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At the beginning of his book *Truth*, Engel rightly says that “most of the history of twentieth-century analytic philosophy is a sort of battlefield opposing various ‘realist’ and ‘anti-realist’ conceptions of truth.”³⁴ But when one contemplates not just the history of analytic philosophy alone but that of philosophy in general, one can discern another sort of battle. This one is between those who think it important to discuss realism versus antirealism and those who do their best to show that it is time to leave such questions behind. I am thinking here of Dewey, Davidson, and Brandom, but also of most of the philosophers in the tradition running from Nietzsche to Heidegger, Sartre, and Derrida. My own preference for this tradition rather than for analytic philosophy arises from my conviction that it is less exposed to the risk of scholasticism.

Engel explains in his book that is it possible to feel “that some of the most sophisticated linguistic and logical analyses produced by present-day analytic philosophers come very close to the post-modernist idea that truth is just a word of

approval, or a device of assertion of the claims that we like most, and in no way a genuine property.”³⁵ I imagine that he was thinking especially of Davidson and Brandom. It is important, however, to note that neither Davidson nor Brandom employs the notion of substantial property or relies on the distinction between description and expression. These two philosophers share the “smooth,” “undifferentiated,” “homogeneous” conception of language described by Blackburn. They both attempt to dissolve traditional distinctions. In my opinion, what links the so-called postmodern philosophers to Davidson and Brandom, as well as to the later Wittgenstein, is a rejection of the idea that some discourses, some parts of the culture, are in closer contact with the world, or fit the world better, than other discourses. If one gives up this idea, then one will view every discourse—literary criticism, history, physics, chemistry, plumbers’ talk—as on a par, as far as its relation to reality goes. The same relations between thought, language, and reality obtain in every cultural domain. If one discourse has the capacity to represent the world, then all discourses have that capacity. If one of them “fits” the world, then they all do so equally.

Thus the dispute between Engel and myself does not bear on the question of knowing whether there is something that we call objective knowledge. That we use this term is obvious. What divides us is the question whether we should say that certain areas of inquiry attain such knowledge, whereas others unfortunately cannot. I do not like the metaphor of “representing the world” or the one that consists of saying that certain propositions can be “validated” by the world. Yet such metaphors are harmless if we employ them in a nondiscriminatory manner. Our dispute thus has to do with the fact that we give different answers to the question whether or not we should divide the language up into different parts and assert that some have a representational function that others lack.

In addition, our dispute revolves around a related question: what profit can we derive from a description of a part of the culture that, instead of simply explaining its social utility, or determining the degree of consensus that obtains within it, goes on to consider its relation to reality? For the “postmodern” philosophers and the pragmatists (among whom I number myself) the traditional

questions of metaphysics and epistemology can be neglected because they have no social utility. It is not that they are devoid of meaning, nor that they rest on false premises; it is simply that the vocabulary of metaphysics and epistemology is of no practical use.

So far I have simply been trying to rectify the description Engel gave of my position. Let me now attempt to reply to the questions he put to me.

I agree with him that one of the main questions that divide us is this: can our ordinary use of the term *true* really be redescribed in such a way as to rid this notion of its objectivist presuppositions? If asserting that there are such presuppositions entails that discriminations between discourses can be made by reference to their ability to produce correspondence to reality, then I think that we should make no such assertion.

Engel says that he is “unable to grasp how that can be an acceptable description of the sense that *we* give to ‘true,’ and not a redescription that leads to a revision, pure and simple, of the sense of this word.” I have no hesitation in saying that I prefer *revision* to *redescription*. On the other hand, I do

not think that using the one term rather than the other makes any great difference.

Consider an analogy. When Kant and other Enlightenment thinkers detached moral obligations from divine commands, they did not think that they were revising our moral concepts but that they were describing them more clearly. They were helping us to clarify our conception of morality. The enemies of the Enlightenment attacked this claim, accusing these thinkers of *revising* morality. Well, which is it? Did Kant clarify our moral vocabulary, or did he revise it? My feeling is that it is not worth the trouble to try to answer that question. If we adopt the standpoint suggested by the later Wittgenstein and by Quine, we do not need to determine whether a suggested alteration in our linguistic practice counts as a clarification or a revision. The change Kant suggested has contributed to the evolution of our moral discourse. The only question that we need to ask ourselves is this: was this change socially useful, or was it not?

The argument in favor of the modifications that the pragmatists wish to introduce into philosophers' ways of speaking about truth is that we might thereby put an end to some purely

scholastic, and by now quite boring, debates between philosophers. The social utility of such a change is obvious.

The most important point, as Savidan has suggested, concerns the question of our responsibilities. If we do things the pragmatist way, we will no longer think of ourselves as having responsibilities toward nonhuman entities such as *truth* or *reality*. I have often suggested that we regard pragmatism as an attempt to complete the project common to the Renaissance humanists and the Enlightenment. The pragmatists think that it is time to stop believing that we have obligations either to God or to some some God surrogate. The pragmatism of James, like the existentialism of Sartre, is an attempt to convince us to stop inventing such surrogates.

Engel is quite right that I interpret the contrast between the truth and those beliefs that appear justified to us in terms of the contrast between future audiences and present-day audiences. The latter will presumably have at their disposal more data, or alternative explanations, or simply greater intellectual sophistication. This way of looking at the matter chimes with my conviction that

our responsibilities are exclusively toward other human beings, not toward “reality.”

But Engel then poses this question:

when someone affirms, in relation to any statement whatsoever, “it is justified, but it isn’t true,” is she really saying “it is justified for this audience, but not for that audience”? It seems to me, on the contrary, that the contrast is between the reasons we have to believe or justify a statement and the way things are “in reality.”

I would maintain that a person who says “that belief is justified, but is perhaps not true” should be taken to be distinguishing not between something human and something nonhuman but rather between two situations in which human beings may find themselves: the present situation, in which the belief appears to be justified, and a hypothetical situation in the future, where it will no longer appear justified. I do not claim that this distinction is an accurate analysis of the concepts of justification and truth as they are currently employed. I just want to suggest a way to think about these notions that may have certain advantages. But I have no

demonstrable thesis to offer. I am offering either a clarification or a revision and (as I said earlier) I do not care which it is called. Engel, by contrast, is suggesting that we revert to the classical philosophical tradition, which contrasts human consensus with the way nonhuman reality is in itself.

Where does that leave the question of the relation between the concept of truth and the moral virtues mentioned by Engel: truthfulness, sincerity, exactness, and trust? I believe that it is just as easy to inculcate these virtues by reference to our practices of justification as by insisting on the importance of truth. A person is sincere when she says what she thinks she is justified in believing. This will, automatically, be what she believes to be true. So I think that we could promote the relevant virtues without ever needing to contrast truth with mere justification. On the other hand, I do not believe, contrary to what Engel suggests, that warranted assertibility and truth are the same thing. In certain contexts the two are interchangeable, but in others they are not. One cannot, for example, use *warranted assertibility* to describe the property preserved in valid inference. But when it comes to inculcating habits of exactness, or creat-

ing a climate of trust, it matters little which notion one deploys.

I do not believe that people will become less sincere or less concerned to be precise because they have become pragmatists. More generally, I do not think that the fact of speaking as I do, rather than according to the guidelines recommended by Engel, would make any difference in the ways people behave when they are not engaging in philosophical discussions. When the thinkers of the Enlightenment dissociated moral deliberation from divine commands, their writings did not provoke any notable increase in the amount of immorality. So I do not see why the separation of the notion of “truth” from that of “reality in itself” should produce either increased insincerity or a willingness to be deluded.

And so to the last question: is truth a normative concept? I am not sure I understand Engel’s use of *normative concept*. If he simply means that we should try to have only true beliefs, then we do not disagree. If, on the other hand, he means that truth is an intrinsic good, that it possesses an intrinsic value, then the question seems to be undiscussable. I do not have the faintest idea how to

go about determining which goods are the intrinsic ones and which are the instrumental ones. Nor do I see the point of raising the question. *Intrinsic* is a word that pragmatists find it easy to do without. If one thinks that sincerity and exactness are good things, I do not see why we should worry about whether they are means to something else or good in themselves. Which reply one gives to such questions will have no bearing on practice. Trying never to have anything but true beliefs will not lead us to do anything differently than if we simply try our best to justify our beliefs to ourselves and to others.

Consider, in this connection, the analogy between beliefs and actions. James notoriously said that “the true” is what is “good in the way of belief.”³⁶ Trying to do the right thing will lead us to do just the same things we would do when we try to justify our actions to ourselves and others. We do not have any way to establish the truth of a belief or the rightness of an action except by reference to the justifications we offer for thinking what we think or doing what we do. The philosophical distinction between justification and truth seems

not to have practical consequences. That is why pragmatists think it is not worth pondering.

In conclusion, I would remark that since Plato the meanings of normative terms like *good*, *just* and *true* have been problems only for philosophers. Everybody else knows how to use them and does not need an explanation of what they mean. I am perfectly ready to admit that one cannot identify the concept of truth with the concept of justification or with any other. But that is not a sufficient reason to conclude that the nature of truth is an important or interesting question.