

## Truthful Liars \*

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La vérité est si obscurcie en ce  
temps, et le mensonge si établi,  
qu'à moins que d'aimer la vérité,  
on ne saurait la connaître.

Pascal

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## 1. *Is Truth a Norm?*

In what sense, and of what, is truth a norm? Is it a norm of inquiry? Of belief? Of judgment? Or of assertion? In this paper I will claim that truth *is not* a norm of belief and assertion in the sense that having a belief and making an assertion commits you to the truth of what you believe and assert. At the same time, in a different sense of normativity, I will claim that truth *is* a norm of belief and assertion in the sense that belief aims at truth and the practice of making assertions aims at truth-transmission.

In particular, the thesis that truth is a norm of assertion, in the first sense just sketched, has been held explicitly or not by many important philosophers in the analytic tradition and in the pragmatist as well. The basic idea is that asserting that *p* commits you to the truth of *p*. Sometimes the thesis is presented, for instance by Peirce, in terms of responsibility: by virtue of some social norm, asserting that *p* makes me responsible of the truth of the propositions I assert<sup>1</sup>. Sometimes, in particular by Frege, the thesis is taken to depend on the very nature of the act of assertion: since to assert that *p* is to assert that *p* is true, if one asserts that *p* he is committed to the truth of *p*<sup>2</sup>. The same is held by Searle in the contemporary field of speech act theory<sup>3</sup>.

Now, I take that thesis to be wrong and I will try to show that making an assertion commits one to *sincerity*, not to truth. This will explain how it is possible to be *truthful liars*. But this does not throw the concept of truth out of the picture: since asserting that *p* is asserting that one believes that *p*, and believing that *p* is believing that *p* is true, when we make an assertion we commit ourselves to believe that what we say is true. Plainly this is correct if believing that *p* is believing that *p* is true. So I don't want to present an opposition, say the truth norm vs. the sincerity norm, but rather see *in what different senses of normativity* truth and sincerity are norms of assertion on the one hand, and truth and justification are norms of belief on the other. What in the end must be made clear, in effect, is the sense in which truth is a norm of belief and assertion even though believing and asserting rather commit one to justification and sincerity. That sense is, in my view, the *teleological* one in which belief aims at truth and assertion aims at truth-transmission.

To discuss these topics, I will present in §2 Peirce's theory of assertion, which will be critically examined in §3, where the case of the Truthful Liar

<sup>1</sup> Cf. e.g. CP 2.314-315, 2.252, 5.30, 8.313.

<sup>2</sup> See Frege (1918-1919: 294 Eng. trans.).

<sup>3</sup> "When I say something and mean it, I am committed to the truth of what I say. And this is so whether I am sincere or insincere" (Searle 1999: 144).

and other similar cases (the Reliable Falsity-teller and the Unreliable Truth-teller) are presented. Finally I will consider in §4 the sense of normativity in which, still, truth is a norm of belief and assertion<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. *Peirce's Theory of Assertion*

Peirce did not write a specific work on assertion, but in his papers one can find several considerations on it and its relations to proposition, belief, and judgment.

In a paper written around 1895, he defines assertion as the act of the speaker communicating to the listener that he has a certain belief, namely that in certain circumstances a certain idea is for him “definitively compulsory”.

The assertion consists in the furnishing of evidence by the speaker to the listener that the speaker believes something, that is, finds a certain idea to be definitively compulsory on a certain occasion (CP 2.335).

In this and in other passages Peirce remarks the *pragmatic dimension of asserting*: every assertion is an act communicating a belief. On this basis he also claims that asserting makes one responsible for what is asserted (CP 5.546-548, c. 1908; cf. CP 2.315).

Of course assertion is not to be confused with proposition: the same proposition can be articulated to various propositional attitudes, giving place to different pragmatic relations. A proposition can be doubted, asked, judged, asserted, ordered.

I may state it to myself and worry as to whether I shall embrace it or reject it, being dissatisfied with the idea of doing either. In that case, I doubt the proposition. I may state the proposition to you and endeavor to stimulate you to advise me whether to accept or reject it: in which I put it interrogatively. I may state it to myself; and be deliberately satisfied to base my action on it whenever occasion may arise: in which case I judge it. I may state it to you: and assume a responsibility for it: in which case I assert it. I may impose the responsibility of its agreeing with the truth upon you:

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<sup>4</sup> This paper elaborates on some previous work like Tuzet (2006) and Canale and Tuzet (2006), where more details are given about Peirce, Frege, Searle and Brandom.

in which case I command it. All these are different moods in which the same proposition may be stated (NEM 4: 39).

An interesting point made by Peirce concerns the difference between asserting and judging. In his *Syllabus*, a work dating (presumably) from 1902, he refers to “judgments” as acts of mental acceptance of propositions (CP 2.309). In another passage of the same work – even if there is no explicit reference to the act of judging – the distinction is put forward between the act of *asserting*, which implies some responsibility to *other subjects*, and the act of *assenting*, which implies some consequence for the *own conduct* of the assenting subject:

an act of assertion supposes that, a proposition being formulated, a person performs an act which renders him liable to the penalties of the social law (or, at any rate, those of the moral law) in case it should not be true, unless he has a definite and sufficient excuse; and an act of assent is an act of the mind by which one endeavors to impress the meanings of the proposition upon his disposition, so that it shall govern his conduct, this habit being ready to be broken in case reasons should appear for breaking it (CP 2.315).

Peirce refers a bit vaguely to the social or moral law inflicting some sanctions on those who make a false assertion. What is worth noting is the defeasible character of this ascription of responsibility: he who makes a false assertion is liable to some penalties “unless he has a definite and sufficient excuse”<sup>5</sup>. On this basis Peirce remarks the difference between an act concerning the agent’s own conduct – the act of *assenting* and undertaking the practical consequences of a certain proposition believed – and the act of *asserting*, namely the act of declaring to others the truth of a certain proposition (cf. CP 8.115, c. 1900).

In 1904 Peirce insists that *assertion* is not an act of pure signification, but a “public” act implying some penalties as possible consequences in case the assertion is false (CP 8.337). On the contrary *judgment* remains a “private” act, “the self-recognition of a belief”<sup>6</sup>. In Peirce’s terms to *judge* is to *assent*, not to *assert*.

<sup>5</sup> On the ascription of responsibility and rights see Hart (1949).

<sup>6</sup> “According to my present view (I may see more light in future) the act of assertion is not a pure act of signification. It is an act of exhibition of the fact that one subjects oneself to the penalties visited on a liar if the proposition asserted is not true. An act of judgment is the self-recognition of a belief; and a belief consists in the deliberate acceptance of a proposition as a basis of conduct” (CP 8.337). But this view is disputable; cf. Brandom (1994: 158): “The judgment is the internalization of a public process of assertion”. On acceptance cf. Burge (1993), Engel (1999) and (2000).

Such a distinction is basically maintained in a subsequent fragment (presumably of 1908) entitled *Judgment and Assertion* (CP 5.546-548)<sup>7</sup>. The fragment starts from the analysis of assertion. As already said, asserting implies an undertaking of responsibility. Whereas in 1902 (CP 2.315) Peirce referred to the social and moral law, now he refers more concretely to the legal practice.

If a man desires to assert anything very solemnly, he takes such steps as will enable him to go before a magistrate or notary and take a binding oath to it. Taking an oath is not mainly an event of the nature of a setting forth, *Vorstellung*, or representing. It is not mere saying, but is *doing*. The law, I believe, calls it an "act". At any rate, it would be followed by very real effects, in case the substance of what is asserted should be proved untrue. This ingredient, the assuming of responsibility, which is so prominent in solemn assertion, must be present in every genuine assertion (CP 5.546).

This passage sketches a sort of speech acts theory *ante litteram*<sup>8</sup>. According to it, an *assertion* differs from other speech acts in virtue of the consequences it typically has. Asserting implies an assuming of responsibility: he who makes an assertion exposes himself to the consequences of it, namely to some penalties or sanctions in case the assertion is false (CP 5.546)<sup>9</sup>. This rightly happens because, according to the theory, asserting commits to the truth of the proposition asserted.

Then, supposing this is correct, what is the *ratio* of the norm imposing penalties or sanctions on those who make false assertions? Presumably the norm has a complex *ratio* but a central aspect of it is the desire to avoid the bad consequences faced by those who rely on false assertions. More precisely, when we assert a proposition we are responsible to those who will eventually orient their conduct on our assertion. So our liability for a false assertion is grounded in the fact that some negative consequences can be the case for those

<sup>7</sup> With the difference that in this fragment Peirce introduces the idea that judgment is something which *ripens* in the mind. See Tuzet (2006). On the normativity of judgment in a naturalist picture, see Papineau (2003: chap. 1).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. obviously Austin (1955) and Searle (1969).

<sup>9</sup> For a comparison of Peirce and Searle on these topics, see Brock (1981). Note that, according to Peirce (but using a later terminology), every "illocutionary act" has a perlocutionary aspect which enters its definition; from this point of view, Searle's separation of the illocutionary (primary) from the perlocutionary (secondary) is inadequate (cf. Searle 1969). What interests Peirce are the "real consequences" of assertions and judgments (CP 5.546-547).

who act on it, or in particular for those who suffer harm from a decision based on it – as is the case, for instance, of someone convicted on the basis of a false testimony (the legal example is made by Peirce himself in NEM 4: 249).

Conceiving of assertion as an act implying a responsibility is in tune with a pragmatist conception of meaning<sup>10</sup>. Any assertion has certain *effects*, which can be predicted, tested and assessed taking into account not only the ethical and practical but also the legal and institutional features of the situation<sup>11</sup>. But a point should be made clear, in my opinion: in our discursive practices we are not directly committed to the truth of our assertions, but rather to their *sincerity*. To put it differently: what is directly relevant for the ascription of responsibility is not the relation between what is asserted and what is *true*, but the one between what is asserted and what is *believed*.

### 3. A Critique of Peirce's Theory

According to Peirce we have to say that, first, the speaker is responsible of the truth of his assertions, and, second, in virtue of this very responsibility a false assertion is to be sanctioned. I take this view to be wrong<sup>12</sup>. The responsibility of assertion does not directly depend on truth, but rather on *belief*. We are not directly committed to the truth of our assertions: what matters is (a) what we *believe* to be true or false and (b) whether we assert what we believe.

Peirce claims that “one subjects oneself to the penalties visited on a liar if the proposition asserted is not true” (CP 8.337). However, I shall remark, a lie is not a false statement, but a statement that contradicts the actual belief of the speaker. Someone lies when he says that *p* and believes that *not-p*, even if it is true that *p*; and vice versa he lies when he says that *not-p* and believes that *p*, even if it is true that *not-p*. In this sense we should say that *sincerity* rather

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Tiercelin (1993: 303): “l’acte d’assertion proprement dit met en cause la vérité ou la fausseté de l’énoncé, et implique un engagement ou la responsabilité de celui qui l’effectue. L’acte d’assertion suppose donc d’une part, une analyse des conditions auxquelles l’assertion doit obéir pour être susceptible de rencontrer le vrai mais d’autre part aussi, des effets de toute nature, en raison de la multiplicité possible des interprétants, qu’elle peut avoir dans le contexte de la communication. L’acte d’assertion ne comporte donc pas seulement des *dimensions* pragmatistes: il est pragmatiste de part en part”. Cf. Pape (2002).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. CP 8.313; Tiercelin (1993: 304).

<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately even some prominent scholars do not remark it is wrong. E.g. Hilpinen (2004: 156): “In an assertive speech act, the utterer of a proposition ‘assumes responsibility’ for its truth and is assumed to suffer some untoward consequences if the sentence turns out to be false, and the hearer or the interpreter will suffer the negative effects of the acceptance of false proposition unless he detects its falsity”.

than truth is the norm of assertion. Note that this is not my own concept of a lie constructed for the occasion, but the concept that emerges from an analysis of our discursive practices and commitments. Let me clarify this point with the following examples.

I will start from the case of the *Truthful Liar* (or perhaps *Wishful Liar*). Theodore believes that the person who killed Basil is not Anastasia. (He has some evidence that it is Sophia). But he has some personal motive for wanting Anastasia to be convicted. So, when he gives his testimony at the trial for Basil's murder, he asserts that he saw Anastasia kill Basil. So, he believes that *not-p* but asserts that *p*. Now, suppose that it is in fact true that Anastasia killed Basil. Is Theodore lying? This is an analysis of his case:

*The Truthful Liar*

- (1) believes that *not-p*;
- (2) asserts that *p*;
- (3) it is true that *p*.

So, is he lying? According to Peirce's account, he is not, since his assertion is true. However, according to mine, he is, for his assertion contradicts his actual belief. I have no empirical data to display, but my intuition is that many of us are willing to qualify that assertion as a lie.

Of course to settle the matter one should understand *what to count as a lie*. What are the conditions of a lie? Pascal's quote at the beginning of this paper implies that a lie is incompatible with truth; I suspect it is not so. Anscombe says that "a lie is an utterance contrary to one's mind"<sup>13</sup>. Austin says that insincerity is "an essential element in lying as distinct from merely saying what is in fact false."<sup>14</sup> But things are more complex. What is the correct concept of a lie if it is neither saying what is false nor saying something contrary to one's mind? Lynch claims<sup>15</sup> that to say what you don't believe is too strong, because, for example, actors on stage speak what they believe to be false, or because of the "mental reservation" doctrine (saying a crucial qualification to

<sup>13</sup> Anscombe (1957: 4). I must add that I cannot understand why after a couple of lines she says that "that a lie is an utterance contrary to one's mind does not mean that it is a false report of the contents of one's mind."

<sup>14</sup> Austin (1955: 41). Cf. Austin (1979: 99): "If I say 'S is P' when I don't even believe it, I am lying: if I say it when I believe it but am not sure of it, I may be misleading but I am not exactly lying."

<sup>15</sup> Lynch (2004: 147-148). I leave aside the issue of "alethic functionalism" that he raises in his later work.

yourself that makes your thought true) or the “equivocation” doctrine (saying something which is ambiguous knowing that the audience will take it in a different meaning). “So lying isn’t simply saying one thing and believing another. To lie, rather, is to assert something you believe to be false with the *intention of misleading or deceiving*.”<sup>16</sup> So the intentional aspect is crucial. But things are even more complex. We should consider the following:

- (i) asserting that *p* but believing that *not-p*, or vice versa asserting that *not-p* but believing that *p*, with the intention of misleading or deceiving;
- (ii) asserting something false.

Now, we could take an assertion to be a lie *either* when (i) obtains *or* when the conjunction of (i) and (ii) obtains. If we take (i) as a sufficient condition of a lie, Theodore is a truthful liar; if we think that the conjunction of (i) and (ii) is needed, he is rather a wishful liar: he tried to lie but didn’t succeed<sup>17</sup>.

Consider now some further situations. Imagine the case of the figure we might call the *Reliable Falsity-teller*: Theodore believes that the person who killed Basil is Anastasia and he has some good evidence that it is she. Then he asserts that it is she. But suppose that in fact it is Sophia. Is he lying? This is what happens here:

*The Reliable Falsity-teller*

- (1) believes that *p* and is justified in believing that *p*;
- (2) asserts that *p*;
- (3) it is false that *p*.

Is Theodore lying here? If making an assertion commits to sincerity, of course he is not. If it commits to truth, he is, unless – being the commitment not strict (more on this below) – he has a “definite and sufficient excuse” (in our example, he has some good evidence that it is Anastasia the person who killed Basil).

Finally, consider the case of the *Unreliable Truth-teller*: imagine that Theodore believes it is Anastasia who killed Basil, but he is not justified in so believing

<sup>16</sup> Lynch (2004: 148), who also wonders when a lie is justified. A possibility is whether it passes the “publicity test” (149): “Lies are by nature secrets, but a justified lie is one that – probably – would pass muster were it exposed to the light of day and subjected to the examination of reasonable people.”

<sup>17</sup> I am indebted to Susan Haack for a suggestion on this last point.



(he has no evidence at all). Suppose also that he asserts so and that it is in fact true that it is she who killed Basil. In this case:

*The Unreliable Truth-teller*

- (1) believes that  $p$  but is not justified in believing that  $p$ ;
- (2) asserts that  $p$ ;
- (3) it is true that  $p$ .

Now is Theodore lying? According to Peirce's account, he is not, for his assertion is true. According to mine, neither, for his assertion is not only true but also sincere. However, we are disappointed by the fact that the Unreliable Truth-teller asserts what he has no justification to believe.

So, if I were to sum up these considerations, I would say that asserting that  $p$  commits to:

- (a) being sincere;
- (b) giving on demand a justification of the belief that  $p$ ;
- (c) accepting the consequences of the belief that  $p$ <sup>18</sup>.

Therefore, if I am right, lying is determined by the relation between what is believed and what is asserted, in a way which is *relatively independent* from the truth. Why do I say "relatively independent"? Because that independence is relative to the cases in which a false belief may be nevertheless justified (and the asserting subject is capable of providing such a justification). The situation is different when an error is not justified: when, according to a given norm or criterion, one is expected to have a *true* belief, not a merely justified one. In this case, even if one were saying what really corresponded to his actual belief (strictly speaking, he were not lying), he would be responsible of the failure in forming accurately his own belief. (To talk law, in such cases the belief-forming subject wouldn't have a means- but an end-obligation, and he wouldn't be liable for fraud nor for negligence<sup>19</sup>, but for the simple fact of failing to satisfy that end-obligation, namely to form a true belief). Thus, to be responsible of an assertion is not to be responsible of its truth, rather of its conformity to actual belief, on condition that the latter can be justified and the

<sup>18</sup> In this paper I don't deal with this last requirement, some considerations on which – elaborated from Brandom (1994) and (2000) – can be found in Canale and Tuzet (2005), (2006) and (2007).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. e.g. Holmes (1881: chaps. 3-4); Hart and Honoré (1959: part 2).

justification is acceptable because the requirement on the formation of belief is not a strict one that makes justification irrelevant. In this sense, *justification* rather than truth is a norm of belief and *sincerity* rather than truth is a norm of assertion<sup>20</sup>. Remember what Peirce specified in 1902: the asserting subject is not responsible if he has “a definite and sufficient excuse” (CP 2.315). Peirce got the point but perhaps didn’t put a sufficient emphasis on it.

However, as I said above, this does not throw the concept of truth out of the picture: insofar as asserting that *p* is asserting that one believes that *p*, and believing that *p* is believing that *p* is true, we shall give an account of the normativity of truth for belief and at the same time we shall ask whether truth, in this sense of normativity, is also a norm of assertion.

#### 4. What Sense of Normativity?

Pascal Engel is among the philosophers who have given an account of truth as being a norm of belief<sup>21</sup>. The starting question is whether *truth* is the goal of our epistemic practices and beliefs or whether this role is played by *justification*. Engel has claimed that truth is a norm of belief in the sense that it is *constitutive* of belief that “belief aims at truth”<sup>22</sup>. Justification is not enough, since a justified false belief ought to be abandoned or revised. This does not mean that if something is true then one ought to believe it, for this would commit us to believe even trivial and practically irrelevant truths. It rather means, according to Engel, that one ought to believe only what is true<sup>23</sup>.

Engel rejects principle (A): For any *p*, if it is true that *p*, one ought to believe that *p*; instead he subscribes to principle (B): For any *p*, one ought to believe that *p* only if *p* (is true)<sup>24</sup>. He believes that the latter expresses a constitutive *norm of belief* and that truth is normative only insofar as there are norms of belief formation<sup>25</sup>. These norms provide criteria of justification and not the other

<sup>20</sup> Notice that this is not incompatible with the idea that truth is a norm of belief in a different sense: when we assert that *p* we are supposed to believe that *p* is true. On the conceptual relations between belief, assertion and truth, cf. Engel’s remarks in Engel and Rorty (2005: 31 ff.).

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Engel (2001), (2002), (2007). On truth’s normativity and a pragmatist conception of truth (explaining it in terms of its role in discursive practice) cf. Price (2003). See also Esfeld (2005).

<sup>22</sup> Engel (2001: 43). On constitutive rules cf. Searle (1995).

<sup>23</sup> Engel (2001: 47). See also Engel (2002: chap. 5).

<sup>24</sup> Or rather, in a formulation that takes into account our standards of *knowledge*: For any *p*, believe that *p* only if, for all you know, *p* (is true). See Engel (2002: 128-129). Cf. Williamson (1996).

<sup>25</sup> Engel (2002: 129-130).

way round. Concerning the belief justification, then, Engel remarks there are internalist and externalist conceptions of it: for the former, one can have a justification for believing that *p* even though it is false that *p*; for the latter, if it is false that *p* one cannot have a justification for believing it<sup>26</sup>. An externalist conception would clearly rule out my above considerations on justified false beliefs. But I have the impression that a conception of that sort is not the one which is embedded in our cognitive and discursive practices. The case of the Reliable Falsity-teller shows there are justified false beliefs, and the case of the Unreliable Truth-teller shows there are unjustified true beliefs. We are disappointed in both cases because we care for both truth and justification. So an externalist conception of justification might be welcome for certain purposes and in certain contexts at least, but in my view it does not give an account of our actual practices. It might be a good revisionary conception, in sum, but it is not an explanatory one as far as we are concerned. However it is true that evidence<sup>27</sup> and justification standards are truth-oriented, in that we care about justification because we care about truth. Therefore it is fine to say that belief and justification aim at truth, and that truth is a norm in this sense.

Now we may think something similar about assertion. It is implausible to accept principle (A[2032?]): For any *p*, if it is true that *p*, one ought to assert that *p*; but it is not implausible to accept principle (B[2032?]): For any *p*, one ought to assert that *p* only if *p* (is true). Truth is a necessary, not a sufficient, condition of a correct assertion. In this sense, for those who follow this norm, “asserting something is asserting something that one takes to be true”<sup>28</sup>. Varying on this theme, one could say that when you utter that *p* you mean that you *know* that *p* (not only that you believe it)<sup>29</sup>. Hence truth, and possibly knowledge, is a norm of assertion. For assertoric practice aims at transmitting truth and possibly knowledge.

The problem is, however, that we have no absolute guarantee that what we believe to be true or assert to be true is in fact true. So, even if truth is

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<sup>26</sup> Engel (2007: 32-34).

<sup>27</sup> On different stripes of evidentialism, cf. Engel (2007: 114-115). Going back to a past discussion with Engel (see Tuzet 2008), I wish to point out again that practical considerations play a role in the justification or in the acceptance of a belief, as Carnap remarked time ago (1936: 426): “Suppose a sentence *S* is given, some test-observations for it have been made, and *S* is confirmed by them in a certain degree. Then it is a matter of practical decision whether we will consider that degree as high enough for our acceptance of *S*, or as low enough for our rejection of *S*, or as intermediate between these so that we neither accept nor reject *S* until further evidence will be available.”

<sup>28</sup> Engel (2001: 43).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Engel (2007: 102 ff.).

a constitutive norm of belief and assertion, it is not a norm in the sense that having a belief or making an assertion commits us to the truth of such belief or assertion. From a constitutive point of view, when we believe that *p* we believe that *p* is true, and when we assert that *p* we assert that (we believe that) *p* is true. But the ascription of responsibility does not (directly) depend on truth, but on justification with regard to belief and on sincerity with regard to assertion<sup>30</sup>. As to assertion, this was showed in the case of the Truthful Liar. As to belief, think of the cases of the Reliable Falsity-teller and the Unreliable Truth-teller: what determines the fact that the latter but not the former deserves some social criticism or sanction is the fact that the latter has no justification for his (true) belief, while the former has a justification even though his belief turns out to be false. If believing would commit us to truth, the Unreliable Truth-teller would satisfy the requirement and deserve no sanction, while the Reliable Falsity-teller would deserve a sanction regardless of the fact that his (false) belief is justified.

To put it differently, truth is a correctness condition for belief and assertion<sup>31</sup>, but is not a requirement of them in the sense that false beliefs and assertions deserve as such a form of social criticism, a kind of blame or even a stronger sanction. We can say that the norm of truth is basic, fundamental; the norm of sincerity wouldn't exist without it, since the latter prescribes to say what one believes, that is what he takes as true. We can also contend that truthfulness is the default position and the liar in general, not only the truthful one, takes advantage of that<sup>32</sup>. Yet, this is not to say that truth is a requirement in the absence of which beliefs and assertions deserve as such a form of social criticism or sanction.

One of the troubles in the discussion about this is the ambiguity of "norm"<sup>33</sup>. Among the several meanings attributed to this word (including rule, standard, criterion, constitutive condition, prescription, custom, aim, goal, etc.) it is helpful to select here the idea of norms as *prescriptions* and that of norms as *aims*. Given the foregoing argument I strongly disagree with the claim that truth is a norm of belief and assertion in the prescriptive sense that we should have true beliefs and make true assertions on pain of sanctions if our beliefs

<sup>30</sup> Not "directly" because it depends on some norm or criterion whether an error might be justified or not.

<sup>31</sup> But see Price (1998) for a more articulated picture.

<sup>32</sup> "Lying works because truthfulness is the default position, and the good liar takes advantage of just that fact. [...] By lying, the liar increases her own power and decreases ours" (Lynch 2004: 152).

<sup>33</sup> On that ambiguity see e.g. von Wright (1963: chap. 1).

and assertions turn out to be false. On the other hand I strongly agree with the claim that truth is a norm of those attitudes in the teleological sense that belief aims at truth and assertion aims at truth-transmission. (To talk law again, if there is an obligation here it is a means-obligation, not an end-obligation: we are supposed to do our best to get true beliefs and spread them, and if we don't achieve that goal we are not to blame when we have a justification, with the exception of the cases in which the truth requirement is strict and the justification we might have for our failure is irrelevant). I take this teleological sense to be the root of what Engel calls the "constitutive" normativity of beliefs and assertions. It is constitutive of belief that "belief aims at truth" (and similarly for assertion) and the fact that we consider it constitutive depends in my view on the fact that such features of aiming at truth and aiming at truth-transmission shape our concepts of belief and assertion.

Let me also note that my argument has, if I am right, some important theoretical consequences. The first is to make less ambiguous the use of "lie", distinguishing between (1) saying what is false and (2) saying what one believes to be false with the intention of misleading or deceiving<sup>34</sup>. The second important consequence is the upholding of different senses and kinds of normativity, taking into account in particular the distinction between norms as prescriptions and norms as aims. The third consequence is that we have the possibility to maintain a non-epistemic conception of truth, as the one which is implicit in the present account, and combine it with an inferential semantics about the vocabulary of responsibility (something I have not done here but consider not just feasible but also recommended given the fact that responsibility ascriptions depend upon social norms and practices).

To conclude. Truth is a norm of belief and assertion in the constitutive sense of what it means to have a belief and to make an assertion, and it is a norm of these attitudes in the fundamental teleological sense in which belief aims at truth and assertion aims at truth-transmission. However, it is not a norm in the sense that a false belief or assertion is to be negatively sanctioned as such: as far as our practices are concerned, the ascription of responsibility rather depends on justification and sincerity. The case of the Truthful Liar

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<sup>34</sup> So Lynch (2004: 153): "to be sincere [...] is to be disposed to say what you believe, with the intention not to mislead." And also (155): "Other things being equal, a sincere person says what she thinks is true, on any particular subject that arises, *because she thinks it is true*. In sum, sincerity is good because true beliefs are good, but sincerity requires caring about the truth as such for its own sake. As with intellectual integrity, caring about truth is a necessary part of being sincere. Someone who couldn't care less about the truth may end up telling the truth about this or that when it suits him, but he won't be a sincere person. He'll just be honest when it pays."

and the other cases presented above support this conclusion, for one cannot explain what happens in those circumstances unless he recognizes those different commitments of belief and assertion.

## 5. References

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