

## THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

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### ON THE MEANING OF TRUTH.<sup>1</sup>

THE philosopher labors under a difficulty which is not felt in the several sciences: the terms which he employs, at least when any of the larger and more interesting problems are in question, are, almost without exception, what Matthew Arnold calls 'literary' terms. They have no single determinate meaning. They cover a variety of meanings which imperceptibly shade into one another. They are like living things, and in the actual business of intellectual intercourse they have a bland and genial way of adapting themselves to the company they keep. This is one reason why philosophical discussions are in their unique way so humanly interesting, and also one reason why they are apparently so interminable. We are forced to speak the language of the market-place, which means we must use terms that lack precision. Since every one uses these terms, every one understands them, — until he is brought to book and asked to define his meaning. Then he finds it well nigh impossible so to define his meaning as to make it include all he intends the term to cover without at the same time including a great deal more. Truth is just such a term. We all use it, and all know what it means, until we try to make that meaning definite and explicit. Then even those who should be experts are non-plussed.

The first answer that one is tempted to make to "jesting Pilate's" question is the sophists' answer: "There are truths many, and no lack of definitions of them." But if a Socratic gadfly is on hand to rouse us from our sluggishness by urging: "But

<sup>1</sup> Read as part of the 'discussion' of this subject at the Cornell meeting of the American Philosophical Association, December 28, 1907.