



## Theories of Truth

### KEYWORDS

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**ABSTRACT** *On characteristic of any proposition we know is that it must be true. If it is not true, we cannot be said to know it. Truth is involved in knowing. A proposition can be true without being known to be true, but it cannot be known to be true without being true.*

*The word 'true' is used in many senses. Philosophers are concerned only with the sense of 'true' in which truth is property of characteristic of proposition. A true proposition describes a state-of-affairs which is actual – that is, which actually exists and a false proposition reports a state-of-affairs which does not actually exist. When a sentence is used to report a state-of-affairs, and this state of affairs is actual, then the proposition that the sentence expresses is true. Further, any other sentence that is used to express the same state-of-affairs will also express a true proposition.*

*There are different kinds of truth, and we can discover the truths of different propositions in many different ways, for example, truth as correspondence, truth as coherence, truth as pragmatic etc .*

*According to the correspondence theory of truth a proposition is true if it corresponds with a fact; that is with a state-of-affair. How does a true proposition corresponds to a facts? According to A. C. Ewing, the word "Correspondence" suggests that when we make a true judgment, we have sort of picture of the real in our minds and that our judgment is true because, this picture is like the reality it represents.*

*According to the pragmatic theory of truth , truth is what "Works", and true proposition is one that works. Suppose, I believe that there are living organisms on mars.. If I go to Mars and find living organisms there, then indeed my belief has turned out to be true (i.e. "it works") and it is true because that proposition describes and actual state of affairs.*

*'Coherence' is a relation among propositions. 'A group of proposition is coherent' means each of them supports the other ones – they are mutually supporting. Whatever the relation of a group of propositions may be to each other, the question of truth does not arise until we consider whether any or all of these propositions reports an actual state – of-affairs in the world. In this sense coherence is a matter of degree.*

### INTRODUCTION

The words 'true' and 'false' are sometimes used in ordinary language as adjectives of things and persons as in phrases like "a true friend", true patriotism', 'true love', and in expressions like "a false tooth", "a false alarm", "a false button" etc. In epistemology however we are concerned with 'truth' and 'falsity' as common properties of true and false propositions as shown in the last section. With regard to such properties two questions can perhaps be raised. If we ask the question what is the nature of truth, we are seeking a definition of truth as distinguished from falsity. If again we ask the question, how is a true proposition known to be true, we are demanding the test or the criterion of truth. In the former case we are asking what is it that makes the true judgments true as distinguished from erroneous ones; in what does truth and falsity consist. What is the character of a judgment which makes us say that it is true? But the problem of the test or criterion of truth is something different. The question here is how we come to know that a judgment is true as distinguished from an erroneous one. What is the criterion by which we measure or appreciate the truth of a judgment? Truth and the knowing of truth being different, the two questions should be kept distinct. The knowing of truth is only a psychological accident and judgment may be true or false without being known as such (Russell).

Though there is an important element of truth in this view, the distinction cannot be regarded as absolute. The realists make a separation between truth and its test and believe that the nature of truth consists in correspondence or agreement of our judgment with the external reality, whereas its test or criterion may consist in self-evidence, coherence or practical success. A judgment that is obvious or judgment that does not contradict our established body of knowledge or a judgment that works in practice are known to be true. But a judgment is

true because it agrees with reality. Such distinction between nature of truth and test of truth implies that a truth can exist without being known as such. But a truth which is unknown is meaningless to us. If it is to be real it must be known and appreciated as such. Further truth is a form of intellectual value and value depends on valuation or appreciation. If truth is correspondence and its test is something different as the realists contend, then we are to test truth by something different from truth which seems absurd. Truth, therefore, must be its own criterion. Thus the distinction between the nature and criterion of truth cannot be absolute and truth depends on truth-getting or valuation. But it may be that the nature of truth does not lie exhaustively in any individual mind's appreciation. If so, truth will be entirely subjective in character and utter individualism must be the result. We are to admit that truth as an intellectual value is something objective, but it can exist for me only as it is known or appreciated by me. Truth, therefore, is both subjective and objective.

There are different kinds of truth, and we can discover the truths of different propositions in many different ways, for example, truth as correspondence, truth as coherence, truth as what 'works' etc.

### CORESPONDENCE THEORY OF TRUTH

According to, the correspondence theory of truth a proposition is true if it corresponds with a fact; for instance, if it is a fact that you have a pet leopard, and if you say that you have a pet leopard, your statement is true because it corresponds with the fact. Truth is correspondence with fact.

But what is fact? i) "Fact" is sometimes used to mean the same as "true proposition": thus we say "It's a fact that I was gone last week- that is, the sentence "I was gone last week" express a true proposition. But this definition of "fact" will

be of no use here, because, this gets us not one step ahead. ii) Sometimes "fact" refers to an actual state of affair. A true proposition is one that corresponds to a fact - that is, to an actual state of affair: How does a true proposition correspond to a fact? The word "correspond" is here being ripped out of its usual context. A true proposition does not correspond to a fact in the way that the colour sample on the colour-chart corresponds to the colour of the paint on my wall. There is certainly no resemblance between a proposition and state-of-affairs or even between a sentence and a state-of-affairs. We can compare the correspondence in the way the names of books on library cards correspond to the books themselves that is; there is a one-to-one correspondence between them. If we wish to say that there is a correspondence between a proposition and a fact in this sense no harm is done.

According to A.C Ewing, the word "correspondence" suggests that when we make a true judgment, we have a sort of picture of the real in our minds and that our judgment is true because, this picture is like the reality it represents. But our judgments are not like the physical things to which they refer. The images we use in judging may indeed in certain respects copy or resemble physical things, but we can make a judgment without using any imagery except words, and words are not in the least similar to the things which they represent. We must not understand "correspondence" as meaning copying or resemblance.

### COHERENCE THEORY OF TRUTH

Coherence is a relation among propositions, not a relation between a proposition and something else (a state-of-affairs) which is not a proposition.

But what, kind of relation among propositions is coherence? Are a group of propositions coherent with one another when they are consistent with one another?

No, for this relation too weak: the propositions "2 + 2 equals 4", "Caesar crossed the Rubicon" and "Minks are far-bearing animals" are all consistent with one another: that is, not one of them contradicts any of the others. But a group of propositions is not coherent unless each of them supports the other ones - they are mutually supporting. If five witnesses who do not know one another each testify (independently of one another) to seeing Mr. White in Pillsville last Thursday evening, their reports are mutually coherent in this sense. If nothing is known about the veracity of witnesses, the testimony of each witness taken alone would easily be discounted; but if they all say the same thing without having been in conspiracy with one another, the testimony of each one of them tends to support the testimony of others; each lends strength to the other, but let us notice a few things about this. The testimony of one or all of the witnesses taken together is not what makes the proposition (that Mr. White was in Pillsville last Thursday evening) true. The testimony of the witnesses is only evidence that the statement is true; it does not make it true; it points to the truth of the statement without being what the truth of the proposition consists in. Indeed, the combined testimony of the witnesses is quite compatible with the falsity of the statement about Mr. White: all the witnesses may have been victims of mistaken identification.

A body of propositions may be coherent and yet not true. There are numerous systems of geometry, each of which consists of a body of coherent propositions, but not all of these systems of propositions can be true of the world. Whatever the relations of a group of propositions may be to each other, the question of truth does not arise until we consider whether any or all of these entire proposition reports an actual state-of-affairs in the world or, if you prefer, corresponds to a state-of-affairs about the world.

### PRAGMATIC THEORY OF TRUTH

According to the pragmatic theory of truth, truth is what "works", and a true proposition is one that works. Here, however we must pay very careful attention to the meaning of the word "work". It too, is being used far from its home base. What does it mean to say that a proposition or (a belief) works? We all know what is meant when we say that a car works: first, it would not stand at all; then you fix something in it, and it works - that is; it runs again. Even here is your belief that the starter button was disengaged made true by the fact that when you made a certain repair the car then worked? Not at all: you might have done one thing, A, which unknown to you caused something else, B, to happen, and B was what caused the car to work again although you thought it was A. your belief in A was not made true by the fact that the car subsequently worked. So, even here it is false to say that "the truth is the one that works".

The fact is that the word "working" has a meaning in only a rather limited context: that of things working - that is, functioning in a certain way that we consider normal or satisfactory, with respect to certain goals or objects the statement of which makes clear what we mean by "working" in the given context. But what is meant by a belief working? Suppose- I believe that there are living organisms on Mars. In what sense does that belief? Work - or for that matter fail to work? If I go to Mars and find living organisms there then indeed my belief has turned out to be true; but what made it true as that proposition describes an actual state-of-affairs. If this is all that is meant by the word "working" then we are back with our original definition. But if something other than this is meant by "working", what is it, and how does the truth of a belief consists in its working? Even if true belief in some sense work, is this not because they are first true? It is of course, possible that the word "works" in the sentence "The truth is what works" can be given some broader interpretation, so as to make the theory more plausible. But even if this is done, it does not appear promising to extend the word "work", to perform a task in this quite different context, while other words will function much better.

### SELF EVIDENCE THEORIES

This theory says that obviousness is the test of truth. There are some judgments which are indubitable; they are true by their own right and do not require and further proof. To think of their opposite is impossible e.g. "2+2=4", "two straight lines cannot enclose a space" etc. These judgments are obviously true, discovered by natural light of reason. They are self evident. All judgment which can be deduced from self-evident principles or axioms are also indubitably true. Though all true judgments are not obvious yet they are or can be deduced from obvious truths of self evident axioms.

But this theory makes truth entirely subjective. What is obvious to one may not be so to everybody. There was a time when the opposite of the truth "earth is the centre of universe" was inconceivable. But now this judgment is rejected and we accept that the sun is the centre. What is inconceivable in one age may not be so in another. Even axioms in mathematics like "parallel lines cannot meet" no longer appear to be indubitable. Obviousness by itself cannot be the sole test of truth.

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