

REALISM AND TRUTH IN *THE LOGIC OF SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY*

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It is typically thought that truth plays a significant role in Popper's philosophy. Truth is the aim of science, and in Popper's hands, truth also provides a powerful response to relativism — by underlying a methodology that provides rules to choose between rival theories and select tentatively the theory that is closer to the truth. As a result, it comes as no surprise that truth is so basic for Popper's realism (Popper [1963], Chapter 10).

In this paper, I argue that this is *not* the picture articulated in *Logik der Forschung*. In this book, Popper basically adopted what we now call a *deflationary conception of truth*: truth is fundamentally a logical device, and it can be thoroughly dispensed with (see Popper [1934], section 84). Moreover, rather than taking truth to be the aim of science, in 1934 Popper was proud to have avoided the use of the concept of truth in his logic of science ([1934], pp. 273–274). Relativism then does become a challenge; a challenge that Popper tries to take up — with *methodological decisions* regarding the empirical basis ([1934], p. 111). Needless to say, with such meager resources, he cannot successfully meet the challenge.

Popper's conception of truth, and of its role, changed substantially from the original edition of *Logik der Forschung* (1934) to the publication of the English translation (1959). As he acknowledges, after being exposed to Tarski's theory of truth, not long after finishing *Logik der Forschung*, Popper was “no longer hesitant in speaking of ‘truth’ and ‘falsity’” ([1934], p. 274, note *1; this footnote was added to the English translation). Of course, Popper also gave a particularly strong interpretation of Tarski's theory of truth: one that makes the theory substantive and realist. To resist relativism, Popper could then use the notion of truth, and eventually developed his theory of verisimilitude (see Popper [1963], Chapter 10).

In this paper, I examine the dramatic shift that Popper's conception went through from 1934 to 1959, and I ask whether this shift succeeds in resisting the challenge of relativism and in articulating a robust form of realism about science. I argue that it doesn't. In the end, the metaphysically more inflationary Popper isn't more capable of resisting relativism than the deflationary one. It's unclear that the additional metaphysical assumptions are doing much work for Popper's realism.

Popper, K. [1934]. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. (The revised English translation, with new appendices and footnotes, was published in 1959.) London: Hutchinson.

Popper, K. [1963]: *Conjectures and Refutations*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.