

ANALOGY AS THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE UNITY OF TRUTH

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Abstract

Notwithstanding the importance of the notion of truth in philosophy and in daily human existence, the fact that truth or the truth predicate is applicable to diverse domains of discourse poses serious challenge to truth theorists as regards the unity of truth. Some philosophers tend to evade this challenge to opining that truth is not a substantive concept that requires a metaphysical explanation of its nature. The philosophers who are not dismissive about the unity of truth generally align themselves with alethic monism or with alethic pluralism/functionalism. However, none of the two alternatives seems to sufficiently account for the unity of truth which is a sort of unity in diversity. Contra the two positions, I argue that the unity of truth is best understood when truth is taken to be an analogous concept with truth as correspondence as its primary analogate.

Key words: Truth, Analogy, Analogous, Correspondence, Intentional Subject, Knowing, Being

Introduction

Truth is an important concept in philosophy especially in theoretical philosophy. Aristotle in the second of book of his *Metaphysics* avers that truth is the goal of theoretical philosophy. Because of the importance of truth in the philosophical enterprise, some philosophers, for instance, Marian David (2005) argue that truth is the primary epistemic goal, while others like Paschal Engel (2002:1) contends that truth is the central philosophical notion and that '[m]any other important philosophical notions depend upon it or are closely tied to it'. Despite being an important philosophical notion, the philosophical investigation of truth has been engulfed by a lot of controversies. This is manifest in the truth discourses in the analytic philosophical tradition where the concept of truth is reduced to a "thin" concept, and thus trivialized by deflationary theorists who claim that truth is neither a property nor a substantive notion in need of metaphysical explanation, and hence reduces the concept of truth to logical, semantic and anaphorical analysis of the truth predicate. Nonetheless, the deflationary attitude towards truth (that is the rejection of substantives theories – the correspondence, coherence, pragmatic and identity theories) does not settle the challenges

that the concept of truth poses to a philosopher. Consequently, some philosophers defend mid-way theories. That is, the theories that acknowledge strengths of both substantial and deflationary theories, e.g., minimal realism (Engel 2002), alethic realism (Alston 1996), alethic pluralism and a functionalist theory of truth (Lynch 2001).

Regardless of solutions proffered by the mid-way theories, the concept of truth still raises problems since their conceptions of truth are inadequate. One of the problems that the concept of truth still raises is the question of its unity since the concept is applicable to different domains of discourse. The contention is whether the concept of truth applies exactly in the same way to empirical, ethical, mathematical and theological propositions or not? Put differently, the issue in question is whether truth is a univocal or equivocal concept. Contra the ambiguous positions of truth pluralist and truth functionalists, I will argue that truth is neither univocal nor equivocal term, rather it is analogous. In other words, analogy is the key to understanding the unity of truth. Since any analogous concept has its primary analogate, I will argue that truth as correspondence is the primary analogate of truth and that all other conceptions of truth, be they substantive, deflationary or mid-way theories assume at least minimal correspondence.

Possible Solutions to the Problem of the Unity of Truth in the Analytic Tradition

Considering that there are various conceptions of truth and that truth applies to diverse realities, for instance, truth of empirical propositions, ethical truth, theological truth, mathematical truth, negative truth and others, an inevitable question that arises is whether truth is one or many. If there is plurality of truth, one must then ask, is there any form of unity irrespective of the plurality? Pascal Engel expresses the dilemma regarding the unity or plurality of truth thus:

Is truth one or many? In other words, is there a single and unique property of being true which applies to all truths whatsoever, or are there different kinds of truth? Our intuitions go both ways. On the one hand if truth is truth it should not be truth-P for P-things or P-discourse, truth-R for R-things, etc. On the other hand, we want to account for the fact that there are different kinds of things and properties to which truth applies. (Engel 2008:1).¹

¹ Engel's paper "Truth is One" was presented at The Peruvian Colloquium of Analytic Philosophy: Mind, Language and Reality, 23rd to 25th July/ 18th to 20th August, 2008.

The challenge that the oneness (unity) or plurality/pluralism of truth poses is whether truth can be considered as a univocal term or an equivocal term². If it is a univocal term, then there should be only one conception of truth; hence, truth is a property of propositions in exactly the same way in all domains. If, on the other hand, truth is an equivocal term, then the different kinds of truth would be totally different from one another and so it would be futile to seek a uniting factor or the unique property of truth. From the beginning, it seems that arguing for unity or pluralism of truth in terms of univocation or equivocation respectively would be problematic.

Engel (2008:1-2) proposes that there are four possible solutions regarding the problem of unity or pluralism of truth. According to him, the first option is *truth chauvinism*. This emphasises that not all discourses are truth apt. In other words, it is the denial of the application of the truth predicate to diverse domains. The second option is what he calls truth monism, implying that the different kinds of truth ‘are all true alike’. The third option is alethic pluralism. This means that the different kinds of truth are not true in the same way. The fourth solution according to Engel is the deflationist view, in which all kinds of truth are all alike though not ‘in a substantial way’. Although the deflationist view resembles truth monism, it is different since it maintains that truth is not a substantial property³. Each of the four solutions has its own shortcomings. For simplification purpose, the four possible solutions can be reduced to two, that is, truth monism and alethic pluralism. In this case the deflationist view will be attached to alethic pluralism, while truth chauvinism could conveniently be attached to either truth monism or truth pluralism. Although none of the solutions are defended in this paper, since monism and pluralism could be understood in terms of univocity or equivocality, the challenges of defending either alethic monism or alethic pluralism are outlined. The outlining of alethic monism and pluralism is important because it helps to show how the third option which is defended here, that is, the analogous nature of truth, is able to account for the unity and the applicability of truth to diverse domains.

² A term is said to be univocal when it is ‘predicated of many things according to precisely the same meaning.’ (Blanchette 2003:120). This happens in ‘concepts of specific, well determined kinds of thing, such as man, woman elephant’ etc. (Clarke 2001:45). An equivocal term on the other hand is one in which ‘the same term is applied to several different subjects according to a completely different meaning in each case’. For instance, bark in the case of a dog and a tree, bank in the case of a financial institution and a river (Clarke 2001:45; Blanchette 120).

³ Engel (2008:2) articulates the deflationist view as follows: ‘Truth is not a “heavy weight property”: it is not a property such as being square, or being made of wood, or even like being red. It is a “thin” or “light” property. In another sense, however, the deflationist accepts the disunity of truth. the deflationist bites the bullet. Truth is not a common property that our sentences or judgments have.’

The fundamental problem in subscribing to truth monism is the “problem of scope” since truth applies to a wide range of domains. In this case, it is difficult to precisely say what the uniting factor is when the different kinds of truth (for example truth of empirical propositions and moral truth) are analysed. According to Michael Lynch, the problem of truth monism is the common tendency to extend a theory of truth that is suitable or applicable to a certain domain, to all other domains. For instance, while correspondence is applicable to ‘physical objects’ extending correspondence theory of truth to mathematical or moral truth would be out of place, since such extension does not account for the clear difference between the different domains (Lynch 2001:723-724). It is to account for the “unity in diversity” nature of truth that Lynch argues for the pluralism of truth by considering truth as a functional concept. Lynch’s pluralism is understood as functionalism since he argues that ‘truth is a functional property’ (:745). Lynch argues that his functionalist theory of truth accounts for both monist and pluralist intuitions. He writes:

At one level, the functionalist theory is consistent with monism. In every discourse, the concept of truth is the concept of a particular higher-order property – the property of having the property that plays the truth role for that discourse. But at the level of deep metaphysics, alethic functionalism allows that this role may be realized by distinct properties that depend on the discourse in question. So to have the property of truth is to have a property that can, *by its very nature*, be realized in multiple ways. (Lynch 2001:745).

Lynch prefers functionalism as a brand of pluralism he defends so as to avoid any ambiguity when the concept truth is mentioned. If truth is ambiguous or equivocal, it would compromise whatever form of inference and as such any deduction would lead to an informal fallacy – the fallacy of equivocation. Lynch’s inspiration for defending truth as a functional role emanates from the philosophy of mind. According to him, since ‘to be true is to play the truth role’ different properties can realize that role (Lynch 2001:734). He argues that the property of truth is a “higher-order” property, that is, ‘the property of having a property that plays a certain causal role’ (:734). To resolve the problem of ambiguity that outright alethic pluralism could lead to, Lynch contends that while the ‘truth role is realized by different properties in different contexts, ‘the chief cognitive goal’ is truth (:734-735). Consequently, the realization by different properties accounts for pluralist intuition while the cognitive goal accounts for monist intuition.

Does Lynch's functionalism succeed in accounting for the wide range of domains that the concept of truth can be applied to without resulting in equivocation? Although Lynch claims that his alethic functionalism has settled the apparent ambiguity of the concept, it seemingly does not⁴. His functional role of truth does not account for the unity of truth. It is susceptible to equivocation just as alethic pluralism. In fact, while making a comparison between the realisation of pain role and truth functional role, he affirms; 'the role of truth does not explain how that role is filled in a particular discourse. For the underlying nature of truth, we must look at the details of the type of thought in question.' (Lynch 2001:735). Hence, since the underlying nature of truth is not settled by the truth functional role, there is the possibility that functionalism entails equivocation of truth. Equivocation is the view that truth or the truth predicate is used in totally different ways from one domain of discourse to another, that is, the meaning of truth is different in each of the domains that truth is used and that there is no common concept of truth that is applicable to all the domains. This is the reason why Lynch (2006) rejects the pluralist conception of truth especially Wright's version and all forms of strong alethic pluralism. Lynch argues that pluralism cannot to be defended because its understanding of truth is ambiguous. According to him, the problem with Strong alethic pluralism is that 'the truth predicate is used to express more than one robust concept of truth.' (Lynch 2006: 17).⁵ Although Lynch rejects alethic pluralism because of its ambiguous conception of truth, his favoured functionalist conception ultimately leads to ambiguous understanding of truth, since functionalism cannot adequately account for the underlying nature of truth.

If pluralism and functionalism cannot adequately account for the single underlying nature of truth, but claim that the underlying nature of truth varies from one domain to another, then it does not settle the question of the unity of truth. In that light pluralism and functionalism lead to equivocation of truth.

Engel contends that pluralism cannot settle the question of truth. According to him, all the views that favour or accommodate truth pluralism, for example, functionalism, minimalism, alethic realism, alethic pluralism and minimal realism, do not contribute to a satisfactory

⁴ Engel (2008:7) questions the suitability alethic functionalism thus, 'is truth a role property or is it a realiser property: is truth the higher order property in which various realiser properties are realised (truth about ethics, comedy, maths etc.) or is it the realiser property itself? If truth is the realiser property, it is not a general property at all.'

⁵ Though Lynch article, "Rewriting Pluralism" is published in the *Monist* 89 (1) the page number of the citation is from his original manuscript.

understanding of truth. Taking functionalism as a case in point he writes: 'None of the versions of functionalism about truth is satisfactory. The problem does not come simply from the ambiguous status of truth as both a higher-order and a realiser property, but it comes also from the conception of the norm of truth that is presupposed by truth functionalism.' (Engel 2008:9). Following his rejection of pluralism, Engel affirms that 'truth is one, not many' (:10). A question that arises is, does Engel's oneness (unity) of truth entail outright monism? Put differently, since truth is not an equivocal term, is truth a univocal term for Engel? If it is, then it leads one back to the very problem that gave rise to truth pluralism, that is an attempt to explain how the concept truth is applied to various domains.

From my consideration so far, one can conclude that neither truth monism nor truth pluralism adequately accounts for the unity of truth. Hence if the unity of truth is to be defended, a different route is to be sought. Such route will be explored below.

Truth as an Analogous Concept

Outright truth monism or outright truth pluralism does not satisfy the quest for the unity of truth. In other words, truth is neither a univocal nor an equivocal term. The problem then is if alethic monism and alethic pluralism are rejected as the pathway towards an adequate understanding of truth, should philosophical investigation of truth jettison the quest for the exposition of the unity of truth or is there any other pathway possible? I propose that the inadequacy of truth monism and truth pluralism in accounting for the unity of truth does warrant the abandonment of the quest for the unity of truth. This is because although truth is neither a univocal nor equivocal concept, it is an analogous concept and so the unity of truth is an analogous unity.

Analogy 'designates a kind predication midway between univocation and equivocation' (Klubertanz & Symington 2013:59). In analogy, there is no complete similarity or total dissimilarity. Hence a term is said to be analogous when it is 'applied to several different subjects according to a meaning that is partly the same, partly different in each case'. (Clarke 2001:45). Oliva Blanchette contends that the description of an analogous term as that which is '*partially* the same and *partially* different' only emphasises that which is extrinsic to an analogous term by situating between univocity and equivocity. He therefore argues that:

A properly analogous term reaches out beyond univocity not on the side of equivocity, which is still only a state of confusion, but on the side of the truth of being itself. A truly analogous term is a universal term that can be predicated of many, not in the way of a univocal term, but in a way that includes differences, as “being” does. In other words, it expresses differences as they affect the very sameness expressed in the notion, so that its meaning becomes somehow totally different and yet remains totally the same. (Blanchette 2003:123)

Although there is both similarity and dissimilarity when an analogous term is used, the principal feature of an analogous term is that there is a focal meaning or point that accounts for its unity, that is the Aristotelian *pros hen* (πρός ἓν). Aristotle used the *pros hen* when describing being in the Metaphysics 1003a 32- 1003b 19. According to him, though being is said in many ways, it is related to one central point. For this reason, being is neither univocal nor equivocal. In Aristotle’s view, the central point of being is substance. Other terms that Aristotle describes as analogous are good and healthy. St. Thomas Aquinas in *De Veritate* followed the example of Aristotle.

What differentiates an analogous term from an equivocal term is the central or focal point which is the primary analogate. Without the primary analogate, analogous terms would lead to ambiguity. Blanchette expresses the centrality of the primary analogate as the uniting factor thus:

We cannot properly think of analogy apart from an analogand or a primary analogate. It is from this analogand that the meaning of the analogous term begins to develop. Other things, or what we shall also call *secondary analogates*, come under the analogous term by the extension of the original meaning according to some relation or order that is seen between the secondary analogate and the primary analogate. (Blanchette 2003:124).

So how does this apply to truth? In all domains or regions in which the concept of truth is applied, there is unity and not ambiguity. Hence truth pluralism is problematic and cannot be defended without some sense of equivocation. On the other hand, the conception of truth in the different domains (empirical, mathematical, moral etc.) is not exactly the same. There is both similarity and dissimilarity or what Blanchette refers to as ‘somehow *totally* different and yet remain *totally* the same’. Consequently, truth is neither univocal nor equivocal. The unity of truth is analogous, that is, truth is an analogous concept or term. Put differently, the unity of truth is “unity in diversity” and it cannot be reduced to either alethic monism or alethic pluralism. In the *Summa Theologiae* Question 16 article six, St. Thomas Aquinas

proposes that truth is predicated analogous by relating it to healthiness which is predicated analogous to animals, medicine and urine. However, Aquinas consideration of truth as an analogous term is in a more seminal state than what I am proposing in this work. This is because Aquinas' aim is to show why truth can reside both in the intellect and things by arguing that truth resides primarily in the intellect and secondarily in things.

As stated above, for any analogous term, the primary analogate serves as the focal or central point (*pros hen*). Consequently, the question is: if truth is an analogous term, what is the primary analogate to which all other conceptions of truth has a relation? My claim is that the primary analogate of truth is truth as correspondence and all other conceptions of truth has some relation, whether directly or indirectly, to truth as correspondence as they presuppose correspondence or at least minimal correspondence. In other words, my contention is that central or focal meaning of truth as an analogous term is the conception of truth as correspondence as proposed by Bernard Lonergan, that is, 'the relation of knowing to being' (Lonergan 1992[2013]:575).

My preference of the Lonerganian formulation of truth as correspondence over the popular conception of truth as correspondence within the analytical philosophical framework which defines truth as some form of relation of correspondence between proposition and fact, is informed by its (Lonergan's formulation) explicit exposition of the context within which the quest for truth is founded, that is, the context of human search for knowledge and self-transcendence. In this understanding of truth as correspondence, the role of the intentional and conscious subject is pivotal as emphasis is laid on the intentional acts of the subject – experiencing, understanding and ultimately the act of judging – which is the decisive act in the quest for truth and knowledge. Because of the centrality of the intentional subject and his cognitional acts, I refer to truth within this framework as critical or reflective correspondence. While Lonergan's formulation explicitly acknowledges the indispensability of intentional acts of the subject and a philosopher's background cognitional theory, the analytical philosophical formulation of truth as a relation of correspondence between proposition and fact, emphasises intentional signs (concepts and propositions) to the detriment of intentional acts (McCarthy 1990:323). Placing the emphasis on the intentional signs does not only neglect the centrality of intentional acts in the quest for truth but truncates the intentional subject and obscures the background cognitional theory. (This much suffices for preference for Lonergan formulation of truth as correspondence).

Granted that the unity of truth is analogous and that the primary analogate is truth as correspondence, an inevitable question is: How then do other conceptions or domains of truth relate to truth as correspondence as their point of unity in order to avoid equivocation or ambiguity? Put differently, how are negative truth, mathematical truth, moral truth and theological truth a form of correspondence, at least indirectly? One may consider negative truth as an example. Within the analytical framing of truth as correspondence, the problem that arises is how to account for some correspondence that is involved in negative truths since there are negative propositions and negative truths but not negative facts. So what do negative propositions correspond to? My take on it is that negative truth is so-called derivatively since negative propositions do not correspond directly to anything,⁶ as there are no negative facts and at the same time negative propositions cannot correspond to facts. In other words, negative truth is indirectly arrived at through inference. As it is argued that truth is an analogous term, it could be said that inference is done by making a relation to truth as correspondence. For instance, the truth value of the proposition <The book is not the table> is inferred by relating it to the BOOK FACT, that is, the fact that “*The book is on the self*”. Thus, for convenience, one could say that the truth of a negative proposition is an “indirect correspondence”.

Considering that truth is an analogous term and that truth as correspondence is its primary analogate which is the focal point for the unity of truth of the other domains of truth, how are moral and mathematical truth related to correspondence? The relationship of correspondence that is involved in truth within moral and mathematical domains is by extended correspondence or what Strawson (1992: 90-91) calls “correspondence by extension”. By this Strawson means that moral and mathematics propositions are truth-apt but their truth-aptness is an extension which is founded on ‘the simple model of word-to-world correspondence [...] as the primary or basic cases of truth.’ (Strawson 1992: 90-91; cf. Vision 2004: 281-282).

Strawson’s articulation of the extension of truth as correspondence beyond empirical truth seems to be based on the understanding of truth as analogous, at least in spirit if not in letter. Hence, he maintains that simple model or word-to-world correspondence is the primary analogate of truth. He argues thus: ‘It is the simple model of word-to-world correspondence

⁶ Rodriguez-Pereyra (2005:21) seems to argue in a similar way, that negative truth does not correspond to anything.

which encourages one party to confine the extension of the concept of truth within the limits of the natural world (as they conceive it) and encourages the other party to extend the concept of the world or reality to embrace all that is acknowledged as truth.’ (Strawson 1992: 90-91). To buttress his point that the unity of truth is an analogous unity, he continues to argue:

Of course I am not saying that we should give up altogether the simple model of word-to-world correspondence. On the contrary. I remarked long ago that the central role, in our system of ideas, of the distinction between our judgements on the one hand and, on the other, the objective reality which makes them true or false. So there are plenty of case – perhaps the majority – to which the simple model applies in an unqualified way. Instead of abandoning the model, we should rather consider the kinds of cases to which it applies without reserve as the primary or basic cases of truth; and then, taking this as a starting point, seek to explain how it is possible and legitimate to extend the notion of truth beyond these limits without feeding on myth and illusion. In this way one can succeed in understanding and accepting without difficulty the application of the notion of truth to propositions which are not simply records of natural fact, but play different and perhaps more complicated roles in our lives. (: 91).

Strawson’s correspondence by extension is similar to what is defended here as the analogous nature of truth, since he argues that simple model of word-to-world correspondence is the primary case of truth. Nevertheless, a possible objection to Strawson’s correspondence by extension is the possibility of an adequate explanation of his basic correspondence in terms of word-to-world correspondence. This is the root of the objection of those who clamour that the correspondence theory to be forgotten (Lewis 2001) or those who propose the elimination of truth altogether (Rorty 1989, Rorty & Engel 2007). In fact, this is the very reason why Strawson in his earlier writings argued that ‘the correspondence theory requires not purification, [the sort that J.L. Austin proffered] but elimination’ (Strawson 1950:447). I am not going to respond to the objections raised against the correspondence theory of truth because it is beyond the scope of this paper. All I can say is that without the correspondence conception of truth or at least presupposition of minimal correspondence no theory of truth, not even deflationary theories can be adequately defended. The arguments of the redundancy theory, Tarski semantic conception and Quine’s disquotationalism makes sense only when minimal correspondence is assumed. For instance, to say that: It is true that snow is white is equivalent to snow is white rests on the assumption that what is stated correspondence with what is the case.

The Analogy of Truth in Classical Metaphysics

I remarked and argued that truth is an analogous term and that its primary analogate is truth as correspondence. Granted that my preferred formulation of truth as correspondence is Lonergan's formulation: 'Truth is a relation of knowing to being'; and that Lonergan's formulation belongs to Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition; a question that might arise is: How can the truth as correspondence as the primary analogate of truth be defended within that tradition? In claiming that Lonergan's definition of truth belongs to Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, I mean that there is some similarity between Lonergan's formulation and those by Aristotle and St Thomas Aquinas. For Aristotle "to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true" (Metaphysics 1011^a 26), while Thomas Aquinas defined truth thus: "*Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*" ("Truth is the correspondence of thing and intellect")⁷. The core of this classical understanding of truth is that the attainment of truth is inconclusive if the relation of knowing to being is not considered. Put differently, truth is founded within the wider context of human quest for knowledge. Hence Lonergan asserts 'knowing is true by its relation to being, and truth is a relation of knowing to being.' (Lonergan 1992[2013]:575)

Bearing in mind the classical conception of truth, one would argue that the foundation of the analogy of truth is the analogy of being. Aristotle articulates the analogy of being by saying that being is said of in many senses or ways but always in relation to one central point (Metaphysics 1003^a). The analogy of being becomes obvious when it is appreciated that that which is, whatever it might be, chair, table, stone, computer, trees, animals, human being, spirits, etc are referred to as being. It does not matter whether the thing in question is animate or inanimate, material or immaterial. When these things are analysed, it is realised that they are partly similar and partly different, or as Blanchette puts, they are 'totally different and yet remain totally the same'. So given that being is analogous and truth is the relation of knowing to being, then truth would be analogous. In fact, the understanding of truth as an analogous term is assumed in the mediaeval characterisation of truth as a transcendental property of being. Truth so understood is the relation of being to the intellect because of the intrinsic intelligibility of being.

⁷ Aquinas attributes this definition to a mediaeval thinker Isaac Israeli.

Conclusion

The dilemma of a truth theorist is how to account for the applicability of the truth predicate to various domains of discourse while at the same safeguard the unity of truth. The reduction of truth to a “thin” concept does not eliminate the quandary. Not even deflationary attitude by reducing the concept to logical, semantic and anaphoric functions of the truth predicate is capable of eliminating the challenge that the question of the unity of truth poses. Bearing in mind that the defence of truth as a univocal or equivocal term is incapable of satisfactorily addressing the issue concerning the unity, I have argued that neither outright alethic monism nor outright alethic pluralism/functionalism is suitable solution to the question concerning the unity of truth. The problem with truth monism is its inability to account for the applicability of truth to diverse domains of discourse – empirical realities, theology, mathematics, ethics, fiction, etc. Regarding truth pluralism and functionalism, their problem is the propensity to lead to equivocation of ambiguity. Having indicated that inadequacies of monism and pluralism, I concluded that the unity of truth is a unity in diversity and so analogy is the only key to a proper understanding of the unity of truth.

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