SciencePG
Science Publishing Group

Truth, Way, and Life: Pragmatic Reflections on the Concept of Truth

Lars Albinus

School for Culture and Society, University of Aarhus, Aarhus, Denmark

Email address:
lal@cas.au.dk

Abstract: The present article opts for a pragmatic understanding of truth with a special focus on religion as a complex of belief and practice. Although the principle of accordance seems pertinent to the concept of truth, the argument is that there is no single definition of truth, which can account for the range of its actual use. The aim is to drive home this argument by showing how the concept of 'truth' is used in various ways and with different connotations, in religion, philosophy, and science. Although the article sides in overall terms with the pragmatic view of truth and language in William James and Ludwig Wittgenstein, it also points to the necessity of taking a semantic level of propositional 'truth' into account in order to keep a relativizing notion of sheer fruitfulness at bay. In this respect, it is argued that one should distinguish between the way in which 'truth' is used, on the one hand, and the implicit beliefs that support such use, on the other. Among other things, the article traces an implicit understanding of truth as an ideal order of the world that pertains in different ways to a religious and a scientific view of reality. Referring to Foucault's final studies, it is finally shown that the concept of truth in ancient philosophy was not used as an ontological predicate without also carrying the meaning of being realized as a way of life. In this respect Wittgenstein, James, and Foucault seem to converge in detecting a 'practice of truth'.

Keywords: The Use of 'Truth', Pragmatism, Reality, Way of Life

1. Introduction

The Ultimate Test for us of What a Truth Means is indeed the Conduct it Dictates or Inspires. ---------- William James

The aim of this article is to reflect on the concept of truth from a pragmatic point of view in order to show how it may inform the overall understanding of truth in various contexts, especially with regard to religious discourse. It is customary to associate truth in a religious context with a belief in some propositional content. In this article, the argument is that such an understanding of truth is shortsighted. In order to appreciate the implications of the use of 'truth', one must be aware of the cultural practice in which it makes sense. Instead of trying to understand this practice from some underlying, isolable propositions about reality, one should proceed contrariwise. 'True' is what is made 'true' owing to a certain way of life.

To interview a person from a foreign culture about her notions of the world makes very little sense if not seen in light of her actual way of life. In order to understand what 'truth' means to her, it might be necessary, but far from adequate, to establish shared means of reference. The fact that all humans live in the same physical world does not mean that the world they believe in is identical. But how, then, can one ever be sure that all share a translatable concept of truth? Surely, a translation of truth might be justifiable in some concrete instance, but such juncture should not lead too quickly into believing that t^1 ('truth' in the foreign language) and t^2 ('truth' in the interpreter's language) entail the same semantic connotations or play the same role in the overall language game. [1] The suggestion of this article stands somewhat in contrast to the frequently appraised truth-semantics launched by Donald Davidson. [2] Instead of holding 'belief' and 'truth' to constitute the anchor of meaning, it is argued that meaning is a condition of possibility for something to be true. Accordingly, interpretation and translation of meaning should proceed in an open-ended manner, which steer between the Scylla of subjectivist internalism and the Charybdis of objectivist externalism. The ally in this enterprise is Wittgenstein, yet

the argument will also enfold in a critical discussion with Charles Sanders Pierce and William James pertaining to their pragmatic views on truth and meaning.

2. The Pragmatic Concepts of Truth in James and Pierce

The question of 'truth' is an ever-returning one in philosophy. The odd thing about it is that some intuitive naturalness seems to cling to the concept, while on closer inspection it proves difficult to account for it adequately. Normally, everybody uses 'true' and 'truth' without hesitation. Yet being a competent language user is by no means the same as being (or needing to be) aware of the underlying rules. One may give a seemingly standard example of the use of 'true' as in 'it is true that snow is white', but pondering a bit further, one may come up with other examples to which other rules apply. Take, for instance, sentences such as 'it is true that 2 plus 2 equals 4', 'it is true that I sometimes feel a pain in my stomach', 'he is true to his wife', 'she stands true to herself', 'he believes the Bible speaks the truth', 'she shows true passion in her work'. While the 'standard' example (it is true that snow is white) may seem to call for a correspondence theory of truth, this will not do in the others cases inasmuch as a distinction between language and objective reality does not apply to them in any immediate sense. They follow other rules than a method of verifying a statement empirically. Thus, far from being the core reference of meaning in any given statement, the concept of 'truth' is subject to the dynamics of language.

Speaking about the logics of signs from a pragmatic point of view, Charles Sanders Peirce presented a groundbreaking notion of 'truth' as the property of propositions insofar as these are matched by a consequential practice. Thus, an opinion (strictly scientific or otherwise) counts as true, if it "is fated to be ultimately agreed by all who investigate". [3] Although the implication is that an external reality is supposed to offer resistance, Pierce nevertheless exchanges a correspondence-theory of truth with a pragmatic principle of consensus. As long as a proposition is not contradicted by anyone in an ideal community of speakers (who have unrestricted access to the 'ground' of the proposition), it stands as true. As a belief it represents a habit of action, rather than a representation of reality, as Richard Rorty has poignantly summed it up. [4]

William James adopts Pierce's view in many respects, including the view of truth as resulting from truth-establishing activities. [5] However, James speaks in addition of truth as that "which happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events". [6] According to this view, theoretical statements are only 'relatively true' insofar as they are bound by contemporary borders of experience. In contrast, 'absolute truth' is a regulative idea for future verification. Yet, it is also what actually happens to agree with reality in the sense of one's being "guided straight up to it or into its surroundings, or to be put into such working touch with it as to handle

either it or something connected with it better than if we had disagreed". [7] Following James, one might say that an idea about something is true, if it leads up to the perception by which it comes to be verified, not because it is in itself a reasonable conception representing a linguistically and practically independent order of things. In line with this concession to instrumental realism, James emphasizes the pragmatic dimension by holding that "'The true,' to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking". Thus, the commitment to 'truth' directs the language user purposefully and experimentally towards the world (by means of acting in it and gaining verifiable knowledge about it). This is the opposite of taking 'truth' to be a "static relation of 'correspondence' between our minds and reality", [8] as an empiricist in the Aristotelean tradition would have it. [9]

Generally speaking, and this may be the very gist of James' pragmatism, an idea is true as long "as to believe it is profitable to our lives". [10] Thus, the empirical principle of 'agreement with reality' may lead to a better – and more practically profitable – relation with the world than, for instance, a superstitious worldview. In that sense, it is closer to 'truth'. Yet, inasmuch as objective knowledge is never final, [11] there is also room for "the religious hypothesis" as a "living option" according to which things eternal have the highest value. [12] The kind of truth that religion appeals to, therefore, is a moral truth that speaks to the heart. [13] Being part of an emotional or existential attitude, religious truth is likely in many cases to trump the empirical truth of science. Moreover, whereas empiricism merely "sticks to the external senses", James says, pragmatism is ready to appreciate the 'truth' of "mystical experiences if they have practical consequences". [14] In general, the notion of truth for a religious person is "measured by his willingness to act". [15] Inversely, it is meaningless to speak of an idea as true if it does not have the implied consequences in practice.

Sometimes, however, James seems to retract from the radicalness of a pragmatic stance. Thus, he can also speak of truth in ontological terms as if its primary significance stems from a referent that lies beyond the grasp of human knowledge. In his famous lecture *The Will To Believe*, [16] the concept of truth as intrinsically pointing to an external reality keeps lurking in the background. [17] Richard Rorty claims that James is obviously making a mistake here – wanting to have it both ways. [18] Either 'true' is a useful predicate or it is thought to be in accordance with reality itself, but it is a blunder, Rorty says, to want to make these ends meet. Endorsing a strict non-representationalism, he criticizes James' distinction between cognitive and non-cognitive statements for overlooking, or downplaying, the fact that religious and scientific truth conditions merely aim at satisfying different desires. It is those needs, Rorty claims, that feed into the discursive principles rather than reality-references as such.

According to Rorty, this is the inevitable consequence of pragmatism as initiated, yet not fully realized, by Peirce and James themselves. However, Rorty's unmitigated utilitarian

view of truth runs the risk of trivializing the underlying criteria without wholeheartedly buying into them. For if it did, what would even prevent anybody from choosing to ignore it other than perhaps the possibility that such choice might prove unprofitable in the end? More importantly, though, inasmuch as the utilitarian view of truth slides into being a fact itself, that is, a fact about facts as being something other than reality-depicting, it becomes self-contradicting. Now, the predicament is that if the utilitarian view disavows its own truth-value, how can it hope to dissuade anybody from holding a view of facts as being actually reality-depicting? As a consequence, one may still hold with James that true ideas are basically those ideas which are useful or desirable without giving up the principle of agreement (or accordance) as a principle of 'leading up' to something real. "Agreement turns out", James claims, "to be essentially an affair of leading". [19] And where would it lead, if not to something real?

James has a sound argument, therefore, up to the point of understanding the concept of truth as typically implying an idea of what it means for something (as, for instance, a proposition) to be in agreement with reality. Then the concrete confrontation with reality can happen to this idea by convincing someone to determine it as – in fact – a true one. When comparing the semantic cross-over from externally verifiable to internally verifiable truths, it seems fair to conclude that it is not the concept of 'truth' that is the anchor of linguistic meaning in general. Rather, the meaning-potential of language-in-use constitutes the bedrock for truth as the underlying principle of propositions.

James applies his concept of usefulness to matters of empirical knowledge as well as religious belief. Hence, "theological ideas" will be true, he says, if they prove to have value in practice, that is, in life. [20] Contrary to empiricism, pragmatism holds that 'truth' is not tailored entirely to a function of empirical verification, but pertains to a wider function of "living options" as well. In other and more Wittgensteinean terms, one might say that 'truth' is meaningful only as being part of a language game which entails 'a form of life'. [21] Naturally, the pragmatic understanding of 'truth' forces language users to see 'reality' in a new light as well. Far from being the bedrock of objectivity, 'reality' is simply that which makes a difference in people's lives. One way of putting it that would be in line with James' philosophy of religion is to regard the 'real' not merely as the physical wall against the senses, but as the window of spirit as well.

Either way, 'truth' represents something that is beyond dispute. And this is 'true' (there is, of course, a circularity here) even for a non-representationalist such as Rorty. If one sets out, in the name of ontological constructivism, to unmask one 'naturalness' after the other, this maneuver implies an ontology that suspects naturalness as such. In other words, the inherent claim is that reality is truly of the kind that one should not take any naturalness for granted. In other words, 'truth' happens to ideas, either because people manage to verify them somehow (empirically, logically,

aesthetically, symbolically, existentially) or because one simply rely on them. It goes without saying, that this may apply to religious faith through thick and thin, but it also goes for the hard-core positivist, who rely on an artificial language to match the simplest of sense data, as well as for the radical pragmatists who trust the principle of usefulness to be the actual ground of knowledge. Differently put, views of reality that seem to have very little in common may all believe in an invisible inner structure, what the real is in and by itself.

Yet, language users are inclined to realize, at the same time, that they are the truth-makers inasmuch as reality itself does not make any linguistic claims. This realization may not be universal, though. In a Western context, it seems restricted to logos as it differentiated itself from mythos. Thus, in Greek antiquity the philosophers, among others, accused the poetic tradition for failing to separate form and content. Myth produced reality in a narrative form (cf. poēsis, which holds the meaning of fabrication as well as presentation). For the new intellectuals, ranging from the writers of history to the dialectical philosophers, this confusion had to be resolved through trustworthy testimony and reasoned argument. The result was a dissociation of form and content that opened the path for critical learning processes. However, the distinction between language and reality should also prove to have other consequences. The apparently unresolvable fissure between signifiant and signifié, expression and concept, as proclaimed, for instance, by Saussure, has often moved beyond critical knowledge to the paradox of relativism. The dimension of expression may be important as a topic of its own, but to regard the connection between language and world as merely conventional is, at the same time, to disavow of a platform of truth needed as support of the argument. Such relativism is uncalled for, and it should be acknowledged that pragmatism may have an unfortunate tendency to move in that direction. The present argument buys into a more restricted form of pragmatism, subscribing to a soft form of realism supported by reasoned argumentation rather than a metaphysical view of correspondence.

Relativism and physicalism aside, modernity means that, in most regards, people have exchanged their trust in religion's ancient truths, praxis, and values with the accustomed faith in scientific knowledge and technological designs. Yet, the fundamental belief in a hidden or invisible nature of reality seems to remain unaltered. Following different courses of historical evolution, human communities have in various cultures exchanged their belief in invisible powers with a belief in an invisible order of ideas and subsequently with a belief in an invisible order of the material world (pervading the deepest core of modern minds, one should think). Even the diehard empiricist must admit that a principle of knowledge that recognizes nothing but that which stimulates the sense organs cannot find any confirmation for itself in any concrete impression. [22] Rather, it demonstrates faith in an invisible conjunction between principle and fact.

Yet, as Peter Winch has famously put it, in a kind of pragmatic and linguistic conversion of metaphysical

empiricism: "[r]eality is not what gives language sense. What is real and what is unreal shows itself in the sense that language has". [23] Inasmuch as it is linguistic conventions rather than the sum of single observations that constitute the order of the real, it goes without saying that this order can never be observed as such. Instead, it consists in the web of meaning through which something becomes detectable as something in the first place. In other words, the ideal order of the world is only deducible from the linguistically and culturally structured precondition for any observation to even take form and become describable. Theories of science, open to falsification as well as verification, make a world of difference, as it were, from myths about cosmic origin and divine intervention. Yet, in both cases, human beings believe in more than meets the eye.

Making this point, the intention is not to criticize the attempt to seek natural explanations wherever possible. What merely bears repeating is that truth is not to be found in itself. What is found in science, for instance, is the kind of 'hard' reality language users strive to understand as part of an ideal order of truth. As Aristotle has pointed out – and we can already deduce a pragmatic point from this – a sentence (logos) does not become true simply by referring to empirical data. Only a proposition (apofantikos) can be true by making use of this reference as a means of verification. In other words: A scientific proposition is not true, or does not manifest a particular part of the overall ideal truth, simply because it is in agreement with external conditions but because it conforms to a convention of testing it against these conditions. A religious proposition, on the other hand, is true, not because it is in agreement with transcendent conditions, but because it is part of a symbolic system that defines these conditions as being real. [24] What is real and what is unreal shows itself in the sense that language has. This is what a descriptive, linguistically committed form of pragmatism is entitled to claim.

3. The Actual Use of 'Truth' in Different Contexts

In many instances, an order of truth-conditional beliefs seems to frame religious language and practice, [25] but there is more to religion than that. It is hermeneutically shortsighted to reduce the making of truth in a mythical or religious context to its cognitive content. It seems reasonable, as Kevin Schilbrack points out, "that one cannot make sense of religious practice without the category of belief". [26] It is questionable, however, whether this is equal to letting a semantic theory of truth (such as Davidson's to which Schilbrack subscribes) define the connotations of this 'belief'. [27] Surely, one must presuppose some shared inclinations in order to speak meaningfully about these connotations. The question is at what level of meaning they are located.

In order to understand the beliefs entailed in a foreign culture, it is reasonable to detect a linguistic reference to the physical world. Obviously, such reference will be truth-conditional and its translation will accordingly imply some form of shared truth-convention. [28] But it does not follow from this premise to what degree the ostensive notion of truth actually constitutes the basics of religious belief. At least, one must also take the expressive character of symbols into account. "No opinion serves as the foundation for a religious symbol", Wittgenstein claims, and he offers the following example:

Burning in effigy. Kissing the picture of one's beloved. That is obviously not based on the belief that it will have some specific effect on the object which the picture represents. It aims at satisfaction and achieves it. Or rather: it aims at nothing at all; we just behave this way and then we feel satisfied. [29]

The force of the picture, or religious symbol, one might say, lies in its expressive meaning. When, in contrast to this, James speaks of a 'religious hypothesis' as entailing beliefs about eternity, perfection, and moral superiority, it seems obvious that he is thinking of an Abrahamic religion rather than, for example, a tribal culture. [30] In other words, a modern conception of truth seems biased towards a theoretical view of the world. Therefore, many philosophers tend to regard other uses of 'truth' as metaphorical upon that view. Yet, one must realize that there are other ways and other forms of life in which a non-theoretical concept of truth makes sense. It would be a mistake, however, to make a clear-cut distinction between an empirical, verifiable use (logos) and a poetical or religious use (mythos). The situational context of meaning is of utmost importance. With bearings on this argument, Wittgenstein is reported for having aired the following whim:

We come to an island and we find beliefs there, and certain beliefs we are inclined to call religious. What I'm driving at is, that religious beliefs will not… They have sentences, and there are also religious statements. These statements would not just differ in respect to what they are about. Entirely different connections would make them into religious beliefs, and there can easily be imagined transitions where we wouldn't know for our life whether to call them religious beliefs or scientific beliefs. [31]

Speaking of shifting, yet interrelated contexts of use, it goes without saying that the scientific concept of truth is part – though an often very specialized part – of an overall empirically founded concept of truth which is significantly at work in other institutionalized contexts as well. In jurisdiction, for instance, the obligation under oath to tell – not only the truth but – 'the whole truth', obviously carries empirical implications. At the same time, the range of these implications clearly differ from the way in which anthropologist Roy Rappaport uses the same idiom when claiming: "That language is central to the human mode of adaptation is the truth, but it is far from the whole truth". [32] Whereas Rappaport's phrase discloses a metaphysical view of reality as a whole, the juridical reference to the 'whole truth' is case-relative rather than absolute.

The above goes to show that the concept of truth may slide from one context of associations to another without language

users being likely to notice the difference. As for religion, changes in intellectual history have allegedly made their impact on the meaning potential of statements and symbols, including the concept of truth. One might venture the claim, for instance, that criteria of an empirical truth-claim has rubbed off on a religious discourse in many respects. That being said the theological use of 'truth/true' might still include its own internal range of associations. A member of a protestant congregation, for instance, would probably not refer to the altar-wine as the blood of Christ in the same sense as she would normally refer to the nature of things. Yet, at the same time, she may acknowledge the symbolical *truth* of such identification. One might also imagine a vicar who, even though he utters all the right words of liturgy, faces a suspicion of not having his heart in it. Although he acts in accordance with his office, he might not be a *true* believer. Here, the principle of accordance, which seems generally predicable of truth, follows other rules than that of outward practice (and concerns inward authenticity instead).

Wittgenstein uses 'grammar' as a term for underlying rules that constitute a language game, and it is no wonder that he refers to theology as an example. [33] Yet, one should not think of grammar/language game as an isolated set of rules (as, for instance, in chess). Wittgenstein's point is also (and perhaps primarily) to emphasize the game-like character of using language as such. Generally, language users will not hesitate to distinguish a petitionary prayer from a courtly appeal, for instance, but that does not prevent the associations stemming from the one to cross over into the other. To take another example, people are accustomed to understand irony as well as to sense its slide towards sarcasm. In other words, as language users people have internalized a pre-reflective ability to move effortlessly from one context of meaning to another. The specific argument, in this article, is that there are no watertight barriers between different uses of 'truth', but that they rather form a complex network of interaction. Ignoring this pragmatic underground, as it were, may lead to erratic translations of religious expressions. Whereas it might be true for the anthropologist as well as for the interviewed member of a native society that 'the earth is fertile', it may, at the same time, mean very different things to each of them. The same 'truth' is part of different realities inasmuch the cultural context of language lays the ground for observing facts rather than the other way round. Language users realize truth in what they regard as real.

4. Religious Truth (as Perception and Authority)

As an example of a pragmatically qualified view of the real, one might refer to the view on dreams by the Vedānta philosopher Ramanuja (ca. 1056-1137). He argues that although there is a contradiction between the objects people perceive in dreams and the objects they perceive in a waking state, both perceptions are real:

Real, too, is the belief in the poison of apprehension, which

may actually cause death. So, too, the reflected image of something like a face in something like water becomes a real thing, the cause of a definite opinion about the face, that is a real thing. Because all of these states of consciousness have a definite origin and are the causes of actual effects, they are real. [34]

This argument is interesting inasmuch the distinction between truth and falsehood is as important to Ramanuja (as to other branches of the Vedānta tradition) as it was to Aristotle (and the Western scientific tradition in general). According to Ramunja, however, reality flows unaffected beneath this 'objective' distinction:

The discriminations that are made in practical everyday life do not, therefore, depend upon a distinction between an object of perception that is false and one that is true, but merely upon the fact that everything is part of the nature of everything else. [35]

The real distinction between truth and falsehood is that between brahman – the inner nature of everything – and the deceptive distinctions of the material world. As perception is partaking in the consistency of everything, "all perception [that of the dream as well as that of the waking mind] is true", [36] and stems from the Lord (Vishnu): "the highest ultimate reality who has the power to make what he images real, who is known from scripture, who is omniscient…". [37] What is real corresponds to the thoughts of God, who is therefore 'truth' as the subject of all being. This knowledge is supposed to stem from the three "authorities" of "one's own eyes, inference, and scripture". [38]

The ways in which people use the concept of 'truth' in a Western context have obvious similarities with this Eastern form of thinking. For most Westerners, at least, 'truth' is also used with a meaning potential that spans over empirical, logical, and religious criteria. The important difference, however, is that the Vedānta concept of the real seems to link these criteria together in one 'language game'. What Hindus are supposed to believe with their own eyes is logically inferred from (or bound up with) the way in which their Holy Scripture interprets the nature of perceptions in the first place. Thus the Vedānta concept of 'truth' is recognizable and translatable to a Western interpreter, but at the same time it attains a different discursive position than the customary propositional truth. In Vedānta 'truth' is a predicate for 'the inner nature of things' before and beyond empirical verification. Empirical criteria gain meaning only from this religious premise. Although Ramanuja and, say, Immanuel Kant may agree on the importance of empirical verification, the language games from which they to come this agreement are still close to incompatible.

5. Truth as a Way of Life

Another dimension of truth as accordance, which is of utmost importance in many religious contexts, is that between word and act. The authority of the divine word has its counterpart in the authenticity of the believer. To the degree in which religion is lived out as an existential and

personal matter, one may say with Ludwig Wittgenstein:

No one can speak the truth; if he has still not mastered it himself. He cannot speak it; - but not because he is not clever enough yet. The truth can be spoken only by someone who is already at home in it; not by someone who still lives in falsehood and reaches out from falsehood towards truth on just one occasion. [39]

The truth Wittgenstein is speaking of here is what German philosopher Jürgen Habermas would call 'truthfulness' (Wahrhaftigkeit). Importantly, 'truthfulness' follows other rules than discursive criteria of validity. [40] Whereas discursive truth-claims pertain to criteria of objectivity, truthfulness concerns subjectivity and cannot be redeemed directly by communicative means. It can only be lived, as it were, and simply comes across as more or less authentic in a social context.

Wittgenstein (at least in his early phase) regards a religious or ethical standing as something that shows itself in a way of life, not something that attains meaning from statements. One has to be at home in truth, as he phrases it. Although, in an existential sense, 'truth' is not objective, but subjective, one might speak of verification, in line with James. However, the criteria would differ profoundly from other kinds of verification.

An example of what one might call 'an existential verification' is found in the late works of Michel Foucault. Referring to a principle of accordance between words and action in his lectures about parrhesia (fearless speech) among the ancient Greeks, he cites Plato:

When I hear a man discussing virtue or any kind of wisdom, one who is truly a man and worthy of his argument, I am exceedingly delighted; I take the speaker and his speech together, and observe how they sort and harmonize with each other. Such a man is exactly what I understand by 'musical' ... I have made trial of his [Socrates'] *deeds; and there I found him living up to any fine words however freely spoken* [logon kai pasēs parrēsias]. [41]

As Foucault notices, the 'musical' aspect here denotes the right relationship with the Muses, expressing a harmony between life (bios) and words (logos). [42] However, apart from demonstrating a musical accordance between speech (logos) and deeds (erga), the Socratic will to truth is not merely a matter of personal authenticity. More than anything else, it is communicative in nature, directed at the novice.

The aim of this Socratic parrhesiastic activity, then, is to lead [emphasis added] *the interlocutor to the choice of that kind of life (bios) that will be in Dorian-harmonic accord with logos, virtue, courage, and truth.* [43]

Thus, the concept of truth pertaining to 'true life' (alēthēs bios) is "essentially an affair of leading", to borrow the phrase from James cited earlier[44]. Socrates manages to establish a relationship with himself, which is, at the same time, a commitment to truth as a philosophical relationship. From denoting the audacity to speak against authorities at the risk of one's own life, parrhesia comes to attain the meaning of the courage and willingness simply to hear, say and do, what is true. In his final lectures, Foucault deals in detail with the way in which the Cynics were to radicalize this emerging

consciousness of truth as a way of life. "In the case of the Cynic scandal", he points out, " – and this is what seems to me to be important and worth holding on to, isolating – one risks one's life, not just by telling the truth, and in order to tell it, but by the very way in which one lives." [45]

Truth was separated from outer conditions. For the Cynics it referred neither to heaven nor to earth, but became an inner measure, a show of independence. In other contexts, this understanding of truth would suffer suppression, as for instance by the development of religious dogmas and philosophical idealism, not to speak of the scientific will to knowledge. As Foucault says: "If scientific practice, scientific institutions, and integration within the scientific consensus are by themselves sufficient to assure access to truth, then it is clear that the problem of the true life as the necessary basis for the practice of truth-telling disappears."[46] The philosophical point pervading Foucault's historical expositions of a philosophical way of life is to circumvent this theoretical reification of truth and to restore its practical, expressive meaning. What Foucault takes pains to point out in his studies of the ancient philosophers, is that 'truth' was not yet an isolated question of abstract (or theoretical) importance, but instead intimately connected with an 'aesthetics of existence', even in Plato. By taking care of oneself (epimeleia seautou) as a precondition for knowing oneself (gnothi seauton), this philosophical way of life implied "changing one's style of life, one's relation to others, and one's relation to oneself". [47]

Obviously, the article has crossed over more than one way of using 'true' and 'truth' in the last paragraphs, but it should also be clear that several similarities bind them together as should be expected from a concept being one single concept. [48] However, in all instances, 'truth' creates a barrier against falsehood in whatever form it might take (illusion, inauthenticity, error, contradiction). Thus, in his famous words: 'I am the truth the way and the life', Jesus claims to embody truth, to be the Lord's testimony against which falsehood and disbelief can be recognized. Of course, the said utterance is a religious one, and yet it does not merely represent a symbolic system. It takes place in it, but it also transcends it through a surplus of meaning gained – or shown – by the narration of Jesus' way of life (as even Nietzsche recognized, [49] and what Ricoeur would call 'testimony' [50]). In other words, the truth that Jesus proclaims he also realizes as a way of life. It implies, moreover, that whoever shows faith in his proclamation (by living this faith) shall be with Christ himself in paradise. Thus, he tells his fellow convict: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23: 43). The implications of truth have apparently changed from the authority of law and Scripture to the authority of personal truthfulness as exemplum. [51] To be in accordance with this exemplum, this life of Jesus Christ, is to be in truth (according to Christianity). Similarly, citing Foucault from his reading of the Platonic dialogues Laches and Alcibiades:

The care of the self does not lead to the question of what this being I must care for is in its reality and truth, but to the question of what the care must be and what a life must be

which claims to care about self. And what this sets off is not the movement towards the other world, but the questioning of what, in relation to all other forms of life, precisely that form of life which takes care of self must and can be in truth. [52]

Similar to religious belief and practice, a philosophical way of life, as Foucault sees it, takes place in truth, i.e., in the expressive, lived-out, truth as an aesthetics of existence.

Of course, Foucault is aware of the difference, which Christianity's reference to the realm of God makes in this respect:

I think we can say that one of the master strokes of Christianity, its philosophical significance, consists in it having linked together the theme of an other life (une vie autre) as true life and the idea of access to the other world (l'autre monde) *as access to the truth.* [On one hand]*, a true life, which is an other life in this world,* [on the other] *access to the others world as access to the truth and to that which, consequently, founds the truth as that true life which one leads in this world here.* [53]

Even if the ultimate reality is the other world, it becomes real in any actual and practical sense only by leading a true life in this world, or, which is the same thing, by leading a life in truth.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to show that the conventional concept of truth as correspondence with reality is a thin veil over various contexts of meaning. More often than not, people uses 'truth' without explicit distinctions between the specific meaning-potentials associated with it in different language games. If something holds these various uses together, it is not empirical justification (as in a correspondence-theory of truth), but the realities of life. James may be right to regard 'truth' as a name for that which proves most profitable in practice, but he does not take sufficient account of the very belief that having a true access to the world is intrinsic to this profitability. 'Truth' is, therefore, not only a predicate of verifiable statements, but also a name for what language users believe to be the invisible order of things.

The use of 'truth' moves between myth, religion, mathematics, science, ontology, and authenticity owing to interchangeable rules of meaning. In other words, language users seem accustomed to employ it in a continuum from being predicative of a matter-of-fact-proposition at the one end of the scale to being that article-of-faith, in which life realizes itself, at the other. What seems to present itself as religious belief may not merely cover a propositional attitude (reducible to some underlying, if not explicitly expressed, propositional content). As Foucault has shown, and Wittgenstein would certainly agree here, a religious or even philosophical truth may also realize itself in a certain way of life. Truth is that which happens, as James would have it, not only to propositions, but also in a way of life, as in the "physical model" of the Cynic. [54] It should be possible, therefore, to draw a line from a scientific to a religious belief in truth as ideal order. Similarly, another line could be drawn

from truth as a way of life in religion to a philosophical, or existential, way of thinking in practice. However, the intension, here, is not to trivialize the differences between 'truth' and 'belief' in religious, philosophical, juridical, and scientific contexts. It is exactly because of the grammar that separates these differences in practice (though not without the imminent possibility of contamination or crossovers) that no purely semantic theory alone can hope to cover them.

A notion of authority clings to 'truth', either because it stems from a divine source, from the self-evidence of pure thought, from empirical tests, or from the authenticity of a life lived. Finally, and most importantly from a pragmatic point of view, 'truth' may slip from one context into the next, carrying with it something of its former use while, at the same time, transforming its meaning-potential according to the game-like character of language. In order to round up these pragmatic comments on 'truth' by one summary sentence, one might say that truth is that which happens whenever human beings decide and act on the reality of their existence.

References

[1]   The term 'language game' is here used in the sense of Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, §7.

[2]   Donald Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth", in: *The Journal of Philosophy*, 87/6, 1984, pp. 279-328; "Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation", 1990, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

[3]   Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 8 vols., eds., C. Hartshorne & Weiss, P. (1-6); Burks, A. (7-8), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-60.

[4]   Richard Rorty, "Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance", in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 84-101, 84.

[5]   "Pragmatism – What It Is" ; "What Pragmatism Means" & "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth", *in Pragmatism – The Classical Writings*, ed., H. S. Thayer, Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982, pp. 131-134; pp. 209-226; pp. 227-244, 133.

[6]   William James, *Pragmatism: A new name for some old ways of thinking*, 1922, London: Longman's, Green & Co., 97.

[7]   William James, *Pragmatism: A new name for some old ways of thinking*, 1922, London: Longman's, Green & Co., 102.

[8]   "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth", in *Pragmatism – The Classical Writings*, ed., H. S. Thayer, Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982, 220.

[9]   In the *Categories* (12b11, 14b14), Aristotle defines a statement as true if it parallels the logical structure of the things to which it refers (a definition which also informs Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and the empirical positivists of the Vienna Circle). Moreover, truth is also, by implication, in agreement with reason, for, as Aristotle points out elsewhere (*De Interpretatione* 16a7-8), truth is but another word for the accordance (*homoiosis*) between thoughts and things.

[10] "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth", in *Pragmatism – The Classical Writings*, ed., H. S. Thayer, Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982, 223

[11] "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth", in *Pragmatism – The Classical Writings*, ed., H. S. Thayer, Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982, 195 f.

[12] "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth", in *Pragmatism – The Classical Writings*, ed., H. S. Thayer, Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982, 204.

[13] "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth", in *Pragmatism – The Classical Writings*, ed., H. S. Thayer, Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982, 202.

[14] "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth", in *Pragmatism – The Classical Writings*, ed., H. S. Thayer, Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982, 225.

[15] "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth", in *Pragmatism – The Classical Writings*, ed., H. S. Thayer, Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982, 187, cf. p. 207.

[16] James delivered this speech as an Address to the Philosophical Clubs of Yale and Brown Universities in 1896.

[17] James 1982, 197; 200; 202; 204; 207. Although James deals specifically with the relation between propositional attitudes (i.e., in the form of willing and believing) and may therefore, for the mere sake of convenience, refer to 'truth' as but another word for the object of belief, it is still bewildering that he repeats the concept of 'truth' in the pragmatic sense of 'practical usefulness' (as, for instance, p. 196), and in relation to a "desire" that brings it about (p. 203), when at the same time he uses ontological phrases such as "the risk of losing the truth" (p. 193); "we do not give up the quest or hope of truth itself" (p. 197); "in our dealings with objective nature we obviously are recorders, not makers, of the truth" (p. 200); "in case the religious hypothesis … be really true"; "we lose the good, if it be true" (p. 204). All else being equal, such choice of words does not sit well with a strict pragmatic utterance such as ""[t]he knower is an actor, and coefficient of the truth on one side, whilst on the other he registers the truth which he helps to create", "The Will To Believe", in: *The Works of William James*, vol. 7, eds., F.H. Burkhardt, F. Bowers & I.K. Skrupskelis, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1979, 21.

[18] Richard Rorty "Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance", in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 84-101, 90.

[19] "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth", in *Pragmatism – The Classical Writings*, ed., H. S. Thayer, Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982, p. 235.

[20] "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth", in *Pragmatism – The Classical Writings*, ed., H. S. Thayer, Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982, p. 222.

[21] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, §19; §23.

[22] Thus the evidentialist claim that we should only believe in statements which can be empirically verified (either immediately or logically implied by other verified statements) is, self-evidently, a claim that cannot itself be empirically verified (nor logically implied unless one counts induction as a logically valid means of generalization).

[23] Peter Winch, "Understanding Primitive Society", in: *Language, Truth, and Religious Belief: Studies in Twentieth-Century Theory and Method in Religion*, eds., Nancy K. Frankenberry & H. H. Penner, Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, pp. 342-377, 346.

[24] James is not far from voicing a similar point, cf. "The Will To Believe", in: *The Works of William James*, vol. 7, eds., F.H. Burkhardt, F. Bowers & I.K. Skrupskelis, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1979, 162 ff.

[25] See, in this respect, Mark Q. Gardiner, forthcoming in Method & Theory in the Study of Religion.

[26] Kevin Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study of Religions. A Manifesto*, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014, 78.

[27] Cf. Lars Albinus, "The limitation of truth-semantics in the understanding of religion", *Method & Theory in The Study of Religion*, 2015, 27, pp. 447-474.

[28] Cf. Gardiner & Engler, "Ten implications of semantic holism for theories of religion", *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 22 (4), 2010, pp. 283-292.

[29] (PO) *Philosophical Occasions* 1912-1951, eds., James C. Klagge & Alfred Nordmann, Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, p. 123. Religious views of the world, from Augustine to a Buddhist Holy man, do not rest on a theory about the world, says Wittgenstein, PO, p. 119. Therefore, the game of truth as we normally play it in a modern context implies the possibility of error, which is, nonetheless, irrelevant in religious belief (ibid.). The point of Wittgenstein's remark, which is certainly not universally valid (but rather directed against Frazer's rationalistic universalism), may be to prevent us from imposing logical or theoretical thinking in contexts where such thinking is, at best, secondary.

[30] Wittgenstein refers primarily to instances of religious belief among tribal cultures and tries to show how we are often inclined to think and react in a similar manner. "A hypothetical explanation", he notices, "will be of little help to someone, say, who is upset because of love" PO, 123). The point is that not every symbol, or belief, works as an explanation or a hypothesis, but might just as well reflect the expression of an emotional state of mind. "Kissing the picture of one's beloved" (ibid.) would be a non-religious case in point.

[31] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology & Religious Belief*, ed., Cyril Barrett, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970, p. 58.

[32] Rappaport, Roy A., *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 9.

[33] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, § 373.

[34] Shribhashya 1.1.1., cf. Wendy Doniger, *Hinduism, The Norton Anthology of World Religions*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2015, p. 290. James would clearly condone such consequential notion of the real inasmuch as he emphasizes that "all propositions whether attributive or existential, are believed through the very fact of being conceived", 1979, p. 164. Yet, after offering a thought-experiment much like Plato's cave-allegory, he states that: "[a] dream candle has existence, true enough; but not the same existence (existence for itself, namely, or extra mentem meam) which the candles of waking perception have", op.cit. 165. Unlike Vedānta thought, James thus slips back into focusing epistemologically on the content rather than effect of a certain perception.

[35]   Cf, Doniger, *Hinduism, The Norton Anthology of World Religions*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2015, p. 291.

[36]   Doniger, *Hinduism, The Norton Anthology of World Religions*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.,2015, p. 290.

[37]   A curious similarity with the *noēsis noēseos* of Aristotle's nameless but living god (theos), Metaphysica 1074b, is notable, as is also the theologico-philosophical variant espoused, for instance, by Thomas Aquinas.

[38]   Cf. Doniger, *Hinduism, The Norton Anthology of World Religions*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2015, 289.

[39]   Ludwig Wittgenstein, (CV) *Culture and Value*, ed. G.H. von Wright, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (translated by Peter Winch), 1970, p. 35e.

[40]   Jürgen Habermas, *Moralbewußtsein und kommunikativen Handeln*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1983, 68.

[41]   Plato, *Laches* 188c-189a, cf. Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson, L.A.: Seimotext(e), MIT Press 2001, p. 98 f; 101.

[42]   Foucault, 2001, p. 100; likewise Thomas Flynn, "Foucault as parrhesiast", in: *The Final Foucault*, eds., J. Bernauer & D. Rasmussen, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988, pp. 102-118, p. 108.

[43]   Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson, L.A.: Seimotext(e), MIT Press 2001, p. 101.

[44]   William James, "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth", in *Pragmatism – The Classical Writings*, ed., H. S. Thayer, Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982, 235, cf. Above.

[45]   Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II*: Lectures at Collège de France 1983-1984, translated by Graham Burchell, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 234.

[46]   Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II*: Lectures at Collège de France 1983-1984,2011, p. 235.

[47]   Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson, L.A.: Seimotext(e), MIT Press 2001, 106. This resonates in Wittgenstein's musings from 1937: "The way to solve the problem you see in life is to live in a way that will make what is problematic disappear. The fact that life is problematic shows that the shape of your life does not fit into life's mould. So you must change the way you live and, once your life does fit into the mould, what is problematic will disappear," CV 27e.

[48]   Even though Habermas makes a sharp distinction between discursively redeemable criteria of truth as a matter of reality-depicting statements, on the one hand, and social criteria of credibility pertaining to authenticity, on the other, the semantic connection between Wahrheit and Wahrhaftigkeit (truth and truthfulness) speaks for itself.

[49]   Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed., Karl Schlechta, München: Carl Hanser Verlag, II, pp. 1197 §35.

[50]   Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, translated by Lewis S. Mudge, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1984, chapter 3.

[51]   Karl-Heinrich Lütcke, *"Auctoritas" bei Augustin*, 1968, Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 73.

[52]   Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II*: Lectures at Collège de France 1983-1984,2011, p. 246.

[53]   Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II*: Lectures at Collège de France 1983-1984,2011, p. 319.

[54]   Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II*: Lectures at Collège de France 1983-1984,2011, 310.