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Truth and Warranted Assertibility

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Résumé : Cet article soulève la question de savoir si le réaliste sémantique doit soutenir le principe selon lequel : (R) toute raison de penser qu'un énoncé est vrai est une raison de penser que l'énoncé est soutenable de manière garantie. A l'inverse de ce qui est proposé par W. Alston, qui dit que l'acceptation de (R) impose l'identification de l'extension du « vrai » et du « soutenable de manière garantie », l'article soutient que (R) peut être dérivé de l'hypothèse neutre entre le réalisme et l'antiréalisme selon laquelle il faut accepter toute illustration par des exemples non-pathologiques du schéma d'équivalence ES (il est vrai que p ssi p) pour comprendre le prédicat « vrai ». En outre, l'article argumente en faveur de la thèse selon laquelle le réaliste a des motivations positives pour accepter (R) , car ce principe est la prémisse d'un argument très général pour la thèse que la signification d'un énoncé ne peut pas être donnée par les conditions dans lesquelles l'énoncé est soutenable.

Abstract: The article addresses the question whether the semantic realist should accept the principle (R) according to which every reason to think that a statement is true is a reason to think that the statement is warrantably assertible, and vice versa. As against W. Alston's suggestion, according to which the acceptance of (R) commits one to regarding "true" and "warrantably assertible" as having the same extension, it is argued that (R) just follows from the neutral assumption, also shared by Alston, that the acceptance of all non-pathological instances of the Equivalence Schema (it is true that p iff p) provides a necessary condition for understanding the truth-predicate. So, it is argued, (R) is open both to the realist and to the antirealist. In addition, in the final part it is sketched a general argument against the anti-realistic identification of meaning with assertibility conditions, which is essentially premised on (R) . With this it is shown that the realist has also good dialectical motivations to accept (R) .

Introduction¹

The alethic debate on realism and antirealism characterizes these two positions as ones concerning the *nature* of truth: the realist holds that truth is an evidentially unconstrained property. She argues that the extension of the predicate is fixed independently of what humans actually know, will know and would know, were their epistemic powers and/or the epistemic conditions an idealization of some sort of ours. The antirealist holds that truth is an epistemically constrained property; so she argues that the extension of “true” coincides with that of a (complex) epistemic predicate, like “warrantedly assertible”, “warrantedly assertible under idealized epistemic conditions”, “*incontrovertibly* warrantably assertible”, etc.

The realist is committed to denying that

(R^*) it is true that p if and only if it is warrantably assertible that p . (R^*) asserts that “true” and “warrantably assertible” coincide in extension. The realist is committed to rejecting it because of her endorsement of a non-epistemic conception of truth, according to which the existence of truths for which a warrant is even in principle unavailable constitutes a possibility.

Now consider the following claim:

(R) Every reason to think that a statement is true is a reason to think that the statement is warrantably assertible, and vice versa.

Apparently, (R) does not entail that “true” and “warrantably assertible” coincide in extension. It just says that, as a matter of conceptual necessity, every *reason* to think that a statement is true is a *reason* to think that the statement is warrantably assertible, and vice versa. This means that the statements “it is warrantably assertible that p ” and “it is true that p ” are *cognitively equivalent*; which simply means that “it is warrantably assertible that p ” and “it is true that p ” have the same conditions of assertibility. So, it would seem, the realist is not committed to rejecting (R) as she is to rejecting (R^*).

In *A realist Conception of Truth* W. Alston has claimed that endorsing (R) *presupposes* endorsing (R^*). Since (R^*) voices a commitment inconsistent with the realist identification of truth with a non-epistemic

¹I am indebted to the following persons for very helpful comments and observations on previous versions of this paper: Sergio Bernini, Nicola Ciprotti, Michael Lynch, Teresa Marques, Luca Moretti, Marco Santambrogio, and an anonymous referee.

property, Alston has claimed that the realist must also reject (*R*). According to Alston, (*R*) is in good standing only if one presupposes that “what *ES* [the Equivalence Schema, according to which every instance of “it is true that *p* iff *p*” holds necessarily] says to be equivalent to the truth of *p* is some positive epistemic status of the assertion of *p*” [Alston 1996, 219]. If one reads (*ES*) in this way—Alston insists—one immediately gets to (*R**). So, as long as the meta-linguistic reading of (*ES*) is required to have (*R*), the acceptance of (*R*) cannot be divorced from the acceptance of (*R**).

As against Alston’s suggestion, I will show (i) that (*R*) can be derived without endorsing the so-called meta-linguistic reading of (*ES*). On the contrary, I will show that (*R*) can be derived by uncontroversial assumptions concerning the role performed by—rather than the correct reading of—(*ES*). As a consequence, I will show that the realist is not prevented from accepting it. Finally, I will argue (ii) that the realist had better accept it; for (*R*) can be used by the realist to put forward an argument against the antirealist. The final part of the paper will be devoted to outline this argument.

Cognitive Equivalence, Implicit Definition

Recall an old-fashioned piece of philosophical exemplification. There is a person, Caroline, who knows that the first planet she sees in the sky after the sunset is Venus. She learned that the expression “the evening star” is a quite common label people uses to denote the planet, and, upon being consulted on matters of astrophysical identity, is always prone to maintain that the evening star is indeed Venus. An unlearned friend of Caroline, Tom, heard something about the existence of a star commonly referred to as the “morning star”, in virtue of the fact that it is the least star to disappear before the sunrise. Tom asks Caroline the weird question whether, because of the similarity between the two labels, the heavenly body denoted by “the evening star” and the star denoted by the “morning star” are one and the same star (actually Tom does not know which planet that “star” would be). Caroline, who does not know that the “morning star” too denotes Venus, unintendedly delivers the false answer that Venus is not the morning star. Though perhaps this is not its most interesting achievement, the philosophical literature has unanimously granted that there is nothing wrong in Caroline’s answer, nothing at least concerning her rationality (a rational agent has the right, at times, to ignore something of the world she rationally inhabits), nor

her linguistic competence (the example works on the presupposition that the expression “the morning star” can be understood without mastering a full theory concerning its *denotatum*).

If one asked what fault could have been attributed to Caroline beside or instead her (partial) ignorance, consider the following case (nothing wrong if, again, the reader’s mind is surfaced by the suspicion of a philosophical *déjà-vu*). Caroline is well aware of the fact that Tom, her unlearned friend, is not married, and is used to tell her female friends this fact, in the hope that one might get interested in the poor Tom (normally no one does). However, one day Laura—unexpectedly driven by her interest for Tom—asks Carolina whether Tom is still a bachelor. This could be a good occasion for Tom; unfortunately, Carolina delivers the false answer that he is not anymore. As before, Carolina wanted to be sincere. So, if she is guilty of something, this is not to be found in her propensity to tell the truth. However she is not ignoring that Tom is a bachelor: she knows that he is not married. What is wrong? As more than one reader might have guessed, we are faced by an alternative: either Carolina does not know the *meaning* of the expression “bachelor”, or, if she does know it, she is being logically faulty: she does not seem to appreciate that if S has the property A , and the property $A =$ the property B , then S has the property B .

In both cases Caroline tells a falsehood. The second time, however, we have the strong intuition that more than ignorance is involved. We do not stay content with the supposition that she just ignores the fact that Tom is still a bachelor. What is the difference between the two cases? Why is Carolina faulty in the second case *differently* than in the first case? The difference, though arguably not its most interesting explanation, is that the statements

(1) The evening star is Venus, and

(2) The morning star is Venus,

contrary to

(3) Tom is not married, and

(4) Tom is a bachelor,

are not cognitively equivalent.

Two statements are *cognitively equivalent* whenever “for any context c , nobody who fully understands them can take one of them to express

a truth with respect to *c* without immediately being ready to take the other to express a truth with respect to *c* as well”². The idea is that some statements, for reasons which have to do with the meaning of the expressions they feature, are such that no one, unless excusable for a lack of semantic competence or of logical capacities, can take a different attitude toward them: if one accepts the first, then one accepts the second; if one doubts the first, then one doubts the second, etc. The second example pivots on the identity of meaning between “bachelor” and “unmarried man”. Since they mean one and the same thing, (3) and (4) are cognitively equivalent. No one can accept the first and reject (doubt, simply weight, etc.) the second, and vice versa, unless falling sort of being a competent user of both expressions (henceforth I shall drop the second alternative concerning logical mistake, and shall maintain that whenever two statements are cognitively equivalent, *S*’s failure to take the same attitude toward both statements signals her semantic incompetence, i.e. her inability to understand what either the first or the second statement says). The first case, on the contrary, differs because (1) and (2) are not cognitively equivalent: “the morning star” and “the evening star”, though coincide in extension, have a different meaning. So that a thinker who accepts the first and rejects the second needs not be charged of something like incompetence in the use of either expression.

Identity of meaning (as it is arguably the case for “bachelor” and “unmarried man”) does not constitute a necessary condition for cognitive equivalence. It arguably supplies a sufficient condition for it, if the relevant statements are of the form “*S* is *p*” and “*S* is *q*” and the meaning of “*p*” is the same as the meaning of “*q*”: in such case, no one understanding both statements can, for instance, believe the first and disbelieve the second.

However, consider a biconditional *B*, whose left-hand side and whose right hand-side are not of the indicated form. Suppose that *B* performs a definitional role of a devised form of one of the expressions, say “#”, featured either by *B*’s right-hand side or by *B*’s left-hand side. In this case *B* would be what is commonly called an implicit definition of “#”, much in the same way Hilbert thought that Euclid’s axioms are implicit

²Künne, who has recently re-called the philosophical attention to Frege’s notion of cognitive equivalence, adds the clause concerning a fixed context in order to exclude cases of equivocation. Consider the word “bank”, and the statements “there is a bachelor on the bank” and “there is not an unmarried man on the bank”: there would be nothing amiss, were they uttered, respectively, in the public garden and in front of a big building down in the City, if the same person on either occasion accepted both. See [Künne 2003, 42].

definitions of geometrical expressions like “point”, “line”, etc. Roughly, an implicit definition is supposed to work as follows: suppose that the expression “#” is undefined, and that it is introduced within a language by the stipulation that it means whatever makes true a (partially uninterpreted) formula featuring the expression “#” among its sub-sentential constituents. According to the theory, the acceptance of the formula as true affects that “#” acquires the intended meaning, in that whoever thinks that the formula is true is thereby affecting that the content the formula conveys is true, and so that “#” receive the intended meaning. Accordingly, “point”, in Hilbert’s story, means whatever makes true the axioms which feature among their constituents that very expression.

Suppose, as more than one does, that the meaning of some expression is successfully introduced by means of an implicit definition. Suppose further that our B is indeed a implicit definition of “#”. If B is an implicit definition, acceptance of B constitutes a necessary condition for being a competent user of “#”. Since “#” means whatever makes B true, falling short of appreciating the truth of B is to fall short of understanding the meaning of “#”. Now remember that B is of a bi-conditional form. So it is of the form p iff q , where “#” is either a constituent of “ p ” or a constituent of “ q ”, no matter whose constituent it is. If it is so, failure to accept the transition from p to q and from q to p is a failure to count as competent user of the expression “#”. Acceptance of a bi-conditional may in fact be broken down into the unconditional acceptance of the transition from its left-hand side to its right hand, and of the transition from its right hand-side to its left-hand side. So, whoever accepts p and rejects q , or accepts q and rejects p , falls short of being a competent user of “#”. Moreover, what the implicit definitional status of B seems to rule out is the consistency of a difference in attitude toward its left-hand side and its right-hand side, and the supposition that this difference is not to be attributed to one’s linguistic incompetence. For every attitude ϕ , a different attitude ξ is ruled out by the acceptance of B , whose bi-conditional form guarantees p ’s and q ’s covariance in truth-value. Whoever accepts B , and takes the attitude ϕ toward p is thereby committed to taking the same attitude toward q (and vice-versa). Accordingly, if B is a biconditional, and performs the semantic role of an implicit definition, its left-hand side and its right-hand side are *cognitively equivalent*: the acceptance of B constitutes a necessary condition for understanding “#”, and the acceptance of B rules out the possibility of a difference in attitude toward B ’s left-hand and right-hand sides, so that whoever takes different attitudes toward them falls short of being competent with “#”. Which is what the cognitive equivalence of a pair of statements requires.

The Equivalence Schema as a (partial) implicit definition of “true”

Does (*ES*) plays an implicit definitional role along the lines of the preceding section? Assessing the question whether a context “*B*” is to be regarded as an implicit definition of one of its constituting expressions “#” arguably requires assessing two distinct sub-questions: whether mastery of “#” can be credited *independently* of the doxastic attitude one is disposed to take toward “*B*” (i.e. whether acceptance of “*B*” constitutes a necessary condition on the understanding of “#”), and whether mastery of “#” is entailed by the acceptance of “*B*” (i.e. whether acceptance of “*B*” constitutes a sufficient condition on the understanding of “#”).

To say that acceptance of “*B*” provides a necessary condition on the understanding of “#” is to say that *every case* in which one is reluctant to accept “*B*” is to be regarded as a case in which one does not understand “#”. Acceptation of (*ES*) seems, in light of the following example, to possess this feature. Tom (again) tells Caroline an unbelievable story concerning his relationship with Laura: “We have been to New York for the week-end”. Caroline is not convinced because she knows that both Tom and Laura live in Austria. So she asks Tom whether *it is true* that they have been to New York. Tom apparently weighs the question, and delivers the answer that it is not true. However, he finally adds: “but as I already told you, we have been to New York”. What should we think of Tom? His linguistic performance reveals that he fails to appreciate the fact that “We have been to New York” does entail “it is true that we have been to New York”. Differently than before, however, we are not disposed to treat Tom’s *defiance* as immaterial to the question whether he understands the predicate “true”: he is not sensitive to the fact that to assert is to present as true, so that his asserting that *p* commits him to assert that it is true that *p*. So, we are disposed to treat Tom as one who *fails* to grasp the concept of truth. It would seem that this example could be easily generalised to every *p*. So that, it might be suggested, the acceptance of (*ES*) seems to provide a necessary condition for the understanding of the truth-predicate.

As against the foregoing suggestion, it might be argued that having the disposition to accept *every* instance of (*ES*) provides too strong a condition on the understanding of “it is true”. After all, it might be suggested, no rational thinker can be disposed to accept the transition from “what I now say by uttering this sentence is false” to “it is true that what I now say by uttering this sentence is false”. Such transition

would entail the utterance of a paradoxical claim, which never seems to be possibly true. If what I say is true — that is to say if I what I now say by uttering the first sentence is false — then what I say when uttering it is false. If false, however, than what I say is true.

This rejoinder can seemingly be dealt with by imposing the constraint that it is the disposition to accept all *non-pathological* instances of (*ES*) that constitutes a necessary condition on the understanding of the truth predicate. However, once such constraint is in place, it seems that understanding the truth predicate requires having the disposition to recognise as such all pathological instances of (*ES*). Can the latter observation be made compatible with the claim that the *qualified* acceptance of (*ES*) provides a necessary condition on the understanding of the truth predicate?

A negative answer is plausibly enforced by the observation that if one is in a position to comply to the qualified condition, one must *already* be in possession of the concept of truth (as constituted by the acceptance of the claim that if a statement is true, then it is not false). If one reads the “already” in a logical manner, then the possession of the concept of truth must be constituted much independently of the qualified disposition to accepting every non-pathological instance of (*ES*). Accordingly, the acceptance of every non-pathological instance of (*ES*) cannot constitute a necessary condition for understanding the truth-predicate.

However, it might be suggested that the concept of truth has an holistic nature, such that its possession is constituted by several conditions, of which the condition that if something is true, then it is not false, and the condition that every non-pathological instance of (*ES*) hold good constitutes just two different instances. Were it so, possession of the concept of truth would be constituted by the joint acceptance of all the basic conditions.

What about the *sufficiency* condition? If we allow for the holistic nature of the truth concept — i.e. if we allow the acceptance of more than one principle to constitute the possession of the truth-concept — it hardly constitutes a possibility that one of those principles, besides providing a necessary condition, also provides a sufficient one for possessing the truth concept. For if a condition for possessing a concept is both necessary and sufficient, then meeting the condition is all that is required to possess the concept. Accordingly, if we salvage the contention that the acceptance (*ES*) provides a necessary condition for understanding the truth predicate by constraining the range of the instances one is to be disposed to accept just to its non-pathological instances, then it must be at the cost of denying that acceptance of (*ES*) also provides a sufficient

condition for the possession of the truth concept.

Does this result impede the characterisation of (ES) as an implicit definition of the predicate “it is true that”? According to the foregoing *provisos*, this question deserves an affirmative answer. Acceptation of (ES) does in fact not provide a necessary and sufficient condition for understanding the truth predicate. However, it resulted from the foregoing considerations that the qualified acceptance of (ES) does indeed provide a necessary condition. If we allow that a context partly constitutes the understanding of an expression if accepting the context constitutes a necessary condition for understanding it, we can then propose to regard (ES) as a partial implicit definition of the truth predicate.

Nothing significant happens concerning the relation between the notion of implicit definition and that of cognitive equivalence if partial implicit definitions are allowed as legitimate implicit definitions of an expression. It remains true that if a (partial or non-partial) implicit definition has a biconditional form, its left-hand side and its right-hand side are cognitively equivalent.

Let us illustrate the point by concentrating on the case most interesting for us, that is to say on (ES) . Along with the foregoing considerations, suppose that the acceptance of every (non pathological instance) of (ES) constitutes a necessary (though non-sufficient) condition of the possession of the concept of truth. That the qualified acceptance of (ES) constitutes a necessary condition to possess the truth concept guarantees that whoever falls short of the disposition to accept all (non-pathological) instances of (ES) does not possess the concept of truth. Accordingly, for any arbitrary p that does not give rise to a pathological instance of (ES) , acceptance of “ p ” and rejection of “it is true that p ” is not consistent with the possession of the concept of truth. Conversely, whoever possesses the concepts necessary to grasp both what “ p ” says and what “it is true that p ” says cannot but be disposed to take the very same propositional attitude towards both statements. For if she has the concepts to understand both “ p ” and “it is true that p ”, a fortiori she possesses the concept of truth, and the possession of concept of truth, so long as it is also constrained by the qualified acceptance of the covariance in truth value of “ p ” and “it is true that p ” encapsulated by (ES) , guarantees the necessary convergence of propositional attitudes.

Alston's Commitment

In Alston's own terminology, the Equivalence Schema is referred to as the *T*-schema. Accordingly, every statement that derives from the uniform substitution of "*p*" with a declarative sentence, is, in Alston's terminology, a *T*-statement. Does Alston attribute to the acceptance of every *T*-statement the role of constituting the understanding of the truth-predicate? This would be equivalent to attributing a constitutive role to the acceptance of (*ES*). Given the result of the preceding section, an affirmative answer to this question would then show that Alston is committed to the claim that '*p*' and "it is true that *p*" are cognitively equivalent.

The following quotation from *A Realist Conception of Truth* seemingly provides promising evidence as to Alston's endorsement of the implicit definitional role of (*ES*):

The suggestion is that if we understand that any *T*-statement is *conceptually, analytically* true, true by virtue of the meaning of the terms involved, in particular the term 'true', then we thereby understand what it is for a proposition to be true. [Alston 1996, 27]

However, there is one difficulty in construing Alston as endorsing the conception that (*ES*) implicitly defines "true". The problem is that Alston seemingly requires one to appreciate that every *T*-statement (every instance of (*ES*)) is conceptually true for her to understand the predicate "true". However, the attribution of an implicit definitional role to (*ES*) just requires a thinker to accept every instance thereof, much independently of the recognition that every such instance is conceptually, not to say analytically true.

More than this, Alston is quite explicit in declaring that the *T*-schema is not a definition, not even a contextual definition, of "true". The reason is that, unlike in a proper definition, the right-hand side and the left-hand side of (*ES*) are not synonymous.

The *meaning* of "The proposition that *lemons are sour* is true" cannot be the same as that of "Lemons are sour". The former has conceptual content absent from the latter. One could understand "Lemons are sour" perfectly well without having any concept of truth whatever. [Alston 1996, 34]

Two considerations are in order. The first one concerns the role Alston attributes to (*ES*). If my reading of the foregoing quotation is correct, Alston is implausibly making the capability to understand the truth-predicate depend on the capability of entertaining propositional

attitudes of the form “it is conceptually *true* that —” and “it is analytically *true* that —”. The implausibility stems from the fact that Alston’s account of the way the understanding of the truth-predicate can be imparted circularly requires, on the part of those who still lack the linguistic resources to understand it, the capability of entertaining complex attitudes toward — and therefore of understanding — contents featuring the very concept expressed by the predicate. Where the understanding of “true” to depend on the satisfaction of Alston’s condition, no one could understand that predicate.

Second observation: both the claim that the truth-predicate “is the only predicate such that, when one appreciates that the statement generated by that insertion [within the schema: for any p , p is _____ iff p] is conceptually true, one is thereby in possession of the concept expressed by that predicate” [Alston 1996, 54], and the claim that (ES) ’s left-hand side and right-hand side are not synonymous, are consistent with the *cognitive equivalence* of the left-hand side and right-hand side of (ES) .

As to the first contention, consider, as Alston seemingly suggests, that S is able to understand every statement of the form “it is true that p ”, only if S understand that every instance of (ES) is conceptually, analytically true. If it is so, for every S possessing that capability, we might derive the consequence that S knows, for every p , that if it is true that p , then p , and that if p , then it is true that p . Knowledge that every instance of (ES) is conceptually, analytically true certainly entails knowledge that the transition from its left-hand side to its right-hand side, and vice versa, holds good.

As to the second contention, if “ p ” and “it is true that p ” are not synonymous, then one being in a position to understand “ p ” can plainly be in a position not to understand that “it is true that p ”. For in addition to possessing the conceptual resources necessary to understand that p , she also has to possess the conceptual resources necessary to understand that is true that _____. However, once it is granted that, for some S , S does possess both kinds of conceptual resources, and once it is granted that the conceptual resources necessary to understand the truth predicate are acquired in the indicated way, it follows that “ p ” and “it is true that p ” are cognitive equivalent. No one understanding both of them can take one of them to express a truth (a falsehood, or whatever) without at the same time being ready to take the other one to express a truth (a falsehood, whatever) as well.

I conclude this section by maintaining that Alston’s stance toward (ES) does indeed commit him to the view that “ p ” and “it is true that p ” are cognitively equivalent. Therefore, the following argument, tak-

ing as its first premise the claim that both statements are cognitively equivalent, is acceptable by Alston's own lights.

Vindicating (*R*)

To say that "*p*" and "it is true that *p*" are cognitively equivalent is to say that

- (i) *R* is a reason to believe that *p* iff *R* is a reason to believe that it is true that *p*.

The cognitive equivalence thesis ensures that no consideration possibly enjoins acceptance of *p* unless it also enjoins acceptance that it is true that *p*, and vice versa. Existed an *R* whose substitution within (i) gave rise to a false statement, there would be circumstances under which a thinker fully understanding both sides of (*ES*) would be rationally required (permitted) to take different propositional attitudes toward them; which is inconsistent with the statements' cognitive equivalence.

Now consider the following premise:

- (ii) *R* is a reason to believe that *p* iff *R* is a reason to assert that *p*.

(ii) should be taken to be a definitional truth. With this I mean that (ii) just codifies the purely epistemic sense in which the notion of "reason for an assertion" is referred to within the debate over semantic realism and anti-realism³.

By substituting (i)'s left-hand side with (ii)'s right-hand side we yield

³(ii), as a consequence, excludes as reasons for an assertion prudential considerations, or motivational considerations. If I think of someone that she is very impolite, and I attach much value to politeness, I may find my self with strong reasons to believe that she is impolite (imagine I saw her many times being impolite with someone else, and that some trustworthy witness told me the same), but with no (motivational) reasons to assert it. Did I say to this person that she is impolite, I might run the risk of being impolite in turn, and I am not willing to be so. This does not change that when I have reasons to believe that she is unpolite the assertion that she is would be justified under the relevant respect. Wright emphasized the same point where, by commenting on Putnam's Deweyan use of the label "warranted assertibility" instead of that of "rational acceptability", he says: "Naturally, there can be conversational or social reasons why a belief which one is warranted in holding had better not be expressed in a particular context. But if we are concerned only with *epistemic* justification, then each of one's warranted beliefs corresponds to a justified possible assertion and vice versa", [Wright 1987, 37]. Wright also writes: "we may take it that this [*i.e.*, *rational acceptability*] is the notion which is now standardly called *assertibility*", [Wright 2000, 337].

- (iii) R is a reason to assert that p iff R is a reason to believe that it is true that p .

If every reason to assert is a reason to believe, and vice versa, and every reason to believe in a proposition is a reason to believe that the proposition is true, and vice versa, *then* every reason to assert a proposition is a reason to believe it true, and vice versa, that is to say (iii). As a last premise consider now the following one:

- (iv) R is a reason to assert that p iff R is a reason to believe that it is warrantably assertible that p

(iv) too holds true on conceptual grounds. It just spells out the iterative nature of the reasons for an assertion. If one has a reason to assert a proposition, then one has a reason to believe (assert) that the proposition is assertible. Conversely, if one has a reason to believe (assert) that a given proposition is assertible, then one has a reason to believe (assert) the proposition^{4,5}. It suffices to substitute (iv)'s right-hand side for the

⁴(iv) involves no commitment as to the contents a thinker must be prepared to accept if she is to count as a rational epistemic agent. The case of a lay-man L who lacks the concept of warranted assertion but still shows in his linguistic practice, for most of the p expressible in her language, the ability to tell apart the circumstances which are germane to the assertion of p constitutes no counterexample to (iv). For L would falsify the left-to-right transition of a slightly modified principle, according to which (iv*) S has a reason to assert that p iff S believes that it is warrantably assertible that p . The L under consideration has possibly reasons to assert that p , yet it is arguable that L cannot meet the right-hand side condition stated by the principle; for she lacks the relevant conceptual repertoire. So (iv*) is arguably false. Contrary to (iv*), however, (iv) does not impose any condition on what a thinker must (be in a position to) believe of a proposition in order to (be in a position to) have a reason to assert it; it just signals that whatever counts as a reason to assert that p automatically turns into a reason to believe that it is warrantably assertible that p (much independently of the fact that any thinker who is able to appreciate reasons to assert that p actually believes or possesses the concepts necessary to believe that it is warrantably assertible that p whenever it is the case).

⁵It must also be noted that "reason" and "warrant" are not used in this context as synonymous. This can be appreciated by considering cases in which R counts as a reason to accept that p , at the same time failing to warrant the belief (or the assertion) that p . To generate such cases it suffices to consider *bad* reasons. It might then be argued that "reason" is to be contrasted with "warrant" in that the former characterises the *subjective* epistemic property of taking oneself to have a warrant, and the latter the *objective* epistemic property just referred to within the scope of the intensional operator. I do not think that this characterisation impugns the status of (iv). As before, to differentiate *reasons* from *warrants* along the subjective-objective axis is problematic only if one accepts a different principle, (iv**), according to which R is a reason to assert that p only if R warrants the assertion of p . The original principle just exploits the following conceptual link between subjective and objective reason: if one has a (*subjective*) reason to assert that p , one takes oneself to have a(n *objective*) warrant to assert it, and vice versa.

left-hand side of (iii) to yield

- (iv) R is a reason to believe that it is warrantably assertible that p iff
 R is a reason to believe that that it is true that p ,

which is the very condition $(R)^6$.

Conclusion 1

In the light of the foregoing argument, it should be clear that acceptance of (R) does not presuppose the acceptance of the meta-linguistic reading of (ES) . So, also if one accepts Alston's claim that such reading is false, acceptance of (R) is not inconsistent with the acceptance of (ES) (in its correct reading). For (R) derives from the further principle (i) that is consequent upon the supposition — arguably shared by Alston — that acceptance of (ES) is indeed necessary to grasp the concept of truth. Contrary to Alston's suggestion, then, (R) does not beg the realist's question. Its acceptance does *not* depend on the further claim,

⁶In his recent *Conceptions of Truth* Wolfgang Künné offers a new version of Fitch's argument against every form of alethic antirealism: it is based on considering as a candidate for truth the following pair of sentences: Σ_0 "The number of my hairs is odd and nobody can be justified in believing that it is odd", and Σ_1 "the number of my hairs is even and nobody can be justified in believing that it is even". His argument shows that the joint assumption of the truth of Σ_0 (respectively of Σ_1) and of the rational acceptability of Σ_0 (respectively of Σ_1) leads to a contradiction. Since either Σ_0 or Σ_1 is true, one of them constitutes the premise of a *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea that every truth must be in principle rationally acceptable. I mention this result just to dispel the impression that it enjoins any kind of consequence for (1^*) . The impression to the contrary might arise as a consequence of the correct observation that sentences like Σ_0 or Σ_1 are such that any belief in their truth is inconsistent with any belief to the effect that their assertion would be warranted. They constitute a clear counterexample to (1^*) — one might wish to conclude — in that it is also clearly the case that having any reason to believe in the truth of either Σ_0 or Σ_1 does not imply having any reason to believe that either Σ_0 or Σ_1 is warrantably assertible. For the latter belief is inconsistent with the former. The reason I take sentences like Σ_0 or Σ_1 to be neutral with respect to (1^*) is however that they are built in a way that no belief to the effect that they are true, nor any belief to the effect that they are warrantably assertible can ever be as much as justified. So that neither the transition from-left-to-right nor the transition from-right-to-left of (1^*) — when either Σ_0 or Σ_1 is substituted for p — can ever be falsified: as a matter of conceptual necessity, both transitions can never deploy a truth to be preserved in the first place. Künné himself, in a different context, observes that "a biconditional is false (as understood in classical logic) if one of its branches is true and the other false"; and in (1^*) , when either Σ_0 or Σ_1 is substituted for p , "such a divergence in truth value cannot arise", [Künné 2003, 188].

unacceptable to the realist, that “it is true that p ” and “it is warrantably assertible that p ” are extensionally equivalent.

Before concluding, I would like to stress an important respect under which the realist should welcome this result. The next section is in fact devoted to outlining a very general argument against the semantic anti-realist, taking as its main premise (R).

(R) and Meaning Antirealism

As it is commonly suggested, “the essence of an anti-realist conception of meaning [is] given by the thesis that a sentence’s meaning or content is given in terms of its assertion conditions” [Skorupski 1993, 133]. Such conception straightforwardly derives from the antirealist identification of truth with an epistemic notion: understanding meaning is in fact held both by the realist and by the antirealist to consist in grasp of truth-conditions; if, along with the antirealist, truth is (some kind of) assertibility, then understanding meaning is to grasp conditions of assertibility. Let us state the antirealist claim in the following form:

(a) Meaning is assertibility conditions.

If meaning is assertibility conditions, then two sentences having the same assertibility conditions have the same meaning. Now (R) says that if R is a reason to assert that it is true that p , then R is a reason to assert that it is warrantably assertible that p . This claim can be put equivalently as a claim to the effect that “it is true that p ” and “it is warrantably assertible that p ” have the same assertibility conditions. In fact, (R) guarantees that every reason in the light of which “it is true that p ” is assertible is a reason in the light of which “it is warrantably assertible that p ” is assertible, and vice versa.

So, acceptance of (a) commits the antirealist to accept that

(b) “it is true that p ” and “it is warrantably assertible that p ” have the same meaning.

Now consider a given p which, under an available body of information E , is still undecided (where *agnosticism* is the right epistemic attitude toward p). In this case, it is both assertible that *it is not the case that it is assertible that p* and it is not the case that it is assertible that $\neg p$. If it is assertible that *it is not the case that it is assertible that $\neg p$* , then it is not assertible that $\neg p$ is true. The antirealist is in fact committed to the

claim that $\neg p$'s truth consists in (some form of) warranted assertibility enjoyed by $\neg p$. Accordingly, when p is undecided it can be assertible that it is not the case that it is assertible that p , and at the same time it can fail to be assertible that it is not the case that p is true (equivalently, that $\neg p$ is true). So,

- (c) "*it is not the case that it true that p* " and "*it is not the case that it is warrantably assertible that p* " have not the same assertibility conditions, hence they do not have the same meaning

(b) and (c) are actually inconsistent with

- (d) The meaning of a complex sentence is a function of the meanings of its constituents.

The statements mentioned in (c) result from embedding the statements mentioned in (b) with the phrase "it is not the case that". According to (b), the constituent statements have the same meaning. Therefore, (d) entails that also the complex statements they constitute should have the same meaning⁷.

Conclusion 2

If the first conclusion is sound, then the antirealist is committed to accepting premise (b) of the foregoing argument. Accordingly, the only options available to her seem to reduce either to reject, along with (d), the compositionality of meaning, or to reject the very premise (a), voicing her essential commitment to an epistemic conception of meaning. This is not the right place to press the intuitive point that the latter alternative does not look as much as available to the antirealist. The compositionality of meaning doesn't seem to be a negotiable belief: its rejection in fact threatens to make language learning an impossible task. The main conclusion I want to draw is rather the following: so long as the foregoing argument is intuitively appealing, it apparently forces the antirealist to recede from her commitment to the epistemic nature of meaning. Since the argument essentially features premise (R), its very existence constitutes good reason, in contraposition with the worries voiced by Alston, for the realist to accept it.

⁷The argument, in its essential lines, is already sketched in [Skorupski 1993].

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