

# Desiring the Truth and Nothing But the Truth

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## *Some Background*

We want to do well. Doing well as a philosopher means to think, to say, and to write philosophically interesting things. No one is only a philosopher. We are also, among many other things, family members, legal subjects, and physical objects. Doing well as a son, let us say, means, among other things, to care for one parents in appropriate ways. Doing well as a physical object means, if it means anything at all, not to fall apart. Being many things creates some problems. Parents and philosophy might both legitimately demand more of one's time. Then one might be able to become a better son by doing less well as a philosopher. Such conflicts are a common aspect of our lives. Should I try to become a better son or a better philosopher? I do not make these choices as a philosopher or as a son. It seems right to say that it is simply me – and not me as such and such – who chooses. *We* want to do well.

We are many things, I said. One of them is to hold opinions, to have a view of the world, to be, as we might put it, believers. We are also imaginers, intenders, and desirers. What does it mean to do well as a believer? To me this sounds like an odd question. We can (more or less) isolate the concerns that characterize one as a son, and thus the question 'What should I do as a son?' brackets all unrelated concerns. My interest in doing philosophy, for example, will presumably be bracketed by this question. What is bracketed when we think of ourselves simply as believers? What sort of concerns remains? Compare the following question: What sort of concerns should one bring towards one's being a desirer? Let us consider cases of desiring badly. I do not desire well, for example, if I want things, the wanting of which is disruptive in regard to other things, which are important to me. Wanting to remain in open spaces at all costs might be such a disruptive desire – 'ein Störenfried'. My being a desirer, it seems to me, cannot be isolated in the way being a son can be. I think the same holds for being a believer.

Other philosophers are more ambitious (Velleman, Shah, Wedgwood). They start by pointing out that there is a standard of correctness for beliefs. A belief is correct if what is believed obtains (or is true). This tells us something about what beliefs are. They are the mental states that have truth as their correctness condition. Does this help us to find out what it is do well as a believer? Do the correctness conditions for beliefs provide us with a nonnegotiable aim insofar as we are believers? These philosophers think it does. 'To believe a proposition is to accept it with the aim of thereby accepting a truth', says David Velleman. For Velleman, belief aims at truth. It is a state characterized by its aims, i.e. by its teleological structure. A belief's aim, however, need not be my aim, even if the belief is mine.<sup>1</sup> According to Nishi Shah

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<sup>1</sup> Velleman recognizes this point. See p. 254 of 'On the Aim of Belief' in his *The Possibility of Practical Reason*: 'An acceptance has the aim of being the acceptance of a truth when it is regulated, either by the subject's intention, or by some other mechanisms in ways designed to ensure that it is

(Phil Rev 2003, 470), ‘to say that it is a conceptual rather than [as in Velleman’s view] a metaphysical matter that truth is the standard for correctness of belief is to say that a competent user of the concept of belief must accept the prescription to believe that p only if p is true for any activity that he conceives as belief-formation’.<sup>2</sup>

What makes me more cautious than these philosophers? Let me explain. I am a wearer of shoes. I wear my shoes incorrectly if I put the left shoe on my right foot and the right shoe on my left foot. Suppose, on occasion, I wear my shoes incorrectly. So what? I have made a mistake in some sense. I have violated the correctness condition of putting on shoes. I have not made a mistake in any serious, i.e. normatively relevant sense. The kids, let us suppose, loved it and the inconvenience was negligible. In fact, it was very much part of the fun. If I put them on the right way, I do it because I want to look normal, walk comfortably and so on. There are standards of correctness that lack normative significance. They might be essential to some activity, which we do not or cannot escape from. None of this, however, gives them normative significance.<sup>3</sup>

When I think about, how I can do well as a believer, one plausible suggestion might be that I want to have beliefs that are helpful to me and to others. If you ask for the right way, and I want to help you, I need to know what the right way is. At least I need a true belief about it. The same holds for all the questions I might ask myself. A true belief about the right way is important because it is important to take the right way. If, however, I am set on taking a wrong way (due to, for example, unavoidable ignorance or weakness of will) it will be bad for me to have a true belief about how best to pursue what is wrong.<sup>4</sup> Are truths like apples, some tasty, some rotten?

In acting we are guided by our conception of the situation in which we are. Acting well, therefore, demands an accurate picture of the situation.<sup>5</sup> We want to act well. We can only do so if our conception of our situation is accurate. Thus, we want true beliefs about the situation.

Jane Heal says, ‘The transparency of truth allows whatever valuable features there are in a situation or project to shine through but does not itself contribute anything of substantive value’ (‘The Disinterested Search for Truth’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 88, 1987/88, 97). True beliefs are necessary to do well. Their value comes from their participation in valuable projects (which, Heal rightly emphasizes, need not make it ‘instrumental’). If we pursued truth not in the context of

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true.’

<sup>2</sup> See also Wedgwood, ‘The Aim of Belief’, *Phil Perspectives* 16, 2002, for whom truth is normatively significant for believings because it is the standard of correctness for beliefs.

<sup>3</sup> This, by no means, is meant to decide issues about the normative status of the aim of having true beliefs. I only want to say that the existence of correctness conditions does not by itself decide the normative issue. It is not even an original point; see Shah, p.458.

<sup>4</sup> Compare Moore’s (1907/08, 173) example of the slow watch, which makes a man miss a train. This turns out to be a good thing, as the train will be involved in an accident. See also Stich 1990, who draws some odd consequences from such examples. Given that we already have got something wrong – the train will make it safely to its destination – further mistakes might prove useful. (And who could think of himself as never getting anything wrong?) Weakness of will, by contrast, shows that true beliefs might be harmful even under conditions of full information.

<sup>5</sup> On this picture of action, we do not act well by achieving our ends by luck. See Aristotle’s NE, who says that doing well requires knowledge of all the particulars of an action, e.g. what one is doing, by what means one is doing it, for what end, in what way and so on.

such a valuable project, the promotion of correspondence between beliefs and facts, ‘... would be a project of the same shape as that of, say, providing a suitable gnome for every garden and a garden for every gnome, gnomes and gardens just not being at their best unless paired off’ (Heal, 103). We all, however, pursue worthwhile projects. We all need truth.

Other philosophers hold truth in even higher regard. Plato says in the *Laws* (5.730c), ‘of all things good, truth holds the first place among gods and men alike’. Aristotle famously starts his *metaphysics* with the sentence that ‘All men by nature desire to know’. Man realizes his telos by being a knower. Brentano says that those things are good, which are loved with a love that we experience as being correct. Considering the love of truth and the hatred of error, we are, he says, immediately aware of the correctness of these attitudes. I mention Plato, Aristotle and Brentano to point to a stronger anchoring of our interest in truth. Its acceptability, however, depends on the credentials of the general philosophical views from which it springs. Heal’s position is all I need to endorse to explain my project. Truth is important to us. I am interested in the nature of our concern for truth. What is it that we want when we say we want the truth and nothing but the truth?

### *The Interest in Truth: James’s Insight and the Standard View*

Our interest in truth is an interest in the way we can ‘have truth’. Our interest in truth is an interest in being believers of truths. William James – and I will refer to this in what follows as James’s Insight – claims that there are two sides to our interest in truth.<sup>6</sup> ‘There are two ways of looking at our duty in the matter of opinions, – ways entirely different, and yet ways about whose difference the theory of knowledge seems hitherto to have shown very little concern. We must know the truth; and we must avoid error, – these are our first and great commandments as would-be-knowers; but they are not two ways of stating an identical commandment, they are separable laws.’<sup>7</sup>

What I call the Standard View accommodates James’s insight in the form of a bi-conditional content of our desire for truth. What we want is to believe that p if and only if p is the case.

The Standard View: DES(Bp\_p)

We can separate the two conditionals.

Part 1: DES (p\_Bp)

Part 2: DES (Bp\_p)

The first part tells us to believe all truths (if we understand it as universally quantified).<sup>8</sup> The second part tells us to believe no falsehoods. The first part is by

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<sup>6</sup> In fact he does not speak of interest but of our duty to pursue truth. This does not matter here. Whether our interest is, indeed, as James thinks, in some sense required, is not important for my purposes. (I think it is rationally required, as my remarks in the first section indicate.)

<sup>7</sup> Arguing against Clifford’s position, he says, ‘It is like a general informing his soldiers that it is better to keep out of battle than to risk a single wound. Not so are victories either over enemies or over nature gained. Our errors are surely not such awfully solemn things.’

<sup>8</sup> Depending on where we put the universal quantifier, we get different conceptions of our interest in truth. If the universal quantifier is inside the desire operator, we have one desire to believe all truths. If it is outside we have a desire for each proposition to believe it if it is true. The relevance of this

itself insufficient to spell out our interest in truth. A being (or a computer) which says yes to every question will not miss any truth, but, intuitively, it will not satisfy our interest in truth. For all the true answer it gives there will be many false ones. The second part is by itself also insufficient to account for our interest in truth. A being who believes nothing, trivially, will believe no falsehood. Taking the two parts together, however, looks much better. We want to believe all and only truths.

Above I switched freely between the bi-conditional formulation and its parts. The bi-conditional entails the Part 1 conditional. However, we deal here with propositions in the context of being desired. Thus, we ought to be cautious. I certainly do not want to claim that desire or rational desire is closed under obvious entailment. Alf Ross (1941) has, if I remember correctly, used the following example to illustrate how problematic such a move would be. If I want a letter to be mailed, then, if rational desire were closed under obvious entailment, I would also want any disjunctive expansion of the thing I want. For example, I would also want that the letter be mailed or that it be burnt. Anything would then satisfy a desire of mine – even burning the letter, I wanted to be mailed. We can use Ross's observation to explain why another move would be illegitimate. We cannot, in general, move from a desire of a conjunction to a desire for one of its conjuncts. This would also be a weakening of the desired proposition. A proposition  $p$  is logically equivalent to the disjunction  $(p \& q)$  or  $(p \& \text{not-}q)$ . Moving from the conjunction  $(p \& q)$  to  $p$  is, thus, like disjunctive expansion. So-called complimentary goods – a cigarette and a lighter, a car and a tank filled with petrol – illustrate the illegitimacy of such a move.

We ought to be cautious when using logical manipulations within a desire context. At this point, however, we are safe. Our interest in truth, James has said, has two parts. The bi-conditional formulation simply puts these two parts together.

Many philosophers endorse the bi-conditional formulation of our interest in truth. Paul Horwich ('The Value of Truth', *Nous* 2006, 347) defends the following principle. 'It is desirable to believe what is true and only what is true'. Ralph Wedgwood ('The Aim of Belief', 2002, 291) writes, 'In this way then, it is plausible that the norm according to which, for every proposition  $p$  that one actually considers, one should believe  $p$  if and only if  $p$  is true does indeed explain the norms of rational belief and knowledge. In this sense, this norm is indeed the fundamental epistemic norm'. Marian David ('Truth as the Epistemic Goal', in Steup 2001) writes, 'Let us characterize the truth-goal as the goal of believing truths and not believing falsehoods. Using 'p' as an objectual variable ranging over propositions, we can abbreviate this as the goal of believing  $p$  if and only if  $p$  is true. Note that the goal has two parts, a positive part (believing truths) and a negative part (not believing falsehoods)'.

If there are critical voices, they find Part 1 of the bi-conditional, which says that we want to believe all truths, implausible. They point to our limited capacities or simply to utterly uninteresting truths, like those one can gather from an old phone book. A norm to believe all truths, Pascal Engel says, '... is absurd. I can certainly incur no obligation to believe anything whatsoever that is true (Truth, 2002, 128). Engel continues, 'A more adequate formulation of the norm of belief comes from the observation that the phrase 'belief aims at truth' indicates that it is the function of

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distinction is explored in David (2002), but will not affect what I will discuss.

belief to reach true, rather than false, contents. ... So the idea is that we should believe only the things that we deem true. Then the norm, in ought form, for belief, is rather this: For any p, one ought to believe that p only if p(is true).<sup>9</sup>

Engel confuses me on two accounts. First, to believe those things that we deem to be true seems, as long as we do not know what the difference between deeming to be true and believing is, to be no substantive norm at all.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, he seems to miss James's insight. He endorses Part 2 of the truth aim but puts nothing in the place of the rejected Part 1.

I do not think that the existence of uninteresting truths points to a deep problem. Thus, it does not anything 'deep' to solve it. I do not know anyone in Irkutsk. The entries in its local phone book are certainly of no interest to me. Nevertheless, I would say, I am interested in truth. Not in any truth, obviously, but in the correct answers to questions that are of some concern to me. I will restrict a person's interest in truth to those propositions the person finds, in some way or other, interesting.

### *Why the Standard View is Incorrect*

In this section, I want to raise four points which all speak against the Standard View of our interest in truth. They are all related and so it might be just one point in different guises. They all point to the same conclusion. We have to reject Part 2 of the bi-conditional, which is the idea that we want to believe p only if p is true.

I will make use of a certain rational transition rule, which the following example illustrates. Planning a walk in Irkutsk, I want the following: If someone asks me something, this person should speak English. Soon after I set off, someone indeed asks me something. I did not understand a word and I answer in English, hoping that this person would understand me. Wanting to be understood is what my initial desire has committed me to. In general, if I want that if A then B and I notice that A, then, if nothing else is relevant, I am committed to wanting B. Another example: I want that if my friend Jim does not get the post, then John should. I hear that the appointment committee has already eliminated Jim. Thus, I hope John will get it.

The rational transition from a desire for a conditional and noticing the truth of the antecedent to a desire of the consequent, strikes me as very plausible. Ross's point does not affect it. This transition does not involve a weakening of the desired proposition we start with, quite the contrary. Arguably, it moves from a disjunctive desire to a desire for one of the disjuncts, via realizing that the other disjunct does not obtain. This is certainly plausible. I want to marry Sue or Lou. Sue is married to someone else, I hear. So, I want to marry Lou.

In anticipation of a criticism, I actually have to make things a bit more complicated. I might want that John gets the post, after Jim has been eliminated, because he is the second most deserving candidate. In terms of the candidate's merit, I rank Jim over John and John over all the others. Thus, in terms of merit, I want that if Jim does not get the post, John should get it. Thereby, I have qualified my desire. It is desire based

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<sup>9</sup> Later on (p. 129), Engel seem to make the problem even worse. He suggests the following for what we ought to be interested in: 'For any p, believe that p only if, for all you know, p (is true).'

on only one group of concerns. I allow desire talk, even if by saying one desires something one only means that one desires something in respect to a certain group of concerns. In this example, the area of interest is fairness – appointing in accordance with merit. Although, in terms of fairness I want John to get the job, if Jim does not get it, fairness neither needs to be my sole concern, nor need it be what is most important to me in these matters. Suppose I do not want anyone new in the department (for whatever reasons), and that this desire to leave things unchanged is stronger than my desire to appoint by merit. Thus, what I overall want (or want in an unqualified sense) is that no one gets the job. Overall, I also want that if Jim does not get the job, no one else should get it. Nevertheless, in terms of fairness, I want that if Jim does not get the job John should. Fairness is important to me so I will have to agree that Jim's not getting the job is a reason for me to want that John get the job. I recognize this reason. However, it does not determine what I want overall. The reason provided by my qualified conditional desire is outweighed by my desire to appoint no one. Taking such cases into account, I want to weaken the rule of rational transition I explained above: Wanting if A then B and noticing that A commits me to wanting B or, at least, gives me a reason to want B.<sup>10</sup>

With this qualification in place, I can now move closer to my target. Part 2 – the desire to believe p only if p – is, intuitively, not an interest in truth.

*Point 1* Believing that something bad is going to happen to me is no reason to want it to happen.

What Part 2 says is that we want if we believe that p, then p. Suppose we know that we believe that p. Then, by the transition rule introduced above, we seem to be committed to wanting that p. At least, believing that p would be, given what is taken to be an aspect of being interested in truth, a reason for wanting p. This is implausible. Suppose p is something bad. Does the fact that I believe something bad will happen to me, give me any reason at all to want it to happen? It seems not.

*Generalizing Point 1* The expected bad is not made any better by having been expected. The unexpected good is not made any less good by having been unexpected. The expected (or unexpected) indifferent remains indifferent.

Whether I want p to obtain depends on my evaluation of p. If p is something good, then I want it, if it is bad, I do not want it, and if I care neither way, I will be indifferent towards p. Whether I believe that p will occur does not make any difference to my evaluation of p (if things are, as they normally are). Here is an example. I like sunny weather; I do not like rain. The forecast, which I know is reliable, predicts rain and so I believe it will rain tomorrow. Suppose tomorrow I look out of the window. What do I see? Rain. The fact that I thought it would rain, does not make it any better, it seems. The expected bad is still as bad. Suppose I look out of the window and what do I see? Sunshine. Great, I think, what a nice surprise! The fact that I believed it would rain does not at all diminish my delight in the weather. The unexpected good is not made any less good by having been unexpected.

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<sup>10</sup> This weakening allows for the desire for the conditional if A then B to be a qualified desire and not an overall desire. If the desire for the conditional is a qualified desire, it will still give me a reason to want B, although, because of other things important to me, this reason can be outweighed.

Our interest in truth is only one of our interests. Thus, I have made room for qualified desires. I am happy to phrase Part 2 as follows. Epistemically speaking, what we want is if we believe that  $p$  then  $p$ . Qualified desires, I have argued, create reasons. After Jim has been eliminated as a candidate I want, in terms of fairness, that John gets the job. If he does, this makes what for me is a bad outcome, namely that someone is appointed, slightly better. I did not get what I most wanted, namely that things remained unchanged, but at least the second-best candidate got the job. My desire for fairness could have been insulted even more. Thus, a qualified desire for truth should make an expected bad a bit less bad. However, my example shows that nothing like this takes place.

One could challenge my first point as follows. I seem to care a lot about the weather and only a little about truth. Thus, for me, the effect of having been right in my belief that it will rain is so small that it does not really show. Is it a good defence of an account of our interest in truth to belittle this interest? I do not think so. I answer this challenge as follows. 'I do not care a lot about the weather. You know how it is. Sunshine is nice. But I have to go to work anyway, so it does not matter so much what the weather is like. Nevertheless, this morning I realized with some regret that it was raining.' The thought that I expected rain plays, as far as I can see, no role in my evaluation. No one can tell me not to feel so bad about the rain, as I expected it to be like this.

If our interest in truth were really as tiny as the objection above makes it out to be, we should expect that it shows its effect when it is unchallenged. Consider something one is indifferent about. I am locked in a cell. I am bored. I am very bored. I start counting the bricks it took to build my cell. I count simply to fill my mind with something. I do not even concentrate on my task. I start counting again. Over 2000 bricks, I conclude. Much later, free again, I hear I was right, there were more than 2000 bricks. I do not care. I only counted because I was bored. The expected indifferent is not made any better by having been expected.

*Point 2*      Wanting to be right is not being interested in truth.

There are exceptions to what I just said. I do not care about the number of bricks that made up my cell. However, having miscounted in the past, I might be concerned about my counting abilities. Depending on the example, one could be concerned about any aspect of one's epistemic abilities. Now it seems I would be glad if I hear from a reliable source that my idea about the number of bricks was actually correct. Although I do not care about the number of bricks, I care about getting things right. We understand such a concern. Similarly, for weather forecasts. Suppose I form my beliefs about tomorrow's weather not by listening to the forecast but by gut feeling. This is interesting. It would be an unusual (and useful) ability to have. I think I can do it. My reaction to tomorrow's weather will then be different from before. Suppose my gut feeling told me that it would rain tomorrow. Seeing rain the next day, I think, 'Wow, I can really do it! Excellent!' I still prefer sunshine to rain but my desire to have an unusual epistemic ability is more important to me. Wanting to get it right outweighs my concern for good weather.

My point is that this is a special case. In such a case we move easily from the fact that one believes something to the desirability of what is believed. Such cases show us

what it is to have a Part 2 concern. It is to want to be right. Another example: Suppose I spent all my life arguing for a certain theory T. A crucial experiment takes place. Of course, I want it to confirm my theory T. I want to be proven right because my reputation depends on the outcome of this experiment. Am I a man of remarkable insights or a man who has been chasing shadows all his life? I hope so much that T will be confirmed. Do I have what, intuitively, is a concern for truth and nothing but the truth? Certainly not.

If wanting confirmation for my beliefs is not a concern for truth, what is? Being concerned about truth, one would hope that the experiment is reliable. One would not care about whether the experiment confirms or refutes T. One would want it to decide the question one is interested in. The person, however, who would reason from the belief that p and Part 2 of the alleged interest in truth to the desirability of p – the person who wants to be right – does not have this open-mindedness which, intuitively, is part of an interest in truth. I conclude that sometimes, for sure, we have good reasons to want to be right. Wanting to be right, however, is not the same, it seems to me, as being interested in truth.

It will not help to object that Part 2 is just one of the parts of being interested in truth. We can, I believe, be interested in truth without at all wanting to be right.

*Point 3* An example that illustrates both points

There are signs that you have a serious illness; it is an illness that has hardly a chance of being cured and only a small chance of being contained. At the moment, your symptoms are nothing but signs, maybe it is just a harmless rash. Soon you will know more. Your doctor has done a test. It is very reliable, not a 100%, but it will be strong evidence one way or the other. You are a tough person. You want your doctor to give you a straight answer. That is why, after all, you have done the test. You want to know what your state is, even if it is bad. Here is the order of preference for a tough person like you. 'H' stands for being healthy.

S1: H&B(H)

S2: H&B(not-H)

S3: not-H&B(not-H)

S4: not-H&B(H)

What do we learn from this preference order? The first thing we learn is that you prefer being healthy to being ill. Being healthy is being in state S1 or in S2, being ill is being in state S3 or in S4. S1 or S2 is preferred to S3 or S4.

The second thing we learn is that you are interested in truth. You are interested in truth in what to me is the only right way of being interested in truth. You prefer S1 to S2. If you are healthy, you prefer believing that you are healthy to believing that you are not healthy. If you are healthy, you prefer believing truly do believing falsely. Furthermore, you prefer S3 to S4. If you are ill, you prefer believing that you are ill to believing that you are healthy. If you are ill, you prefer believing truly to believing falsely. Whatever you are, healthy or ill, you prefer believing truly to believing falsely. The first part, preferring truth when healthy, is easy. Who wants to have to worry about something unnecessarily? The second part, preferring truth when ill, is

hard. Some prefer to live in an illusion. They prefer S4 to S3. They rather do not want to know when afflicted by some bad. You are not like that. You want to face the facts whatever they are. You are interested in truth.

The third thing we learn is that you are not interested in being right. If you believe you are healthy, then you prefer being healthy to being ill. If you believe you are healthy, you prefer believing truly to believing falsely. You prefer S1 to S4. If, however, you believe you are ill, then you prefer being healthy to being ill. If you believe you are ill, you prefer believing falsely to believing truly. You prefer S2 to S3. Your health is more important to you than the reliability of the test. This is how things normally are with being like us. We can understand the conditions under which the preference between S2 and S3 might be reversed. You are old. Your life will come to an end whether you have this illness or not. The little extra time you would get if you did not have this illness is not your biggest concern. You want to have lived a meaningful life. Your life was devoted to develop this test. You could not bear it if it got things wrong. In these circumstances you want to be right, no matter what. Are you concerned for truth, as we normally understand it? I do not think so.

Part 1 of the standard bi-conditional view – to believe p if p is the case – is a correct account of our interest in truth. Your preference order satisfies Part 1. Part 2 of the standard bi-conditional view – that p be the case if one believes that p – is not part of a correct account of our interest in truth. Your preference order violates Part 2 because you, very reasonably, prefer S2 (wrongly believing that you are ill) to S3 (rightly believing that you are ill).

We might describe the lesson of this example as follows. For every mismatch between beliefs and the world, there is a match that is preferred. This shows that you are interested in truth. What is not true, however, is that every match is preferred to every mismatch. This shows that you are not interested in being right.

In my view, this example shows that the Standard View is incorrect. Part 2 of the Standard View is simply not part of a concern for truth as we understand it. It is not a concern characteristic of a seeker and lover of truth; it rather is the concern of a person we call the dogmatist. A concern for truth requires a certain kind of openness towards the world. Let me believe whatever it is that is true. Part 2 contains a rather different openness. Whatever I believe, let it happen. Let me be right.<sup>11</sup>

### *An Objection Rejected*

Someone, and there are many such people, who is in the grip of Part 2 might object to my way of seeing things as follows. Part 2 of our interest in truth is violated in my example because you prefer S2 to S3. All this shows is that your health is more important to you than reaching truth in this particular instance. We can introduce the notion of a qualified desire to express this point. Epistemically speaking, S3 is better than S2. Overall, however, S2 is better than S3. Thus a trade-off between health and truth has taken place. Because truth is not in every instance our main concern, the

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<sup>11</sup> Point 4: If Part 2 were part of being interested in truth, we would have reasons to interfere in the world to make our predictions come out true. Suppose that, having behaved in epistemically unobjectionable ways, I have come to believe that p will happen. I can help it along a bit. Intuitively, my purely epistemic interest in truth does not give me any such reason. To help in bringing p about would, intuitively, be cheating.

example does nothing to show that Part 2 is not part of our interest in truth.

There is something right about this objection and there is something wrong about it. I agree, epistemically speaking, S3 is preferable to S2. However, this does not show that we accept Part 2 of the Standard View. S3 is preferable to S2 because S3 satisfies Part 1 of the interest in truth, whereas S2 does not satisfy Part 1. There is something good about S2 – you are healthy – and there is something bad about S2 – you have missed a truth. There is something good about S3 – you have captured a truth – and there is something bad about S3 – you are ill. Because you prefer S2 to S3 you would trade off one good – having captured a truth – for another – being healthy. We do not appeal to Part 2 at all to explain these facts. Thus Part 2 cannot be introduced by appeal to these facts.

Suppose you prefer S4 to S3. S3 contains one good – you believe something true. S4 contains no good. Why would you then prefer S4 to S3? You would have this preference because health and truth are not your only concerns. A further concern comes into play. Believing something positive about yourself is itself a good to you, independently of whether the positive thing actually occurs or not. Now there are two goods in play, which both can come with believing something. The one is that you believe truly the other is that you believe pleasantly. If one trades off the good of truth for the good of pleasure (or the good of lack of anxiety), then he or she has given up on the concern for truth. Insofar as believing is concerned, one might be willing to forgo the good of truth. In the trade-off I talked about earlier, the trade-off justified by your bigger concern for health, you are still fully concerned about truth in the only way that is right. Insofar as the goods that come from believing is concerned, all you want is the truth and nothing but the truth.<sup>12</sup> Obviously you are not only concerned about the goods believings can bring you. It would be absurd to suppose that it is part of our understanding of being interested in truth that it excluded or trumped all other worldly concerns. Only a fool or a whole-hearted dogmatist would have such a structure of concerns. Only a fool would want, insofar as all goods are concerned, the truth and nothing but the truth.

This completes my answer to the objection. First, I have shown that we do not need to appeal to Part 2, in order to explain the facts on which the objection builds. Secondly, I have distinguished between two different kinds of trade-off. One kind of trade-off relies only on the claim that truth is not our only concern. Such trade-offs are compatible with the idea that insofar as one's beliefs are concerned truth is the only thing that matters. Insofar as one's beliefs are concerned we want truth and nothing but the truth. The second kind of trade-off is a trade-off between different features of beliefs all of which some agent might regard as important. Someone whose interest in truth is captured by Part 1 will allow trade-offs of the first kind but not of the second-kind. In this sense, such an agent is fully committed to an interest in truth. To disallow trade-offs of the first kind would show a pathological interest in wanting to be right. If the objection were right, we would have such a pathological interest. In order not to make us look like fools, however, the pathological interest attributable to us if the objection were right is said to be overridden by other worldly concerns like the concern for one's health. I have argued that there is no reason to attribute such an

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<sup>12</sup> All other so-called epistemic virtues a belief might have, like simplicity, explanatory power, and interest, are taken care of by my restriction of the interest in truth to those propositions an agent is interested in.

interest to us as part of our interest in truth. I conclude (diametrically opposed to Engel) that Part 2 is absurd as a characterization of our interest in truth. Special reasons aside, no one should want things to turn out a certain way simply because he or she believes that this is the way they are going to turn out.

I have argued for the view that Part 1 captures (at least) an essential aspect of our concern for truth. Part 2, however, captures a different concern. Special circumstances have to be put in place in order to make a Part 2 concern legitimate. In any case, it is not part of a concern for truth. I have expressed this point by talking about different forms of openness. Being concerned for truth is being open to the world. Let me believe whatever it is that the world might offer and throw at me. It is concern for my beliefs which is specified by how the world is. Such a concern is of the form ‘If the world is such and such, let me be such and such’. We express this concern by means of world-mind conditionals. Part 2, however, is a concern about the world, which is specified by reference to my beliefs. Let the world be such that it proves me right. Such a concern is of the form ‘If I am such and such, let the world be such and such’. We express this concern by means of a mind-world conditional.<sup>13</sup> Being interested in truth, is a self-centred concern. I want to be a certain way, namely responsive to the world. Whereas the relation between the world and truth is (in some way) symmetric – ‘p’ is true if and only if p – our concern for truth is a concern about us and not about the world.<sup>14</sup>

### *Astounding Mistakes*

Hartry Field (Truth in the Absence of Fact, 2001, 120f) says ‘What we desire is the infinite conjunction of all claims of the form ... ‘I believe “p” only if p’... There is no difficulty in desiring that all one’s beliefs be disquotationally true; and not only can each of us desire such things, there can be a practice of badgering others into having such a desire. Is not this enough for there being a ‘norm’ of believing?’ Why would I want all my beliefs to become true? I think bad things are going to happen to me and to you as well. Why would I want them to happen?

Michael Lynch (Minimalism and the Value of Truth, 2004) writes, ‘Nobody likes to be wrong. If anything is a truism, this is. And it suggests that we value believing the truth. ... Other things being equal, it is good to believe a proposition if and only if it is true.... For not only do I not want to live in a world where I am a brain in a vat, or deceived by a demon, or whatever, I also do not want to live in a world where I am not thus deceived, but believe that I am. That is, if such and such is the case, I want to believe that it is, and if I believe that it is, I want it to be the case. I can put this by

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<sup>13</sup> The desire is, strictly speaking, a wide-scope desire. It is a desire for the conditional. I have argued for a certain transition rule, namely that we can move to a desire for the consequent on the basis of the desire for the conditional and knowledge of the occurrence of the antecedent. It is this transition rule that justifies the formulations I use above.

<sup>14</sup> I think that everyone shares the intuition that our interest for truth is a concern about us and not a concern about the world. This explains why proponents of the Standard View, when talking about Part 2, prefer the formulation ‘Bp only if p’ to ‘If Bp, then p’. The first formulation makes it look like a self-centred desire. The second formulation would make it look like a world-centred desire. I said that truth is in some way symmetric. We use a bi-conditional when explaining truth. It is not symmetric in all ways. There is, for example, an ‘explanatory’ asymmetry. The fact that p obtains might ‘explain’ why ‘p’ is true. The fact that ‘p’ is true cannot explain why p obtains. (This is, I seem to remember, discussed by Gonzales Rodriguez-Perreira.)

saying that I want my beliefs and reality to be disposed in a certain way – I want my beliefs to track reality, to ‘accord with how the world actually is’ – which is to say I want them to be true.’

Nobody likes to be wrong? I am pessimistic about the chances for peace in the Middle East. Everyone who shares my worries would, like myself, want to be proven wrong. Lynch does not want to be a brain in a vat. The reason for his dislike, however, is not that he believes that he is not a brain in the vat. That would be a rather shallow reason. Lynch, in contrast to Field, is one of the few who actually uses the mind-world conditional, accepts the transition rule I have argued for and endorses desiring the detached consequent. If I believe that the world is such and such, he says, then I want it to be such and such. Despite the absurdity being right on the surface, staring at him, it still went unnoticed.

### *Rejecting Part 2 Creates a Problem: How Can We Accommodate James’s Insight?*

Part 1 says that we want to believe all the truths (or rather we want to believe all the truths we are interested in). Part 2 says that we want to believe no falsehood. I have argued that Part 2 is not part of our interest in truth. Have I said that, sometimes, it is quite okay, even epistemically speaking, to accept a falsehood? Take the following case, a person believes that p, but not-p obtains. If this is all we say about this case, then the agent has missed a truth, the truth of not-p obtaining and, thus, has failed to achieve his Part 1 desire for truth. Part 1 is sufficient to explain that this person did not do well. So, why did we think we needed Part 2 in the first place? Suppose that not-p obtains, a person believes that p but, furthermore, believes that not-p as well. This person has not missed a truth. Part 1 provides us with no handle to criticize this person in terms of having failed to fulfil his interest in truth, as far as we have explained this interest. Therefore, our explanation is incomplete. We need to add something to Part 1 in order to exclude an agent who believes obviously inconsistent things from fulfilling his or her epistemic duties (or from satisfying his or her interest in truth). (If Part 2 were the missing part of the interest in truth, a person who believes both p and not-p, could be criticized.)

We have come some way already. We know that Part 1 is an important part of our interest in truth. Now we need to exclude contradictory beliefs. So let us just do this and let us replace Part 2 with Part 2\*.

Part1 DES(p\_Bp)  
Part2\* DES not(Bp&Bnot-p)

I have said earlier that logical manipulations within the context of desiring are dangerous. Especially, we ought not to manipulate by weakening the content of what is desired. Nevertheless, some manipulations will be acceptable. I suppose the following might well be. The content of Part2\* ‘not(Bp&Bnot-p)’ is the same as ‘notBp-or-notBnot-p’, which is the same as ‘Bp\_notBnot-p’. This is still clearly the content of a desire for consistency. Now we have to use a further rule. If one wants if A, then B and one wants if B, then C, then one is committed to wanting if A then C, and, if rational, will have this desire. Let us apply this rule to the Part 1 desire DES(p\_Bp) and the manipulated Part 2\* desire DES(Bp\_notBnot-p) and we get

DES( $p \rightarrow \neg B \rightarrow \neg p$ ). Let us replace the content of this desire with one of its logical equivalents, which we get by contraposition, and we get DES( $B \rightarrow \neg p \rightarrow \neg p$ ). We could have started with  $q$  instead of  $p$  and have  $q$  fixed as  $\neg p$ . If we had then replaced  $q$  with  $\neg p$  and eliminated double-negation, we get DES( $B \rightarrow p$ ). This desire is familiar. It is the Part 2 desire we want to reject. Now it turns out that someone who has desires Part 1 and Part 2\* is rationally committed to having the Part 2 desire. The problem is, how can we introduce a desire for consistency without thereby committing ourselves to the absurd Part 2 desire?

### *Suggesting A Solution to Our Problem*

When I discussed what is wrong with Part 2, one thing I said was that, in contrast to Part 1, Part 2 is a mind-world conditional. Our interest in truth, however, is not an interest in the world but an interest in how our mind works, i.e. it is an interest in us. In making this point, I rely on a distinction between mind-world and world-mind conditionals. In my logical manipulation of the Part 2\* desire, I have relied on a truth-functional understanding of the conditional. I have understood if-then sentences on the truth-functional model of material implication. One of the rules I have used, which is valid for material implication, is the rule of contraposition. We can move from 'If A then B' to 'If not-B, then not-A'. The validity of this rule undermines my distinction between mind-world and world-mind conditionals. Thus, I have to make a choice. Holding on to the difference between the two kinds of conditionals, I have to reject a truth-functional understanding of the if-then sentence I use to express our interest in truth.

How else can we understand the conditional 'If  $p$ , then  $Bp$ '? We can adopt Stalnaker's idea of a non-truth-functional account of the indicative conditional and explain its truth condition in terms of possible worlds. The following example motivates his account.<sup>15</sup> If you strike the match, it will light. Suppose you strike the match. Then this sentence will be true if the match lights, false otherwise. The truth-functional and the non-truth-functional account agree. Suppose you do not strike the match. A false antecedent makes the conditional true on the truth-functional account. This, however, does not seem right. Suppose the match was wet. Then the sentence 'If you strike it, it will light' strikes us as false. Why? Because in the closest possible world, in which you strike the match, it will not light.

Stalnaker's account serves our purposes ideally because contraposition is not a valid rule for his conditional. The fact that the closest A-world is also a B-world, does not entail that the closest not-B world is also a not-A world. Take the conditional 'If you pray for rain, it will rain' and suppose that you do pray for rain. Furthermore, suppose that in the actual world and in near-by worlds it rains, whether you pray or not. Thus the conditional is true: it rains in the actual world and you have actually prayed for rain. Nevertheless, nothing in what we have supposed decides whether the contraposited conditional 'If it does not rain, you have not prayed for rain' is true.

Being interested in truth means to want that one believes  $p$  if  $p$  occurs (for all interesting propositions  $p$ ). One wants that the closest  $p$ -world is a world in which one

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<sup>15</sup> See Stalnaker 1975 and Edgington 2001 for details.

believes that p. One also has the Part 2\* desire, one wants not to hold contradictory beliefs. This is how we should understand our interest in truth. (Part 2 would tell us that the closest Bp-world is a p-world. Often we have no reason to want this.)

I do not want to claim that the problem to explain the twofold nature of our interest in truth decides issues in the theory of conditionals. This would be an odd argument. What I claim is the following. The right understanding of our interest in truth requires an account of the Part 1 conditional, which disallows contraposition. The right semantics for the sentence that expresses this aspect of our interest in truth is non-truth functional. I do not think that this commits me to any general claims about the semantics of conditionals.<sup>16</sup>

### *Considering Other Proposals*

In the remainder of this paper, I want to consider the views of two philosophers who, in one way or another, come close to the position I have defended here.

#### *Chisholm*

Roderick Chisholm (in his *Theory of Knowledge*) endorses James's Insight. He says, 'Each person, then, is subject to two quite different requirements in connection with any proposition he considers: (1) he should try his best to bring it about that if a proposition is true then he believe it; and (2) he should try his best to bring it about that if that proposition is false then he not believe it. Each requirement by itself would be quite simple: to fulfil the first, our purely intellectual being could simply believe every proposition that comes along; to fulfil the second, he could refrain from believing any proposition that comes along. To fulfil both is more difficult. If he had only the second requirement – that of trying his best to bring it about that if a proposition is false then he not believe that proposition – then he could always play it safe and never act at all, doxastically. But sometimes more than just playing it safe is necessary if he is also to fulfil the first requirement: that of trying his best, with respect to the propositions he considers, to believe the ones that are true.'

Chisholm's way of understanding our interest in truth has the following two parts.

C-Part 1	DES (p_Bp)
C-Part 2	DES (not-p_not-Bp)

If contraposition were valid, then Chisholm would defend the Standard View. Given contraposition, there is no difference between C-Part 2 and Part 2 of the Standard View. Chisholm, as always, is careful. He uses two world-mind conditionals to express the two parts of our interest in truth. Therefore, we are well justified in assuming that Chisholm would be very unhappy about contraposition, as it would undermine the distinction between world-mind and mind-world conditionals, which he took such care to obey. The two parts taken together show that in having inconsistent beliefs an agent fails to satisfy his or her desire for truth. Thus, Chisholm's formulation is fine. We only need to add emphasis that the conditionals

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<sup>16</sup> For reasons that have to do with the role our interest in truth could play within epistemology, David (2002) also argues for a subjunctive understanding of the conditionals involved. (Remember, he accepts the Standard View.) We end up at the same point – the conditional is not a truth-functional conditional – for different and completely independent reasons.

involved are not truth-functional.

*Ernest Sosa*

Sosa (*For the Love of Truth?* 2002) writes, ‘A way to be interested in the truth as such, then, is to be motivated by interest in a question... Someone who wants the answer to the question whether  $p$  wants this:  $\langle$ If  $p$ , then  $B(p)$ ; and if not- $p$ , then  $B(\text{not-}p)\rangle$ . That is to say, one desires that if  $p$ , then one believes that  $p$ , and if not- $p$ , then one believes that not- $p$ . Again, to be motivated by the truth on a question is to be motivated to believe the correct answer; let the chips fall where they may.’

Let us note this down. The interest in truth is given by two world-mind conditionals.

S-Part 1	DES ( $p\_Bp$ )
S-Part 2	DES ( $\text{not-}p\_B\text{not-}p$ )

One might wonder whether S-Part 2 adds anything to S-Part 1. As these desires hold for all (interesting) propositions  $p$ , it does not seem to matter whether we deal with negated or unnegated propositions. (Interest in whether  $p$  brings with it an interest in whether not- $p$ .) S-Part 2 adds something important to S-Part 1. Someone could be interested in believing that  $p$  regardless of whether  $p$  is the case or not. Such a person fails to be interested in the truth regarding  $p$ . This person, however, might well have the interest described in S-Part 1. He is not interested in truth because he lacks the interest described in S-Part 2.<sup>17</sup>

There are two problems with this account. First, Sosa has a twofold account of our interest in truth. Nevertheless, his account fails to preserve James’s Insight. An inconsistent believer might well satisfy both parts of Sosa’s account. Someone who believes everything (a computer that answers ‘yes’ to any question) will miss neither a negated nor an unnegated truth. Secondly, Sosa takes the conditionals involved to be material implications. If that were so, they would not be robust world-mind conditionals and our problem with Part 2 of the bi-conditional formulation would also affect Sosa’s account.<sup>18</sup>

Sosa makes an interesting observation. Wanting an  $X$  that is  $F$  does not entail any specific attitude towards  $X$ . It might be anything – aversion, indifference or desire. Let us look at a case in which I dislike  $X$ s in general, but want an  $X$  that is  $F$ . I dislike that I do bad things. Nevertheless, the bad things I do I want to be forgiven. Let us next consider a case in which one is indifferent towards  $X$ s in general. One might be indifferent towards acquiring a belief about a certain subject matter. Sosa thinks, rightly in my view, that this is compatible with being interested in truth. You want a

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<sup>17</sup> Let me add that this is just one of the proposals Sosa investigates. I will come do a different account later on. Sosa’s aim is different from mine. I simply want to understand our interest in truth. Sosa wants to understand the role of our interest in truth in our intellectual lives and in epistemology. He would have found a role for our interest in truth if having such an interest would be a pre-requisite of knowledge. In order to know that  $p$  you have to be interested in the truth of whether  $p$ . In contrast to Sosa, I have no ambition here to relate our interest in truth to an account of knowledge.

<sup>18</sup> In footnote 5 Sosa considers a subjunctive understanding of these conditionals. He rejects it for reasons that have to do with his more ambitious philosophical project. Someone, Sosa feels, might know some  $p$  that is good news for him without wanting that he believed not- $p$  were not- $p$  the case. To me this is a problem with the idea that an interest in truth has to play any role in an account of knowledge. It is not a problem of how to understand the interest in truth. Sosa might well have an opposing view on this matter.

belief which is true, although you are indifferent towards its acquisition.<sup>19</sup>

In this context Sosa addresses what is, in my view, the main problem of the Standard View. He writes (2002, p. 50), 'If we believe that a dear friend is terminally ill we would not want our belief to be true. What we want, therefore, is not the truth of the beliefs we do have. We want rather that we would believe <p> only if <p> were true. And from this it does not follow that we want to believe <p>, nor does it follow that we want <p>. Neither of these follow even on the assumption that we do believe <p> and that it is true that p. What we desire is only that our beliefs are safe; for any given proposition, other things equal we would generally desire this: that we believe it only if it were true. Desire neither for the antecedent nor for the consequent is logically entailed by our desire for the conditional. Our general antecedent desire is only for the safety of our beliefs, whatever they may be.'

This is for me a difficult passage. Sosa suggests that the safety of beliefs expresses our concern for truth. What we want is that we would believe p only if p were true. Strictly speaking, Sosa is right that such a desire does not entail a desire for the consequent p, even if one believes that p. We are not dealing with an entailment relation, but with a rule of rational transition that applies when an agent notices that the antecedent of his conditional desire obtains. A response in which one simply says the opposite of what one is responding to is hardly satisfactory. Nevertheless, I cannot do much else. If I want that you would come here only if she comes as well, and I notice your presence, then this conditional desire of mine commits me to want her to be here as well. The same, it seems to me, holds for the desire that our beliefs be safe. It commits me to wanting p once I notice that I believe that p. Sosa, in my view, focuses on the wrong part of what is traditionally seen as our interest in truth. He realizes the problem of mind-world conditionals. They seem to commit us to wanting the world to be a certain way and, consequently, we lose the self-centredness of our desire for truth. It is puzzling that despite this awareness, Sosa simply asserts that the problem does not arise.

In Sosa's paper I find two objections to the view I have defended here. First, an unrestricted world-mind conditional faces the problem of uninteresting truths. Sosa thinks that any restriction to interesting truths faces a problem of vicious circularity (p.53): our interest in truth is restricted to those propositions in the truth of which we are interested. I fail to see any threatening circularity. The Yellow Pages of Irkutsk, accurate as they are, contain many truths, none of which is of any interest to me. My interest in truth passes by this and many other sources of information. Secondly, If we

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<sup>19</sup> I would make a different use of Sosa's point. According to my view, the desire for 'If p, then Bp' is central to our interest in truth. I would say there are so many propositions p, some of them good, some of them bad, some I do not care about either way. I want for all of them (which are of some interest to me) that they are believed by me. [Sometimes I do not want to know too much. This is true for good things as for bad things. It is an attitude-related reason.] Rutte (2000, footnote 1, my translation) observes, 'From wanting to acquire the false belief that I am healthy, it does not follow that I want the belief that I am healthy to be false. Similarly, the desire to buy some expensive good does not entail the desire that the good be expensive.' Relating the example to my concerns here, one could say, 'From the fact that I like a true belief it does not follow that I like that the belief is true'. True, I might want a certain true beliefs for other reasons than for its being true, for its being pleasant, for example. If one is thinking about our interest in truth, however, one likes true beliefs, either because one wants the belief to be true or because one wants the truth to be caught. I argue that the second alternative captures our interest in truth.

understand the desire to believe that p, if p as a material implication, then we will have this desire ‘vacuously’, whenever we desire the falsity of the antecedent p. Such a ‘vacuously held’ desire for the conditional is, however, not an interest in truth.<sup>20</sup> Thereby Sosa has provided a further reason for the view defended here. The conditional desired is not a material implication.

### *Conclusion*

Many philosophers endorse the Standard View. According to them, we can express our interest in truth in form of the bi-conditional, to believe that p if and only if p. I have argued that the second part of this bi-conditional, namely to believe p only if p, is not part of being interested in truth. The Standard View is incorrect. Our interest in truth is given by the first part of the bi-conditional to believe p if p, for all interesting propositions p, and by a desire to avoid inconsistent beliefs. Adding a desire for consistency preserves James’s Insight that our desire for truth has a twofold nature. Central to our interest in truth is to want to believe p if p is the case. This if-then sentence, I have argued, cannot be a material implication. It has to be a robust world-mind conditional. The non-truth functional semantics of this conditional disallows contraposition. We can interpret Chisholm as agreeing with the proposal put forward here, though he does not explicitly discuss the problem, which lead us to abandon the Standard View. Sosa discusses this problem. His position, however, remains in the end unclear.

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<sup>20</sup> In footnote 4 of his paper Sosa explains, ‘One may well prefer that no present headache that one suffers should escape one’s notice, for at least this reason: because one prefers that none such occur at all, whether noticed or unnoticed’.