

Finding Out What is True

there is no affirmation of separate and independent existence. The reason for this is that the truth claim is dependent upon an observer making a judgement about the claim. The observer judges the claim to be coherent or not (thin or thick). That's as far as it goes. If the observer is confident in her judgement, she may declare that her judgement (if made by reliable means) may be sufficient to assert truth as separate and independent. But that is only a conjecture. There is no attaching necessity to some ontological claim. Whereas, in the case of correspondence theory, the truth of the object was given necessarily and only *our* ability to fashion replicas was in question. In the case of coherence theory, the ability to fashion sound, error-free accounts is given and only the account's ultimate mode of existence is in question – just the opposite!

Pragmatic Theory

The pragmatic theory of truth asserts that a theory is confirmed to be true relative to the work it can perform. There are two distinct ways to understand this: 1) relating to mere personal expediency (the internalist perspective), and 2) relating to intersubjective scientific confirmation in the experimental method (the externalist perspective). Let's examine these in order.

The first interpretation of pragmatic theory follows from William James who said, 'The true is only the expedient in the way of our behaving, expedient in almost any fashion, and expedient in the long run and on the whole course.'¹⁹ This means that a success standard arises to justify what is or is not true. When related to personal expediency from the internalist standpoint, this amounts to the criteria for justifying some belief as true. Plato, in the *Theatetus*, floats the claim that if someone believes something, and is justified in that belief, then the belief is knowledge. However, Plato is careful to suggest various pitfalls in what would count as a justification (Plato was a correspondence theory advocate). In the twentieth century the problem of what counts as adequate justification for belief from the internalist perspective has led to arguments concerning adequate conceptual grounds for justification.²⁰ From the internalist perspective it all returns to some belief being good for us. This may be

Theories of Truth

The last section discussed *ways of coming to know*. But the follow-up question is: 'Knowing what?' The object of our quest for knowing is truth. Now some have said that we can make far too much of this. They want to *deflate* the concentration on the nature of truth and rather concentrate on the processes we undergo and the checks on the same. I have some sympathy with this critique, but since the history of philosophy has put forth depictions of truth, and since this essay is an exploration of the good, the true, and the beautiful, it seems rather straightforward to enter into some analysis of what the true might be.

Correspondence Theory

Correspondence theory states that a proposition is true when it accords with the actual state of affairs. In this case the proposition is in fidelity with the way things *are*. This definition presupposes a number of things. First, and foremost, it suggests that 'true' is an ascription based upon resemblance, but it does not offer criteria for evaluating how resemblance is to be evaluated. Second, it finesses what constitutes the actual state of affairs. Let us begin with the first hurdle.

Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) suggested a principle of identity that said if two entities x and y had all and the same properties, then they were identical.⁶ This seems quite reasonable, but it finesses the question of how various properties are identified and described. From the externalist, intersubjective perspective, asking questions of the community could solve this. The general agreement (based upon empirical data) would constitute grounds for acceding to a claim of identity (resemblance). Thus, we would posit the representation of Mollie (say in the form of a photograph). Resemblance in this way is principally understood empirically. One might look at the photograph and declare that it is flawed because it depicts Mollie as having red eyes when everyone knows she has brown eyes. In this respect, the photograph does not resemble what *is* and so is false to some degree

what will count (in your worldview) as the entity against which all things are measured (vis-à-vis their verisimilitude).

However, the external and the internal perspectives are different when one chooses (a), (b), (c), or (d) on The Official Question and Answer Test. Those who choose (a) can always claim to offer (at least 'in principle') an externalist perspective that is capable of intersubjective verification.¹¹ Those who choose (b) are bound to an internalist perspective or a naïve empiricist perspective that refuses to assign substance to empirical perceptions or (c) rely upon the subject and her reliable procedures for picking out just what is true for acceptance and what is false for rejection. The 'reliable procedure' may be open for public scrutiny, but the data inputs are not. Thus, the mechanical operation of the process remains intersubjectively inscrutable. In the case of correspondence theory, the truth of the object is given and only our ability to fashion replicas is in question. Such is a quick take on correspondence theory.¹²

Coherence Theory

Coherence theory stipulates that a given body of knowledge is true if and only if there are no internal deductive contradictions. (Sometimes people also add the stipulation that the body of knowledge is also complete – meaning that one cannot pose a problem from the covered universe and not generate an answer.) *Truth* here means that everything works smoothly together so that an artificial whole is produced that has boundaries and symmetry. Proponents of the coherence theory of truth often point to symmetry and elegance as properties attaching to true bodies of knowledge. This sort of language is obviously evocative of Beauty. One views an elegant system as one that *must* be true because it is elegant. The beauty of a coherent system stirs the student's aesthetic sensibilities. This collision of beauty and truth also has ethical ramifications. When we think of coherent accounts of nature by scientists I have observed that there is not only an overlap with beauty but there is an action-guiding response. When I was doing research on my co-authored text *Genetic Engineering: Science and Ethics on the New Frontier*, I observed this very behaviour that I term *The Value-Duty Doctrine*: Whenever agent