Truth and Perspectives

An Essay on Theoretical Differentiations and Relations

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Abstract

This paper proposes a theoretical means of dealing with different perspectives on truth that cannot be resolved into a unified single perspective. Through the development of a dialectical understanding of truth, knowledge and justification, the three can be differentiated into a multitude of interrelations. The focus of this development will be on understanding truth via its relationship to knowledge. Both truth and knowledge will thereby be conceived of as dynamic and revisable. Truth could then be regarded as an accordance of knowledge, which provides the possibility of relating different perspectives on truth via the relationship of their contents of knowledge and their procedures of justification. These relativisations should not give rise to relativism or skepticism but build upon existing structures of reasoning and justification.

Keywords

truth – epistemology – knowledge – relativity – revisability

1 Introduction

This essay forms a contribution to the discourse on how to understand the concept of truth while taking into account that many truth ascriptions exist that seem to have their own right and thus have to be related. The problem addressed in this paper is a very broad topic with a long tradition behind it,

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made of many strands, such that it can only be investigated through reference to exemplary positions. For this reason, the genre of essay has been chosen for this investigation, due to its approach of sketching out a few ideas that might then inspire further and more detailed research. After the introduction (1), this paper argues for a dialectical consideration of the concepts of truth, knowledge and justification (2). Then, truth is preliminarily identified as ideal convergence (3). The concept of knowledge is examined and determined as revisable and externalised strong belief (4). Combining 3 and 4, the concept of truth can be understood as a convergence of knowledge. Doing this could lead to a contextual differentiation of truth that itself builds upon differentiations of justification (5). Finally, this conception of truth will be applied to the subject of this issue through an investigation of questions of relativism and scepticism (6). The ideas in this paper can be assessed as presenting a pragmatic theory of truth, taking “pragmatic” in a broad sense, incorporating contexts, presenting an epistemic notion of truth and reflecting on the use of the concept of truth. At the same time, the dialectical relationships between truth, knowledge and justification are maintained. These dialectics allow for the inclusion of other theories and perspectives – even though, in this paper, only the direction from knowledge to truth is discussed.

Philosophy is specialised to account for the concept and use of the expression “truth” and related notions. However, as truth is at the core of all types of research, as well as of political, of public and of everyday truth claims, philosophy has to deal with a concept that is blurred and is hardly ever used in a strictly philosophical sense. It should be noted that the expression “truth” is usually not that important in itself – setting aside systematic theology and theoretical philosophy, as well as areas as logic, which are more restricted in their use of “truth”. In public discourse and in political settings, as well as in ordinary language “truth”, however, is mainly used in reference to speaking truthfully, e.g. in matters of political conflict or legal affairs. Hence, debates over “facts”, “knowledge” or “proof” are the challenging notions with respect to truth claims. In research, for example, methods and their standards are more important, as well as evidence or logical soundness. Nonetheless, in philosophical theory, the concept ‘truth’ is important for explicating the meaning behind the expressions “facts”, “knowledge”, “proof”, or the concepts ‘method’, ‘evidence’ and ‘logic’. This can be demonstrated with the examples

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3 In the following, to support readability, single inverted commas that would unambiguously mark the use of concepts are omitted (in contrast double inverted comma mark the use of
of (1) populist striving for public epistemic influence and (2) cooperation in interdisciplinary research between the disciplines of the humanities, the life sciences and the social sciences, which will be used to clarify theoretical aspects in the following sections.

(1) The subject of this issue, “truth and reliability in times of crisis”, relates to important perceived changes in society. In our times, the concept of truth is particularly important in both public and political discourse, which witness struggles and debates for the power to declare what is true – as the contrast between so-called “fake news” and the simplified expression “facts” indicates. Furthermore, due to modern social media in particular, new ways of organising social subgroups have emerged, which can lead to their cognitive isolation and epistemic immunisation. Paradoxically, ideological positions, which entail a strong concept of truth, can at the same time refer to relativism, which can be a rather unreflective and arbitrary “everyone may believe what he or she wants” and is often accepted in Western societies. This simultaneously allows a strong claim to truth and an ability to discredit any opponents, who would only hold another “opinion”. This blocks real discourse which is essential for democracies. Although this example cannot be elaborated further in this paper, it demonstrates the importance of reflecting truth claims in everyday language.

(2) I have been working on the philosophy of interdisciplinary research for some time within the project “Resilience in Religion and Spirituality”. It can serve for exemplification in the following sections. In that project, we are working together on how questions of personal or psychological resilience could be conceived from a multidisciplinary approach and what could thereby be learned to help people to deal with crises. As we are combining research and insight from the humanities (theology, philosophy, theological ethics/moral psychology), the life sciences (psychosomatic medicine and psychotherapy, palliative medicine) and the social sciences (sociology, spiritual care) this frequently leads to a clash of cultures of approaches and styles of thinking. This relates to varying ideas of what truth might be and how it can be approached and achieved. As has been said, the expression “truth” is not so important here: “truth claims” as such are seldom addressed. However, we have to deal with different understandings and methodological approaches that provide “real”, “better” or “deeper” understanding of the objectives and phenomena in expressions and will be used throughout). As the objects truth, knowledge and justification are used as epistemic terms, they can be considered as being determined by their concepts.

4 This might be devised as simple lies, as so called “bullshit” or as rhetoric of propaganda. Cf. Breul, Lies, Bullshit, or Propaganda.
question. Therefore, the question of how to relate different understandings of truth is equally important for interdisciplinary research, whether it is on resilience or any other topic.

Both examples indicate the background of this essay. In the following sections I present and combine theoretical approaches that advocate a relative epistemology in one way or another. It is important to note that I draw a distinction between relativity and relativism. Relativity entails the consideration of elements and their relationships to each other while also taking into account one’s own position. Relativism is stronger, as it takes relativity in a principle sense and hence concludes that “anything goes”: if there is no single absolute truth, everything might be asserted equally as true. This argument will be dealt with in section 6 in more detail. In the following sections, different philosophical traditions will be brought into conversation with each other in terms of the notion of relativity described above: Discussions of traditional JTB (i.e. justified true belief) account (Beckermann Gettier) are the starting point of my argumentation. Theories of justification (Alston, Audi) are part of this, although these occur at all stages of the considerations – even though justification can only be treated in a very superficial manner, as an adequate treatment would require another paper or even a book. The theory clusters considered for the already mentioned relative human insight into “the world” are: the Kantian Erkenntnistheorie, Wittgensteinian ideas on certainty\(^5\) (Keil), theory dynamics in the philosophy of science (Fleck, Kuhn, Friedman), belief-revision theory in formal epistemology (Levi, Rott) and theories of truth in pragmatism (Peirce, Apel). By combining these very different ideas, in the following I outline an attempt to clarify the concept of truth through its relationship to knowledge.

2 Towards a Dialectical Conception of Truth and Knowledge

In the tradition of analytic philosophy, knowledge is generally identified as justified true belief. Following Edmund Gettier’s counterexample\(^6\) to this

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\(^5\) Cf. Wittgenstein: *On Certainty*, which discusses the relation of relativity and certainty using the language-game approach. However, the notes that Wittgenstein made and that were published after his death by Elizabeth Anscombe and Georg Henrik von Wright were not ready for publication and would require a closer reading and contextualisation than can be given here.

\(^6\) Cf. Gettier, *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?* Gettier’s own two examples are based on deductive logic. A simpler example – which is taken form Bartelborth, *Begründungsstrategien*, p. 17 – is the following: Imagine someone reliably telling you that he owns a BMW car, which he shows to you (here the conditions could be specified in more detail but to get a picture
definition and the ensuing discussion, the inadequacy of the standard definition is generally acknowledged. Consequently, knowledge is frequently defined as true belief plus $X$, where $X$ is at least partially justification. The proposals of how to describe $X$ differ significantly. Roughly, one can distinguish externalist from internalist positions. However, even the complete abandonment of justification is being discussed, taking knowledge to be simply true belief. Therefore, not even an approximation of a unified understanding of knowledge can be expected. Recently, Ansgar Beckermann has called into question the concept of knowledge itself. He asserts that the practical aim of epistemology has always been truth, with justification or other conditions $X$ providing only a means of identifying truth. For this reason, he proposes that the concept of knowledge in general be omitted in the course of focussing on the concept of truth.\(^7\) A discussion of this might be considered futile in certain strands of epistemology. However, it cannot be denied that in ordinary speech knowledge plays a different role than truth. Beckermann’s suggestion is used here to shape an initial idea that will be discussed in this paragraph and that finally will lead to a dialectical conception: would it be productive to proceed the other way around and omit the concept of truth from the concept of knowledge?

A tempting solution could be: taking the general definition of knowledge as an “equation”\(^8\) with the variables $K$ (knowledge), $t$ (true),\(^9\) $B$ (belief) and $X$ (further condition, of which justification is usually a part of): $K = t(B) \text{ and } X$. A proposal – that Beckermann explicitly denies because of his estimation that the concept of knowledge is unfertile – could be to substitute $K$ by $t(B) \text{ and } X$. Considering the concept of truth, one could tentatively take knowledge to be the basic concept and “transform the equation”. However, this is not possible for the following reasons: First, the expression is imprecise. Knowledge is not self-explanatory but is expressed by belief. Furthermore, $X$ might also

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7 Cf. Beckermann, *Erkenntnistheorie ohne Wissensbegriff*.
8 Of course, this is merely an analogy to (mathematical) equations since, here, concepts and their definitions are used.
9 The adjective “true” is used for a belief if and only if the noun “truth” can be somehow attributed or related to this belief. Consequently, adjective and noun as conceived here are interdefinable. Even though the expression “truth” can be grammatically rendered substantial there does not seem to be much meaning in taking it as absolute without any references. So the suggestion is to take it as an attribution but, of course, another kind of relation might be possible, too.
be based on belief and maybe on truth as well. At the worst, it might even be based on knowledge, but this shall not be considered for the time being. Consider \( K(B) = t(B) \) and \( X(B, t) \). Truth has two positions and therefore an easy “transformation” to \( t \) is not possible. However, even if we assumed \( X \) would bear no reference to truth or it could be eliminated, a second problem would arise. The mapping out of truth is further restricted by the supposition \( X \) and thereby leads to knowledge. Hence, the concept of knowledge is more restricted than the concept of truth, and it remains unclear how it can be expanded to arrive at truth.

This intellectual game exemplifies (and simplifies) a problem that should also apply to more complex theories of knowledge than the one indicated above. That is, the concepts of truth, knowledge, justification, evidence, warrant, and so on cannot be defined separately or mutually as the analogy to equations suggests. Rather, they are in a way so interdependent that it is not possible to single out one of them or explain it using the others without being constrained to explain the others by referring to the one that is singled out. Therefore, the relationship of these concepts can be conceived of as dialectical. Taking research on resilience to be an example, knowing what resilience is and how to scientifically investigate resilience presupposes and at the same time depends on what one thinks resilience factually, i.e. what it truly is. At the same time the two are connected in various ways to justifications, described more concretely below. However, they can be used as a standard means of describing ways of justification. The argument given above is not a strategic attempt to get rid of analytical examinations. In the view presented here, they remain useful but are not complete. In the following sections the dialectic between the concept of truth and the concept of knowledge is outlined. Since the dependence of knowledge on truth conditions is generally acknowledged, the focus here will be on the conception of truth via knowledge.

Here, due to space constraints, full treatment of justification must be neglected, although it will be briefly hinted at. For this reason, using William Alston’s *epistemic desiderata approach*, I will insinuate what a satisfactory notion of justification might look like. Justification could be understood as a family of procedures that differ depending on their context, intention, object, and so on.\(^{10}\) This remains very vague. The problem is that there is a multitude of approaches to justification with a range of theoretical backgrounds. One example, which is oversimplified here, is the difference between internal and external conceptions. A more concrete case can be found in interdisciplinary

\(^{10}\) Cf. Alston, *Beyond "justification"*, part 1. I would opt for a larger diversity than Alston leaves in the end.
research. Here, justifications can include – among other things – statistical examinations of questionnaire scales, discourse analytics run on a recorded and transcribed survey, applying and checking definitions, searching and sorting literature, analysing literature, discussing concepts, relating concepts, reflecting on given theories and oral discussions. All of these have to be performed in accordance with certain standards and criteria, which are described with certain theories or belong to common thinking. Following Alston’s idea, differing theories of justification could be conceived of as expressing different facets of justification. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to put these conceptions of justification into relation with each other and give an account of which facets are relevant in which circumstances. For Alston, even the adequacy of the term “justification”, with its presupposed unity and focus on forms of defence, could be questioned. However, to concentrate on arguments concerning truth and because of the lack of a broadly shared alternative “justification” shall be taken to have a rather intuitive meaning for the time being, bearing in mind its wide-ranging differentiation and leaving a full discussion to another opportunity.

3 An Onset: Truth as an Ideal

Let us begin with Immanuel Kant and his discussion of truth in the Critique of Pure Reason: “daß sie nämlich die Übereinstimmung der Erkenntnis mit ihrem Gegenstande sei”\(^\text{11}\). The correspondence theoretical “agreement” of Erkenntnis with something (“its object”) indicates that something is (correctly) identified. Erkenntnis stands in conceptual opposition to illusion, deception, error, mistake, and so on. The meaning of “object” is more intricate: What is the object and how can correspondence with it be verified? Kant observes here that the object of Erkenntnis does not exist. Rather, there are different objects that have different criteria of truth. Here, a multitude of theories of truth emerges. These differentiations, which are necessary at this point, shall not be drawn out here. Instead, a universal perspective shall be furthered, as another complication arises. Neglecting for the moment any differences in objects, how can

\(^{11}\) “[N]amely that it is the agreement of cognition with its object”. Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, A 58/B 82/AA 111 79. Here and in the following the English translation of Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood is used. Because of the better availability of the Academy Edition its pages are quoted, too. The German term “Erkenntnis” is only inadequately translated by “cognition” or “knowledge” and blurs the temporarily strict distinction between knowledge and truth, so the German word is employed. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that even this quotation does not represent Erkenntnis in its full extent, as Kant focuses on the result but Erkenntnis also refers to the relevant procedure.
correspondence with one or more objects be checked, and where is the point of view of certainty? Here, Kant is quoted again, this time regarding his explanation of “Umänderung der Denkart” (the so-called Copernican Revolution):12 “daß wir annehmen, die Gegenstände müssen sich nach unserem Erkenntnis richten”.13 The question of the correspondence of Erkenntnis with its object, which has traditionally been conceived of as the correspondence theory of truth, is itself a question of Erkenntnis. There is no other way of verifying Erkenntnis than by Erkenntnis. The conditions of Erkenntnis are therefore self-referential. The knowledge of this self-referentiality renders the putatively safe and unique ground of truth doubtful. This is crucial, for example, in the case of definitions. For instance, in psychosomatic medicine it is necessary to define resilience to be able to develop operationalisations for investigations and instruments for interventions. At the same time, the deeper one investigates and the more disciplines and perspectives one tries to integrate the clearer it becomes that it will not be possible to create a single and ultimate definition of resilience, as it is quite a difficult and ambiguous concept and phenomenon; only those definitions of resilience that refer to this or that small aspect of it are safe. Therefore, it is important to ask oneself what one is actually seeking to grasp with a specific definition.

A second consideration is needed to follow up. Usually, truth is not conceived as dynamic or as a development of Erkenntnis. Instead, it is generally considered to be irrevocable. However, what could count as truth then? Even the empirical sciences, that are considered the role models of secure gain in knowledge,14 have seen significant change throughout their history.15 Consequently one should be rather cautious with absolute statements about them. The study of truth must therefore consider its own conditions of Erkenntnis and the possibilities of deception, error, and imprecision. The static truth is thereby rendered a practically interminable ideal.

What is “ideal”? As noted, the ascription of truth is afflicted with uncertainties for epistemological reasons. Truth can only be claimed with reservations, that is, that the proposition of a certain speaker in a certain situation and with

12  Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, B XVI/AA III 12.
13  That is, “assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition”. Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, B XVI/AA III 12.
14  An important example is the philosophy of science by the Vienna Circle. Still today, long after the abandonment of the search for an empiricist criterion of meaning, the sciences bear a model function or are at least counted among the good or successful ways of gaining knowledge.
15  Cf. Fleck, Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache; Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.
a claim to truth will not someday turn out to be false. This is the conception of Charles Sanders Peirce. He understands – especially in his two papers in Popular Science Monthly from 1877 and 1878 that were influential for American Pragmatism – truth or reality as the result of empirical “inquiry” and “investigation” under the condition that they are pursued long enough. For him, the concepts of truth and reality include the “great hope” of a “predestined” unity of opinion of all people under the stated conditions. Hence, the ideal expresses the hope of a unified Erkenntnis – the failure of this hope does not even seem possible for Peirce. One reason for this might be the belief in progress that was widespread at this time, fuelled by the enormous success of the empirical sciences. Later, in 1908, Peirce states his concept of truth again, this time to distinguish himself from William James’s pragmatist utility understanding of truth: “If Truth consists in satisfaction, it cannot be any actual satisfaction, but must be the satisfaction which would ultimately be found if the inquiry were pushed to its ultimate and indefeasible issue.”

Karl-Otto Apel has, in his presentation of Peirce’s philosophy, introduced the fitting term of convergence (“Konvergenz”) to describe the process or progression that aims at unity. Here, Apel’s observation of the counterfactual-conditional wording in Peirce’s statement is important. Consequently, Peirce’s theory of truth does not require an actual accomplishment of this convergence but only its conception, hence an ideal. From this, Apel develops his own theory of truth:

Der Begriff der schlechthin intersubjektiven Gültigkeit läßt sich nun […] als regulative Idee einer methodischen Approximation verwenden, wenn man ihn als ideales Ziel möglicher argumentativer Konsensbildung in einer idealen Forschungsgemeinschaft versteht.

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17 Peirce, How to Make Our Ideas Clear, 5.407. This rather theological or religious use of words, which points to an eschatological dimension, might be worth further research.
19 Apel, Der Denkweg von Charles Sanders Peirce, pp. 120, 131. This wording is suitable. Peirce is using an analogy to an infinite approximation respectively specification of the number π. Cf. Peirce, Truth and Falsity and Error, 5.565.
20 Apel, Der Denkweg von Charles Sanders Peirce, p. 126. Apel refers to a supplement from 1903 in: Peirce, The Fixation of Belief, 5.375. Page 5.384, too, is counterfactually formulated only in the supplement from 1903.
21 This is only the philosophical concept of truth. Apel works out Peirce’s idea of practical truth claims in: Der Denkweg von Charles Sanders Peirce, pp. 122–126.
22 “The term of plainly intersubjective validity can only […] be used as regulative idea of a methodological approximation, if it is understood as ideal goal of possible argumentative
The community of researchers in opposition to the entirety of humanity is not identified in the mentioned papers of Peirce. However, this conception is in accordance with him since his focus is usually on the empirical sciences. Apel specifies the counterfactual. One must conceive of the generation of consensus in a community of researchers. In doing so, one conceives of both as ideal. First, it would be possible that a consensus is reached only partly or not at all. The “argumentative generation of consensus” as well as the term “community” are given through Apel’s transcendental-pragmatical discourse ethics. Second, the community of researchers would need to at least represent all researchers of past, present, and future.

Geert Keil questions the plausibility of a convergence in relation to Apel’s theory of truth by considering the possibility of a changing reason. Continuing the mathematical metaphor, it is possible that Erkenntnis follows cyclic, divergent, chaotic or other regularities. For example, palliative research is mainly interested in quality of life at the end life. If their interventions proved not to be useful due to new findings or because of cultural changes, for instance, then palliative research and palliative care will adapt. Nonetheless, certain standards are held and considered factual, i.e. true, for the moment, and looking back they may nevertheless be considered to have been true for that unique time. However, to establish truth as described by Peirce and Apel, the assumption of convergence is necessary. Are their concepts of truth flawed? Here, another aspect of their theories becomes important. Peirce alludes to this feature with the term “hope” and with his counterfactual phrasing. Apel is more precise and uses Kant’s term of regulative ideas. For Kant, a regulative idea is “[eine] Idee, welche bloß zur Regel dient” and which has no “objektive Realität”. In the case of Apel’s use of the term for “plainly intersubjective validity”, a rule of “Fortsetzung” of efforts for truth and Erkenntnis in discursive exchange should be understood. Hence, demonstration that convergence is generally impossible would be a problem for this theory of truth. In accordance with Keil, the meaning of this regulative idea can be questioned,
nevertheless. Because, if it is fundamentally different from common attempts of gaining Erkenntnis, and if it is possible to understand the preservation and progress of Erkenntnis, along with the regulative idea, differently, it will lose its explanatory power and its function. Section 5 returns to this question.

4 Knowledge “Without” Truth

After having offered an initiation to the concept of truth, it is now necessary to examine the concept of knowledge, which will be needed in section 5. Completely omitting the concept of truth will not be possible – at least it returns via the detour of justification. However, the concept of knowledge shall be described here as independently as possible.

Here is a well-known observation: Often, we think we know something, but later we learn that we were mistaken. Then, we do not say something like “back then I knew […] but now I don’t know it anymore” but rather something like “I thought I knew […].” This linguistic observation may lead one to conclude that knowledge must be something that is immune to mistake. According to this idea, we unconsciously erred at the time that we asserted that we know. This idea, of course, is near to the concept of truth used for determining the invariant, distinct, and corresponding background. In the stability theory of knowledge, this feature of immutability is used for the definition of knowledge: the belief $B$ of person $P$ is knowledge, if and only if $B$ is still believed by $P$ after receiving any arbitrary true information.27 Hans Rott restores this idea and offers two counterexamples, namely, situations in which belief $B$ is true and must be regarded as knowledge in the beginning. However, after having received further true information, $P$ is no longer certain and consequently does not know $B$.28

These observations illustrate Gettier’s cases as well.29 The discrepancy between knowledge and non-knowledge results from differences between

27 It is possible that this definition is weaker than the example above. $B$ might not be believed by $P$ after successively receiving two or more different items of true information. The further restriction of $B$ being justifiedly believed by $P$ could be added so that $B$ is not believed arbitrarily and nonetheless complying with the definition.


29 Cf. Keil, Was lehrt uns das Gettier-Problem über das Verhältnis zwischen Intuitionen und Begriffsanalysen?, pp. 25–28. Keil draws another consequence that is not oriented to different perspectives: compared to the ontological denseness of the world in theoretical descriptions, not all vacancies – i.e. linguistically and mentally under-determined representations – can be captured.
specific perspectives, which are combined with variable contexts, times, information, and/or initial knowledge. Instead of claiming an unchangeable God’s eye perspective, it also becomes possible to take perspectivity into account while working on the concept of knowledge. The attribution of knowledge always stems from a first-person perspective, whether as an individual or from a social system, whether in theory or in practice, and whether actual or imaginatively. Finally, putative knowledge can be ascribed only to another perspective – whether one’s own at another moment or another’s at any moment. Here, the distinction between epistemic certainty and incorrigibility is important:

To regard some proposition as certainly true and as settled is to rule out its falsity as a serious possibility for the time being. [...] But from this, it does not follow that good reasons will not become available in the future for a change of mind and for calling into question what is currently considered to be true and, as a consequence, for undertaking investigations to check on its truth.

Isaac Levi uses the term “truth” here. Nonetheless, due to his orientation towards formal epistemological contraction, his aim is knowledge as “error-free, full belief”. To “rule out its falsity as a serious possibility” is a rather vague description. Depending on the interpretation, this might be too strong. Presumably, we can claim to know something without being absolutely certain of it, i.e. beyond the slightest doubt. Nevertheless, some certainty about what one knows is necessary for knowledge. We must have a strong belief in what we know. An awareness of the possibility of future revisions may – but does not need to – go along with these strong beliefs. At this point, justifications become relevant, as they are the basis of or even the guarantee for understanding and holding strong beliefs.

The foregoing paragraph sets knowledge in proximity to strong beliefs, be they modelled by probabilities, ranks or something else. This indeed goes well

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30 The we-perspectives are, of course, in need of further clarification. I cannot further discuss them here but take them for the moment as a rather intuitive but blurred notion (however cf. Crone, Foundations of we-perspective). The same holds with the difference between theory and practice.

31 Levi, The Fixation of Belief and its Undoing, p. 3.

32 This means modelling how a belief state can be adapted by giving up certain beliefs and their consequences when one learns that they are false.


34 I take knowledge to be a prominent epistemic state, which nonetheless is one state next to others, for example believing, suspecting, or doubting.
with belief revision theory, even if Levi does not use grades of beliefs in the work quoted above. Therefore, the well-known epistemological position that concentrates rather on beliefs than on knowledge seems to be reasonable in certain aspects. However, the concept of knowledge is not fully captured in this way. For example, "knowledge" – for simplicity only knowing that is referred to here – can mean something else than beliefs: the content of books, collective convictions, curricula or research results, among many other things. Of course, each of these, in its own way, relates beliefs and could – depending on the given theory – be expressed as varieties of beliefs. At the same time, these would be "beliefs" that belong to no single subject, and whose carriers are at most diffuse collectives that might be merely materially present. Therefore, to take the form of knowledge, strong beliefs, whether it be actually or conceptually, must be externalised in social and material forms. Here again, ways of justification that facilitate or justify the externalisation, are relevant.\textsuperscript{35} By externalisation, knowledge – even in the form of the strong belief of a single person – is to be understood in relation to a social or material formation.\textsuperscript{36} By this means, it is fixed without needing to be conceived as not revisable. For example, "hermeneutics" often serves in interdisciplinary exchanges to refer to the idea of how people work in the humanities. Even though knowledge of hermeneutics could be said to be tacit and even indefinite, it serves as an orientation to understand, relate, and distinguish different types of research. To know that some work conducted in a hermeneutical perspective requires relating it to an externally shared understanding, which is built, among other things, upon oral exchange, practical proceedings and given literature. It is a complex form of interrelations that enable a person to know something about hermeneutics and consider it externally accessible without having to read any of the various texts on it with their very different conceptions of the subject.

5 Truth as “Convergence” of Knowledge

The concept of truth can be more closely understood with the concept of knowledge. In the theories of Apel and Peirce, the problem of reduction appears: these authors’ conceptions are determined scientifically by a community of researchers, in the case of Peirce, likely by scientists only. This does not

\textsuperscript{35} This brings to mind the indicated family of justifications in section 2. It means that certain justification procedures need not only be linked to collective consensus but could, for example, include methods, which are considered to promote knowledge or truth. In everyday life, this might be testimony, for instance. Cf. Audi, Epistemology, pp. 129–148.

imply any disrespect of expertise, but it may be asked whether all knowledge and truth can be established by researchers. First, this would indicate a devaluation of everyday experience and everyday knowledge. Second, truth is tied to a certain, culturally established conception of research, preferentially in the sciences. Third, the epistemological prioritization of a certain group might be considered to be elitism. Independent of the expertise already mentioned, the affiliation with groups of researchers is to a certain degree historically contingent and, furthermore, has fuzzy boundaries. Later, Apel differentiated his theory by acknowledging that he focused his truth conception defined by his ideal community of researchers on “the reality” investigated by the sciences. Truth in politics and ethics would be accessible by an ideal community of discourse, which represents all people. Nonetheless, this differentiation is too simple, considering the multitude of ways of accessing the world, which is only imprecisely accounted by the difference between the normative and the factual. If any ideal community could serve to substantiate the regulative idea it would not be the ideal community of researchers but only the ideal community of discourse.

The concept of ideal convergence thus established might be taken to apply to the dynamics of scientific research programmes. The philosophical articulation of truth as an absolute entity can also make use of this ideal. Here, one is concerned with the ultimately and unchangeably correct, which takes the form of the always present grounding of our world. Levi contrasts this view to his own described in section 4, terming it “messianic realism”. Apel, in his later works, refers to „kontrafaktische Antizipation“. This makes him conceptually close to e.g. Wolfhart Pannenberg’s philosophico-theological appreciation of an eschatological conception of truth. Consequently, the subtle inclusion of temporality leads to a conception of truth as realised only in eschaton. This is a strong assumption that might not always be required for knowledge. It might be sensible, therefore, to replace the ideal consensus of the community of discourse with a general accordance of all knowledge. In interdisciplinary

37 Cf. e.g. Apel, Der Wahrheitsbegriff und die Realität der menschlichen Kultur, pp. 351, 365. It has to be noted that a discourse does not mean simple fighting with words but is rigorously restricted to forms of argumentation and reciprocity.
38 Cf. Friedman, Dynamics of Reason, p. 63 et seq.
40 “[C]ounterfactual anticipation” [translation TA], Apel, Diskursethik als Antwort auf die Situation des Menschen in der Gegenwart, p. 91.
research, this could take the form of the consistent unity of all knowledge in all relevant disciplines. By this means, the concept of truth could be expanded. In relation to the just established absolute concept of truth, this approach offers the advantage of avoiding a limitation to the procedures of discursive consensus. Instead, it offers the possibility of permitting further procedures of justification, depending on the context and type of object. For example, in the context of everyday perception, these should be criteria like epistemic virtues or causality rather than any imagined or sought consensus in discourse. Regarding interdisciplinary research, these could be the exemplary procedures of justification given in section 2.

However, even a general accordance of all knowledge would only be a special case of what can be conceived as truth. This is already clear in the example above, which refers to a consistent unity of all knowledge in all relevant disciplines of research. Usually no such unity is available. Furthermore, this appears to impose too strong of a constraint on how to conceive truth in interdisciplinary exchanges, which would rather hinder joint investigations. To put this more generally: first, it is not clear whether all knowledge can be united at all. There may be multiple irreducible scopes of knowledge. Alternatively, an attempted unity could lead to irresolvable inconsistencies. Second, there are many contexts in which the reference to absolute truth constitutes an unnecessary complication and a metaphysical charge. Let us take the example of any description of an experience in court or in everyday life that is considered to be true. Here, the eschatological whole, the consensus of an ideal community of researchers, and the general accordance of all knowledge are hyperbolic tools that should instead be reserved for the great philosophical problems. Third, even truth does not need to be regarded as not revisable, though it may be absolutely certain from a certain point of view. This can be illustrated by Michael Friedman’s concept of relativised a priori, which he takes from Hans Reichenbach. This idea describes principles that form a constitutive frame for knowledge, perception, experience and so on. Thus, they cannot be questioned from the point of view of a particular perspective. At the same time, in terms of a more global historical reflexion, relativity is manifested or can be suspected. The reason for this is that there are or have been perspectives of individuals, or rather collectives, that possess other constitutive principles:

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42 This could even concern the physical world. Cf. Cartwright, The Dappled World.
43 This has been early stated by Fleck’s theory of styles of thinking (Denkstilte). Kuhn has referred to this and Friedman in turn is informed by Kuhn.
the concept of the relativized a priori [...] was explicitly intended to prise apart two meanings that were discerned within the original Kantian conception: necessary and unrevisable, true for all time, on the one hand, and ‘constitutive of the concept of the object of [...] knowledge’ on the other.44

Thus, even the foundations of our perceptions of the world are certain but not unchangeable. Consequently, it would be too great of a demand on truth to always consider it absolute. Even (relativised) principles a priori are not true in an absolute sense but are at most anticipations of this absolute truth. While this could be appropriate for a reflected reasoning in certain cases, it would burden the practical use with highest requirements that necessitate relativising additional clauses. This does not correspond to the use of expressions such as “truth” or “fact” and would complicate or even inhibit communication.

For the reasons given above, a more general concept of truth, incorporating absolute truth as a special case, is proposed. It is suggested to take truth as the accordance of knowledge; taking up the mathematical metaphor, one could say as the convergence of knowledge. Thus, it is possible to describe and understand different constellations of truth, from a self-conscious embrace of one’s own assumed knowledge as truth, across processes of negotiation in social systems, to absolute truth. This should not be understood to make a gradation or a rank-ordering of truth(s). Naturally, while reflecting on conceptions of truth, people can develop an ordering from their point of view. However, it is unclear how a general ordering could be achieved or justified. If we take truth as the accordance of knowledge, we obtain a frame for the attribution of truth to different coverages and scopes, under practical considerations. The aim here is not to replace correspondence and a realistic interpretation with pragmatism. Rather, it is to broaden and adjust a theory that, in my view, is too focused on specialized traditional problems. Therefore, the philosophical concept of truth proposed here is a frame and not a definition. It should be able to provide moderately realistic and moderately pragmatic interpretations. The account described so far allows different conceptions of truth to be related to each other by relating the contents of knowledge and the justifications afforded. The process of accordance itself must be conceived as procedural;45

44 Friedman, Dynamics of Reason, p. 72. Friedman restricts himself to the dynamics of theories in mathematical physics. But, with reference to Kant, his concept could be enlarged to the subjective – and, combining both, even the intersubjective – perspective.

45 This is Keil’s suggestion concerning the mentioned problems at the end of section 3. Cf. Keil, Über den Einwand einer anderen möglichen Vernunft, p. 75 et seq.
consequently, it is in need of time and dedication. Other criteria that are not based on pure reason – for example power in discourse – can emerge as important. Furthermore, the claiming of truth and the commitments thereby entertained can be questioned and ideally debated with reference to reasons.\textsuperscript{46} Once more, procedures of justification emerge as important. The matter here becomes quite complex and, admittedly, somewhat vague. The reason for this is that it does not seem possible to safeguard the truth of any precise individual case procedurally once and for all. Rather, these individual cases must be considered concretely. For the purposes of this paper, however, it is sufficient to make an offer of how truth could be conceived in general. In the case of interdisciplinary research this means that different disciplinary perspectives, representing different systems of knowledge and justification, are acknowledged to have different concepts of truth. But these concepts and the objectives that are taken to be true are not static but are themselves in development through interdisciplinary and other exchanges. On the one hand, these conceptions of truth can be maintained in their own right relative to their indigenous manners of justification and types of knowledge. It is possible to analyse the different contents of knowledge and the procedures of justification that are connected to it. On the other hand, the reflexions just indicated can help relate the differing conceptions of truth, especially with regard to one’s own conception, which in turn might be changed by this means. As has been indicated, it is simply a frame that is offered here. This is why concrete performance has to be demonstrated – and can also fail in being demonstrated – practically and not merely in this theoretical account. However, following at least the main features of this account, it could be shown that not only is the concept of knowledge dependent on the concept of truth but the reverse is true as well.

6 Outlook: the Illusion of the Obvious and the Relative Reliability of Reasoning

Taking the foregoing thoughts on truth and knowledge into account, certain consequences for relativism emerge. Here, the question of realism has largely been avoided through reference to the not further explicated justifications. However, the problem is already sufficiently clear in relation to truth and knowledge. If \textit{the} truth and \textit{the} knowledge do not exist, what can be regarded as certain or obvious? The previous certainty melts away, possibly even reaching

\textsuperscript{46} The normative and social aspects of truth and knowledge cannot be dealt with here but shall at least be mentioned as desiderata.
the point of an existential experience of senselessness. In theoretical terms, we could describe this as relativism, in which no position is preferred. If all have an equal right to truth, anyone can contradict anything. This would naturally give rise to scepticism.

It is important to take a theoretical step back and reflect on the preconditions here. The descriptions of truth and knowledge in this paper do not imply arbitrariness by any means. First, the theoretical point of view of this paper is a general one and does not ensure any concrete procedure for evaluating truth or knowledge. For example, interdisciplinary research builds on long research traditions of different disciplines that each have their own procedures of justification, along with the well-established processes of justification in everyday life. These are not determined or evaluated with reference to the theory of truth sketched thus far. Second, the complexity of the conditions and circumstances that leads to complex processes of decision-making regarding truth and knowledge has already been described; there is no simple means of comprehensively capturing or regulating these concepts. If, nonetheless, this is seen as arbitrariness, one maintains a dichotomy between the truth and no truth at all as well as knowledge and no knowledge. Consequently, the underlying logic demands either compelling proof for certainty, inability to revise, unambiguousness and maybe even unity or abandonment of all these together. By contrast, a theoretical point of view could be developed that would not require one truth or one knowledge – except perhaps eschatologically, but that might give rise to other epistemological difficulties. This theory indicates that this two-valued option is far from obvious. Of course, if there is not one truth, it is not possible to prove that there is truth, let alone certainty or knowledge without the slightest possibility of any doubt. This is no defeat, of course, but a consequent self-application. Instead of dictating a result, one has to use reasons and counter-reasons in discourse. Of course, the theory of the notion and evaluation of reasons would have to be further elaborated.47 In concrete settings, it is quite possible to argue for truth or against it. The excluding alternative between certainty and relativism or scepticism is therefore the real illusion. Furthermore, the burden of proof would be only on one side distributed. That is, on the one hand, a strong notion of proof and truth is presupposed. On the other hand, the request for proof is delegated to the opposite party alone. This ignores that while there appears to be no infallible reliability, that does not mean there is no reliability at all.

47 One might first think of discourse ethics. However, it is quite astonishing how little Apel and Habermas are saying concretely about reasons and their related concepts (Cf. Kettner, Argumentative Discourse, Good Reasons, and “Communicative Rationality”, p. 331). So, even though these theories are quite important, there is still some work to be done.
Biography

Thorben Alles is a research assistant in the sub-project “Hermeneutics of Resilience. Theoretical documentation, supervision and comments on research problems and results” (University of Bonn) of DFG-Research Group 2686 “Resilience in Religion and Spirituality. Endurance and the Formation of Powerlessness, Fear and Anxiety”. From 2011 to 2018, he studied protestant theology, mathematics, educational sciences and philosophy in Bonn and Strasbourg. From 2014 to 2017 and in 2018, he was student assistant at the Institute of Hermeneutics of the Faculty of Protestant Theology at University of Bonn. From 2018 to 2020, he completed his postgraduate teacher training in Solingen.

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