnam identifies truth with justifiability in ideal epistemic
conditions.}}
\footnote{52}{\textbf{Cf. Prawitz (1980) and Prawitz (1987). In the latter essay (pp. 153-154) Prawitz observes
that "there exists" in this context "is not to be understood as a quantification over a domain that
is well defined in the same way as that of the natural numbers".}}
Such a notion of truth is explained in terms of the notion of ideal argument, which, as the name suggests, is an idealization of the ways in which we justify assertions in our everyday cognitive practice; therefore it is an epistemic notion of truth. By asserting a sentence S a speaker raises the claim that there is an ideal argument for S, and the speaker's assertion is correct (in a non-relativistic sense) if, and only if, the speaker, in that circumstance, if requested and well disposed would give an ideal argument for S. Thus the appropriate qualification of the notion of ‘correct argument’ that we need for an explication of truth is the notion of ‘ideal argument’.

In terms of the same notion we can explicate the notion of knowledge: p knows that X if, and only if, i) if requested and well disposed p would give an argument A in order to support an assertion that X (sincerely thinking that it supports the assertion in question) and ii) A is an ideal argument for the asserted sentence. Knowledge implies truth.

The epistemic conception of truth which turns on the concepts of ideal epistemic situation and ideal argument is – I think – the most appealing. Now I shall try to make it a little more precise by connecting it with the conception of understanding centred upon immediate argumental role.

If S is a sentence belonging to a language \(<L,A,\geq>\) and \(<L^S,A^S,\geq^S>\) is the language fragment presupposed by the immediate argumental role of S in \(<L,A,\geq>\) (as defined in chapter 3, section 17), we can call a language which preserves the immediate argumental role of S in \(<L,A,\geq>\) a language \(<L^*,A^*,\geq^*>\) such that: (1) \(L^S \subseteq L^*\) and \(A^S \subseteq A^*\); (2) \(A^*\) does not contain any new argumentation rule concerning S which is not already in \(A^S\); (3) \(\geq^*\) is an extension of the presupposition relation \(\geq^S\) which preserves the presuppositions between words of \(L^S\). If \(<L^*,A^*,\geq^*>\) satisfies (1)–(3), the immediate argumental role of S in \(<L^*,A^*,\geq^*>\) is equal to the immediate argumental role of S in \(<L,A,\geq>\). In accordance with the view of assertion delineated above, a theory of meaning centred on immediate argumental role can explain assertoric force as follows: to assert a sentence S in a language \(<L,A,\geq>\) is to claim that there is a language \(<L^*,A^*,\geq^*>\) which preserves the immediate argumental role of S in \(<L,A,\geq>\) such that \(<L^*,A^*,\geq^*>\) is accepted in an ideal epistemic situation \(E^*\) for S, and S is assertable in \(<L^*,A^*,\geq^*>\) independently of assumptions.53

This is right if the sentence-type S does not contain indexical expressions. But, of course, the ideal epistemic situation \(E^*\) for S can be different from the situation E in which S is asserted, and this possible difference gives rise to some

53 In the sequel I shall often omit the words "independently of assumptions": "S is assertable in \(<L,A,\geq>\)" will be an abbreviation of "S is assertable in \(<L,A,\geq>\) independently of assumptions".
complication in the case of indexical sentences. Some aspects of the circumstances of utterance (the speaker, the hearer, the time, the place etc.) are relevant to the argumentation rules concerning indexicals. In the ideal epistemic situation E* such aspects may be different from the corresponding aspects of the situation E in which S is asserted. Thus, if S contains indexical expressions, the truth-claim which is raised by asserting S does not amount to the simple claim that S is assertable in an ideal epistemic situation E*, but to the claim that S or some appropriate reformulation in E* of S – a reformulation S* – is assertable in E*. S* may contain an explicit description of the indexically relevant aspects of the situation E in which S is asserted. For example, in the situation E (today August 15th 1994) I may assert "I have measles", but, though I have noticed some spots on my skin, I am not a doctor and have only very vague ideas on the symptoms of measles; so, I am not in an ideal epistemic situation for the sentence "I have measles". If it is true that I have measles, in an ideal epistemic situation somebody who knows enough about measles could correctly assert "Cesare Cozzo has measles on August 15th 1994", which would be an appropriate reformulation of the sentence that I have asserted. Admittedly, this is far from being a detailed account of the phenomenon of indexicality from the point of view of the epistemic conception of truth. The reader is invited to regard it as a hint, which could be developed in some other work.

The foregoing considerations, in conclusion, suggest the following general explanation of assertoric force in the framework of the argumental conception of meaning:

**xxxv ASSERTORIC FORCE**

To assert a sentence S in a language \( \langle L,A,> \) is to raise the claim that there is an ideal epistemic situation E* for S, and there is a language \( \langle L^*,A^*,>^* \) which preserves the immediate argumental role of S in \( \langle L,A,> \) such that:

1) the language accepted in E* is \( \langle L^*,A^*,>^* \);
2) S (or an appropriate reformulation S* of S, if S is indexical) is assertable in \( \langle L^*,A^*,>^* \), i.e. there is an argument I* for S (or for S*) according to the argumentation rules in A*, which does not contain undischarged assumptions.

The above mentioned I* is an ideal argument for S (for S*). Thus, the corresponding explication of the notion of truth is the following:

**xxxvi A sentence S is true if, and only if,**

there are E*, \( \langle L^*,A^*,>^* \) and I* as described in xxxv above.
4. Understanding assertoric force.

If the explication of assertoric force is right, our implicit understanding of assertoric force – which manifests itself in our practice of accepting and rejecting arguments and assertions – contains an anticipation of possible rational extensions and revisions of the language we are presently using. Such an explication also shows that the description of a meaningful language as an ordered triple \(<L, A, \geq>\) given in chapter 3 is – as we already hinted there\(^{54}\) – incomplete. An understanding of the syntactic rules of a language, of the argumentation rules which give sense to words and sentences of the language, and of the presuppositions between those words and sentences is not the whole understanding. An other essential component of our understanding of the language is the understanding of the assertoric force. Without assertoric force, a language would be something static, like a formal system, a closed set of fixed rules. On the contrary, the assertoric force that we attach to the asserted sentences makes our language open and dynamic, it drives us beyond the set of rules that we presently accept, towards possible rational changes of those rules.

5. An objection.

The outcome of section 3 is that a sentence S in a language \(<L, A, \geq>\) is true if, and only if, there is an ideal epistemic situation \(E^*\) for S where a language \(<L^*, A^*, \geq^*>\) is accepted in which the immediate argumental role of S is preserved and S is assertable. Let us call such a language \(<L^*, A^*, \geq^*>\) an ideal development of \(<L, A, \geq>\) for S. In short, S is true in \(<L, A, \geq>\) if, and only if, there is an ideal development of \(<L, A, \geq>\) for S.

One might object that if neither S nor \(\neg S\) are already assertable in \(<L, A, \geq>\) independently of assumptions, which is of course often the case, there could be two alternative possible courses of rational inquiry leading to two different ideal epistemic situations \(E_1\) for S and \(E_2\) for \(\neg S\) in which the language fragment presupposed by S is extended in two different ways, \(<L_1, A_1, \geq 1>\) and \(<L_2, A_2, \geq 2>\) respectively, so that in \(E_1\) one can correctly assert S, and in \(E_2\) one can correctly assert \(\neg S\). There is no way – the objector says – of ruling out such a possibility, but if there could be two courses of rational inquiry of this kind, there would be an ideal development \(<L_1, A_1, \geq 1>\) of \(<L, A, \geq>\) for S and an ideal development \(<L_2, A_2, \geq 2>\) of \(<L, A, \geq>\) for \(\neg S\). This would lead to the absurdity that S in \(<L, A, \geq>\) is at the same time true and false (because also its negation is true).

\(^{54}\) Cf. chapter 3, section 7.
There are two possible ways of meeting this objection. One possibility is to change the definitions of assertoric force and truth. We could say that $S$ is true if, and only if, there is an ideal development of $\langle L, A, \geq \rangle$ for $S$ and there is no ideal development of $\langle L, A, \geq \rangle$ for $\neg S$. The truth-claim involved in an assertion could be correspondingly reinterpreted: by asserting $S$ in $\langle L, A, \geq \rangle$ it is implicitly claimed that there is an ideal development of $\langle L, A, \geq \rangle$ for $S$, and there is no ideal development of $\langle L, A, \geq \rangle$ for $\neg S$. A consequence of such an adjustment of the epistemic conception of truth is that – in the situation described by the objector – $S$ would be neither true nor false (because $\neg S$ is not true). This should not strike us as an extreme novelty because also according to definition xxxvi given in section 3 there are sentences which are neither true nor false. In the course of inquiry concerning $E$ the language fragment presupposed by $E$, $\langle L^E, A^E, \geq \rangle$, might be rejected as an incorrect language, for example because it is paradoxical, so that there is no ideal development of $\langle L, A, \geq \rangle$ for $E$ and there is no ideal development of $\langle L, A, \geq \rangle$ for $\neg E$. In this case $E$ is neither true nor false also according to xxxvi.

Another possible way of countering the objection is to stick to the definitions of truth and assertoric force given in the preceding section, and to argue that the predicament delineated in the objection is impossible, because at least one of the two epistemic situations $E_1$ and $E_2$ described by the objector would not be an ideal epistemic situation. An argument to this effect could be the following. Let us call $\Xi_1$ the possible course of inquiry leading to $E_1$ and $\Xi_2$ the possible course of inquiry leading to $E_2$. If $\Xi_1$ and $\Xi_2$ are both possible courses of inquiry, then it is always possible to pursue them further so as to develop a possible course of inquiry $\Xi_3$ which contains both $\Xi_1$ and $\Xi_2$ as parts. For example we could pursue $\Xi_1$ first, and then $\Xi_2$. By pursuing $\Xi_3$ we would reach an epistemic situation $E_3$ in which we have both a development $\langle L_1, A_1, \geq_1 \rangle$ of $\langle L, A, \geq \rangle$ in which $S$ is assertable and a development $\langle L_2, A_2, \geq_2 \rangle$ of $\langle L, A, \geq \rangle$ in which $\neg S$ is assertable. What would be reasonable to do in $E_3$? In $E_3$ we would know that the language fragment $\langle L^S, A^S, \geq S \rangle$ presupposed by $S$, not only is ‘incomplete’ – because in it neither $S$ nor $\neg S$ is assertable – but also can be extended in two opposite ways, $\langle L_1, A_1, \geq_1 \rangle$, where $S$ is assertable, and $\langle L_2, A_2, \geq_2 \rangle$, where the negation of $S$ is assertable, and – since the objector maintains that they are ideal developments – we would also know that both ways of extending $\langle L^S, A^S, \geq S \rangle$ present some epistemic advantages which give good grounds for accepting them in $E_3$ according to the various criteria of language correctness mentioned in chapter 5. Thus in $E_3$ we would face the dilemma: i) to accept both extensions $\langle L_1, A_1, \geq_1 \rangle$ and $\langle L_2, A_2, \geq_2 \rangle$ of $\langle L^S, A^S, \geq S \rangle$ and to be forced to admit the absurdity that both $S$ and $\neg S$ are assertable or ii) to renounce the epistemic advantages offered by
or the epistemic advantages offered by \(<L_2,A_2,\geq_2>\) by rejecting one of the two languages, and in this way to eliminate the absurdity. If we opted for (ii), we would reject one of the two developments \(<L_i,A_i,\geq_i>\) (where \(i= 1\) or \(i=2\)) and this would show that one of the two epistemic situations described by the objector, \(E_i\), would not be an ideal epistemic situation for the relevant sentence, because by pursuing inquiry far enough we would finally come to a rational change of our attitude towards the sentence. Thus, in this case, the objector's description of \(E_i\) as an ideal epistemic situation would be wrong. However in \(E_3\) we might not be willing to opt for (ii) because we might neither be willing to renounce the epistemic advantages offered by \(<L_1,A_1,\geq_1>\), nor those offered by \(<L_2,A_2,\geq_2>\). What should we do in such a case? Option (i), as it stands, would not be an acceptable option, because it would be absurd – in so far as "¬" has its usual sense – that both \(S\) and \(¬S\) be assertable. However, a reasonable solution of the problem would be to say that the situation in \(E_3\) shows that the meaning given to \(S\) by the argumentation rules in the language fragment \(<L^S,A^S,\geq^S>_S\) presupposed by \(S\) is too highly indetermined – since it admits to opposite valuable developments, one leading to an assertion of \(S\) and the other leading to an assertion of \(¬S\). Therefore such a meaning ought to be changed and rendered more determined without losing the epistemic advantages acquired in \(E_3\): the unacceptable indeterminacy ought to be eliminated by adopting instead of \(<L^S,A^S,\geq^S>_S\) two different language fragments \(<L^S,A^S_1,\geq^S_1>_S\) and \(<L^S,A^S_2,\geq^S_2>_S\) obtained by adding to \(<L^S,A^S,\geq^S>_S\) two different sets of new argumentation rules, \(J_1\) and \(J_2\), concerning the words in \(S\). The new language fragments \(<L^S,A^S_1,\geq^S>_S\) and \(<L^S,A^S_2,\geq^S>_S\) ought to be such that a counterpart of \(S\), \(S^1\), would be assertable in \(<L^S,A^S_1,\geq^S>_S\) by exploiting \(J_1\) and a counterpart of \(¬S\), \(¬S^2\), would be assertable in \(<L^S,A^S_2,\geq^S>_S\) by exploiting \(J_2\). (A very rough way to do that would be to set \(J_1=\{S^1\}\) and \(J_2=\{¬S^2\}\) which would amount to turning \(S\) and \(¬S\) into two axioms, \(S^1\) of \(<L^S,A^S_1,\geq^S>_S\) and \(¬S^2\) of \(<L^S,A^S_2,\geq^S>_S\), respectively). The immediate argumental role of \(S^1\) would presuppose the language fragment \(<L^S,A^S_1,\geq^S>_S\), and the immediate argumental role of \(S^2\) would presuppose the language fragment \(<L^S,A^S_2,\geq^S>_S\). So the senses of \(S^1\) and \(S^2\) would be two alternative more determined improvements of the sense of \(S\). In such a case the absurdity would be eliminated, because the sentence \(S^2\) negated in \(¬S^2\) would not have the same sense as \(S^1\). But if we opted for this tactic, we would reject the original language fragment \(<L^S,A^S,\geq^S>_S\) presupposed by \(S\), and thereby our inquiry would lead us to reject both \(S\) and \(¬S\). Hence both \(E_1\) and \(E_2\) would not be ideal epistemic situations for \(S\) or \(¬S\), respectively. Thus, also in this case, the objector's description would be wrong and the supposed difficulty dissolves.
Which of the two responses I have just delineated is the best way of meeting the objection – to adjust the explication of truth or to argue that the difficulty envisaged by the objector does not arise because at least one of the two epistemic situations would not be ideal – should be decided by examining the practice of rational investigation, also by considering historical cases. I don't want to take a stand about this issue here. But I think that in one of these two ways the objection can be satisfactorily met.