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To Make Truth: Ontology, Epistemology, Technology

Maurizio Ferraris

Contrary to what is often argued, new realism is not a return to a pre-Kantian ontology, but proposes an enrichment of the philosophical perspective based on three terms: *ontology*, what there is, which in the case of natural objects is independent of what we know; *epistemology*, what we know, which interferes with what there is only in the case of social objects; and *technology*, what we do—often without concepts, such as when we use tools, speak a language, or perform social acts (promise, pay, confer or receive titles)—which ensures the transition from ontology to epistemology. This chapter will first define these three spheres and then analyze a world in which they interact.

Three theories of truth

At some point in the *Confessions*, Augustine poses an elementary, almost comical question: Why should I confess to God, who knows everything? What is the point of telling one's life to someone who knows more about me than myself? The answer is enlightening: Augustine says he wants to *make truth*, not only in his heart, but also in writing before many witnesses.¹ Does he mean that one makes truth just as one makes post-truth? Of course not: one can hardly pass off fashionable nonsense to an omniscient being. He rather means that truth is not only an inner process, but also a testimony that is made publicly, has a social value, and is, above all, something that entails effort, activity, and technical skill. Let us try to place this position within contemporary philosophy. To this end, I propose three theories of truth: hypotruth, which corresponds to mainstream hermeneutics; hypertruth, which is the mainstream analytic philosophy; and mesotruth, which is the theory I would like to develop in these pages.

Hermeneutic philosophers have developed an epistemic theory of truth that is, in fact, a *hypotruth*, a subordinate truth, as it is disconnected from ontology and rather consists of the conceptual schemes that mediate—and, in fact, constitute—our relationship with the world. In this version, with different degrees of radicality, “true” becomes synonymous with “conforming to a shared belief.” Thus, hermeneutic thinkers

rightly note that truth does not go by itself, as it requires a context and some actions. However, they go too far when they claim that truth only lies in investigational procedures, and that the idea of a world “out there,” independent of our conceptual schemes, is a pre-Kantian naivety. This way, they not only provide a theoretical guarantee for post-truth (which does not know what to do with it), but, above all, they lose the opportunity to give hermeneutics its right dimension, which—as I will argue later on—is technological and not ideological.

Most analytics, instead, develop a very strong notion of truth. I call it *hypertruth*, as it postulates a necessary correlation between ontology and epistemology, in which the proposition “snow is white” is true (epistemology) if and only if snow is white (ontology). This means: if snow is white, then it is true that snow is white, so it would be true that snow is white even if there was not (never was or never will be) any human on the face of the earth. For hypertruthists, if it is true that salt is sodium chloride, then this proposition was true even for an ancient Greek, although he did not have the tools to access this truth. To designate truth as a relationship between the proposition “snow is white” and the fact that snow is white is a thesis that one can hardly disagree with. However, hypertruthists draw the conclusion that this proposition would be true even if there had never been a human being on earth who could formulate it. And that is far from obvious.

This second thesis of hypertruth seems motivated by the concern that one might otherwise fall into hermeneutics and hypotruth. But this is by no means a necessary outcome. For example, Heidegger’s thesis that before Newton, the theories of the motions of the planets he enunciated were not true is not relativistic in itself: Newton’s laws (epistemology) did not exist, but the reality they referred to (ontology) existed. Newton revealed something that was already there. To say this does not mean—independently of the conclusions drawn by Heidegger—to argue that the motion of the planets was created by Newton, but that the true conception of the planets’ motion depends on the apparatus thanks to which Newton could elaborate his laws (in this case, mathematics, unthinkable without paper and pen), applying them to physical reality. In the same way, the true conception of the Medicean Planets depends on the technical device with which Galilei discovered them (in this case, a telescope), and this conception is not so despotic as to turn into planets those which are actually the four main satellites of Jupiter.

That salt is sodium chloride or that dinosaurs existed does not depend in any way on us and our conceptual schemes. However, what depends on us is that we developed chemistry (we did not have to), that we found bones and fossils, and that we proposed classifications and interpretations. Thus, before Newton, there indeed were planets and their interactions, which, of course, were exactly what they were without the intervention of any conceptual scheme. However, to claim, as hypertruthists do, that the laws were true even before they were discovered means either making a meaningless assertion, or—involuntarily converging with hypotruthists—making the interactions between planets depend on conceptual schemes.

Against hypotruth and hypertruth I propose what I call *mesotruth*. The point is not so much that mesotruth is halfway between the other two, but rather that it insists on the technical mediation between ontology and epistemology, that is, on the *apparatuses*,

devices, and *operations* I mentioned earlier. In mesotruth, truth is neither epistemology shaping ontology (as in hypotruth) nor ontology mirroring itself in epistemology (as in hypertruth). Rather, it is a threefold structure, including ontology, epistemology, and *technology*, which is the element—so far widely neglected in philosophy—ensuring the passage from ontology to epistemology and allowing us to *make* truth. For mesotruth, truth is the technological outcome of the relationship between ontology (what there is) and epistemology (what we know).

Let me clarify with a vaguely Peircean example. In a jar, there are twenty-two beans (ontology); I count them (technology); I make the statement: “There are twenty-two beans in this jar” (epistemology). The statement is true. The jar has some weight (ontology); I put it on a scale (technology); I make the statement, “The jar weighs 100 grams” (epistemology). This statement is also true. If I was in the United States, I would say that the jar weighs 3.5 ounces, and it would be equally true, even though 3.5 and 100 are different numbers. Moral of the story: truth is relative to the tools of technical verification, but absolute with respect to the ontological sphere to which it refers and to the epistemological need to which it responds. The terms “relative” and “absolute,” in the version I propose, indicate two different forms of the dependence of truth, in relation to technology and ontology, respectively.

In this way, truth depends on propositions, without—for this reason—being relative. There is white snow (or not) regardless of us humans (ontology). There is the phrase “snow is white,” which is true (if snow is white), and it depends on the fact that there are beings like us (it is hard to think of the validity of “snow is white” for a bat): this is epistemology, which is not necessarily related to ontology, despite the claims of hypo- and hypertruthists alike. And above all, there are operations that allow us to link ontology and epistemology, which I call “technology.” They include observing snow to ascertain whether it is white, the chemical analysis of salt to determine whether it is sodium chloride, finding out that the butler did it, and that the Donation of Constantine is a fake. There are, therefore, two very different spheres and a series of operations that can (though not necessarily will) connect them.

To clarify this theory, I propose a terminological reformation. In the analytic area, it is common to distinguish between truth makers and truth bearers, where the former would be the ontological foundation of a true proposition (snow is white) and the latter would be the epistemological expression of truth (the statement “snow is white”). This distinction, however, rests on the hypertruthist identification between ontology and epistemology. Conversely, in the perspective I propose, there can be reality without truth, but not truth without reality, and truth is something that is made: the set of true propositions that emerge from reality. What do I mean by this? A positive theory of verification. “To verify” comes from the Latin *veritas facere*: to make truth. This has two sides to it: that of invalidation (if snow is not white) and that of convalidation (if the snow is white). In the light of my threefold perspective, I propose a further differentiation: instead of understanding the ontological foundation as a “truth maker,” as ontology is what provides the material, I would suggest indicating the ontological layer as a “truth bearer”; the function of “truth maker,” instead, for what I have said, goes to technology, which is indeed responsible for making truth; finally, epistemology has the function of “truth teller.”

Truth bearers are what (using Peirce in an ontological, not gnoseological, sense) I propose we call “firstness”: the first thing that exists and exists independently is ontology, which makes up reality and is composed of individuals. Truth tellers constitute epistemology, what we know, which is always a “secondness” (something that is known, or is believed to be known, *about something* that is there: *τι κατὰ τινος*), which makes up truth and consists of objects, which are relational concepts that presuppose knowing subjects. Truth makers are the “thirdness,” the technology mediating between ontology and epistemology through interpretations, which serve as diagrams and generate facts. I summarize these terms in the table below and will describe them in greater detail in the following pages.

Truth bearers	<i>Firstness</i>	<i>Ontology</i>	<i>Reality</i>	<i>Individuals</i>
Truth tellers	<i>Secondness</i>	<i>Epistemology</i>	<i>Truth</i>	<i>Objects</i>
Truth makers	<i>Thirdness</i>	<i>Technology</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Facts</i>

Truth bearers

Let us start with *firstness*, which, from an ontological point of view, is not the first thing we know (as in Peirce), but is what is there regardless of whether we know it or not. This firstness is not the indeterminate, but the most determinate of things: the individual. From elementary particles to atoms to molecules to organisms, the world is composed of individuals, which are what they are regardless of whatever knowledge one may have of them. Individuals and their interactions constitute ontology, what there is, from which may—much later, or never—emerge epistemology (what we know) and politics (what we do as free or supposedly free agents). Firstness is precisely ontology, whose distinctive characteristic is the alternative between *existence* and *non-existence*. This may seem unimportant, but this alternative is, in fact, the basis of the three fundamental characteristics of what there is: unamendability, interaction, and emergence.

Unamendability defines *negative realism*, which has nothing to do with naive realism, for which perception would grant us truthful access to reality. Perception does not give us infallible access to reality (nor systematically illusory access): it is simply proof of its resistance. With the sole power of thought, I cannot turn a white object into a black object; I must at least take the time to turn off the light. Without this operation, which is an action, not a thought, the white object remains white, which confirms the unamendability of the perceptual with respect to the conceptual, which, in this case, is presented as the unamendability of ontology with respect to epistemology. We know that a stick immersed in water is not really bent, yet we cannot help seeing it bent.

Let us now come to *positive realism*, for which reality is not an indeterminate noumenon, but has positive characteristics. The latter manifest themselves through the fact that beings with different or no perceptual apparatuses, interpretive schemes, and conceptual schemes, can *interact*. For Cartesian negative philosophy (for which the

world is cookie dough shaped by the cutters of conceptual schemes), the world has no ontological consistency, and everything is traced back to thought and knowledge, whence the world is reconstructed in epistemology. For positive realism, instead, it is possible to start from ontology to found epistemology. The latter, of course, when it comes to the social world, can and must be constitutive (it is clear that laws are made by people, not atoms), while it cannot be such in the natural world, as posited by negative philosophy from Descartes to postmodernism. For our purposes, this means at least two things. First, that ontology is a solid space that does not need the forms imposed by epistemology. Secondly, that in order to interact and to live in general, there is no need for epistemology or concepts. Concepts serve the extremely rare and specialized function typical of some living beings, which is called “knowledge” (between the sphere of knowledge and that of being there is a disproportion that the constructionists have left unaccounted for: the first is enormously smaller than the second).

Unamendability and interaction are what characterizes the real as something that hurts us, escapes us, or meets us. That is what I call “emergence.” Its main characteristics, in the light of negative realism, are *resistance* and *persistence*: unamendability is the reason why individuals do not get out of the way or disappear very easily. Its traits related to positive realism,² instead, are variously linked to interaction: the *direction* of a movement, the *fixation* of traces, the *invitation*, the *affordances* coming from the individuals (to use Eco’s example: I can use a screwdriver to open a package, but not to drink). Unamendability, interaction, and emergence define the character of reality, which precedes truth. Between the first and the second there is an ontological and logical dependence, as well as a chronological difference: if reality is only potentially relational (if there were humans, then reality would smack them in the face and say “talk about me”), truth is thematically relational (in the perspective that I am defending, there is truth if and only if there are humans capable of making truth). The fact that being is different from, and prior to, knowledge is *a priori* material stronger than any conceptual *a priori*, and is as material and as *a priori* as the axiom for which there is no color without wavelength. If knowledge did not refer to something other than and prior to itself, then the words “subject,” “object,” “epistemology,” “ontology,” “knowledge,” and “reflection” would not make sense, or rather, they would be inexplicable synonyms.

Given that it is previous to and independent of our knowledge, reality (which we are part of ourselves) is composed of individuals: unities that are what they are independently of other factors (senses, concepts, past experiences). The first characteristic of individuals is that they are *external* to other individuals. By “external” I mean external to epistemology, so that exteriority qualifies as a non-topological but functional independence. We are surrounded by separate existences on which, in large part, we have no influence at all (and that, fortunately, largely have no influence on us). Despite the opinion of Berkeley and his many followers, there is no need to be known or to know in order to exist. These followers include not only hypotruthists but also hypertruthists, since both, although in different directions (the former from left to right, the latter from right to left), postulate an analytic correlation between truth and reality.

Truth tellers

Truth tellers always come second, and their field is therefore secondness. The term *secondness* is to be understood in an ontological and chronological sense (this may not be evident in “snow is white,” but it is very clear in “salt is sodium chloride”) since, as we have said, knowledge, being the knowledge of something, necessarily comes after the known thing. Knowing that snow is white means having the concepts of “snow” and of “white,” and linking them in a judgment, which is true if and only if snow is white. The sphere in which judgments take place is epistemology, which, however, depends not only on ontology but also on technology, which is the way through which epistemology has access to ontology, and which will be discussed later.

If ontology is about presence and absence, epistemology is about *truth*, *falsehood*, and *non-knowledge* (what is neither true nor false). It is neither an inert sphere, which only mirrors what there is, nor an overactive sphere, which fabricates everything there is. Rather, it is the field in which concepts take shape. The concepts of “number” or “disabled” do not exist in nature. They are sedimented and culturally selected: concepts like “calories” and “phlogiston” survive, but as historical and non-physical notions; with time, new concepts are formed. In the case of social objects, concepts have not only a descriptive, but also a performative value, as they highlight ontological layers still unseen: workers will discover that they are the victims of surplus value, people of color will find out they are discriminated against, and the bourgeois gentleman will find that he has spoken in prose all his life. But even in this case, truth refers to an ontological layer that is independent of epistemology, which merely gives it a form. Hypotruthists would object, saying that without epistemology there would be no ontology, as the characteristics of individuals are defined by knowledge and concepts. Which is obviously nonsense. Hypertruthist nonsense is less obvious, arguing that ontology and epistemology come at the same time: if salt is sodium chloride, then it is true that it is sodium chloride even if there are no humans on the face of the earth, or even if the humans that are there (say, Homer) have no knowledge of modern chemistry.

It seems strange that the proposition “salt is sodium chloride” would be true *in* Homer’s world, i.e., to be more precise, at Homer’s time, so many hypertruthists claim that it was rather true *of* Homer’s world, i.e., to be more precise, for us today considering Homer’s world. Now, if by “Homer’s world” one means the earth, that world is neither Homer’s nor ours nor anybody else’s, so saying that “salt is sodium chloride” is true of Homer’s world is meaningless. If, however, one means Homer’s age, saying that the proposition “salt is sodium chloride” is true of Homer’s era is false. Being true (today) of the world we know—and which probably has many characteristics in common with the world in which Homer lived, although we cannot be absolutely certain—does not equal being true (consequently) of an epoch in which, among other things, it was not known that salt is sodium chloride.

It also seems strange that a proposition like “salt is sodium chloride” (not to mention “stalking is a crime,” “practicing Christians do not eat meat on Friday,” “Nelson won the Battle of Trafalgar”) can have meaning regardless of language, and therefore of humankind. So, some hypertruthists insist on the non-linguistic but logical nature of propositions. However, I do not think that this changes much, not only because

hypertruthists themselves often speak of propositions as linguistic expressions (and one could hardly do otherwise), but especially because logic, like mathematics and language, is a technique whose existence depends on the existence of humans. We will see this shortly in my own theory, which, incidentally, is not very original as it is shared by all non-Platonist philosophers, i.e., most philosophers. Unless one is worryingly anthropocentric, and attributes properties of today's age to very ancient times, the proposition "there were dinosaurs on the earth" only appeared at a certain point in time: before, dinosaurs had still existed, but nobody knew it. And saying that for Homer it was true that salt is sodium chloride is like saying that "dinosaurs exist" (in the present) is true for us.

Finally, coming to the idea, shared by both hypo- and hypertruthists, of a necessary correlation between ontology and epistemology, it is worth observing that this correlation (which is, in fact, simultaneous) would deprive epistemology of its meaning. In fact, virtually all the beliefs held true 10,000 years ago, as far as we know, have now changed, so much so that Ramses II never suspected that he was dying of tuberculosis, although he did indeed die of tuberculosis. This is not only true of scientific knowledge. The whiteness of snow is a perceptive datum that applies to humans but not to bats. The proposition does not express a necessary fact: if there were no humans, snow would have all the properties it has, but the proposition "snow is white" would not be there, and would seem meaningless to anyone disagreeing with the hypertruthist belief that reality and truth are correlated. Even more so if "snow is white" stood for "snow appears to be white to the human perceptual apparatus" or (to complicate things even further) for "snow has the dispositional property of appearing white to the human perceptual apparatus."

As I said, *secondness is an essential characteristic of truth*. Truth comes after reality because it refers to it, differs from it, and depends on it. This is clear from a chronological perspective: from the point of view of truth, reality is not a starting point but a point of arrival, something that only comes later (if all goes well). In this way, truth is not archaeologically founded in reality; *it is teleologically oriented toward it*. Ontological emergence proceeds from the past to the present; the epistemological operation goes from the present to the past. This—anticipating the point I will deal with in the last part of this chapter—is the principle of making truth: finding out how things are, starting from a situation of not knowing. Truth, therefore, does not take place at the same time as reality, but always comes next. In this sense, truth has a teleological dependence on ontology (its purpose is to enunciate the truth about ontology), and a causal dependence on technology (without some form of technology we would have no truth).

If ontology is made up of individuals, epistemology refers to *objects* (*objectum*: a thing placed in front). These may be classic individuals (individuals in the strict sense), as is the case with natural objects, which exist in space and time independently of knowing subjects,³ and with *social objects*, which exist in space and time, but depend on knowing subjects—in fact, social objects manifest a general dependence on subjects, as they do not depend on a particular subject (10 euros do not cease to be such if I ignore the fact that they are 10 euros). However, objects may also be atypical individuals, as is the case with *ideal objects*, which exist outside time and space, independently of subjects. The fourth (and last) family of epistemological objects is that of *artefacts*,

which depend on subjects for their production (like social objects) but continue to exist even in the absence of subjects (like natural objects).

Truth makers

Epistemology concerns what we know, or think we know; it is a form (syntax, judgment, concepts) and has the values of truth and falsehood. Ontology concerns what there is; it is a force (something effective, an agent: resistance, unamendability, etc.) and has the values of existence and nonexistence. *Technology*, finally, concerns what we do, and its values are *success* or *failure* (or, if you prefer Austin's terminology, happiness or unhappiness).⁴

If ontology is firstness and epistemology is secondness (as it always refers to ontology), technology is *thirdness*, indicating the mediation between the former and the latter. There are, of course, reasons to say that technology is secondness and ontology is thirdness, but I prefer the above choice for three reasons. First, it allows me to re-link technology to the tradition of "thirds": the interrelations between reality and concepts, which are so common in the philosophical tradition (in order of appearance: the *chora* in Plato, the scheme in Kant, the dialectic in Hegel, the *différance* in Derrida). Secondly, it is the most interesting thing, so I prefer to keep it last. Finally, there is a third reason that suggests that technology should be allocated to the sphere of thirdness: technology is *becoming*, as it is no longer being (which is or is not) and is not yet knowledge (which is true or false). It is doing: it expresses a competence that can, though not necessarily will, lead to understanding⁵ (I only have a very vague idea of the psychophysical mechanisms that are activated by me typing these very words, and if I were a neurophysiologist, I would not type any better).

By "technology" I mean the wide range of actions we perform in a competent way without prior knowledge. These actions are varied, ranging from lighting a fire without any notion of physics to speaking a language without grammatical and syntactical knowledge, to creating works of art without having the ability to figure out why they were made exactly that way. In this sense, technology has a privileged relationship with gestures (though, of course, there can be technologies of thought, such as logic, mnemotechnics, arithmetic).

We act before thinking, and that way, new truths are discovered, while comprehension is necessarily linked to the formulation of analytic reasonings, which belong to the sphere of ascertained knowledge. This action allows for the emergence of truth from reality. This knowledge comes from doing and often surprises us (unlike analytic judgments, which make up knowledge that emerges from further knowledge, and are therefore not surprising). Competence is, in fact, a *praxis* that can result in *poiesis*, a practical attitude that leads to a result: the bee makes honey, the termite builds the termite mound, Michelangelo sculpts Moses, Maradona scores goals. But *poiesis*, the more-or-less ritualized action, may also happen for no reason, as shown by people who knit, scrabble on a piece of paper, or play with their phone. Without hands, and the experience of handling and grasping, thought would not exist; without the competence of manuality, there would be no comprehension.⁶ Hands are prehensile, they grasp

things (as Hegel knew very well, seeing the noun *Begriff*, “concept,” as related to the verb *greifen*, “to grasp”). Hands indicate and, when they indicate without grasping, making gestures, they start the production of symbols.

Speaking a language, lighting a fire, writing a novel, counting, interacting socially: these skills do not rely on conceptual schemes but on *interpretive schemes*, which, in some cases (as in, for example, finding a four-leaf clover in a meadow), mediate between concept (abstract and general) and perception (concrete and individual), but in many others—in fact, in the vast majority of cases—apply to perceptions or operate in the world independently of concepts. This is not surprising: we have a disposition that manifests itself from the most elementary devices and evolves in increasingly complex formations, like a reproductive faculty that transports ontology into epistemology. Conversely, technology is not only related to the remote origins of humankind but also to our highest intellectual achievements: it shows itself in mathematics and logic, in the creation of scientific experiments and artistic works, in the actions and rites that accompany our social lives.

New realist hermeneutics

The interpretive scheme is not a conceptual scheme (whatever this desperately vague expression means), but a practical rule through which we interact with individuals. In most cases, the rules are neither known nor explicit (I walk, play with my cat, apologize), in others the rules are explicit but not “understood.” What do I really understand when I count the beans in the jar? I follow a rule (“add one”) I learned as a child. At the same time, this operation is an interpretation not in the sense that it defines some conceptual horizon, but because it fulfills the practical function that traditionally belongs to hermeneutics, which, not coincidentally, is defined as *hermeneutikè techne*: the technique of carrying messages, capable of mediating as a link between the ontological layer of being and the epistemological layer of knowledge.

Hermes is the messenger of the gods, and the hermeneut is a mailman, one who performs the task of carrying messages (a hieroglyph, a Hungarian novel, a threatening letter, a love letter), which he almost never understands. And all the meanings of hermeneutics, ancient and modern, are easily attributable to practical operations: expression (the meaning of Aristotle’s *hermeneia*) means taking outside, translation means transporting, comprehension means grasping—all manual operations. Even deconstruction, typical of nineteenth- and twentieth-century hermeneutics, has a clear technical connotation. By understanding interpretation as an operation, I refer to two aspects. The first is the practical character of interpretation, namely the fact that it is perfectly possible without understanding—as we have seen, the latter is just one of the traditional functions of hermeneutics. For Plato, poets are messengers of the gods (*hermenes*),⁷ and considering his poor opinion of the poets’ knowledge, this is not a compliment.

The second, though, is that this operation allows for judgments: that is, technology can turn into epistemology. Consider the case of *a priori* synthetic judgments, which were Kant’s ultimate goal. They are indeed operations, as is clear in the arithmetic

example made by Kant himself: $7 + 5 = 12$, where 12 is synthetic and not analytic because it cannot be obtained from the analysis of 7 and 5, since I can achieve that result even by adding 6 to 6, 8 to 4, etc. Kant was so interested in *a priori* synthetic judgments because, in his conception, they depended on concepts that were independent of experience and therefore certain. Now, we can easily note that informative *a posteriori* synthetic judgments do indeed come from *operations*: we get the number of beans by applying the rule “add one,” and many pieces of information (for instance, what time it is or how much we weigh) come from machines, which have no concepts, only mechanisms regulating their functioning.

On the one hand, Kant offers us a hyper-conceptualist view (“intuitions without concepts are blind”), by which even the most distracted of intuitions depends on concepts. And Kant’s world is made up of epistemology (conceptual schemes with which we order the world) and ontology (the world that we order, and which we never really know, as it is made of things in itself, which we can only access as phenomena). On the other hand, however, in the chapter on schematism, Kant mentions a third term that lies between concepts and intuitions (that is, between epistemology and ontology): the scheme, defined as a “hidden technique” (*verborgene Kunst*, which usually translates as “hidden art,” but of course has the same meaning as “hidden technique”). The scheme performs operations (Kant defines it as a “construction method”).

Translating Kant’s proposal into my own terms, I suggest we invert the succession epistemology/technology/ontology (with the latter being inaccessible as such) into ontology/technology/epistemology. First there is ontology, with individuals that are not inaccessible as such because they manifest clear characteristics in interaction (among themselves and with us). That is, first there are individuals, e.g., snow, whose properties are independent of me, of you, of my cat, and of whomever: this is the ontology of what, later, we will recognize as natural objects. Then there are interpretive schemes, namely those operations that generate facts and are not free or subjective: I see snow with my visual apparatus and note that it is white (the operational aspect appears more clearly if we think of salt, which I have to taste to realize it is salty, or of beans, which I have to count). Finally, there are judgments, which constitute objects: snow is white; salt is salty (and, much later, salt is sodium chloride); there are 22 beans in this jar. If I said that snow is black, salt is sweet, and there are 21 beans in the jar, this would not be an interpretation but a mistake. What I do when I interpret something—I repeat—is not apply a conceptual scheme to some formless matter (“there are no facts, only interpretations”), but rather note the emergences of ontology (the properties of snow, salt, or the beans in the jar independently of me), through technological procedures (looking, tasting, counting), which may, though not necessarily will, produce epistemological judgments.

In so doing, mesotruth recovers hermeneutics without falling into the correlationism of hypo- or hypertruth. The mistake made by postmodernists was twofold: they treated hermeneutics as epistemology (the entirety of knowledge would be the outcome of interpretation) and as ontology (there are no facts, only interpretations, or, more modestly, every fact can be interpreted). The hyperbolic (and false) statement that “there are no facts, only interpretations” should be replaced with the principle that the existence of interpretations does not exclude the existence of facts, individuals, and

objects. As radical and attractive as it may be to think of undoing truth (which has fascinated philosophers and non-philosophers after Nietzsche), making truth seems to be a better idea, even though it is harder. Indeed, the saying “so easy to criticize, so hard to create” also applies to the art of interpretation.

Notes

- 1 See Augustine, *Confessiones*, X, 1.1.
- 2 Maurizio Ferraris, *Positive Realism* (London: Zero Books, 2015).
- 3 Compared to them, epistemology only adds an external property: the fact of being known. In this sense, natural objects are individuals because they are known as existing in space and time independently of subjects.
- 4 John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).
- 5 Daniel C. Dennett, *From Bacteria To Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds* (Cambridge, MA: Bradford Books/MIT Press, 2017).
- 6 Colin McGinn, *Prehension* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).
- 7 See Plato, *Ion*, 534 e.