

The Truth According to James

A Verdade de acordo com James

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Abstract: Pragmatist truth – as advocated e.g. by Peirce and James – is usually taken to integrate four key elements: (1) the value of truth is likened to some kind of utility; (2) truth is naturally taken to consist in correspondence; (3) truth is essentially linked to the possibility of knowledge; (4) truth is not relative but absolute. Critics have never tired to question the individual and collective consistency of these four constraints. The principal challenge issued to pragmatists (and many other essentially epistemic theories of truth) always consisted in developing viable interpretations of the key notions utility, correspondence, knowability and absoluteness that would render the pragmatist proposal at least consistent. I shall take up that challenge developing some ideas of James in a contemporary garb.

Keywords: Truth. Utility. Knowledge. James

Resumo: *Verdade pragmatista – como defendida por Peirce e James, por exemplo – da forma como é considerada usualmente, integra quatro elementos-chave: (1) o valor da verdade é assemelhado a algum tipo de utilidade; (2) a verdade é naturalmente considerada como consistindo de correspondência; (3) a verdade está essencialmente ligada à possibilidade de conhecimento; (4) a verdade não é relativa e sim absoluta. Os críticos nunca se cansam de questionar a consistência individual e coletiva dessas quatro limitações. O principal desafio lançado aos pragmatistas (e muitas outras teorias essencialmente epistêmicas de verdade), sempre envolveu o desenvolvimento de interpretações viáveis das noções-chave: utilidade, correspondência, cognoscibilidade e integridade, que tornariam a proposta pragmatista, ao menos, consistente. Aceitarei o desafio, desenvolvendo algumas idéias de James sob uma roupagem contemporânea.*

Palavras-chave: *Verdade. Utilidade. Conhecimento. James*

1. James on truth

Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of the pragmatist's writings on truth and related matters is that they contain, sometimes even within the range of a few pages, apparently very diverse theses about the subject. Of course, this must be particularly striking for those who have been raised in the tradition of, say, Western Philosophy according to Russell. This tradition has it that the pragmatist truth of a belief consists in its "cash value". It is true that James did use such formulations; he used them frequently and, one

may suspect, with some relish at the prospect of upsetting his opponents. “Our account of truth is an account of truths in the plural [...], having only this quality in common, that they *pay*” (1907, 218).

His opposition to what he called ‘intellectualism’ pervaded even his prose. But James always hastened to assert that the idea of truth as cash value harmonizes well with what (nearly) everyone believes about the concept of truth. There are in particular three common theses which James emphatically endorses.

First, according to James truth is naturally *correspondence*, or agreement, with reality:

Truth [...] is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their “agreement”, as falsity means their disagreement, with “reality”. Pragmatists [...] accept this definition as a matter of course. (1907, 198)

Second, James believed that truth is conceptually linked with *verification*: “True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we can not” (1907, 201).

Third, truth, for James, is *absolute*. By this he simply meant that it is not relative: truth is not relative to evidence available to a given inquirer at a given time; even less so to varying standards of judging the truth. More specifically, for James the absoluteness of truth consists in its stability under the impact of further experience, thus commanding *convergence* in the long run.

The “absolutely” true, meaning what no farther evidence will ever alter, is that ideal vanishing-point towards which we imagine that all our temporary truths will some day converge. (1907, 222f.)

In another passage James considers the question in what sense he could claim his theory of truth to be true. (Apparently some critics believed that he could not.) He writes:

I expect [...] that the more fully men discuss and test my account, the more they will agree that it *fits*, and the less will they desire a change. I may of course be premature in this confidence, and the glory of being truth final and absolute may fall upon some later revision and correction of my scheme [...]. To admit, as we pragmatists do, that we are liable to correction (even tho we may not expect it) *involves* the use on our part of an ideal standard. (MT, 142)

I shall be mainly concerned with James’s thesis that pragmatist truth is absolute. James tried to safeguard this aspect of pragmatist truth by means of a particular version of the convergence thesis.¹ But before turning to this aspect of his theory, I shall begin by briefly reviewing James’s view of how the three theses are to be integrated into a

¹ Though I shall not here argue the point, I believe that James’s version of convergence is different from the one advocated by Peirce and neo-Peirceans like Jürgen Habermas. While Peircean versions are very vulnerable to a certain kind of criticism, this criticism cannot affect James’s use of the convergence idea in his theory of truth. The criticism I have in mind is essentially the one formulated most forcefully by Plantinga (1982). For a more detailed investigation of the rôle of convergence in James’s theory of truth see Fuhrmann (2004a, b).

pragmatist theory of truth. I shall then discuss in some detail James's theory of absolute truth as it emerges in a discussion of a supposed problem case for any evidenceconstraint theory of truth such as James's. This is the case of past events that have left no evidential traces. James's theory of absolute truth, so I shall argue, is a close cousin to Crispin Wright's theory of superassertibility.

2. Expediency, correspondence, verification, and absoluteness

Any pragmatist theory of truth will have to blend these four aspects – expediency or utility, correspondence, verification and absoluteness – into some coherent whole. The utility aspect comes first because it formulates pragmatism's distinctive answer to the *vorab* question why we should care for truth at all – a question strangely not even within the scope of many rival theories of truth.² But utility takes also first place in the sense that it underlies the proper understanding of the other three aspects.

To start with, the utility aspect eventually pervades the pragmatist understanding of the correspondence aspect. 'Eventually', because pragmatists, including of course James, typically start by giving a rather minimal reading to the correspondence aspect of truth. They presents themselves as identifying the commonplace and commonsense core of the correspondence idea and liberating it from metaphysical inflation. After Tarski we have come to formulate this core by mean of the so-called *T-schema* (for any proposition *P*)

'*P*' is true if and only if *P*,

or ' $P \leftrightarrow \text{true } P$ ' as we shall abbreviate in the sequel. Pragmatists concord with just about anyone else that unless this schema is satisfied no theory of *truth* is on offer. Any pragmatist theory of truth will have to underwrite the schema.

Yet when pragmatists speak of correspondence, they frequently end up giving the notion a very particular flavor, thus inflating the T-schema in their own way. In the quote above James subtly indicates this by putting the key terms "agreement" and "reality" between inverted commas. Such scare-quoting denounces suspect notions which need treatment by the pragmatic method. They pinpoint precisely those notions over whose proper understanding "pragmatism and intellectualism begin to part company" (1907, 212). For James,

[t]o 'agree' in the widest sense with a reality *can only mean to be guided either straight up to it or into its surroundings, or to be put into such working touch with it as to handle either it or something connected with it better than if we disagreed. Better either intellectually or practically!* (212f.)

Opponents of pragmatism, so James, have too frequently given in to the temptation that the idea of truth as correspondence is fully captured in a copy-theory of truth.

The popular notion is that a true idea must copy its reality. Like other popular views, this one follows the analogy of the most usual experience. Our true ideas

² Cf. MT, 57f.

of sensible things do indeed copy them. Shut your eyes and think of yonder clock on the wall, and you get just such a true picture or copy of its dial. But your idea of its ‘works’ (unless you are a clockmaker) is much less of a copy, yet it passes muster, for it in no way clashes with the reality. Even though it should shrink to the mere word ‘works’, that word still serves you truly; and when you speak of the ‘time-keeping function’ of the clock, or of its spring’s ‘elasticity’, it is hard to see exactly what your ideas can copy.

You perceive that there is a problem here. Where your ideas cannot copy definitely their object, what does agreement with that object mean? (1907, 199)

If truth is essentially correspondence with reality but if correspondence may refer to very different circumstances, that is to say, if correspondence may be realized in very different ways, then *a fortiori* the property of being true may be realized in many different ways. The common coin of all these realizers is their functional rôle, which James somewhat polemically describes as their having a “cash value” in the widest sense, their fitting in a practically expedient manner with the course of experience.

Let us next turn to verification. This term has taken on a very specific meaning in connection with the verificationism of the logical positivists. But it is by no means obvious in what sense, if any, James’s theory aligns itself with the sort of verificationism that started to gain currency in the 1920s. It is in any case evident from James’s writings that he took the insistence on truth being verifiable not as an extra constraint on a pragmatist theory of truth but just a consequence of its particular reading of the agreement formula. If we ask in the pragmatist fashion what verifying a particular statement may mean, we are referred to the practical consequences – practical, again in the widest sense – of the statement in question. But when we ask further what kind of consequences would qualify the statement in question as verified, then

[i]t is hard to find any one phrase that characterizes these consequences better than the ordinary agreement-formula – just such consequences being what we have in mind whenever we say that our ideas ‘agree’ with reality. (1907, 201)

Being true, agreeing with reality, being verified – in James’s pragmatist idiom these are all phrases referring to the same functional property referred to by the cash-value slogan. The verification aspect is just the correspondence aspect in a different garb. And the correspondence aspect of truth, as far as it goes beyond insistence on the T-schema derives from reading “agreement” in the particular way demanded by the utility aspect. Thus there is a good sense in which Russell got James exactly right when he focused his critical attention on the idea of truth as expediency. (Though he probably gave the term a too narrow reading.)

On any ordinary understanding of “expediency” or its variants, expediency may come in degrees and may even make sense only as a two-fold relative notion: one idea being more or less expedient for a certain purpose than another. As purposes change so does the range of things expedient relative to those purposes. So what is expedient now, may cease to be expedient tomorrow. Even with purposes remaining constant we may find it expedient now to adopt one means to a particular end only to replace it at the next occasion when more expedient means become available. So, again, what is expedient now, may not to be so tomorrow. If your purposes are different from mine, or if your circumstances make other means available than are available to me, then what

is expedient for you is not likely to be expedient for me. Surely, truth is not relative in this way.

James was well aware that without further constraints the notion of expediency has a tendency towards being indexical in a manner that truth presumably is not. He counters this tendency by way of two moves. The first is fairly obvious and up to a point unexciting. He insists that expediency should not be read in a caricature manner. If anyone needed to compile a thesaurus entry on the cognates of the word “expedient”, he would hardly find a candidate word or phrase that James had not yet pressed into service. ‘Expedient’, of course, is to mean expedient in the widest sense. It would lead me too far afield now to inquire further in to this topic.

James’s second move is to introduce an *absoluteness condition* on any candidate notion of truth and then to show that a pragmatist theory can observe this constraint. The condition is that

if a proposition is true at some time, then it is true at any time.

Now there is an obvious problem at hand. Accepting a proposition has certain effects – expedient or otherwise – at a certain time and may have other effects at other times. The effects it has are also likely to depend on what else is being believed under the circumstances. Similarly, propositions are assimilated, validated, corroborated or verified given a certain body of evidence. But available evidence may change from time to time or from place to place. Hence, if “true ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify” (1907, 201), then truth cannot be absolute in the sense required by the condition.

The problem, as it turns out, is one of terminology. James has accustomed himself to an unfortunate use of the word “true”, one that does not satisfy the condition of absoluteness. His way out is to suspend this usage at times and to use “truth” in a higher, absolute sense which will satisfy the absoluteness condition. He argues that this higher version of truth, or *absolute truth*, as he calls it, can be constructed from the lower version. Lower, or plain truth is truth for the plain man, as it were. By contrast, absolute truth

runs on all fours with the perfectly wise man, and with the absolutely complete experience; and, if these ideals are ever realized, they will all be realized together. Meanwhile we have to live to-day by what truth we can get to-day and be ready to-morrow to call it falsehood. (1907, 223)

The problem of constructing eternal from daily truth is the place where the idea of convergence enters the James’s theory of truth.

For the rest of this paper I shall reserve the term *true* for what James means by “absolutely true”. And I shall say that a proposition is warranted in a certain evidential situation when James would say that belief in it would “pay” or be “expedient” in that situation. In short, warranty will be my substitute for James’s lowly truth. The substitution is not meant to offer an interpretation of “expediency” as James uses the term. I hope “warranty” is initially at least as vague as “expediency”. (In the course of what follows I shall have a few rather specific things to say about warranty.) The purpose of adopting this way of speaking is just to remove a now pointless terminological bump on the way to how truth is discussed nowadays.

3. Absoluteness by stability

James's construction of truth from warranty can perhaps best be gleaned from the final piece in his collection *The Meaning of Truth*. The piece is entitled *A Dialogue* but despite the chatty genre it is one of the more technical pieces in the collection. The dialogue attempts to dispel "a residual state of mind on the part of my reader which may still keep him unconvinced" (154). The unconvinced reader James has primarily in mind is probably Josiah Royce; for the lack of conviction stems from an objection first put to James by Royce. Even one of the most sympathetic commentators of James's work, Hilary Putnam, believes the objection be "fatal" (1997, 182), proving James's account of truth "a disastrous theory" (183).

The dispute is about propositions concerning past events of which no evidential trace exists and will ever exist. James's interlocutor mentions as examples facts of "antediluvian planetary history" (154). Let P stand for any fact of this kind. The anti-pragmatist of the dialogue poses the following dilemma. Either it is admitted that P has a definite truth value. But then that truth-value cannot be settled by appeal to justification now or in the future. For, insofar as justification needs evidence, there can be none by our hypothesis. Thus, if P is true, then its truth cannot consist in what we have now or in the future reason to believe – there is and will be no such reason. Alternatively, to turn to the other horn of the dilemma, it may be said that under the hypothesis, P can be neither true nor false; propositions about events that leave no evidential traces are not truth-apt. This horn James immediately rejects and so the ensuing discussion turns to the first horn.³

The anti-pragmatist opens the discussion by asking: "Do you say that there is a truth even in cases where it shall never be known?" [290] To which the pragmatist responds: "Indeed I do, provided you let me hold consistently to my own conception of truth, and do not ask me to abandon it for something which I find impossible to comprehend." [290] This short exchange sets the agenda for the argument that now follows. Briefly put, James argues that no counterexample to the claim that

$$(Et) P \leftrightarrow \text{true } P$$

can be produced unless the anti-pragmatist succeeds in persuading the pragmatist to adopt a rival concept of truth. Let $wabr$ stand for such a rival concept which is not essentially tied to the availability of evidence. Since the anti-pragmatist takes $wabr$ to be a truth-predicate, he holds that

$$(Et) P \leftrightarrow wabr P$$

Hence, he believes that a counterexample to (Et) is exactly one that also tells against

$$(Etw) wabr P \leftrightarrow wabr \text{ true } P$$

³ Hook, in his *John Dewey* (1939, pp. 83–86), discusses the same dilemma at some length and lets Dewey opt for the second horn. I do not know whether this correctly reflects Dewey's view of the matter.

But James insists on being granted the liberty to hold to his own conception of truth. Hence, he denies that the proper question to ask is whether (Etw) is the case. Instead, for him the question could only be whether the equivalence

$$(Ett) \text{ true } P \leftrightarrow \text{true true } P$$

holds. Since James will soon be making a case for (Et), the equivalence (Ett) follows trivially. So unless the anti-pragmatist can argue that *wabr* is indeed a truth-predicate which potentially diverges from *true*, he will not be able to present a counterexample to the T-scheme for pragmatist truth. Consequently a good part of the dialogue is devoted to arguing that *Wahrheit* is either “unintelligible” or coincides with truth in James’s sense.

* * *

Let me offer a close analogy to illustrate James’s strategy. Suppose we are situated in a cave, trying to find out the truth about events outside and that the only means of finding out such truths is by trusting an oracle. (Within the scope of the analogy I shall use ‘true’ not in the pragmatist but in an unspecific, a neutral sense.) All agree that whatever truth may come to, the basic equation

$$(E) P \leftrightarrow \text{true } P$$

should hold. Now suppose that someone, T, claims to be a candidate for being a reliable oracle:

$$(ET) P \leftrightarrow \mathbf{TP}$$

Given (E), the claim (ET) is equivalent to

$$(ET^*) \text{ true } P \leftrightarrow \text{true } \mathbf{TP}$$

What would it take to produce a convincing counterexample to (ET*) (and hence to (ET))? Since by hypothesis access to truth within the cave about affairs outside is only by way of oracles we would have to find some oracle *X* such that

$$(ETX) XP \leftrightarrow X\mathbf{TP}$$

fails. T may itself be such an oracle. But suppose that T can sustain his candidature by somehow showing that he satisfies the condition, i.e.

$$(ETT) \mathbf{TP} \leftrightarrow \mathbf{TPP}$$

In that case a convincing counterexample can only be produced by some better oracle *X* which competes with T. This is to say that the claim (ET) stands unrefuted as long as there is no competitor *X* with a better claim to being a reliable oracle, i.e.

$$(EX) P \leftrightarrow XP,$$

and which diverges from T over the truth of at least some proposition. The task for T then is to make a prima facie case for (ET) and to show that he satisfies the condition (ETT). As long as no clearly better competitors enter the stage, this is all T can and need to do to keep his claim in play.

The cave analogy transfers straightforwardly to our case. If we interpret (ET/Et) as

the pragmatist's claim to having found a truth-predicate, then that claim will stand unrefuted as long as (i) (ETT/Ett) is satisfied, (ii) no one comes up with an intelligible predicate X which satisfies the basic equivalence for X , i.e. (EX), and (iii) which clearly diverges from pragmatist truth over at least one case. If these three conditions are satisfied, then the strength of the pragmatist's claim to having found the true theory of truth is proportional to the strength of his argument for (Et).

* * *

Let us now turn to James's positive argument for why the T-scheme (Et) for pragmatist truth is valid. Before James states the argument he lets his interlocutor present the case against pragmatist truth one more time. The interlocutor says that the fact that P must precede the fact that P is known. But the latter fact may never obtain; in the case at hand it does not obtain by hypothesis. Thus, James's opponent concludes, we have a violation of the T-scheme: P but P is not true in the pragmatist sense.

Here is James's response:

The truth of an event, past, present, or future, is for me only another name for the fact that *if* the event ever *does* get known, the nature of the knowledge is already to some degree predetermined. The truth which precedes actual knowledge of a fact means only what any possible knower of the fact will eventually find himself necessitated to believe about it. [...] This seems to me all that you can clearly mean when you say that truth pre-exists to knowledge. It is knowledge anticipated, knowledge in the form of possibility merely. (157f.)

Given that truth and knowledge are wedded in the Jamesian manner, then

wherever knowledge is conceivable truth is conceivable, wherever knowledge is possible truth is possible, wherever knowledge is actual truth is actual. Therefore when you point your first horn at me, I think of truth *actual*, and say it doesn't exist. It doesn't; for by hypothesis there is no knower, no idea, no workings. I agree, however, that truth *possible* or *virtual* might exist, for a knower might possibly be brought to birth; and truth *conceivable* certainly exists, for, abstractly taken, there is nothing in the nature of antediluvian events that should make the application of knowledge to them inconceivable. (158)

This passage finally hands in all ingredients needed for formulating James's conception of pragmatist (absolute) truth. According to this conception a proposition P is true just in case there could be a state of evidence which would warrant belief in P and no matter how that state is augmented by further evidence as to P , the warrant for believing P would persist. It is important that we identify in the right way the range of evidential states which according to James should ideally be accessible to an investigating subject. James is not thinking of time-travel fairy tales. All he is pointing out is that there is nothing in the notion of any past event that would rule out that evidence of its occurrence could be a possible object of knowledge. If such evidence were (counterfactually) handed to an investigator now, he would find himself in a state of belief that would warrant belief in P , and if that evidence would subsequently neither be lost nor undermined in the long run by further evidence, then P would be true absolutely.

Let us record clearly which features of James's account of truth allow him to escape from the dilemma, specifically from the horn that charges him with a violation of the truth schema from left-to-right:

if P , then it is true that P .

There is one assumption, namely that

(A) any state of affairs P is a possible object of knowledge ("knowable"),

and there is what James takes to be a consequence of his definition of truth:

(B) if P is knowable, then P is true.

Given (A) and (B), violations of the truth-schema from left-to-right – if P , then P is true – are plainly ruled out. For, assuming that P , it follows by (A) that P is knowable whence, by (B), P is true. For the converse – if P is true, then P – it suffices to assume the consistency of truth, i.e.

(C) if P is true, then not- P is not true.

For, assuming that P is true, it follows by (C) that not- P is not true whence, by (B), not- P is not knowable. So, by (A), the state of affairs denoted by 'not- P ' does not obtain which is to say that P .

4. Truth and superassertibility

Those familiar with Crispin Wright's work on the concept of superassertibility will no doubt have experienced a moment of *dejà vu*.⁴ Superassertibility according to Wright is

...the property of being justified by some (in principle accessible) state of information and then *remaining* justified no matter how that state of information may be enlarged upon or improved. (2001, 771)

A proposition is superassertible just in case someone investigating it could, in the world as it actually is, could arrive at a state of information in which its acceptance was justified, which justification would then persist no matter how much more relevant information was acquired. (1998, 62)

A statement is superassertible [...] if and only if it is, or can be warranted and some warrant for it would survive arbitrarily close scrutiny of its pedigree and arbitrarily extensive increments to, or other forms of improvement of, our information. (2001, 771)

I have been arguing above that superassertibility is not merely reminiscent of but exactly what James has in mind when he speaks of truth in the absolute sense. Even James's strategy and argument when presented with putative counterexamples to his account of truth mirrors exactly the one Wright gives in the course of defending the

⁴ See Wright (1992), (1998), (2001).

candidature of superassertibility for taking on the rôle of truth in a particular area of discourse. I take this to be a demonstration of the continued actuality of James's theory of truth – not in a vague sense to the effect that the “basic ideas” of his theory still inspire present-day theorizing about the matter but in a precise and substantial sense concerning the details and even the very formulation of James's theory.

Of course, there are some important differences between James's and Wright's theories of truth. As pointed out above, superassertibility can only be a candidate for truth in those areas of discourse that satisfy the condition that every state of affairs must be a possible object of knowledge. James makes the extra assumption that every area of discourse is thus epistemically accessible *tout court*; Wright prefers to remain agnostic about this. Thus for James superassertibility is truth – period. For Wright superassertibility may be a suitable realizer of the truth rôle only in some areas; in other areas other properties may have a better claim to playing that rôle. This certainly is a first substantial difference.

A second difference is perhaps more one of degrees. Wright is very explicit about the fact that superassertibility's claim to being truth rests on fairly abstract, if not to say formal considerations. In James's writings about truth this point is more or less obscured by the circumstance that James has very substantial things to say about key notions such as belief and knowledge, warrant and justification. Yet, as his discussion of truth shows, up to a certain point not much of that substance is needed for the purpose of discussing truth.

Third, James takes no time arguing that his notion of truth satisfies the important condition

(Et) $true P \leftrightarrow true true P$.

He does not do so because he prefers to argue directly for the stronger

(Et) $P \leftrightarrow true P$.

But suppose – as will very likely be the case – that we cannot yet reach agreement over (Et). Then regardless of how strong the positive case for (Et) may be, the question as to whether putative counterexamples to (Et) can legitimately be fended off is equivalent to settling the status of (Ett). Unlike James, Wright gives this problem careful consideration and offers an argument for (Ett).

The main line of the argument is as follows.⁵ A proposition is *true*, just in case some in principle accessible evidential state stably warrants belief in *P*. A state *K* *stably warrants* belief in *P*, if and only if *K* warrants belief in *P* and no matter how *K* is improved upon in response to evidence to do with *P*, it will continue to warrant *P*. In this sense stable warrant is just indefeasible warrant.

This definition allows to prove that

if a state warrants belief in *P* if and only if it warrants believing that it stably warrants *P*,
then any given state *K* stably warrants a proposition *Q* iff *K* stably warrants the belief that *K* stably warrants belief in *Q*.

⁵ For a detailed exposition see the appendix.

The consequent of this lemma suffices for asserting (Ett), i.e. that Q is true iff it is true that Q is true. It thus remains to show that the antecedent of the lemma holds.

Since stable warranty entails warranty, it is clear that if a state K warrants believing that K stably warrants believing that P , then K warrants that K warrants P which arguably implies that K simply warrants P . The two principles use here are, first, that warranted belief is closed under logical consequence and, second, that iteration of the warranty predicate can be reduced – a kind of reflection principle.

The more difficult direction of the required equivalence is this:

If K warrants believing that K stably warrants belief in P , then K warrants belief in P .

In order to prove this, we need to assume three further principles of which the following requires perhaps some commenting.

If K warrants believing that P , then K warrants the belief that P will be corroborated at the next occasion when new evidence regarding P will become available.

If you were not justified to expect that P would be corroborated in the very next round, then, so the principle says, you have no justification to believe P in the first place. Note that the principle neither claims nor entails that warrant must be indefeasible. It only claims that the notion of warrant underpinning pragmatist truth must be such that a warrant to believe P warrants the *expectation* that P will not be defeated at the next possible occasion. To illustrate, suppose I am now warranted to believe that this is a cloudy day. The belief might turn out false next time I look out of the window. The principle requires that I should be surprised about the ready availability of such contravening evidence to the extent that I should then call into question whether I really had a warrant for my belief in the first place.

Given this principle – and two further assumption – the required implication does indeed follow and thus the important equivalence (Ett) holds.

Appendix: Wright's lemma

In the following I offer a framework for and present a proof of the equivalence (Ett). This framework is designed to make transparent the abstract structure of James's theory of truth. The proof proceeds from slightly weaker assumptions than the ones presupposed by Wright.

Our considerations are based on four kinds of items. We assume as given, first, a set of states of information (or belief states, or corpora, H, I, K, \dots), second, propositions (or beliefs, or statements, P, Q, \dots) and, third, a relation of warrant (\Rightarrow) between states and propositions. We assume that the language contains the resources to express relations of warrant such that we may say that state I warrants the proposition that, say, K warrants the proposition that P , in short:

(*) $I \Rightarrow (K \Rightarrow P)$.

It is important for our purposes that \Rightarrow can be thus iterated.⁶ Under some, though perhaps not all natural readings of the warrant relation such iteration makes good sense. If “I warrants P” is taken to be short for “I contains some piece of information Q justifying belief in P”, then (*) will have to be rendered as “I contains some piece of information Q justifying the belief that K contains information R which justifies belief in P.” If, for example, I hear the reliable witness Karl testifying that P, then I am in the possession of information which justifies the belief that Karl has information justifying the assertion that P.

We also assume, fourth, some order among states of information. Given a particular state K, newly available evidence may induce us to advance to a new state I which may be replaced in due course by some other state H. There are thus paths through the space of states representing possible sequences of belief states that an agent may adopt in response to poised evidence. An advance from one belief state to another may or may not make a difference as to whether or how a particular proposition is warranted. If the advance to H is the first in a path of advances from K that does make a difference as to the warranty of P, then we say that it is first-time P-incremental and write

$$K <_p H.$$

The transitive closure of each such relation $<_p$ will be denoted by $<_p^*$.⁷

Now we say that a state of information I stably warrants a proposition P (notation: $I \Rightarrow^s P$) if and only if

- (i) $I \Rightarrow P$, and
- (ii) for all K such that $I <_p^* K$, $K \Rightarrow P$.

A proposition P is true (Wright: superassertible) just in case some (in principle accessible) state of information stably warrants P.

LEMMA 1. Let K be a state of information. If for all states I, $I \Rightarrow P$ iff $I \Rightarrow Q$, then $K \Rightarrow^s P$ iff $K \Rightarrow^s Q$.

PROOF. Assume the antecedent and suppose that $K \Rightarrow^s P$. Then (a) $K \Rightarrow P$ and (b) for all H such that $K <_p^* H$, $H \Rightarrow P$. But by the assumption, a state warrants P iff it warrants Q. Hence, $K \Rightarrow Q$ and for all H such that $K <_p^* H$, $H \Rightarrow Q$, which is to say that $K \Rightarrow^s Q$. ■

COROLLARY. Let K be a state of information. If for all states I, $I \Rightarrow P$ iff $I \Rightarrow (I \Rightarrow^s P)$, then

$$(Ess) \quad K \Rightarrow^s P \quad \text{iff} \quad K \Rightarrow^s (K \Rightarrow^s P).$$

PROOF. By substituting $K \Rightarrow^s P$ for Q in Lemma 1. ■

⁶ In that respect for each state I, the expression $I \text{ P}$ behaves much like a unary modal operator. In fact we shall assume below some of the principles one typically encounters in epistemically interpreted modal logics.

⁷ Transitive closure: $I <_p^* K$ iff $\exists H_1, \dots, H_n (n \hat{=} \mathbf{N})$ such that $I <_p H_1, \dots, H_{n-1} <_p K$.

We now come to introducing the Five Principles that provide the basis of our proof of (Ett). They should be thought of as simultaneously constraining the notions of a belief state and the relations of warrant and evidence increase. These principles are quite abstract by nature. Though certain connotations not entailed by the principles may seem harmless or even heuristically helpful, they are strictly speaking not part of the argument.

FIVE PRINCIPLES

- P1. If $I \Rightarrow P$ and P entails Q , then $I \Rightarrow Q$.
- P2. If $I \Rightarrow (I \text{ } \text{P} \text{ } P)$, then $I \Rightarrow P$.
- P3. If $I \Rightarrow P$, then $I \Rightarrow (I \Rightarrow P)$.
- P4. If $I <_p K$ and $I \Rightarrow P$, then $I \Rightarrow (K \Rightarrow P)$.
- P5. If $I <_p^* K$ and $I \Rightarrow (K \Rightarrow P)$, then $I \Rightarrow P$.

Of these principles only the last two may cause some controversy. Suppose that you are presently warranted in believing that P . Then, according to (P4) you are thereby warranted now to expect that an increment of knowledge that would result from putting your present state of knowledge to the test with respect to P , would continue to warrant belief in P . As to (P5) suppose you are warranted now to expect that any increment of evidence with respect to P will justify belief in P . Then this fact puts you into possession of a warrant for P now. There is certainly more to be said about the principles. But we have to leave the issue now and carry on with the promised argument.

LEMMA 2. For all states of information I , $I \Rightarrow P$ iff $I \Rightarrow (I \Rightarrow^s P)$.

PROOF. Right-to-Left. Assume $I \Rightarrow (I \Rightarrow^s P)$. Since stable warranting entails warranting we have by (P1), $I \Rightarrow (I \Rightarrow P)$. Hence by (P2), $I \Rightarrow P$.

Left-to-Right. Assume that

$$(1) \quad I \Rightarrow P.$$

It follows by (P3) that $I \Rightarrow (I \Rightarrow P)$, and it remains to show that for all K ,

$$(*) \quad \text{if } I <_p^* K, \text{ then } I \Rightarrow (K \Rightarrow P).$$

If $I <_p^* K$, then K will be the terminal element in a finite chain

$$H_0, \dots, H_n$$

with initial member $H_0 = I$ and for each $i \in \{0, \dots, n\}$,

$$(2) \quad H_i <_p H_{i+1}.$$

Let us write $I <_p^n K$ to denote the fact that K may be reached from I by way of n P -increments.⁸ We prove (*) by induction on the length n of the incremental chain.

⁸ Transitive closure up to some particular number n of increments: $I <_p^n K$ iff $\exists H_1, \dots, H_n$ with $I <_p H_1, \dots, H_{n-1} <_p K$.

In the base case, $I <_p^1 K$, (2) instantiates to $I <_p K$ and we can infer $<_p^n$ from (1) by (P4) that $I \Rightarrow (K \Rightarrow P)$.

Our inductive hypothesis is that

i.h. $\quad \quad \quad$ if $I <_p^k K$, then $I \Rightarrow (K \Rightarrow P)$

Suppose next that $I <_p^{k+1} K$. Then for some K' , $I <_p^k K' <_p K$. It follows from the i.h. that

(3) $\quad \quad \quad I \Rightarrow (K' \Rightarrow P)$.

But if $K' \Rightarrow P$ and $K' <_p K$, then $K' \Rightarrow (K \Rightarrow P)$, again by (P4). Hence, it follows from (3) by the closure principle (P2) that

$I \Rightarrow (K' \Rightarrow (K \Rightarrow P))$.

To this we apply the reduction principle (P5) to obtain

$I \Rightarrow (K \Rightarrow P)$

as required. ■

From the above lemma and the corollary to the previous lemma there follows

WRIGHT'S LEMMA. For any state of information K and proposition P ,

(Ess) $\quad \quad \quad K \Rightarrow^s P \quad \text{iff} \quad K \Rightarrow^s (K \Rightarrow^s P)$.

(Ess) clearly entails

(Ett) $\quad \quad \quad \text{true } P \leftrightarrow \text{true true } P$,

which we wanted to show. But (Ess) is actually stronger than needed. For, given our definition of true, (Ett) requires only the validity of

$\exists H : H \Rightarrow^s P \quad \text{iff} \quad \exists I : I \Rightarrow^s (\exists K : K \Rightarrow^s P)$.

There is no need that $H = I = K$. This naturally invites the question whether the assumptions of the Lemma can accordingly be weakened in a philosophically significant way.

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