

Truth: The Paradox of Believable Lie and Unbelievable Truth

Asira E. Asira (PhD)¹ Udofia, Chris A.²

1. Philosophy Department, University of Calabar, P.M.B 1115, Calabar -Nigeria
2. Philosophy Department, University of Calabar, P.M.B 1115, Calabar - Nigeria

* E –mail of the corresponding author: asiraunical@gmail.com

Abstract

Man's attempts to arrive at Truth or uncover falsehood have preoccupied man from time immemorial. Many theories of truth have been advanced by many philosophers and lovers of truth, yet man is no nearer to the Truth. The more man presses to get the Truth in or of a matter, the more he is demanding for more explanation which may put his mind to rest, whether it is true or false. This has given birth to the oversight of what is at stake in such an effort – Truth. Hence, we tend to believe a lie which offers a convincing explanation and ignore truth whose explanation is unconvincing. This predicament tasks us to emerge with the concepts of *believable lie* and *unbelievable truth*. The focus of this paper therefore, is to make a presentation of the concept of truth, the various theories of truth and the damage done by *believable lie* at the expense of *unbelievable truth* in human society.

Keywords: truth, believable lie, unbelievable truth

1. Introduction

From time, man has been bedeviled by Truth. How? The more man tries to cheat, deceive or cover and or uncover secrets, lies etc, the more he gets confused. The more he tries to demand for explanation, the more he is requesting for a higher level of confusion because he will be demanding for an explanation of explanation.

Demand for explanation is aimed at arriving at truth, reality, certainty or to uncover falsehood. Man's attempts to separate "the true" from "the false", the "real" from the "illusory" has been the task of thought at all times" (Basil Willey - *The Seventeenth Century Background*, 1).

2. Clarification of Concepts

2.1 Lie: This connotes falsehood. What is not true, what is not real. What is not certain. What is not.

2.2 Truth: The demand for truth is as old as man himself. In some centuries, truth was 'what felt to be truth' and not actually what was truth. In other centuries, truth was a conscious 'habitual assumptions'. That is, "doctrines felt as facts". In the seventeenth century it was explanation, that suffices as truth (Willey, 12).

Truth therefore, is what ought to be. Truth does not change. Truth is what is real. What is certain. Truth remains the way it is not withstanding the circumstances and person involved. Truth remains no matter how much suppression 'we can do nothing against the truth but for the truth' (2 Corinthians 13:8). Truth is irritating to the ears of a liar and pleasing to the ears of a truthful person (John 18:37).

Pilate, like all men, demanded to know the meaning and concept of truth. But he in turn defined truth thus: "I find in him no fault at all" (John 18:38). Truth is absence of fault - spotless, without blemish. Truth is therefore a state of perfection that is why it is without fault.

It is difficult, if not impossible to separate truth from reality, certainty, authenticity, immutability, etc. Francis Bacon is cited by Willey as advancing that Truth is two fold – Truth of religion, and truth of science (35). Indeed, Francis Bacon did not mean here that truth is relative, all he was concerned with was to create an avenue for science to blossom too because, religion was domineering (Willey 35-36). Truth is not by agreement. It is there for one to discover or know or fail to know it (John 8:32). Truth is objective. The thinking that truth is subjective and/or otherwise had given rise to the distinction of truth into: absolute truth, objective truth, subjective truth, relative truth, linguistic truth, pragmatic truth etc.

The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy defines truth as "the qualities of those propositions that accord with reality, specifying what is in fact the case" (812). This further points to the fact that reality and truth go together. Man's inability or difficulty to explain what truth is or define truth has brought to bear many suggestions as to what the nature of truth should be. This is itself a problem which has to do with distinguishing between what is truth and what is true. 'What is truth' has to do with what one is saying about a proposition when he is saying that that proposition is true. 'What is true' has to do with what or that which is true. In what is truth, the aim is to discover the nature of that property. On the basis of looking for the nature of truth many philosophers have developed various theories of truth.

3. Theories of Truth

3.1 Correspondence Theory of Truth

This view is traced to Aristotelian – Scholastic tradition of epistemology and metaphysics, and it holds that a statement or a proposition or whatever constitutes truth is so if and only if it shares in a certain feature of the external world. For instance, the truth of the statement "Dr. Goodluck Jonathan is the president of Nigeria" lies on the fact that he is an

incumbent president of Nigeria. This means that correspondence theory requires adequate verification for truth postulation.

3.2 Coherence Theory of Truth

Advocated by the great Western Rationalist system – building Metaphysicians like; Leibniz, Spinoza, Hegel and Bradley, this theory holds that truth does not consist of correspondence with the facts but coherence among sentences. The rationale behind this outlook is that truth does not depend on a conjunction between language and reality but only upon the relation between sentences. Appraising the coherence theory of truth, Randall J. & Buchler, J. (www.truth.defined.com/theoriesoftruth.htm) observed that even if correspondence with facts were completely eliminated and attention to the relationship among ideas alone could be achieved, it would hardly serve as a guarantee of truth because a system of beliefs could be perfectly consistent and yet each of these beliefs could be false. Hence, coherence or consistency itself cannot suffice for the establishment of truth.

3.3 Pragmatic theory of truth

This theory was introduced in their different forms by Charles Sanders Peirce, Williams James and John Dewey. Amidst the variations in viewpoints, the nexus of this theory is that truth is verified and confirmed by the results of putting one's concepts into practice. For Williams James, "the 'truth' is only the expedient in our way of thinking, just as the 'right' is only the expedient in our way of behaving" (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/truth). "Truth" for James therefore means "useful" and "false" means "useless". However, it is doubtful whether popular beliefs which are appealing to a majority qualify as truth against those uncharming and marginal beliefs of the minority.

Pragmatists measure things by their utility and is a predilectional matter of like and dislike. Therefore, going by their theory, truth has become a predilectional matter of taste.

3.4 The Deflationary Theory of Truth

This view holds that the function of truth "is not to describe propositions as one might naively infer from its syntactic form, but rather to enable us to construct a certain type of generalizations" (Robert Audi, 813) the deflationists aver that all legitimate uses of truth predicate in Science, Logic, Semantics and Metaphysics are displays of generalizing function. It is only that equivalent schema that is needed to explain that function. Prominent deflationary theories are:

3.4.1 Redundancy Theory of Truth

Advocated by Frege, Ramsey and Horwich. Frege expressed it thus: "It is worthy of notice that the sentence "I smell the scent of violets" has the same content as the sentence "It is truth that I smell the scent of violets. So it seems then that nothing is added to the thought by my ascribing to it the property of truth". (Frege, www.ep.utm.edu/truth).

This theory holds therefore that the addition of "It is true" to the sentence is redundant or adds nothing to the veracity of the statement.

3.4.2 Disquotation Theory of Truth

This theory of truth holds that truth captured by the disquotation principle of 'P' is true and only if P. thus, for example; the sentence "Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white. To ascribe "truth" to the sentence is to ascribe whiteness to snow. Thus ascription of truth cancels out the quotation marks. Truth here becomes disquotation.

3.4.3 Semantic Theory of Truth

This is the view that a statement or proposition is true on the strength or basis of its meaning. If a statement corresponds to the state of affairs then it constitutes truth, if not, then it is not.

4. Some Problems of Truth

The problems associated with the concept of truth include:

4.1 Language: language plays a significant role in human existence and as a medium of communication, it is the only means of expressing what is arrived at as truth. But however, it is obvious that language does not really capture the object of which it represents. On this note, Gorgias, as noted by Edet, sees language as being a problem to the attainment of truth by saying that nothing exists, if anything exists, it cannot be known, even if it is known, it cannot be communicated (24). Here Gorgias means that there exists a gap between objects and the mind, and another gap between the mind's knowledge and the language which expresses it. Language is expressed by words, but words are only symbols or signs and no symbol can ever be the same with what it symbolizes.

However, this position is not without flaws by its subjective nature or status. One may be tempted to ask how he came by the knowledge of "nothing can be known"? By saying that "even if something is known, it cannot be communicated", is contradictory because at the same time communication is going on. This position also points at the impossibility of truth attainment. The impossibility of truth attainment does not mean impossibility of the existence of truth.

4.2 Preconception and Beliefs

The argument has to do with the fact that whatsoever someone has in his mind and believes it to be true often makes it impossible for him jettison it for new knowledge. Francis Bacon's idols of the cave and distempers of learning explore and expose the difficulties in learning or acquiring new knowledge with preconceptions and beliefs.

In the same vein, in teaching pedagogy, it is upheld that when you meet a man who knows not and knows that he knows not, teach him, he will know. But if you meet a man who knows not and knows not that he knows not, don't teach him, he will never know anything (Anonymous).

For Kemp preconception and beliefs can blur knowledge or truth attainment as he states that: "...we tend to perceive whole pattern which are familiar to us, and if, in fact what we perceive only nearly matches the standard pattern, then we automatically compensate for whatever is different from the pattern"(15). He further presented an account of an astronomer to demonstrate that it pays better to approach knowledge or reality with an unbiased mind thus: "A well known and highly respected astronomer, van Maanen, early in this century made some photographic observation and then carried out measurements on the photographs with special equipment. The results, as he recorded and published them, were a major part of the evidence for a theory that was widely held to be correct for the next twenty or thirty years...the accumulated weight of other evidence was in favour of an alternative theory, until eventually only the observation of van Maanen...remained to support the original theory and refute its alternatives. Eventually, three astronomers...repeated his measurements using exactly the method he had described, their results were quite different from Van Maanen's and supported the new alternative theory" (51-52).

4.3 Relativity of Truth

It is also argued by some philosophers that truth is relative. For them, truth is dependent on time, place, situation and other existential factors. In attempt to explain the concept of ontological relativity of Quine, Ozumba opines that "There is nothing a priori in our meaning... we can alter the content in accordance with our whims and caprice, all in keeping with our chosen background theory" (212).

Truth is reality is not changed by anybody's disposition or position, whether one sees it as truth or not it does not change. It is the different assessors that give relative accounts of an unchangeable and immutable truth. According to Lamprecht, "For practical purpose a man ought to accept those objects as real and those opinions as true which are accepted by consensus of his fellows" (25).

Here truth is identified with the conventions of a people. This cannot be correct because truth is absolute. What a people hold to be true may not constitute truth.

The unbelievable truth and believable lie here has to do with when we are forced to believe what is not true based on the accuracy of the account story, records etc. yet the truth is far from them or a situation where we fail to believe something is the case because of poor presentation, lack of correct language and diction. Sometimes inability to explain or express what is true does not change nor destroy the truth of that matter.

5. Conclusion

From the foregoing, we have seen the kinds of truth, the different theories of truth in attempt by different philosophers to articulate what can qualify as truth and also we have seen the diverse problems associated with the concept of truth. All these have equipped us with the knowledge of the nature of and the diversity of problems generated by the concept of truth. However, for anything to qualify as truth, it must be seen in absolute terms. This will help in eradicating human errors which characterize the different variants of realistic theories of truth. Absolute truth is the highest truth. Ozumba toes this line of thought when he opines that absolute truth does not countenance the possibility of error or uncertainty. It is the court of final appeal in matters concerning truth (79). The major problem however, is how to harmonize the absolute conception of truth with the different theories of truth. The answer is farfetched and the controversy continues.

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