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Stefano Colloca (ur.)

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Recenzija

The Value of Truth. The Truth of Value

Stefano Colloca (ed.)

Milano: LED Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere
Economia Diritto, 2013; 208 p.

Reviewed by Vojko Strahovnik (University of Ljubljana
and Faculty of Government and European Studies, Kranj)

The book *The Value of Truth. The Truth of Value* is an engaging collection of essays on the topic of truth, value and normativity. The book is the result of an international seminar *Nomologies 1* held at the Residenza Golgi in Pavia in 2011 and sponsored by the University of Milano and the University of Pavia. It features 13 contributions by some leading authors in the field, giving rise to a comprehensive and well-structured investigation of the subject. A number of essays are written in English and others are in Italian. The collection is accompanied by two prefaces, one by the collection's editor Stefano Colloca and by Paolo di Lucia, who briefly introduce the contributions and place them in a wider framework of the debate. They explicate that the essays in the book can be broadly divided into two clusters, with the first dealing with the value of truth, particularly with the familiar is-ought distinction in the context of the distinction between ontic judgments concerning truth and deontic judgments concerning values. The second cluster addresses the truth of value and predominantly the search for an *analogon* to truth in the evaluative domain. The second preface by Valerio Marotta offers an insight into some historical aspects of the debate. Taken together, these provide a nice supplement that guides the reader when moving through the essays that follow. The contributions are divided into three sections or parts. Part I entitled Truth features five essays that range from themes from the history of philosophy to contemporary debates on the nature of truth and related questions. Part II entitled Value includes four essays focused on axiology, while part III entitled Norm contains four essays dealing with questions of normativity as-

sociated with truth and value. The book concludes with a brief presentation of the authors and a useful index of names.

Below I will briefly sketch out the main ideas, although space only permits me to deal a little more closely with just a few contributions. In the first essay entitled *Vero de dicto vs. vero de actu* Amedeo, Giovanni Conte starts by discussing the interpretation of the etymology of the Greek “*aletheia*” and later addresses the relationship between the predication of truth aiming at judgments or what is said (truth *de dicto*) and predications of truth aiming at acts like the act of testimony itself (truth *de actu*), the latter being significantly less investigated in the literature. He also demonstrates this difference with some examples from the Gospel of John (Johannes, 5:32, 8:14, and 21:24 as representing *de dicto* ascriptions of truth and Johannes 5:31, 8:13, and 8:17 truth *de actu*). In the essay entitled *Anselmo D'Aosta/Anselm of Canterbury: la duplice duplicit del vero*, Paolo di Lucia tackles the question of the relationship between the notion of truth as correspondence and truth as rectitude as these appear in the works of Anselm of Canterbury. The third essay by Matjaž Potrč entitled *The Value of Truth* discusses the ontological grounding of truth ascriptions within a correspondence theory of truth and does so on the basis of distinguishing between truth as direct correspondence and truth as indirect correspondence. The former is ontologically committed to the existence of corresponding items in the world (entities, properties) stated by the sentence (consisting of nouns, predicates etc.). On the other hand, truth as indirect correspondence lacks such one-to-one commitment but still maintains correspondence with how things are in the world as a basis for ascribing the truth. This position arises from the following basic presuppositions. There are numerous sentences and statements that we use in our everyday life and also in scientific use of language that we take to be unproblematically true and quantify over entities that should not be countenanced within or compose the right minimal ontology. There is also no way to paraphrase these statements into ones that avoid commitment to problematic entities and no plausible way to identify the problematic entities with ontologically unproblematic ones. Truth is correct assertibility; a statement is true if and only if it is correctly assertible and for the truth of a statement two components are important, namely the world and contextually operative semantic standards. Potrč then goes on to investigate

some consequences that follow from this distinction particularly for the field of deontic statements and deontic commitments. In the paper *La confutazione del relativismo* (a translation from the English version not previously published), John R. Searle deals with relativism about truth, which he defines as “the theory that the truth (or falsity) of any proposition is always relative to certain sorts of psychological attitudes on the part of the person who states, believes or otherwise judges the truth of the proposition” (p. 51). The contrary position is truth absolutism as a claim that truth is not dependent on the feelings and attitudes of the people who are making or assessing the truth claim. He goes on to show how truth relativism refutes itself, building upon a standard version of the counter-argument for relativism which puts into question the relativist’s thesis itself and shows that the problem is not just that you cannot coherently state relativism, the problem is that if you are a consistent relativist you cannot coherently state anything. One consequence of the relativity of truth is the relativity of reality (ontological relativism). Ontological relativism is implausible according to Searle and it turns into solipsism. The first part concludes with an essay by Wojciech Żelaniec *Truth-Value and Self-Reference: Against the Spectre of the ‘Revenge Liar’*, which addresses a special aspect of the Liar paradox. Żelaniec defends a position that sentences like “This sentence is false.” and “This sentence is true.” that supposedly generate paradoxes are best interpreted as not having a truth value at all and further provides some insight into the motivation for holding such a view. The mentioned sentences do not express any thought, they lack thought contents and therefore also thought objects. At the end of the essay, the author briefly responds to an objection made by Francesco Berto, which stipulates that any attempt to avoid the Liar and similar paradoxes by denying that they have a truth value, simply makes the paradox recur on another level.

Part II of the book is dedicated to the topic of value. In an essay entitled *Two Arguments for Axiological Scepticism*, Stefano Colloca discusses two standard (Sextus Empiricus, Blaise Pascal) sceptical arguments about the foundation of values. Both arguments are a version of the so-called argument from disagreement. Sextus Empiricus argues that it is impossible to attain knowledge on matters of values since any objective value assertion can be based merely on unsupported hypothesis, which is further undermined by the

possibility of disagreement or an opposing view and accompanied by the lack of any hope of arriving at the final criterion that would decide the matter. Colloca calls this *a priori* argument from possible disagreement and contrasts it with Pascal's *a posteriori* argument from actual disagreement about values and their foundation. Colloca concludes that the latter argument is not tenable and that, on the other hand, the former is; one cannot conclude from a mere supposed existence of disagreement the lack of a foundation of values, although one must notice that also such an argument can shift the burden of proof to the one defending such a foundation to at least put forward a position able to accommodate the existence of such disagreement. In essay 7 *Sullo scetticismo pratico e il cognitivismo assiologico*, Roberta De Monticelli deals with the topic of practical scepticism in the context of legal and moral philosophy, and especially in relation to practical norms as embedded in social and political institutions. In an essay entitled *La verità come valore logico*, Giuseppe Lorini discusses some of the aspects of truth as logical value and situates it in the wider context of investigation of logical values. In the last essay in this part entitled *Valori personali e valori impersonali. Sulla teoria dei valori di Alexius Meinong* Venanzio Raspa investigates Meinong's value theory through the distinction between personal and impersonal values.

Part III of the book deals with norms and normativity in the context of truth and value. Francesca De Vecchi in her essay *Eidetica e normatività in Edmund Husserl* discusses the relevance of Husserl's theory of ontological dependence relations for the theory of value. Lorenzo Passerini Glazel in his essay *Norm Atrophy and Nomotropic Behaviour. On a Mode of Inexistence of Norms* discusses an interesting aspect of the interplay between norms and social reality. Methodologically, he understands norm both as a point of departure and as a point of arrival with regard to the exploration of social reality. Another important topic is the rejection of the unjustified reduction of the operancy of norms to their effectiveness. "A norm, though, may operate on (may have influence on) the behaviour of an agent in many different ways, and many of those ways are not reducible to the effectiveness (regarded as fulfilment) of that norm" (p. 160). Passerini Glazel utilises the notion of nomotropic behaviour and shows how it surpasses the mere fulfilment of a given norm. He also focuses on other

types of nomotropic behaviour as in the case where norm affects behaviour and our understanding of social reality even when it is not fulfilled. Another interesting aspect of these phenomena is the observance of our reactive attitudes and other consequences (e.g. imposition of sanctions, disapproval etc.) in cases where a norm is violated. All of this offers a valuable epistemological entry point into the existence and nature of norms and social reality. The essay concludes with a discussion of norm atrophy in relation to nomotropic behaviour. The book is rounded off with two essays engaged in dialogue with each other, the first essay is entitled *Mimetic Boundaries of Constitutive Rules* by Corrado Roversi and the second is *Repeal, Money (M1), Institutional Entities. Some Thoughts on Corrado Roversi's Mimetic 'Constitutive' Rules* by Edoardo Fittipaldi. The central point of the discussion is the constitutive power of rules and their mimetic limits together with the interaction of the mimesis of social practice and its teleology and deontology.

In conclusion, we can state that the book *The Value of Truth. The Truth of Value*. presents an appealing collection of essays tackling interesting points of the truth and value relationship. The essays included are informative, engaging and motivating. The collection as a whole is of interest and may be recommended to philosophers and students of philosophy interested in the theory of truth and value, philosophers working in the fields of normativity and to legal scholars. We may conclude with a high commendation of the book and with an invitation to dwell on the themes it addresses.

