

THE EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF TRUTH

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Like the Latin God Janus, Truth looks in two directions. Its logical aspect is an inward glance enclosed in the conscious mind. The other looks to the outer world, to things themselves. Not infrequently philosophers, as guardians of the mind, have looked upon this ontological or ontic aspect of truth as a kind of philosophic infidelity or frivolity.

After Descartes, European philosophy was concerned almost exclusively with ideas. This trend reaches its culmination in the precise phenomenological analysis of Edmund Husserl. This phenomenology deals with *noumena*, with ideas as they appear to our judgment-free intellect, which puts bewildering existence in parentheses (*epoche*) so that eidetic intuition can describe things as they appear, as phenomena.

Yet it is important to bear in mind that appearance (*maya, doxa, image*) is nothing else than the manifestation or epiphany of being itself (*brahman, noumenon, reality*). Not only is being the background of appearance but appearance is the foreground of being. Manifestation and being are not two different realities, but one. Appearance is being itself exactly as it appears. Only through appearance can I penetrate being.

In other words, phenomenology need not be tied to the framework of an idealistic philosophy. It is the correct method of gnoseology (critical knowledge) as well, and it is the first correct approach to ontology. Furthermore it can be used not only as the method of an essential ontology, a metaphysics of essences, but also as the fruitful path to an existential ontology, a metaphysics of existences. Such an existential phenomenology should be supplemented, however, by the essential phase, and both by an ultimate ontology which transcends phenomenology. For the phenomenological method discloses only how things appear, as essences as well as existences, not what things are. We wish to apply the method to one of the great philosophic problems by describing the outward-looking countenance of truth, the aspect that was emphasized by Christian philosophers until the time of Descartes as well as by many systems of the Vedanta, and once again claims the attention of contemporary philosophers. Phenomenology will be used, therefore, not as a logical analysis of the data of consciousness in the essential spheres within the *epoche* of Husserl, but as the existential method to discover what is, without penetrating into that which "what is" is, without forcing the inner sanctuary of that which is.

THE UPWARD ANALYSIS

TRUTH IS BEAUTY

Whatever its cause the nature of error lies in the proposition. With truth it is exactly the opposite. Whatever its relation to the proposition, its nature lies in the thing itself. We may borrow a classical example from Indian philosophy: "This is a snake" is an error; "This is a rope" is the truth. If we reject the first, the false proposition, we destroy the error, but we do not destroy the truth by rejecting the second. "This," what this is, remains, and it remains true independently of human judgment. The "this" of the false proposition will also remain, and it will not be false, but true, whether the "this" refers to the extra-mental rope or to the imagined snake (which as imagined snake is true). The nature of the truth will be the nature of the "this." "S is F" may be a true proposition, but *the* truth is the subject: S is that which is true. Truth, therefore, lies in reality itself:

that which is true. F is never true if it is identified with S. It may be true insofar as it is something of S, but it is never *the* truth.

We must guard against confusing the classical distinction between the logical and the metaphysical concept of truth. The locus of the former is the judgment, whereas the latter is found in the thing itself. Still, the distinction does not solve all problems, for truth is more than a concept. The truth of S is not the truth of one part of the statement "S is F," but the real basis for that which appears as S in the sentence.

TRUTH IS GOD

Truth is reality, it is S, the subject of a sentence. But where can I find the genuine S? We saw that in the judgment, "this is a rope," the truth is "this;" that is, lies in the subject. But when I say "this," the subject of the previous judgment has been transformed into the predicate, into the object, of a second. I cannot say "this" without making an object of it. Therefore, "this" can be true, but it cannot be *the* truth. Things cannot present themselves as subjects. They are always objects for me; perhaps true, always true as objects, but never *the* true. But the truth is indispensable for the trueness of any judgment.

Where can I find a pure subject if not in an object or the subject of a judgment? I have only one refuge: myself. If I can identify the "this" with myself, if I can transform "S is F" into "I am F," I shall have S not as object but as pure subject.

This might be possible if we were concerned with mere dialectic. But phenomenology is a method of analyzing ontological data that are actually given on the horizon of my existence or consciousness. "I am F" is only a dialectic judgment unless I find the F that I am. I am not really a subject, and thus the truth, if I cannot find the predicate identical with myself. I must be in a position to answer ontologically who I am. But I cannot fulfill this requirement as long as I am in this world. For I am neither my body nor my conscious self. I am not my mind or consciousness. I *have* a body, a self, a mind; but I cannot identify myself with any of the things that I have or of which I partake.

I cannot even identify my "I" with the ego, for "I" am not only my ego as it is here and now. My ego is all that I am just now, but it is not what I was and even less what I shall be. "I" am more what I shall be than what I am now. The real possibilities and hopes of my being are not yet present in my ego. "I" am surely not this small, self-seeking ego that I still find in myself. I shall be my I. I am not yet, for our nature is not yet complete, not yet born - nature not yet *nata*. The I that we are looking for cannot be the changing subject of human stages. It simply is, in a supra-temporal sense.

Meanwhile, the mere expression *my* "I" will not bring us to term. What does "mine" mean? The I is the I. My I means that the I is mine, that it belongs to me. My I cannot be the absolute subject we are looking for, for it is an object, a predicate of me.

"I am I" is the absolute identity we seek. The absolute I is God's name. He is He Who is. He alone can say "I am I," or simply "I am." He is the absolute reality and the absolute truth. We need not detract from God's immanence if we speak of the absolute as "He," nor diminish His transcendence if we name Him "I." He is the absolute I; I is His name.

THE DIVINE LOGOS

God is the only absolute subject and the only absolute truth. Things are true insofar as they are objects to this subject. They are not subjects to themselves; they do not give themselves their being. On the basis of the fact that they are objects of God, they become subjects only in relation to the objects which *they* generate, which they objectify, throw before themselves.

"This is a rope" is ultimately true not when I say it or in the sense in which I express it, but insofar as God expresses it, for His expression makes both the rope and the "this" that is a rope. When we say "this is a rope," we only discover that a rope is there and that our proposition is true, and that it would be an error to say "a snake is there." Our inner private logos is the domain of our inner private truth. The statement, "this is a snake," is true if by "this" we mean that which we see or imagine we see in the semi-darkness. If we create the subject, we create its truth at the same time. But we can do this only to the subject in our thinking or imagination, not to ourselves or to reality.

Truth is then the product of a logos. Our logos can only bring out the truth of the object; it can do nothing about a subject. Yet we discover the object and its truth because the object has already been made a subject by the divine Logos; it has already been "thought" by God. The divine Logos through its thinking creates its objects as subjects. Things are what the Logos, the absolute intellect, thinks of them. His thought gives them their proper knowability and being.

My ego cannot say: "I am you." The absolute I says to me: "I am that," "I am you;" otherwise my ego, His thou, would not exist at all. The whole mystery of this world's existence consists in this: that He, the absolute I, says the "this," the "you," without going on to complete, from our temporal point of view, the expression, "I am that," "I am you." Of course He expresses it, but from our viewpoint it is something in the future: "I shall be that," "I shall be you." When the temporalness *is* past (I do not say, when it *will be* past), we shall be in a position to realize the full truth about ourselves; that is, the proper personal identity of His expression, "I am this." My ego will have grasped the truth and will simply answer, for my being is only a divine answer: "YOU," "You are," "You are the I," "You are I." My real personality, my true ego, is this "you" of His. It is this you that I am. But this is really the Logos, the You of the Father, so that ultimately our being is a partaking of the Logos. In some way God and the world meet in the Logos.

THE DESCENDING WAY

HUMAN TRUTH IS RELATIVE

As long as this temporal interval lasts, we cannot attain absolute truth, but neither can we renounce our task of uncovering in ourselves and in our knowledge the true nature of being and thereby our specific human temporal truth.

From the existential point of view, human truth has an inward-turning character compared to absolute divine truth. That I am true will consist in my being, not a subject, as He is, but a predicate, His predicate. The more I am P, the more true it will be that "S is P" and the closer I shall come to S and truly realize myself. The truth of my being will grow in the same way as my own being attains its goal, being. The truth of my being will depend upon my loyalty

to self, my obedience in relation to my being. Truth must be sought and sifted. We must believe in the truth. Truth dwells primarily not in my intellect, but in my being.

The important conclusion from this ontological character of truth is that man comes near to truth only to the extent that he is truth (Upanishads). Mere theoretical understanding is not possible. The intellect can grasp only what belongs to its level, the logical or essential aspect of truth, not its existential or ontological core. Truth is not something that we possess but something that possesses us or besets us, something in which we find our being. I approach real truth through wisdom concerning the One alone, wisdom which does not spurn true knowledge but contains it as an element, wisdom which is ultimately a divine gift, and which is not so much knowing as a consciousness of being known.

This existential advance toward truth does not reach its goal on earth, for here no one possesses the whole truth or is completely possessed by it. The way to truth is an inner approach with our whole being, in which good will is as important as right understanding, a pure heart as essential as correct ideas.

Human truth is relative to our ontological position, which is singular. No one else can be in my position. But this is not the singularity of exclusiveness. It consists precisely in my relation to the only One, Who does not exclude but includes all, because of His absolute oneness.

From the essential point of view, expressed in the proposition "S is P," human truth is also relative. It is impossible to identify absolutely a real subject with a predicate, since the subject is always an existence and the object an essence. It was the error of western idealism to believe in such a possibility, and since this possibility exists only in God, idealism was forced dialectically to think of human understanding as a divine mind.

"S is P" will be true if P expresses something that is S; but no P can exhaust the being of S (the I). Thus, as with existence, it is impossible for our understanding to transfer the complete essence of S to P. "S is P" is never completely equivalent to "P is S." Error, and sin in the ontological sense, becomes possible when we suppose an equivalence that does not correspond to reality.

The classical definition of logical and anthropological truth in medieval philosophy, *adequatio rei et intellectus*, included recognition of the fact that identity, *aequatio*, can never be achieved. It introduced the dynamic term *adequatio*, on the way to identity, to indicate that as long as we remain in this world of duality, we approach truth only asymptotically. Truth must be won.

THE NEGATIVE ELEMENT OF HUMAN TRUTH

We are of course permitted to formulate "S is P," and it is a true judgment as long as we are aware of its limitations, of its relativity. But we have a specific human way of approaching truth, the *via negationis*, the way of denial. "S is not Q" is in a sense closer to the truth than "S is P" (supposing of course that P differs from Q), for even though the statement may be too barren to tell us anything about S, the judgment as such does not suffer from the limitations of the affirmative one. "S is P" can never be an absolute identity, but "S is - not Q" is an absolute negation of identity. This logical absoluteness, however, cannot be taken metaphysically. "S is -

not Q" implies something logically different from the metaphysical equivalent "S is non-Q," where we again have the simple affirmative, "S is R" (substituting R for non-Q). If we can more easily determine what any subject is not, than what it is, it is especially true that, since we ourselves are relative, we penetrate more deeply into the truth concerning the absolute reality knowing what it is not than knowing what it is. If it is true that it is, it is not so in the way we are able to think of it. "He" is known as unknown (*cognoscitur tamquam ignotus*). He is a hidden God. Not only human truth but truth itself has a certain negative character. (*Aletheia*, not to hide.)

On the other hand, logical negation can have metaphysically only a positive character. Pure negation does not exist even ideally. It is unthinkable, for it ought not to presuppose something that will be denied - in which case it would not be pure negation - and negation does not make sense, either, for it might be a judgment affirming everything. Negation is always negation of something, and this something is positive.

For this reason one of the best ways of identifying the absolute is to say that it is *sadasat*, it is and is not. God, the absolute, is A and non-A, and He is not A and non-A, not because He is full of contradictions but because He is infinite beyond every possible contradiction or negation. If He were only A, He would be limited by non-A, so He includes both. But the sense is not that He is A *and* non-A, which makes B, for He is neither A nor non-A. Furthermore, the negation must not be too outspoken. We must listen rather than ask. "He is that from which all speech rebounds."

THE LOCUS OF ERROR

"S is P" is a true proposition, but it contains only a fragment of truth concerning S and P. Error arises when we overstep the bounds of its validity either by extrapolation or by interpolation.

In extrapolation, the subject is pushed beyond its limits. "That is a snake" is a false proposition if by "that" we mean the rope that lies a few steps in front of us. We said "S is P" but we should have said "S₁ is P." The thing before us is not a snake, but the image we have formed in our imagination is the true picture of a snake. In our day the new physics has uncovered the error of classical physics in projecting concepts beyond the magnitude for which they were and still are valid.

We are constrained to use the term S, yet we cannot attain the full S. In reality, S is for us: S₁ plus S₂ plus S₃...S_n. "S_n is P" is true, but not "S_{nm} is P_n." We supposed erroneously that S = S_n, whereas S_n = S₁ plus S₂...S_n.

Interpolation is the inclusion of heterogeneous elements in the predicate. "This is a rope" will be a false judgment if we consider "rope" the ultimate reality of "this." "This" is certainly a rope, but it is much more than that. We are in error if we think of "this" only as a rope. We must express ourselves in the proposition "S is P;" but we have no means of exhausting the predicate of S, so that we really mean "S_n is P_n," which is true for P_n only, and not for P_{nm}.

THE INEXPRESSIBLE MULTIPLICITY OF TRUTH

The saying, "truth is one," is accepted uncritically as a rule, and surely absolute truth, which is absolute reality - God - is one. But when the unity of truth is pompously proclaimed in human discussions, what is behind it is not the unity of the absolute but the justification of personal opinion. The danger of the formula is that it overlooks the existential character of truth and busies itself with a one-sided philosophy of essence, or with narrow rationalism. "S is P" contradicts "S is Q" only if Q is equivalent to non-P. For us S embraces many predicates, since none of them exhaust the subject.

Every existing thing has as much truth as it has being, and this relative existential truth of the world is one to the extent that there is one being, and multiple in the measure that being is multiple. In the realm of the absolute, beyond time, my being and my truth are identical. "You are this" is the spark from the divine being and truth that I am. But while we are immersed in time, the "you are that" expressed by God takes on for me the form: "You *will be* that." Truth, like being, is my goal. I must win the truth.

If for human essences truth is what will be, it is also what should be. Truth is duty. "We are to practice the truth" (Eph 4:15). Truth must not be imposed from outside, but witnessed to as the inner chronological law of our becoming, our growth toward being. This law of our being is our truth, and this truth is our proper being, provided we do not falter in its discovery, formation and deliverance.

In this existential perspective we do not use the formula: truth is one. Truth is my being, and no one can penetrate the inexpressible ontological relation between God who calls me and my being which is His call. Truth is as manifold as the things that are. I must follow my own personal way, and no other way may take its place.

But this multiplicity of existential truth is ineffable, as inexpressible as my proper being which is expressed effectively only by the divine mind, and we can draw no conclusion from it concerning essential truth. It does not point to relativism and indifferentism, for as soon as I begin to *speak* of truth I am in the realm of essences. Whatever expression I formulate will be a universal essence, common to many, and therefore neither *my* truth nor pluralistic.

THE IMPERFECT UNITY OF ESSENTIAL TRUTH

If truth is many as are existing things then it also has the metaphysical unity of existing things. From my viewpoint, my ego, the thou of a divine utterance, is not your ego; my person is not your person. But from the standpoint of the absolute, He does not say twice, "you are this," in order to call into existence you and me. Not only is the divine and timeless Being one, but the entire creation emanating from his Being alone is also one. The divine Logos speaks but once an eternal "S is P," and this P includes all that is. "The unique Word is expressive not only of the Father but also of creation" (*S. Th. I, 34, a. 3*). "*To on pollachos legetai*" was the deep intuition of Aristotle. Being is expressed in many ways, *pollachos*, but it remains *the* being, *to on*.

Logical, formulated truth must also be one, since our intellect to a degree contacts the essences of existing things and discovers the essential structure of the world. This is the

province of the principle of non-contradiction, which safeguards not only our thinking but also the essential unity of the world.

"S is P" expresses that perfect knowledge of things which our intellect only approaches as an ideal. Actually our knowledge has to do with S_1 is P_1 , S_2 is P_2 , etc. Within each of these propositions also the truth can only be one; that is, if S_n is P_n , it cannot be that S_n is P_m . On this foundation logic is built and develops toward a dialectic of truth. And where truth is one it is also incorruptible, permanent and unchanging.

THE PURIFYING AND MEDIATIONAL NATURE OF TRUTH

That truth brings freedom and fulfillment is a long tradition in both western and oriental religion and philosophy, and it is clear that this truth is not the mere lightness of a proposition but existential truth. It is also well known that truth has a cathartic function (Plato). It purifies our being not through magical or esoteric properties but because of its very nature as truth and its relation to our being. It is instructive to follow through the ages this idea of the purifying aspect of truth. It is an index of the development of western philosophy.

In the golden age of Greek philosophy the very notion of truth springs from the idea of purification. Plato and Aristotle, as Heraclitus before them and the Stoics and others later, inherited from dawning philosophy and human history the realization that man's chief concern is his redemption, his union with the divine, his fulfillment or beatitude. The powerful insight of the Greeks was that the divine is being, and that therefore union with the divinity means assimilation to being. But - and here begins Greek intellectualism - to be united with being means to know being, for we have no higher way. Knowledge is precisely this mysterious assimilation, this union, between the knower and the known, between subject and object. Knowledge of being is *theoria*, contemplation, through which alone we achieve the goal of life. Its organ is our mind, the *nous*, and truth, *aletheia*, the discovery of being, is its central value. The wise man is the seeker of truth, and he alone will be divinized and achieve immortality and being. Contemplation is the only way, and it automatically brings about the highest realization, independently of the moral virtues. Truth is itself cathartic, or rather, it is the purified and perfected goal. Blessedness is the result of a life that corresponds to the essences of things.

But reality and being are more than naked, transparent essences. The existential forces of sin, redemption, human failings, grace, strength and weakness of will, the fact that human life cannot be reduced to a reasoned schema, and that *theoria* is closed to all but the few - all this undermined the Greek intellectualism of Plato and Aristotle. Christian philosophers from the beginning to the Scholastics knew well that truth has an existential character and an important purifying power, but they are influenced by the consideration of the radical inadequacy of man after original sin, the fragile character of human values, the fact that on earth truth does not coincide with goodness, and that Christian contemplation is more than an act of understanding.

With the decline of the intellectual influence of Christianity in western culture and the emergence of rationalism and idealism, truth loses all contact with life and existence becomes a bare symbol of pure reason, a mere rightness of judgment. Theory is no longer *theoria* or contemplation, but an intellectual value divorced from practice and ethics. Truth has neither existential nor religious meaning. It has little to do with power or happiness or practical life. It is interesting to observe that in recent centuries the reaction to this dichotomy was a complete

inversion of this concept of truth, so that it now becomes a mere practical value assuring me of power, success, and enjoyment.

At long last the European thinker again sees that truth has an existential and a purifying aspect, and that it is never irrelevant. He is returning to the perennial philosophical tradition of humanity for which truth has meant more than mental gymnastics. Truth has a strong appeal, often more than God, freedom, heaven, etc. This is not only a sign of our time, but has always been the case, because truth mediates between the absolute and eternal and the relative and changeable. Unity, freedom, vision of God are distant ends toward which we strive, whereas truth is a specific immediate bridge between these two worlds. It is the messenger between essences and existences. Materially it coincides with being, God, goodness, but formally it contains a specific reference to the predicate of the absolute subject. This truth is S, but S is always stated ontologically, "S is Q." Over this bridge we reach divinity. If God speaks He can speak only truth, not because He may not speak untruth, but because His speaking is truth. Truth always comes as a revelation. First we hear it, then we believe it, and finally we see it (St. Augustine). Through it God communicates to us and we rise to Him. It is the most human of his attributes, for after all we are children of the Logos, the divine Truth.

CONCLUSION

We can sum up the problem of existential ontology by discussing the formal aspect of truth as distinct from being, goodness, reality. An essential phenomenology would not go beyond the proposition, "S is P," and the analysis of the identity as the dialectic unfolding of our intellect or consciousness. For existential phenomenology the formal aspect of truth is its mediative or mesoteric character. Truth has the sense of a medium; it is not being, *to on*, but "being as being," *to on he on*. We cannot know in what consists that which we call being. We only know that being "is." We can reach being only as existing, and that is truth. It is being as existing, as manifesting itself, and not what appears to me as truth, since I am not outside of existing things.

In speaking of the absolute we must go beyond all categories, but without losing our footing in reality. We must retain the sense of the real and avoid the constitutional weakness of our limited thinking. The mere dialectic projection of our mental structures is a groundless extrapolation. We can always think of a beyond, but in doing so we may leave reality and truth behind.

We can express it thus: If F is the ultimate reality, in itself, and if we ask what F is, then it is not F that asks the question (not even the F in us, for F need not ask), but we, our logos, that asks. Now we can only ask what F "is." We cannot project the answer beyond the "is," and so whenever we want to know about a thing, we make of it only an existing thing. So whatever F may consist of, we can only say that it is L in which the being of F lies. This L is not different from F (it is the "is" of F), but it need not "be" identical with it. It is the being of F: the "being" as existing, and therefore the truth of F.

Truth is the revelation of being but not an external disclosure thereof, for there is no spectator, no one beyond the pale of being to whom it could be disclosed. Yet truth is this unfolding of what is not folded, this reflection of the simple, this image of the imageless, this fullness of the absolute. We may add: this logos of silence, this "this" of the not-this, to

emphasize the inadequacy of speech and the singular specificity of these concepts which are applied to the absolute. Being is truth because it is not empty but full, full of life, truth and love. Truth is the epiphany of being as existing and therefore the authentic road to being: being as manifest truth.

For our temporal being, also, truth is manifestation, but for us it is equally the veil of existing things, the envelope under which we grasp being, as long as we have not reached our God-filled state. It is not a mere intellectual identification of P with S but an ontological descent - *avatar* - from S as S. When S as S appears, when the subject comes, not just the logical subject of a predicate, but simply as existing, then is truth present: truth is being as being. When there are existing things, then the being of the existing things is the truth. Therefore we are insofar as we are truth, and meanwhile we are in the state of becoming as long as we are true. Truth is the horizon of being, the line of meeting of earth and heaven, man and God.

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