

IS TRUTH ABSOLUTE OR RELATIVE?

Ilkka Niiniluoto
University of Helsinki
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REFERENCES

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- CAPPELEN & HAWTHORNE: *Relativism and Monadic Truth* (2009)

PLATO vs. PROTAGORAS

- PLATO: "Theaetetus"
 - against the sophists and relativists
- PROTAGORAS: *homo mensura*
 - "man is the measure of all things"
 - man: individual – subjective relativism
 - any given thing "is to me such as it appears to me, and is to you such as it appears to you"

KNOWLEDGE

- classical definition of knowledge (*episteme*):
justified true belief

p proposition (true or false)

$K_a p$ = a knows that p

$B_a p$ = a believes that p

Tp = p is true

$J_a p$ = a has justification for p

- Def. $K_a p = B_a p \ \& \ J_a p \ \& \ Tp$

BELIEF

- PLATO: genuine knowledge
 - the success condition: $K_a p \rightarrow p$
- ordinary beliefs may be true or false,
 - not generally: $B_a p \rightarrow p$

RELATIVITY

- we may have for two different persons a and b

$$B_a p \ \& \ B_b \neg p$$

- but, by the success condition of K,

$$K_a p \ \& \ K_b \neg p$$

would entail the contradiction $p \ \& \ \neg p$

OBJECTIVE TRUTH

- the truth predicate T is not relative to a person, T is independent of our beliefs or wishes
- ARISTOTLE: truth as correspondence (*adequatio*), true propositions mirror the structure of reality
- belief or statement p is true iff p expresses a fact obtaining in the actual world W
- RUSSELL, WITTGENSTEIN: *Tractatus*
- TARSKI: Tp iff p
it is true that p iff p is the case

SCEPTICISM

- suspension of judgment (*epoche*)
 - $\neg B_a p \ \& \ \neg B_a \neg p$
 - avoids errors of falsity (no false beliefs)
 - commits errors of ignorance (no true beliefs, failure to assert true statements)

FALLIBILISM

- PEIRCE: all factual human knowledge is uncertain and corrigible
- pragmatism
 - fallibilism with epistemic truth, lure of relativism
- critical realism
 - fallibilism with objective truth

PROBABILITY AND VERISIMILITUDE

- Academic skeptics
 - uncertain beliefs may be convincing enough to be sufficient for action
 - CARNEADES: *pithanon*, CICERO: *probabile, veri simile*
- epistemic probability $\Pr(p/e)$
 - degree of belief in the truth of p given evidence e
- degree of truth, approximate truth
 - closeness to being true
- truthlikeness, verisimilitude $\text{Tr}(p, c^*)$ (POPPER)
 - closeness of p to complete truth c^*

WEAK AND STRONG FALLIBILISM

- weak fallibilism
 - human beliefs may be true or false, they are more or less probable, approach to certainty
- strong fallibilism
 - human knowledge is typically false, but it may be more or less truthlike
 - scientific knowledge need not satisfy the success condition, changes of such "knowledge" not changes of "truth"
 - approach to the truth, scientific progress as increasing verisimilitude

HEGELIANS

- HEGEL: 'a is G' is true iff G is the essence of a
- BRADLEY: degrees of truth
 - 'This rose is red'
 - confusion of errors of ignorance (incompleteness) and errors of falsity
- ENGELS, LENIN: dialectics of absolute and relative truth
- "relative truth" can be explicated by the dynamic notion of truthlikeness

EPISTEMIC NOTIONS OF TRUTH

- DESCARTES: clear and distinct ideas
- BRENTANO: evidence
- PEIRCE: truth as the limit of inquiry
- DEWEY: warranted assertability
- JAMES: verified
- NEURATH: coherence
- HABERMAS: consensus theory of truth
- DUMMETT: provability, verifiability
- PUTNAM: ideal acceptability
- TUOMELA: best explaining theories

EPISTEMIC TRUTH

- truth is not directly accessible, define knowledge $K_a p$ by $B_a p$ & $J_a p$, and characterize justification $J_a p$ so that the truth T_p of p is guaranteed
- identifying truth with our actual beliefs relativizes truths to their owners, leads to alethic relativism
- no unknown or "recognition-transcendent" truths allowed

LURE OF RELATIVISM

- avoiding alethic relativism
 - choose the epistemological subject as the scientific community (PEIRCE) or the ideal speech community (APEL, HABERMAS, PUTNAM)
- the problems of convergence (will truth be reached?) and circularity (have we reached the truth?)

BELIEF RELATIVISM

- Protagorean relativism: p is true for person a
- doxastic truth: define relative truth by

$$T_a p = B_a p$$

where a is a person

- relative falsity for a: $B_a \neg p$
 - relativism: it is possible that $T_a p$ & $T_b \neg p$
-
- similarly for group beliefs

CLASSICAL TRUTH

- TWARDOWSKI: Protagorean personal truth predicate would violate classical principles of logic
- TARSKI: you may vote for a new non-classical concept of truth, and call the semantic concept "frue", but that would not show that my concept is wrong

TRUTH-LOGIC

- $T_a p$ fails to satisfy several principles of VON WRIGHT'S truth-logic (cf. HINTIKKA for B)

$$(+) T_a(p \& q) \equiv (T_a p \& T_a q)$$

$$(+) T_a p \rightarrow T_a(p \vee q)$$

$$(+) T_a p \rightarrow \neg T_a \neg p$$

$$(+) T_a p \rightarrow T_a T_a p$$

$$(-) T_a(p \vee q) \rightarrow (T_a p \vee T_a q)$$

$$(-) T_a p \vee T_a \neg p$$

$$(-) T_a T_a p \rightarrow T_a p$$

FURTHER PROBLEMS

- omniscience: it is not admitted that there are truths unknown to me or that some of my beliefs are false
 - no external constraints for truth and falsity
 - TARSKI'S T-equivalence $T_a p \equiv p$ does not make sense; would not be valid, as $B_a p \rightarrow p$ and $p \rightarrow B_a p$ are not accepted in doxastic logic
- (-) $T_a (T_a p \equiv p)$

INCOHERENCE

- what does $B_a p$ mean for a relativist?
- if this is a statement with absolute truth conditions, relativism is self-refuting
- $B_a p$ is true for person a (KUSCH)
- $B_a B_a p$, $B_a B_a B_a p$, ... endless iterations
- PUTNAM:
I think that I think that ... snow is white

CULTURAL RELATIVISM

- all persons/communities/tribes/cultures/historical periods have their own truths
- no distinction between knowledge and belief
- sociology of knowledge, strong programmes in the sociology of science, KUHN
- science has no epistemic authority in comparison to other belief systems (occultism, religion, metaphysics)

PERSPECTIVISM

- relativization to theories, world views, historical situations, traditions, paradigms, frameworks, perspectives, view points
- 'p is true-from-viewpoint A'
- reduction to group beliefs: p belongs to the belief system A
- is this statement only true-from-viewpoint B, infinite iteration of viewpoints?

PROVABILITY

- try to define truth as provability in an axiomatic system S
- truth as warranted assertability leads to intuitionistic logic (DUMMETT)
- but the generalization of this approach to empirical or factual truth faces serious difficulties
 - confirmation not better understood than truth
- GÖDEL: truth and provability do not coincide even in arithmetic

CONCLUSION

- epistemic or doxastic definitions of truth (true-for-a) fail to give interesting definitions of truth
- but they may serve as evidence-based or methodological indicators of truth

TRUTH-MAKERS

- according to the correspondence theory, truth is a relational concept
- *veritas est adequatio rei et intellectus*
- truth-bearer p is true iff there is a truth-maker W such that p is true in W
- truth-makers W are usually taken as states of affairs or facts

FREGE

- truth is the common referent of all true sentences
- HINTIKKA interprets Frege as supporting the universality of language, ineffability of semantics
- Frege in 1918: the content of the word 'true' is *sui generis* and indefinable

TARSKI

- BRENTANO, TWARDOWSKI, KOTARBINSKI, the Lvov-Warsaw School
 - material truth absolute, no relative truths
 - language interpreted
- TARSKI 1931/1935
 - semantic definition of truth as explication of the classical theory of truth
 - "absolute" concept (KOKOSZYNSKA)
 - interpretation not made explicit
 - truth in the domain D of all objects
 - truth in the subclasses of domain D (HILBERT)

CARNAP

- *Introduction to Semantics* 1942
- semantical system S: uninterpreted language L and designation function des
- (C) sentence s is true in S iff there is a proposition p such that s designates p and p
- (T) if p in ML is the translation of s in L, then s is true in L iff p
- proposition p is true iff for every S and every s in S if s designates p in S then s is true in S
- the proposition p is true =df p (absolute, not semantical involving des) - leads to deflationism

MODEL THEORY

- syntax: language L
- interpretation function I maps the vocabulary of L to various domains D
- $K = \langle L, I \rangle$ interpreted linguistic framework
- L -structures $W = \langle D, I(L) \rangle$, possible worlds
- sentence s of L is true in W , W is a model of s
- truth in a model is relative to interpretation function I

MONADIC TRUTH

- in model theory and possible worlds semantics, truth is a relational but objective notion:
 - true in a model, true at a world
- CAPPELEN & HAWTHORNE: monadic truth of propositions, truth and falsity *simpliciter*, more fundamental than the relational notion
 - but how could the relational concept be explained by the monadic one?
 - actual truth definable in model theory

ACTUAL TRUTH

- W^* = the actual world
- L a fragment of natural language
- I specifies the meanings of the terms of L
- $K = \langle L, I \rangle$ conceptual framework
- D a domain of objects in W^*
- $W^*(K) = \langle D, I(L) \rangle$ world version, the actual world relative to K, the way the world is in relation to the expressive power of K
- truth in $W^*(K)$ = actual truth of sentences of L

CONCEPTUAL PLURALISM

- there is no ideal language K with $W^* = W^*(K)$
- all conceptual frameworks have their own truths
- truth objective: we choose L and I , the world W^* decides the truth values of L -sentences
- truth about $W^*(K)$ is truth about W^*
- the truths about different world versions $W^*(K)$ cannot be incompatible with each other ("genuine relativism" avoided)

INCOMPLETE STATEMENTS

- open formulas: 'x is a logician' is true for (or satisfied by) $x = \text{Jan Wolenski}$, false for $x = \text{Brigitte Bardot}$
- temporally indefinite sentences
 - 'Gabriel Sandu is in Kyiv'
 - sometimes true, sometimes false
 - 'GS is in Kyiv on May 25, 2013'
 - eternal absolute truth

INDEXICALS

- TWARDOWSKI: defence of absolute truth in 1900
- *contextualism*: an utterance with indexicals is interpreted relative to a context of use
- context C: agent, location, time, world
- the utterance of 'I am here now' is true in context C if the agent of C is in the location of C at the time of C in the world of C
- relativism is avoided

AGAINST RELATIVISM

- CAPPELEN & HAWTHORNE: "Simplicity"
- the semantic values of declarative sentences relative to contexts of utterances are propositions
- propositions instantiate the fundamental monadic properties of truth *simpliciter* and falsity *simpliciter*

THE NEW RELATIVISM

- KAPLAN, LEWIS, MACFARLANE, KÖLBEL
- faultless disagreement in spite of conflicting claims
- meaning, context, and world not sufficient to determine truth values, some extra factors needed
- hidden indexicals – “moderate” approach
- non-standard propositions, sometimes true, sometimes false – relativism

EXAMPLES (I)

- standards of taste: 'a is prettier than b'
- epistemic possibility: 'it might have been a'
- epistemic justification: 'p is justified by e'
- knowledge attributions: 'a knows that p'
- value statements: 'a is good'
- normative statements: 'a ought to do f'
- future contingents: 'Spain is the European Champion in 2012' (uttered before 2012)

EXAMPLES (II)

- these statements are relative to a certain
 - standard of taste
 - state of knowledge
 - standard of justification
 - moral system or auditory
 - time of utterance

PERSONAL TASTE

- CAPPELEN: contextualist treatment of personal taste (spicy, funny, disgusting,...)
 - 'Skiing is fun'
 - hidden indexicals: 'Skiing is fun for me', 'Skiing is fun for you', 'Skiing is fun for all'

MORAL RELATIVISM

- modest moral relativism, moral constructivism
 - 'Stealing is bad' without a truth value
 - 'In Christian ethics, stealing is bad'
 - 'In the moral code valid in Finland, ...'not determined by the context
- not radical relativism ("anything goes"), not moral subjectivism
- need not be construed as a case of alethic relativism