

# Three Theories of Truth

## CORRESPONDENCE THEORY

Bertrand Russell

The correspondence theory of truth corresponds to objective reality. A claim is made about the universe. We check out the claim with **observations and physical measuring devices**.

While this theory properly emphasizes the notion that propositions are true when they **correspond to reality**, its proponents often have difficulty explaining what facts are and how propositions are related to them.

### Problems:

- Verification involves subjective experiences as to both observations and requires interpretations.
- Claims are made about things that are very large such as galaxies and the entire universe, as to its shape and size and duration that are beyond the ability of any human to have a direct experience of it.
- Claims are made about things that are very small such as sub-atomic particle and small quanta of energy, bosons, gluons, neutrinos, charm particles and the like of which no human can have a direct experience.

## COHERENCE THEORY

Bland Blanshard

This explains how scientists can make claims about the very large and small objects using a system of claims already accepted to be true.

**The theory is the belief that a proposition is true to the extent that it agrees with other true propositions.** In contrast with the correspondence theory's emphasis on an independent reality, this view supposes that reliable beliefs constitute an inter-related system, each element of which entails every other.

Truth is a property of a related group of consistent statements e.g., Mathematics, Science

Truth is a systemic coherence of propositions interconnectedness of beliefs

### Problems:

1. what if other judgments (statements) are false? Consistent error is possible.

2. coherence theory in the last analysis seems to involve a correspondence since the first judgments must be verified directly.

## PRAGMATIC THEORY

C.S. Peirce, William James, James Dewey

The theory is the **belief that a proposition is true when acting upon it yields satisfactory practical results**. As formulated by William James, the pragmatic theory promises (in the long term) a convergence of human opinions upon a stable body of scientific propositions that have been shown in experience to be successful principles for human action.

Examines how beliefs work in practice, the practical difference.

This makes TRUTH something that is PSYCHOLOGICAL.

TRUTH is whatever has met a society's criteria for justification.

### Problems:

1. What is justified for one community to believe may not be true.
2. How to explain errors? Falsehoods?
3. It makes truth RELATIVE. NO ABSOLUTE TRUTH. NO OBJECTIVE TRUTH. MANY TRUTHS AT ONCE.

There is a difference between truth and justified belief which pragmatism overlooks.

Truth = what an ideal community would believe in the long run of time

## REVIEW

**Correspondence:** Check it out using observation and physical measurements.

**Coherence:** Does it fit in with other accepted beliefs?

**Pragmatic:** Does it work?

## Justified True Belief

In Plato's dialogue the *Theaetetus*, Socrates considers a number of definitions of knowledge. One of the prominent candidates is **justified true belief**. We know that, for something to count as knowledge, it must be true, and be believed to be true. Socrates argues that this is insufficient; in addition one must have a *reason* or *justification* for that belief.

One implication of this definition is that one cannot be said to "know" something just because one believes it and that belief subsequently turns out to be true. An ill person with no medical training but a generally optimistic attitude might believe that she will recover from her illness quickly, but even if this belief turned out to be true, on the Theaetetus account the patient did not **know** that she would get well, because her belief lacked justification.

Knowledge, therefore, is distinguished from true belief by its **justification**, and much of epistemology is concerned with how true beliefs might be properly justified. This is sometimes referred to as the theory of justification.

The Theaetetus definition agrees with the common sense notion that we can believe things without knowing them. Whilst *knowing p* **entails** that p is true, *believing in p* does not, since we can have false beliefs. It also implies that we believe everything that we know. That is, the things we know form a subset of the things we believe.