

NATURE OF TRUTH

YOGINI G. NIGHOSKAR

The life of man finds its meaning only in a community of persons. As such, truth will have to be sought in such human relations. The whole conception of social ethics is based on some sort of supernatural order the community accepts. The grounds for such acceptance of supernatural order may be religion. In case of agnostic or skeptic arguments, the order may have its basis in humanism or pragmatism. In any case, the society has to have some sort of foundations in view of which it seeks to inculcate its spiritual, religious or moral values . Social scientists are concerned with the issue of social dynamics. A society has to remain integrated and the binding adhesive, its truth - may be local truth. Such truths hostage objectivity of truth. Truth is made a matter of social coherence and sustenance of social order. A journey through such subjective truths leaves a feeling of discontent and unease, because it makes truth ordinary. If analysts have to be charged for trivializing truth, then men of religion and morality cannot be spared. They have made truth a matter of convenience.

Truth is experience of the things in their own right. It means that one 'knows' them in proper perspective. Truth is of no concern to a child with limited experience of life. His mind is tender, just enough to grasp and interpret its immediate surrounding. The power to coordinate his experience and relate it to a future propensity or so to say, maintain continuity from his birth to death and beyond, is not expected of him. This process requires 'being in space and time consciously' for a reasonable number of years. For some, it may take whole life span of normal longevity. For others, it may never occur¹. Most men are not even expected to give 'truth' a thought. To the fortunate few, truth may dawn upon them at an early age. An exceptional case may be of someone born with it.

According to me, the question 'what is truth'? is not at all a vague question. It has been raised by many a scholar, scientists, artists and men of religion. It has been answered by them in the context of their experience with the world. Ideally speaking to know 'truth' means to be able to answer some fundamental questions regarding the mysteries of origination and purpose. Since no one can have genuine claims regarding the nature of this prime truth, it is worth while not to consider anyone's authority as decisive. But it is possible to grade the claims of authorities on the basis of validity tests. We know by now what would form the concept of validity for each such claim. The scientist would give his arguments for validity whose form and content may not be the same for the artist's argument for the 'validity' of his painting. Rather, it would be awkward to question a piece of art for its validity. But if for instance, the authorities in art grade abstract art as an apt medium of expression, then abstract art has validity. In aesthetics, the criteria are different. For Kant, only the cultured and the educated mind was best suited to appraise a piece of art. The unoriented and native mind may just be content with the exclamation, "How beautiful !" Therefore, those areas where validity has implications, meanings and overtones other than 'truth', need from the right area of dealing with the nature of truth. That is not their concern. In an extended meaning of the concept of truth where like Greeks and Indian philosophers truth goodness and beauty are seen to culminate into one truth which may be termed as God or Brahman or Reality², truth teams up with goodness and beauty to form equations and identifies. Keat's was the finest poetic truth where we 'Truth is Beauty and Beauty is Truth.' But all of us are aware that Beauty need not be truth. And no epitaph go well with truth. There may be theories of Beauty and theories of Goodness, or even metaethical theories, which do not however, come under the discussion on nature of truth. Even moral philosophy has nothing to do with truth. Neither progress of science nor insights of metascience are the home-discipline of truth. The success of science lies in its applicability. Or it is just a laudable hypothesis for future application. Truth is not at all a simple concept and hence, to disperse it into the well-formulated and self-sufficient idea of the types of truth is an over simplification. Questions on truth are not 'why' questions or 'how' questions Intricacy is the very fibre of philosophy. It should not be sacrificed at the alter of simplicity by sheer analysis of language.

The powerful force which commands man's action is not always reason or fact. The impetus that underlies human activity is manifold. It may be separated in thought but not distinguished in reality. For some, this kind of 'hotchpotch' is what is truth. Of course such thought is mostly the outcome of some type of melodrama which need not interest a reflective and critical mind. Hesitations are there regarding the existentialist philosophy forming a legitimate branch of philosophy. Our truth expects only minimum standards of rationality. Like Aristotle, or even Euclid, we demand that the standards of generality, consistency, coherence and if possible, correspondence should be maintained in our truth-claims. When such claims are made in humanities and social science these standards will suffice. But in science, even with 'maximal interpretability' (which means that as many propositions as possible are applicable to 'observable facts') they will not.

But historical truth is not judged by same criteria. Russell for instance has remarked in one of his seminars that 'to science', a miracle would not be important if it happened only once 'or even very rarely,' but in history the point is to find out 'what did happen just once and what were the specific facts about a specific occasion.'

I have discussed in my book *'Universals and Particulars, An Essay in Contextual analysis,'* the relation between the context and the word³. Now I wish to add that it could also be studied as the relation between the context and the truth, provided truth is known. It is a well known fact the scientific truths have precise and well-styled context. But there are realists who would brush it away on the grounds that such contexts need not decide the 'whole truth.' It may give a partial idea of truth, which may be hailed for its accuracy and patted for its practicability. The truth of the realist is the truth of the modern man at whose alter he can stake almost all of his earlier wisdom. He is prepared to unlearn his ancient tradition, his faith and religion. The problem of religious statements and its truth is the problem of reconciliation of the 'mysteries' of reality and the not-so-mysterious language technique. It is the same old problem of the expression of the 'subtle' and the abstract, or even 'divine' and 'transcendental' in terms of empirical experience. Such problems echo mind-body, matter-mind, and also noumena-phenomenon duels. That there is a non-sensuous or para-sensuous truth

which cannot be captured by sense-experience and expression of sense-experience in positions, is at the core of religiosity and religious statements. The nature of religious truths is such that they deal with values or statements of moral philosophy intensionally and explicitly. Extensional meaning of religious statements is not forthcoming because extensionality comprises of class-membership where as intensionality, is designation and the defining characteristics of the words that are the components of religious statements. For example, in the statement 'self is immortal' the words 'self' and 'immortal' are empty classes and as such, have no members and hence, they have no extension. There may be difficulties regarding designation of self and its characteristics. Designation would be decided by its attributes and defining characteristic, whether well-speltout or implied, would give 'self' its meaning, its concept or its definition. Thus religious statements may not satisfy the standard expectations of analysis in terms of extensional and intensional meaning. At least extensional meaning of religious terms is out of question.

But it does not follow that religious statements have no significance and no truth. Truth is not an attribute of anything like red colour or wisdom or beauty which can be easily exemplified. Some scholars may have reservations regarding 'wisdom' and 'beauty' being attributes. Whether general terms, collective nouns and abstract names are to be treated as attributes or universals is an issue in itself.

Moral philosophy itself is a norms giving discipline and hence its language is not in the order of ordinary language of discourse⁴. Hence, when it is seen to take religious statements as its material for value-concepts or value hierarchy, it serves the purpose of making religious statements mobile. There is a view that when intellect is at its best, or at its highest pitch or apex, religious truths are 'known.' Dr. Radhakrishnan in his book *An Idealist's View of Life* has even said that seasoned reason is emotion and he therefore places intuition which is seasoned or mature intellect, at a level which is highest on knowledge chart. Religious truths are thus 'revealed' through intuition. Of course there are the standard objections to any statement that is made as the result of revelation. Empirical truths I think, are the results of curiosity, call it scientific research. But religious truths are the consequences, or the sum-total of experience, beliefs or an opinion of a mature thinking.

Philosophy is also a continual pursuit of meanings which are clearer and more articulate- which is the truth. Truth permeates all mental life. Sometimes in the conscious form of metaphysical thought and sometimes in the unconscious creative arts which we call intuition. More practically it permeates our day-to-day activity and also systematic, organized activity we call science. Truth is also evident in the highest forms of abstractions as well as in hard robust existence. Truth is thus at least human experience, expressed or unexpressed. Often in the former version it is lost on us as habitual, ordinary, next-door-neighbour. But in the latter version, it poses challenges of interpretation. And we have the vast literature sprawling all over our academic discipline. It is the truth which is in veil, which is not expressed fully, or not expressed at all, which commands a philosopher's attention. However there is no attempt to give the impression that there are two truths or even types of truths. Truth is undivided wholesome total and a pervading human experience.

Naive realism or common sense identifies the datum with the object; neo-realism also agrees to it. However there is no reason why common sense, which is merely primitive philosophy should have the final decision. It was an attempt of neo-realism to replace dualism by monism. Some kind of dualistic thinking regarding mind and object has always lurked philosophical thought. Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Descartes, Lock, Kant and the like, held it in some form or the other. Neo-realism says that there are no ideas at all. We have perception which is a direct contact of sense with objects. There is no mediation whatsoever, not even sense data. There is no question of ideas intervening, therefore idealism is ruled out. We have definite knowledge of the object therefore there is the truth to be known for sure. Hence no room for either skepticism or agnosticism no Keime, no Kant⁵. Critical realism makes a difference between object which exists and object which is perceived. Epistemologically, they are two different entities⁶. A form of realism called relativistic realism or functional realism; holds that every entity or reality is determined by everything else in the universe. It holds that 'things exist only in fields, in mutuality with other things in the universe, and they have properties only in their dynamic interrelations.'

Not that this philosophy appeals to many. They would rather use their instruments than instincts or intuitions. But philosophy certainly is the aesthetic

combination of our own world of experience and possible worlds of similar experiences. The truth is, that this world that we live in is presupposed as real and objective throughout.

Religion, traditions, myths, epics are not things to be relinquished; they never are, in any sense, because they appear in new form at every age. They may be outgrown or even ignored where material life and corporate would hold sway. But that does not mean that bad days are ahead for them. On the contrary, if one would will, better times are ahead because now they will emerge as old wines in new bottles and not as ghosts in the machine. Their relevance will be understood in the right perspective. Man has witnessed devastation that mad race for matter can lead to : let us hope that mankind has learnt the lesson at last. Truths of religion and morality alone can rescue mankind from its ultimate catastrophe. This is not just faith, but it is the outcome of seasoned reasoning. Only then will such subjects survive in the mainstream philosophy. It is true that truths of religion, morality and the like are individualistic where as truths of science are all pervading and for everybody. Nevertheless, all of them are truths of life.

Of course truths of science have an immediate impact on human life. They are the material as well as the efficient causes of human ends and endeavours, if we recall Aristotle's views on causation. Formal and final causes may be shaped by tradition, morality and religion. But in the final product of these series of causation, called effect by Aristotle, they are related in the background. What meets the eye is the concrete completed complex existent that we call 'fact.' We have, in the due course of time, strengthened our inherited faith in the substantiality of facts. We treat them as ultimate constituents of our ordinary as well academic life. They have even come to acquire a status slowly but steadily in our education fields. So much so that those exact disciplines where facts are precisely calculated or manipulated are rated higher than those which deal with rather non-factual curriculum. There is a continuous unconscious conditioning to such facts: to the extent that most men are convinced that if human life is to have any value, it must be intellectually filled with appreciation of 'things as they are.' Dr. Radhakrishnan believed that man is the measure of all things. But facts are the measure of value, says Susan Langer. Wittgenstein has captured modern man's zeal for 'down to reality' in his metaphysical aphorisms, in his *Tractatus*

- "The world is everything that is the case" (1)
- "The totality of atomic facts is the world" (2.04)
- "The world divides into facts" (1.2).

Truth is the quest and the search of every man. Knowingly or unknowingly, his is the hankering after it in his own way. More systematically, every generation carves out its activity in a general way. If there is any guarantee of truth, then 'facts are the guarantee of truth.' Truth is expressed in propositions, written expressed or otherwise. Whenever propositions express truth and this truth has all possible appraisals and acclamations. then it is accepted and it becomes the basic knowledge with which we start the culmination of knowledge beyond which there is nothing worth the truth.

NOTES

- 1 In *Principia Mathematica* (Vol. I - Introduction) Russell has imagined a situation where the skeptic asserts that he knows nothing. He is refuted by an argument which involves a vicious-circle fallacy, But if some limitation is placed upon his ignorance area, then his assertion may have significance. Thing of which it is possible to be ignorant forms an "illegitimate totality."
- 2 Vedantins concept of Maya as depicting the immeasurable extent of our ignorance may be recalled here. We may know the extent of our knowledge, but not of our ignorance.
- 3 My book "*Universals and Particulars, an Essay in Contextual Analysis*," M.S.U Press, Baroda, 1978.
- 4 A.J. Ayer has talked about the nature of Ethical proposition in his well-known book, "*Language Truth and Logic*."
- 5 Darke Lovejoy, *Essays in Critical Realism*, Macmillan, 1920, p. 52. Neo-realism accepts two-factor theory of Brentano. Critical realism holds three factor theory of Meaning.
- 6 Boodin, "Functional Realism," *The Philosophical Review*, March 1934.

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