

On “Truth is Good”

Marian David
University of Notre Dame

As to the preference which most people—as long as they are not annoyed by instances—feel in favor of true propositions, this must be based, apparently, upon an ultimate ethical proposition: ‘It is good to believe true propositions, and bad to believe false ones’. This proposition, it is to be hoped, is true; but if it is not, there is no reason to think that we do ill in believing it. Bertrand Russell, “Meinong’s Theory of Complexes and Assumptions” (1904).

Truth is objective. Truth is good. Truth is a worthy goal of inquiry. Truth is worth caring about for its own sake. Truth matters. These five claims are the ones Michael Lynch is most anxious to make, explain, and defend in his book.¹ My comments will focus primarily on the second claim, “Truth is good”, which Lynch says is a “truism” about truth. I will look in some detail at what this truism amounts to and how it relates to some of the other claims.

I

What does Lynch mean by his truism: “Truth is good”? He often rephrases it using words such as “it is good to have true beliefs”, or “having true beliefs is good”. As Lynch himself points out, this talk, though colloquial and quite serviceable for many purposes, is not strictly accurate, because, strictly speaking, “true” and “false” do not apply to beliefs at all; they apply to propositions: propositions are true or false (pp. 13, 56). However, as Lynch also points out (p. 56), propositions are not good or bad, at least they are not good or bad, period. Rather, what we should say is that propositions are good or bad *to believe*: true ones are good to believe, and false ones are bad to believe. So, colloquial talk of “having true beliefs” should be understood in terms of “believing true propositions”; and the colloquial versions of the truism, such as “it is good to have true beliefs”, should be understood to express what is expressed more accurately by: “true propositions are good to believe”, or “it is good to believe true propositions”, or most briefly, “it is good to believe what is true” (cf. pp. 12f, 56).

Two remarks: (1) Lynch does not actually hold that his truism is adequately captured by saying “it is good to believe what is true”, because this requires an important qualification. Unqualified, it suggests that believing what is true is *always* good *all things considered*, and this, Lynch says, is quite wrong, and he does not

¹ Michael P. Lynch: *True to Life: Why Truth Matters*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press 2004, xii+204 pp.

maintain it. Instead, what he maintains is this: believing what is true is always *prima facie* good, or *defeasibly* good, or good *other things being equal* (pp. 13, 46-51). (2) While Lynch qualifies his truism in the manner just indicated, there is no qualification or restriction when it comes to subject matter: believing what is true, *whatever* is true, is *prima facie* good; *any* true proposition is, *prima facie*, good to believe (cf. pp. 13, 46-51, 55).

II

Let's look at the simplest version of Lynch's truism, suppressing for the moment the "prima facie/other things being equal"-qualifier:

T. It is good to believe what is true.

This is interestingly ambiguous. It can be taken to say that what is true is good to believe, and it can be taken to say that believing what is true is good. Taking '*p*' to range over propositions, " \forall " as the universal quantifier, and using "G" for "good", the two readings can be represented, somewhat roughly, as

T1. $(\forall p)(Tp \rightarrow GBp)$,

and

T2. $G[(\forall p)(Tp \rightarrow Bp)]$,

where we can think of the "prima facie/other things being equal"-qualifier as being incorporated into the "G". Obviously, T1 and T2 differ with respect to the scope of "G". I want to suggest that this is more than a merely syntactic scope difference, that it bears on the meaning of "G": it indicates that the word "good" itself is being used here in two different ways.

Consider T1 first. For any particular proposition which is in fact true, T1 entails that it is *prima facie* good *to believe* this particular proposition. Here the word "good" is applied to the "act" of believing a particular proposition. Ethicists tend to point out that it's advisable to use the word "right" when commending actions and to keep "good" for the quite different use of evaluating non-actions, such as persons, things, conditions and states of affairs. Admittedly, believing a proposition is not quite a genuine action like helping a blind person across the road. Nevertheless, we tend to talk of believing as if it were a doing of some sort: using the active verb "believes", we treat believings as quasi-actions. I suggest that T1's use of "good" to evaluate these quasi-actions, believings, is best understood as being very close to the use of "right" when commending regular actions. So let me call T1's use of "good" the *right* use of "good".

Consider T2. This use of “good” differs from the one in T1. Here “good” is not used to commend believings of certain propositions conditional on the assumption that they are true. Instead, “good” is applied to a whole condition a person can be in, the condition of believing true propositions—one might also think of this as a state of affairs or as a state of affairs type.² This use of “good” is strongly reminiscent of the use of “good” that shows up when ethicists talk about the good or valuable states of affairs or conditions right actions are supposed to secure or realize. What’s inside the ‘[]’s in T2 specifies a good or value of this general sort, and T2 says that it is a good or value. So let me call the use of “good” in T2 the *value* use, or the *good* use, of “good”.

Lynch usually puts his truism in terms of T (or a more or less colloquial variant of T). But when he is at his most official, he adds an “only”-clause; he says: “other things being equal, it is good to believe a proposition when and only when it is true” (p. 13); and: “other things being equal, it is good to believe what is true and only what is true” (p. 48, cf. p. 51). Leaving the “prima facie/other things being equal”-qualifier silent again, we can put this official or *full* version of Lynch’s truism as:

FT. It is good to believe what is true and only what is true.

Modifying our two readings of simple T accordingly yields the two readings:

FT1. $(\forall p)(Tp \leftrightarrow GBp)$,

FT2. $G[(\forall p)(Tp \leftrightarrow Bp)]$.

Considering the full version of Lynch’s truism, it now looks as if FT2 is the better rendering of what he has in mind. For it tells us, or at least it strongly suggests, that it is *good not* to believe propositions that are untrue, which seems to be what FT is supposed to be saying; whereas FT1 tells us that, if a proposition is untrue, it is *not good* to believe it, which doesn’t seem to be quite what FT is saying.

Lynch sometimes says his truism is or expresses a *value*, “the value of truth” (p. 13), and he frequently connects this with talk of truth as a goal worthy of pursuit and worthy of caring about (pp. 13-17, 120). This goes well with FT2.³

² Waffling over conditions vs. states of affairs is due to the fact that T suppresses reference to the subjects, *S*, who do the believing. Adding them yields two versions of T2. First, “ $(\forall S)G[(\forall p)(Tp \rightarrow SBp)]$ ” tells us that, for everyone, it is good for him/her to be in the condition of believing what is true. Second, “ $G[(\forall S)(\forall p)(Tp \rightarrow SBp)]$ ” tells us that the state of affairs of everyone believing what is true is good. I’ll try to gloss over this additional complication.

³ In his official formulations, Lynch uses a comma after the “other things being equal”-qualifier, apparently giving it wide scope. This also suggests FT2.

On the other hand, Lynch also says his truism is a *norm* or *rule*, “the truth-norm or rule” (pp. 13, 47). This goes much better with FT1: for it is FT1 which says that it is *prima facie* right to believe *p*, provided *p* is true, and *prima facie* not right to believe *p*, provided *p* is untrue. Note that Lynch needs FT1, or at least T1, in any case, because he wants to say things like: “beliefs that portray the world as it is are good” (p. 19); and “being true always makes a proposition *prima facie* good to believe” (p. 47); and he wants to talk about “the value of any particular true belief *qua* true belief (p. 52). That is, he clearly wants the inference from “*Tp*” to “it is *prima facie* good/right to believe *p*”. For this, he needs FT1, or at least T1.

So, while the official version of Lynch’s truism suggests FT2, various things he says about, and does with, his truism suggest FT1.

III

What is the relation between FT1 and the FT2? It is tempting to think about the relation between the right use of “good” in FT1 and the good use of “good” in FT2 as if Lynch were engaged in developing some sort of *teleological* ethics of belief, relating the right to the good. This analogy is, I think, fairly apt. But there is a difference. Teleological ethicists are usually *consequentialists*; they hold that whether an action is right or wrong depends on its causal consequences, roughly, on how much good performing the action brings about downstream. The relation between FT1 and FT2 is not quite like that. According to FT1, a quasi-action of believing a particular proposition *p* is *prima facie* right provided *p* is true. Now, if *p* is indeed true, and you believe *p*, i.e. if you do what is *prima facie* right with respect to *p*, then you are *a fortiori* one tiny step closer to being in the good state specified by FT2. That’s because believing a truth is *constitutive* of the *prima facie* good of believing what is true. The causal consequences of believing a truth seem to drop out of the picture as far as FT2 is concerned (which of course does not mean that they drop out of the picture entirely: believing a particular truth may have various bad causal consequences, e.g. it may enable you to harm others more efficiently, which is why believing a truth is only *prima facie* right rather than right period).

A worry: On second thought, the causal consequences of believing will re-enter the picture—complicating it considerably—as soon as we take *temporal* references into account. It seems FT2 tells me that (a) it is *prima facie* good to be *today* in the state of believing what is true, and also that (b) it is *prima facie* good to be *tomorrow* in the state of believing what is true. By FT1, to believe a particular truth *today* is *prima facie* good/right. It is also partly constitutive of (a). So, in believing that particular truth today, I am doing well with respect to (a). But believing that particular truth today may have bad causal consequences with respect to (b); it may somehow cause me to believe more falsehoods tomorrow than I otherwise would have. Say there are no other considerations in play relevant to whether it is good/right to believe that particular truth: Is it good/right, all things

considered, to believe that truth today? It looks as if FT2 is getting into conflict with itself here.

A much more general question—one about the structure of Lynch’s “ethics of belief”: Consequentialist ethicists can say that actions are right or wrong *because* of their relation to the good. Is Lynch’s view a version of this? Is it his view that it is prima facie right to believe particular truths (=FT1) *because* it is a prima facie good to be in the condition of believing what is true (=FT2)? I wonder. Given that this prima facie good, FT2, appears to be wholly constituted by right believings, this would seem a bit curious. How can FT2 “ground” the rightness of right believings, when it looks like it is itself nothing over and above the sum of right believings? But maybe the “because” is supposed to go the other way round? Maybe the view is that being in the condition specified in FT2 is a prima facie good *because* true propositions are such that it is prima facie right to believe them (=FT1). Would this mean that Lynch’s ethics of belief is better thought of as *deontological* rather than teleological? Or maybe it is misguided to ask such questions; maybe it is misguided to ask: Which of the two, FT1 or FT2, is the more fundamental one, if any?⁴

IV

My representation of Lynch’s truism, using the good/value sense of “good”, i.e.,

FT2. $G[(\forall p)(Tp \leftrightarrow Bp)]$,

requires charitable reading. This comes out most clearly when we connect it, as Lynch also does, with talk of truth as a goal, as something I want or might want (assuming that I want what is prima facie good). Taken as a claim about what I want, FT2 could be read as saying that (1) I want propositions to be true if and only if I believe them—which would make me look a bit crazy. But it is a misreading: surely,

⁴ If Lynch inclines towards the first option, i.e. if right believings are good in the constitutive sense of “good” (because they are constitutive of the prima facie good specified in FT2), then I have a Moorean worry. At various places later in the book, Lynch seems to take it for granted that what is constitutive of an intrinsic good (of something worth caring about for its own sake) is itself intrinsically good, because it is not merely instrumentally good (cf. pp. 127f., 136). Moore would object, pointing out that a whole that is intrinsically good might be an “organic unity”, having constituents that contribute crucially to its intrinsic value even though they are not themselves intrinsically good (i.e. what is “good” merely in the constitutive sense is a non-instrumental but still extrinsic good). Interestingly, Moore suggested that true belief is just such a merely constitutive good: “[I]t appears that knowledge [he tends to mean “true belief”], though having little or no value by itself, is an absolutely essential constituent in the highest goods, and contributes immensely to their value”; see G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge 1903), sect. 120; cf. also sects. 116-120; cf. also Moore’s, *Ethics* (Oxford 1912), pp. 154f. Lynch, it seems, ought not reject the general idea of such organic unities. For he holds that true propositions are not intrinsically good (not even prima facie), even though it looks like they are constituents of *believings* of true propositions which, according to Michael, are (prima facie) intrinsically good.

my “want” ought to be understood as directed not at the propositions but at my beliefs. This makes it tempting to read FT2 as saying that (2) I want my beliefs to be true rather than false. But this doesn’t seem right either. It suggests that I want *the beliefs I actually have* to be true (rather than false); that I want *my beliefs*, whatever they are, to be true. Taken strictly, this would mean that in case of conflict, in case the world does not conform to my beliefs, I would expect the world to change so that it does conform to my beliefs. That would be hybris or megalomania—or maybe it would mean that I am confusing my beliefs with my desires. No, the intended interpretation of FT2, taken as specifying a goal, is of course that (3) I want to believe whatever is true and only whatever is true: in case of conflict, I want the misfit beliefs to go away and be replaced by ones that conform to the world.

At one point, Lynch makes, I think, a mistake similar to the second misreading of FT2, namely in his preliminary discussion of the claim: “Truth is worth caring about for its own sake”. Going by the idea that our *de facto* caring for something “is very good evidence that we find it worthy of caring about” (p. 19), his main point in these pages is to convince us that we do in fact care about truth for its own sake and not only for the instrumental value true beliefs tend to have. To convince us of this, he uses, among others, a brain-in-a-vat scenario and a Russell-world scenario (in the latter, the world, including me, began to exist yesterday, so that my beliefs about the past are all false). In both cases, my actual beliefs are held fixed, i.e., it is stipulated that I have the beliefs I actually have; and it is asked whether I would prefer to live in the normal world or in the alternate world of the scenario (cf. pp. 17f.). This, it seems to me, ought to be irrelevant to the issue at hand. The expected response, namely that I prefer to live in the normal world, indicates at best that I want my beliefs, the beliefs I actually have, to be true, that I want to live in the world in which the beliefs that I actually have are true. This does not indicate that I want to believe whatever is true. To show the latter, especially, to show that I care about believing what is true for its own sake rather than for its instrumental value, Lynch has to present a scenario where I am in *one* world but with *two* radically different belief-sets, one made up of true beliefs and the other made up of false beliefs, which nevertheless are equally valuable on purely instrumental grounds; and he has to convince me that I prefer to have the set with the true beliefs, even though its cash-value is no higher than the one with the false beliefs.

V

To keep things simple, I go back now to the one-sided versions of Lynch’s truism:

T1. $(\forall p)(Tp \rightarrow GBp)$,

T2. $G[(\forall p)(Tp \rightarrow Bp)]$.

The universal quantifiers I put in highlight a natural worry: “Is he serious: *all* true propositions?—each and every one?” Lynch, it seems, is serious about this: it is, he says, “*prima facie* good to believe even the most trivial truth” (p. 55). Of course, there is the “*prima facie*”-qualifier to soften the blow. But still, one might well think: “Come on, that’s not even *prima facie* good!”

It is difficult to criticize claims with “*prima facie*/other things being equal”-qualifiers: objections tend to receive the response that that’s a case where other things aren’t equal. But maybe we can do something with T2. After all, we know that Lynch takes our actually caring or not caring about something as good evidence for whether we find it worth caring about, which ought to be evidence for whether we regard it as good or valuable. So: Do I want to believe all truths, including all trivial truths? Lynch’s examples of trivial truths are truths about how many threads there are in my carpet or in my shirt (pp. 55, 120). Such examples are not quite representative of the mindboggling amount of triviality and redundancy involved in believing all truths: “all truths” comprises not only each and every trivial truth of the “how many threads in my carpet”-variety, but also every conjunction of every two truths I already believe (trivial or non-trivial), including, of course, complex conjunctions whose conjuncts are themselves conjunctions of truths I already believe (trivial or non-trivial); it also comprises every disjunction of (trivial or non-trivial) truths I already believe with any propositions you like; and lots of other redundant “garbage” of this sort. This seems a bit much.

Lynch responds to worries about trivial truths by pointing out that, when it comes to truths such as the one about the number of threads in my carpet, the *prima facie* value of believing what is true will be overridden by the time and energy it will cost me to acquire the true beliefs, so that it won’t be good all things considered to believe such trivial truths (pp. 55, 120). But this response does not cover trivial truths that come at no cost additional to the cost, if any, incurred by what we are already doing anyway. We pick up trivial truths at no additional cost while watching TV, being too lazy to get out of the chair anyway; or maybe we are listening to the TV while doing something else that is actually worthwhile but doesn’t require a lot of concentration—even commercials will be good for truths like “They are *saying* this is the best toothpaste of all times”, though probably not for “This *is* the best toothpaste of all times”. Do we really care about believing trivial truths that come for free? In the end, this is of course a personal question. But I suspect quite a few people will say: Not at all.

Many people attribute omniscience to God, which entails that God believes all truths without exception, even the most stultifyingly trivial and redundant ones. This, I take it, is evidence that they regard believing all truths as a good, as an in-principle valuable state, even though they might not be much inclined to adopt it as a goal *for themselves*—so T2 might be a case where what people care and don’t care about for themselves is not a very good indicator of what they are prepared to regard

as a good. Divine omniscience is usually paired with divine omnipotence: supposedly, it costs God no time or energy or any effort at all to believe all the truths, not even to believe the vast amounts of all the redundant truths mentioned earlier.⁵ It seems people are prepared to regard believing *all* truths as a good, provided it is *guaranteed* that believing all the trivial and redundant truths involved in believing all truths doesn't cost the believer anything at all. Can this observation lend support to Lynch's view? I am not sure. It would have to be developed a bit more. In particular, Lynch would have to look into the difference between regarding something as a good, abstractly speaking—for God, say—and regarding something as a good *for us*. In any case, there is still the introspective conviction, which I think quite a few people have, that they simply don't care about believing trivial truths and simply don't care about believing free trivial truths either.⁶

VI

Michael often talks of truth as being “worthy of pursuit, of being a goal of inquiry” (p. 15). He also says that we “care about truth” (p. 17), that “we want the truth, warts and all” (p. 15). And he says that “something's being good is action-guiding” (p. 56); and at one point he says: “in believing, we are guided by the value of truth” (p. 13). I want to end with a puzzle about the idea of truth as a value or goal that guides belief.

To begin with, consider how odd T1 becomes when taken as talking about goals or wants rather than about what is good/right to believe—for definiteness, I put in a “W” for “want”:

T1. $(\forall p)(Tp \rightarrow WBp)$.

Note that this does not specify a goal. It makes a very false factual claim. It claims that every true proposition is such that I want to believe *it*. But I do not have that

⁵ Also, God might be able to get around a problem that makes it particularly hard for us to understand what it would even mean to reach the goal of believing all the truths: Take one true proposition *p*. Assume you believe *p*. There is another true proposition, namely that you believe *p*. Assume you believe that too. There is another true proposition, namely that you believe that you believe *p*; and so on. Somehow, God apparently manages to believe all these truths in one stroke—no effort required.

⁶ In *De Interpretatione*, 17^a38-18^a13, Aristotle mentions what are called “indefinite” statements, such as “man is white”, about which Ackrill says: “The peculiarity of the indefinite statement is that it lacks an explicit quantifier”; see Aristotle's *Categories and De Interpretatione*, translated by J.L. Ackrill (Oxford 1963), p. 129. It strikes me that using such indefinite phrases, lacking explicit quantifiers, is most likely to yield a formulation of a truth-goal that people might actually be inclined to assent to when queried, viz.: “I want to believe true propositions and not believe false propositions”. Putting in explicit quantifiers, on the other hand, always ends up sounding either too bold (“I want to believe *all* true propositions and not believe any false propositions”) or too meek (“I want to believe *some* true propositions and not believe some/any? false propositions”). Russell uses indefinite phrases in the quote given at the beginning.

many wants—and the claim remains false even if we silently restrict the initial quantifier to non-trivial, important, and humanly graspable propositions: there are still way too many truths of that sort for me to have that many wants.

Note also that reading T1 like this takes us to the strange idea of someone's wanting to believe particular propositions. Admittedly, this is not downright impossible. Sometimes people who have lost faith do *want to believe*, say, that there is a god after all. But this is a rare and rather special condition to be in. It is unusual to have non-conditional wants with respect to particular propositions, i.e. wants of the form: "I want to believe *p*". No doubt, this is somehow connected with the fact, frequently pointed out nowadays, that the quasi-action of believing is not under our voluntary control, at least not in anything like the direct way in which many genuine actions are under our voluntary control.

Michael is of course aware of this—at least most of the time.⁷ When he talks about truth as a goal, what he usually has in mind are not the weird goals with respect to particular truths mentioned in T1, but the one *global goal* specified in T2, which I now also put in terms of "W" for "want":

T2. $W[(\forall p)(Tp \rightarrow Bp)],$

i.e., "I want to believe all truths"—if you want, you can take the quantifier as silently restricted to propositions of a certain sort, say important propositions; it won't make much difference.

Note that the goal/want version of T2 makes considerably more sense than the goal/want version of T1. (I think this supports my idea that there are two uses of "good" in the original versions of T1 and T2: T2's value use of "good" is closely linked to talk of goals and wants; T1's right use of "good" is not.) Nevertheless, I want to raise a worry about the goal/want version of T2.

Say you're going through a stack of CDs in the bargain bin at the record store with a global goal like T2 in mind: you want to buy all CDs by Tricky (and only CDs by Tricky, but I'll go on suppressing this part to keep things simple). You're presently looking at the eighth CD. We can say that, when considering this particular CD, your

⁷ Though apparently not always. Summing up his discussion of the two scenarios mentioned in section IV, Michael uses the following formulation: "if such and such is the case, I want to believe that it is, and if I believe that it is, I want it to be the case" (p. 18). The first half of this formulation sounds way too much like the absurd version of T1 read in terms of "wants". (The second half seems to involve the mistake pointed out in section IV: as if I wanted the beliefs I actually have to be true, rather than believe whatever is true.)

global goal, T2, turns into a *conditional goal* with respect to that particular CD: you want to buy it *if* it is by Tricky. Less ambiguously put, what you want is this: to buy this CD *if* it is by Tricky. You have, as it were, pushed the “W” one step inside. For each *p* under consideration:

T3. $W(Tp \rightarrow Bp)$.

Now, say you *believe* of this particular CD you’re looking at that it is by Tricky. You will then want to buy this CD (unless it is too expensive, broken, etc.). That is, upon believing that this CD is by Tricky, your conditional goal with respect to this particular CD has turned into a non-conditional goal with respect to this particular CD; it has turned into the intention to buy this CD.

Compare this with a case where you’re going through a list of propositions (or a list of sentences expressing propositions), with a global goal like T2 in mind: you want to believe all the propositions that are true (and only the ones that are true). You’re presently considering the eighth proposition on the list. Just like earlier, we can say that, when considering this particular proposition, your global goal, T2, turns into a conditional goal with respect to this particular proposition: you want to believe it *if* it is true. Less ambiguously put, what you want is this: to believe this proposition *if* it is true—an instance of T3. So far, so good. But now the analogy breaks down. If we were to continue in the same vein as before, we would have to go on like this: Say, you *believe* of this particular proposition under consideration that it is true. You will then...What? You will then want to believe this proposition? No, this is too odd. Note that it is not merely odd because wanting to believe a particular proposition is odd anyway. It’s additionally odd because you’re already believing this particular proposition to be true. Given that, there just doesn’t seem enough room for also *wanting* to believe it, for forming the intention to believe it.⁸

No doubt, my example is a bit artificial: in many cases belief formation does not work like this at all (e.g. in perception). However, we *can* do what I just described. We *can* go through a list of propositions with the global goal in mind to believe the ones that are true (actually, reading non-fiction literature is a bit like that). But when we do this, what happens does not seem to be at all like what happens when we go through some CDs with the global goal in mind to buy the ones by Tricky. For some reason, a very basic picture of what pursuing a goal amounts to does not seem to work when the goal is T2. Why is that?

⁸ Cases where a person wants to believe some particular proposition tend to be cases where the person has *lost* her faith, where she does *not* believe the proposition and does *not* believe that the proposition is true.

The reason why the analogy breaks down is, I think, different and independent from the issue of belief not being under voluntary control. Note that the oddness in my example remains even if we pretend that belief *is* under voluntary control. Imagine I have a psycho-physical computer program: I can plug my brain into my computer via a cable; I can scroll through a list of declarative sentences that appear on the screen; by clicking the DOWNLOAD-button next to a sentence I can cause myself to believe what the sentence says. Bracketing various question about how this program is supposed to work, I can see how I might use it with the goal in mind to believe the propositions that make me feel good about myself. I would try to figure out whether believing a proposition under consideration would make me feel good. Having come to the conclusion that it would, I would click the DOWNLOAD-button. But it's difficult to see how I would use the program with the goal in mind to believe the propositions that are true: once I have come to the conclusion that a proposition under consideration is true—hence, worthy of being downloaded—downloading it has become pointless.

The feature that makes my original example odd arises, as it were, one stage earlier than the involuntariness of belief; it arises with respect to the antecedent of T3 rather than the consequent. When it comes to buying CDs, we can go through three steps: (1) start with a global goal like T2; then (2) convert this global goal into a conditional goal with respect to a particular thing under consideration, which is an instance of T3; and then (3) convert this conditional goal into a non-conditional goal (“I want this”) *by coming to believe* that the thing satisfies the relevant condition. But in the special case where the relevant condition is *being true*, coming to believe of a particular thing (a particular proposition) that it satisfies the condition leaves no room for step (3): believing that p is true leaves no room for converting the conditional goal into a non-conditional goal, for wanting to believe p .

My talk of believing that p is true “leaving no room” for wanting to believe p is of course rather loose. Without going into much detail (and the details appear to be a bit complicated), I can maybe put it like this. When you believe that p is true, you *in effect* believe that you have already reached the goal of believing p if p is true. To then want, or intend, to believe p is odd because it's like wanting to possess something, or intending to get something, of which you believe you already own it.⁹

In the section entitled “Truth Is a Worthy Goal of Inquiry”, Michael reminds us that “belief isn't something we have direct voluntary control over”, and he points out that because of this “the pursuit of truth is in fact always indirect” (p. 14). It seems to me

⁹ The “*in effect*” glosses over questions like this. Is $B(Tp)$ sufficient for believing that one has reached one's goal with respect to p ? Wouldn't one have to $B(Tp \& Bp)$ first? Or is it enough that $B(Tp)$ gives one a (strong) disposition to $B(Tp \& Bp)$ on reflection?

that the odd feature I've described above is a second, and seemingly more fundamental reason why the pursuit of truth has to be indirect: it would still have to be indirect, even if we had voluntary control over what we believe—at least, there seems to be no intelligible conception available of how we would pursue this goal directly, even if we had voluntary control over our beliefs.

When Michael tells us how to go about *indirectly* pursuing the goal of believing what is true, he mentions genuine actions along the lines of going to the library to gather evidence with respect to the question whether *p* is true (cf. p. 14). This talk may be quite alright provided we don't confuse genuine actions, such as going to the library to collect evidence, with the quasi-action of believing. That is, it may be quite alright to say that T2 is *action*-guiding, but to think of it as guiding *belief* seems to be an altogether different and more problematic matter: in light of the odd feature I described above, it does not seem to make much sense to conceive of T2 as guiding belief.¹⁰ In fact, I am inclined to wonder whether it is even a good idea to talk of T2 as action-guiding after all. It looks like we have no conception of what it would mean to pursue T2 directly. Given that, Do we really have a clear conception of what it means to pursue it indirectly?

¹⁰ I should point out that the third passage quoted at the beginning of this section is the only place where Michael explicitly indicates that he might be thinking of the value of truth as guiding belief.