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## TRUTH AND LANGUAGE

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The challenge of this paper is to say enough about the subject of truth in a short space so that the picture of truth that emerges is not a false witness.

You may be aware that in the long history of the problem of truth there have been some principal answers as to what truth is. The correspondence theory of truth holds that truth is ideas or statements which are perceived empirically to correspond to the nature of the universe. The main problem with the correspondence theory is that empiricism often yields false results. Another historic theory is that truth is the property of propositions which rationally cohere with certain fundamental truths; this coherence would be good if we could only find those fundamental truths. The pragmatic theory of truth says that what works may be taken as true; but what that theory supports is that what works does work, not why it works or what it is that works. A recent entry into the arena is the linguistic theory of truth as initiated by Wittgenstein and articulated by Garth L. Hallett in the book Language and Truth (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1988). This linguistic theory holds that statements are true if they are faithful to the linguistic norms of the culture in which they are uttered. I believe there is a good deal of merit in Hallett's formulation in that he does well represent how the word "true" is actually used in society, but that his theory also falls short by not giving a clear statement as to what truth is and in failing to handle the problem of untruth in ordinary usage.

I therefore now proceed to give my own theory of truth and true, hoping to shed light on this important subject.

I define truth as a synonym for reality. Reality is all that exists, or has existed or yet will come into existence. One cannot discuss reality without making fundamental metaphysical commitments, which I now proceed to stipulate for my ideas of truth.

I understand existence to be composed of material things in various orders, arrangements and functions. These material things and their relationships constitute a whole, each part of which is essential. Thus truth is one, and cannot be divided. To be grasped as truth, it must be grasped as a whole, all that is and was and will be in all of its whys and wherefores, particles, subsystems and totality. Needless to say, this truth is beyond the grasp of any human being.

Each human being is a particular part of the whole of truth, a participant. Each of the feelings, ideas, and representations of a human being are part of the whole truth. The pertinent and pressing question about any given human being is then how he or she represents the truth of the universe to self and to others, and how intelligently one takes ones place in that great truth.

Of principal concern to us is representation of truth. We shall define "true" as a quality of something which measures up to a standard. Thus human beings are true to their word if they do what they have promised to do, and their statements are true if and as those statements measure up favorably to the truth of the universe. What are the possibilities that what an individual thinks or says can be called "true"? To answer that question, a taxonomy of human representations must be posited. We will now explore

a taxonomy which begins with representations which have the greatest possibility of being most true and ends with those least true.

The general label which I give to all human representations of truth is "factitions," from the Latin facere. I use this term to emphasize that in every case, human attempts to characterize truth are for each individual a creative making and doing. Human beings do not passively reflect the universe at any time in their characterizing of it. There is a personal element in each factition which is ineradicable. To use the analogy of a landscape painter, every human factition of truth is an attempt to paint some piece of the universe in a helpful manner. But the painting is never exactly true relative to the truth for at least two constant reasons: first, every human representation is an abstraction from truth, leaving out much that is true; second, no human representation can capture the whole, and only the whole is the truth.

The first level of human representation is perception. Perception, or conocer, kennen knowledge, is the direct sensory inspection of some aspect of the universe. In that direct sensory relationship perception is as close to the truth of things as a human being can get. Sensation is always particulars and of particulars. But this perception is ordinarily flawed by the fact that sensation is not perception until it is interpreted by the mind of the person. That interpretation is done on the basis of the total contents of the mind of the person; all of his previous sensations, ideas, theories, hopes, fears and inhibitions color his interpretation of sensation. Sensations must be read, just as a book must be read, to make any "sense."

The categories of understanding which the person uses to interpret the particular sensations are usually themselves universals. These universals are theories as to what is important and true in the universe and what is not. The more truth the person already has in mind, the more true will be his perceptions. But it is quite safe to say that no human ever perceives all things truly. The best and paradigm case of human perception is found in the direct, continuous, present, proximal sensing of a limited and very familiar aspect of the universe by one who is an expert on that subject. At best direct perception is once removed from the truth, which is to say that the best representation of the truth a human can make may yet be false.

The second degree or echelon of representation is the understanding of an experienced person. This is saber, or wissen knowledge of the world. At its best and surest this understanding is limited to the spatial, temporal, and causal sequences with which the person is very familiar. Identities, differences, continuities, etc., are part of this domain. At its weakest, this type of representation may be so flawed by false theories of the universe as to render the individual without a workable hypothesis as to what is being perceived, as is seen in certain types of mental illness. At best, these representations are twice removed from truth; at worst they are wholly untrue.

The third echelon of human representation of truth is found in the ability to do what one wishes to do. This ability exists only in doing what one wishes to do. This is koennen knowledge, can do in English. This kind of representation of truth comes after perception because the desire to do things comes only after understanding the possibility that they might be done. This can-do knowledge is a representation of truth by emphasizing what works, what the effective sequences of action are that are necessary to produce a certain result. Producing results does give us the truth that a certain action has produced a result, which is a specialized form of understanding, but knowing that a thing has happened does not involve knowing why that thing happened. Thus a full understanding of echelon two is a better representation of truth than the partial understanding of what works as found in echelon three. And echelon three is thrice removed from the truth.

Perception, understanding and the ability to do something are personal representations of truth within the individual. They have been the inspiration for the correspondence,

the coherence, and the pragmatic theories of truth. Though not truth, they are the representations of truth closest to the truth and therefore the most true ideas which the individual may have. They are not linguistic, but they reflect heavily the prior linguistic experience of the individual. The remaining categories of representation of truth by persons are all linguistic functions.

The fourth echelon of human representation of the truth is found in the individual's witness of his own perceptions. Using his own personal perceptions as a base, the person formulates some verbal means of expressing a new perception. All words represent universals. When an individual tries to express the particulars of his experience in words he always faces a mismatch between what sensations are and what words can do. That problem, compounded with the universals of interpretation and understanding which color all perception, make an individual's testimony as to what he has personally perceived four times removed from the truth.

The fifth echelon of human representation is in the witness an individual gives of his understanding of actual experiences he has had. All of the problems of perception and the reporting of perception are here augmented by the potential flaws in his understanding. A person might honestly report a temporal or spatial or causal sequence which he has observed, but be so thoroughly mistaken as to what actually was happening as to be a totally misleading witness. This fifth echelon is five times removed from the truth.

The sixth echelon of human representation of the truth is in the individual's linguistic representation of what has worked for him as he has tried to fulfill his objectives as a person. Colored by his perceptions and limited by his understanding of the truth, this echelon is further hampered by the fact that when an individual is successful in accomplishing something he seldom can give an exhaustive account of all that he did and of all that the environment furnished to bring about his desired result. The individual knows that in situation X he did Y and obtained Z, but cannot give a full and accurate account of X or Y or Z. Therefore, this sixth echelon of representation is six times removed from the truth.

The seventh echelon of human representation is human witness as to inductive generalizations he has made about the world out of his own experience. We have now crossed the line from the possibility of inadvertent error in representing truth to the overt and deliberate embellishment of what the individual has experienced. In other words, we are now in the realm where pure guesswork characterizes the attempts of the individual to represent the truth. All interpolations and extrapolations are technically guesses, and these guesses suffer even more from the possibility of wishful thinking than do the previous levels of factitions. Valuable and useful as some inductive generalizations of experience may be, such representations are at least seven steps removed from the truth.

The eighth echelon of representation is theory. Theories are understandings that are deliberately invented to characterize some aspect of truth which cannot be the subject of direct empirical observation. Thus discussion of the nature of atoms, of space-time matrices, of how man came to be on the earth, of what is good and evil, --all such are inventions of men to try to overcome their lack of ability to see for themselves the truths of these matters. All historical accounts and all interpretations of linguistic formulations are types of theories. This echelon includes all quotation of other human beings. While it is true that logical consequences of a theory sometimes offer the possibility of empirical confirmation, no empirical experience necessitates either the adoption or the rejection of any theory. Theories are often accepted and rejected on non-experiential criteria. Theories are eight times removed from the truth.

The ninth echelon of human representation of truth is found in overt fictions. These are counted as representations of truth because one main use and value of fiction is to

present ideas as to the way things really are in some respect using non-historical characterizations. These characterizations are usually attempts to present inductive generalizations or theories of truth in an artistic form, one that is pleasing or attention-getting. But as representations of truth, fictions are at least nine steps removed from the truth of things.

The tenth and final echelon of human representation of the truth in this taxonomy is found in the deliberate lie. This lie is a deliberate mis-representation which is known to the positor of the lie to be a lie but which he hopes he can get other humans to accept as true, as adequately representing truth. Lies are very effective in a world where truth is important and valued, where truth is difficult to come by, and where people are not always very careful as to what they accept as a representation of truth. Such is the world in which we live. Thus lies are ten steps removed from the truth. But they are not very far removed from those representations which are close to it in the echelons of representation.

Sometimes human beings do recognize the importance of truth and take special precautions to try to eliminate falsehood from linguistic exchanges. In law there is a recognition that the personal testimony of an eyewitness to an event is more valuable in establishing the true representation of an historic event than any other kind of representation, and that the testimony of several witnesses is better than that of only one. Also recognized is the testimony of expert witnesses, who are allowed to tell of their understanding and can-do knowledge, sometimes even of their inductive generalizations and theories. But since that kind of representation is from four to eight times removed from the real truth, the justice of our courts of law sometimes miscarries because it must accept such a poor representation of the truth as this, for want of better. The scholarly world recognizes that primary sources (fourth echelon representations) are much better evidence of the truth than are secondary sources (eighth echelon representations).

Science as an institution has sought to rid itself of the problem of representing truth by eliminating all personal knowledge and witness of truth, the first four echelons, and by replacing them with inductive generalizations and theories which are agreed upon by the majority of competent scientists. Science thus focuses on the seventh and eight echelons of truth representation. Scientists essentially say to the rest of mankind: We will manage your truth concerns for you; just put your trust in us and we will deliver you from error, because anything different from or outside of what we propound is error. Historical insight reveals that science is not omniscient but advances by replacing one scientific representation by another through time. The power of science is of course not in its representations. Its power and prestige come ultimately from the fact that the technology associated with modern science is formidable. Science is accepted as a painter of truth because of the fireworks it can produce. Producing fireworks does show that sometimes the inductive generalizations and theories of science do have some positive relationship to the truth.

Art in some of its forms is a non-literal attempt to represent truth, as discussed above in the matter of deliberate and overt fictions. Another side of art is that it attempts to create truth, to bring to pass new being which is valuable in some way. The attempt to capture ideals in artistic production is the attempt to "realize" things which are taken to be true, good and beautiful. The question about such art is, does it fully embody the ideal which the artist set out to create? Inasmuch as an artist does create, his artistic production becomes truth, part of the whole being of truth, which itself must and may then be represented by some one of the above delineated ten echelons of human representations of truth.

We come now to some conclusions and applications.

1. Truth is a whole and cannot be represented adequately by human beings. Therefore a large measure of humility is appropriate in every human attempt to find or state something which could be called true.
2. There are no degrees of truth. Something is either the truth or it is not. But human representations of truth certainly do come in degrees, in at least the ten steps of removal from the truth as explicated in this paper. The trueness of a representation is thus a qualitative variable which may vary from 1 to 10, 1 being best. But human beings have no human means of being sure that their representation of the truth is true. Error always lurks as a real possibility.
3. There is also a quantitative measure of truth as well as a qualitative measure. How much truth a human being represents is a function of the amount of experience he has had with whatever fraction of the universe he has experienced.
4. All human representations of the truth are creative, factitious, and are therefore as much a measure of the artificer as they are of the truth being represented.
5. It is easier to know truth, to represent it to oneself, than it is to speak truth, to represent it to others.
6. Most of human discourse, statistically speaking, lies at the untruth end of the spectrum rather than at the truth end.

Which brings us to the necessity of including in what we say some mention of spiritual matters. Spiritual matters are part of the reality of the universe, and to try to discuss truth without saying something about spiritual experience would be deliberately to falsify everything that has been said. There are two troublesome problems that must be dealt with in connection with spiritual matters. One problem is that every human being is more an expert on his own spiritual experience than is any other human being. This is good in that it fosters individual initiative and independent thinking. The other problem is that because there are two spiritual sources, many persons latch onto a spirit that fosters untruth, and in their independence, are difficult to assist. A typical human attempt to overcome these problems is to encourage people to denigrate all spiritual experience in favor of trusting in some human authority. We shall show that that is a poor expedient, if getting close to the truth is the goal.

The individual in his own personal experience of truth can be closer to the truth than any linguistic and socially acceptable account of the universe could ever be. Personal experience is always spiritual, and furthermore each honest person knows that there are at least two spirits besides his own which affect him constantly. Let us then make a brief account of truth in light of those two spirits which affect human beings.

One spirit is the spirit of truth and the other spirit is a lying spirit. By whatever names these spirits are known to men, they are known to men. Whenever a person attempts to characterize the truth, to know it or to speak about it, one or both of those spirits is at hand to assist in the process.

It is the mission of the spirit of truth to assist the person to see, to understand, and to be able to do all that he needs to do in this world. But the spirit of truth is not primarily interested in truth. What the spirit of truth is more concerned about is righteousness, doing good in the world. Truth is a means to doing good, but knowing truth is never more important than doing good. So the spirit of truth comes to a person first to tell them the importance of doing good, then to tell them what truly is the good to be done by them in their situation, then to tell them any other truth they need to know to be able to do the good they should do. Should what that person needs to do to do good involve linguistic characterizing of the truth about the universe for the benefit of another human being, the spirit of truth will instruct the speaker as to what to say,

and then will interpret for the hearer, so that the exact portion and quality of truth necessary for both the speaker and the hearer to do good will be communicated.

The lying spirit is of course also not principally interested in truth and error. That spirit is principally interested in getting human beings to do evil to one another, to damn and hurt one another. The chief weapon of this spirit is lies, thus this is a lying spirit. He will tell truth and will influence human beings to know and speak truth whenever that will bring about evil, and he promotes lying whenever it will bring about evil.

So if a human being understands the difficulties of representing truth and also knows these two spirits, how can or should he or she act? We shall first delineate the case of the follower of the spirit of truth, and then the case of the person who follows the lying spirit.

How will a follower of the spirit of truth act in this world? Such a person will seek to feel the influence of the spirit of truth in all situations. He or she will be apt to listen to and quick to do that good which that spirit of truth commends, seeking also to gain true perceptions, true understanding, and true ability to do that which needs to be done. Should this person need to speak of the truth, he or she will assiduously strive to measure every gesture, word and characterization to itself become a good and a true representation, acting and speaking as humbly as possible under the influence of the spirit of truth. When one speaks by the spirit of truth, though words cannot convey the truth, the truth of the matter can be manifest to the hearer by that same spirit of truth by which the speaker speaks. Thus it is the spirit of truth that is responsible for the truth, not the human speaker. This does not give license for the speaker to be careless with the truth, for he must attempt always to speak truly, by the spirit of truth. But truth is yet the province of the spirit of truth.

Should the follower of the spirit of truth encounter the words of another human being who speaks by the spirit of truth, that hearer will pay close attention to the personal witness of particulars which the speaker relates out of his own experience. If the matter is important, the hearer will go to see for himself. He does not want to depend on the word of another, even a good word, because words are always further removed from the truth than is personal observation under the influence of the spirit of truth. Should the good speaker speak of things not in his personal knowledge, that person will speak only under the influence of the spirit of truth, and the hearer will then apply to the spirit of truth to receive a personal manifestation of the matter from the spirit of truth for himself. He knows that personal knowledge is always closer to the truth than a manifestation reported by another, even if the speaker is truly saying what he has been led to say by the spirit of truth. Thus the influence of the spirit of truth is to cause every person to seek to know for himself both the natural things he may observe and the unseeable things concerning which he may receive his own personal instruction from the spirit of truth.

When one who hears by the spirit of truth hears a person who speaks by the lying spirit, the results are much the same. The hearer will not accept the reported personal knowledge of the speaker, but will go see for himself. Neither will he accept the witness of things which are not personal knowledge, but will seek further from the spirit of truth the truth about the matters on which the person of the lying spirit speaks.

What happens when one of a lying spirit hears another who speaks by the spirit of truth? In this case the person of the lying spirit will accept whatever is in the personal knowledge witness that the speaker gives which the hearer finds to be useful or pleasing, and will reject the rest. The person of the lying spirit hears the speaker who speaks of unseeable matters by the spirit of truth in such a way as to reject what is said unless it can be twisted or interpreted to become pleasing or useful to the hearer.

When one of a lying spirit hears one who speaks by a lying spirit, the witness of personal knowledge is again accepted if it is pleasing or useful. But if the hearer wants to use that knowledge to accomplish something in the real world, he will go find out the truth of the matter by his own personal observation, for even liars must abide truth in that which they wish to accomplish. But in the matters which are not the personal knowledge of the speaker, the hearer of the lying spirit will hear what pleases himself or what he will find useful in promoting lies with others.

Now for some conclusions and generalizations about spiritual matters related to truth.

1. A person of the spirit of truth wants the real truth no matter how unpleasing it is, because only the truth enables him to work in a real way to solve the real problems with which he is confronted.
2. A person of a lying spirit must leave that lying spirit and seek truth to be able to do anything in the natural world, for nature cannot be flattered into cooperation by lies as people can.
3. People who speak truly by the spirit of truth will often be rejected by those who hear with the lying spirit, because the truth does not please them. If truth pleased them, they would seek and hold to the spirit of truth rather than the lying spirit.
4. Persons who seek influence in society by the lying spirit only need to tell those who hear by a lying spirit what pleases them in order to gain power.
5. No person can assure any other person of the truth. That is the domain of the spirit of truth.

The conclusion of the matter is then that two factors must be accounted for by one who would make truth his standard. First he must be more interested in righteousness than he is in truth, for then he will be able to find the spirit of truth and to hold to abide in it without error. Second, he must understand the difficulties and problems in knowing and speaking truth, so that he will believe and speak only by the spirit of truth, and not be tempted to let go of the spirit of truth and propound on his own as if he were some sort of non-human paragon of truth. For to propound on our own that which pleases us is to have fallen into the arms of the lying spirit.