The Interpretive Structure of Truth in Heidegger

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I.

Let us begin with a 'minimal correspondence theory of truth' (CT): x is true if and only if p. Such a theory requires any usage of the word 'true' to imply possible conditions by which what is said to be true could in fact be false (not-p). This distinguishes minimal CT from "robust CT." Robust CT stipulates (a) that truth is correspondence with fact, and related to this, (b) only language which corresponds to fact is meaningful.[1] Minimal CT says only that a legitimate truth claim can also be false. Does minimal CT also, at least implicitly, install bi-valence as the necessary condition of every meaningful proposition?

Before a phenomenological evaluation of minimal CT is possible, the phenomenological objection to robust CT needs to be clarified. Here the early Heidegger becomes analytically relevant. Heidegger's critique of the (robust) correspondence theory of truth places him in a certain proximity to defenders of minimal CT.[2] Heidegger's primordial truth (*aletheia*)–not correspondence but revelation, is the removal of a veil (*lethe*)–defers falsifiability to a penultimate level of discourse. *Aletheia* does not have falsehood as its opposite. The unrevealed is not false, but hidden. It does not show itself as what it isn't–the unrevealed is not necessarily a dissimulation (although a dissimulation is a non-

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[1] Michael Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 235.

[2] See Daniel Dahlstrom*,* "The Scattered *Logos*," in *A Companion to Heidegger's* Introduction to Metaphysics, ed. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 83-102, at 85. For a defense of bi-valence see W.V.O. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 90-93.

revelation); rather, it does not show itself at all. The primordial sense of truth as revelation does not have an equiprimordial sense of falsehood corresponding to it. Hence the break with robust CT's identification of falsifiability and meaningfulness. Robust CT achieves univocity at the expense of adequacy. It reduces truth to propositional truth. Like every reductionism, it elevates a partial sense to a normative definition. Truth becomes a univocal term at the expense of the varied senses of the word 'true.'

To demonstrate the diversity of meanings of 'truth,' we need not dig into ancient Greek. In fact, it is plain in the English usage of the word 'true' that truth as 'the property of a proposition corresponding to a state of affairs' is only one of a multiplicity of meanings of the term.

Consider the following usages of 'true.'

(1) "She always comes through in the end. She is a true friend." Here true means steadfast and loyal. The aletheic usage of 'true' here is more original than falsifiability, more original than 'true' in the sense of "It is *true* that she is a true friend." There are two meanings of 'true' operative in this last sentence. Only the first has as its opposite falsehood.

(2) "Moving to the big house in the country was a dream come true for the newlyweds." This is truth as fulfilment of an intention. When a dream comes 'true' does it correspond with anything? A CT theorist might want to say that the fact corresponds to my dream. But it would be more accurate to say that my dream comes into actuality in fact.

(3) "The carpenter trued up the doorframe." This is a verbal sense which means to position something so as to make it balanced, level, or square. No correspondence is possible here, but rather the securing and stabilizing of a structure.

The notion of truth as correspondence to fact (minimal or robust) fails to account for any of these three senses of 'true.' An etymological analysis of the English word 'true' deepens the ambiguity. 'True' comes from the Old English *triewe*, which means "faithful, trustworthy." The root *tru* seems to be related to the Indo-European root *dru* which means "tree." This would explain why *triewe* also means "tree" in Old English. The equivocation here evokes the notion of strength, reliability, "steadfast as an oak." Thus we get the derivations, Lithuanian *drutas* or "firm"; Old Irish *dron* or "strong." The sense of truth as "consistent with fact" is first recorded in English in 1205–late in the history of the word.[3] We are left with the implication that the oldest meaning of 'true' is not

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[3] Online etymological dictionary, http://www.etymonline.com (© November 2001 Douglas Harper).

correspondence with fact but faithful, reliable, trustworthy. But in what sense is the 'true' trustworthy or reliable? Is it trustworthy or reliable because it corresponds to the facts? Or is a correspondence to fact true because it is trustworthy and reliable? What could trustworthy mean in a philosophical context? Trustworthy for what? I can rely on the trustworthy; it supports me in my projects, my living. Truth as trustworthy has a concrete reference to living.

Aristotle tells us that when dealing with an analogous term–one admitting of multiple and related senses that cannot be reduced to a univocal definition–we cannot speak of a single meaning. We deal, rather, with a series of participations in a preeminent meaning (what the Scholastic Cajetan will call the analogy of attribution). The many meanings of the common term form an ordered set, with one meaning primary and the others secondary. The primary meaning, the *primum analogatum* is presupposed by the others while presupposing none of them. If truth is an analogous term, what is the primary analogate, the preeminent sense (*modi significandi*) of the word, which is presupposed by all others? The primary analogate will be implicit in the other senses, but they will not be implicit in it. To take a recurring example, 'health' in a meal, or 'health' in a complexion, presupposes 'health' in a body–the meal is 'healthy' or the complexion is 'healthy' because it contributes to or is indicative of 'health' in a body. But 'health' in the sense of 'a healthy meal' or 'a healthy complexion' is not presupposed by 'health' in the sense of 'a healthy body.'

It seems plain from the above examples that "correspondence with fact" could not be the *primum analogatum* of the analogous senses of 'true' outlined above. 'True' in the sense of "true friend," or even stronger, in the verbal sense of 'trueing' does not presuppose 'true' in the sense of correspondence to fact. But does 'true' in the sense of correspondence to fact presuppose 'true' in the sense of trustworthy or reliable?

The problem of the diversification of analogous meanings was the beginning of Heidegger's philosophical career. He often reminded us that he was first awakened to philosophy by reading Franz Brentano's dissertation, *Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles* (*On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle*), the book that drew Heidegger's attention to the problem of the ambiguity inherent in the notion of being.[4] Aristotle notes that 'being' means a variety of different things in different contexts. The 'is' in the sentence

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[4] First published in 1862, Franz Brentano, *Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1960). Available in English as: Idem, *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle*, trans. Rolf George (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

"Socrates is a man" is doing different work than the 'is' in the sentence "Socrates is older than Plato." The many meanings of being according to Aristotle are analogously related. Heidegger's youthful interest in analogy remained with him his whole life, and in some ways, shows itself in all of his work. The exposure of shades of meaning in terms, for example, Heidegger's tedious etymologies, is motivated by a commitment to expose the variations in meaning in the history of a word, what Derrida calls "dissemination." The danger for us, in the age of calculation, is to mitigate the ambiguity by an imposed univocity. We nail down a single meaning and foreclose dissemination. A further question for a minimal CT theorist: does the substitution of an empty symbol (technically, a sign) for the polysemous word also foreclose dissemination? 'P' cannot diversify itself into analogous meanings because 'P' does not mean anything at all. But are the multiple meanings of whatever 'P' might stand for left intact by the symbolization?

II.

The early Freiburg lectures have changed the way we read Heidegger by giving us a different Heidegger to read. In his courses, lectures, and writings leading up to the 1927 publication of *Being and Time*, we meet a young Heidegger who has not yet divorced himself from the philosophical community, a philosopher intensely committed to phenomenology as a collaborative enterprise, indeed a scientific enterprise, where science is understood as the search for a primordial understanding of life (*Urwissenschaft*). His highly innovative lectures quickly departed from the technical terminology of his teachers, Heinrich Rickert and Edmund Husserl, on the grounds of an early insight (perhaps his "single" thought before it incarnated itself in the language of ontology): the grasp of the limitations of the theoretical attitude, which contaminated the philosophical tradition. The theoretical attitude imports an unexamined assumption into phenomenology: the assumption that the human being is primarily a knower, that is, a subject who relates to objects through a cognitive faculty. If phenomenology is to give an account of life as it is lived, it must first dislodge this assumption. The human being is primarily one who lives, that is, projects herself upon existential possibilities for being-in-the-world. The young Heidegger explores alternatives to theoretical paradigms, what he calls "hermeneutical concepts," which, *pace* Husserl, are not grasped in an objective intuition of essence; they are rather always already understood in living, if never adequately known, the domains of meaning within which we pursue our projects of living. Heidegger calls the grasp

of these basic concepts "hermeneutical intuition." Because hermeneutical concepts are multiply variegated by the different situations in which they operate, the intuition can only be accomplished through an immersion into that which is to be described. Hence the vital language of Heidegger's phenomenology, the talk of "enactment," "being gripped," "taking action within metaphysics," and later "decision." Description must immerse itself in the fore-structure of what is to be described. It must be transparent to its own *Vorhabe*, *Vorsicht* and *Vorgriff*,[5] the levels of anticipatory prejudgment that make the domain of meaning of the interpretation possible. Hermeneutical concepts are not added onto a theoretically neutral state of affairs; rather, they constitute the state of affairs. Interpretedness is inherent in every description, because it is inherent in experience. Pure description in the sense of an account of facts which is free of interpretive fore-structure is an illusion. The ideal of objectivity is itself an interpretive fore-structure, a determination of what can and cannot show itself in a certain situation, namely the situation of theoretical science. Phenomenology cannot allow itself to be confined a priori to a limited domain of meaning by the theoretical attitude, which rules the sciences; its adequacy to its subject matter will be determined by the degree to which it allows its language to grow out of life and its meanings to be refracted and adumbrated by it.

The young Heidegger's "hermeneutics of facticity" is all the more relevant today, when the analysts are discovering *Being and Time*, and earnestly trying to situate it in the context of historical positions. Is Heidegger a realist or an anti-realist? Is he a pragmatist of some kind? To what "ism" does this most elusive of philosophical giants belong? "Like any philosophical view," Taylor Carmen writes, "Heidegger makes sense only in relation to the competing alternatives."[6] Carmen describes Heidegger's position as "social externalism," by contrast with the externalism advocated by Putnam and Kripke. "The world that has authority over the contents of our intentional attitudes is not the physical world itself, but the social world, that is, the world of human customs and institutions made accessible to us by our ordinary shared normative standards of intelligibility."[7] This translation of Heidegger into the language of analytical

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[5] Martin Heidgger, *Being and Time*, trans. Edward Macqurrie and Edward Robinson (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1962), 150. Pagination refers to the seventh German edition, which appears in the margin of the Macquarrie-Robinson translation.

[6] Taylor Carmen, *Heidegger's Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse, and Authenticity in* Being and Time (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 128.

[7] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 137.

philosophy is not necessarily wrong. But something is lost in the translation, perhaps the central point of *Being and Time*. Heidegger's text is not intended to add arguments to existing debates, or to decide metaphysical issues; it is meant to destroy the ways of speaking enshrined by these debates.

III.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that the truth of the proposition–in Aristotle the *logos apophansis*–is not originally a function of judgment but rather a "letting something be seen."[8] *Apophainô* means "to show." Drawing on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Heidegger formulates a notion of truth whose opposite is not falsehood but non-apprehension, *agnoein*, or as one translator of Aristotle puts it "non-contact."[9] This means that the falsifiable truth claim is derivative; it presupposes a deeper sense of truth as disclosure, primordial truth, revelation.

With the distinction between propositional truth and primordial truth, Heidegger breaks the bond between truth and knowledge. *Aletheia* is prior to knowledge, which means it is not knowledge.[10] In the view of some commentators, Heidegger hereby becomes vulnerable to the charge of relativism. Ernst Tugendhat, for example, argued in 1967 that Heideggers notion of "disclosure" annuls the possibility of verifiable philosophical knowledge. That which cannot be false cannot be verifiably true either.

> If truth means un-concealment, in the Heideggerian sense, then it follows that an understanding of world in general is opened up but not that it is put to the test. What must have seemed so liberating about this conception is that, without denying the relativity and opaqueness of our historical world, it made possible an immediate and positive truth-relation, an explicit truth-relation which no longer made any claim to certainty and so could not be disturbed by uncertainty either … That he already calls disclosure in and of itself truth leads to the result that it

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[8] Ibid., § 7.

[9] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans W.D. Ross, in *Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), Θ 10, 1051b25.

[10] John Sallis, "The Truth that is not Knowledge," in Theodore Kisiel and John van Buren, eds., *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in his Earliest Thought* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press), 390: "It is this doubling that decisively breaks the bond of truth to knowledge in its traditional determination as intuition. For disclosedness is a matter neither *of* intuition nor *for* intuition. The originary phenomenon of truth, truth as disclosedness, is a truth that is not knowledge."

is precisely not related to the truth but is protected from the question of truth.[11]

Disclosure compromises truth by precluding the possibility of testing. Primordial truth becomes totalitarian. The skepticism, ostensibly essential to philosophy, is threatened and the possibility emerges of a privileged revelation, which cannot be shared but only declared to others. These are disturbing consequences of Heidegger's retrieval of *aletheia*. But they do not stand as grounds for rejecting the interpretation. A phenomenological discovery cannot be ruled out because we do not like what it implies. If what is at issue here is a phenomenology of truth, then the matter itself alone can decide the issue.

The medieval formula for the correspondence theory of truth, *adaequatio intellectus et rei* (truth is an agreement between thought and the thing), assumes, Heidegger says, that truth is a relation. The relation need not be taken as an identification. Signs, which have a relation to the signified, point without identification. Six corresponds to (agrees with) 16-10 without being identical to it. "With regard to what do *intellectus* and *res agree*?" Heidegger asks.[12] The Cartesian straw man is summoned and dutiful responds: the agreement is between a mental representation and an extra-mental thing. This of course leads to the critical problem, by what criterion can I guarantee that my mental representation corresponds with an extra-mental thing? If my knowledge of things is always mediated by mental representations, the criterion will itself be another mental representation. But how am I to know that my second mental representation agrees with the thing? Heidegger's phenomenological investigation of the problem distinguishes between the act of judgment and its content. A judgment is an intentional act, it has an "about which," or directedness. Heidegger shows that in a judgment I intend the thing itself, not my representation of it. I judge that the temperature outside has dropped because I see the snow melting off the roof through the window. My judgment does not intend a mental representation but the thing. It is directed to the state of affairs outside my window. "Asserting is a way of being towards the thing itself."[13]

When the mediation via representation drops out of the analysis, the proposition is revealed to be more of a sign than a picture; it does not re-present

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[11] Ernst Tugendhat, "Heidegger's Idea of Truth," trans. Christopher Macann, in *Critical Heidegger*, Christopher Macann, ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), 238.

[12] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 216.

[13] Ibid., 218.

but points out. It is not a substitute but an indication of a thing. As such the proposition does not call for comparison but confirmation (*Ausweis*). The proposition is confirmed (*ausgewiesen*) in the thing or not. The confirmation consists in a re-showing of the thing. The unconfirmed proposition is falsified by being resisted as a possible interpretation by the thing itself. The assertion reveals or fails to reveal the thing anew.[14] The confirmed proposition, however, remains hermeneutically situated, that is, determined by time and presupposition. The showing which the proposition makes possible is historical. Not only is it unique and unprecedented, but it emerges out of a field of possible showings. The proposition, by virtue of its implicit fore-structure, its foundations in Dasein's projective understanding, opens up these possibilities for interpretation (and necessarily forecloses others), ultimately lighting the thing up in a singular fashion. "Assertion and its structure (namely, the apophantical 'as') are founded upon interpretation and its structure (viz, the hermeneutical 'as') and also upon understanding–upon Dasein's disclosedness."[15] The proposition, then, emerges out of an existential situation, within which the possibilities for a showing of beings have already been decided. "Assertion communicates entities in the 'how' of their uncoveredness."[16] But assertion can just as easily fail to communicate the uncoveredness of beings, assertion can cover over what has been uncovered. Hence truth must be "wrested" from beings; beings must be snatched out of hiddenness.[17]

   In his discussion of truth in *Being and Time* Heidegger references Aristotle *Metaphysics* Θ 10. Here Aristotle says that the being of truth is twofold, "contact" and "assertion." The truth of contact is the more primordial truth, for the truth of assertion presupposes it. It has as its opposite, not falsehood, but "ignorance," or "non-contact." "For it is not possible to be in *error* regarding the question what a thing is, save in an accidental sense; and the same holds good regarding non-composite substances (for it is not possible to be in *error* about them)."[18] It is not possible to be in error about the *what*; the apprehension of

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[14] Ibid., 218: "What comes up for confirmation is that this entity is pointed out by the Being in which the assertion is made–which is Being towards what is put forward in the assertion; thus what is to be confirmed is *that* such Being *uncovers* the entity towards which it is. What gets demonstrated is the Being-uncovering of the assertion [*Ausgewiesen wird das Entdeckend-sein der Aussage*]."

[15] Ibid., 223.

[16] Ibid., 224.

[17] Ibid., 222.

[18] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1051b25.

whatness, like the sense impression, is unfalsifiable. The judgment about the *what* is falsifiable, but it presupposes apprehension. Before assertions, there must be contact, and in the contact, the primordial truth of the thing first shows itself. The non-showing of the thing is not an experience of falsehood, but of oblivion. The truth of the thing is not there. "And truth means knowing these objects, and falsity does not exist, nor error, but only ignorance–and not an ignorance which is like blindness; for blindness is akin to a total absence of the faculty of thinking."[19] What is this ignorance that is not blindness? It is not the absence of the capacity to know the truth, but the absence of the truth. The thing, which could show itself, and could become the subject matter of an assertion, does not show itself. But let us allow Heidegger to provide the gloss. "To be closed off and covered up belongs to Dasein's *facticity*. In its full existential-ontological meaning, the proposition that 'Dasein is in the truth' states equiprimordially that 'Dasein is in untruth.'"[20]

IV.

Heidegger's neo-Aristotelian account of the two-tiers of truth, primordial truth or situated disclosure, and propositional truth, language that points out–which can be confirmed or not–leaves the multiple meanings of truth intact. We have not lost the bivalent judgment, the falsifiable claim, defended by minimal CT. Rather, we have localized it in a special kind of discourse, the pointing out of what has been revealed. Now the problem with robust CT comes to the fore. The robust CT theorist does not merely stipulate that every truth claim can be falsified; he goes further and stipulates the kinds of disclosures that can be the subject of a truth claim, i.e., the disclosure of an objective publically verifiable fact. But among the kinds of things that might be pointed out, things that show themselves, the publicly accessible fact is only one. Return, for a moment, to the showing of friendship, which is pointed out in the statement, "Peter is a true friend." How does friendship show itself? Does the acknowledgment of friendship admit of the same kind of public verifiability, as say, measuring someone's height? We can say of course, the proposition, "Peter is a true friend" either does or does not correspond to a fact. The proposition "Peter is my friend" is true if and only if

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[19] Ibid., 1052a2.

[20] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 222.

Peter *is* my friend. But that is to talk around the problem. What do I recognize when I recognize friendship? Friendship does not show itself directly, nor is it objectively available when it does. It is a showing that is not accessible to the theoretical attitude. It is not a present-at-hand thing. Friendship shows itself through action in an inter-subjective situation. Friendship only shows itself to friendship; that is, I must be disposed in friendship to see friendship. To acknowledge Peter as my friend, as a true friend, is to commit to a certain interpretation of Peter's actions. The acknowledgment is hermeneutical, i.e., a self-involving act, not a theoretical observation.

To return to the etymology of the English word 'truth,' it may be that "trustworthiness" is the deepest sense of the word. The true is the trustworthiness of the original showing. Without the showing that we can commit to as true, there could be no proposition, and no CT, minimal or robust. Without an original showing, which commissions us to speak–or to remain silent–there is neither the possibility of deception nor of fidelity. The abyss of uncertainty which the two-tier theory of truth opens up in our philosophical discourse does not necessarily catapult philosophy into relativism. But it does indicate the finitude of understanding.