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Truth and Argument Evaluation

Abstract
In this paper, I argue for a truth-directed conception of the general purpose of arguments. I also argue that, if arguments are properly taken to be truth-directed, then the concept of truth must appear in the metatheory in terms of which a theory of evaluation is articulated, but truth ought not to be a constraint, alongside of acceptability, on the adequacy of premises.

We are all familiar with the traditional conception of what makes for a good argument: that its premises are true and that it is valid.[1] That traditional view of the goodness of arguments has sustained serious criticism over the past few decades, so that most theorists have dropped either the validity requirement or the truth requirement or both. Almost all theorists that I am aware of take it that an argument is good if it fulfills its purpose, and it is widely agreed that arguments can fulfill their purpose even when not all of their premises are true, or they are not deductively valid. Still, some theorists retain a focus on the truth-directed nature of arguments, and those theorists rightly hold that, given such a focus, truth plays an important role in the evaluation of arguments. Johnson (2000) goes so far as to reintroduce truth as a constraint on premise adequacy, alongside the criterion of acceptability, and he holds that in a case where a premise is false but acceptable, truth (/falsity) outweighs acceptability.

What I propose to do in this essay is to discuss the role that truth plays in the evaluation of arguments, when the purpose of arguments is understood as truth-directed in some important way. I begin with a discussion of truth and the purpose of arguments. In the second section of the paper, I give an argument to the effect that the theory of argument evaluation ought not to involve truth as a constraint on premise adequacy. The third section contains my argument for the positive claim that the proper place for the concept of truth is in the metatheory in terms of which the theory of evaluation is worked out.[2] I conclude the essay with a response to Hamblin's (1970) argument that no arguments are truth-directed.

1. Truth as the purpose of (at least some) arguments

The goodness of an argument, I take it, is a function of how well it fulfills its purpose. So, first of all, it must be admitted that there are many conceptions of the nature and purpose of arguments that do not involve the establishment of the truth of a conclusion: Walton (1998), Blair (2004), van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004), Hitchcock (2006), and Pinto (2009), to name a few, all give accounts of argument on which truth is not the central purpose.

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[1] Hitchcock (1999) traces the concept of soundness in the textbook tradition to Black (1946), and before that (but with different terminology), to Cohen and Nagel (1934).

[2] By "theory of evaluation" I mean the set of criteria that a theory provides us with for evaluating arguments. By "the metatheory" in terms of which the theory of evaluation is worked out, I mean the broader theory of argument, including reference to what it is that the criteria for argument evaluation are supposed to accomplish, in which the theory of evaluation is articulated.

However, there is also a respectable contingent of thinkers that takes arguments to be directed towards truth. Goldman (1999, p.156) views the "ultimate end" of good argumentation as true belief, although he admittedly restricts his position to ordinary factual arguments. Biro and Siegel take the "intrinsic goal, the *raison d'être*, of arguments" to be to "provide good reasons for belief," and they hold that a good argument is one that "provides reasons for believing that its conclusion is *true*" (2006, p.94, italics in original). Finally, Johnson (2000, pp.168, 181) takes the goal of arguments to be the rational persuasion of an Other (audience, interlocutor) of the truth of a claim.

I am inclined to endorse the view that the internal purpose of arguments – the purpose that they have just by virtue of being arguments, independently of the various further uses to which they can be put – is truth-directed. More specifically, I take the goal of the rational persuasion of an interlocutor or audience of the truth of a claim to be the best candidate for the general purpose of arguments, and arguments ought to be evaluated according to how well they fulfill that purpose. That is not to say that I take the purpose of arguments to be to establish the truth of their conclusions beyond all doubt; rather, the purpose is to reach a conclusion that is most rational, from the point of view of the participants in the argument, to take to be true.

My case for thinking that arguments are truth-directed, in a nutshell, is the following:

Premise 1. An essential part of the content of propositions is their truth-conditions.

Premise 2. To assert a proposition is to assert that its truth-conditions are satisfied. (From Premise 1.)

Premise 3. Assertions are always assertions of some proposition or other.

Premise 4. Arguments consist of premises asserted in support of asserted conclusions.

Conclusion: The conclusion of an argument is the assertion, on the basis of the premises, that the truth-conditions of the propositional content of the conclusion are satisfied. (From Premises 2, 3, and 4.)

I take it that Premises 1 and 3 are uncontroversial; Premise 3 is true by definition, and even arch-inferential-role semanticist Robert Brandom has a place for truth-conditions in his account of propositional content (see the discussion of the "broadly inferential" articulation of propositional content, in his (1994, ch.2)), so Premise 1 looks safe. I expect that there are three objections that will come to mind, though, which I will try to answer presently.

First of all, it might be urged, against Premise 2, that one might make an assertion without wanting to commit oneself to the claim that the truth-conditions of the asserted proposition are satisfied. For example, a scientist might make a claim about the singularity of a black hole (which is an unobservable entity – not even light can escape once it is within the black hole's event horizon), without wanting to commit herself to the *truth* of the proposition that she is asserting, because its truth-conditions cannot in principle be verified.

By way of response to this objection, notice that if the scientist only means to commit herself to the claim that her assertion is consistent with the observed phenomena, then she is not in fact *asserting* a proposition about the singularity of the black hole itself – if she were, she would be committed to the truth of that proposition. Instead, she is making the more qualified assertion that the proposition she is putting forward is *consistent* with the observed phenomena. That is, she is making an assertion q about a proposition p (that p is consistent with observed phenomena), not asserting p. That more qualified proposition, q, is one to which she *is* committing herself, and in so committing herself, she is committing herself to its truth.

A different way to push the objection to Premise 2, if we take the content of a proposition to be identical with its inferential role, is that someone might want to assert a proposition, and

only intend thereby to commit himself to those parts of the meaning of the proposition (i.e. those parts of its inferential role) that are not its truth-conditions. My response to this objection is to say that if someone wants to commit himself only to those parts of a proposition *p*'s inferential role that are not its truth-conditions, then he is not asserting *p* at all; he is making some other move in the language-game. (Recall Tarski's T-schema: "*p*" is true iff *p*. If that biconditional holds, and someone wants to assert that *p*, he is thereby committed to the truth of *p*.) However, if an arguer is explicit about intending to assert *p*, then whether he *wants* to be committed to the truth of *p* is irrelevant. Assertions are public commitments; we are committed to the content of our assertions whether we like it or not, and that certain truth-conditions are satisfied is part of the content of an asserted proposition.

The second objection that I expect will naturally come up is against Premise 4. The objection is that not all arguments have asserted propositions as their conclusions. There are two ways to make this objection: either to hold that arguments can have conclusions that lack truth-values (for example, questions, as in (Hitchcock 2006)), or to allow that even though they must have truth-values, conclusions need not be *assertions* of the truth of a proposition. Reasons might be offered for *doubting* a proposition, for example, or for having some other attitude toward a proposition (as in (Pinto 2009)). Furthermore, *reductio* arguments seem to involve the rejection of a premise or assumption, rather than the assertion of a conclusion, as their goal.

I admit that this objection has some force. An adequate response to it would likely take an entire paper to itself. In order to keep this paper tolerably short, though, it will have to suffice for me to remark that arguments that appear to have conclusions that have a truth-value but are not asserted appear to me to be best viewed as having implicitly asserted conclusions. In a *reductio*, for example, the implicitly asserted conclusion is that the guilty premise/assumption is to be rejected; in the case of an argument that a proposition ought to be doubted, we should take the conclusion of the argument to be of the form: "Assert: we should doubt that *p*." However, if we are presented with a case where no asserted conclusion can sensibly be taken to be implicit, then it is not clear to me that we ought to call that an argument at all.

A final objection to the argument that I put forward above is that even if my argument is a good one, it does not establish what I want: I want to say that arguments are truth-*directed*, but all that the argument above purports to show is that arguments essentially involve the assertion of the truth of their conclusions. It does not show, the objection goes, that arriving at the truth of the conclusion is the *purpose* of arguments.

On the face of it, though, it looks to me like the argument I give above does support the view that arguments are truth-directed. If an argument is the assertion of premises in support of an asserted conclusion, and the assertion of a proposition essentially involves the assertion of its truth, it seems to follow that what we do in giving arguments is that we give reasons to think that the conclusion is true. The only way that I can think to object to this line of reasoning is to point out cases where arguments are used for purposes other than to show that their conclusions are true (for example, to simply get an issue on the table, to prove that one is very witty, etc.).

However, it does not follow from the fact that arguments can be used for many purposes that there is no central purpose of arguments. A hockey stick can be used, among other things, to defend oneself against a mugger, but that does not mean that the purpose of a hockey stick is to defend oneself against muggers, nor that the goodness of hockey sticks is to be measured by how well they can be used for that purpose. A good hockey stick is one that fulfills the particular function of hockey sticks well; even bad hockey sticks can serve other purposes well. Similarly, it does not follow from the fact that arguments can be used for various purposes that there is no

central purpose of arguments – and if there is a particular purpose of arguments, then arguments ought to be evaluated according to how well they fulfill that purpose. I am taking up Johnson's view of the particular purpose of arguments here, as the rational persuasion of an audience or interlocutor of the truth of a claim; the argument that I set out above is my case for taking that position on the purpose of arguments.

That concludes my case for taking arguments to be are truth-directed. Fortunately, though, it is not necessary to agree with me about the general nature and purpose of arguments in order to accept the discussion of argument evaluation that appears in the following sections of the paper. Most theorists (with the possible exception of Hamblin (1970), to whom I respond at the end of paper) agree that some arguments, at least, aim to give good reasons to believe that their conclusions are true, and so sometimes, at least, arguments ought to be evaluated according to how well they achieve that goal. If you accept that arguments generally are truth-directed, then you can accept that the evaluative criteria that I will discuss will be perfectly general, applying to arguments across the board. If, on the other hand, you do not accept that general claim about the purpose of arguments, still the following discussion will be of interest as long as you accept that *some* arguments have that purpose, so that the truth-directed evaluation of arguments discussed below will apply to the subset of arguments that aim to establish the truth of their conclusions.

No doubt, before moving on, I owe an explanation of what I mean by "truth" when I say that arguments are truth-directed. I will not argue for the theory of truth that I have in mind, because there just is not the space to do so here, but I want to be clear about the position I am advocating. By "true," I do not mean either *verifiable* or *certain*. Nor do I have in mind a relativist, pragmatist, or coherentist theory of truth. Rather, the account of truth that I have in mind is much like Goldman's descriptive-success theory, which is a version of the correspondence theory, on which an item (belief, statement, etc.) is true if and only if it purports to describe some portion of reality, and it successfully describes that part of reality (1999, p.59).

Goldman restricts his discussion to ordinary factual argumentation (1999, p.132), and so his theory of truth only needs to be able to accommodate truths that come up in such discourse; he neither asserts nor denies, as far as I know, that there even *are* truths in practical or aesthetic discourse. Now, I am of the view that there are truths in practical discourse, but that need not complicate the descriptive-success account of truth; it looks to me as though the account can easily cover practical as well as ordinary factual discourse. For example, the proposition "S ought to ϕ" is true, on a descriptive-success account of truth, if and only if it successfully describes an obligation that S has. Provided that there are real obligations (or, more generally, real practical imperatives), the descriptive-success account of truth can handle them, because real imperatives can be accurately or inaccurately described, just like ordinary facts can. If someone should object that there just are no truth-makers for practical claims, the response that I will want to give is that whatever it is that generates obligations (or practical recommendations generally) *is* what makes the propositions about them true.[3] So I take it that Goldman's descriptive-success theory can apply to both practical and factual discourse.[4]

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[3] One might object here that *nothing* generates practical imperatives. If that is the case, so be it – but that is no problem for the descriptive-success account of truth; practical claims will simply turn out to be false, in that case, because a practical claim says that something is the case (that we ought to be charitable, for example), but what it purports to be the case, is not (we have no obligations; *a fortiori*, we have no obligation to be charitable, so any purported description of our obligation to be charitable is bound to be unsuccessful).

[4] I have to admit that am less certain about how well Goldman's account of truth can handle aesthetic propositions, such as "*Pnin* is Nabokov's most humorous novel," or "Aristophanes' plays are more entertaining than Sophocles' plays." However, my initial inclination is to say that it can handle them, in a manner analogous to the way that it can

2. Premise adequacy: acceptability, not truth

The question on the table now is what the appropriate criteria for evaluating arguments are, when we view arguments as aiming to rationally persuade an audience of the truth of a conclusion. Perhaps the most natural place to start is with the requirement that an argument's premises be true. Johnson (2000) argues that premise truth ought to be included in the set of criteria that we employ for evaluating arguments, alongside of premise acceptability. He admits that there are good reasons for not employing the truth criterion in the evaluation of arguments, but he argues that there are even better reasons for employing it. The main reasons for excluding the truth requirement are that it does not appear to be necessary for an argument to be good that all of its premises be true, and that logic ought to say something about premise adequacy, but logic has nothing to say about the truth of an argument's premises (Johnson 2000, pp.196-197).

The reason Johnson gives for maintaining the truth requirement is that it is difficult to see how we could develop a theory of evaluation without having some recourse to it. Theorists who propose to do without the truth requirement either make use of it unofficially, or continue to rely on it by employing terms that presuppose a commitment to it, or else they use the truth requirement in their metatheory, employing it in the metalanguage in which they develop their account of argument evaluation (Johnson 2000, p.197).

Given that Johnson takes the purpose of arguments to be rational persuasion of the truth of a claim, he also includes the requirement that a premise be both *accepted* by the audience and *rationally acceptable* to them. The idea here is that if a claim is not accepted by the audience, or if they do accept it but it is not rational for them to do so, then it cannot be used as a premise in an enterprise that aims to achieve rational persuasion. It might be an effective premise, if it plays to the emotions or biases of the audience, but the persuasion that ensues in that kind of case is not *rational* persuasion. The premises that an arguer employs must, then, either be supported themselves by a good argument, or else they must be such that it is rational for the arguer to believe that the audience will accept them, and also that it is in fact rational for the audience to accept them (Johnson 2000, pp.194-195). (I would also add that it must be rational for the *arguer* to accept them as well. More about this below.)

In his discussion of the truth criterion, Johnson often talks in terms of a *requirement* (e.g. p.195), which makes it sound like he is talking about a necessary condition for premise adequacy. At one point, though, in response to the argument that the truth of a premise is neither necessary nor sufficient for the premise to be adequate (a complaint that comes up, for example, in Pinto (1994) and Govier (1999, ch.7)), Johnson appears to be content with considering truth to be a standard, or criterion, that is neither necessary nor sufficient for premise adequacy (2000, p.280). The truth of an argument's premises might be one important consideration, on this line of thought, which can be overridden by other factors, just as winning the most games in one season in Major League Baseball is neither necessary nor sufficient for winning the Cy Young Award, but it is an important consideration.

Presenting truth as a standard or criterion is more palatable than presenting it as a requirement, because examples of false but acceptable premises do not then count as

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handle practical propositions: insofar as aesthetic propositions purport to describe something (which it seems to me that they do – to say of *x* that it is funnier than *y* is to describe their relative levels of humour, for example), and insofar as what they purport to describe can be accurately or inaccurately described, the descriptive-success account can handle them.

counterexamples. However, I still have some misgivings about even this weaker presentation of the truth criterion. First, whether an argument's premises are true does not seem to me to be an appropriate criterion by which to measure them, even on that weaker reading; and second, in cases where a premise is false but acceptable, Johnson privileges truth over acceptability (2000, pp.339-340), so he seems to want truth to be a necessary condition for premise adequacy after all.

The reason I worry about privileging the truth of a premise over its acceptability in any kind of case is that premises that are acceptable (as opposed to merely accepted) are more suited to fulfilling the purpose of arguments: acceptable premises, remember, are those that are rational to accept. Just *when* a premise counts as acceptable is still an open question, I take it; Johnson (2000, pp.194-195) puts forward the requirement that either a premise must be supported with good reasons, or else it must be such that the arguer takes it to be rational for the audience to accept without support. Freeman (2005) develops a plausible account of acceptable premises, as premises for which there is a presumption in a dialectical situation. However the acceptability requirement is worked out in the end, though, it is clearly crucial for premise adequacy: if an argument is to provide rational support for the truth of its conclusion, its premises must be such that they are rational for the participants in the argument to accept, and whether the premises are true is an independent question from whether they are rational to accept (for the widely acknowledged reasons that we can have good reasons to believe false propositions, in unfortunate epistemic circumstances, and that we can have true beliefs that have little or no evidential support).

Admittedly, Johnson sometimes gives the impression, when he is arguing that we should privilege truth over acceptability, that what is really the issue is whether an arguer ought to employ premises that *she* takes to be true, or premises that the *audience* takes to be true (2000, pp.336-340). To scant the details, it seems that Johnson sometimes (not always, but sometimes) wants to associate acceptability with the audience's perspective, and truth with the arguer's assessment of claims, and what he wants to avoid is the view that one may pander to an audience's beliefs, when one takes those beliefs to be mistaken. Johnson is correct, I take it, in wanting to say that an arguer may not employ premises that she believes to be false, but that requirement is better put in terms of the *acceptability* of a premise from the perspective of the arguer, rather than in terms of the *truth* of the premise. I see no reason to privilege the epistemic position of the arguer over that of the audience, by associating her perspective with the truth criterion; both arguer and audience are, in principle, equally well-placed to determine the truth of a premise. The same criterion ought to apply to each of their assessments of the truth of a claim, and the appropriate criterion (I am arguing) is acceptability.

So, whatever we think of the status of truth in the evaluation of premises, acceptability ought to be seen as a necessary condition of premise adequacy. What is more, acceptability also appears to be *sufficient* for premise adequacy: whenever a premise is rational for the participants in an argument to accept, it is an appropriate candidate for employment in an enterprise that aims to rationally persuade the audience of the truth of the conclusion (cf. Pinto 1994, pp.118-119). There is nothing more that we ought to require for the adequacy of a premise than that it be rational to accept. Johnson writes that he sees no reason why we should not want our premises to be true as well as acceptable (2000, p.337), and I think that there is something to that – after all, the point of restricting permissible premises to those that are rational to accept is that those are the ones that are most likely, from the point of view of the participants in the argument, to be true. Now, in an epistemically ideal world, all of the claims that are rational to accept would be

true. In the actual world, what is rational to accept is not always what is true, but still the rational status of a proposition is the best indicator of whether we should take it to be true. Whenever a premise is rational for the participants in an argument to accept, then, it is a good premise to employ. The upshot of all of this is that acceptability is both necessary and sufficient for premise adequacy, which means that the truth of a premise is beside the point for premise adequacy; what matters is whether it is rational for the participants in the argument to take them to be true.

At this point, we might notice that to raise an objection against an argument on the grounds that its premises are false is perfectly legitimate, and the legitimacy of this kind of objection lends *prima facie* support to the truth requirement for premise adequacy. Now, I agree that if we are participants in an argument, then of course it is legitimate for us to object to the argument on the grounds that it has false premises (assuming, of course, that it is reasonable for us to believe that it has false premises) – and that legitimacy is captured by a theory of evaluation that only emphasizes premise acceptability just as well as it is by a theory that also requires the truth of premises. For a premise to be acceptable is for it to be rational to accept; if a participant in the argument has reason to believe that the premise is false, then the premise fails to be acceptable, and so may not be used (at least, not without further argument in support of the premise). In other words, the objection "but that premise is not true" is only a legitimate objection if the objector has some reason to deny its truth, in which case the premise fails to be acceptable.

The further objection that evaluative concepts like *inconsistency* presuppose commitment to the truth requirement (because inconsistency occurs when two or more claims cannot be true together) is not a problem for the acceptability-account of premise adequacy either. If an argument employs inconsistent premises, then the participants in the argument have excellent reason to doubt that they can all be true. Therefore, even if someone is *willing* to accept the inconsistent premises, it cannot be *rational* for him to do so. The rejection of inconsistency does presuppose a commitment to the *truth*, but not to a truth *criterion* for premise adequacy; acceptability can do the job just as well.

So, to sum up my case for excluding the truth criterion: acceptability is both necessary and sufficient for a premise to be adequate to employ in an argument. Truth does not add anything when it is present, or take anything away when it is absent, so it ought not to be taken to be a criterion for premise adequacy.

3. Where the truth properly lies: the metatheory of argument evaluation

In this paper, I am interested in the place of truth in the theory of argument evaluation, for those arguments that are truth-directed. In the previous section, I argued that we ought not to take truth to be a criterion for premise adequacy; in this section, I want to argue that the proper place of truth is in the metatheory in terms of which the theory of evaluation is articulated. Recall Johnson's point that theorists who claim to disavow the truth requirement still make use of it, some by making unofficial use of it, others by using terms that presuppose commitment to it, and still others by making use of it in their metatheory. I take that third strategy to be exactly the one to adopt. I will not attempt to develop a theory of argument evaluation here, via a metatheory employing the concept of truth, but I will argue that that is the best approach, and I will also argue that it does not entail a truth criterion for premise adequacy.

The argument for the claim that the concept of truth must be employed in the metatheory in terms of which the theory of evaluation is articulated is very brief. First, I take it that

arguments are truth-directed; they aim to rationally persuade someone of the truth of a claim. Even if I am wrong, though, and that is not the goal of all arguments, still it is the goal of at least some arguments, and it is those that I am interested in. The second premise is that arguments ought to be evaluated in terms of how well they fulfill their purpose.[5] So, since rational persuasion of the truth of a proposition is the purpose I am interested in, truth will necessarily figure in the metatheory in terms of which the theory of evaluation will be articulated.

That argument, at least, appears to me to be both clear and cogent, so I will move on to the next point, which is to establish that having a metatheory that employs the concept of truth does not entail that truth ought to be a constraint on premise adequacy in the theory of evaluation that is developed in the framework of that metatheory. The idea is that, given the truth-directed nature of the kind of arguments that I am interested in, the criteria of a good argument will be such that they will maximize the likelihood, from the point of view of the participants in the argument, that they will arrive at true conclusions. Because it is the *rational* persuasion of the truth of a conclusion that is the goal, emphasis must be placed on the conditions under which an argument appears to be rational to its participants.

As I argue above, when truth and rational acceptability come apart, acceptability matters more than truth, because what is rational to accept is what is most likely, from the point of view of the participants in the argument, to be true. The criteria by which arguments are to be evaluated, on this approach, gain their legitimacy by the way that they increase the likelihood[6] that the argument will proceed in a rational manner from premises that are rational to accept to a conclusion that is rational to accept. So, even though the metatheory in terms of which the theory of evaluation is to be worked out is one that favours truth, it cannot place a direct constraint that the premises be true, because then it will undermine the rationality of the procedure in cases where truth and acceptability conflict.

I do not propose to develop a full theory of evaluation here, but I would like to note that the three criteria that Johnson advocates other than truth − the familiar criteria of relevance, sufficiency and acceptability − seem to me to fit well in a metatheory that privileges the rational persuasion of the truth of a conclusion. (I take it that I have already said enough about acceptability.) *Relevance* of a premise-set to its conclusion is clearly important for an argument to fulfill its purpose: although we are still arguably in need of a sustained theory of relevance, it is clear at least that if the premises of an argument are to persuade anyone rationally to accept the truth of a conclusion, the premises must bear on the truth (or acceptability) of the conclusion. That is to say, they must be relevant. *Sufficiency* is also key, because if there is not enough support for the conclusion, then (almost by definition) it cannot be rational to accept the truth of the conclusion on the basis of the premises offered.

That set of criteria is not, of course, the only candidate for a truth-oriented theory of evaluation. Goldman (1999, pp.134-144), for one, offers a set of fourteen explicitly truth-oriented criteria, and I see no prima facie reason to doubt their usefulness (except perhaps for Goldman's explicit proviso that he is only concerned with factual, not practical, arguments,

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[5] Goodwin (2007) rejects the view that functions can determine norms, on the ground that functions do not determine unique sets of norms – many different sets of norms can often serve the same function. This objection is a problem for those who want to establish that a particular set of norms is correct, by way of showing that they satisfy the norms for good argument. The objection does not worry me, though, since my aim here is not to determine a unique, correct set of argumentative norms.

[6] Both from an objective point of view, a point of view emphasizing what really promotes the rational progression of the endeavour, as well as from the point of view of the participants in the argumentative exchange, since what makes for a good argument (what makes it likely that rational persuasion takes place) must be manifest to the participants.

whereas I am interested in arguments generally). I do not mean to adjudicate between Johnson's and Goldman's approaches here, or to suggest that theirs are the only ones available, but only to point out that there are several kinds of approach that a truth-oriented theory of evaluation could adopt.

4. Concluding remarks: Hamblin and truth

In the first section of the paper, I noted that almost all argument theorists agree that some arguments, at least, aim to establish the truth of their conclusions, and that that is enough to make the project of this paper interesting. Hamblin (1970) is the only theorist I am aware of who might be read as denying even the qualified claim that some arguments aim for truth. (I say "might be," because he never directly claims that *no* arguments aim to establish truths, but his views on truth and on arguments seem to imply it.) What I want to conclude with is a response to the view that no arguments aim to establish the truth of their conclusions.

Hamblin's main challenge appears to be that, when a speaker *S* utters "*p* is true," he might just as well have uttered "*p*," or "I accept *p*" (p.243). In other words, the concept of truth is not doing any work here; all that an assertion of the truth of a proposition does is to assert the speaker's acceptance of the proposition. Now, Hamblin never explicitly adopts the view that truth in general is an empty concept; his view is that whenever anyone asserts of a particular proposition that it is true, the *assertion* of truth is empty. But notice that the assertion of the truth of a proposition is empty is compatible with the truth or falsity of the proposition. In the end, I do not think that Hamblin is willing to reject the contentfulness of the concept of truth altogether, given that he holds that truth is an onlooker's concept (p.242) – so there must be something that the onlookers have in mind – and also given the extended hearing he allows to the alethic and epistemic criteria of argument evaluation.[7]

It is therefore plausible to read Hamblin not as holding that the concept of truth never does any work, but only as rejecting the view that truth can play any role in an argumentative situation. If that interpretation is correct, then I have two things to say about it. First of all, as Johnson notes (2000, p.279), "*p* is true" and "I accept *p*" are two very different claims. Now, Hamblin does accept that there is a difference in the kind of *response* that each type of claim will elicit from the interlocutor in an argument (p.244): "*p* is true" will elicit either a statement of the interlocutor's acceptance or non-acceptance of *p*, whereas "I accept *p*" will elicit the interlocutor's acceptance or non-acceptance of the claim that *S* accepts *p*. Notwithstanding the difference in the responses that they would elicit, though, Hamblin holds that the two statements are alike in *meaning*. Johnson's point, though, is that there is a difference in meaning between them: "*p* is true" and "I accept *p*" have entirely different truth-conditions. One is made true by whatever *p* is about, and the other is made true by *S*'s propositional commitments. Where Hamblin asserts that "*p* is true" and "I accept *p*" mean the same thing, then, he is simply mistaken.

On the other hand, if we read Hamblin's criticism of the role of truth in an argumentative situation as the more modest claim that the words "is true" in "*p* is true" are empty *because the*

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[7] If Hamblin in fact wants to hold that truth in general is an empty concept, then his position is beyond the scope of this paper to answer, and it does not worry me very much anyway. I will assume for now that truth in general is not an empty concept. It is only if we take Hamblin to hold that truth is not an empty concept in general, but that it is empty in an argumentative situation, that his criticism is worrying, because I am taking truth to be integral to the project of arguing. It is therefore the possibility that truth is a meaningful concept, but that it means nothing in arguments, that I take up here.

speaker is already committed to the truth of p *in asserting* p, then his claim seems to me to be perfectly correct. When one asserts a sentence, one commits oneself to its truth (i.e. to its descriptive success). If that means that uttering the words "is true" adds nothing to the assertion of a sentence, so be it, but that does not mean that the concept of truth is playing no role. The reason that "is true" is empty is because commitment to the truth of *p is already present*. What we have to avoid is taking the superfluity of "is true" in an argumentative situation to indicate that truth is playing no role in that situation.

So I take it that some arguments aim to rationally persuade their audiences or interlocutors of the truth of a claim, and that that conception of arguments is not undermined by Hamblin's criticism of the role that truth plays in arguments. It is still an important question, then, what role truth plays in arguments, and in particular, in argument evaluation. If the arguments in this paper are good ones, then the place of truth is in the metatheory in terms of which the theory of evaluation is worked out – not in the theory of evaluation itself, as a constraint on premises adequacy.

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