From Truth To Certainty

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In his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Ludwig Wittgenstein proposed the ontological model by means of which he formulated the conception of truth as the correspondence of facts to reality. Subsequently, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, having abandoned the exact ontological model, he also rejected the a priori conception of truth and spoke about certainty as an internal trait of the language-game.

Truth can be treated from at least three viewpoints. First, truth is an ontological concept, subordinated to that ontological model to which a particular philosopher adheres. In the Aristotelian philosophical tradition, truth is a transcendental concept, expressing the relationship between being and cognition. Therefore the analysis of the notion of truth must be based both on the ontological and gnoseological conceptions. The Aristotelian tradition describes truth as the correspondence between the thing and the intellect – *Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus.* The statement is called correct, even if such correspondence is erroneous or does not exist at all. Truth is revealed in the process of cognition, but that can take place only when being is the truth.

Secondly, the way to the cognition of truth is indicated by the theory of knowledge – gnoseology, which never exists as an independent philosophical problem; it is always contingent upon ontology. According to the Aristotelian tradition cognition is feasible due to the power of intellect and mind. In the data of knowledge, the intellect manages to disclose the essential features of an object (res as an ontological construction) and express them in a generalized notion. On the basis of the Aristotelian model of cognition, it could be maintained that truth is the correspondence of the eventually treated being to the perception of the essence of the object formed still prior to the consideration in the intellect.

The problem of truth became still more intricate with Descartes, and later with Newton introducing the concept of law into the philosophy of nature. The connection between the phenomena of nature rather than the thing itself came to be treated as an aspect of truth. New problems arose in the investigation of that connection. For example, is there a precise method for the establishment of that connection? Are there techniques, enabling to determine the reliability of that tie?

In the solution of these problems, alternate conceptions of truth were proposed – the coherent and pragmatic notions. The traditional conception of truth correspondence

underwent further alterations, too. There were proposals to discard the term of truth altogether, replacing it by such terms as confirmation, corroboration, simplicity, etc. These are interesting issues, however, they are not the topic of the present discussion.

Finally, the third aspect of truth (in addition to ontology and gnoseology) is logic. Its essence could be formulated in the following way: is it possible to use the concept of truth logically correctly and precisely in a language, characterized by an exact structure? The point is that it is far from clear whether the concept of truth is logically uncontroversial. In his famous article 'The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics' Alfred Tarski proved that a logically irreproachable conception of truth is possible if the object language and the metalanguage are not taken into account.

This paper presents an analysis the conception of truth in Wittgenstein's philosophy. In his early work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus Wittgenstein* offers a definite ontological structure. In his opinion,

> the world is a totality of facts, not of things (1.1). The facts in logical space are the world (1.13). The totality of existing states of affairs is the world (2.24). The totality of existing states of affairs also determines which states of affairs do not exist (2.05). The existence and non-existence of states of affairs is reality (2.06). We picture facts to ourselves (2.1). A picture is a fact (2.141). A picture agrees with reality or fails to agree, it is correct or incorrect, true or false (2.21). What a picture represents is its sense (2.221).

The correctness or falseness of the picture means the agreement or disagreement of its sense to reality. Therefore, statements, which do not express facts, are neither correct nor false. They are simply nonsensical. According to Wittgenstein,

> a logical picture of facts is a thought (3). A thought is a proposition with a sense (4). A proposition is a picture of reality. A proposition is a model of reality as we imagine it (4.01). The simplest kind of proposition, an elementary proposition, asserts the existence of a state of affairs (4.21). A proposition is a truth-function of an elementary proposition (5).

Thus, in the Tractatus Wittgenstein provides a peculiar ontological conception of truth as the correspondence of facts to reality in a logical space. The conception of truth here turns into a basis of distinguishing between what can be talked about and what should be passed over in silence (cf. 7).

> In the Aristotelian philosophical tradition the theory of cognition leads to the understanding of the conception of truth, while Wittgenstein attributes this

function to logic. Logic, for him, is a warrant of truth as relationship. An atomic fact and an elementary proposition, expressing that fact, have the same logical form, and namely that enables one to speak about the correspondence between the idea and the fact.

Truth is one of the major problems in Tractatus. The later Wittgenstein abandoned his ontological scheme and a related conception of exact truth. In *Philosophical Investigations* the central issue is the concept of the language-game, which Wittgenstein describes in the following way.

We can also think of the whole process of using words as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games "language-games" (7). There are countless different kinds of use of what we call "symbols", "words", "sentences". And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once of all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come to existence, and other become obsolete and get forgotten ... Here the term "language-game" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of form of life (23).

The language-game consists not only of linguistic rules and names of objects. Speaking, for Wittgenstein, is a certain part of an activity and a form of life.

The child learns to believe a host of things. I.e., it learns to act according to these beliefs. Bit by bit there forms a system of what is believed, and in that system some things stand unshakeably fast and some are more or less liable to shift. What stands does so, not because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather held fast by what lies around it (144). When we first begin to believe anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions.

All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis take place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life (105).

Wittgenstein maintains that propositions of the form of empirical propositions, and not only propositions of logic, form the foundation of all operating with thoughts (with language).

Therefore, it is only in the context of the language-game and in usage that the word acquires sense. The sense of the word is the way of its use. Later Wittgenstein

does not recognize any a priori instructions or rules, which would allow to determine the correctness of the proposition or the structure of the world. There is no universal ontology. There exists only logical truth. Now Wittgenstein uses the conception of certainty instead of ontological truth. The possibility of certainty belongs to the sphere of the language-game.

> Really "The proposition is either true or false" only means that it must be possible to decide for or against it. But this does not say what the ground for such a decision is like (200). With the word "certain" we express complete conviction, the total absence of doubt, and thereby we seek to convince other people. That is *subjective* certainty.

> But when is something objectively certain? When a mistake is not possible. But what kind of possibility is that? Mustn't mistake be *logically* excluded? (194) [emphases in original].

In the polemics with Edward George Moore, maintaining that he knows that that is his hand, Wittgenstein asks why he could not imagine the opposite: 'What would I believe if I didn't believe that?' His answer is : 'So far I have no system at all within which this doubt might exist' (247). In other words, I do not doubt when I do not know any alternative language-game within the framework of which a doubt might arise.

Thus, having abandoned the a priori and the only ontological scheme, Wittgenstein abandons the conception of ontological truth as well, treating certainty as an internal feature of the language-game. In his opinion, subjective certainty means merely that there does not exist an alternative language-game which could raise doubts about certainty.

Bibliography:

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