"Truth" as the Word and as the Notion

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Abstract

The idea of "multiplicity of truths" is considered in the article as an indicator of real problems in postmodern understanding of the notion "truth". It's asserted that the meaning of the word "truth" and the content of the notion named by this word is one and the same in natural and scientific languages. Being the category of thought by which we express the property of our thinking to reflect, to be in correspondence with objective entities, which are transcendent to the thinking itself, "truth" has non-conventional content, which is invariant to the all kinds of socio-cultural and cognitive differences. As the result not of the convention, but of the process of human existence, category of truth can't be the object of arbitrary theoretical manipulations. The theoretical definition of truth can only explicate in scientific language the meaning of the word that exists in natural language.

Keywords: truth, word, notion, meaning, content, definition.

Introduction

In postmodern philosophy the opinion has formed, more or less clearly expressed in various texts, that only erroneous – Aristotelian-medieval – idea of "one objective reality" leads to the same erroneous conclusion about "one truth", while understanding that different people deal with different realities supposedly leads to the correct conclusion about "many truths". The question about the number of knowable realities came to be regarded by many philosophers as the most significant in the understanding of truth, and the statement about existence of one reality – as a sign of naive realism.

In attempting to understand what is really meant, when one is speaking about "multiplicity of truths" that reflects "different realities", two questions will be considered:

The fist one: Are there different meanings of the word "truth" in natural and scientific languages?

The second one: What is the epistemological content of the notion "truth"?

1. The Meaning of the Word "Truth" in Natural and Scientific Languages

One of the main arguments in support of the idea of "multiplicity of truths" is that in such ordinary expressions as "true friend", "true work of art", "true delight", or "true crime", on the one hand, and "true theory", "true idea", "true statement", etc., – on the other, the word "true" is used in different meanings. But is it really so? What are these meanings?

Even if we identify "truth" with "good" and "true" with "right", the meaning of the word "true" is the same in any context, namely: "in agreement with reality itself", "genuine" , "not false". It′s just this meaning we have in mind, speaking that someone is a "true friend", if his/her actions are in line with the relationships between people that exist in the human community under the name of "friendship". It′s just to this meaning we are referring to, speaking about some work of art as "true", if we consider that it is in accordance with the cultural phenomenon that is called "art". And even in the case when the work of art is compared with the standard or the "idea of what should be the work of art", it is, however, compared with that, which really exists in culture, and with which some work of art must be in accordance to be "true art". And, no doubt, it′s just the meaning of "correspondence with reality itself" that scientist is investing in the definition of "true", talking about some idea or a theory.

If we ask ourselves, what is really meant, when one is speaking about "multiplicity of truths" that reflects "different realities", we can reasonably suppose that it means that, for example, subjects of one culture believe that the Earth is flat, subjects of another culture claim that the Earth is round, subjects of the third culture are confident that the Earth has the shape of a cylinder, etc. But it′s difficult to understand how these facts may indicate "multiplicity of truths"? Does anyone expect that those who believed, that the Earth was flat, could simultaneously recognize as true the assertion that the Earth was round? Or could believe that each human community has its own Earth?

Hunters, fishers, farmers, traders, etc. for thousands of years were engaged in different activities. However, hardly ever in the history of mankind there was a community whose members believed that their neighbors, engaged in a different line of work, live in a "different world". Those, who believed that the Earth was flat, were convinced that all people consider or should consider the same. Their belief existed as long as they haven′t received the convincing evidence that the Earth was not flat, but spherical. But "two (five, eight, or ten) truths" about the shape of the Earth have never been and could not be in the consciousness of one and the same subjects of culture, although there were various judgments, opinions, beliefs, assumptions, whose truth was not confirmed.

Any scientific theory is an ideal model of the object. And this model is based on a certain number of principles and notions that can′t be derived from other notions within the theory. The basic notions are introduced in the theory by means of definitions. As a result, the theory is an extensive set of statements derived from basic notions and principles.

The impression of a purely linguistic, terminological nature of scientific and philosophical discussions is often created due to the fact that researchers are free to enter in the theory any term as a sign of some object, or use in a theoretical study the words of natural languages in specific meaning. This means that, generally speaking, any meaning of a given term may be justified in a theoretical study. Ultimately, the introduction of a new term or of a new meaning of the term already existing in the theoretical cognition is based on the fairly well-developed theory, and therefore any of the significance of the term is nothing more than a "concentrated", i.e. minimized to the definition, expression of the essence of the theoretical approach to the object that this term signifies.

If we tern to postmodern scientific language, we can find that the term "truth" is defined as "the self-coordination of knowledge", as "utility", as "experimental confirmation". But what gives us the reason to believe that the term "truth" with so different meanings relates to the same quality of thought? After all, if the term "truth" really is used in different meanings, we must still prove that these meanings express the same notion.

And what does it mean "to have a notion" of something: of truth, of reality, of knowledge, or of values? How many notions of one and the same object the subject of cognition can create?

It is obvious, that "to have a notion" means to know what kind of being is represented, reflected in consciousness under the name of "knowledge", "truth", "reality" or "value". The concept of something is always one, and the variety of theories of the object reveals the content of this "one notion", whether the notion of truth, value, atom or reality.

If we identify a variety of definitions of the same term with multiplicity of the notions of a particular object, we simply don′t distinguish between linguistic and epistemological problems. But if we think that we are dealing with multiplicity of notions of the same object, then it means that in our thinking there is no the notion of this object at all.

2. The Epistemological Content of the Notion "Truth"

Linguistic analysis of the semantic of scientific and philosophical terms doesn′t lead to the understanding of the content of philosophical categories and scientific notions, since semantic properties and relations of words aren′t identical to the notions and categories of thinking that these words are marked. The relationship between language and thought is such that the same terms can denote diametrically opposite objects, and different definitions of the term can express only different aspects of the same notion. Therefore, it′s necessary to distinguish between the linguistic aspect of scientific terms that defines their meaning in language and the epistemological aspect of scientific terms, defining their content in relation to the object.

Since epistemology explores not the semantic of the language, but the content of thoughts, epistemological study of terms and statements is concerned not the question of meanings in which the same term can be used, but the question of possibility for thinking to display the different phenomena in the same notion.

And even if we assume that the reasoning about the number of cultural worlds, social practices and knowable realities is something deep and in no case so trivial as a distinction between planets, mushrooms, computers, plantations, and many other phenomena of natural and social worlds as the objects of knowledge, all these arguments are irrelevant to the content of the category "truth" that reflects not the number of knowable worlds or objects, but only and exclusively the correspondence of the content of our ideas to the object of thinking itself.

If scientific notions are formed only on the theoretical level of consciousness and terms denoting them are introduced in the scientific theory by special definitions, the matter with universal categories of thinking is different in principle.

The fundamental difference between the words of natural and scientific languages, denoting universal categories of thinking, from all the other words and terms is that the meanings of these words, being defined by the way of the human existence as such, are invariant with respect to any cultural and historical differences and activities, so we can′t enter into the consciousness no other meanings of these terms.

Speaking about various "concepts" of necessity, accident, truth, good, beauty, etc., we mean actually different criteria, by which some statements can be verified as true, some things as beautiful, and some deeds and actions as good. But even if someone considers as necessary something that others consider as accident, and calls true, good and beautiful something that in the opinion of others is the epitome of evil, ugliness and lies, logical foundations of the evaluation are the same: necessity, accident, truth, good, beauty, etc., – for it is in these categories universal characteristics of existence and the fundamental goals of human culture are expressed.

The invariance of meanings of the words, denoting in different natural languages such universal categories, as "cause", "result", "necessity", "accident", "good", "beauty", "truth", etc., are provided not by agreement or contract between the people, but by the universal laws of human existence, which determine the categorical structure of thinking. Being the result not of the convention, but of the process of human existence, categories can′t be objects of arbitrary theoretical manipulations. This means, that the theoretical definitions of universal categories can be only analytical, i.e. such, that explicate in scientific language the meanings of these terms that exist in natural languages.

So, no matter how the term "truth" is defined in this or that theory, none of these definitions can be abstracted from the "classic" definition of truth as the correspondence of thought with reality. This analytical definition is "classic" just because directly makes explicit the only meaning that is ascribed to the word "truth" in natural language.

Any attempt to introduce "non-classical" meaning of the term "truth" is meaningless, because gives no possibility to withdraw the categorical meaning of the word "truth" from the natural language, on the one hand, or to override this meaning by symbolic forms in scientific contexts – on the other. So scientific text, in which the term "truth" could be used in some "non-classical" sense, simply doesn′t exist. On the contrary, whatever reason for entering certain "non-classic" concepts of truth would be, content analysis of these "concepts" will always find that they all are based on a single – classic – understanding of truth and are, essentially, the concepts of the criteria of truth, complementary to each other.

Conclusions

As it could be drown from above reasoning, the answers to the questions which had been formulated in introduction are as follows:

1. The word "truth" has one and the same meaning in natural and scientific languages. Identification of the variety of linguistic definitions of the term "truth" as the evidence of the existence of "multiplicity of notions" of truth means that there is no the notion of truth in the mind of some subject.
2. Non-conventional content of the notion "truth" is determined by universal characters of human existence and can′t be changed or withdrawn from different scientific conceptions. The theoretical definition of truth can only explicate in scientific language the meaning of the word that exists in natural language.