THE COHERENCE THEORY OF TRUTH

by

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To

Herschel Elliott

My Teacher and Friend

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I.S.D.

An Abstract of

The Coherence Theory of Truth

The purpose of this paper is to examine the coherence theory of truth. First an exposition of its fundamental assumptions will be given. Secondly there will be a discussion of the nature of coherence, the evidence for it as the criterion and nature of truth, the doctrine of degrees of truth which it implies, and a defence of the theory. And thirdly I shall give an evaluation or criticism of the theory.

The assumptions underlying coherence are the idealistic theories of perception, knowledge, and internal relations. According to the first, perception involves judgement; consequently no fact is independent of theory, and any fact seen in the light of a new theory is a new fact. Knowledge is the ultimate identity of thought and reality, or the ultimate coincidence of the immanent and the transcendent ends of thought; where the immanent end is the satisfaction of man's curiosity to know by the construction of a system of truth, while the transcendent end is the nature of things as they are. The possibility of such a coincidence is assumed first in our process of thinking; second in our attempt to understand a thing by relating it teleologically, causally,

or logically to a system; and third by conceiving of thought as a stage in the realization of the object with which it ultimately becomes identical.

Another fundamental doctrine is that of internal relations. Where a term is conceived as any possible object of thought and an internal relation as any relation which makes a difference to a term, the doctrine of internal relations must establish that each term is related to every other term internally. The evidence for such a relationship is given by four arguments, namely: that every term is related to every other term by the relation of difference; that the context determines the nature of a term; that what makes a term unique is its total complex of relations; and that there is a necessary causal connection between all physical events. Consequently the universe will be a system which is ultimately identical with the system of thought and where complete knowledge of anyone of its parts involves knowing the whole of reality.

Secondly, coherence as the criterion of truth is established by a criticism of the correspondence theory. The correspondence of a judgement with an independent fact leads to scepticism, because there is no independent fact given in perception. Furthermore as there is no independent fact, the test of truth of one judgement can only be another judgement, which reduces to coherence, not correspondence.

Again to consider the criterion of truth different from the nature of truth leads to incoherence. Thus coherence

must be not only the criterion of truth but also the nature of truth. But perfect coherence cannot be conceived without an absolute and all-comprehensive system. Yet human knowledge has not and cannot actually attain such system. It is limited to imperfect degrees of system in terms of which only relative or partial truth can be defined. Consequently for us there is no absolute truth achievable. But on the other hand since all judgements must find place in some system, no judgements can be absolutely false. Hence the doctrine of degrees of truth follows as a development of the meaning of the system of internal relations.

Third, my criticism of the coherence theory shows that there is absolute falsity; that the doctrine of degrees of truth is invalid thus making coherence inconsistent and to lead to scepticism; that the coherence test is circular; that we have absolute truth; and that inconsistency is inherent in the very conception of coherence. Therefore the coherence theory is invalid and consequently it must be rejected as the ultimate criterion and nature of truth.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the nature of truth. Truth is the central problem of epistemology, for knowledge is really what is true. Truth, whether directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, has been one of man's chief occupation throughout history. Consequently it behooves us to understand the nature of truth as well as the criteria by means of which it is established.

If we have chosen to discuss the nature and criterion of truth, besides its central importance to knowledge, it will be only a shift of emphasis from metaphysics to epistemology, although neither can be dismissed from any philosophical discussion completely. However, our choice of and the consequent emphasis on the problem of truth marks, as far as the search for knowledge is concerned, the beginning of man's philosophic adventure whose ultimate goal is truth.

Although the goal of epistemological study is to determine an adequate theory of truth, such a study should start with an evaluation of all existing theories. But as such a study would be far beyond the limitations of this paper, I will confine my discussion to an examination and criticism of one of the most important theories, namely the coherence theory of truth. It has had great importance in philosophy, first because it is bound up with idealism, one of the major types

of philosophy, and second because its examination involves rival theories of truth the most important of which is the correspondence theory. Moreover coherence is an important criterion of truth widely used in science and accepted by different types of philosophers. Consequently it behooves us to limit our study to the coherence theory of truth, drawing our inspirations mainly from the Hegelian theory, particularly as interpreted by Brand Blanshard. Our interpretation of it will begin by establishing its foundation, that is, its primitive assumptions. The relation between the theory and its grounds is analogous to the relation between the shoot and the root of a plant. Without a firm root the shoot cannot stand. We shall next formulate the theory and draw its implications; and finally, test its truth. Although the test of the truth of the coherence theory must be coherence itself, still this does not in any way make it illigitimate to criticize the theory externally, by some criterion which is foreign to it. Thus our study of the problem of truth will consist of the exposition or the formulation of the coherence theory of truth, including its assumptions, its implications, and a critique designed to assess its validity.

The assumptions which constitute the ground of the coherence theory of truth are the idealistic theories of perception, knowledge, and internal relations. According to the first, perception is 'interpreted sensation' for 'sensation'

and its 'meaning' cannot actually be separated from each other. Consequently, there are no facts which are independent of theory, and a fact seen in the light of a new theory is a new fact. Idealistic epistemology defines knowledge as the ultimate identification of thought and reality, and attempts to show that such an identity is possible, thus making reality 'ideal'. And the doctrine of internal relations supports the idealistic metaphysics in attempting to show that the universe is such a system. Thus perception, knowledge, and internal relations support the coherence theory by framing the idealistic scheme of nature and knowledge.

Our next step will be to formulate the meaning of coherence and the evidence that it is the nature of truth. We have done that by first attempting to show that coherence is the criterion of truth, and then that it is also truth itself. Our further development and support of the coherence theory takes into consideration the doctrine of degrees which the theory implies, as well as an attempt to defend the theory as forcibly as possible against objections.

Finally we shall criticize the theory in order to find out its philosophical status. My criticism is intended to show that the coherence theory is invalid as defining the nature of truth. Consequently it must be rejected. We now come to give a brief account of the idealistic metaphysics in order to show in what way it can serve as a ground for the coherence theory of truth.

CHAPTER II

P E R C E P T I O N

Our analysis of the idealistic theory of perception will be confined to that aspect relevant to the coherence theory of truth. "Perception", as defined by Blanshard, "is that experience in which, on the warrant of something given in sensation at the time, we unreflectingly take some object to be before us."[1] 'Object', as Blanshard uses it, is a wide term which may mean a concrete thing, a quality or a relation, while 'sensation' is mere awareness of a sensible quality, such as the seeing of the color of a dress as such. Perception is neither sensation alone nor its meaning alone. It is sensation to which meaning is added. The reason for this interpretation of perception is as follows:

The given in perception are wholes such as particular people, dogs, chairs, trees or leaves. In perceiving a green leaf, for example, I do not perceive the green color separated from the leaf. I immediately experience a green leaf, a colored object. Thus we can never find the two component elements of perception - sensation and its meaning - in their purity, actually separated from each other. Both are present together and are essential in perception.

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1. Blanshard, B., The Nature of Thought, Vol. I, p. 52.

We can approach pure sensation, i.e. mere awareness of the so-called sense-data, only as a limit, but we cannot attain it. We do not normally distinguish these two elements of perception simply because we perceive things and react to them as wholes in the course of practical life, and because such distinctions normally have no practical importance. But we do recognize the distinction at least theoretically on the occasions when we perceive falsely. For example when we mistake a paper box for a heavy weight, we become aware of the difference between the shape and the color of the object and the object itself. Thus sensation and meaning in perception are logically distinguishable but actually inseparable in experience.

This distinction between sensation and its meaning in perception is not, however, absolute because there is a variation in the range and depth of perceptual meaning. Perception ranges between nearly pure sensation, as when you see the color of a dress without seeing the dress, and nearly pure idea as when you are aware of, for example, a relation of 'between' or 'before and after' divorced from a specific context. The depth of perceptual meaning can be illustrated by observing the distinction between the perceptions of a genius and those of an average man. Newton, for example, if the story is correct, saw in the falling of an apple what the average man was unable to see. He saw a gravitational law

governing the whole universe, instead of the simple dropping of the one-time forbidden fruit. Thus compared to the average man the genius reads into his perceptions greater depth of meaning.

Again the depth and range of perceptual meaning differ for different people depending on different meaning-contexts. Such a context would include the interests, purposes, and dispositions of each individual perceiver, which in no two cases are exactly alike.

The dominance of meaning in perception may be so great that at times it may even prevent the appearance of sense data which do not support it. A religious fanatic, for example, may not be aware of the observable data of science if they are opposed to his religious dogmas. "Christian scientists flatly deny the reality of visible facts that are unpleasant, and act on their disbelief."[1] "We saw," says Blanshard, "that the ratio of meaning, so to speak, may vary greatly, so that at times the perception is very nearly pure sensation, while at the other extreme it is very nearly pure idea."[2]

Thus perception can be true or false, and different for different people depending on different contexts. And since these are exactly the characteristics of judgement, we can

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1. Langer, S.K., Philosophy in a New Key, p. 222.
2. Blanshard, B., Op. cit., vol. I, p. 181.

assert that perception involves judgement.

Can we draw a sharp line between sensation and thought in perception? The answer is in the negative. For although, as we have seen, sensation and thought are logically distinguishable, yet actually they are inseparable. And no sensation in its purity, unadulterated with thought, can ever exist. Blanshard believes that thought is the extension of sensation and that any line drawn between them will be arbitrary. Consequently, no fact is independent of theory, and a fact when seen in the light of a new theory is a new fact.

CHAPTER III

K N O W L E D G E

The coherence theory of truth which Blanshard and the other idealists hold presupposes an idealistic metaphysics - the ultimate identity of thought and reality. The acceptance or rejection of this metaphysics and, consequently, the theory of truth which presupposes it, is contingent upon one's conception of knowledge. Our proposal then will be to examine the meaning of knowledge.

Our examination of the idealistic view of knowledge can be developed in three stages: First, we shall draw a logical distinction between 'knowing' and 'knowledge', the first being an activity or a process, the second a state or the end of a process. Our next step will be a discussion of what we call the immanent and the transcendent ends of knowing. Finally, we shall argue for the ultimate coincidence of these two ends as a necessary condition for the very possibility of knowledge, or rather, as itself constituting knowledge.

We must, first of all, distinguish 'knowing' from 'knowledge'. 'Knowing is an activity or a process. Its end is knowledge. It must be understood in its broadest possible sense so as to include perceiving, judging, inferring, conjecturing, doubting, wondering and other possible cognitive

activities. That these activities or processes involve knowing can readily be seen after examination. I shall examine the two least obvious, namely, wondering and doubting.

In wondering, a person stands puzzled in the presence of an object or a situation which he cannot understand. He may wonder because he in some way realizes his ignorance and desires to escape from it. He can or does escape from ignorance by seeking knowledge. Thus wondering is a stage, an early stage, in the process of knowing, and therefore it is a cognitive activity.

In doubting, a person knows that he has no certain knowledge. However, this in no way means that there is no knowledge at all. The doubting person through methodological doubt, can seek certainty. Now, since doubting may involve knowing that one does not know, and since it is a step towards certain knowledge, it follows that doubting is a cognitive activity. By similar reasoning, perceiving, judging, inferring, and conjecturing can be shawn to be processes of knowing or cognitive activities.

We now come to state what we mean by 'knowledge'. Knowledge is the ultimate identification of thought and reality; it is that state in which what we have called the ends of knowing ultimately coincide. Without the thinking or the knowing process we cannot realize such a state. Although all cognitive activities aim at knowledge, nevertheless, they may not com-

pletely achieve it.[1] However, cognitive activities do lead us to the possession of some knowledge. For even if we do not arrive at the knowledge we seek, still, if we are aware of our ignorance, this very awareness is some knowledge. Since knowledge is the end of the process of knowing, it must satisfy the mind and at the same time reveal the order of things or the world. The meaning of the statement 'in knowledge the two ends of knowing coincide' will become clear when we will have discussed it in its proper place.

The distinction between knowing and knowledge can be illustrated by observing the relation between the treatment given to a patient and the state of recovery which he may reach after the treatment. We are assuming that such a treatment is necessary for the patient's recovery. Now, treating the patient, is a process analogous to knowing, and the achievement of recovery is a state analogous to knowledge. Although recovery is inseparable from, or cannot be realized without the treatment, yet treatment and recovery are logically distinguishable. Likewise, though knowing and knowledge are actually inseparable, yet they are logically distinguishable. Or as Blanshard summarizes the relationship, "we must distinguish knowing as the process by which knowledge is realized from knowledge itself as that which the process realizes in various degrees."[2]

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1. The question of whether or not knowledge will be achieved at all is answered in the last chapter in which we have criticized the coherence theory of truth.
2. Ibid, Vol. I, p. 487.

Our next step is to discuss the two ends of knowing, namely, the immanent and the transcendent. The former has been defined by Blanshard as the satisfaction of man's instinctive curiosity to know, the other as the apprehension of the nature of things and our awareness of them as they really are. We shall consider these two ends separately beginning with the first.

Our discussion of the immanent end of knowing will take into consideration the fact that there is in man a natural desire to know, just as there is in him a natural desire for food and for sex; and that man seeks to satisfy such a desire only through the formation of a system.

The desire to think or know can be fruitful only if it is coupled with the capacity to think, and the capacity or power to think can manifest itself, as it is the case in man, only if there is a desire to think. Indeed the fact of this desire together with man's capacity to reason have long been considered man's distinctive or defining characteristic. This fact was emphasized by Aristotle when he said that man differs from other animals by virtue of his rational soul, that is, his desire and ability to think. And this is confirmed by modern science, particularly biology and psychology, when they state that man's distinctive characteristic is his power of abstract thinking.

Not only does man have certain desires, but he also seeks to gratify them, even though he may fail, either partially

or fully, in attempting to do so. The struggle to satisfy the desire to know is inherent in man's nature.

What can satisfy man's desire to know? That is, how can the immanent end of knowing be realized? What satisfies man's curiosity to know, or the immanent end of knowing, is truth. Truth, we shall hold, consists of a system. Only a system can satisfy the mind; this is a fact of our introspective experience. The chief characteristics of that system which is truth are consistency, deductibility or fruitfulness, and inclusiveness or comprehensiveness.[1]

A system, in order to be satisfying, must be self-consistent. In fact, a so-called system, if it is not self-consistent, is not really a system. It may be called an apparent system; it cannot, for example, satisfy the mind of a logician or any normal mind, and hence it must be rejected.

Deductibility or fruitfulness is another characteristic of a system. According to Blanshard, all the components of the system of truth are internally-related and entail each other. This means that if we are well-acquainted with the system we would be able to go from one part to the other parts of that system. We can extend our knowledge from that of a part to that of the whole of the universe, if the universe can be shown to be a

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1. See section on 'Coherence as the Nature of Truth'.

system.[1] A so-called system where one is unable to go from one part to another - that is, a system whose parts are not necessarily related - is enough to be condemned as a system.

The third chief characteristic which a system must have in order to satisfy man's curiosity to know is completeness, inclusiveness or comprehensiveness - which makes truth single and whole. The knowledge which we have of the universe is incomplete and partial, and for this reason it is not completely satisfying. Only an all-inclusive system can perfectly satisfy the mind's characteristic desire to know. Thus, "Any partial system, just because partial, must be rejected and transcended; the impulse to expansion will tolerate no arbitrary arrests; its goal is nothing short of a system perfect and all-embracing. The end of theoretic impulse may thus be said to be system as such, or better perhaps, a system that would include and order all lesser systems."[2]

We now turn to consider the meaning of the transcendent end of knowing. In knowing we aim at knowing an object. That object may be any entity in the universe or the universe as a whole. It is an order independent of our thought; nevertheless our thought intends and claims to disclose it. This order may be what the realists call the 'external world', meaning by it

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1. The doctrine of Internal Relations attempts to show that the universe is a system.
2. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 438.

something which exists independently of our thought and perception of it. Such an 'external world', the idealists believe, is only apparently external. Now, this 'external world' which the realists posit and which the idealists consider as apparently external only, is the transcendent object which the knowing process itself aims at knowing. Whether or not it can be known, and how, will be discussed later.

Not only does this apparently external world transcend thought but an idea may do so in another sense: For example, one idea is different from another to which it is compared or related. We might think of the 'good' or 'end' of man in terms of 'utility' or 'power' or 'harmony' and so on. In so doing, we would be thinking of an idea through the machinery of another idea. Of two ideas one would be the object of thinking, the other the machinery. That is, one idea is said to go beyond or transcend another.

Thus for knowing or thinking to proceed, there must be an object which we aim at knowing or thinking. This object may be thought itself or an assumed apparently external world. It is the object which we aim at knowing that we call the transcendent end of knowing or of thought. "It is impossible to find an instance of thinking or knowing that does not go beyond its own machinery so far as to intend and claim the disclosure of an ulterior order to which it is in some sense adjusting itself. If this is realism, then all of us are realists."[1]

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1. Ibid, Vol. I, p. 488.

But this realism which Blanshard has mentioned in a hypothetical form is only apparent and methodological. That it is only apparent will be shown when we discuss the relation of thought to reality or the relation of the two ends of knowing. It is methodological because it is a step in the examination of this relation between the two ends of knowing which ultimately coincide. Thus this coincidence can only result in an idealistic rather than realistic metaphysics. Consequently, if we start with an apparently realistic metaphysics, we end, after analysis, in an idealistic view of knowledge. That is, we start by assuming, as the realist does, an object independent of thought, and end by rejecting this assumption since it leads, as we shall see, to scepticism, or to inconsistency with the belief that knowledge is possible. Before we deal with the problem of the relation of the transcendent and immanent ends of knowing, let us summarize what we have meant by them: Knowing or thought appears to have two ends, the one immanent, the other transcendent. We aim at knowing an object beyond the process of knowing itself. At the same time we seek to satisfy our curiosity to know through the formation of a system. The immanent end of thought sets the direction in which knowledge must develop, namely, towards systematization. The satisfaction of thought indicates the completion of the process of knowing. This means that the ideal all-inclusive system has been achieved. "The transcendent end of knowing is the direct

revelation in experience of what is also beyond it... The immanent end is to achieve a state of insight that will bring the theoretic impulse to rest."[1] "Thus knowing is doubly purposive. It aims at revealing the outside world; it aims equally at satisfying an inner demand."[2]

We have raised the question of how thought can transcend itself or know an object beyond itself. The answer to this question depends on the nature of the relation between the immanent and the transcendent ends of knowing. Blanshard and the other idealists in general have come to the conclusion that in order to have knowledge these two ends must ultimately coincide. For this conclusion they offer three arguments.

The first argument is derived from the way the process of thinking proceeds. In the first place, for thinking to proceed there must be a problem - of no matter what kind. Once you are aware of the problem you presumably start thinking of solving it. The problem creates a tension within the field of the individual's experience. Thinking arises to point the way for the solution of the problem and consequently the resolution of the tension. The problem and its solution are a real object of thought. They are what we have called the transcendent end of thought. The plan which the mind constructs for solving the problem is what we have called the immanent end of

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1. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 489.
2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 490.

thought. When we think of solving the problem we assume that it can be solved. This means that we assume reality to be intelligible in that region. To assume that reality is intelligible can be justified only if the two ends of knowing or thought ultimately coincide.

Suppose the two ends of thought to be independent - what then? If there is no necessary connection between what satisfies knowing and the object of knowing, knowledge would be, as Blanshard says, 'luck' or chance. But what satisfies knowing does reveal reality. An astronomer, for example, may predict the appearance of a star or an eclipse of the sun at an exact time and his prediction may be true. This means that in this particular respect the immanent and the transcendent ends of thought come together. Of such a coincidence of ends a multitude of cases can be given. All the predictions of science testify to this fact. Hence to assume their coming together purely accidentally, without any necessary connection, is incredible.

Moreover, the complete independence of the two ends of thought means that what we think does not apply in any way to the real world. That is, we cannot know the world and we cannot know whether we know it or not. In other words, we are led to scepticism. But scepticism is contrary to the initially accepted primitive assumption that reality is intelligible. Hence, since we have rejected scepticism we are forced to reject the assumption which entails it, and accept the belief in

the ultimate coincidence of the immanent and the transcendent ends of thought.

To sum up: To think is to raise a problem, to seek a solution for it, and to assume that it can be solved. To assume this is to take it for granted that reality in that specific field is intelligible, that thought is relevant to reality. Thus the process of thinking behaves as if its fulfillment also meant its approximation to reality. In other words, a person in every act of thought assumes that the two ends of thought must coincide in varying degrees.

The second argument for the ultimate coincidence of the two ends of knowing is derived from the nature or meaning of understanding. To understand a thing means to build or construct an intelligible relation between that thing and the system of knowledge one already has. Understanding implies the inclusion of an unknown within the system of what we already know. It is a sort of bridge, so to speak, between the unknown and the known. There are three types of such bridges or intelligible relations, namely, causal, teleological and geometrical or logical. Let us discuss briefly each of these relations.

First of all, we shall discuss the causal relation. We understand an event by relating it to its cause or system of causes. For example, we can understand malaria by relating it to the conditions that led to it, such as the presence of

certain protozoa in the blood, the environment in which these protozoa live, the degree of immunity of the patient and so on. Thus understanding malaria means including it in or relating it to a context or a system of causes.

Understanding can be achieved also by establishing a teleological relation, as when people plan their actions with an end in view. A political leader, for example, who attempts an overthrow of his government must create a social organization through which he can realize his aim. Thus his aim guides both his actions and that of the organization which he creates. That is, his actions can be understood by relating them teleologically to an end, or more exactly, by fitting them in a teleological scheme or system.

The third type of intelligible relation is geometrical or logical. A theorem in geometry can be understood to be true or false only in a system of geometry, that is, in relation to a certain set of axioms or postulates. Again, a straight line cannot be understood independently of geometrical space. The same is true of other elements of geometry. They cannot be understood except by relating them to, or including them in, a certain system of geometry.

Thus we see that the link between what is to be known and the known may be causal, teleological, or geometrical or logical; but it is always systematic. Hence understanding is always in terms of a system where the immanent and the trans-

cendent ends of thought ultimately coincide.

Let us turn to the last argument in support of the ultimate coincidence of the two ends of knowing or thought. The assumption that knowledge is possible means that thought is relevant or applicable to reality. The relevance of thought to reality can be justified, Blanshard thinks, if we conceive of thought as a stage in the realization of its object or transcendent end. This means that knowledge is the ultimate identification of thought and reality or the ultimate coincidence of the two ends of knowing. Since such an identification is complete only ultimately, it follows that there are degrees of knowledge[1], that is to say, there are degrees of approximation of thought to reality before they are completely identified.

This conception that thought is a stage in the realization of its object, reality, may be supported, according to Blanshard, by this argument: To think of an object is to relate it to, or get it within, the mind. For example, to think of a color is to get it, so to speak, within our mind or apprehend it as it really is. When we apprehend the color as it really is, thought and reality would be identical. The actual knowledge which we have is, as we have said, only a partial identification of thought and reality, since we know only something about an object, and since complete knowledge, as we shall

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1. See section on 'Degrees of Truth'.

see, would involve the whole of the universe.[1] Hence identification of thought and its object is partial; it becomes complete only ultimately. Blanshard expresses this point by saying that thought relates to reality as the partial to the perfect fulfillment of a purpose. This means that one's thought is potentially what thought seeks to realize. The plan of a building which an architect draws is a partial fulfillment of a purpose, that is, the building which is to be built. The building is the perfectly realized purpose. The greater the grasp of our thought, the more our thought approximates and the more fully it realizes in itself the nature and the relations of its object. "If thought can be seen as a stage on the way towards its transcendent end or object, as that end itself in the course of becoming actual, the paradox of knowledge is in principle solved. The idea can then be both as its object and different; the same because it is the object in posse; different because the object, which is its end, is as yet incompletely realized."[2]

The acceptance of the belief in the ultimate identity of the immanent and transcendent ends of thought, depends on whether or not the arguments we have given in its support are convincing. The belief in such an identity implies that reality is 'ideal'. If reality is ideal, then, we have ultimately a system of the same fundamental nature; its truth or the truth of any one term would, as we shall see, be coherence. It is

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1. See section on 'Internal Relations'.
2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 494.

in this way that the idealistic theory of knowledge can serve as a basis for the coherence theory of truth. "That these processes (self-realization in thought and approximation of thought to reality) are really one is the metaphysical base on which our belief in coherence is founded."[1]

The idealistic conception of perception and knowledge and the doctrine of internal relations join together in support of the coherence theory of truth. We have so far examined perception and knowledge. We now turn to the doctrine of internal relations.

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 263.

CHAPTER IV

INTERNAL RELATIONS

The belief in the intelligibility of the world can be justified, we have seen, if the immanent and the transcendent ends of thought ultimately coincide. We have previously argued that they do coincide. And for a further justification of the ultimate identity of thought and reality the idealists offer the doctrine of internal relations.

A relation is an indefinable primitive concept. "No other category is so universal; and therefore, no other is so impossible of definition or even of description."[1] Consequently, we must give its meaning by denotation or example. The following are different kinds of relation: spatial, temporal, and causal relations, relations of likeness and difference and so on. We become aware of these relations by reflecting upon the related terms.

What is the meaning of a 'term'? A term is anything which enters into relation. It may mean a quality such as 'red' and 'heavy', or a concrete thing made up of a complex of qualities and relations, such as a chair, a paramecium, a plant, a star or a man. It may mean an abstract universal, such as a

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1. Ladd, G., The Philosophy of Knowledge, p. 359-60.

number in a number-system, a line in a system of geometry, or any concept in a system of concepts. It may even mean a relation when taken in situ. Thus a term, as Blanshard writes, is "every possible object of thought."[1]

What is the meaning of internal and external relation? "A relation", says Blanshard, "is internal to a term when in its absence the term would be different; it is external when its addition or withdrawal would make no difference to the term."[2] The theory of internal relations which we are examining states that a term is an integral part of a context, that the context or the total complex of relations which a term may have makes the term what it is, and that a change in the context changes the term's nature in differing degrees. The doctrine, as we shall see, logically leads to the belief that the universe is a system. Complete knowledge of anyone of its terms will not be possible before this knowledge exhausts all the relations w which the term has or may possibly have to everything else. In other words, the knowledge of a term's nature requires a knowledge of its context which is the entire universe. And since the knowledge which we actually have about a term does not exhaust all the relations that that term may possibly have, we cannot possibly know or define completely its nature.

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1. Blanshard, B., Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 452.
2. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 476.

What structure must the world have so that it can be called intelligible? There cannot possibly be a logical proof for the intelligibility of the world, since logical proof"Would assume validity for a supposedly independent world of the very canons whose applicability is at issue."[1] Nevertheless, in seeking to know the world we must assume it to be intelligible, that is, thought is relevant or applicable to reality. Such an assumption can be justified if the structure of the world is imaged or reflected, so to speak, in the system that thought seeks to construct, that is, a world which is internally related. For this belief we shall offer the following evidence:

The first argument which is Hegelian in character is designed to show that the internality of relations is implicit in the very being of a thing. It is an obvious fact that the universe is made up of parts which are in some way related. We cannot find, nor conceive of, a term which is not related to other terms. For example, take any particular concrete thing, a chair, and try to isolate it absolutely from any context, or think its relations away, you find you cannot do so. That chair is always in some relation with other things.

For a term to be what it is or to be at all, it must be differentiated from other terms. A term is x and not y. 'This object' is a chair and not a table or a flower. Not - being a

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 475.

table or a flower is as much a characteristic of 'this object' as its being a chair. Thus a term to be what it is, must be related to other terms and to the whole at least by the relation of difference. This relation of difference is so pervasive that no term whatever can be free from it and still remain what it is. Such a relation makes a difference to the term, since it is one of the negative characteristics which make up the being of the term. Thus the relation of difference is an internal relation. And since it is implicit in the very being of any part of the world, it follows that the world is an internally related system.

Blanshard summarizes the whole argument thus: "Putting it generally everything is related to everything else by the relation of difference at least. If it were not so related, it would clearly not be the thing it is, since then it would not differ from that which is admittedly other than itself. But a relation that could not be theoretically changed without changing the thing itself is precisely what we mean by internal relation. Whence it follows that everything is related internally to everything else."[1]

We now come to another argument for the internality of relations. It states that a term acquires qualities or properties from its context, that these qualities are constituents of the term's nature and that they are internal to the term in differing degrees.

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 476.

It is an obvious fact that the context or, so to speak, the web of relations, gives rise in the term to qualities or properties which may be called 'relational qualities'. For example, a single man becomes a husband after he marries, and a father after he has a child. A child who has never been in school becomes a student after he goes to school, and a teacher after he starts teaching. We can generalize these specific examples expressive of a fact by saying that a term acquires relational properties by virtue of its context.

Like any other property, a relational property is a constituent of the term. That is, the context determines in part the nature of a term. This would be true if we can show that a change in the context produces a corresponding change in the term's nature. That this can be done is readily seen from the following example: A human heart is what it is by virtue of its relations to the other organs and functions of the human body. If you remove the heart from the body it ceases to be the heart which it was. It loses among other things, its function which is a part of its nature. In other words, its nature changes. Thus a change in the context or relations results in a change in the term's nature. And this is precisely what internal relations mean.

Just as the context or the relations of a term determine in part the nature of that term, the term, when it is taken as a concrete common-sense object, also determines the type of

relations that it can have. For example, a thing in time and space, such as a stone, can have, among other things, spatial and temporal relations. On the other hand, a concept as such assumed to be out of space and time, cannot have spatio-temporal relations. An illiterate and uneducated person cannot be a teacher of the special sciences, for example, in a university. His nature or the nature of his knowledge makes him incapable of having such a position, and determines, in part, the context or the relations which he can have. However, this distinction between the nature of a term - a concrete common-sense object - and its context, is only a logical distinction. Actually we do not see terms divorced of their context, no matter what they are, nor do we see contexts without terms to make them up. It is inconceivable that there are terms without relations or relations without terms. A universe without relations is inconceivable; a universe without terms is also inconceivable. The only conceivable universe is a system of related terms, or terms which are always in a context.

Since relational qualities, as we have said, give rise to different characteristics, they determine in different degrees the nature of a term. Each characteristic makes a certain degree of difference to the term which it characterizes, that is, its internality to the term is a matter of degree. For example, wearing a suit with a specific color is a trivial characteristic of a man. Though it is not as important a characteristic as

intelligence, nevertheless, it indicates his standard of taste, culture and wealth. Such a characteristic makes a difference to his personality. It is not external; on the contrary, it is internal. Its internality is a matter of degree, since the difference which it can make to the man's personality is much less than that which intelligence can do. Whence it follows that the internality of the relation which gives rise to such a characteristic is also a matter of degree.

Let us turn to a third argument in support of the doctrine of internal relations. It is closely related to the ones we have already given. It states that what makes a term unique is its total complex of relations, and that a change in the term's relations results in a change in its nature. That is, it becomes another term. This can be shown by giving specific concrete examples: First, take a given set of boards. Arrange them in one way and you may get a table; arrange them in another way and you may get a chair. The chair and the table are unique. Anyone can recognize that each is different from the other. Their uniqueness cannot be said to have resulted from the boards they were made of, since both the chair and the table have been made of the same boards. The only reasonable explanation of their uniqueness must turn on the relations which the boards bear the one to the other.

The distinction between the table and the chair in the above example can be explained by reference to Aristotle's

conception of Matter and Form. Both the table and the chair are unities of Matter and Form. The matter of these two common-sense objects is the same, since they have been made of the same boards. The reason why they are two unique different things is that they have two different forms which in part are given by their structural patterns. Thus the structural pattern which is only a set of relations out of the total complex of relations that a term may possibly have, in part makes the thing what it is. That is, the relations determine the uniqueness of a term.

The distinction between terms, a table and a chair for example, is not due to their specific structures only, but also to other relations as well. The chair and the table do have, besides their specific structures, specific spatial and temporal relations to each other and to every other thing. The chair may be placed to the right of the table, and the table might have been made before the chair. They are also related to human purposes in this sense: The purpose of the chair may be to sit on, that of the table to write on or dine on, and so on. These relations distinguish the chair from the table, and contribute in part to the uniqueness of each. Similarly, other relations play their part. Thus all relations whether possible or actual determine the uniqueness of their terms.[1]

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1. Blanshard states the same idea thus: "Two stones that were exactly alike, not only in quality, but in... relations as well, would not be two stones but one. The qualities of what

Thus we have good evidence that the uniqueness of a term depends on the relations its parts have to one another, and on the relations it has as a whole to every other term. Now, since the uniqueness of a term is determined by the relations it has, a change in its relations, therefore, changes its nature. A relation between the term and its context, such that if the context changes the term's nature changes, is what we call an internal relation.

The same reasoning as that we have made in discussing concrete terms applies also to universals, not, however, in themselves, but in their context. These universals are what they are by virtue of their context. That is, their uniqueness is determined by the relations they have or may possibly have. For example, a schoolboy's idea of the human body differs from his idea of the same thing when he becomes an anatomist. As an anatomist, he has a fuller grasp of the facts about the human body; and hence, his idea of it has greater depth of meaning. Thus each idea by virtue of the system it is in, has its own uniqueness. In other words, a change in the context of an idea changes or makes a difference to that idea. And this is, again, what we mean by internal relation.

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1. Continued
we call a single stone, if they had two different sets of relations would not make one stone but two. We must either admit that the relations are essential to a thing's being what it is, or exclude from its nature what is indispensible if it is to be this stone at all. The second course does not make sense. We accept the first." (Ibid., Vol.II, p.488)

Does the doctrine of internal relations also apply to abstract universals? The answer to this question requires no discussion of abstract universals, since we are only concerned, for the present, with whether or not they can be internally related. The answer is in the negative. The doctrine does not apply to them as such. The reason is that abstract universals by definition cannot have a specific relation or reference to a context. Hence the objection that may be raised, namely, that the doctrine of internal relations, if it is to be complete, must apply to abstract universals, is out of the question. The doctrine applies, to repeat, only to concrete terms or to universals in their context, though one need not exhaust the whole of that context before he is aware of the internality of relation.

Further evidence which the idealists offer for the doctrine of internal relations is the belief in necessary causation. As I am not interested in causality as such, and as a satisfactory discussion of it will require time and space which are not at my disposal, I shall assume it to be a characteristic of all natural events, that is, that everything is causally connected directly or indirectly with everything else, and that such causal connection involves logical necessity.

Such causation is seen in gravitation. The moon causes the tides of the sea to rise and fall. The planets attract one another in the same way that the earth attracts small bodies

towards its center, and so on. Thus it is generally recognized that gravitation is an all-pervasive causal relation in which each body affects, and is affected by, every other body in the universe.

Causation is also seen in prediction. We become aware of it by observing specific predictions. An astronomer, for example, may predict the appearance of a star or the eclipse of the moon at a certain time and in a certain place. A physicist may, likewise, predict the exact time of the explosion of a bomb and its fall on its target. By means of a theory or an hypothesis, to generalize, we can predict consequences which may be verified. That is, one can deduce how A will have to act if it is to be A at all.

Just as in reasoning the conclusion follows from the premises with absolute necessity, once an effect follows from a cause or a set of causes it does so necessarily, even though we cannot always predict or we may not predict at all what particular effect follows from what particular cause or set of causes. Such an assertion can only be made on the assumption that each cause is intrinsically, and therefore, necessarily related to the effect that follows from it. That is, the intrinsic characters which make up the nature of a thing necessarily determine the effect, within the limits of the given conditions. This is not, however, a proof but an illustration or an explanation of the necessary connection theory

of causation we have already assumed.

Necessary causation is also assumed by science. Scientists accept the principle of induction as valid inspite of the fact that it cannot be proved by experience, since all experience presupposes it. The acceptance of this principle entails the acceptance, on 'animal faith', of what makes it valid, namely, intrinsic, and therefore, necessary connection between cause and effect. And if science does not assume such connection, all science will fail, since it will be deprived of its power of prediction. Thus science is seen to assume logical necessity in causality - which is in conformity with our proposal of illustrating the assumption of rather than proving necessary causation.

Now if everything in the universe is directly or indirectly causally connected with everything else, the world is an internally related system and the nature of anyone thing is incomplete and internally incoherent when taken by itself apart from the causal system on which it depends. The belief in, or the assumption of, necessary causal connection between things implies, as Blanshard concludes, that "the universe of existing things is a system in which all things are related internally. Let a and x be any two things in the universe. They are then related to each other causally. But if causally, then also intrinsically, and if intrinsically then also necessarily, in the sense that they causally act as they do in virtue of their

nature or character, and that to deny such activity would entail denying them to be what they are. And to have this sort of relation to all other things is precisely what we mean by being related to them internally."[1]

What is the importance of internal relations to knowledge? The importance is great. For if reality is an internally-related system it will be intelligible. The structure of the real world will be a counterpart to the ideal system of thought. The more the immanent end of thought is realized the more thought approximates its transcendent end, that is the apprehension of reality. Consequently thought and reality can be ultimately identified, that is, reality is completely knowable.

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 516.

CHAPTER V

DISTINCTION BETWEEN TEST AND NATURE OF TRUTH

The nature or meaning of truth is logically distinct from the criterion or test of truth, even though what tests truth may be truth itself. The distinction is so obvious that it hardly needs explanation. Nevertheless, it is quite useful to illustrate this distinction by an example. Let us say, I buy seven meters of silk from a merchant whose honesty I suspect. And I want to test whether or not the silk is truly seven meters. So I take the standard of measurement, the standard-meter in this case, and I compare the silk to it. The silk would truly be seven meters, if it measures seven times the standard-meter; on the other hand, if it measures more or less than seven times the standard-meter, then it is false that the silk is seven meters long.

Seven times the standard-meter, in this example, is analogous to the nature of truth; and measuring the silk by the standard-meter to find out its exact length is analogous to the test or criterion of truth. Thus testing the truth is an activity or a process, and truth is the result or the end of that process. Hence, the test and meaning of truth are logically two different things. It is after you know what truth means

that you can test the truth of your judgement by it.

What is the nature of truth? What is the criterion of truth? These two questions will occupy us for the rest of this chapter and the next one. In fact, the answer to them constitutes the thesis of this paper. Although we test the truth of judgement after we know what truth is, yet this in no way detains us from considering first the criterion of truth. This is justified on the following ground: The criterion of truth as we have seen, is a process which logically ends in truth itself. This process is, on the one hand, temporaly prior to the realization of its end; and on the other hand, it is always guided by that end which is truth. Hence a discussion of the criterion of truth is prior and introductory to one of its nature. This discussion must, however, anticipate and develop, support, and even logically assume a certain conception of truth. We shall, therefore, begin with the second question.

COHERENCE AS THE CRITERION OF TRUTH

Our defence of coherence as the sole criterion of truth will take the form of examining its great rival theory and showing that this rival theory ultimately appeals to it. We shall discuss, therefore, the correspondence theory of truth, since this theory, we think, is most opposed to coherence.

Our analysis of correspondence aims at exposing its inadequacy as a test of truth, and showing that it really resolves itself into coherence.

First of all, we must state what we mean by correspondence. 'Correspondence' is a relation between two terms. This relation, as described by different realists, may be similarity in structure, one-to-one correlation, an indefinable accordance, or a "copying" such that one term of the relation copies the other term. All of these meanings of correspondence have in common a very important element which makes them open to criticism, namely that the terms of correspondence-relation are independent of each other. Regarded as any one of those conceptions, we shall see, correspondence as a test or meaning of truth is untenable. Our main concern, however, will be not to discuss each and every specific meaning separately but to analyze them in their common element, which is sufficient for our purpose. Our criticism of correspondence, therefore, will concentrate on showing that its terms cannot be independent,[1] and that if we assume them to be so, we cannot know or know that we know them or the relation which may exist between them; thus we will be led to scepticism.

The types of correspondence which we can have depend on the types or kinds of terms which may participate, so to speak,

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1. See the sections on 'Perception' and 'Internal Relations'.

in forming such a relation. Three possible kinds of terms -- percepts or sense-data, concepts and physical objects -- can be distinguished. Consequently, there are three possible types of correspondence, namely, correspondence between percept and physical object (assuming epistemological dualism), concept and physical object, and concept and percept. All of these types of correspondence will be seen to resolve themselves into one type, that of a judgement with an independent fact about which the judgement is made. The meaning of this last statement has to be explained and analyzed later, since on its analysis depends the acceptance or rejection of the correspondence theory of truth and the ultimate appeal of correspondence to coherence as the test of truth. However, the conclusion which we can anticipate is that that term of the correspondence-relation which the realist considers to be an independent fact will be seen not to be independent and to involve a judgement. Thus the relation of correspondence will be no longer correspondence; it will be a relation between a judgement and another judgement - which is coherence.

The reason for interpreting the different types of correspondence ultimately as a 'correspondence', or better as a coherence of a judgement with another judgement is as follows:

The correspondence between percept or sense-datum and physical object resolves itself, first, into a correspondence of a percept and a concept. This is seen after examination.

The physical object, assuming a dualistic framework, cannot serve as a term in the relation of correspondence, because it is unperceived and unperceivable. As far as we can know it, the physical object is what we conceive it to be. But of course our conception may be false. Hence if this type of correspondence is to be possible, it has to be made either between our conception of the nature of physical object and some other conception of it, on the one hand, or on the other hand, between our conception of the physical objects and the percepts which, the dualist believes, are the effects of the causal action of the physical object on the percipient. But we cannot know in any particular case whether a percept does 'correspond' to its physical cause, i.e. we cannot test, we cannot find out whether the percept corresponds to the object. Thus the relation between percept and physical object, as the latter really is, is impossible - the consequence is scepticism. And this relation becomes possible when it is resolved to, or interpreted as, a relation between a percept and a concept.

The correspondence between concept and percept, which is another type of correspondence, leads, after further resolution, to an idealistic view - that of 'correspondence' between a concept and another concept. The percept which is one term of the relation is partially our conception of it; and hence it cannot be independent of this conception, that is, it involves judgement.[1] Thus correspondence ceases to be what the realists and

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1. See the section on 'perception'.

the plain man conceive it to be; it will be what the idealists, among others, call 'coherence'.

By reasoning similar to that which we have used above, it is seen that the notion of correspondence between a concept and a physical object either leads to scepticism or to a 'correspondence' between a concept and another concept. To repeat, this is due to the fact that, on a dualistic ground, the physical object is not known directly to us. We can know it only through the conception which we have of it, no matter how we get this conception.[1] Hence the relation, if it is to be possible, has to be between a concept and another, and this is not correspondence but coherence.

Thus we see that all the types of correspondence which may be held by one realist or another turn out to be one which is idealistic in character, namely, that of a concept with another concept or a judgement with another judgement. Indeed we do not normally call this relation 'correspondence'. 'Coherence' is the appropriate name. The test of the truth, therefore, of one term of the relation, judgement, by the other is not, as we have seen and shall further see, a matter of

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1. Our interest is not to discuss how we get our conception of the physical object. It suffices to note, in this connection, that such a conception is derived from an analysis of the perceptual object, and that the concept of the physical object must be so formulated as to explain the perceptual world, the world of experience.

correspondence, but one of coherence.

Before we further examine the correspondence theory of truth - which will take the form of analyzing the basic relation of correspondence, namely, that of a judgement with its object - we shall state very briefly the views of some advocates of the theory. Our purpose is to show that our discussion of correspondence is not done, so to speak, in a vacuum and that it touches the views which the realists advocate. We shall consider only those representative thinkers whose views or conceptions confirm what we have previously indicated as three logically possible types of correspondence.

The first representative thinker whose view we shall state is W.T. Stace. He mentions two types of correspondence, one between a concept and a percept, the other, assuming a dualistic ground, between a percept and a physical object. The correspondence of a percept with a physical object, Stace says, is an impossibility, since there is no way in which we can be directly aware of the physical object, and since the physical object, if it can ever be known, is known through the medium of our percepts, assuming these to be the effects of the causal action of physical object on the percipients. Although he defines truth as a correspondence of a judgement with our independent fact, yet he means by an independent fact a percept of a particular thing. He also believes that the view of correspondence as thought copying reality or a concept copying a

percept is untenable. The reason is that while a percept is individual, a concept is a universal. Consequently, he rejects the correspondence of a concept with a physical object, and retains that of a concept with a percept, meaning by correspondence, not copying, but the application of the right concepts to the right facts. To quote Stace, "If there is any kind of correspondence involved in the notion of truth, it will not be between our percepts and an unperceived 'thing' behind them. It will be a correspondence between the percept and the concept. And the correspondence between percept and concept is not the relation of copy to original."[1]

Bertrand Russell, also, holds a realist view of correspondence. Truth, according to him, is a property of a belief or of a judgement, and the truth of a belief depends on something which lies outside the belief itself. That is, truth is a correspondence between a judgement and a fact by which he means either a percept or an experienced event, or something which we do not experience, but which is nonetheless existent, i.e. physical object. The correspondence between a percept or a concept and an unexperienced and inexperienceable, and yet logically possible and independent fact leads, to repeat, to scepticism. That is, we can never know that we know the nature of the external world. Russell says, "If truth consists in a correspondence of thought with something outside thought, thought can never know when truth has been attained."[2] Let us

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1. Stace, W.T., The Theory of Knowledge and Existence, p. 255.
2. Russell, B., The Problems of Philosophy, p. 121.

now state Russell's account of correspondence in greater detail.

Russell distinguishes two types of correspondence theories of truth: the 'logical' and the 'epistemological'. The latter, briefly stated, holds truth to be a correspondence between 'basic propositions'[1] and experience. Basic propositions are propositions which arise on occasion of, and depend for their truth on, some sensible occurrence or experience. In other words, truth is a correspondence between a concept and a percept, since a sensible occurrence, as far as we are aware of it, is a percept, or sense-experienced event. While the truth of basic propositions is tested by their correspondence with experience, propositions which are derived from, or founded on, basic propositions depend for their truth on their syntactical relation to, or coherence with, those basic propositions. That is, truth is a coherence ultimately based on correspondence.

The 'logical' theory of truth which Russell accepts includes the epistemological type; and the former is opposed to the latter in not violating the law of contradiction which Russell assumes. It defines truth as a correspondence or a

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1. "We may then define a 'basic proposition' as follows: It is a proposition which arises on the occasion of perception, which is the evidence for its truth, and it has a form such that no two propositions having this form can be mutually inconsistent if derived from different percepts." (Russell, B., An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, p. 139)

semantic relation between basic propositions and some occurrence, or a syntactical relation between propositions other than basic, that is, derived propositions, and basic ones. In other words, truth of basic propositions is a correspondence between a proposition and a 'fact'. A 'fact', Russell says, is undefinable, inclusive of, and wider than 'experience'. The reason is that it is logically possible to have unexperienced and unexperienceable 'facts'. But although we may know the facts which we can experience through sensation, yet we cannot know that we know those which we cannot. For all possible knowledge is assumed to be ultimately based on experience. It follows that propositions which we can know, and know to be true are those which we can verify, verification being by means of experience. However, there are, logically, true propositions which we cannot verify. Thus, true propositions are a wider class than verifiable propositions and the latter are only a subclass of the former. This makes the logical theory wider than, and inclusive, but not entirely, of the epistemological type of correspondence. To quote Russell, "Everything that is true according to the epistemological theory is also true according to the logical theory, though not vice versa."[1]

Russell summarizes his discussion of the two theories of truth as follows: "What we have called the epistemological

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1. Russell, B., An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, p. 290.

theory of truth, if taken seriously, confines 'truth' to propositions asserting what I now perceive or remember. Since no one is willing to adopt so narrow a theory, we are driven to the logical theory of truth, involving the possibility of events that no one experiences and propositions that are true although there can never be any evidence in their favour. Facts are wider (at least possibly) than experiences. A "verifiable" proposition is one having a certain kind of correspondence with an experience; a "true" proposition is one having exactly the same kind of correspondence with a fact ... Since experience is a fact, verifiable propositions are true; but there is no reason to suppose that all true propositions are verifiable."[1]

A.C. Ewing, still another realist, who, according to Blanshard is the most recent advocate of the correspondence theory of truth, states that "According to most realists as well as the plain man, a judgement is true when it corresponds to an independent reality and false when it does not, and this is either a definition of truth or an essential characteristic of truth."[2] Blanshard, an idealist, attempts to refute correspondence and resolve it to coherence. Before he does so, he presents the theory of correspondence which the realists hold, practically, in the same way we have so far done. He defines correspondence as a relation between two terms: one is a judgement, the other

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1. Ibid., p. 305.
2. Ewing, A.C., Idealism, p. 195.

is a fact which is the object of judgement. Although he defines 'fact' in a sense so inclusive as to include sensory as well as non-sensory facts, nevertheless he finds out that correspondence cannot be saved from its appeal to coherence. However, the fact to which the correspondence theory of truth strongly appeals is sensible facts. The fact to which a true judgement must correspond, Blanshard emphasizes, must be independent. If it can be shown that no fact independent of the judgement can exist, then the case for correspondence is forfeited, and the appeal to coherence is established.

The attempt to refute correspondence, on the one hand, and establish coherence, on the other hand, is now made by a more specific examination of correspondence, namely, as a criterion or test of truth. Our analysis of the correspondence test of truth will take the form of applying it to three typical judgements of fact such as: 'Brutus stabbed Caesar', 'That is a chair', and 'I feel pain in my heart'. We shall discuss each of these judgements separately and we shall begin with the first.

'Brutus stabbed Caesar' is a historical judgement of fact. To test its truth by correspondence is out of the question, because one of the terms of correspondence is irrecoverably gone. We cannot have a living witness of the event. Even if such a living witness exists, he can verify his memories, not by correspondence, but by the coherence of his memories

with the memories of still other witnesses and other historical records as well. For there might exist some records which conflict with his memories. Thus correspondence, in this case, fails as a test of truth, and coherence is resorted to.

But an objection may be raised, namely, that the truth of a judgement cannot be tested by correspondence where correspondence is not possible, such as in the judgement previously discussed 'Brutus stabbed Caesar', but that the test applies to such judgements as 'that is a chair' where correspondence is possible. If you perceive sensibly what your judgement asserts, then your judgement is true.

This argument assumes the 'chair' to be a brute given fact of sensation to which our thought must correspond. But this assumption is not tenable for the following reason: A chair is, among other things, a concept which requires an intellectual activity to formulate and an inference, that is, a passing from what is given in sensation to the perception of a chair. It is not only a group of sense-data but also a concept based on them, that is, a concept of something to sit on. The consideration of the chair as a brute given fact of sensation was shown to be untrue by the fact that perception may be in error.[1] Hence our sensations of the chair are always mixed, so to speak, with theoretical elements. The verifying

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1. See the section on 'perception'.

fact which is supposed to be independent is always dominated by a theory, and thus is not independent. Assuming that there are sense-data, still as such they cannot verify anything, since mere sense-data are not, as far as we are aware of them, ultimate and, in principle, may be in error. Thus perceptions are judgements, or better still, they involve judgement; they are to be checked by further perceptions which again involve judgements. And this is an appeal to coherence as a criterion or test of truth.

'I feel pain in my heart' is a third type of judgement where correspondence, the realist might say, is possible but incomplete. The various terms which are involved in the judgement, 'I', 'feel', 'pain', 'in', 'my', and 'heart' cannot be brute facts or given in sensation. Each of these terms goes beyond sense-data; yet everyone must be so given if the judgement is to be verified completely.

Let us now consider the term "pain" by itself and see if it can correspond to a sense-datum or to a group of sense-data. But any attempt to do so is bound to fail. Pain goes beyond the sense-datum. The reason is that there is a difference in content between the general idea of pain in the judgement, and a wholly specific pain which one experiences. There are, also, in our experience, degrees of intensity of pain to which the concept of pain cannot correspond exactly. Thus, there is no sensory fact to which 'pain' can exactly correspond.

The defenders of the correspondence theory attempt to defend it by modifying their position. They take "fact" to be wider than, though inclusive of, sensory fact. In a judgement, they say, it is true that there are terms or elements which are not found in sense-data, but why assume that given facts must be confined to sense-data? In the second place, it is absurd to say that because there is incomplete correspondence, there is no correspondence at all.

Let us examine the point that facts must not be confined to percepts or sense-data. We grant this. A fact can be other than what is given in sense. We do not, for example, sense the judgement A is B, but we apprehend the B-ness of A through the judgement, A is B, which is itself an expression of the apprehended fact. But judgements are capable of error, and hence need verification. To verify a judgement by correspondence, no independent fact to which it corresponds can be found, since we can get at the facts only through the medium of judgement. Now, to take judgements as infallible is groundless; to test a judgement by its coherence with other judgements is to join us in our view. Thus coherence, rather than correspondence, is resorted to as the criterion of truth.

The view that there can be incomplete or partial correspondence assumes that the nature of a term or "component is not affected by the other terms or components, and that we can get access to a sensory fact in its purity and use it in such

a pure form in testing the truth of a judgement. But, as we have seen, these two assumptions are groundless. No sensation is separable from its meaning,[1] and no term can be severed from its specific context or web of relations, so to speak, and still remain the same.[2]

Facts to which thought corresponds are supposed to be independent facts, not sensations to which meaning is added. If we cannot discriminate between fact and thought, or fact and judgement, then the correspondence theory of truth fails at a crucial point. The attempt to differentiate between two givens can only be successful when we go beyond what is given to a judgement about them, thus abandoning correspondence.

Correspondence as the criterion or test of truth has been examined where it is strongest, namely, where correspondence is between a judgement and a given sense-datum or a perceptual object. If it fails here, as it does, it fails all the more in the case of abstract judgements where sense is then remote or absent. The argument is, since a judgement cannot be tested for its truth by its correspondence with a sensory fact, it must be tested by a different kind of fact. This fact cannot be what Russell meant by the term 'fact', since, as we have seen, that will lead to scepticism. The only

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1. See the section on 'perception'.
2. See the section on 'Internal Relations'.

alternative that makes 'correspondence' possible is that between a judgement and our conception of a fact which is not sensible; and this is an appeal to coherence. Geometrical and ethical propositions, for example, are not tested by their correspondence or lack of correspondence with a sensory fact, since this is not possible, but by their coherence with other judgements. Thus, we conclude, coherence is the criterion of truth.

At the beginning of this chapter we raised two questions, one concerning the criterion, the other concerning the nature of truth. Our analysis of the correspondence theory of truth has shown that it is inadequate as a test of truth; and we were led to assert that coherence is the criterion of truth. We now come to the problem of the nature or meaning of truth.

CHAPTER VI

COHERENCE AS THE NATURE OF TRUTH

Coherence, if our previous analysis was correct, was shown to be the criterion of truth. Our next problem is to see whether or not coherence is also the nature or meaning of truth. For the two problems, as we have indicated, are different from each other. And there are philosophers, for example, who hold coherence to be the criterion, and correspondence the nature of truth. The contention which we shall presently attempt to support is that coherence is not only the criterion, but also the nature of truth. We shall proceed by stating, first, the meaning of coherence and then the evidence for its identification with truth.

Although the coherence theory of truth has traditionally been associated with a group of philosophers, the so-called idealists, yet it is not necessarily confined to them. For although the realists hold that the object of thought can exist without thought, yet, they must believe, like the idealists, that thought and its object are internally related in knowledge, if knowledge is to be possible. The believers in the coherence theory, be they idealists or realists, are of different types,

and consequently they have given different formulations of it. This seems to have led Ewing to say that it is wrong to tie down all the advocates of coherence to a precise definition. However, I believe that the fundamental conception of coherence is not necessarily different. And hence I shall attempt to define it in as comprehensive and inclusive a way as possible.

The coherence theory of truth which we shall examine is the Hegelian type and not that of the 'logical positivists'. The main difference between the two theories is that according to the second, contrary to the Hegelian type, there may exist more than one internally coherent, and yet mutually incompatible systems. And the positivistic type of system, like the Hegelian, is internally coherent or consistent, but it lacks comprehensiveness and inclusiveness which are essential characteristics of the latter. Since our interest is not to make a comparative study of the two theories, we shall mainly, if not wholly, confine our discussion to the 'idealistic Hegelian type which, we think, is more comprehensive and more inclusive than the other. We shall try to develop the coherence theory of truth by critically stating some accounts of it given by some champions of the theory.

H. Joachim, a Hegelian, defines coherence or truth as 'conceivability'. The true, he says, is the conceivable. To conceive is not to picture mentally, but to think clearly and logically, or to hold many things together in a relation

necessitated by their contents. In other words, it is to formulate or construct what Joachim calls a 'significant whole', which is a system whose constituent elements involve one another, and determine one another's nature. Its chief characteristic is conceivability or systematic coherence, meaning by this all-inclusive system of reasoned knowledge, which is truth.

Each term of this whole is conceivable to the degree it, in manifesting itself, also manifests the other terms and the whole as well. In other words, a system is coherent, and therefore true, to the degree in which each constituent element involves, and is entailed by, every other element. That truth is a matter of degree follows also from the degrees of conceivability, since the two are identical, or since conceivability is, at least, an essential characteristic of truth. Conceivability admits of degrees in the sense that we can conceive of the nature of things only partially. This doctrine of the degrees of truth which coherence implies will be discussed later.

Coherence, we have said, is system. What kind of system is it? It is not a system of self-evident propositions where each proposition, it is supposed, can be true in isolation. The reason is that no proposition can ever exist by itself, since "internality of relation" is a pervasive characteristic of all terms or constituents of reality. This ideal system is

not similar, for example, to that of Descartes who conceives of ideal knowledge as a system of truths, a truth being a self-evident, a clear and distinct, proposition known by intuition; or a proposition correctly or validly deduced from such self-evident truth. It is a system of truth where each term, as we have said, entails, and is entailed by, every other. That is, truth is the one and whole truth.

Such an ideal system should not be confused with logical or formal consistency. A logical argument or a chain of arguments might be formally consistent, and yet it might not exhibit systematic coherence, and thus may not be true. The various elements of a system are ordered under some form, the universal form of thought. The materials of our thought, so to speak, regardless of whether they are true or false, can be arranged so as to exhibit formal consistency. Thus formal consistency does not necessarily give truth.

This point was expressed by Joachim when he said, "So syllogism is the function of thought whereby two judgements are combined to generate a third; and 'formal' logic gives you the rules of 'valid' combination irrespective of what is combined, and impotent therefore to determine the truth of the result."[1]

Russell dismisses the coherence theory as merely logical consistency. He says that "The coherence required, however, is

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1. Joachim, H., The Nature of Truth, p. 75.

not strict logical coherence, for factual premises can and should be so stated as to be deductively independent of each other."[1] This is an invitation to the belief in a pluralistic world where each fact is logically independent, meaning by logical independence lack of entailment, or direct or indirect exclusion. Even though facts or things may be indifferent to each other and involve no logical contradiction, the believers in this metaphysics would not be holding the coherence theory. Assuming the doctrine of internal relations, the believer in coherence maintains that propositions or judgements fulfill the ideal of coherence only if they are so related as to entail one another. No proposition or a set of propositions in a coherent system can logically be independent of the rest, even though this ideal system may not actually exist, or may exist without our knowing that it exists. The holder of the coherence theory believes that the constituent judgements of our knowledge are based on, or derived from, our individual experience; and that any one judgement involves the whole system. Thus such system cannot disregard experience, and therefore, cannot be mere formal or logical consistency.

Another characteristic of a coherent system is inclusiveness or comprehensiveness. A fully coherent system includes in itself all its conditions.

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1. Russell, B., An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, p. 161.

This implies that if reality is a coherent system, no other system within reality would be fully coherent, since it would not be all-inclusive or comprehensive. Truth would be that system of thought in which thought ultimately coincides, or becomes identical with its object, reality. Nothing short of the whole will be that coherent system which we are looking for as the nature of truth. "The view that reality as a whole constitutes a coherent system might be described as the view that the sum-total of true propositions describing all the different facts constitute a coherent system."[1] That the world is coherent is an assumption which underlies the belief in coherence as the criterion and the nature of truth. The doctrine of internal relations and the idealistic conception of knowledge which we have discussed, assume that the world is internally related, something which is essential for a coherent system. They also assume that the subject and the object of knowledge, or judgement and fact, are inseparable - which gives the coherence theory an idealistic character.

Although in a coherent system we cannot necessarily infer from one particular fact or term all the other facts or terms in that system, yet we cannot know the governing principles of any one term without knowing the general principles governing the whole. For example, we cannot fully understand

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1. Ewing, A.C., Op. cit., p. 237.

the 'flower in the granite wall' before we understand the universe as a whole. This presupposes, to repeat, an internally related system or universe. To quote Blanshard, "In a perfectly coherent system every proposition would entail all others, if only for the reason that its meaning could never be fully understood without apprehension of the system in its entirety."[1] It is the direct or indirect reciprocity or implication of the components of the system, that makes the significance of that system. In further developing the notion of coherence, let us make explicit the meaning of implication which was implicit in all our previous discussions, and which is an essential characteristic of the nation of coherence.

Implication is a systematic interdependence between the terms of a system, in so far as these terms refer to their context. Implication between two terms is not exhausted by the linkage of the pair, but it involves other terms as well. For no term or a pair of terms can exist in isolation from the whole system, the thing which we have maintained in discussing internal relations. Thus, implication is always relative to a system.

There are different kinds of wholes or systems, such as a house, a city, an organism, a symphony, or theory or a painting. Each part, in each of these systems, implies, and is implied by, every other part. Since implication, as we have seen,

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1. Blanshard, B., op. cit., Vol. II, p. 266.

is relative to system and since there are different kinds of system, it follows that implication is also of different kinds.

Not only does implication vary in kind and is relative to a context, but is also a matter of degree. This follows from the fact that the systems of actual knowledge, for instance, are of varying degrees of completeness, each system being relative to a still wider system, i.e. knowledge is a matter of degree; it expands, like a growing organism, not by external addition of parts, but by an internal reorganization. It is organized in the degree it approximates or coincides with reality, and consequently, becomes more complete, as for example, when we pass from a machine to a human brain, or still higher, to a human mind.

That systematic interdependence, or implication, is relative and a matter of degree, not only so far as knowledge is concerned, but also so far as physical nature is concerned, can be further seen from the following example: A bud and a flower are two orders in nature. The bud is a partially realized flower. The relation between them is similar to that of a partial to a more completely realized system. However, the bud may not necessarily become a flower. For this depends on a system of conditions which is dependent on a still wider system of conditions. Some or all of the existing factors or conditions may actualize the bud only partially; they may not

actualize it at all. Thus, although the bud may develop or grow, still its development or growth is bound up in its physical context and environment.

The meaning of implication which we have stated requires that the coherent system which is truth, in so far as it is realized, must have corresponding features. Our knowledge of those features is derived from our reflection upon actual systems of various degrees of realization of the ideal system of coherence. These features already mentioned, will become clearer as we develop further the notion of coherence.

Although we cannot exhaustively define coherence, we can illustrate it with examples: A man and a square are two composite wholes; their constituent elements involve one another, and thus eternally cohere in determinate relations. "Fully coherent knowledge would be knowledge in which every judgement entailed, and was entailed by, the rest of the system."[1]

Although coherence is an ideal, yet, it may exist in varying degrees. These may be illustrated by instances such as a stone-pile, a building, a machine, a human body and geometrical systems. The increasing degree of organization and coherence can be seen after a brief explanation. In building up the wall of a room one may infer the position of the

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 264.

individual stone from the position of the other stones, and more generally, from the general plan or structural pattern of the building. In a machine where the organization and the coherence of the parts are of a higher degree one can infer the general characteristics of a missing part. The organization and the interdependence is seen to be still much greater in a living organism, such as the human body. The interdependence is so great that each part and its function are so related as to involve, and be involved by, every other part and function. The instance of system which most approaches ideal coherence is Euclidean geometry, where we cannot think of a straight line, for example, without thinking of the Euclidean three-dimensional space. A straight line is not intelligible and cannot even exist, apart from some system of geometry. Thus a straight line entails, and is entailed by, the rest of the geometrical system or systems to which the line belongs.

Although the Euclidean system of geometry may be considered the most perfect example of system yet constructed, still it has its defects, and falls short of the ideal of coherence. Its main defects are that it is not all-inclusive, and that some of its postulates are independent of each other. Although there is a mutual entailment between the postulates and the geometric structure which is based on them, yet such entailment does not exist between the postulates themselves.

And "A completely satisfactory system would have none of these defects. No proposition would be arbitrary, every proposition would be entailed by the others jointly and even singly, no proposition would stand outside the system. The integration would be so complete that no part would be seen for what it was without seeing its relation to the whole, and the whole itself would be understood only through the contribution of each part."[1] Whether or not we can actually construct a geometrical system in which the postulates are dependent on each other, is a problem which requires investigation. Although all geometrical systems must make certain primitive assumptions as starting points, yet we cannot deny the possibility of some system where the postulates entail each other. Such a system is nothing more than a logical possibility, and we cannot know whether or not it can ever actually exist. The same thing can be said of the system of coherence which is an ideal of which only instances of varying degrees can actually be found. In other words, the ideal system of coherence is a limit which we can only approach but never reach.

The coherence which we find in the natural and social sciences is much less complete than the coherence we find in geometry. Judgements in these sciences are tested by the degree of coherence existing within the field of the particular science.

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 266.

No scientific theory, say, can be accepted if it is incoherent, or if it conflicts with another theory when the latter is coherent and can explain the same facts and predict other possible facts as well. The truth of a judgement, moreover, is better tested by its coherence with propositions within a system which is inclusive and explanatory of all that the particular sciences aim at explaining. Thus science behaves as if coherence is true.

The special sciences or the so-called systems of knowledge, being internally coherent in varying degrees, reflect only partially, each from a different perspective, the ideal system of coherence. According to the coherence theory of truth, they ultimately cohere with each other, supplying only partly, within the limitation of our knowledge, the components of the ideal system of coherence - a framework or a structure in which every thing actual or conceivable is coherently included.

What is the importance of this ideally coherent system if it does not actually exist? Although coherence is an ideal, yet it is very important. Its importance lies, as Blanshard says, in its being a standard for grading the truth of the so-called systems of actual knowledge. The greatest certainty or the highest degree of truth which may be realized naturally lies in that system of knowledge which most nearly approached the ideal system. On the other hand, the greatest doubt or the

lowest degree of truth will be found in the system of knowledge which is most remote from that ideal. Of course, various probabilities or degrees of truth lie between these two extremes.

Now, having defined or stated the meaning of coherence, what is the evidence for regarding it, not only as the criterion but also as the nature of truth? We shall offer two arguments, one based on the view that coherence is the criterion of truth, the other on the basic assumptions of the idealistic theories of perception, knowledge and internal relations.

Does the belief in coherence as the criterion of truth imply that it is also the nature of truth? The answer is in the positive. Indeed, this argument is considered the strongest support of the coherence theory of truth. If you accept coherence, the argument states, as the criterion of truth, coherence must be used to test the suggestion that truth is other than coherence. When we do so, we find that this suggestion leads to inconsistency, or incoherence with other judgements, and consequently, it must be rejected. This formal or logical argument can be expounded or presented in more details as follows:

Let us take coherence as the test, and correspondence as the nature of truth. This combination leads to incoherence. For if truth is correspondence, then correspondence must also be the criterion, since it will be a standard to which the judgement to be tested must conform. That is, if truth means

correspondence, the correspondence theory cannot depend for its truth on any other test, for instance, coherence. Otherwise, it ceases to be true, that is, correspondence ceases to be the nature of truth. This, as Blanshard says, is a typical difficulty. To consider the test of truth as one character and its nature as another, makes the two fall apart by creating a conflict or incoherence, and therefore, inconsistency, between them. This assumes coherence to be the criterion of truth. The only way in which this incoherence can be overcome is by identifying the test of truth with the nature of truth.

Thus if truth means correspondence, then the test must be correspondence. We have seen, however, that correspondence failed as a test of truth. For since we know reality only through the medium of our ideas, we can never get at original independent facts. All the facts which are known to us are mixed or adulterated with ideas. Hence the test of the truth of our judgements by these facts is not a matter of correspondence but of coherence. Thus correspondence, which we have assumed to constitute truth, contradicts itself in not enabling us to test its own truth, and therefore, it cannot be the nature of truth.

Correspondence fails on other grounds. If we can know reality directly, which is doubtful, we shall no longer have correspondence, since no two independent terms, which is the necessary assumption of correspondence, will any longer exist.

Consequently, the test of our judgements cannot be correspondence, or in any way dependent on correspondence. Moreover, since a reality completely independent of knowledge cannot ever enter into the knowledge relation, it cannot serve as a criterion of truth. Thus, the correspondence theory of truth, as Blanshard says, is forced to choose between an appeal to coherence, on the one hand, and self contradiction or scepticism on the other.

The attempt to combine coherence as the criterion of truth and correspondence as the nature or meaning of truth, or vice versa, we are forced to conclude, fails since it leads to incoherence. By the same reasoning, the combination of coherence as the criterion of truth and some other conception as the definition or meaning of truth leads to incoherence, and consequently, fails. The character of the criterion of truth implies that the character of the nature of truth implying it, or vice versa, must be the same. Thus the assumption that coherence is the criterion of truth leads, if our argument is to be coherent, and therefore true, to the conclusion that it is also the nature of truth.

The second argument confirms and supplements the first argument in support of the coherence theory. It is based on the underlying assumptions of the idealistic theories of perception and knowledge, and the doctrine of internal relations. We shall draw on the conclusions of these theories, therefore,

for our argument.

Since according to the idealistic theory of perception judgement and fact or thought and reality, so far as we can know them, are internally related, no fact is independent of theory, and a fact seen in the light of a new theory is a new fact. As a consequence truth will not be the correspondence of judgement with an independent fact, but the coherence of a judgement with another judgement.

According to the idealistic theory of knowledge, reality is a coherent, and therefore, an internally related system, and knowledge is the ultimate identity of thought and reality. As a consequence, the knowledge of any one term involves knowing reality as a whole; and since ideal knowledge would be the complete identification of thought and reality, our actual or merely partial knowledge results from their partial or incomplete identification. Thus actual knowledge or truth is a matter of degree.

But, it may be objected, isn't this a correspondence between the system of thought and its counterpart, reality, thus, introducing again the controversy between the correspondence and coherence theories of truth? Can't we, then, dismiss coherence? We can, if we should interpret correspondence as one-to-one relation of the system of thought with that of reality, and yet hold that the two systems are internally related. But if we can do that, we will no longer have

correspondence. The 'internality' of thought and reality will make a fiction out of the independence of judgement and fact, which the correspondence theory of truth assumes as an indispensible part; and consequently correspondence fails.

Thus even though you consider truth as one-to-one correlation between thought and reality, truth cannot be correspondence, or coherence ultimately based on correspondence.

One of the meanings of correspondence is similarity in structure. And according to the correspondence theory of truth, the structure of the world is completely independent of the structure of thought or ideal knowledge. On the other hand, coherence, also, might be thought of as similarity in structure, but this is not exactly the case. According to the coherence theory, the two systems of thought and reality are internally related, at least so far as knowledge is concerned. The ideal structure of thought, after it is fully completed, is itself identical with the structure of the world. Consequently, there is ultimately one metaphysical system, the truth of which is coherence, and the truth of any one term is the coherence of that term with the whole.

A problem may be raised: Conceived of as a logical relation between judgement and 'fact',[1] can correspondence be refuted,

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1. 'Fact' in the sense used by Bertrand Russell when he discusses the 'logical' theory of truth. (See section on 'Coherence as the criterion of Truth').

or resolved to coherence? It may be argued that the refutation of the correspondence theory by refuting the belief in the independence of its two terms may be justified, not logically, but only so far as knowledge or awareness of facts is concerned. For it is logically possible to have 'facts' of which we have no knowledge or awareness. This problem is an outstanding one. However, the definition of correspondence as a logical relation between judgement and 'fact' which we may not know of is no defense of correspondence, and is disastrous to all knowledge. For assuming that this sense of correspondence is irrefutable, it can only lead to scepticism.

If these two arguments were satisfactory, then coherence is not only the criterion but also the nature of truth. For a still clearer understanding and further support of the coherence theory of truth, we must turn to the objections which may be raised against it, and the doctrine of degrees of truth which coherence implies. We shall first begin with the objections.

CHAPTER VII

OBJECTIONS TO THE COHERENCE THEORY OF TRUTH[1]

Most of the objections that we shall presently discuss are not uniquely raised against the coherence theory of truth. Our analysis of them is an attempt, not only to defend the theory as forcibly as possible, but also to bring into light its nature and implications. Although there may possibly be other objections, we shall, however, analyze among those which have actually been raised only those which we consider most important. We shall begin with the minor ones, and then move to those which may prove to be fatal.

First, it is objected that since, according to the coherence theory of truth, the truth of a judgement may be tested by its coherence with present knowledge whose truth is in turn measured or tested by its approximation to ideal

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1. The coherence theory of truth implies degrees of truth ranging between the least coherent of actual knowledge and the ideal system of coherence which is absolute and complete truth. Blanshard appeals to the doctrine of degrees of truth for answering some of the objections raised against the coherence theory of truth. However, our criticism of the doctrine of degrees of truth shows that it is untenable as well as inconsistent with the coherence theory of truth which implies it. (See the section on 'Degrees of Truth' and our criticism of the doctrine of degrees in the last chapter.)

coherence, actual knowledge will be true in so far as it corresponds to the coherent system of reality, and is false in so far as it fails to do so. Thus coherence is reduced, it is thought, to correspondence.

The present objection is only an apparent objection. For 'correspondence', as it is used here, is not what the realists mean by the term. We have already criticized, in great detail, the correspondence theory of truth, and found it untenable as a test of truth. It suffices to mention for the present that the relation of thought to reality, even though one may call it 'correspondence', cannot mean, as Blanshard says, what the realists conceive it to be, namely, one-to-one correlation, copying, similarity of structure or indefinable accordance where, in all these cases or senses, the two terms of that relation are assumed to be independent of each other. The present sense of 'correspondence' may be illustrated by the analogous relation between seed and plant, egg and chicken, or more generally, between the germ cell and the living organism, where the plant emerges or grows out of the seed, the egg develops into a chicken, or the germ cell into a living organism, assuming in all cases favorable conditions. The seed, the egg, and the germ cell are not independent of the respective plant, chicken, or living organism into which they develop. Similarly the correspondence between these three pairs of terms, if it can be called correspondence, is not what the realists under-

stand by correspondence. Moreover, if such a relation can be considered correspondence, then the disagreement between the believers in the coherence theory of truth, on the one hand, and the correspondence theory of truth, on the other, is only verbal. The reason why the holder of the former theory avoids using the term 'correspondence' is simply that it is confusing. 'Coherence' is the appropriate word.

Secondly, the critics of the coherence theory of truth believe that it is possible to have many coherent systems which, because of their incoherence with each other are, therefore, false. There are, they argue, internally coherent geometrical systems - which, because of their mutual inconsistency, cannot all be true. It may be that none of them is true. But at most only one of them can be true, if there is any true one. Nevertheless, if truth lies in coherence we are compelled to consider them all as true, thus, making truth multiple; and the coherence theory of truth, since it asserts the truth of contradictory systems, will be inadequate.

This objection, no matter how plausible it may seem, involves misconception. For coherence seems to be conceived of merely as logical consistency. Moreover according to the coherence theory of truth that we have presented, only one system and not any and every so called system of knowledge is completely and absolutely true, namely that in which, as Blanshard puts it, "Everything real and possible is coherently

included."[1] We cannot logically conceive of more than one system of that kind, and whenever we attempt to do that, we fall into a contradiction. Whether or not we actually do or can ever have that system is not the question. But we can ideally conceive such a system. In fact we do have systems of varying degrees of coherence, and, therefore, of truth. Indeed, all actual knowledge is of this latter kind. No system, however, which disregards concrete experience completely would be true, even if it is self-consistent. But according to the coherence theory of truth, no such system can ever exist, and, therefore can be completely false; that is, truth is a matter of degree. Although we may have many internally coherent and yet mutually inconsistent systems (which, according to the coherence theory, must all be true), still, they cannot all be equally coherent, and hence, equally true. Thus the doctrine of degrees of truth is brought in to clarify the coherence theory of truth and answer the present objection - the possibility of having internally-coherent and mutually incompatible or inconsistent systems which are, nevertheless, true. The coherence theory of truth asserts, on the one hand, the absolute and complete truth of only one system - the ideal system of coherence - and, on the other hand, the partial truth of the many systems which make up the bulk of our so-called

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 276.

actual knowledge; thus avoiding the difficulty of multiple truth and the consequent self-contradiction.

The objection would gain strength if it could be shown that it is possible and conceivable to have two or more systems or theories which are mutually inconsistent, and yet equally explanatory of all known and knowable facts. According to the coherence theory of truth, all of these systems must be true. But since they conflict with each other, the least that we can say is that they cannot all be true. Hence the invalidity of the theory.

That there can be more than one system, each including all known and knowable facts, but differing in internal structure, is inconceivable. Such systems cannot be inclusive of all the facts, at least, as Blanshard states, not of the fact of their differing structures. They would be one system of the same nature if they differ neither in their component elements nor in their structures. However, what makes two systems with the same constituents different from each other is the difference between their structures, that is, the relation which these constituent elements bear to one another.[1] Accordingly, each of these systems must omit, at least, one fact which the other possesses, namely, the particular structure

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1. See section on 'Internal Relations', particularly, the illustrative example of 'chair' and 'table' which are two different things due to different structures, although they are made of the same boards.

which each one has. Moreover, we cannot have two systems, each all inclusive, since each must include the other. That is, it is necessary to have all actual and possible systems included in one system in order that this system may be all inclusive. Consequently, it is inconceivable that all actual or possible, known or knowable facts, should be included in conflicting systems. What is conceivable is that we can have only one all-inclusive system in which every lesser system is coherently included.

A theory or a so-called system of knowledge is the outcome of an attempt or endeavor to explain or interpret the real world. The facts of the world, in so far as we are aware of them, may be ordered in different and rival systems which would cease to be rival, or even different if all the actual and possible facts were known. We would have, then, as we have seen, only one explanation or interpretation of reality.

In scientific investigation when two or more internally coherent but mutually inconsistent theories explain, equally well, the same situation or facts, we cannot be justified in making a choice as to which theory is true or truer than the other. We, however, shall be able to make such a choice when there appears a new fact which can harmoniously fit, so to speak, in one and not in the other of the two theories. Thus, science, so far as it is practised, behaves as if it were assuming the coherence theory of truth, since it accepts,

among two or more given theories, the more coherent, other things being equal.

When the world of dreams conflicts with that of waking hours, assuming the two to be equally coherent, there is no reason, as Blanshard believes, for considering one to be truer than the other. Dreams are usually differentiated from waking hours not by mere vividness which may equally, or in varying degrees of intensity, exist in the other, but by the greater degree of coherence of the latter. The constituents of dreams, like those of waking hours, are various data which one experiences and may order in different systems of varying degrees of coherence. These systems, nevertheless, may be included in a coherent, i.e, a more inclusive system. This latter, since it would reveal a wider perspective of reality, would have a higher degree of truth.

The tendency to accept, among systems less than all-inclusive, the most coherent may be further illustrated first by the case of conflicting world-views, each struggling for acceptance, and second by the psychological foundation of beliefs as well.

In the first place, the intellectual background or status of a people, in a certain age, affects their way of life and vice versa. A change in the one implies a change in the other, the tendency is always to accept the broader and more coherent outlook. Due to scientific progress, for

instance, the substitution of a naturalistic outlook for a supernaturalistic one has led to disbelief in superstition and witchcraft. The existentialist's belief in the priority of 'existence' over 'essence' leads to an emphasis on the actual present life of man, and awakens in him the sense of determining his own destiny, thus affecting his actions and his attitude toward life and the world. Thus the mutual modification and adjustment of old and new beliefs in different cultures and ages indicate the movement of thought in the direction of its aim, as Blanshard would say, which is a coherent system.

Second, an individual confronted with a more satisfactory theory than the one he cherishes may continue to advocate the less satisfactory theory but with inner psychological tension or resistence. If he is honest enough, he finally surrenders to realize an internal psychological coherence. The wider the system and the more it approximates ideal coherence, the higher the degree of truth and the more complete the satisfaction of the natural impulse to know.

"We have been dealing with the objection", Blanshard summarizes, "that truth cannot be coherent because different systems are possible which include the same facts and indeed all the facts. Against this we have argued that the notion of two systems, each all-inclusive is meaningless; and we have gone on to show that when two-systems less than all-inclusive come into conflict with each other, as they do when dreams

conflict with reality, or vagary with science, or one world-view with another, the issue tends always to be settled by acceptance of the view that, in the sense defined, is more coherent".[1] It is the more coherent system (which includes lesser and apparently conflicting systems) that has a higher degree of truth.

Thirdly it is maintained that a judgement, according to the coherence theory of truth, depends for its truth on its coherence with every other judgement in a system. Taking A and S to be any two judgements, A is true partly because it coheres with S, and S is true partly because it coheres with A. Moreover in finding out whether or not A coheres in a system in which it is a component, its truth is partly tested by its coherence with itself. The judgement must be assumed to be independent, at least while it is being tested for its truth. Thus, the truth of a judgement is established by assuming the judgement to be already true, which means circularity. This circularity, further, implies another objection namely, that a true judgement strengthens the probability of all other judgements in a system, and, therefore, implies, contrary to the coherence theory of truth, that we can have true propositions in isolation.

The proponents of the coherence theory of truth argue

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 284.

that the acceptance of the judgement A, as true is partly its coherence with the judgement S. This does not mean, however, that S must be true independently or in isolation. Truth emerges, so to speak, from or is the coherence of, terms which cannot be but related. In the case of the judgements A and S, neither of them can have any truth without the other, since neither can have any coherent relation, or even existence without the other and other terms as well. In fact, truth is that quality, so to speak, which qualifies or binds, in a certain specific way, certain given terms. Hence there is no circularity.

The believers in the coherence theory insist that we cannot have propositions in isolation, and thus that a single proposition cannot be tested by, or be the test of, the truth of another single isolated proposition. The judgements A and S, for example, assuming internal relations can be logically distinguished but not absolutely separated from each other. Each judgement may, and in fact does, lend the other support, not in isolation, however, but through the coherence and therefore the internality of relation of the one with the other. In no way does this mean what the critics would like us to believe, that A is the criterion of truth of S or <u>vice versa</u>. In other words, truth is a function of the system in which both judgements are component members, and, since no judgement whatever can be known to exist apart from a system, no judgement, there-

fore, can be absolutely false. That is, all actual knowledge, and truth and falsity are relative or matters of degree. A proposition would have a higher degree of truth relatively to the system to which it is immediately more relevant, rather than to the one in which it is less relevant. Moreover, the degree of truth will further depend on the degree of coherence of a system. Although it is possible for a proposition to be excluded from a certain particular system, it cannot be excluded from all systems. Such exclusion cannot be absolute, but is a matter of degree. It is relative to and therefore varies with different perspectives, depending on different individuals.

Thus, there are no propositions existing in isolation, and therefore the truth of no proposition is independent of a system. And if the truth of propositions is a function of the system in which they are components, there is no circularity involved. And each individual proposition lends support to every other proposition in a system.

Fourth, coherence is conceived to be an ideal system whose component elements are internally, and, therefore, necessarily related. This system, it is contended, can never account for the facts of the actual world. Further, although it is admitted that the component terms or judgements of a system of knowledge are related, it is thought that they are not necessarily related. The reason is that it is thought that if an historical judgement, such as, Brutus stabbed Caesar, is found

to be false, this does not necessarily lead to the view that every judgement which is now accepted as true is likewise false.

The above argument is a common objection raised against the coherence theory of truth. It seems, however, to be based on a misapprehension of the theory, and cannot really stand analysis. It would have been valid if coherence were merely logical consistency and if it were possible to have judgements isolated from the so-called systems of knowledge. The denial of a seemingly-isolated judgement such as 'Brutus stabbed Caesar' does make a difference to every other proposition. 'Brutus stabbed Caesar' is accepted on that kind and degree of evidence which scientists and historians would accept without hesitation. To deny this proposition is to call into question scientific and historical evidence and, as a consequence to make most of science and history doubtful, that is, destroy actual knowledge. Thus the proposition about Caesar's murder is internally related to a system and cannot, therefore, be isolated.

A coherent system of knowledge, moreover, is inseparable from its component data or elements, namely, the data of experience. Since our experience is partly derived from the actual world, our knowledge which is an interpretation of that world cannot be a castle in the air, even though the interpretation may be wrong. Thus every judgement, or a system of judge-

ment, is logically as well as psychologically related to and grounded in a wider system - ultimately in that system which is nature as a whole. Hence the objection that coherence is a castle in the air is unfounded.

Fifth, the truth of a proposition depends on the system of knowledge to which it belongs, and since our knowledge is always expanding, no proposition is absolutely true. But the assertion of the coherence theory of truth that all propositions are partially true must wholly be true. Thus, the objections run, in asserting that all propositions are partially true, the defender of the theory asserts this either absolutely or relatively, and in both cases he contradicts himself.

The truth of a proposition, it may be answered, is asserted relatively to a context, that is, in the light of the present state of knowledge. Should our knowledge expand or change, our judgement with respect to the truth or falsity of that knowledge, and, therefore, of the coherence theory of truth, will also change. Every judgement is both conditional and unconditional. In asserting the reality of our awareness as well as its object, no matter how that awareness occurs, our assertion is unconditional. On the other hand, since our awareness is relative to a context, both psychological and logical, it changes as the context changes. With a change in the context we will have a new awareness or we will be aware of a new fact. In other words, implicit conditions which we

may be unaware of at the moment we make a certain assertion may later present themselves to our awareness, thus changing the significance of our assertion, which means that that assertion is conditional to a context. For example, an assertion made about the nature of a disease may be absolute relatively to the context when the assertion was made. Its relativity will have a different degree or significance with respect to a new context which might be constructed when new conditions or data about that disease appear. In other words, an assertion is perfectly or completely true relatively to the situation, context, or conditions out of which it has arisen. But it is true to a lesser degree relatively to a new and wider context that may later develop, in which new conditions are included. Thus all assertions are both conditional and unconditional, relative and absolute, but, as we have stated, in different senses. Hence, the objection of self-contradiction made against the coherence theory, because it is the unconditional or absolute assertion that all assertions are conditional or relative, is invalid.

Sixth, the coherence theory of truth holds that everything in the universe is relevant to everything else. Hence the opponents of the theory believe that knowledge or science, since it involves the inclusion of the relevant and the exclusion of the irrelevant, would be impossible and would become indistinguishable from fiction.

The holders of the coherence theory of truth believe that this objection is unfounded. For although all things in the universe are relevant to one another, yet, they state, not all are equally relevant. It is a fact that an event or a situation is not caused by a single condition, but rather by a system of conditions. And to follow these conditions, as Blanshard says,"would involve in the long run the whole state of the universe."[1] Nevertheless, science does not deal, at least so far as scientific practice is concerned, with the first or ultimate cause of an event. It deals, rather, with the immediate conditions, some of which are more important or relevant to the production of an event. Thus, science or the actual search for knowledge is in perfect harmony with the notion of degrees of relevance.

Blanshard emphatically illustrates the concept of degrees of relevance by the traditional logical distinction between the essence, properties, and accidents of a thing, and the change which this distinction has undergone in history. Properties, it was believed, follow with absolute necessity and complete logical relevance from the essence or nature of a thing. On the other hand, accidents compared to essence and properties were considered to be irrelevant to the nature of things.

This sharp distinction between these three constituents

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 236.

of a thing is seen not to hold any more. The distinction between their natures and the relevance of each to the constitution of a thing is a matter of degree. There is no question of logical priority between essence and property; nor can there be any absolute distinction between them, on the one hand, and between each of them and accidents, on the other hand. We may illustrate this as follows: "A man may be a man without driving a plough; therefore driving a plough is an accident. But one cannot drive a plough without being a man, so being a man must have something to do with driving the plough; hence the latter is not an accident."[1] Driving a plough may be a manifestation of man's intelligence. Indeed this distinction, from a different angle, was previously anticipated when we argued that the nature of a thing determines, and is determined by, the relations it may have, and that such determination is only a matter of degree.

Closely connected with the above-mentioned objection is this: A judgement once true, the critics hold, must be always true; that is, truth is absolute. But according to the coherence theory of truth, what was true may now be false, and what is now true may become false as our knowledge expands or develops. Hence the absurdity of the theory.

The answer to this objection is that the standard of

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 301.

truth is an unalterable measure of truth, even though it may not be practicable. Our standard, in practice, is the system or systems of knowledge that we actually have. That is, the truth of a judgement is relative to the system in which it is a component. Moreover, we do not hold that truth changes, but that while the ultimate standard, ideal coherence, is unvarying, our belief that it is validly applied, or invalidly applied, does change. And it is not inconsistent or absurd to say that although our standard of truth does not change, yet our belief that the standard has been applied, or that truth has been realized, changes. Moreover, the coherence theory of truth does not assert any judgement to be false or completely true, since it considers truth to be a matter of degree.

Although such an argument supports the view that our actual knowledge is relative, does it, however, mean that all that we can possibly know is also relative, that is, that all knowledge is relative? Although we seem to be sceptical about having ideal coherence or the whole truth about reality, do we have to be also sceptical about the relatively coherent actual knowledge? Does the coherence theory of truth ideally as well as actually lead to scepticism?

According to our proposal in this chapter, we shall attempt to defend the coherence theory of truth against the immediately following objection which, on further consideration, may prove fatal to the theory, namely that it entails scepticism.

If in order to know the truth of a judgement we have to know it in relation to all actual and possible knowledge, that is, the ideal system of coherence which we do not actually know or know whether we shall ever know, then we neither do nor shall ever know anything. Thus the coherence theory of truth leads to scepticism.

This objection, according to Brand Blanshard, is partially valid. The coherence theory, he admits, does involve a degree of scepticism regarding the truth of all actual knowledge. We can assert with absolute certainty the truth of no proposition, not even the present one. The coherence theory of truth is not, however, unique in this respect. No theory whatever, claims to know the absolute and whole truth. Blanshard believes this to be a merit from the view-point of the development of science or knowledge. All scientific theories are considered to be probable or true in varying degrees, and therefore to involve some scepticism. In fact, many of the scientific theories which were considered as true turned later to be unsatisfactory, and consequently were modified. That is, actual knowledge is relative or a matter of degree.

The correspondence theory as well as other theories of truth are in no better position than that of the coherence theory. Many judgements, for example, which, in accordance with the correspondence theory of truth, were considered to be true turned out to be false. The defenders of the correspondence theory may ascribe the falsity of a judgement previously

considered as true to the misapplication of the correspondence-test of truth rather than to the standard of testing itself. That is, they may consider the judgement to have been thought to be true, when, in fact, it was not. The mistake lies in the act of judging the truth rather than in the standard of truth. In other words, we are not able to judge truly whether or not we rightly apply the correspondence test of truth. If we cannot know with certainty whether our judgements are true or not, no matter what theory of truth we assume, can't we know what degree of truth they possess? Whether or not the doctrine of degrees of truth leads to scepticism requires investigation.[1]

Thus the objection that the coherence theory of truth, in contrast to other theories, entails scepticism, is invalid. Its theoretical scepticism, on the other hand, has been effective as a motive-power in promoting the search of better understanding nature and man, and consequently, realizing higher degrees of truth.

In practice, however, we test the truth of a judgement, not by its coherence with the inaccessible absolute system of coherence, but with the immediate limited actual systems of knowledge. This implies that knowledge and truth are relative, since none of those actual systems can give us the whole truth.

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1. See criticism of the doctrine of degrees of truth in the last chapter.

Indeed, this is the procedure of science. A judgement of any special science is tested, for its truth, by its coherence with the body of judgements of that science, in the first place, and in the second place, with the whole body of actual knowledge. Thus the coherence theory of truth, the idealists assert, does not, in practice, lead to scepticism. So far as theoretical scepticism about the absolute and whole truth is concerned, all theories of knowledge and truth are in the same boat - which is the main spring of progress and development in knowledge.

A number of questions may come to one's mind. Can we know absolute and whole truth, at least theoretically? Is there really a difference in nature between scepticism concerning ideal knowledge and that concerning actual knowledge? Doesn't the first imply the latter and vice versa? How do we know that there are instances of degrees of the ideal system of coherence if we do not know the latter? We shall touch on those questions in one way or other in the following chapters, particularly the last.

The objections to the coherence theory of truth, as we have seen, concentrate mostly on the attempt to show that the theory is self-contradictory, sceptical and inapplicable. Most of them have been answered by an appeal to the doctrine of degrees of truth which the coherence theory implies. We shall therefore turn to an examination of the latter to assess its

validity and find out whether or not it has really succeeded in answering those objections, already considered, which were raised against the coherence theory of truth.

CHAPTER VIII

DEGREES OF TRUTH

We have previously maintained that coherence is not only the criterion but also the nature of truth. And we have defined it as that self-consistent, inclusive, comprehensive system in which every component element implies, and is implied by, every other element. Such system is an ideal which can be realized only partially. Our task now is to show that coherence implies degrees of truth, and then state the grounds for this belief.

That truth is a matter of degree follows from the idealistic epistemology. Knowledge is conceived as the ultimate identity of thought and reality. To know the complete nature of anything involves knowing all its relations, that is, knowing reality as a whole. But our actual knowledge is not exhaustive, since we do not know all that makes up the nature of things. We do have, however, some knowledge of things, that is, partial identification of thought and reality. Consequently actual knowledge and, therefore, truth are matters of degree.

What is the meaning of 'degrees' of truth? We have already anticipated the answer when we defined truth as an ideally coherent system which for us is only realized by varying degrees of completeness. Accordingly, the greater the approximation of a system to ideal coherence, the greater or higher its

degree of truth. The degree of truth of a judgement varies initially with the degree of coherence in its limited system and ultimately with the system which is the whole of truth. Since there is nothing meaningful which is not systematized, absolute falsity is impossible. "The degree of truth of a particular proposition", Blanshard states, "is to be judged by its coherence with experience as a whole, ultimately by its coherence with that further whole, all-comprehensive and fully articulated, in which thought can come to rest."[1] Thus truth means the whole and absolute truth, and degrees of truth means relative and incomplete truth compared to that whole.

Our task now consists in showing both on the psychological and the logical grounds that the meaning of a judgement or term depends on or varies with, the context. I shall illustrate my point by instances similar to those I have already given in discussing 'internal relations', using concepts which cover the various aspects of reality in so far as it is known.

The internality of the relation of meaning to the context of the judging mind - what Blanshard calls the 'psychological ground' of the doctrine of degrees - can be illustrated by the case of the schoolboy who later becomes a human anatomist.

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 264.

Although the words he uses and the object judged may be the same, still his conception of the human body as a schoolboy and later as an anatomist differs in the depth of meaning. In developing from a schoolboy to an anatomist, his mind and experience expand, with increased depth of meaning. In perceiving a thing, the greater the depth of perceptual meaning, the more one is aware of the nature, relations or context of the thing, the greater the knowledge one can have of reality and the greater the degree of truth that one can grasp. Thus advance in thought, as Blanshard says, entails advance in or higher degree of truth.

Thus the degree of truth of a judgement is relative to the context in which it is found. As a consequence the more coherent (i.e., consistent, inclusive, internally related) our experience is, the greater are the number of aspects of reality it reveals, the greater is the depth of meaning involved, the more developed is the system of knowledge that can be constructed or achieved, and the higher is degree of truth it represents.

"Thus the psychological ground", as Blanshard says, "was that meanings as actually affirmed, are organic to the mind of the thinker, and hence the same words as uttered by different persons, or by the same person at different times, bear contracted or expanded meanings which will therefore embody truth in varying degrees... Just as the asserted content is organic with the mind as a whole, so it is organic (as we shall see)

with a logical system whose influence permeates it through and through."[1]

Not only is meaning internal to the psychological context of the person, but also to a logical system, what Blanshard calls the 'logical ground' for the doctrine of degrees of truth. That is, the identity of logical terms, again, is not absolute; it is, as we shall further see, relative to a context and its significance, therefore, changes when that context changes.

The believers in absolute truth or falsity insist on the existential independence of judgements or terms of their contexts. The truth or falsity of what they suppose to be isolated judgements, they argue, is inherent in the nature of those judgements rather than dependent on their context. Thus their criticism of the doctrine of degree of truth, is really made indirectly by criticizing the doctrine of internal relations which the former presupposes. Hence a brief defence of the latter will equally serve as a ground for the former.

The concept of a heart, for instance, as well as the organ itself, the logician believes, can be isolated from the system to which it is related. To make a system of relations possible, he argues, there must be, to use Blanshard's terminology, an 'it', something which enters into relation and which must be capable of isolation.

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 314.

Blanshard agrees with the logician that there must be an 'it', but he adds that an 'it' which is not related is inconceivable. One may pursue the 'it' in the human body through and through as much as we like, but what we attain will not be, in the given case, a heart. Although one may get something totally different, still that something, no matter what it is, can only be an integral part of some system apart from which it cannot even be conceived.

Thus, on the one hand, if one is to conceive of an 'it' there must be a system; and on the other hand, there must be an 'it' if he must have a system.[1] The concept of a heart, to go back to the same example, is related to the system of concepts of the human organism, which, as we have seen in the case of the heart itself, in part determine, its nature. In other words, the heart can be understood, not in isolation, but in so far as it is an integral component of the animal organism, or better still, of a wider system. Moreover, it is better understood by the physiologist who has deeper understanding of the heart and its place in the living organism as well as in nature or the universe. This living organism is revealed to the

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1. There is no logical limit, however, for pursuing that ultimate 'it', if it exists at all. We cannot actually point to it; and if we take anything to be that 'it', it will be a mere assumption necessitated by our minds. For to know the ultimate 'it' is to know reality as a whole. On the other hand, it is logically possible to keep looking for it and yet never find it. In the first case, if we assume an 'it', we can never know it except in a context; the other case is absurd. This conclusion is or implies one of the objections that we have raised against the doctrine of degrees of truth, which makes it invalid. (See criticism of the doctrine of degrees of truth in the last chapter.)

physiologist by its various parts and functions more perfectly than to the layman. The physiologist's judgement of the organism is an integral part of a system of experience more coherent than that of the layman. The former is aware of a greater number of relations of the 'heart', not only to the body, but also to the universe at large. His awareness or knowledge of the human organism is much deeper, and therefore the degree of truth it has is higher than that of the layman.

Any inanimate object, such as a chair, will serve further to illustrate this theory. A chair is an integral part of the physical environment. It is not a collection of percepts each taken by itself, nor is it only these taken together. It is in addition something to sit on, since it is related to human purposes and needs. And this we cannot perceive sensibly. Thus a chair cannot be apprehended apart from a system of relations, including its relations to human beings. And if one takes away these relations, he destroys the chair. Not only does similar reasoning apply to other concrete instances but also to terms such as specific 'colors' and specific 'numbers' as well. We cannot conceive of color 'blue', for example, divorced from the spectral system and a specific medium or a set of conditions. Nor can we ascribe any significance to number 'one', for instance independently of the numerical system which has in turn significance only in relation or with reference to the actual system of nature. The

arithmetical equation, '2 + 2 = 4', as such will have no meaning, and therefore, if we can ever know it, would be neither true nor false. Its component, '2', for example, will be meaningful only if it is related to the numerical system, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to nature such as two stones, two persons or two specific mental experiences and so on, these being in turn related internally to their context. Thus all judgements, including mathematical ones, are relative to some system, and all lesser systems are relative to and included in wider systems. Since all judgements are relative to some context, the truth of all judgements consequently is relative and a matter of degree.

Every judgement is selective and because selective is conditional. Unless the judgement is so made as to include all the conditions, which is hardly possible, its truth must be, also, conditional. For each judgement is relative to a system of knowledge which when modified, results in the modification of the judgement. That is, our conception of the whole affects our conception of the parts and vice versa. Now in so far as that system of knowledge itself is an integral part of the system of nature, since the two are internally related, (and assuming reality to be in process), neither the system itself nor its component parts can be conceived as complete and final. In other words, no judgement can claim to convey absolute or complete knowledge. Thus, to put it more generally,

every entity or term is relative to a system of entities or terms and neither can exist apart from the other. Any system is, again, relative to a still wider system. Even the whole, the universe, at any particular time (assuming reality to be a process) is relative to its future development. Our knowledge which is based on and derived from experience (in the widest possible sense) is relative to and complete in the degree to which reality is revealed in that experience, and as a consequence, the truth of that knowledge is only a matter of degree.

"To think of any object", to quote Blanshard's summary of the logical ground of the doctrine of degrees of truth, "whatever is to think of it in its relations to what is beyond it. There are always some of these relations that are so vital to the thing's nature and therefore to our concept of its nature, that neither could be what it is if cut off from them. Thus our concept can never be adequate till we have embraced these in our thought, and since we never do grasp them all, our thought (is adequate only to a degree - its truth is relative.)"[1]

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1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 318.

CHAPTER IX

CRITICISM OF THE COHERENCE THEORY OF TRUTH

My exposition of the coherence theory of truth took the form of critically exposing the nature of coherence, some of its presuppositions and implications, and finally of a defence of the theory. Throughout this exposition I have presented the theory as forcibly as possible. I shall now attempt to give a critical evaluation of this theory of truth in five arguments which show its inadequacy as the ultimate criterion and nature of truth.

1. According to the coherence theory, nothing which is meaningful falls outside some system. Since the truth of a judgement is relative to and consists in its being in a system, no judgement is absolutely false. Is it reasonable to assert that no judgement is absolutely false? If it can be shown actually as well as <u>in principle</u> that it is possible to have judgements which are absolutely false, then the coherence theory, which denies such a possibility, will be proved to be inadequate.

I shall attempt to show that actually there are absolutely false judgements. The judgements, '1 + 2 = 6', 'the part is equal to or greater than the whole', 'a round-

square figure can be constructed', and 'a person or a thing can be in two different places at the same time and in the same respect', are examples of absolute falsity. Let us discuss each briefly.

The judgement, '1 + 2 = 6', is a component of the numerical system. It is made up of the terms or numbers '1', '2', and '6'. It expresses a relation of equality between the first two terms together and the third. If we take '1' as the unit of number or quantity, numbers '2' and '6' are number, '1', repeated twice and six times respectively. One side of the equation will be three units and the other side six units. Since by definition 'six' is not equal to but is twice 'three', the two sides of the equation are not equal and they cannot possibly without alteration be made equal. The judgement which states that they are equal is therefore absolutely false. Hence as a component of our ordinary numerical system, the judgement, '1 + 2 = 6', is absolutely false.

The judgement is also absolutely false in so far as it refers to or is used to indicate a relation between particular terms, no matter what these terms may be, for example, 2 pencils + 1 pencil = 6 pencils. The reason is that the left side of the equation, that is, the subject of the judgement, in the present instance 3 pencils, is not equal to or identical with the right side of the equation, the predicate of the judgement, namely, 6 pencils. And it

would be false to assert that the subject of the judgement is identical with the predicate when in fact they are not.

If we analyze the judgement into two component-judgements, one asserting our perception of 3 pencils and the other our perception of 6 pencils, we find that the identification of the two judgements makes '1 + 2 = 6' inconsistent with itself as well as incoherent with the facts of perception or experience. Since inconsistency is incompatible with the coherence theory, and it does not admit of degrees, the judgement is absolutely false.

To defend his denial of absolute falsity, Blanshard would insist that the judgement, '1 + 2 = 6', is not independent of or isolated from a system and that it is related to a psychological as well as to a logical context on which its truth or falsity depends. With a change in its context, the meaning of the judgement and therefore its truth would also change. The understanding of the mathematician, for example, of the judgement is more profound than that of the school-boy. The former knows more facts about the judgement as well as about mathematical systems. In the light of such knowledge, the judgement would have a higher degree of truth.

However, Blanshard's defense of his denial of absolute falsity does not stand examination. In the first place, granting that the judgement, '1 + 2 = 6' is related to a context and that the understanding of the mathematician of

the judgement is greater than that of the school-boy or the plain man; still this does not make the judgement any less false.

In seeking to know the truth of '1 + 2 = 6,' our interest will not be to determine how wide the psychological context or system of the mathematician or the school-boy may be but whether or not the two sides of the equation are identical. The difference in the so-called mathematical knowledge of the mathematician and the school-boy is irrelevant to the existence or non-existence of such identity. That two quantities are or are not equal does not depend on how much mathematics one knows, even though such knowledge may be important for making us aware of truth, if truth were there. No two unequal quantities ever become equal if one's knowledge increases or decreases. It is rather the sort of relation between the judgement and its object that determines whether or not the judgement is true. Again, since by interpreting a judgement in a new light, that is, putting it in a new context, the judgement becomes (as the coherence theory holds) a new one, then again we will be avoiding the issue if we attempt to make the truth of '1 + 2 = 6' dependent on or relative to a context which it is not yet in. Thus, that a judgement is relative to a context, whether logical or psychological, does not in the least make it true or have a certain degree of truth, if it is false. Since the two quantities which the judgement

asserts to be identical are not identical and since identity does not admit of degrees, the judgement is absolutely false.

Secondly, assuming that a judgement is relative to, and dependent for its truth on, a context, both psychological and logical, what context will Blanshard and the advocates of the coherence theory construct which will make '1 + 2 = 6' true or have a certain degree of truth? As far as I can know no such context can possibly exist. Such a context is not conceivable or accessible to human knowledge. Moreover, since with the construction of a new context the judgement in hand becomes a new judgement and since in the present system that we have, as we have seen '1 + 2 = 6' is absolutely false, '1 + 2 = 6' will remain absolutely false. Even if the advocates of the coherence theory attribute a certain degree of truth to all actual judgements, the degree of truth of each judgement will be fixed. It will be impossible for any judgement to have any lower or higher degree of truth at any time or in any context. And this is in a sense what we mean by absolute truth. That is, although the truth of a judgement is a matter of degree, yet it is what it is.

The judgement, '1 + 2 = 6', will be true, and absolutely true, if for instance, we interpret it to mean '1 pair of chairs + 2 pairs of chairs = 6 chairs'. It is absolutely true because the two members of the equation are an identity. This

judgement, however, would not be the initial judgement that we had. Similarly, the assertion that there are four chairs in a room when in fact there are only two is not the same assertion that we make after we bring in to that room two more chairs to make up the number to four. Thus it is true that with a change in the context the judgement may become true. But the assertion, as we have said, will not be the same assertion we have made before. And consequently, the falsity of the initial assertion remains absolute.

Another defense which Blanshard may offer for his denial of absolute falsity may be this: The judgement, '1 pencil + 2 pencils = 6 pencils', involves and is involved by judgements such as 'there are two pencils', 'there is an addition of 1 and 2' and 'there is an equality sign between the two quantities or sides of the equation'. The judgement implies, too, that there is a mathematical system, that there are numbers, that these numbers are related to each other as well as to the world, that it is possible to have many narrow systems and ultimately one all-inclusive system, and so on. If the judgement, so far as the equality of the two sides of the equation is concerned, is false, this does not mean, Blanshard would say, that all the judgements which it involves are false. In other words, the judgement is true to a degree, it cannot be wholly false.

If '1 + 2 = 6' is not absolutely false but has a certain

degree of truth, depending on its component-judgements, in what sense will it have a certain degree of truth? Obviously in the only legitimate sense, namely, that only some of its components are absolutely true. A wholly true judgement, in contrast to a partially true one, is that in which not only some but all the component-parts are absolutely true. Conversely, '1 + 2 = 6' is not wholly and absolutely false because some of its parts such as 'there is an addition of 1 and 2', 'there is an equality sign between the two quantities or sides of the equation', and so on, are absolutely true. I believe, however, as Ewing does[1], that since the judgement asserts that all and not some of its parts are absolutely true, the judgement has no degree of truth, that is, it is absolutely false, even though some of its parts are absolutely true. Moreover, that a judgement is partly true because some of its components are true (and the rest are false) ends after all in an assertion of the absolute truth and the absolute falsity of the component parts. That is, truth and falsity are absolute.

It might perhaps be said that this argument would be valid if 'degrees of truth' mean the absolute truth of the parts. But since this meaning of degrees of truth is not the one which the coherence theory implies, the argument

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1. Ewing, A.C., Idealism, p. 219.

therefore has no force.

Blanshard's objection seems at first sight to be valid. I would be convinced, however, of its validity if it is possible to state the precise meaning of degrees of truth which the coherence theory implies. But when we realize that Blanshard does not and that it is not possible to give any clear or precise meaning to degrees of truth and that the sense of degrees of truth we have given is ultimately the only legitimate sense[1], we realize the invalidity of the objection.

Again, although every judgement is related to a judging mind and an object about which the judgement is made, this does not mean, that a judgement cannot have absolute truth or absolute falsity. For it is in a context that we assert a judgement to be absolutely false or absolutely true. With no judging mind and no object to judge, it is not possible to have any judgement at all. Reality, the ground and object of all knowledge, will be denied; and knowledge becomes impossible. But this does not mean that truth itself is relative to the context.

Although the object and the judging mind are parts of the context of the judgement, still Blanshard might say that they do not constitute its whole context. A judgement is not

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1. See the following argument, p. 113.

absolutely true or absolutely false because it is related to a judging mind and an object but because it is an integral part of a system of judgements as well.

In answer, it may be said, in the first place, that the context of the system of judgements itself which is thought to constitute the context of a judgement is a judging mind and an object. In the second place, if Blanshard insists on considering '1 + 2 = 6' to have a certain degree of truth because, in addition to its relation to an object and a judging mind, it is related to a system of judgements, still his defense of his rejection of absolute falsity would be untenable on two grounds: First, he must show us that context in which '1 + 2 = 6' would be true or have a certain degree of truth. But, as we have said, he cannot meet the challange. Such a context does not exist and cannot possibly exist. Second, it is enough to know roughly the meaning of the conventional symbols of ' + ' , ' = ' , ' 1 ' , ' 2 ' , and ' 6 ' , and that ' 3 ' is not equal and cannot possibly be equal to ' 6 ' to realize the absolute falsity of ' 1 + 2 = 6 ' . Although the meaning of the judgement is dependent for its communication on a system of conventions, yet its truth is not. The system of judgements which involves, or is involved by, '1 + 2 = 6' is irrelevant to the truth of the judgement. If we have two quantities, 3 pencils and six pencils, mere perception would make us realize that they are not identical;

and therefore we will be wrong if we assert that they are. Consequently, no matter to what content '1 + 2 = 6' may be related, the judgement is absolutely false.

If '1 + 2 = 6' has only a certain degree of truth, what particular degree of truth will it have? Will the judgements, '1 + 3 = 6', '1 + 4 = 6', '1 + 4.5 = 6', and so on, have the same, higher, or lower degrees of truth? Probably Blanshard would say that each of these judgements has a higher degree of truth than the preceeding one. But on what assumption would Blanshard make such an assertion? It could only be on the assumption that '1 + 5 = 6', or some other judgement, is the limit, that is, the absolute truth, in comparison to which the various degrees of truth are measured. On the other hand, Blanshard argues that no actual judgement such as '1 + 5 = 6', can take into consideration the complete nature of its object and therefore be wholly and absolutely true. Thus there is an inconsistency between the <u>inescapable</u> notion of truth as limit and the belief in degrees of truth; hence the coherence theory must be rejected.

There is, however, a fallacy in interpreting truth as a limit. Assuming that equality does not admit of degrees, the judgements '1 + 3 = 6', '1 + 4 = 6' and 1 + 4.5 = 6', which assert two unequal quantities to be equal are therefore absolutely false. None of these judgements should be confused with the judgement which asserts that a quantity in the left

side of one equation is greater than the corresponding quantity in the left side of the other equation. The truth of this judgement is irrelevant to the truth of any of these judgements, if they are false.

Again, to argue that the judgement '1 + 2 = 6' is true to a degree because we do not have adequate knowledge of the ultimate nature of number, for example, 'twoness', is another way of avoiding the issue. Our interest for the present is not to determine the general nature of number, that is, number 'one' or 'two' as such or in themselves. It is rather to determine whether or not '3' is identical with or equal to '6'. Even if we do not know the ultimate nature of number, with the knowledge that we have about the symbols and the particular numbers in the equation, we can perfectly well determine whether or not '1 + 2 = 6' is false. Thus to repeat, so far as it expresses a numerical relation between two unequal quantities which it asserts to be equal, the judgement is absolutely false.

Similar discussion of the judgement, 'the part is equal to or greater than the whole,' will show that the judgement is absolutely false. It suffices to point out some of the disasterous implications of the judgement, if it were true. One individual man, for example, will be numerically equal or greater than the world-population, one second of time will be equal to the whole stretch of time; there will be no

difference between one centimeter and the distance from the earth to the sun, or between one gram of mass and the mass of the entire universe or between a partial truth and the whole of truth - which is absurd. A room which can hold only one individual man must equally hold within its bounds the entire world. A simple experiment, however, such as attempting to room the population of only one city, such as New York will convince any one of the impossibility of doing so. That the part is equal or greater than the whole is impossible also in principle: the part is a part because it is smaller than the whole of which it is a part; otherwise it ceases to be a part. Similarly the whole is a whole because it is made up of its parts; otherwise it ceases to be a whole. In the third place, it is not conceivable or conceivable to have a context or system in which the part will be equal or greater than the whole. Thus to take the part as equal to or greater than the whole is in principle absurd as well as actually impossible. Therefore the judgement is absolutely false.

Another example of absolute falsity is this: 'A person or a thing can be in different places at the same time and in the same respect'. If such a judgement were true there would be no distinction between particular 'places', 'times' or 'respects'. Everything will be everything else. Nothing will be what it is. 'A' and 'not -A' will be the same. Everything becomes absurd. Consequently, if we are to have

anything and if our attempt to know reality is to have any significance, then we must assume the identity of the terms that we deal with. Since we cannot actually have or conceive of a person or a thing to be in two different places at the same time and in the same respect the judgement which asserts such an impossibility is actually as well as in principle absolutely false. Our final example of absolute falsity is that a round-square figure can be constructed. The judgement is in principle a self-contradiction, and actually impossible; therefore it is absolutely false.

In principle, absolute falsity is possible. It will be the negation of all the relations which define or make up a particular term. If, according to the coherence theory, a term is what it is because of the totality of its relations to every other term in the universe, then the judgement or the group of judgements about that term which deny each of these relations will be absolutely false.

Thus that there can be no judgement which is absolutely false seems to bear some plausibility only on some metaphysical theory which no man can know or conceive of; but it seems to lack any significance or meaning in actual as well as conceivable human knowledge. We conclude that actually as well as in principle there is falsity and absolute falsity.

Is belief in absolute falsity consistently with the coherence theory? The answer is in the negative. An absolutely false judgement either exists in a system or independently. Both alternatives are incompatible with the coherence theory. On the

one hand, the theory asserts that no judgement can exist independently of a system; on the other hand, if an absolutely false judgement can exist in a system, then it must involve and be involved by the rest of the system. That is, truth and falsity would imply each other - which is absurd. Thus because the coherence theory leaves no room for absolutely false judgements, it is consequently inadequate.

2. Our criticism of the doctrine of degrees of truth as well as of the coherence theory which implies it must clarify and state precisely the possible meanings of 'degrees of truth'.

In the first place, let us assume K to be the whole of reality, and S, A, H, O ... N to be its component-parts. Each component part is either <u>simple</u> or made up of a number, whether infinite or finite, of component-parts. For example, S may have components such as o, e, b, i ... n, each having a number of component-parts, and so on. Since there can be no system of reality apart from its individual components, consequently to know reality is really to know its individual components in relation.

According to the coherence theory of truth, no judgement which is the absolute and whole truth is known to us; and the judgements that we have are only <u>partly</u> true or have a certain degree of truth, because they give us only

a partial or an incomplete knowledge of reality. That is, the degree of truth which a proposition has varies directly with our knowledge of reality. What are then the possible meanings of 'partial' knowledge or 'degrees of truth'? There are two logically possible meanings: (a) either we know some components of reality completely; or (b) we know some or all components partially - which, as we shall see, essentially lead to the same conclusion, the absurdity of the doctrine of degrees of truth. We shall now discuss each meaning separately.

(a) If to know reality partially means knowing some of its components completely - assuming the doctrine of internal relations and the idealistic conception of the nature of a thing[1] we must then know reality as a whole. That is, to know K partially would, ex hypothesi, mean to know S, or S, A and H, and so on, completely. But to know S, or any other component-part, completely means to know o, e, b, i ... n as well as A, H, O ... N, in a word, to know K completely. The reason is that S is internally related to every other term in the world, that is, to reality as a whole. And the nature of S includes all the relations or the context which S may possibly

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1. It will be remembered that according to the doctrine of internal relations, the universe is a system of internally related parts or terms. The nature of any term, or component-part includes all the relations that that term may possibly have, that is, its context which is the whole universe. Thus to know the nature of anything completely is to know the whole of reality.

have. Consequently, to know the whole of reality partially is to know it completely - which is absurd. Hence the failure of this interpretation of the doctrine of degrees of truth.

We shall illustrate the same argument by an actual example: The human organism is a system made up of components, the so-called digestive, circulatory and nervous systems, and so on; each of these has component-organs which are also made of component-tissues. These living tissues are composed of living units, the cells. The cells also have parts, each having other parts, and so on. Assuming the human organism to be a system, all these parts must be internally related. Moreover the human organism is a component-part in a wider system; it is internally related to air, water, pressure, earth, in a word, to the entire universe. If to know the human organism partially means to know some or one of its components, for example, the cell, completely, then we must know the whole context of that component-part, that is, the whole reality. Thus to know the human organism partially is know it completely and know the whole reality as well - which is absurd. Hence the failure of this doctrine of degrees as well as its incompatibility with the coherence theory of truth.

(b) The other possible meaning of partial knowledge or degrees of truth is to have some knowledge of all (or of some) component-parts of reality. On the one hand, to know

a part partially may mean to know some part of it completely.[1] But to know a part of a part completely would mean, according to the coherence theory, to know it wholly or completely and therefore to know reality as a whole. Thus to know reality partially would be to know it completely - which is absurd. On the other hand, to know any one component-part partially may mean to know all or some (at least one) of its components partially or incompletely. To know S partially would mean to know a, or a, e, b ... n partially. And to know a partially would mean to know its parts partially, and so on. To know the human organism partially or to have a certain degree of truth about it, to use the same example, would mean to have some or an incomplete knowledge of all or some of its parts; and to know anyone of these parts, for instance, the cell, partially means also to have some or an incomplete knowledge of all or some of its parts, for instance, the nucleus and cytoplasm. And to know the nucleus partially means in turn to know incompletely its parts, and so on. In order to have any knowledge at all, one must assume to know some part or aspect or relation of reality completely; otherwise knowledge will be impossible. Consequently, the meaning of partial knowledge will have significance only if

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1. This sense of partial knowledge reduces to the first sense we have discussed, namely that to know reality partially is to know some of its parts completely.

it reduces to the first sense, namely that, to know a thing partially means to know some of its parts completely. Thus the only possible and legitimate sense of partial knowledge or degrees of truth is the complete knowledge of some parts of reality.

If we assume reality to be infinitely divisible, then to speak of knowing some ultimate thing would be nonsense; for there would be no ultimate thing. On the other hand, assuming reality to have a finite number of parts, we must ultimately have parts which have no parts or which are not divisible.

If we assume an independently-existing, ultimate thing, an object which we know completely[1], then the nature of that thing or object will not include or depend on its context, the universe; therefore a complete knowledge of it will not involve knowing reality as a whole. And this is inconsistent with the idealistic conception of knowledge, and the doctrine of internal relations underlying it. Consequently the coherence theory including its doctrine of degrees of truth will be untenable.

On the other hand, if we assume that thing to be, what the coherence theory holds, internally related to the whole

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1. Since this ultimate thing has no parts and no relations, the second sense of partial knowledge necessarily reduces to the first, namely that of complete knowledge of the part.

of the universe, then a complete knowledge of it must involve knowing reality as a whole. We have already dealt with this conception of partial knowledge and found that it is inconsistent with, and therefore that it dismisses, the doctrine of degrees of truth and therefore the coherence theory which implies it.

This interpretation of degrees of truth, Blanshard would say, would lead to the failure of the coherence theory only if the coherence theory implies it. But according to the coherence theory, no judgement or a part of a judgement is absolutely and wholly true. Hence partial knowledge or degrees of truth in the sense that some parts of reality are absolutely and completely known is not the one that the coherence theory implies. Consequently, the criticism of the doctrine of degrees of truth which the coherence theory is assumed to imply is invalid, since it is based on a misinterpretation of degrees of truth.

What does Blanshard mean by partial knowledge or degrees of truth, then? Since he does not state clearly the meaning of degrees of truth, and since ultimately the only legitimate sense of degrees of truth or partial knowledge is the complete knowledge of some parts of reality, Blanshard's objection would itself be untenable. Consequently, our criticism of the coherence theory and its implied doctrine of degrees of truth would still remain.

A judgement, Blanshard might say, is true to a degree in the sense that only some of its relations are known. An object will be known completely, that is, absolute and whole truth would be attained, if all the relations of that object are known. To know some of the relations of the object (what we mean by partial knowledge) does not entail knowing all its relations, that is, knowing it completely.

This interpretation of degrees of truth would defend the coherence theory if it were true that we can know the relation between one thing and another without knowing all its relations, that is, involving the entire universe.[1] But, as we have seen, according to the coherence theory, we cannot know any one relation between one thing and another without knowing its relation to every other thing, that is, the whole universe. That is, to know reality partially is to know it completely. Consequently Blanshard's attempt to defend the coherence theory fails. Our criticism that the doctrine of degrees of truth is incompatible with the coherence theory which implies it, still remains.

To sum up, the meaning of 'partial knowledge' and 'degrees of truth' is ambiguous. Its ambiguity is inherent

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1. We are assuming that relation cannot be a matter of degree. Either a thing is related to another thing completely or it is not. And to know the relation between one thing and another thing is to know that relation completely.

in the nature of the very conception of degrees of truth. The inconsistency and, therefore, the inadequacy of the theory becomes apparent, when we attempt to give it a definite and precise meaning, as we have seen. Hence we see that the doctrine of degrees of truth is untenable, and the coherence theory which implies it leads ultimately to scepticism:

If to know anything completely is to know reality as a whole, then since we do not know the whole of reality we do not know anything completely. And since the concept of partial knowledge leads to absurdity, then we do not know anything at all. Thus the coherence theory leads to scepticism.

A more direct way of presenting this argument is this: Since partial knowledge is absurd, then either we know nothing or if we know anything, we know it completely. According to the coherence theory, we know nothing completely; therefore we know nothing at all.

3. The coherence theory of truth asserts that, within the framework of the knowledge we have, we may have only relative truth. That is, so far as actual knowledge is

concerned, we do not know reality as a whole, and therefore we do not know any judgement which is wholly and absolutely true. If all that we can have is relative or partial truth, then the proposition that truth is relative or partial must be asserted absolutely, and at least this assertion must be absolutely and wholly true. Thus there is at least one exception to, and therefore inconsistency in, the doctrine of degrees of truth.

We are not asserting, Blanshard would object, that our assertion that truth is relative is absolutely true. This very assertion is not independent of a context and therefore with a change in the context its truth will change; that is, truth is relative. Moreover, the admission that the truth of our assertion that all truth is relative does not imply that we must actually know some assertions or judgements to be absolutely and wholly true, even though we may admit it in principle. Since the coherence theory asserts that it is actual knowledge that is partial or relative, there is no inconsistency.

In the first place, if our assertion that truth is relative is not absolutely (in the sense that it is <u>not certain</u>) true, then on the one hand, all assertions will be relatively true (and <u>this</u> will be an absolute assertion

of relative truth); and on the other hand, we would be admitting that some judgements may be known to be absolutely (in the sense of completely) true - which again dismisses the coherence theory.

In the second place, if meaning is dependent on a context, does it mean that truth depends on a context of judgements, or is it a specific, fixed relation between the judgement and its object, no matter what that object may be? If the object is an integral part of a context does it mean that truth is relative? Absolute truth must be understood to be the whole and complete truth. An absolutely true judgement is one which is independent of the knower, unchanging and therefore objective. On the other hand, relative truth must be understood to be partial, incomplete, changing, dependent on a context, and to vary from individual to individual, and from group to group. That is, it is subjective. In seeking truth, the context - whether psychological or logical - which a judgement may have, as we have said, is irrelevant to the truth of the judgement. It is rather the relation between the judgement and its object that makes the judgement true or false. Consequently, although meaning depends on and varies with the context, yet truth does not. In other words, truth is absolute.

Assuming that meaning varies with context, the same sentence (or words) in a different respect will be a different judgement with different meaning. Different persons and even the same person may speak the same words in different contexts; and the meaning of these words will be different in each respect, and therefore, they express each time a different judgement. Thus each judgement has an invariable or unchanging meaning, and therefore its truth does not change. In other words, truth is absolute.

It may be objected that the assertion which is believed to be absolutely true, is a judgement of a secondary degree. That is, it is an assertion made about other assertions. Since there can be no inconsistency between different types of judgements, there is no inconsistency involved in the coherence theory of truth.

We reply that like every other kind of judgement, a judgement of a secondary degree is an integral part of a context and it must be treated like every other judgement. Complete knowledge of it, as complete knowledge of any other judgement, according to the coherence theory, involves knowing reality as a whole. But the coherence theory asserts that we do not know reality as a whole. Hence the inconsistency and the inadequacy of this theory of truth.

Belief in absolute truth implies two alternative consequences. If there is an absolutely true judgement which

is not the whole truth, then truth will not consist in system, since to know the whole truth of a judgement is to know reality as a whole. The coherence theory would not be in a better position, however, if we consider the alternative belief which the coherence theory implies, namely that an absolutely true assertion or judgement is the whole truth; such an assertion must therefore take into consideration the whole of reality. Since, as we have seen, we know an absolutely true assertion or judgement, namely that, all truth is relative, then we must know reality as a whole. But according to the coherence theory, we do not know reality as a whole. Hence the self-contradiction involved in and therefore the inadequacy of this idealistic theory or account of truth.

4. According to the coherence theory of truth, no judgement is absolutely false, since no judgement can exist in isolation from or independently of a system. No 'narrow' system of judgements can also be isolated or excluded from a wider system, and ultimately from the ideal system of coherence. This may be illustrated or explained as follows:

Let us assume a and b to be component judgements of systems A and B respectively. Since, according to the coherence theory of truth, nothing which is absolutely false can be found, each judgement or system must have a certain degree

of truth and therefore it can be included in the system which has a higher degree of truth. Now either A can be included in B or vice versa, depending on whether one is wider than the other, or both can be included in a system, for example, C, which is wider than any of them and which can include both. Consequently a and b will be component-judgements in system C. Similarly system C may be a component-member of a still wider system, F; and therefore judgements a and b will be component-judgements in system F, and so on. For the sake of illustration, we may consider the A.U.B. and Tripoli College to be two parts of Beirut and Tripoli respectively. Since Beirut and Tripoli are component-parts of Lebanon which is also a part of the wider Arab world and ultimately of the entire world, the A.U.B. and Tripoli College have to form parts of the world as a whole. If none of judgements a and b can be included in any system, the truth or falsity of each would be absolute. Similarly if none of systems A and B can include the other or both be included in a wider system, then their truth or falsity would not be relative to any system, that is, it would be absolute. But since according to the coherence theory the truth or falsity of no judgement or narrow system is absolute, ultimately all judgements and narrow systems have to be included in the ideal system of coherence.

What does the belief in the all-inclusive character

of the ideal system of coherence imply? In the first place, if the truth of a judgement is relative to or varies with a system, the wider the system, the higher the degree of truth of the judgement will be. If all judgements, whether actual or possible, are ultimately components of the ideal system of coherence, then all of these judgements must be absolutely true. But the coherence theory asserts that all actual judgements are only partially true. Hence the inconsistency involved in the coherence theory.

In the second place, there is an infinite number of propositions which are the contradictories of other propositions. And in fact if our first criticism were true, there are some propositions which are absolutely false. In the absolute system these propositions must all cohere so that each implies all the others. False propositions would imply true propositions and vice versa. Consequently, mutually contradictory propositions (false propositions and true propositions) must be assumed to be coherent in the absolute or the ideal system of coherence. But inconsistency is incompatible with the ideal of a coherent system. Consequently, there is inconsistency inherent in the very conception of coherence, and therefore, by its own criterion of truth, the coherence theory is false.

Blanshard might object that although any given judgement is ultimately a component of the ideally coherent system,

yet no actual judgement would be the same judgement after it is seen to be included in that ideal system of coherence. For since every judgement is an integral part of a context, with a change in the context the nature of the judgement changes. Thus two given contradictory judgements would cease to be contradictory in a wider system, ultimately in the ideal coherent system. Therefore there is no inconsistency involved in the ideal system of coherence.

This objection does not stand examination. In the first place, I do not see how the change which can make two contradictory judgements cease to be non-contradictory takes place. Two contradictory judgements would cease to be contradictory and at the same time cease to be the two given judgements. That is, instead of two contradictory judgements we will now have two (other) non-contradictory judgements. Moreover, it is not necessary that two contradictory judgements should cease to be contradictory in a wider system. Although they may change their meaning - that is, become two new judgements - yet they might remain contradictory. Just as two contradictory judgements may cease to be contradictory in the ideal system of coherence, two non-contradictory judgements may become contradictory in it. In the same way as there is nothing in principle to prevent the change of two contradictory judgements to a non-contradictory nature, the converse is also possible. Thus contradictory judgements

will have to co-exist in the absolute system, which is the height of irrationality.

In the second place, if no actual judgement can remain what it is if included in a wider system or in the ideal system of coherence, then the truth of that judgement would be independent of that system, it would not change. Assume a and b to be two contradictory judgements in system C, and assume them to cease to be contradictory (calling them a' and b') in system D. a' and b' are not, according to the coherence theory, identical with a and b. Consequently, a and b are still contradictory. Thus a change in the context gives us two new judgements, a' and b', rather than makes the assumed contradictory judgements, a and b, cease to be contradictory. If both cannot be true, and if only one is true and the other false, the true judgement will always be true and the false one will always be false. The same can be said of systems C and D. From the viewpoint of a wider system, ultimately the ideal system of coherence, these systems would cease to be what they are. However, if any of these systems is true, its truth does not change. On the other hand, if any of them is false, it will always be false. But their truth or falsity may still be a matter of degree. In other words, truth and falsity are absolute.

In the third place, as far as we know, there are actually contradictory judgements, and in principle for every

possible judgement there is a possible contradictory judgement. Contradictory judgements, whether actual or possible, in order to preserve their identity, must preserve their contradictory character. If the holder of the coherence theory says that contradictory judgements are contradictory only in the actual system, for example, K, of which they are component-parts, our answer will be this: Either system K is a part of a wider system, ultimately of the ideal system, or it exists independently. If K is a part of the ideal system, then any contradictory judgement which it may contain will form a part of that ideal system. Therefore the ideal system will be inconsistent. On the other hand, if system K is independent of the ideal system, the truth of the former system will be independent of the latter, i.e. its truth or falsity will be absolute. This dismisses the coherence theory which asserts that the truth of no actual judgement or system of judgements is absolute.

Our criticism would still hold if the so-called contradictory judgements were either partially or completely exclusive. That is, the one partially true and the other partially false, or the one completely true and the other completely false. The existence of judgements which are partially, or completely, contradictory in the ideal system of coherence would still shatter the coherence theory, since the ideal system would still contain false judgements (whether

these are partially or completely false).

Thus my objection that there is inconsistency in the very notion of coherence still holds. Such an objection, however, would not be valid if we can assert what idealism asserts: that all statements and their contradictories, for instance, 'the earth is flat' and 'the earth is round', can happily co-exist in the ideal system of coherence. This is the height of irrationality as far as I can see.

5. According to the coherence theory of truth[1], the truth of any judgement is tested by the coherence of that judgement with all the other judgements in the system. In a system of judgements such as C, P, E, R ... N, the truth of C is tested by its coherence with P, E, R ... N; and the truth of R or any other judgement in the system will be tested by the coherence of each with the rest of the system. That is, each of C, P, E ... N will partly be the criterion of truth of R; and each of P, E, R ... N will partly be the criterion of truth of C, and so on. Thus R (which is only a part of the system) will test partly the truth of C; and C (which is another part of the system) will test partly the truth of R. In other words to test the truth of C is to

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1. See discussion on the circularity of the coherence theory p. 79.

assume it already to be true. Consequently the coherence theory of truth argues in a circle.

The holders of the coherence theory may object by saying that since no judgement can exist in isolation from a system, the truth of any judgement is relative to, and is tested by the whole system, rather than by any single individual judgement. To consider one judgement the ground of truth for another is to attribute independence as well as absolute truth to that judgement, which is contrary to what the coherence theory of truth asserts. Thus since no single judgement exists in isolation from another or from a system, no single judgement can be tested or be the test of another single judgement. Hence there is no circularity. Instead there is mutual support.

To consider that a judgement is true because it coheres with the rest of the system without being coherent with each of the individual component-judgements of that system (whether individually or collectively) is absurd. For apart from these individual components that system will not exist. The test of truth of a judgement by coherence with the rest of the system implies finding out whether or not that judgement is coherent with each of the component-judgements which make up that system. If it is coherent with all the judgements collectively (which implies that it is coherent with each judgement singly), then it is true. And if it is incoherent

with only one component judgement (which means that it is incoherent with the system as a whole) then it is false. Thus granting what the idealists asserts, namely that all the judgements in a system are internally related to each other, it still remains that the test of truth of a judgement ultimately requires its coherence with each of the other component-judgements, singly. Consequently if the components of a system have anything to do with testing the truth of a component-member, the coherence-test can only refer each judgement back to its coherence with every judgement of the system. Thus the attempt to answer the objection of the circularity of the coherence-test of truth fails; and to call 'circularity' 'reciprocal support', as Blanshard does is merely to conceal the invalidity of the theory.

The same argument may be further developed. Of two judgements in a system, the criterion of truth of one will be the rest of the system including the other judgement. Similarly in testing the truth of the second judgement, the first judgement will be included in the part of system which constitutes the test of truth. If the system is the criterion of truth of a component judgement, each component of that system must participate in forming such a criterion. Thus ultimately the two judgements must participate in forming the criterion of truth of each other. In testing the truth of one, the other must be assumed to be true since it will

be a component of a system which (as the criterion of truth of a component judgement) we assume to be true. For the same reason, in testing the truth of the latter the former must be assumed to be true which is circular.

That the coherence-test of truth is circular may be shown by an argument similar to that we have already given. Since truth consists in system, the question of testing the truth of a given judgement in some system will be to see whether or not that judgement is coherent with that system. No judgement according to the coherence theory can exist independently of a system that is any judgement must be in a system. But a judgement cannot be included in a system (particularly the ideal system of coherence) unless it is coherent with it, that is, unless it has, according to the coherence theory, some degree of truth. Thus the judgement whose truth is to be tested, (since it is already assumed to be in a system) is already assumed to be true - which is circular.

If we assume a judgement to be 'outside' a system, this judgement would be true if it can be coherent or included in a system; and it would be false if it cannot be included in a system. Since a true judgement implies true (and only true) judgements, the system which implies a judgement and tests its truth must already be assumed to be true. Some wider system, ultimately the ideal system of coherence, which will

be the criterion of truth of each and all lesser systems must be assumed to be true. However, this ideal system will be the criterion of truth of itself. But since the system itself is made up of each judgement in it, therefore each of these judgements (since each judgement is a component part the given system) has something to do with the criterion of truth of itself - which is circularity.

Application of the coherence-test of truth to the component-judgements of the so-called systems of knowledge shows the circularity of the test. The example of system which most approaches ideal coherence, according to Blanshard, is Euclidean geometry. This system consists of a set of primitive assumptions (postulates and axioms) on which a structure of judgements is based. If we assume that one or all the primitive assumptions of geometry are self-evident, then the coherence test of truth and therefore the coherence theory will be dismissed. On the other hand if coherence is the sole test or criterion of truth, then a certain postulate will be true (or, according to the coherence theory, has a certain degree of truth) if it is coherent with the system of judgements which are derived from it. And these judgements will be true (no matter what their degree of truth is) if they cohere with the primitive assumptions. Hence the circularity of this test of truth. Testing the truth of judgements in the other actual systems of knowledge (which

approach the ideal system much less than Euclidian geometry) is in no better position. Consequently, coherence as the ultimate test of truth is inadequate.

The wider the system is, the greater is the circle and the more difficult is the detection of circularity in testing the truth of its judgements. Since the ideal system of coherence is the widest possible circle, the circularity will be extremely difficult to detect. Nevertheless the circularity must remain and ultimate truth can only be a tremendous petitio principii whose plausibility arises only as a result of the subtlety of the fallacy.

Our criticism of the coherence theory has shown that it leads to scepticism, that it is inconsistent and circular. Therefore it is invalid, and consequently it must be rejected as the ultimate criterion and nature of truth.

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