

A Philosophical Analysis of Whether Truth is Equivalent to Reality

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ABSTRACT: There is a salient boundary as well as a feeble relationship between reality and truth even though the two notions may not quite be the same. The fact that the two are commonly used interchangeably prompts a philosophical discourse on whether or not the two concepts are exactly the same. For common day to day usage, it is assumed that what is real must also truthfully exist. We must however grant that even if we were to philosophically demonstrate the difference between truth and reality, we must grant that reality as the vague foundation or even a *prima facie* determinant of truth. This is the case because, anything that we eventually come to proclaim to be true, designates the nature and intrinsic status of what is real.

KEYWORDS: *Concept, Fact, Doubt, Reality, Truth,*

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper documents, analyzes and explains the meaning that may be philosophically attributable to the notion of truth and reality and seeks to tackle the critical philosophical question whether the two notions may be used in the same respect. The paper takes note of the fact that even between Plato and Aristotle, the meaning and sense of real is not clearly explained and hence continues to be a complex philosophical problem worth addressing up to today.

II. A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE NOTION OF TRUTH AND REALITY

The notion of truth has remained obstinate in all epochs of philosophy including the contemporary period where we have no one clear-cut and unambiguous definition of truth as is the case with other important concepts. Considering the fact that what the empiricists construe as true is enormously different from the rationalist understanding of what is true.

Modern and Contemporary philosophers have all preferred to construe truth as something that exists independently of human awareness, or as a totality of facts concerning something hugely transcending the subjectivity of the human consciousness, but enjoying nonetheless a relative amount of objectivity and reliability all the same. We know that whenever something is real it must posit as demonstrating some factual truth totally independent of the labels that the individual's imagination might wish to impose on it through some kind of phenomenological approach to reality.¹ It is objectively real regardless of the perceiving mind, regardless of whether it is known by a human mind or not.

On the basis of the above unfailing objectivity and the claim that it can neither be aborted nor manipulated to render it anything else other than objective, we must then conclude that reality always retains its objectivity and sustainability.² This does not fail in any way to recognize the instances where reality may appear to be tampered with or conveniently distorted; this, notwithstanding, will not detract from its original status nor will it take away the fact that it once was a case of an objective phenomenon and in fact still is, albeit now under the shadow of distortion.

A distorted thing does not completely lose the original stamp of its status, but merely succumbs to a manipulation which, in its turn, now posits as a new objective reality.³ This therefore affirms the metaphysical nature of the object of knowledge, such that whether distorted or in its original form, it still remains and is continuously existing. Reality, therefore, whatever it is and wherever it is to be found must be assumed to be

¹ Roger Trigg, *Reason and Commitment* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 32-43

² Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1976), pp. 43-47

³ Moody, E. A., William of Ockham, in P. Edwards (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2002), pp. 121-128

one, undivided, undiluted and enduring. Indeed, something is real as long as it is a reality. And it happens to be a reality not for a single mind alone, but for all minds, as long as those minds are prepared to analyze and assess it objectively.

The above is one sense in which reality can be assessed and judged; the other sense may best be understood and discussed within the context of metaphysical cosmology. This is due to the fact that, cosmology speaks of reality in respect of the universe and the things found in it in a much more specific and technical sense. Reality from a cosmological point of view bears a significant and striking resemblance to it in that both senses alluded to the existence of something objectively there and ineradicably so.

The reality of the universe precisely spells out the fact that the universe is and does not derive as an outcome a subjective impermanent process determined by some human mind.⁴ It is really and truly there objectively manifesting itself as such and available to any bona fide inquiring mind. Similarly, the phenomena strewn on it are not a product of anyone's wild imagination but real things positively enjoying an objective existence regardless of the fact that we perceive or not perceive them.

The question for us to philosophically examine, is whether or not something can actually exist and enjoy an objective existence totally in the absence of some perceiving mind. Philosophers are divided over this issue with some affirming and others denying. The view that insists unequivocally that things do indeed enjoy their own objective existence regardless of the intervention of some cognizing or perceiving mind is more plausible in my view. It is abundantly clear that the perceiving mind does not confer an iota of existence upon the objects strewn in the universe. All that the mind does is to identify them and make some sense out of them.

Now, to make any sense out of something, or, rather, to discover and positively identify it, or even to relate it to another, does not amount to conferring on it an existential reality or any ontological status, or still less, the right to assert itself. In other words, an epistemic enterprise does not always amount to a metaphysical causation role on the part of the knowing mind. Ultimately, the question must boil down to, what is the origin, purpose and end of the thing that has been known; all of which cannot be fully comprehended and answered within epistemology without recourse to metaphysics.

The phenomena in the world are real, compelling and self-assertive all on their own without the least intervention of any secondary cause that man is supposed to be. The knower therefore, cannot be the determinant upon which existence of other beings comes to be or the author of the objects that permanently puzzle and actually defy his sense of comprehension and discerning especially with Kant's *noumena* and phenomena insights. A knowing mind is a stranger to those objects in the same way they are a stranger to him. This alone gives a significant clue as to their claim to independent and objectively ontological existence as well as their auto-assertibility potential.

Even at a metaphysical level, the question of priority or even primacy in terms of coming into existence would not arise as we debate on the issue of which came first between man and the objects of nature.⁵ This would be a blatantly moot and senseless issue since no mind would be engaging in any exercise of cognition in total absence of the objects of nature, and no objects of nature would effectively manifest themselves in total absence of some attention being paid to them by some mind or some keen observer.

In the above abstruse and confounding scenario, it is better to assume that both man and objects of nature make their appearance simultaneously and concurrently for the sake of crystallizing a sensible mutual assertiveness and manifestation. Indeed, it must be true to assume that any instance of either manifestation or assertiveness can only happen in view of some perceiving being, and, if not, that manifestation would be disputable and empty.

From the foregoing, we can confidently affirm that the reality of the universe out there cannot so easily be reduced to or inferred from our sense experience because it enjoys an objective existence even though the senses ultimately count for its transfer and eventual crystallization in our mental life. Much in the same way we are forced to discourage the idea of imposing a benchmark of priority of manifestation as far as the objects of nature are concerned, we must also be prepared to acknowledge their objective and independent existence, avoiding as much as possible the risk of subordinating the reality of one to the other.

Whether we are speaking of reality in the Platonic or Aristotelian sense, we cannot doubt the fact that whichever reality we are referring to must itself be real, self-assertive, existentially and objectively independent.⁶ Moreover, this reality cannot be without its content, otherwise it would be characterized as absolutely nothing or, rather, as a non ens (non-being) as the medievalists chose to call it. If it be something or being for that matter, we must equally be prepared to stretch the concept to its inevitably transcendental and logical conclusion of being true or being truly there. This transcendental characterization brings us face to face

⁴ Benard Lonergan, *Word and Idea in Aquinas*, (Notre Dame: Verbum: 1967), p. 18

⁵ David Wolfe, *Epistemology: The Justification of Belief*, (Illinois: Inter-University Press, 1982), pp. 21-29

⁶ Gabriel Nuchelmans, *Theories of the Proposition* (North-Holland: Linguistic Series, 1973), pp. 32-41

with the fact that reality, strangely and uncannily enough, underpins truth or even implicitly makes the idea of truth and its other transcendental properties such as something, one, beautiful, true and good stand out in sharp relief.

Truth just reality is traceable underneath the concept of reality also lurks the concept of truth because the two are inextricably related and mutually expressive. Whenever it is argued that truth presupposes the nature of reality available, it must make a lot of sense for the proponent or exponent of this concept, in the sense that reality must be capable of determining and giving some guidelines as to what we are eventually going to label as truly existing. Anything as truly existing, must equally evoke and project the idea of truth, since truth is not an empty concept but a concept of something really there and dynamically pulsating.

What then is truth itself, or what is it to be true? This a troublesome and rather complex notion which has kept philosophers since the time of the Pre-Socratics to date agonizing and actually tinkering with the problem it raises as they keep improvising inadequate and not infrequently preposterous answers to it. The enormity of the problem, is itself understandable considering the fact that we have to contend and juggle with the concept of falsehood in the background in order to forge some tentatively persuasive answer. Generally but conservatively speaking, truth has something to do with these concepts: actuality, factuality, verifiability, reliability, accuracy and honesty if we approach it from an ethical angle.

Truth qua truth must always evoke the idea of something actually and factually being there. Where something is actually and factually missing⁷, there is nothing of it there, or to express it metaphysically, there is an overwhelming presence of non-being or no-being worthy considering or worthy attracting our intellectual curiosity or attention. And obviously where intellectual attention is absolutely absent or lacking, or where it expresses absolute disinterest and a negative attitude of involvement, the presumption must be that there is non-being there that can compel that attention no matter how infinitesimal it might be. The truth of the matter is that if it be there at all, it must spark or stir some movement in the intellect no matter how weird or how creepy it may manifest itself. The factual or actual presence of anything must somehow cause some quirky and possibly nondescript passing impression on the conscious mind. Such an impression would be impossible and actually unthinkable if the intellect were confronted with a state of absolute nothingness or absolute non-being.⁸

III. CONCLUSION

The question of Truth and Reality is an intractable issue in the sense that epistemologists are not in agreement as to what exactly constitutes truth and how it is arrived at. Now, to invent a logical methodology of ascertaining truth, and all the stages to the verification and confirmation process of it is the most difficult challenge for epistemology, because it fails to incorporate the whole idea of undertaking any meaningful epistemological inquiry as professionally required. The search, analysis and systematization of truth knowledge is not only an epistemological concern, it is also a metaphysical and logical one to a certain extent. If metaphysics mainly concerns itself with ultimate principles which underscore the working of the human intellect or, indirectly, preoccupies itself with those principles which govern and guide the intellect to arrive at some truthful knowledge, there has to be a relationship between it and epistemology, even though their formal object may not quite be the same. And if logic investigates the structure of the propositions with a view to establishing their relationship and consistency in proving how and why some conclusion is arrived at, it must be assumed that the conclusion drawn is in keeping with the rules used to attain knowledge - hence substantially useful to epistemology as a science.

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⁷ Wippel John, *Medieval Reactions to the Encounter Between Faith and Reason* (Illinois: Inter-University Press, 1995), pp. 51-64

⁸ See, Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*. The Free Press, New York, 1978, p. 12.