The truth is in between.

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‘How did you know that the call was the call of the real?’ ‘Because he annihilated me, then encompassed me, and it was as if all the hairs on my body were speaking from all sides about the call, and were themselves on their own power responding to the call! When the lights of awe encompassed me and the lights of majesty addressed me, I knew that I was being addressed on the part of the truth.’(1)

Introduction

In my first lecture I described a finding from numerous studies: those cities or countries with the greatest religious diversity also have the greatest levels of religious belief and practice. The presence of numerous religions denominations or sects correlates with a higher level of religiousness generally. I argued that this religious diversity is a good thing. The sceptic about religion would be unimpressed by my use of this research finding. It doesn’t matter how popular religion is, such a one would ask; the question is, is it true? And if the different religious claims conflict, they can’t all be true, and probably none of them is true.

If you do believe in a religion, perhaps this issue troubles you even more. Which of our beliefs is true? The stance I articulated in the last lecture - one that welcomes and embraces diversity - only raises the problem more acutely. It’s all very well saying we should accept that we are walking on different paths, and enjoy the fact - which one is the right one? I don’t know what possessed me to promise to give a lecture on ‘Truth’. At the time it seemed like - more than a good idea; it seemed to be one of the most important questions to address. That doesn’t mean it was a shrewd thing to promise to do. The only thing I can think of that is more difficult is to speak on religious knowledge - and guess what I have promised to do next week!

Can all paths be the right one? When religions seem to disagree, must one be right and the other wrong? Often, religions are simply different - different ways of praying, different names or metaphors for God. In such cases, where they differ, their different utterances don’t actually constitute a contradiction that raises serious problems for truth. But I am going to leave aside all such easy cases (which form the majority of religious differences) and just focus on the question of truth, for those situations where we really feel it is an issue.

I will draw comfort then from what two of my favourite thinkers have said on this subject. The medieval Jewish thinker Maimonides, considering how one might go about studying religion, distinguished the ‘quest for truth’ from the ‘defence of the faith’. The point is not to defend to the death what you already believe in; the more desirable practice is to give yourself over to seeking what is true, whether your previous opinions were right or not. The 18th century German philosopher Johann Georg Hamann had this to say on the subject: A little vision and superstition here would not merely merit indulgence, but rather something of this leaven is necessary to start off the soul’s fermentation towards a philosophical heroism. A thirsting ambition for truth and virtue, and a fury to conquer all lies and vice, which precisely are not recognized as such, nor

wish to be; in this consists the heroic spirit of a philosopher.(2)

The idea of a ‘quest’ or of ‘philosophical heroism’ is a little more romantic, rather more impassioned, than the picture most of us have of Anglo-American philosophers dealing in their truth-tables of logic. What I have to say will be in the spirit of Maimonides and Hamann; not so much a sober description of the strengths or weaknesses of competing theories oftruth in analytic philosophy, as an attempt to get on my charger and stumble onto a quest into this large and complex topic. If at the end I have some suggestions for how we might think about truth, especially but not only in an inter-faith context, I will be satisfied.

Traditional views of truth and their problems

In contemporary Western philosophy, we have several different theories of what truth consists in:

- Correspondence theory of truth. A belief or statement is true if and only if it corresponds with the facts: objects or states of affairs is the world.
- Coherence theory of truth. A belief or statement is true if and only if it ‘coheres’ or fits in with other statements and beliefs.
- Pragmatic theory of truth. A belief or statement is true if and only if ‘it works’, if it allows us to predict certain results, if it allows us to function effectively in life, if it encourages further enquiry or helps us lead better lives.

There are others such as the semantic theory, or the so-called redundancy, minimalist or deflationary theory, but we don’t need to explore these tonight. (3)

Questions about truth are in many ways inseparable from questions about knowledge, and questions about what is real. Each of these theories beds into a theory about reality. It does make a difference to your theory of truth if you believe that all that we normally perceive are mere appearances, and not ultimately real. So I want to introduce a basic distinction in world-views between ‘realists’ and any form of non- or anti-realism. The difference hangs on whether you believe there are things out there that correspond to our perception of them, and/ or how real you think such things are. The realist holds the perhaps commonsensical view that there is a world out there, more or less as we perceive it. The non- or anti-realist does not, for a variety of reasons. They may claim that how things seem to us is a matter of mere appearance only, while reality itself may be different. Or they may hold to a salient feature in Buddhist thought, which is the momentariness, the constant change of everything we experience; although this does not oblige one to anti-realism. Another aspect of Buddhist non-realism is demonstrated by the Vijnavada or Yogacara school of Buddhism , which maintains there are no external objects, there is only the self, which is a stream of ideas, none of which has a counterpart in the objective world. ‘The whole world is mental’ is a favourite saying of theirs.(4) The Madhyamikas go further and deny the reality of the self having the sensations. The West also has its non-realists, and many of them are here in Britain. A particularly influential thinker in this area has been Don Cupitt, inspiration behind the variety of theological non-realism that is sometimes called the Sea of Faith movement. David Hart describes its core insight as ‘the view that there is nothing beyond or outside human beings, neither God nor some other notion like "Ultimate Reality" that gives life and meaning and purpose.’(5)

I described these as theories of truth in Western philosophy. But in discussing them, I want to make particular reference to Eastern, chiefly Indian philosophy.

* Realism & correspondence.

A ‘realist’ world-view and a ‘correspondence’ theory of truth go together like tomatoes and basil. If you believe truth consists in the correspondence between our statements or beliefs and the way things really are, it does help if you believe in the real existence of the things. The Nyaya school, and the very similar Vaisesika school, in what we call Hinduism has a realist metaphysics. They hold what a Westerner would recognise as a correspondence theory of truth. The Nyaya Sutra tells us: ‘Perception is that knowledge which arises from the contact of a sense with its object... ‘(6) The Nyaya Kusumanjali tells us: ‘...right knowledge requires an external source...’(7) So the Nyaya view is that objects in the world do exist, are real, and are known directly through perception. For a perception or belief to be true, it must represent the object to us as having the characteristics it actually has. If it is faithful to its object, the knowledge is true.

On this view there was broad agreement with the Vaisesika, Samkhya and Purva Mimamsa schools of Hinduism.(8) The was even agreement with two schools of Buddhism, the two main schools of Theravada Buddhism.(9) Since people in the West often speak about ‘Eastern religions’ as ‘world-denying’, sceptical about the reality of everyday life, it is important to realise that there is a realist stance in Indian religions.

Now one problem with the correspondence theory is this: if you want to talk about something that is not an object or state of affairs in the world, the correspondence theory is not much use to support your talk as ‘true’. If your statement is not meant to correspond with some state of affairs in the world, how do you back it up as ‘true’? Further, as the 20 th century of English-speaking philosophy has demonstrated, there are also intractable problems in saying what a ‘fact’ might be and how we might discover it independently of the language used to describe it.

A further set of problems exist with this account. Since Kant, modern Western philosophy has been conscious that the idea that we perceive things as they really are is questionable. (Actually, Plato suggested much earlier that appearance and reality were not the same, but few modern philosophers are Platonists.) Even on a realist view of the material world, the correspondence theory is unproblematic only as long as the possibility of knowing what is and isn’t the case is unproblematic. It is only reliable if our perceptions are generally reliable, which has consistently been called into question, for example by Descartes and Hume. And further problems arise if, like Kant, you believe that the way we perceive the world is already filtered by certain concepts, such as time and space, or causality, which Kant argued come from the structures of our own minds rather than from the world as it really is.

Nietzsche, for example, asserted that all truths and all claims to knowledge are interpretations from a certain perspective. Once we recognise this, he tells us, we are liberated from the tyranny of supposing that there is any one right way or universally valid view. There is no neutral or disinterested point of view that could fulfil the condition of being a standpoint from which one can ‘objectively’ describe reality. All views are inherently perspectival and therefore not complete or exhaustive.

So if you believe that we in some way structure our own experience and perceptions, you are likely to find the correspondence theory inadequate as it stands.

I think these are considerations which the correspondence theory must come to terms with - if it can. Now the reason I have selected these realist-correspondence strands in Hinduism to look at is because I think they suggest a way forward beyond this objection that all knowledge is subjective or subjectively-conditioned. Knowledge and truth and reality in Indian religious philosophy is inseparable from spiritual progress; from enlightenment and liberation. Thus the possibility of one’s own inadequate perception being imposed on reality is not an objection to their theory. It’s par for the course; part of being human. The way we see things is coloured by our own perspective and does not reflect reality; but the progress beyond such error in perception and interpretation is part of their epistemological system. We will look at the role of error later. But for now, if your theory of truth and knowledge is not conceived in a dynamic way, an important aspect of which is one’s growth in self-understanding in coming to know the truth, then I believe the correspondence theory is inadequate to describe all of what truth really is.

Let’s apply a practical test to the correspondence theory. A Muslim and a Christian are sitting together. The Christian believes that Jesus was crucified, died, and was raised again. The Muslim believes Jesus was crucified, but did not die and rise again. Which of their beliefs is true? Apply the correspondence theory: whichever theory fits the facts is true. How should the Muslim and Christian then proceed?

Coherence

The difficulties in ascertaining what the facts of the world are in order to see if they match up with our statements or beliefs have encouraged the development of the coherence theory. The coherence theorist does notnecessarily do away with the idea of correspondence, perhaps in a weakened sense. But under the burden of scepticism about knowing the facts about the world, the emphasis shifts to the connection between statements themselves.

One thing that the correspondence theory presupposes is that the mind and the world are different. Not everyone believes this - famously, Hegel didn’t - and consequently that theory of truth is no use to anyone of this persuasion.

Certain strands in Hinduism, such as Advaita Vedanta, do not accept that mind and world are ultimately different. However, to avoid lapsing into a caricature of their position, let us unpack it a little more than that. There are really three layers to reality, according to the Vedantins. Brahman, Ultimate Reality, is real in the truest sense. On a different level, a rope which you see lying in the road is empirically real; while it is not permanent and thus not ultimately real, it persists as long as we view reality from the perspective of daily experience. Finally a snake which youthink you see lying on the road (but which turns out to be a rope) is illusory, but is ‘real’ to you temporarily and in a private sense.

Thus although they are not realists, the Advaita Vedantins actually accept there are objective counterparts for all knowledge. The snake you think you see in the road is not actually purely subjective according to the Vedantin. So the correspondence theory won’t work for this reason: not because there are no objects corresponding to our knowledge; but because even for falsehood, there is an object which corresponds to our mistaken perception: an illusory object in the mind. So correspondence applies even to falsehood. Truth instead is found when no part of the knowledge has to be discarded on further investigation as false; when it coheres with the rest of our experience. (10)

Now one problem with the coherence theory that has been raised by twentieth-century philosophers is that a system of beliefs can be coherent yet not true. You could have two different sets of beliefs which are each internally coherent, but which contradict each other. So one must be false; but the coherence theory must pronounce them both true. The Advaita Vedantins had anticipated this problem some centuries ago. Coherence is not a sufficient criterion for truth for this very reason: because of the existence of different sets of truths, which might refer to or operate on different levels (for example, scientific truths, religious truths, and so on.) So these different sets of beliefs are relative to their domain. Ultimate truth is that which includes all such truths; so comprehensiveness and not just coherence is a mark of the truth for the Vedantin.

The notion of completeness and comprehensiveness is also a feature of the Samkhya school. Their doctrine of truth claims that it is ‘complete and comprehensive knowledge, in which one part supplements and corrects another. It is knowledge which knows no preferences or prejudices, and lays appropriate emphasis on all aspects of the objects known... But it should not be imagined that this complete knowledge is merely an aggregate of all possible views of the physical world. It is rather experience in which they have all been integrated’.(11) Simply putting together a set of coherent propositions is inadequate for truth. Whether or not you believe that you can know the world outside of your interpretation of it, the fact is that

you can put together two sets of propositions that cohere within themselves but do not cohere with each other.

So let's try our test again with the Christian and the Muslim to see how useful this coherence theory is. Which belief about Jesus is true? Whichever belief coheres better with the beliefs already held.

* Pragmatism

In the West, we think of pragmatism as a characteristically American phenomenon; its founding fathers were Charles Pierce, William James, and John Dewey. Modern heirs and developers of the ideas include Richard Rorty, albeit very much in his own way. Abstract theories of what truth consists in were not their scene; their focus was on the practical circumstances in which truth matters; when we are actually going to do something about it. Pierce argued that truth is not a matter of sentences about the world; truth is the answer to questions we ask because we have doubts. It is what we come to agree on. James laid the emphasis on practical utility; what advantage is there to believing this is true? Truth is what it is good for us to believe.

It is frequently objected to this that something may work, or feel good, but not be true. For Richard Rorty, however, the problem of justification is one of 'the gap between the actual good and the possible better. From a pragmatist point of view, to say that what is rational for us now to believe may not be true, is simply to say that somebody may come up with a belief which coheres better with a better idea. It is to say that there is always room for improved belief, since new evidence, or new hypothesis, or a whole new vocabulary, may come along. '(12)

The Muslim philosopher Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr, in a work called Our Philosophy which engages critically with Western philosophy, takes issue with pragmatism on a number of points. (13)

1. It 'involves a clear confusion between the truth itself and the basic goal of attempting to attain the truth. The goal of attaining truths may be to utilize them in the practical field and to be enlightened by them during life experiences. However, this is not the meaning of truth in itself.' (For the pragmatist of course this might be question-begging; but it shows the profound difference in attitude between the two mind-sets on truth.)

2. 'to give truth a pure practical meaning and to strip it of the quality of disclosing what exists... is an unrestricted admission of philosophical scepticism...' (Its proponents don't necessarily see this as a disadvantage.)

3. 'the fact that there is human benefit in the truth of a certain idea is not sufficient for accepting that idea. Thus accepting a certain idea is not the same as the other kinds of practical activity that human beings can perform if assured of their benefit.'

4. Whom is this truth to benefit, as-Sadr asks? The individual? A group? Which group? Humankind as a whole, or only a part? If only an individual is meant, this leads as-Sadr claims to 'a frightening social chaos would occur when every individual chooses his own truths, without any attention to the truths of others, which proceed from their own interests. This chaos constitutes a serious harm to all individuals.' If on the other hand it is meant to benefit a group, not only will this lead to problems where there are conflicts of interest. Still more, it requires such an extensive investigation into what is good or bad for human beings generally that 'one cannot determine any truth, regardless of its kind, unless it was subject to long social experience.' (It may not be a coincidence that pragmatism arose in a culture where the rights of the individual are very heavily emphasised.

In Indian thought, pragmatism is not absent from reflections on truth. The Nyaya- Vaisesika school demands practical utility as a verification of truth. But it is a criterion or test of truth; it is not what truth consists in. The thinker Prabhakara of the Mimamsa school on the other hand doessuggest that knowledge is true if it works, and that is what makes it true. This brings him closer to the Americans; but by no means is he one of them, for he believes in the absolute validity of knowledge which we have seen is antithetical to modern Western pragmatism. 'Though all knowledge alike is incomplete inasmuch as it fails to grasp the features of a given object in their entirety, error is so from a specific standpoint, viz. a pragmatic one. It is relatively incomplete... determined by the standard of fruitfulness.' (14)

Truth is a relationship

To me, these competing theories all bring out important aspects of what we believe about 'truth'. For me, none of them says enough about what truth needs to be. Moreover, I do not accept that these competing theories must be mutually exclusive. Instead of either choosing one, therefore, or putting forward an alternative theory, I want to make a different kind of suggestion.

Truth is found in a number of relationships, each of which has to be in order. To relinquish one of these relationships, because of the philosophical difficulties associated with it, does not satisfactorily solve the problem. Each of the theories I outlined describes one of these relationships. What we say must be in the right relationship to the world, to other people in the world; to our action; and our statements need to be in the right relationship with one another. Truth is structured like a series of relationship; but I also think inter-faith work is best seen as a network of relationships. Thus these two 'problems' shared the same structure, and that is how we should reflect on them and where possible resolve them.

These relationships can be the context in which we examine truth-claims, or form a set of criteria almost for considering the claims to truth that people make. I want to make a few observations about several of these relationships.

First relationship: to practical action - ethics in particular

To say that our speech must bear the right relationship to our action, in particular our ethics, is my way of addressing pragmatist considerations. You might even say it is an 'ethical criterion for truth '. That is, truth is not just an epistemological search to be conducted under the proper conditions, but living in the right way, placing ourselves in the right relationship to reality, and letting ourselves be corrected by the response that reality makes to our speech and our action. This may seem a more religious than philosophical conviction to some, but I believe knowledge and the pursuit of truth are inseparable from the conduct of your life.

'What works' is an indication of being in the right relationship to reality. This is admittedly a question of faith and not subject to philosophical standards of proof; but no more so than pragmatism already is an act of faith. It rests on a fundamental trust that reality in the ethical sphere and in the sphere of human history is ultimately congruent.

So when I said in my first lecture that the focus in inter-faith work should not simply be on truth-claims but on ethics and action: in the end I don't think these two, truth and ethical action, are ultimately distinct. They become the same thing; these right-relationships put into practice. What we should do less of is, focus on questions of 'truth' if these are construed as 'who is right?' As a question for inter-faith dialogue I think that is unfruitful. The truth-questions we should be asking are more like: 'regardless of who is right, what is the truth about how should we live together?

Second relationship: to other ‘truths’

The first heretical thing I would like to suggest here is that truths do notnecessarily need to cohere. As with human beings, an absence of disagreement should not be the relationship we insist on. We need to think again on the intrinsic value of contradiction and indeed of error.

The Principle of Contradiction - that it can’t be the case that something is true and not true at the same time - is usually taken as absolute. But some of the most keenly intelligent philosophers have taken a surprisingly lenient attitude to this issue.. Maimonides provided a list of the reasons where there may be contradictions, and many of them were perfectly respectable. Sometimes it is necessary to contradict oneself, in a paradoxical way, in order to teach a difficult truth. Sometimes, indeed, the truth cannot be articulated in any other way, he suggested. This is certainly the spirit of the Upaniads, which often want to speak about Brahman, Ultimate Reality, in a list of flagrant contradictions. In fact, the Mandukya Upanisad refuses to accept the most fundamental contradiction of being and non-being, when applied to Brahman.

But even in the West certain philosophers have sat lightly to the prospect of self-contradiction. Once again Hamann can be quoted in the company of Maimonides:

Yes, daily at home I have the experience that one must always contradict oneself from two viewpoints, [which] never can agree, and that it is impossible to change these viewpoints into the other without doing the greatest violence to them. Our knowledge is piecemeal - no dogmatist is in a position to feel this great truth... (15)

Far from being a pre-condition for truth, the absence of contradiction is in the end a pre-condition for dogmatism, according to Hamann. As with interpersonal, social or political situations, an absence of contradiction is a sign of tyranny.

As far as error itself is concerned, Hamann had this to say:

More damage can be done with truths than with errors, if we make a nonsensical use of the former, and can modify the latter... How many orthodox can go to the devil, despite the truth, and how many heretics go to heaven, despite the ban of the dominant church or the public.(16)

I promised earlier to say something about the Nyaya theory of error. Their notion was that error, even in misperception, is never merely subjective but has an objective basis. ‘Erroneous knowledge’ has truth as its basis; the rope misperceived as a snake not only discloses the misperceived rope; it also re-presents to the mind the image, from memory, of a real snake.(17) Prabhakara similarly claimed that knowledge never involves a reference to anything not actually given to us in experience. ‘Thus the discovery of the so-called error only means a further step in advancing knowledge. It confirms the previous knowledge’.(18) The greatest thinker of Advaita Vedanta, ankara, went so far as to insist that although it is knowledge that leads to enlightenment, we can be liberated by a partial falsehood. Is this anything more than the truism that we can learn from our mistakes? Let us push this paradox a little further.

The ancient Greek poet, Stesichorus was said to have slandered Helen of Troy by telling her life-story in one of his odes. Legend has it he was struck blind by the gods as a punishment. He composed a ‘palinode’ then in order to regain his sight. It began, interestingly, ‘This story isn’t true’. It went on to deny everything true which he had said in the previous ode: ‘You never went in a ship to sea, nor saw the towers of Troy ...’ After performing this lie, his sight was restored.

Plato has Socrates refer to this in Phaedrus (19):‘For those who make mistakes in mythology, there is an old remedy’. By denying the truth, one can cure oneself of blindness. This little paradox ought to be of

interest to contemporary theology. If certain central religious truths are indeed to be described as ‘myths’, then perhaps ‘making mistakes in mythology’ is actually necessary in order to regain our sight.

Curiously enough, we find a similar idea in Freud’s idea of ‘denial’, as discussed in an early essay called ‘negation’ [Verneinung].(20)It was a phenomenon he had just noticed in the consulting room in the birth of his psychoanalytic method of treatment. The patient recognizes, indeed suggests himself, an idea which seems true to the analyst, but does so precisely in order to negate it, to deny its truth. ‘You’re thinking that the woman in the dream is my mother, but it’s not.’ The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan had an elegant way of describing it: ‘I am going to tell you what I am not; pay attention, that is exactly what I am.’(21)

To many of us this is an all-too-familiar phenomenon, which we can see in everybody else. But Freud suggests this has a very positive role to play in attaining to the truth. For him, it represents a crucial first step, since he believes in something called ‘repression’, in which we can refuse to recognise or even consider truths that are too painful for us to accept. By articulating something then denying it, we can let something into our consciousness that we might not otherwise tolerate. Given more time, we can even come to accept it. But we would never even consider the full truth if we couldn’t take that first step with denial.(22) In Lacan’s words, truth lies in the mistake.

Third relationship: to reality

When we speak about this relationship, particular questions of language come to the fore: what relationship does language have to the world? I want to take a particular focus on this huge question by looking at a contemporary trend in British theology; the theological non- realism associated with Don Cupitt, which I mentioned earlier. For Cupitt has increasingly turned his attention to language, and the linguistic version of his theological anti-realism. Just as there is no objective ‘God’ outside of us, so too language is ‘outsideless’; there is nothing beyond or outside language to which language refers, no external reality to act as the guarantee of truth in language.

As I have argued elsewhere (23) ironically, those thinkers that have inspired Cupitt in this direction do not actually support such conclusions about language. Both Ludwig Wittgenstein and Jacques Lacan, principal influence on Derrida, actually undermine such ideas. Lacan points out that truth is dependent on there being something outside language.(24) If this were not so, he tells us, language would be a blind alley with no exit, an order with no meaning.(25) Truth requires something ‘beyond’ signification. Wittgenstein too, even in his early positivist days, believed there was meaning outside the limits of language and therefore of the world, although he maintained nothing could be said about it.

Language, Lacan says, ‘introduces the dimension of truth into the real.’(26) ‘One can only think of language as a network, a net over the entirety of things, over the totality of the real. It inscribes on the plane of the real this other plane’, that of language.’(27) There is therefore a ‘beyond’, which is where truth is found. ‘All speech always possesses a beyond.’(28) Both Lacan and Wittgenstein agree that language in fact can make the world of things present to us. ‘When you understand what is expressed in the signs of the language, it is always, in the end, on account of light coming to you from outside of the signs the truth isoutside of the signs, elsewhere. ‘(29)

So, even the ancestor of postmodernism and anti-realism does not hold the views on truth and reality that many seem to think. Truth requires a relationship to the Real. Why do I believe that the notion of ‘relationship’ can solve the problem of how to speak about ‘the Real’ in a more satisfactory way? Because it makes clear what is at issue is not adequately describing the divine, but being addressed by the truth, as we heard in the words of Imam Sadiq: ‘When the lights of awe encompassed me and the lights of majesty...addressed me, I knew that I was being addressed on the part of the truth.’(30)

Fourth relationship: to other people - and to ourselves

All three of next term's lectures will deal with the question of interpersonal relationships and the place this should have in our thinking, so I will not say very much on this particular relationship tonight. However, there are a few points I want to mention now in anticipation.

The role of error in truth leads to a need for dialogue and the other person. This is where, or how, we are most likely to be confronted with our own error. So Lacan might equally have said: 'I am going to tell you something that will strike you as untrue. Pay attention - this is exactly what you need to hear.'

There is a phrase that is increasingly popular nowadays: 'It's true for me, even if it is not true for you.' Important as it seems to some people to say it, for the sake of freedom; it seems equally important to others to deny it, since it seems to imply a wishy-washy concept of what truth must be. For when people use the phrase, they usually do not mean it in the places where it would be uncontroversial, but essentially trivial, like 'I have a headache'. Or 'I'm bored' - which may be true for you if you said it at this moment, but is not at the moment true for me. A plural, multi-layered approach to truth can help us to explore how and where this phrase might be useful. The Vedantin would say: 'I see a snake in the road' is indeed true for you in a certain sense, and powerfully so. There is no denying thevividness of your experience.

What we should learn from the lesson about the importance of error, and the question of subjectivism raised in various ways by Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche, is this: the role that our subjectivity plays in perception and knowledge is closely connected to our own capacity for distortion. This however should not lead us to pessimism or a fatalist acceptance of the claim 'we can only see things the way we see them'. Instead, it should inspire in us, and in our understanding of truth and knowledge, a forward dynamism. Let us not sit there with our misperceptions eternally in place. Maybe the truism 'we can only see things the way we see them' is true. But we can continually change the way we see things.

'Truth would not let herself be approached too closely by highwaymen, she wore one garment on top of another so that one doubted being able to find her body. How frightening if they had their way and saw that frightful ghost, the truth, before them.'(31)

Conclusion

So in conclusion, here are some features of what I consider to be a desirable way of talking about truth.

Truth consists in a network of right relationships. Truth is not a property of propositions so much as something or someone that can speak to us. Truth is plural in nature, perhaps at times seeming contradictory, when our own standpoint is not comprehensive enough to perceive its ultimate harmony. Truth lives in dynamism and change. Whether your metaphysics holds that Reality is momentary or unchanging - we change, our knowledge and perceptions change, and we ourselves must continually change in relation to the truth.

Perhaps we should always bear in mind something from a poem by the Sufi Jalalu'ddin Rumi:

'When you eventually see through the veils to how things really are, you will keep saying again and again, "This is certainly not like we thought it was!" '(32)

References and further reading

I Ja'far as-Sadiq's commentary on the Qur'anic Moses, in M.A. Sells (ed. and trans.), Early Islamic Mysticism. Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic and Theological Writings (Paulist Press, 1996), p. 81.

2 'Socratic Memorabilia', II 63:31-37; English translation in Gwen Griffith-Dickson, Johann Georg Hamann's Relational Metacriticism. Walter de Gruyter , Berlin , 1995, pp. xx, 534.

3 Semantic theory of truth. A belief or statement is true because the rules of our language set up a correspondence between certain statements and 'the facts' that our language picks out in the world. [NB: allegedly this isnot the same as the correspondence theory, which says the facts are already there; this theory explains the apparent correspondence by telling us that it is our language which sets it up in the first place.]

Deflationary theory of truth says that to assert that a statement is true is just to assert the statement itself. There is no difference between saying 'Crows are black' and 'It is true that crows are black'; and there is nothing more to be said about truth. Truth doesn't have a nature above and beyond that.

4 'One of the chief arguments in support of this view, is based upon the inseparable connection that is observed to exist between knowledge and object. There is no knowledge that does not refer to an object; and there is no object that can be conceived except as known. This necessary association between them, it is said, shows there is no need for treating them as distinct, and that the so-called object may well be regarded as an aspect or form of knowledge itself. The idealism of the school consists in this explanation of objects as but states or forms of the "mind"...' Hiriyanna, M., Essentials of Indian Philosophy (Diamond, 1996) p. 80.

5 David A. Hart, Faith in Doubt: Non-realism and Christian Belief (London:Mowbray, 1993), p. 7.

6 Nyaya Sutra 4.

7 Nyaya Kusumanjali, II.1.

8 The Mimamsa thinker Kumarili maintained that knowledge must not only correspond with the facts, but also contain an element of novelty. It must be a discovery, an addition to our knowledge.

9 The Sautranika tradition holds that the external world is real and perceptible, and thus is realist. They still accept the momentariness of reality central to Buddhism, however. Vaibhanika school was also clearly realist, believing that objects are real, external to the mind, and lasting.

10 See the discussion in Hiriyanna, op. cit., pp. 166-9

11 Hiriyanna, ibid., pp. 118-9.

12 Richard Rorty, 'Solidarity or Objectivity?' in Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays 1972-1980 (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1982.)

13 Allama Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr trans. Shams C. Inati, Our Philosophy (Ansariyan Publications, Iran, 1987) pp. 130-1.

14 Hiriyanna, op. cit., p. 145

15 Hamann's letters, ZH 5, Nr. 833, 432:29-36; 8.5.1785, to Herder.Johann Georg Hamann, op. cit.

16 ZH1,377:10-15. See Gwen Griffith-Dickson, Johann Georg Hamann, op. cit.

17 'The subject of even an erroneous judgement is real' it is only the predicate that is not so, 'Hence a thing is stated to appear in error in a manner which is different from what it actually is.' Sinari, R.A., The Structure of Indian Thought (Charles C. Thomas, 1970), p. 97.

18 Hiriyanna, op. cit., p. 144

19 Plato, Phaedrus, translated by Walter Hamilton, London : Penguin Books, 1973, 243.

20 Die Vemeinung, (1925) Gesammelte Schriften XI, [German] 3-7jGesammelte Werke XIV 11-15. Standard Edition (English Translation) XIX 235-9.

21 Hippolyte, Jean, 'Commentaire parlee sur la Verneinung de Freud', La Psychanalyse 1, 1956,29-40. Reprinted in English translation in Jacques Lacan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book I, translated by John Forrester, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1975, pp. 289-297, 291. (Lacan's first seminar is hereafter cited as 'Lacan, I'.)

22 This point is discussed in greater depth in Gwen Griffith-Dickson, The Roots of the Great Fig Tree' in Browne and Griffith-Dickson, A Passion for Critique. Edited with Herman Browne, Sit, Prague , 1997, pp. 236.

23 See Gwen Griffith-Dickson, ' "Outsidelessness" and the "Beyond" of Signification', Heythrop Journal, Vol. 37 Nr. 3, (July 1996), 258-272.

24 See especially Lacan, I, op. cit., p. 248, for example: When one talks about the signified, one thinks of the thing, whereas in fact signification is what is involved. Nonetheless, each time we talk, we say the thing, the signifiable, by means of the signified. There is a lure here, because it is quite clear that language is not made to designate things. But this lure is structural to human language and, in a sense, the

25 Lacan I, 262.

26 I, 263.

27 I, 262.

28 I, 243.

29 I, 262. Italics mine.

30 Ja'far as-Sadiq's commentary on the Qur'anic Moses, in M.A. Sells (ed. and trans.), Early Islamic Mysticism. Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic and Theological Writings (Paulist Press, 1996), p. 81.

31 Hamann's letters, ZH 1,381:8-11. See Gwen Griffith-Dickson, Johann Georg Hamann, op. crt.

32 The Essential Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks, (Penguin Books, 1995) p. 168