An Axiological Perspective in Understanding Truth

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Abstract

The present study is intended as an analysis of the concept of truth starting from its classical definitions. The axiological perspective on truth – unlike the realistic, logical and utilitarian ones – opens the path towards new significances of this concept/ value: truth depends on the norms of subjectivity, which are the result of the community desire, and is not too different chronologically-wise.

Keywords: *truth, value, axiology.*

On the time scale, truth has robustly edified its theoretical understanding: in any presentation on the topic, one meets almost identical paragraphs and references: the concept of truth, types of truth, theories and criteria of truth, etc. The one who advances the thesis acknowledges its gnoseological-epistemological nature, and from the way in which the topic is approached, it results that he / she considers the *concept* of truth. Notwithstanding, isn't truth a human *value* presiding over theoretical activities, in the way in which other values preside over social behaviour or human sensitivity?

The axiological approach to truth seems to impinge on a fundamental feature of the latter, that is, objectivity. The objectivity requirement, as a warrant of the manifestation of truth, claims the elimination, as much as possible, of the researcher's subjectivity in his/ her theoretical act. However, when construed as a value, truth is in conflict with objectivity, which is the reason why epistemologists rather prefer a conceptual approach.

First and foremost, truth is a value. The Neo-Kantian trend of the School of Baden, through Windelband and Rickert, indicates that values do not pertain to reality, but to norm (*sollen*), by valorising the Kantian distinction between norm and existence. The essence, the significance of the value lies in validity (*Geltung*). What exactly makes up validity in the case of truth as theoretical value? The

classical answer has led to the theory of truth-correspondence: in order to be true, what one says *must* correspond to reality. In other words, one deals with the truth every time one subjects to the imperative of this norm. Charles S. Peirce, who was not afraid of the subjectivist approach to truth, with his consensus theory, develops, in *The Fixation of Belief* (1877), the idea that, when compared to other subjective methods, the scientific one has the advantage that the authority that a belief is confronted with in view of its "fixation" is reality. Reality, through *confrontation* with itself, founds consensus among us and constitutes validity.

This situation is functional for judgments or logical propositions. However, what happens at the level of the theoretical systems, in which any new enounce must be confronted with the totality of the existing enounces? Validity results, in this case, from the imposition of coherence as criterion of truth. One may easily note, in this case, that truth as value is under the imperative of norms, of *what should be and not what is.*

This idea may seem shocking, perhaps even due to incoherence, judging by the above claims.

At the level of coherence, of confrontation of the propositions, the correspondence to reality becomes inoperable. This situation, reflected by the positive experiences of the Sophists, led to the discovery of the empire of normativity in the rationality order. This discovery, which meant the emergence of logic, was made by Aristotle. The laws of logical thinking – the non-contradiction principle, of excluded middle and of identity – represent the *sollen*, in reference to which the validity of reasons is confronted.

What should we note up to this point? It seems obvious that all the requirements – either of the so-called truth-correspondence or of that represented by coherence – are the result of a subjective consensus, of a unanimous desire of men to coincide in their aspiration to truth, or, ultimately, to understanding, which provides a generous outlining for the pragmatist theory of truth. At the ideal level of a general survey, it is not credible that a man would want his dialogue partners to respond with affirmations non-conforming with reality. It would be as if, in a general survey, one would interrogate all people whether they wanted to be always treated as people and never as confined people, and discovered that there existed irrational individuals as well.

Man never assumes such irrationality individually, Kant asserts, which is the reason why, in the moral plane, the subjective and categorical imperative that it should be always treated as ends and never as means is possible and becomes *objective*. In the case of knowledge, conformity to reality is an objective

categorical imperative, precisely thanks to the fact that us, people (from all ages) *want* to relate to what it is precisely how it is what it is. Mankind have made a norm out of this desire, theoretically promoted by Aristotle, mediaeval philosophers and other contemporary epistemologists. The subjective wish of every man to aspire to truth, the banal wish to not be lied to, become norm and acquiring validity status (*Geltung*), seems to become, at the same time, an exigency towards objectivity, misconstrued by the knowledge theorists as a total war against subjective implications in the epistemic act. Thus, it is easily forgotten that truth, as a value, is primarily under the imperative of the norms, of *what should be and not what is*. Notwithstanding, the primordial exigency of *what should be* fatally coincides with the request to precisely designate *what is*, thus giving birth to a new meaning of validity, as theoretical objectivity, accompanied by the imperative of the total exclusion of subjectivity. This aspect has led to the approach to truth from the perspective of the concept, and not that of the value, of the human desire to record exactly what is. What we note, however, is that the entire human subjectivity is involved in revealing truth, and that it is this normative involvement what gives us the truth.

If the confrontation with reality becomes a categorical imperative in the order of judgment, then what happens at the level of reasoning and argumentation? It is there where coherence becomes operational. Aristotle also discovered reasonable norms, the logical principles which, in light of a thorough analysis, reveal as expressions of some generic desires of the human nature. People are mistaken in their argumentation when they disregard the identity of the terms, or when, due to a pathetic urge or intention to capture and benumb the spirit of the interlocutor, insert contradictory statements in their discourse. The exigency of identity and non-contradiction is rooted in the desire (essentially natural) for people not to alter the identity of things and not to contradict their properties. Instead, people, in their discursive urge, alter the identity of things, whereas the expression of their properties leaves, most often, much to be desired.

The natural need for coherence led to the birth of Eleatic philosophy. Anticipating the Aristotelian logic, Parmenides dares to metaphorically define the norms reasonably acceptable for thinking the being: the being can be thought but through its characteristic: *the being is*. The contradictory *the being is not* is rationally unacceptable. When Parmenides asserts that the being is one, that is, it does not know multiplicity, becoming, or movement, he asserts the identity of the meaning of *to be*: this meaning cannot become, if it became, it would receive the attribute of nothingness, which is contradictory. It would be like I would say this

text *is read by you*, while you would understand that it *is not read*, which is absurd. This childish example may be excelled by another one, precisely by virtue of consequences: if *to be* alters its identity by receiving the contradictory tone of *to be not*, then everyone understand whatever s/he wants from the sentence *The star war is in full progress*. Nonetheless, we do not understand whatever, but the exact meaning of the events, because our discourse is controlled by the norms that impose coherence. It seems impossible for many people to understand why Zeno's arrow in flight does not move: in truth, in the timeframe in which it aims to the target, it does not change its identity ("it is motionless", it flies as an arrow, without any metamorphosis), except for the case of some magical scripts worthy of Hollywood.

Once again, we note the case in which the involvement of *what should be* must coincide with *what is* in order to acquire the authentic value of truth. This apparent want in dichotomy between norm and existence allowed for approaching the truth only conceptually, and not from the perspective of the value and of human desirability. When there are no intentions to recover the subjective plane, it is not about a gnoseological truth, but an existential one. What matters is not the theoretical truth of what it is, but the truth about the validity (*Geltung*) of the unique existence of the human person. This latter truth escapes the logical and gnoseological norms of generic mankind; its sphere of understanding is related to revelations that imply enchainment to the entire system of values and to the option for a certain hierarchy of values.

The gateway that the axiological perspective opens to the understanding of truth is the re-evaluation of human subjectivity in the cognitive act. The value, as expression of a subjective wish, acquires its general validity in an *imperative requirement* which brings people together in collective aspirations or adhesions. What determines people have the same axiological experiences, founding and unworn out by time? Let us discuss two classical explicative solutions in moral experience, and then we shall return to suggestions based on analogies to the inquiry into the cognitive experience.

The former solution belongs to Rousseau. He considers that the principles that lie at the foundation of human actions and by which they are judged as either good or bad are rooted in the conscious urges of the soul. Good and, respectively, evil, are grounded in love and hate. If one believes that justice or kindness are abstract concepts, constructs of the thought, then one could not be more wrong, as these two concepts are the result of an alignment of our primary processes. *Reason cannot* construct a natural law through itself, without relying on our natural

sentiments. The love for people, derived from the love for one's self, is a principle of human justice. If the precept to the treat one's peer the way one wishes to be treated is valid, then it derives from the desire of one's own well-being. In order not to suffer, I want that the other does not suffer; *I am interested in him out of love for myself.* As a value, the good is grounded in the innate sense of self-compassion, which is also mediated by the repulsion of the suffering of the sensible beings.

Therefore, human nature is predisposed to the aspiration to the values of good or justice and to the conversation of this aspiration, through the constitutional act of coincidence, in moral or juridical norms of intercommunity, with its inherent responsibilities. This is a very old theory. In Platonisms, the disposition of moral behaviour was embedded by the way in which the soul had contemplated Ideas, and, implicitly, the Idea of Good, before taint; whilst in Christianity, the predisposition depended on the theanthropic nature, on the man's resemblance to divinity.

As far as the latter solution is concerned, we have already hinted at it – the Kantian moral paradigm. The German philosopher, aiming to postulate an ideal norm of human behaviour, notes that *the intentions* of the sensible beings fall in two categories:

- targeted at material goods, they are defined as relative means or ends, as they are the object of our own will. It results that the norms that satisfy our understanding in relation to various things are based on hypothetical imperatives. This is the reason why, in the case of economic, vital and political values, normativity is not constraining, but conditioned, that is to say, beneficiary of incontrollable freedoms that do not stringently impose people's coincidence, as in the following examples: "*if* you want the x goods, *then* you must work/save this much" or "*if* you want to reduce cholesterol, *then* you should not eat…", or "*if* you want a tax cut, *then* vote…"

- targeted at people, whose value is absolute, and who determine an understanding based on categorical imperatives, on the unconditioned *must* that confers noblesse to the human being through the free assumption of constraint and responsibility.

After the vivid demonstration of Socrates, who exclaimed in the bazar: *Look! how many things I don't need!*, Kant does not invite us to free ourselves from those goods that are relative means or ends in order to acquire authentic freedom, unconstrained by our relative inclinations and judgements. He simply forbids us to want these goods when our aspiration to them tramples on the human person. The

desire of any sensible man is to be always cherished as an end, and never as a means. Provided that everybody has this desire, then the sensible nature of the man aware of this becomes the founder of the value of good or justice, with consideration to the categorical imperative. To put it otherwise, people are alike just as sensible beings, in formulating some norms of an undisputed validity in promoting day-by-day behavior.

The two situations concerning the normalisation of the human behavior have underlined the subjective source of the normative act, which gains legitimacy (that is to say, a constraining validity) either through a natural predisposition of men to coincide in aspirations, or through a power of reason to generalize the collective aspirations and impose them on enlightened beings.

In the cognitive experience, there is the illusion that man is not constrained by man in the normalisation of his words on reality, but by the reality itself, which, in turn, induced an illusion of objectivity. The constraint encountered in this experience is also human, the result of the collective desire for understanding, a founder of logical rules and principles. From this perspective, one should rethink Parmenides's poem, *On Nature*.

The two ways of investigation one could think of are an allegory in which the exegetes of Parmenides's text read the unique and authentic way in which one may think and speak of what exists. These exegetes have been surprised by the change in accent that Parmenides introduced in philosophy, and have allowed to be mesmerised by the mysterious being and its qualities. However, in light of axiology, it is worth interpreting his words about the way of Belief (which accompanies Truth) not as a discourse on to be, on the fact that something exists, but rather as a discourse on the *normal* way of thinking and speaking, which excludes the thought of nothingness from the very beginning.

Parts of the poem seem to be titanic struggles to make us follow the normal way of searching for the truth, under Law and Justice, and far from the usual ways of the humanity. We read about the unknowing mortals that they *fumble*, that they are carried along the way *like deaf and dumb people, disoriented, a crowd without judgment, in whose eyes **to be or not to be is and is not the same, to whom there is a way back in everything**. However, once you are on the right and righteous way, with a guiding lighthouse ahead (to think and to be is the same thing), you cannot take the other way, where "the norm" is given by *an eye that does not see*, by *an ear full of noise*; you must sensibly judge this *much-contested rejection that we have preferred*. In his time, Parmenides did not possess either a clear vision on the things he wanted to express (although it was clear to him what he had to

confute, that is, *the fake way of investigation*), or a conceptual apparatus to help him in this respect. Axiology helps us remark that he wanted to set up the norms of rational thinking which all people should follow to speak rightly and righteously. As mentioned above, a wave of Sophist thinking had to pass before this generally human desideratum to be accomplished by Aristotle. Parmenides's reasons to speak this way about the being and its determinations are related to the norms of rational thinking. At the risk of repetition, we note in ourselves the desire to speak about things without altering their meaning (identity) during the debate: in point of meaning, it is one, the meaning is eternal, unborn, undying, continuous, indivisible, motionless and limited. What if, during a speech on the arrow, the latter would alter its meaning, would divide into multiple, contradictory, vacillating and unlimited meanings? It is obvious that there would not remain any bridge for mutual understanding. It is what Parmenides wanted to illustrate through his not-at-all mysterious being.

If we are sensible, when we want to take the path of Belief that accompanies Truth in the investigation of things, we must subject to norms (to our rational beliefs), a coercion that belongs to human subjectivity, and not in the least to the nature of the things. Truth is related to this subjective adventure, inasmuch as lie is related to the same adventure, only in a more perceivable way. That truth has often been associated with objectivity and that it is, somehow, in the power of the things, and not that of subjectivity to reason is, in fact, secondary – a new, epistemological (and not logical) subjective desire not to insert in research other interests than the ones of the pure (neutral) thinking on the object. All these logical and epistemological norms lead us on the path of truth, and the spirit that takes this path cannot disregard them, it wilfully subjects to their guiding coercion, which leads, in turn, to the prosperity of the human collectivity.

Collectivity, in the axiological acception, designates not only the today and yesterday dwellers of the planet, but also those virtual inhabitants, who must equally benefit from the fruitful field of satisfactions. However, nowadays, the cultivation of the excessive individual liberties (in want of the singular meaning of this value), as means to accede to political power, has led, on the one hand, to the supremacy of money as economic value and means for acquiring libertine satisfactions, and, on the other hand, to the extermination of the constraints emanating from every man's desire not to be murdered, robbed, lied to, lapsed into illness, terrified, terrorized, wronged, etc. This is possible, with all the rational gain, precisely due to the dismayed errancy of the helpless mortals, *crowds without*

judgement who think that to be or not to be is and is not the same, and to whom there is a way back in everything.

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