# 4

# Valueless Truth [*]

Paolo Leonardi

By means of the predicate 'is true' we monitor our use of language, thereby claiming truth for, or denying it to, what we say or are said.[1] For instance, we monitor what we say by a tag question like *Isn't it true?* or what we are said by replying *That's not true!* The unit of measure of these evaluations is cases in which we assume that what is said tells (or does not tell) how things are. Truth matches a linguistic representation with a state of affairs.

What we assume to be true, I shall argue, are cases of name placement, i.e. cases in which an object or a kind of object is given a name.[2] What I have in mind are not baptisms, or not only. Introductions, giving an example, and occasionally many other uses of a name can do. Names are tools to investigate the nature of things and by themselves names do not carry any, though a practice in using them carries with it information.[3] If a proper name is attributed to an object, the name ideally distinguishes it from anything else; if a

[1]But '*p* is true' and *p* do not assert the same, see Bolzano 1837: I, 147 and 1849 §13.

[2] Or, cases of name displacement, in which a name is negated to an object or a kind of objects.

[3] Names are like baby's bites – at the core, they trace an interest and an appropriation.

predicative name is applied to an object, it potentially groups it together with other objects and distinguishes the group from other groups.[4] It is uses of a name for the same object or kind of object that develop and transmit concepts and conceptions of the object and the kind.

Minimal and modest views of truth are concerned with the predicate 'is true' and the like, and act as if in asserting *s is true if and only if p* or its modest version there were not already an issue with the truth of *p* – truth comes in before the predicate 'is true'. If minimalism and modesty are pursued to avoid correspondentism, the fact is that a sentence, or a discourse, are no mirror of a state of affairs – if there are atomic sentences there are not atomic state of affairs. Moreover, linguistic expressions are made up of parts to which no thing corresponds in the state of affairs it speaks of (the state of affairs it is used to speak of), the most well known issue being syncategorematic expressions. And that in any state of affairs there are many elements to which no thing corresponds in what speaks of it. 'Mark and Ann were playing chess in the dining room, when I came in', say I. In the dining room there were many other things too, the dining room was located in some house or flat, Ann was drinking a beer besides playing chess, and I have come in with two friends of mine. Etc. This is only a sketch of one of indefinitely many different states of affairs, in which what I say could be deemed true. Rather, by a true sentence we point out some features in a state of affairs.

## 1.

Minimalism, which Pascal half endorses, would have truth as «a merely "formal" or "logical"» property (Engel 2002: 50) plus some platitudes. The formal or logical properties are fully expressed by the equivalence *the proposition that p is true if and only if p*. The platitudes consist in understanding the schema as saying that a proposition *p* is true (i) if and only if it corresponds to the facts, (ii) if and only if things are the way it says they are, or (iii) because *p*. (Engel 2002: 51)

With some good reasons, because of its problems, minimalism and modesty skip giving an analysis of «the internal structure of the truth-value bearers», which Tarski tackles with his recursive strategy (Künne 2003: 317) and in doing which words and objects get connected.[5] The core of their theory

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[4] See Leonardi 2011.

[5] Field 1972 claims that Tarski accounts for the semantic predicate 'is true' by means of the semantic predicates of denotation and satisfaction.

of truth consists of the T-sentences, which Tarski derives as consequences in his own theory. Keeping to the linguistic side, minimalism reduces truth to a formal property and little else, modesty to little more – their accounts leaves truth dangling.

Would, for instance, the biconditional *'The water is sparkling' is true if and only if the water is sparkling* account for the truth conditions of the sentence '*The water is sparkling*'? Surely, if the water is sparkling, 'the water is sparkling' is true, and, if it is not sparkling, 'the water is sparkling' is not true. But what are the conditions for accepting the right element of the biconditional? 'The water is sparkling' is acceptable if and only if the water is sparkling... (How do acceptance conditions differ from truth conditions?) The situation is not very different if we move from a minimalist conception to a modest one, i.e. to one according to which $\forall x(x$ is true $\leftrightarrow \exists p(x=[p]\&p))$. (Künne 2003: 337, but see the whole account 333-74.)

One could conjecture that the grounds for claiming that the water is sparkling do not call for truth. Writes Horwich:

> In mapping out the relations of explanatory dependence between phenomena, we naturally and properly grant ultimate explanatory priority to such things as basic laws and the initial conditions of the universe. From these facts we deduce, and thereby explain, why for example
>
> Snow is white
>
> And only then, given the minimal theory, do we deduce, and thereby explain why
>
> "Snow is white" is true  (Horwich 1990: 111)[6]

We give priority to basic laws and initial conditions of the universe, which in our explanations figure by means of sentences. However, these sentences do if and only if they are *true.*[7] We are rather careful at that, monitoring their case and revising our conjectures anytime we find wanting the basic laws and

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[6] Pascal quotes the passage, see 2002: 51.

[7] Horwich 1998 accounts for meaning by introducing acceptance properties, «a small set of properties which [...] explain total linguistic behaviour with respect to that word.» Then, he offers as instances the acceptance properties of 'and', 'red' and 'true'. We «accept '*p* and *q*' if and only if we accept '*p*' and '*q*'»; we accept «to apply 'red' to an observed surface when and

initial conditions of the universe that we have posited, i.e. anytime we suspect them to be false or not precise. Indeed, the relevance of the truth predicate can be inferred from the fact that any biconditional along the equivalence schema above is true if and only if its left element and its *right* element are both true or both false. It does not matter that in the right element does not occur the predicate 'is true'.[8]

## 2.

We ground truth assuming to be true some sentences in some circumstances. In his definition of truth, Tarski assumes the extension of any predicate to be defined, and hence the truth or falsity of any atomic formula to be established. This is not actually the case. Language is a cognitive tool, and as a matter of fact predicative names are applied to a limited number of things, and their application is always revisable.[9] In any event, we accept *some* contingent truths, which are relevant as proper and predicative names placement relative to *some* circumstances.

The truth of other sentences, as the occasion comes up, is decided by assimilating them and the occasion to, or distinguishing them from, the sentences and the circumstances previously described by the proper and predicative names. Mark is a child, is George a child too? The Earth is a planet, is *Mu Arae e* a planet too? If the cases cannot be assimilated to any previously assumed one, we introduce new sentences – George is an old child, or George is a boy, George is a young man, etc – and assume they properly describe their circumstance. Or, alternatively, we refute assimilating the present case to the previous one – George is not a child. These are mixed waters, where epistemology and semantics mesh together, and they do not concern me here.

Let us call the uses of language I am examining *coordinative uses*. In any such use, language and reality touch each other. The set of cases has neither to

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only when it is clearly red»; and we accept 'true' when we «accept instances of the schema "the proposition *that p* is true if and only if *p*".» Then the question becomes when do we accept '*p*', '*q*', '*red*', and again '*p*'.

  None of these is a basic law or part of the initial conditions of the universe.

  [8] Sher and Wright 2007 remark that deflationist views of truth reduce truth to the predicate 'is true'. This choice has, they claim, two drawbacks. It forgets other ways truth surfaces in natural language sentences – for instance, by means of adverbs as 'truly' – and what they call the illocutionary role truth plays in defining assertoric uses of sentences. On the second point, they refer to Frege 1918. On the stroke symbol and assertion in Frege, see also Picardi 1989.

  [9] If I were careful, I would have claimed that the application of a predicate is almost always revisable. If something, however, is not revisable maybe we cannot claim that it is not.

be stable nor the same for all of us. The sentences have neither to be elementary as Tractarian propositions were, nor to be fully explicit – 'Boy', 'The boy', 'That's a boy', 'Ann's boy', 'The boy is Ann's', etc, all can do. With such units of measure, we distinguish boys from children and adults (and judge the case in which someone is claimed to be a boy).

Only rarely we decide our coordinative uses. Occasionally, we revise single assumptions, but we do not decide anytime the whole asset of cases. We happen to revise our assumptions without deciding – because we are absent-minded and do not even realize we have changed sentences, instances or views, or a change of views may impose on us. Any change is consequential.[10]

Now, I would push my point linking it with some stands that I feel close to it.

What I have in mind articulates a thing that, in "A Defence of Common Sense" in 1925, Moore *en passant* says, namely that he knows the meaning of the truisms, but not how to analyze that meaning. Moore claims to be using the words with their ordinary meaning. Some truisms – for instance, 'I am a human being', or 'Here is a hand' – place common nouns – respectively, *human being* and *hand*.[11] 'Here is a hand' is not a sentence (a proposition) with an empirical look and a grammatical role, as Wittgenstein would have argued, but a use of the noun 'hand' to which Moore attributes a paradigmatic value, and which he suggests his audience to attribute the same value. The use plays the role of a standard. Any use in which a word and what it is about come together can play that role, and the better the more *perspicuous* it is.[12]

There are three relevant aspects in Moore's case. (i) He commits himself to the existence of what is named, whose nature has yet to be investigated. (ii) The existence of two things is acknowledged at once, the noun 'hand' and

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[10]Coordinative uses do not relate to truth-aptness. Truth-aptness is an illocutionary issue, so to speak, whereas coordinative uses are a semantic one. Perhaps, any field of discourse is true-apt, and all judgments but perceptual ones are. That is, sentences about any field of discourse are possibly true or false. Coordination is not about what can be linguistically represented, but about how a linguistic representation acquires content, and the idea is that anchoring a linguistic representation to a state of affairs is what generates its content.

This is how Kant seems to have argued (see Vanzo 2012). Burge 2010 claims that perceptual judgments too are truth-apt – that objectivity begins with perception is a central claim of the book.

[11] 'Here is a hand' is the first premise in Moore's 1939 proof of the existence of an external world.

[12]The placement of a common noun is the placement of a predicative name. And there is also proper name and relational name placing.

I would call 'perspicuous' a use the more easily it is understood by the higher number of people to whom it is offered.

the hand itself. (iii) The previous history of the two things is relevant but inessential. There could be previous concepts and conceptions of the relevant thing that are picked up, or retrieved, together with the suggested standard use of the term – but they may change – or concepts and conceptions of it may develop after the standard, and be transferred by the term which the use anchors.[13]

Schlick, in 1918-1925, advocates a less informal but similar picture, to which Reichenbach later subscribes. Dealing with the introduction of units of measure, they assert that such units are introduced by coordinative definitions, that is by definitions that coordinate physical objects and concepts (I would say 'terms' rather than 'concepts'). Writes Reichenbach:

> In principle, a unit of length can be defined in terms of an observation that does not include any metrica! relations, such as "that wave-length which occurs when light has a certain redness." In this case a sample of this red color would have to be kept in Paris in place of the standard meter. The characteristic feature of this method is the coordination of a concept to a physical object. These considerations explain the term "coordinative definition." If the definition is used for measurements, as in the case of the unit of length, it is a *metrical* coordinative definition. (1928 [1957]: 15)

A coordinative definition transforms a particular length, weight, volume into a standard respectively for length, weight, volume, linking the level of objects with that of language and thought (with words and concepts). The definition supplies no information, but constitutes a tool to collect information. As it is well known, we reflect on our standard and keep looking for better ones. Lateral information and indefinitely many adjustments (how to apply the standard, how to keep properly the physical standard, like the meter bar in Paris, in what circumstances its use can be trusted, etc) point at how to revise the standard itself.[14]

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[13]Quine's denial of a distinction between linguistic and factual elements goes with my Moorean understanding. See Quine 1953. However, Quine 1960, and later, turns the problem towards his indeterminacy thesis.

The idea that naming helps recognizing and developing concepts of things is a topic investigated by Markman 1989 and Bloom 2000.

[14] Speaking of the standard meter, Kripke 1972-1980 investigates how the standard is fixed and kept in the Sévres Museum as a case of an a priori contingent truth. That the standard bar is one meter long is one such truth, and it fixes the reference of 'one meter'. Wittgenstein 1953 ( §50) too discusses the standard meter case, asserting that the standard meter cannot be said to be

Predicative names introduced coordinating them with some instances are thereby defined and true of the instances.[15]   At the same time, as with coordinative definition in physics, the coordination by itself does not endow any articulated content, which comes later investigating what there is thanks to the coordination.

Thirdly, I would compare Wittgenstein's discussion on Moore's truisms in *On Certainty* with my claim.   The sentences we assume true are, in my view, partially alike and partially different from Wittgenstein's hinge propositions.

> 519. Admittedly, if you are obeying the order "Bring me a book", you may have to check whether the thing you see over there really is a book, but then you do at least know what people mean by "book"; and if you don't you can look it up, – but then you must know what some other word means.   And the fact that a word means such-and-such, is used in such-and-such a way, is in turn an empirical fact, like the fact that what you see over there is a book.
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> Therefore, in order for you to be able to carry out an order there must be some empirical fact about which you are not in doubt. Doubt itself rests only on what is beyond doubt.
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> But since a language-game is something that consists in the recurrent procedures of the game in time, it seems impossible to say in any *individual* case that such-and-such must be beyond doubt if there is to be a language-game – though it is right enough to say that *as a rule* some empirical judgment or other must be beyond doubt.

one meter long because it plays a grammatical and not an empirical role. Wittgenstein touches the issue in many other places, indirectly already in the *Tractatus*, in conversations with members of the Wiener Kreis, in his works on the fundaments of mathematics – distinguishing all along the logical (grammatical) role of the standard and its empirical application.   As I argue in the text Wittgenstein 1969 seems to doubt this distinction, though he does not give it up (see, for instance, §§ 309, 319, 321, 519).   Wittgenstein writes that «Not only rules, but also examples are needed for establishing a practice.» (1969 §139)  In the examples, words and objects meet, and if we kept only to the linguistic formulation of the rule we would have loop-holes in the practice.   On Kripke and on Wittgenstein cf Salmon 1988, Diamond 2001, Pollock 2004, Mácha 2012.

[15] Proper names distinguish their bearer from anything and anyone else and do not categorize their bearer.   I am inclined to think that 'This is George' and 'That is not Ann' respectively assert and deny the appropriateness of applying to two individuals the distinctive marks 'George' and 'Ann'.

With some hesitance, Wittgenstein calls the sentences that formulate the re-current procedures of a language game *grammatical propositions*. Any sen-tence, however, can play the role of a grammatical proposition, offering a paradigm rather than voicing a rule, and being used as a standard. Playing this role does not conflict with its being also an empirical proposition. Any sentence can play the two roles – tell, imagine, inquire, comment on what is the case and offer a standard for future uses. Any example does. If I am right, there is no problem in telling true a grammatical proposition as Moore does, and in claiming to know it, though not in the sense of being able to justify it. The dilemma between grammatical and empirical propositions is one Wittgenstein has faced throughout. It shows up already in the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*:

> 2.0211 If the world had no substance, then whether a proposi-tion had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true.

World (and its substance) and language come together in assuming true some uses of a sentence.[16]

Wittgenstein's claim comes very close to mine, substituting 'truth', 'true', and 'assumed to be true' in the quote from *On Certainty*, above, as follows,

> Therefore, in order for you to be able to carry out an order there must be some empirical fact which you assume to be true. Truth itself rests only on what is assumed to be true.

> But since a language-game is something that consists in the recur-rent procedures of the game in time, it seems impossible to say in any *individual* case that such-and-such must be assumed to be true if there is to be a language-game – though it is right enough to say that *as a rule* some empirical judgment or other must be assumed to be true.

My claim, let me repeat, is that some uses of sentences have to be assumed to be true – for instance, that this is a hand, that the Earth exists by more than five minutes, that the White Mountain exists by more than four minutes, that George is a boy, etc.

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[16] Wittgenstein was Kantian enough at the beginning to pursue the idea of conditions of ex-perience as something detachable from experience itself.

Assuming something true, fourthly, is not part of an interpretation – and hence it is not what Davidson aims at when he speaks of retrieving what people hold true. Interpretation reconstructs a language going from words to things, whereas what I am pursuing goes in the other direction.

Rather the case, fifthly, can be compared with Donnellan' referential uses of descriptions. In "Reference and Definite Descriptions", in 1966. Donnellan sketches the referential and the attributive use of a definite description. In a *referential* use, a person has a thing in mind and by the description calls others' attention to it. In an *attributive* use, a person attributes properties or relations to, or looks for, etc, a thing satisfying the description, possibly not having it in mind. Here is an example of the same description once in referential and once in attributive use. I am invited to dinner by a couple of friends. On the coffee table there are some architectural photographs, my host tells me the when and the why of most shots, her preferences in this special category of pictures, etc. Understanding that it was her to take the shots, in leaving, I say «The photographer knows her job!» – I use 'the photographer' to refer to her. At the entrance of a female civil engineering trade exhibition there are some architectural photographs. Suggesting you to have a look, I say «The photographer knows her job!» and add «Can you tell whom she is?» – I use 'the photographer' attributively to denote whoever took the pictures.

Donnellan neatly sketches the attributive and the referential use of a definite description:

> To illustrate this, we can imagine the following games: In the first a player gives a set of descriptions and the other players try to find the object in the room that best fits them. [...] In the other game the player picks out some object in the room, tries to give descriptions that characterize it uniquely and the other players attempt to discover what object he described. In the second game the problem set for the other players (the audience in the analogue) is to find out what is being described, not what best fits the descriptions. (1970: 356; see also Donnellan 1968: 214, n 12.)

Using a description to refer is a game of the second kind.

Section IX of "Reference and Definite Descriptions" assimilates a description in referential use to a Russellian (logically) proper name. As a Russellian proper name does not require that what it names satisfies any description, so a description in referential use does not. It does not even require that what it refers to satisfy its descriptive condition. Almost at the conclusion of the second last paragraph of that section, Donnellan asserts that

> [...] this seems to give a sense in which we are concerned with
> the thing itself and not just the thing under a certain description ...
> (1966: 303)

In the referential use, the speaker grasps what she refers to independently
from the description she offers and claims that it satisfies the descriptive con-
dition. The descriptive condition advocated, whatever its previous usage,
offers a standard, and if the use deviates from the previous one, it is the oc-
casion for a language shift.[17] Donnellan's claim can be extended to predicate.
In the referential use of a description, it is the descriptive condition which is
directly linked with the particular that is thereby claimed to be an instance
satisfying that condition. Then, the same phenomenon happens when a pred-
icate is applied to a thing the speaker grasps independently from what she
predicates of it.

## 3.

How does linguistic representation develop and how does it get its content?
How can we assess whether it is affordable? (This issue is distinct from that
of how language and things are related.) Everything is grounded, I suggest,
on assuming some representations to be affordable, a lighter requirement if
we require a minimal content to be relevant at that. A coordinative definition
attributes no content. The bar offer no content to the standard meter, it offers
its length, whatever it is, as a standard of measure. Another bar will be said,
if it is as long, to be long one meter, if it is twice as long, to be long two meters,
... If it is a proper name to be coordinated, the definition further distinguishes
a thing from the other ones – my brother and me are distinguished by me be-
ing named 'Paolo' and him not being so named. If it is a predicative name
to be coordinated, the definition further assimilates things in groups and dis-
tinguishes among groups of things – my cat is assimilated to your cat by both
being said to be *cats*, both cats are distinguished by Ann's pet, who is said to
be a *dog*. By acknowledging my cat as a cat, I am driven to acknowledge your

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[17]Writes Kripke:

> In particular, I find it plausible that a diachronic account of the evolution of lan-
> guage is likely to suggest that what was originally a mere speaker's reference may,
> if it becomes habitual in a community, evolve into a semantic reference. And this
> consideration may be one of the factors needed to clear up some puzzles in the
> theory of reference. (1977: 271)

pet as a cat too.[18]   Thereby, the realist engagement starts before attributing a
nature to things.[19]

Truth as I have discussed it is a property of linguistic representations and
concern attributing a predicative name to things. By that property we monitor,
in everyday contexts as in more sophisticated ones, the adequacy of linguistic
representation.   It is not exactly a semantic property, but fixing elements to
evaluate truth fixes the semantic of the language.

As most people, I have an instinctive inclination to take truth as correspon-
dence.  But truth is not correspondence.  Any sentence whatsoever matches
little of the circumstance it is about.  Any sentence has a structure much sim-
pler than the circumstance it is about has, and at the same time many parts of
a sentence do not match anything in the circumstance. «Marco has left with
Anna» say I. What Marco does is something much more complex than the
sentence I utter.  Marco has legs, arms, ears, eyes, nose, etc, his going out is
along a path – different in space-time from Anna's path. The name 'Marco'
has no semantic parts – 'arc' is not a semantic element of 'Marco', but a pho-
netic string that distinguishes the name 'Marco' from the name 'Mario', in
which figures the string 'ari'. If Marco's forehead has an arc shape, the 'arc'
in 'Marco' does not represent it. Leaving is a complex activity which starts in
a location and ends in another one, involving a sophisticated motor perfor-
mance – things which have no elements corresponding to them in 'has left'.
One can think that my remark on 'arc' is irrelevant. The problem it poses at the
level of individual word cannot be hidden when we move to sentences which
contain sentences as elements, and specifically those which are logically eas-
ier to deal with, i.e. sentences in which occur a logical connective, or in my
example a sentence in which a preposition occurs such as 'with'. What does a
logical connective, such as 'and' or 'or' (to use their natural language version),
correspond to? What does a preposition such as 'with' correspond to?[20] Even

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[18] Russell 1903 §48 writes: « [...] things and concepts. The former are the terms. indicated
by proper names, the latter those indicated by all other words.». My point is that names keep
indicating things, even when we connect with them a richer content entertaining views, and
mastering information, about the nature of the things named.

[19] Could the meaning or content of language be differently accessed?  Imagine content were
innate.  It could be that our words have meaning because God endowed us some ideas.  God
knows what ideas are appropriate to our world – hence, this is only a indirect link between ideas
and things, and it doesn't detach ideas from things, giving ideas a priority.  Ideas could be innate
because of the biological evolution of our species. But biological evolution tells the experience of
the species rather than that of the individual, and again it is does by having ideas directly selected
by fitness to the case.

[20] Perhaps, it corresponds to an operation to be applied to the linguistic string itself in which

if we had straight up which linguistic pieces have to match which pieces in a state of affairs, any bit of discourse matches only a limited number of the relevant pieces in a state of affairs. There are indefinitely many circumstances that match what has been said.

Sometimes I imagine that the correspondence problem can be solved positing an injective relation between a sentence and the circumstance it tells about. That is, the match is between the relevant elements making up the sentence and only some elements of the circumstance. If that were right, a sentence would constrain the circumstance it is about, by picking out some elements in it. Then, however, it could be related to indefinitely many different circumstances. Which one is that to which the sentence corresponds?[21] Has Marco left alone or did he go with some other people besides Ann? Did they leave by foot or by car? To go out of town or to another place in town? Etc. Any match leaves the relevant circumstance largely indeterminate.

Hence, the relation between words and objects is more sophisticated than how a correspondence view takes it to be. It is a limited match, which starts from matching two complex units as if each where point form. That does not introduce any indeterminacy, because there is no question about which object the words have to be linked with – the object involved in the link was involved in the linking.

## 4.

A very short remark on the norm of truth, in closing. If truth is a property of some linguistic expressions, and it is about the adequacy of the application of a predicate, one such application either is true or it is not.[22] That is, truth is a factual property. On the relevance of entertaining proper information about what's the case, we come to value pursuing truth. Pascal dedicates a chapter in his book *Truth* to the norm of truth, a norm which he formulates in two ways, at p. 129:

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the connective occurs. But it corresponds to nothing in the circumstance.

[21] Austin 1950 introduced demonstrative conventions in his analysis of truth, I believe, to overcome this difficulty. He didn't solve the problem, yet, because he said nothing on how these conventions are supposed to work in selecting the relevant circumstance.

[22] This is a standard formulation of realism by Dummett. An antirealist would add that in the undecided case we cannot claim neither truth value. In my case, I would say that the linguistic representation of the case may be undecided, and hence that in make no sense as yet to imagine the case to be anyway true or false. In my case, the fault, if fault there is, is on language, i.e. we have not yet a proper linguistic representation of the case.

(BT) *For any* p, *one ought to believe that* p *only if* p *(is true).*

(BK) *For any* p, *believe that* p *only if, for all you know,* p *(is true).*

One might agree, but these are norms of belief, which assume truth as a value, and which most likely tell what belief is. But here the norm of truth has truth as object and not as subject.

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