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INTRODUCTION

Christine HELMER and Kristin DE TROYER

Truth is only problematized when competing points of view vie for attention. The context in which truth is raised is one marked not by peace, but by controversy.

It is the aim of this volume to relate the controversy concerning competing knowledge claims to truth. In a pluralist context, substantive claims can no longer be made by skirting epistemological issues. Rather, claims concerning content can only be adequately addressed once epistemological issues have first been clarified.

Epistemological issues, however, cover more than just theories of knowing and how truth adjudicates between competing claims. Truth must furthermore be related to the hermeneutical task of understanding another's position. With understanding, the controversy is focused on one disputed issue, and produces knowledge in the process of arriving at some consensus regarding the one contended point. Finally, truth must be related to the rules governing the path by which competing claims arrive at consensus (or at least preliminary consensus). The appeal to truth criteria along this path is used when comparing positions according to their respective truth values, and thereby aids the resolving of disagreement. Truth in a pluralist age, hence, requires epistemology.

By situating truth in a dialogical context, we characterize truth as a search. Never wholly revealed by the divine in an eternal moment, nor able to be monopolized by an individual or group, truth is rather radically elusive. Within the bounds of finite reason, truth is available as partial and penultimate. The possibility of its search is given by its transcendental status, and the lure of its search is given by desire, located more in feeling than in thinking, which impels the search in the first place.

Contextualizing the search for truth in this volume are interdisciplinary dialogues between philosophers of religion, theologians, historians and biblical scholars. As a common focal point, the question of truth is posed by these fields in the context of discussing religion. This is no coincidence. In the history of Western thought, theology has been in a unique position to pose the truth question. As the study of the supreme being in relation to the self and world, theology has viewed absolute truth in view

of truth in the mind as well as in things in order to give truth its epistemological and its ontological foci. The unity of truth is constituted by the diversity of epistemological and ontological considerations arising from fields outside theology's immediate range, such as philosophy or history, or within its own purview, such as biblical studies or the philosophy of religion. By viewing a dimension of the self/world/God relation, each field contributes its particular understanding of the truth of its subject matter.

In this book, the interdisciplinary dialogues are structured thematically. Three sections concentrate on three aspects of the truth question in order to promote dialogue as the process by which truth as an intersubjective search is regulated. In the first section, "Truth and Reality," the age-old truth definition formulated by Aristotle and Aquinas concerning the agreement between language and reality is posed anew. Although truth as correspondence is not uncontroversial in this section, the common focal point of the contributions rests on interpreting how a type of language is related to a kind of reality construed by that language. The second section, "Truth and History," treats the question of the historical referentiality of biblical and religious-historical texts. This discussion brings to light the question of how the truth of particular textual genres involves a dimension of reality, however pragmatically, empirically or speculatively that reality might be understood. In the third section, "Truth and Religious Pluralism," the question addressed concerns truth as part of the epistemological apparatus to compare and contrast religious claims. The discussion focuses on how truth claims can be made given the context of religious diversity while also acknowledging the penultimacy of those claims without relativist consequences. As an experiment in structuring dialogue, the three themes propose differing dimensions to truth in order to invite both methodological and substantive reflections.

The first section raises the difficulties and merits of truth as correspondence, as well as connecting these issues to historical, linguistic and systematic considerations. Marvin Sweeney begins by taking seriously the fact that there are many truths within the Bible. He takes on the case of "true and false prophecy," and proposes that most biblical books contain a combination of true and potentially false prophecy. The interpreters of the prophetic voices disagree with their predecessors about the precise message—rendering former potentially true prophecies into potentially false ones. Jeremiah debates with contemporaries regarding the meaning of the Isaian tradition. Is the message about the deliverance from the Assyrians true? Or should the people submit to the Babylonians?

A problem, however, arises, for how can one prophet claim that the other one is a false prophet without himself being labeled a false prophet? The truth of an earlier prophet, Sweeney concludes, is relative to the circumstances and the means by which the prophecy is interpreted and by which it is realized.

In her paper, Christine Helmer builds on the problem of many truths in the field of systematic theology. A plurality of co-existing theological systems is not so much conceived as a problem but as an inevitability, given the Kantian (and Schleiermacherian) limits of knowing. From this starting-point, she proposes a model constitutive of systematic theological plurality. She embeds correspondence in coherence, arguing that the possibility for systematic coherence is ontologically/transcendentally grounded and theologically expressed in the narrative structure of classic systematic-theological ordering from creation to eschatology. Finally, the difficulty of the correspondence between theological propositions and reality is resolved by the Kantian figure of regulative and constitutive ideas.

Christof Landmesser demonstrates how the age of Enlightenment and the concurrent development of the historical-critical method lead to a marginalization of truth in view of the New Testament. He argues for a perspective from which truth can be claimed for New Testament science. What justifies scholars in claiming a statement to be true? Landmesser points to the need for a coherence analysis of the New Testament texts, appealing to the threefold criteria of comprehensiveness, consistency and cohesiveness. In view of the correspondence between statements and reality, he offers a transcendental solution, the "proposition" in Puntel's sense. Although all scientific statements about the New Testament must remain principally open to potential falsification or verification, there is a "christological preference criterion" that cannot be logically justified, yet is necessary for construing the self/world/God relation, and is to be acknowledged by a scientific study of the New Testament.

Kristin De Troyer studies Psalm 130. This psalm describes how a person tries to make sense of his/her belief in the coming of a forgiving God while at the same time being weighed down by the burden of Israel's sins. De Troyer takes a cognitive linguistic approach, and thus, moves out of the *adequatio* argument, exploring how categorizing in concepts and judging in metaphors creates (true) meaning for human beings. In her analysis, De Troyer asks questions related to the characters, their actions, and their situations in life, and finally, the focal issue of the psalm. A study of the prepositions and conjunctions used in the psalm shows

how the psalmist struggled with two opposing perspectives of life and God, and how both options can give meaning to life.

In a typical Phillips mode—examining the assumptions behind the allegiance of philosophers of religion to the *adequatio rei et intellectus*—D. Z. Phillips precisely questions the need for an *adequatio*—“Must Truths Tally?”—and moves the discussion from determining truth to investigating sense and meaning. In the first three sections, Phillips unravels beliefs about empirical matters, moral beliefs and religious beliefs. In his final section, he points to the difference in responsibilities of the philosopher and the theologian, the latter carrying the burden of preserving “pictures of God,” the former loving to bring—and lovely bringing—clarity to the discussion.

John Kloppenborg summarizes the contribution of Phillips and then probes two questions. What sense might the historian of religion make of religious polemics and conversion; and how is the historian and exegete to understand the relation of the truth claims contained in their texts to their work as an exegete? Kloppenborg answers by taking a closer look at “idolatry.” He concludes that conceptual analysis will not lead to the persuasion of one or the other believer—a conclusion very much in line with Phillips. Then Kloppenborg questions Phillips’ job description of a theologian as the guardian of the “pictures,” by pointing to the impossibility of knowing which picture of God preserves or effaces the divine image. This leaves the exegete and the historian with precisely the same task as the philosopher, namely clarifying the pictures and tracking its changes through history.

The second section on truth and history has at its forefront the referential question of biblical and historical texts. Tammi Schneider questions the historical truth in ancient texts. She discusses three cases in which one has at least two different views of what actually happened in a specific event. Is Hezekiah’s report on Jerusalem correct, or do the Assyrian’s own annals provide a true account of the event? How can one combine the biblical information on Jehu, and especially his dealing with the house of Omri, with the text of the Black Obelisk? And what precisely does “Israel” stand for in the biblical and non-biblical texts? Schneider argues that the biblical and the non-biblical texts offer their own readings of the events and that they reflect different understandings of the same event. The authors of the biblical texts as well as the authors of the non-biblical texts describe what is real for them, leaving the reader with different truths.

Using the fascinating example of the “ocular catechism,” Lori Anne Ferrell demonstrates how the newly emerging scientific paradigm in the seventeenth century—that skilled knowledge conferred power and confirmed truth—influenced the new religion, in which English Protestants

were being taught a version of Calvin’s doctrine of assurance that called on their skills of observation and analysis to record the signs of their election to salvation with accuracy and specificity. The belief in science and scientific instrumentation buttressed the idea that any learner could grasp the Truth, and thus could, e.g., get a clear picture of the doctrine of predestination. In brief, Ferrell shows that even hard ideas could be taught by easy method—Calvinism for Dummies *avant la lettre*!

Anselm Min offers a reading of Hegel’s ontology of truth against the criticism that Hegel sublated historical particularity into his speculative philosophy. For Min, Hegel’s understanding of truth is correlated with his understanding of being as dynamic and open-ended. Truth resides in the process of being’s becoming. On this basis, Min argues against a totalizing interpretation of Hegel’s understanding of history, and acknowledges that for Hegel, it is the historical context in which all philosophy makes its appearance including Hegel’s own.

The third theme of truth and religious pluralism advances beyond the classical typology associated with this topic (exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism) by taking pluralism seriously in full view of the truth question. Lieven Boeve also leaves the *adequatio* circle behind, and approaches the issue of truth from both a philosophical and fundamental-theological perspective. He links so-called post-modern philosophy with negative theology. He correctly points to the fact that it is precisely the presence of the other and the truth of the other that opens up the category of truth by insisting on the deficit both in our talking about the other as well as the Other. His solid recontextualized theological thinking offers a discourse about the One who cannot be contained in words, and who leaves theological truth open.

Richard Amesbury and H. Jong Kim continue on the path taken by Boeve, focusing on the plurality of religions and its repercussions on the issue of truth. In the first part of their contribution, they defend the classical conception of truth against Rorty’s attempt to replace objectivity with an ethnocentric solidarity with one’s peers, and against Alston, who divorces truth from epistemological considerations. In the second part, the authors focus on the incompatibility of different religious practices. They suggest that relativism can be avoided by distinguishing between the prescription of a practice and its appropriation. In the third part, they consider some theological possibilities for addressing the plurality of religious practices in the contemporary context.

In her paper, Marjorie Suchocki proposes a Whiteheadian ontology of truth as a solution to the problem of different religions’ differing doctrinal claims. She distinguishes between various layers of truth, locating

doctrinal truth at the highest “cosmic level” of truth, and eliminating the verifiability issue at this level. From a Whiteheadian perspective, this cosmic level is ontologically undergirded by the role of God and from a Jamesian perspective, “cosmic truth” consists of projections of culturally determined concepts into that culture’s view of ultimate reality. Suchocki concludes that truth claims cannot be adjudicated at the intellectual level between religions, but rather that the truth of each faith system depends on that system’s lived reality and the cultural concepts abstracted from that reality to express claims of ultimacy.

In the final paper of this volume, David Ray Griffin argues that a model integrating truth as correspondence with a dialogical notion of truth is best suited to address the contemporary situation of religious pluralism. He provides a defense of truth as correspondence in terms of what he calls a hard-core commonsense notion. On this basis, he can argue for absolute truth as an ontological claim. Nevertheless, he admits that the process of arriving at knowledge is fallible. Hence knowledge as dialogical is necessary to promote the mutual understanding of truth claims between the religions.

The book is beautifully illustrative of the “Claremont way.” It represents a diversity of disciplinary interests, a plurality of religious affiliations, and a manifold of methodological and substantive views; it includes agreement and argument, both continuity between disciplines and discontinuity among individual fields. Yet it is the diversity which represents the common unity: truth as a search engaging dialogue and hopefully continuing to do so.

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TRUTH AND REALITY