Truth

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Truth (Anglo-Saxon *tréow, tryw,* truth, preservation of a compact, from a Teutonic base *Trau,* to believe) is a relation which holds (1) between the knower and the known — Logical Truth; (2) between the knower and the outward expression which he gives to his knowledge — Moral Truth; and (3) between the thing itself, as it exists, and the idea of it, as conceived by God — Ontological Truth. In each case this relation is, according to the Scholastic theory, one of correspondence, conformity, or agreement (*adoequatio*) (St. Thomas, Summa I:21:2).

Ontological truth

Every existing thing is true, in that it is the expression of an idea which exists in the mind of God, and is, as it were, the exemplar according to which the thing has been created or fashioned. Just as human creations — a cathedral, a painting, or an epic — conform to and embody the ideas of architect, artist, or poet, so, only in a more perfect way, God's creatures conform to and embody the ideas of Him who gives them being. (Q. D., De verit., a. 4; Summa 1:16:1.) Things that exist, moreover, are active as well as passive. They tend not only to develop, and so to realize more and more perfectly the idea which they are created to express, but they tend also to reproduce themselves. Reproduction obtains wherever there is interaction between different things, for an effect, in so far as it proceeds from a given cause, must resemble that cause. Now the cause of knowledge in man is — ultimately, at any rate — the thing that is known. By its activities it causes in man an idea that is like to the idea embodied in the thing itself. Hence, things may also be said to be ontologically true in that they are at once the object and the cause of human knowledge. (Cf. IDEALISM; and *Summa*, I:16:7 and 1:16:8; m 1. periherm., 1. III; Q.D., I, De veritate, a. 4.)

Logical truth

The Scholastic theory. To judge that things are what they are is to judge truly. Every judgment comprises certain ideas which are referred to, or denied of, reality. But it is not these ideas that are the objects of our judgment. They are merely the instruments by means of which we judge. The object about which we judge is reality itself — either concrete existing things, their attributes, and their relations, or else entities the existence of which is merely conceptual or imaginary, as in drama, poetry, or fiction, but in any case entities which are real in the sense that their being is other than our present thought about them. Reality, therefore, is one thing, and the ideas and judgments by means of which we think about reality, another; the one objective, and the other subjective. Yet, diverse as they are, reality is somehow present to, if not present in consciousness when we think, and somehow by means of thought the nature of reality is revealed. This being the case, the only term adequate to describe the relation that exists between thought and reality, when our judgments about the latter are true judgments, would seem to be conformity or correspondence. "Veritas logica est adaequatio intellectus et rei" (Summa, I:21:2). Whenever truth is predicable of a judgment, that judgment corresponds to, or resembles, the reality, the nature or attributes of which it reveals. Every judgment is, however, as we have said, made up of ideas, and may be logically analyzed into a subject and a predicate, which are either united by the copula *is*, or disjoined by the expression *is not*. If the judgment be true, therefore, these ideas must also be true, i.e. must correspond with the realities which they signify. As, however,

this objective reference or significance of ideas is not recognized or asserted except in the judgment, ideas as such are said to be only "materially" true. It is the judgment alone that is formally true, since in the judgment alone is a reference to reality formally made, and truth as such recognized or claimed.

The negative judgment seems at first sight to form an exception to the general law that truth is correspondence; but this is not really the case. In the affirmative judgment both subject and predicate and the union between them, of whatever kind it may be, are referred to reality; but in the negative judgment subject and predicate are disjoined, not conjoined. In other words, in the negative judgment we deny that the predicate has reality in the particular case to which the subject refers. On the other hand, all such predicates presumably have reality somewhere, otherwise we should not talk about them. Either they are real qualities or real things, or at any rate somebody has conceived them as real. Consequently the negative judgment, if true, may also be said to correspond with reality, since both subject and predicate will be real somewhere, either as existents or as conceptions. What we deny, in fact, in the negative judgment is not the reality of the predicate, but the reality of the conjunction by which subject and predicate are united in the assertion which we implicitly challenge and negate. Subject and predicate may both be real, but if our judgment be true, they will be disjoined, not united in reality.

But what precisely is this reality with which true judgments and true ideas are said to correspond? It is easy enough to understand how ideas can correspond with realities that are themselves conceptual or ideal, but most of the realities that we know are not of this kind. How, then, can ideas and their conjunctions or disjunctions, which are psychical in character, correspond with realities which for the most part are not psychical but material? To solve this problem we must go back to ontological truth which, as we saw, implies the creation of the universe by One Who, in creating it, has expressed therein His own ideas very much as an architect or an author expresses his ideas in the things that he creates except that creation in the latter case supposes already existent material. Our theory of truth supposes that the universe is built according to definite and rational plan, and that everything within the universe expresses or embodies an essential and integral part of that plan. Whence it follows that just as in a building or in a piece of sculpture we see the plan or design that is realized therein, so, in our experience of concrete things, by means of the same intellectual power, we apprehend the ideas which they embody or express. The correspondence therefore, in which truth consists is not a correspondence between ideas and anything material as such, but between ideas as they exist in our mind and function in our acts of cognition, and the idea that reality expresses and embodies — ideas which have their origin and prototype in the mind of God.

With regard to judgments of a more abstract or general type, the working of this view is quite simple. The realities to which abstract concepts refer have no material existence as such. There is no such thing, for instance, as action or reaction in general; nor are there any twos or fours. What we mean when we say that "action and reaction are equal and opposite", or that "two and two make four", is that these laws which in their own proper nature are ideal, are realized or actualized in the material universe in which we live; or, in other words, that the material things we see about us behave in accordance with these laws and through their activities manifest them to our minds.

Perceptual judgments, i.e. the judgments which usually accompany and give expression to acts of perception, differ from the above in that they refer to objects which are immediately present to our senses. The realities in this case, therefore, are concrete existing things. It is, however, rather with the appearance of such things that our judgment is now concerned than with their essential nature or

inner constitution. Thus, when we predicate colours, sounds, odours, flavours, hardness or softness, heat or cold of this or that object, we make no statement about the nature of such qualities, still less about the nature of the thing that possesses them. What we assert is

- that such and such a thing exists, and
- that it has a certain objective quality, which we call green, or loud, or sweet, or hard, or hot, to distinguish it from other qualities — red, or soft, or bitter, or cold — with which it is not identical; while
- our statement further implies that the same quality will similarly appear to any normally constituted man, i.e. will affect his senses in the same way that it affects our own.

Accordingly, if in the real world such a condition of things obtains — if, that is to say, the thing in question does exist and has in fact some peculiar and distinctive property whereby it affects my senses in a certain peculiar and distinctive way — my judgment is true.

The truth of perceptual judgments by no means implies an exact correspondence between what is perceived and the images, or sensation — complexes, whereby we perceive; nor does the Scholastic theory necessitate any such view. It is not the image, or sensation-complex, but the idea, that in judgment is referred to reality, and that gives us knowledge of reality. Colour and other qualities of objective things are doubtless perceived by means of sensation of peculiar and distinctive quality or tone, but no one imagines that this presupposes similar sensation in the object perceived. It is by means of the idea of colour and its specific differences that colours are predicated of objects, not by means of sensations Such an idea could not arise, indeed, were it not for the sensations which in perception accompany and condition it; but the idea itself is not a sensation, nor is it of a sensation. Ideas have their origin in sensible experience and are indefinable, so far as immediate experience goes, except by reference to such experience and by differentiation from experiences in which other and different properties of objects are presented Granted, therefore, that differences in what is technically known as the "quality" of sensation correspond to differences in the objective properties of things, the truth of perceptual judgments is assured. No further correspondence is required; for the correspondence which truth postulates is between idea and thing, not between sensation and thing. Sensation conditions knowledge, but as such it is not knowledge. It is, as it were, a connecting link between the idea and the thing. Differences of sensation are determined by the causal activity of things; and from the sensation-complex, or image the idea is derived by an instinctive and quasi-intuitive act of the mind which we call abstraction. Thus the idea which the thing unconsciously expresses finds conscious expression in the act of the knower, and the vast scheme of relations and laws which are *de facto* embodied in the material universe reproduce themselves in the consciousness of man.

Correspondence between thought and reality, idea and thing, or knower and known, therefore, turns out in all cases to be of the very essence of the truth relation. Whence, say the opponents of our theory, in order to know whether our judgments are true or not, we must compare them with the realities that are known — a comparison that is obviously impossible, since reality can only be known through the instrumentality of the judgment. This objection, which is to be found in almost every non-Scholastic book dealing with the subject, rests upon a grave misapprehension of the real meaning of the Scholastic doctrine. Neither St. Thomas nor any other of the great Scholastics ever asserted that correspondence is the scholastic criterion of truth. To inquire what truth is, is one question; to ask how we know that we have judged truly, quite another. Indeed, the possibility of answering the second is supposed by the mere fact that the first is put. To be able to define truth, we must first possess it

and know that we possess it, i.e. must be able to distinguish it from error. We cannot define that which we cannot distinguish and to some extent isolate. The Scholastic theory supposes, therefore, that truth has already been distinguished from error, and proceeds to examine truth with a view to discovering in what precisely it consists. This standpoint is epistemological, not criteriological. When he says that truth is correspondence, he is stating what truth is, not by what sign or mark it can be distinguished from error. By the old Scholastics the question of the criteria of truth was scarcely touched. They discussed the criteria of valid reasoning in their treatises on logic, but for the rest they left the discussion of particular criteria to the methodology of particular sciences. And rightly so, for there is really no criterion of universal application. The distinction of truth and error is at bottom intuitional. We cannot go on making criteria *ad infinitum*. Somewhere we must come to what is ultimate, either first principles or facts.

This is precisely what the Scholastic theory of truth affirms. In deference to the modern demand for an infallible and universal criterion of truth, not a few Scholastic writers of late have suggested objective evidence. Objective evidence, however, is nothing more than the manifestation of the object itself, directly or indirectly, to the mind, and hence is not strictly a criterion of truth, but its foundation. As Père Geny puts it in his pamphlet discussing "Une nouvelle théorie de la connaissance", to state that evidence is the ultimate criterion of truth is equivalent to stating that knowledge properly so called has no need of a criterion, since it is absurd to suppose a knowledge which does not know what it knows. Once grant, as all must grant who wish to avoid absolute scepticism, that knowledge is possible, and it follows that, properly used, our faculties must be capable of giving us truth. Doubtless, coherence and harmony with facts are *pro tanto* signs of truth's presence in our minds; but what we need for the most part are not signs of truth, but signs or criteria of error — not tests whereby to discover when our faculties have gone right, but tests whereby to discover when they have gone wrong. Our judgments will be true, i.e. thought will correspond with its object, provided that object itself, and not any other cause, subjective or objective, determines the content of our thought. What we have to do, therefore, is to take care that our assent is determined by the evidence with which we are confronted, and by this alone. With regard to the senses this means that we must look to it that they are in good condition and that the circumstances under which we are exercising them are normal; with regard to the intellect that we must not allow irrelevant considerations to weigh with us, that we must avoid haste, and, as far as possible, get rid of bias, prejudice, and an over-anxious will to believe. If this be done, granted there is sufficient evidence, true judgments will naturally and necessarily result. The purpose of argument and discussion, as of all other processes that lead to knowledge, is precisely that the object under discussion may manifest itself in its various relations, either directly or indirectly, to the mind. And the object as thus manifesting itself is what the Scholastic calls evidence. It is the object, therefore, which in his view is the determining cause of truth. All kinds of processes, both mental and physical, may be necessary to prepare the way for an act of cognition, but in the last resort such an act must be determined as to its content by the causal activity of the object, which makes itself evident by producing in the mind an idea that is like to the idea of which its own existence is the realization.

The Hegelian theory. In the Idealism of Hegel and the Absolutism of the Oxford School (of which Mr. Bradley and Mr. Joachim are the leading representatives) both reality and truth are essentially one, essentially an organic whole. Truth, in fact, is but reality *qua* thought. It is an intelligent act in which the universe is thought as a whole of infinite parts or differences, all organically inter-related and somehow brought to unity. And because truth is thus organic, each element within it, each partial truth, is so modified by the others through and through that apart from them, and again apart from

the whole, it is but a distorted fragment, a mutilated abstraction which in reality is not truth at all. Consequently, since human truth is always partial and fragmentary, there is in strictness no such thing as human truth. For us *the* truth is ideal, and from it our truths are so far removed that, to convert them into *the* truth, they would have to undergo a change of which we know neither the measure nor the extent.

The flagrantly sceptical character of this theory is sufficiently obvious, nor is there any attempt on the part of its exponents to deny it. Starting with the assumption that to conceive is "to hold many elements together in a connexion necessitated by their several contents", and that to be conceivable is to be "a significant whole", i.e. a whole, "such that all its constituent elements reciprocally determine one another's being as contributory features in a single concrete meaning", Dr. Joachim boldly identifies the true with the conceivable (*Nature of Truth*, 66). And since no human intellect can conceive in this full and magnificent sense, he frankly admits that no human truth can be more than approximate, and that to the margin of error which this approximation involves no limits can be assigned. Human truth draws from absolute or ideal truth "whatever being and conservability" it possesses (Green, "Prolegom.", article 77); but it is not, and never can be, identical with absolute truth, nor yet with any part of it, for these parts essentially and intrinsically modify one another. For his definition of human truth, therefore, the Absolutist is forced back upon the Scholastic doctrine of correspondence. Human truth represents or corresponds with absolute truth in proportion as it presents us with this truth as affected by more or less derangement, or in proportion as it would take more or less to convert the one into the other (Bradley, "Appearance and Reality", 363). While, therefore, both theories assign correspondence as the essential characteristic of human truth, there is this fundamental difference between them: For the Scholastic this correspondence, so far as it goes, must be exact; but for the Absolutist it is necessarily imperfect, so imperfect, indeed, that "the ultimate truth" of any given proposition "may quite transform its original meaning" (*Appearance and Reality*, 364).

To admit that human truth is essentially representative is really to admit that conception is something more than the mere "holding together of many elements in a connexion necessitated by their several contents". But the fallacy of the "coherence theory" does not lie so much in this, nor yet in the identification of the true and the conceivable, as in its assumption that reality, and therefore truth, is organically one. The universe is undoubtedly one, in that its parts are inter-related and inter-dependent; and from this it follows that we cannot know any part completely unless we know the whole; but it does not follow that we cannot know any part at all unless we know the whole. If each part has some sort of being of its own, then it can be known for what it is, whether we know its relations to other parts or not; and similarly some of its relations to other parts can be known without our knowing them all. Nor is the individuality of the parts of the universe destroyed by their inter-dependence; rather it is thereby sustained.

The sole ground which the Hegelian and the Absolutist have for denying these facts is that they will not square with their theory that the universe is organically one. Since, therefore, it is confessedly impossible to explain the nature of this unity or to show how in it the multitudinous differences of the universe are "reconciled", and since, further, this theory is acknowledged to be hopelessly sceptical, it is surely irrational any longer to maintain it.

The Pragmatic theory. Life for the Pragmatist is essentially practical. All human activity is purposive, and its purpose is the control of human experience with a view to its improvement, both in the

individual and in the race. Truth is but a means to this end. Ideas, hypotheses, and theories are but instruments which man has "made" in order to better both himself and his environment; and, though specific in type, like all other forms of human activity they exist solely for this end, and are "true" in so far as they fulfil it. Truth is thus a form of value: it is something that works satisfactorily; something that "ministers to human interests, purposes and objects of desire" (*Studies in Humanism*, 362). There are no axioms or self-evident truths. Until an idea or a judgment has proved itself of value in the manipulation of concrete experience, it is but a postulate or claim to truth. Nor are there any absolute or irreversible truths. A proposition is true so long as it proves itself useful, and no longer. In regard to the essential features of this theory of truth W. James, John Dewey, and A.W. Moore in America, F.C.S. Schiller in England, G. Simmel in Germany, Papini in Italy, and Henri Bergson, Le Roy, and Abel Rey in France are all substantially in agreement. It is, they say, the only theory which takes account of the psychological processes by which truth is made, and the only theory which affords a satisfactory answer to the arguments of the sceptic.

In regard to the first of these claims there can be no doubt that Pragmatism is based upon a study of truth "in the making". But the question at issue is not whether interest, purpose, emotion, and volition do as a matter of fact play a part in the process of cognition. That is not disputed. The question is whether, in judging of the validity of a claim to truth, such considerations ought to have weight. If the aim of all cognitive acts is to know reality as it is, then clearly judgments are true only in so far as they satisfy this demand. But this does not help us in deciding what judgments are true and what are not, for the truth of a judgment must already be known before this demand can be satisfied. Similarly with regard to particular interests and purposes; for though such interests and purposes may prompt us to seek for knowledge, they will not be satisfied until we know truly, or at any rate think we know truly. The satisfaction of our needs, in other words, is posterior to, and already supposes, the possession of true knowledge about whatever we wish to use as a means to the satisfaction of those needs. To act efficiently, we must know what it is we are acting upon and what will be the effects of the action contemplated. The truth of our judgments is verified by their consequences only in those cases where we know that such consequences should ensue if our judgment be true, and then act in order to discover whether in reality they will ensue.

Theoretically, and upon Scholastic principles, since whatever is true is also good, true judgments ought to result in good consequences. But, apart from the fact that the truth of our judgment must in many cases be known before we can act upon them with success, the Pragmatic criterion is too vague and too variable to be of any practical use. "Good consequences", "successful operations on reality", "beneficial interaction with sensible particulars" denote experiences which it is not easy to recognize or to distinguish from other experiences less good, less successful, and less beneficial. If we take personal valuations as our test, these are proverbially unstable; while, if social valuations alone are admissible, where are they to be found, and upon what grounds accepted by the individual? Moreover, when a valuation has been made, how are we to know that it is accurate? For this, it would seem, further valuations will be required, and so on *ad infinitum*. Distinctively pragmatic criteria of truth are both impractical and unreliable, especially the criterion of felt satisfaction, which seems to be the favourite, for in determining this not only the personal factor, but the mood of the moment and even physical conditions play a considerable part. Consequently upon the second head the claim of the Pragmatist can by no means be allowed. The Pragmatist theory is not a whit less sceptical than the theory of the Absolutist, which it seeks to displace. If truth is relative to purposes and interests, and if these purposes and interests are, as they are admitted to be, one and all tinged by personal idiosyncrasy, then what is true for one man will not be true for another, and what is true now will not

be true when a change takes place either in the interest that has engendered it or in the circumstances by which it has been verified.

All this the Pragmatist grants, but replies that such truth is all that man needs and all that he can get. True judgments do not correspond with reality, nor in true judgments do we know reality as it is. The function of cognition, in short, is not to know reality, but to control it. For this reason truth is identified with its consequences — theoretical, if the truth be merely virtual, but in the end practical, particular, concrete. "Truth *means* successful operations on reality" (Studies in Hum., 118). The truth-relation "*consists* of intervening parts of the universe which can in every particular case be assigned and catalogued" (Meaning of Truth, 234). "The chain of workings which an opinion sets up *is* the opinion's truth" (Ibid., 235). Thus, in order to refute the Sceptic, the Pragmatist changes the nature of truth, redefining it as the definitely experienceable success which attends the working of certain ideas and judgments; and in so doing he grants precisely what the Sceptic seeks to prove, namely, that our cognitive faculties are incapable of knowing reality as it is. (See PRAGMATISM.)

The "New" Realist's theory. As it is a first principle with both Absolutist and Pragmatist that reality is changed by the very act in which we know it, so the negation of this thesis is the root principle of "New" Realism. In this the "New" Realist is at one with the Scholastic. Reality does not depend upon experience, nor is it modified by experience as such. The "New" Realist, however, has not as yet adopted the correspondence theory of truth. He regards both knowledge and truth as unique relations which hold immediately between knower and known, and which are as to their nature indefinable. "The difference between subject and object of consciousness is not a difference of quality or substance, but a difference of office or place in a configuration" (Journal of Phil. Psychol. and Scientific Meth., VII, 396). Reality is made up of terms and their relations, and truth is just one of these relations, *sui generis*, and therefore recognizable only by intuition. This account of truth is undoubtedly simple, but there is at any rate one point which it seems altogether to ignore, viz., the existence of judgments and ideas of which, and not of the mind as such, the truth-relation is predicable. We have not on the one hand objects and on the other bare mind; but on the one hand objects and on the other a mind that by means of the judgment refers its own ideas to objects — ideas which as such, both in regard to their existence and their content, belong to the mind which judges. What then is the relation that holds between these ideas and their objects when our judgments are true, and again when they are false? Surely both logic and criteriology imply that we know something more about such judgments than merely that they are different.

Bertrand Russell, who has given in his adhesion to "The Program and First Platform of Six Realists", drawn up and signed by six American professors in July, 1910, modifies somewhat the *naïveté* of their theory of truth. "Every judgment", he says (Philos. Essays, 181), "is a relation of a mind to several objects, one of which is a relation. Thus, the judgment, 'Charles I died on the scaffold', denotes several objects or 'objectives' which are related in a certain definite way, and the relation is as real in this case as are the other objectives. The judgment 'Charles I died in his bed', on the other hand, denotes the objects, Charles I, death, and bed, and a certain relation between them, which in this case does not relate the objects as it is supposed to relate them. A judgment therefore, is true, when the relation which is one of the objects relates the other objects, otherwise it is false" (loc. cit.). In this statement of the nature of truth: correspondence between the mind judging and the objects about which we judge is distinctly implied, and it is precisely this correspondence which is set down as the distinguishing mark of true judgments. Russell however, unfortunately seems to be at variance with other members of the New Realist school on this point. G.E. Moore expressly rejects the

correspondence theory of truth ("Mind", N. S., VIII, 179 sq.), and Prichard, another English Realist, explicitly states that in knowledge there is nothing between the object and ourselves (Kant's Theory of Knowledge, 21). Nevertheless, it is matter for rejoicing that in regard to the main points at issue — the non-alteration of reality by acts of cognition, the possibility of knowing it in some respects without its being known in all, the growth of knowledge by "accretion", the non-spiritual character of some of the objects of experience, and the necessity of ascertaining empirically and not by *a priori* methods, the degree of unity which obtains between the various parts of the universe—the "New" Realist and the Scholastic Realist are substantially in agreement.

Moral truth, or veracity

Veracity is the correspondence of the outward expression given to thought with the thought itself. It must not be confused with verbal truth (*veritas locutionis*), which is the correspondence of the outward or verbal expression with the thing that it is intended to express. The latter supposes on the part of the speaker not only the intention of speaking truly, but also the power so to do, i.e. it supposes (1) true knowledge and (2) a right use of words. Moral truth, on the other hand, exists whenever the speaker expresses what is in his mind even if *de facto* he be mistaken, provided only that he says what he thinks to be true. This latter condition however, is necessary. Hence a better definition of moral truth would be "the correspondence of the outward expression of thought with the thing as conceived by the speaker". Moral truth, therefore, does not imply true knowledge. But, though a deviation from moral truth would be only materially a lie, and hence not blameworthy, unless the use of words or signs were intentionally incorrect, moral truth does imply a correct use of words or other signs. A lie therefore, is an intentional deviation from moral truth, and is defined as a *locutio contra mentem*; i.e. it is the outward expression of a thought which is intentionally diverse from the thing as conceived by the speaker. It is important to observe, however, that the expression of the thought, whether by word or by sign, must in all cases be taken in its context; for both in regard to words and to signs, custom and circumstances make a considerable difference with respect to their interpretation. Veracity, or the habit of speaking the truth, is a virtue; and the obligation of practising it arises from a twofold source. First, "since man is a social animal, naturally one man owes to another that without which human society could not go on. But men could not live together if they did not believe one another to be speaking the truth. Hence the virtue of veracity comes to some extent under the head of justice [*rationem debiti*]" (St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiæ* II-II.109.3). The second source of the obligation to veracity arises from the fact that speech is clearly of its very nature intended for the communication of knowledge by one to another. It should be used, therefore, for the purpose for which it is naturally intended, and lies should be avoided. For lies are not merely a misuse, but an abuse, of the gift of speech, since, by destroying man's instinctive belief in the veracity of his neighbour, they tend to destroy the efficacy of that gift.