The Correspondence Theory of Truth: Pragmatism and Epistemological Implications

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the Correspondence Theory of Truth provides the most comprehensive and coherent model for understanding truth across diverse disciplines. Through a pragmatic approach, the paper analyses the theory's applications in science, institutions, and the evolutionary development of human cognition. Through detailed analysis, the historical significance, practical viability, and explanatory power of the correspondence model are highlighted, offering a robust lens for interpreting reality. Counter arguments such as for relativistic truth are critically evaluated to highlight the limitations of alternative theories. Furthermore, the paper explores the implications of correspondence theory for Epistemology, proposing a unified framework for knowledge. This analysis contributes to the ongoing discourse on the nature of truth and its relationship to human understanding.

Paper Claim

The Correspondence Theory of Truth is the model of truth which is most effective in providing a stable and unified framework for knowledge, and for the promotion of a stable society through improving the trust-based systems of law and media whilst allowing for scientific development.

Introduction

What is truth?

    Some of the earliest philosophical discussions of truth comes from Parmenides in Ancient Greece, discussing the idea that thought, and reality can be inseparable, "For it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be." (Parmenides, n.d./1920).

    A thought can correspond in some way to the world. This idea that a thought or statement can relate or correspond in some way to the world differs from opinion or perception in the sense that the relation between the statement and the world can be verified. Conversely, an opinion does not relate in some way to something that is unchanging, rather it relates to individual perception or a subjective view on a matter.

    A key development in this idea of an objective, relational truth was by Aristotle who claimed, "To say that that which is, is not, and that which is not, is, is a falsehood; therefore, to say that which is, is, and that which is not, is not, is true" (Cohen et al., 2021). This espouses that in order to have a true statement, it must relate to what is. From Aristotle's early thinking on relational truth, a theory of what objective truth is has developed into what is known as The Correspondence Theory of Truth. The classical formulation of The Correspondence Theory of Truth states that for a statement to be true, it must accurately relate (*id est* corresponds) with the world in some way (David, 2016).

The Correspondence Theory of Truth

The Correspondence Theory of Truth affects and benefits a broad range of fields and practices, as illustrated in the following arguments.

Correspondence Theory as A Characteristic of Human Nature

Objective truth provides a consistent and unified framework for interpreting and agreeing about the world around us. In our own evolution, we can look to this theory of truth as a model which developed naturally. When we were hunter gatherers, co-operation and a collective understanding would be key in order to survive, as a common understanding of food sources, food levels, dangers, and navigation routes would enhance the chances of the group surviving. This mode of operation closely aligns with correspondence theory, as it looks to collective understanding of objective truths (such as food levels) to best survive (Patterson, 2003).

Another aspect of this evolutionary survival mechanism is a connatural demand for psychological consistency. When individuals hold contradictory beliefs, they tend to feel psychological discomfort as when they hold different beliefs about reality, especially in a survival situation, they are less likely to thrive in that environment. Say an individual holds the initial belief that a food source is safe, but later observes signs that it is dangerous, they suffer from cognitive dissonance because there is a contradictory holding of both its safety and its danger (Festinger, 1962). In resolving their dissonance, they will update their initial belief to acknowledge the danger posed by the food, thus preventing a harmful behaviour, therefore increasing their survival odds.

Withal, in language and communication, we assume a correspondence between words and objects or their corresponding abstract concepts. *Exempli gratia*, say a proposition claimed, "There is a cat on that mat" (Rasmussen, 2018). For that statement to be true under correspondence theory, there would in fact have to be a cat precisely on that mat. To foreground correspondence theory's importance in communication, I will examine a case of miscommunication. In language, Correspondence claims are common, such that when one miscommunicates something, this has been a miscommunication because one has made a claim which does not correspond to reality. A miscommunication using the above example would be "The cat is not on the mat", when in fact the cat in reference is on the mat. Correspondence between a proposition's claim and what is, is *ergo* integral for understanding between individuals.

Therefore, for the reasons examined above, the intrinsic adherence to correspondence theory underpins human interaction.

Correspondence Theory as A Method of Fairness and Equality

The application of correspondence theory extends beyond just survival concerns. In fields such as science, law, and media, the method of operation and truth finding follows the correspondence theory in verifying objective truths in order to validate the soundness of a claim. In a legal system, public confidence is founded on its "fair" method of deciding the outcomes of trials (American Judges Association, 2007). The outcomes are weighed using evidence, which is both objective and verifiable (iResearchNet, n.d.). Without such a focus on what is, a contextual truth-based approach would likely result in a great public distrust over the supposed fairness of the system. If the truth of evidence was to be measured as a truth discretionary to a judge or jury, then that opens such a system to bias and inequality. Public trust in systems such as the legal system is at least partially reliant on the principle of weighing up objective evidence and then deciding solely on that.

This similar approach is generally found in "free media". To keep public trust in media as a reliable information provider, the media will generally verify that what they are claiming or reporting in fact corresponds to reality. Without such an approach, there would likely be a fractured media landscape, in which a fractured reality based on relativistic truths is more likely as a result (Mirra et al., 2021).

In absence of a correspondence theory approach, stability and equality such as that attained in society today, I argue would not be possible.

However, objective truth can be viewed as an inappropriate "one-size-fits-all" solution in comparison to a flexible truth. In a modern society with multi-faceted culture and viewpoints, the rather black and white approach of objective truth can fail to take in the nuanced experiences of different individuals.

The idea that justice is best delivered by a blind examination of objective truths is not accepted by all. Indigenous and Tribal cultures such as Native American Tribes tend to put individuals on trial through courts which focus on consensus and on a restorative approach which is most likely to benefit the community rather than a sole consideration on the facts at hand (Alaska Native Justice Center, 2024). This approach to some would be unfair or incorrect as a way of seeking justice, but it may work for those in that culture. Correspondence, in its rigidity, fails to capture best practices which are cultural dependent or human in nature. A flexible approach to truth allows for the acceptance that even if there is an existence of an objective truth, then it reasonably supports that individuals are not going to accept or follow that just because its objectively true. Rather than asserting that there is one correct view, it accepts the broad perspectives of others, which in doing so can reduce the conflict which can be derived from Correspondences rigidity.

Relativistic truth in its flexible nature encourages tolerance and co-existence in a multi-cultured society. Rather than encourage conformity to one perspective, such as Correspondence does, it encourages the acceptance of other beliefs and perspectives. In this acceptance, a more developed, and less conflicted society would likely arise.

Additionally, relativistic truth is not necessarily in competition with objective truth. In emphasising tolerance and understanding between people, Lynch (2001) argues in *Truth as One and Many* that a completely relativistic model for truth would risk a fragmented society such that individuals would have few shared standards. His argument for relativism both encompasses the positives of an objective truth and the societal betterment from a relativistic truth, "Truth must be understood as both one and many—one in its function and value, many in the ways it manifests across diverse practices.".

In summary, there is societal benefit to both a rigid and more flexible truth. Attempting to determine which is more beneficial is not only challenging but impractical because they are intertwined in societal function. A rigid truth best promotes stable institutions providing the coherence needed for laws, media, and science; however, it overlooks the fact that individuals with subjective experiences is what society is made up of. Flexible truth, conversely, contends with the human element of society, in which individuals prioritize social harmony and adaptability over adherence to objectivity. In a dichotomy scenario between adherence to a standard and culturally accepted truth, the latter is bound to be chosen as following the evolutionary argument we are more likely to promote survival and social acceptability over an intangible standard. Yet, in advocating for one's own survival, rather than disregarding objective truth as an abstract standard, individuals implicitly use it. Survival itself demands alignment with reality, making objective truth – a central tenant to correspondence theory – a necessary foundation. In this interplay, rigid and flexible truths are not oppugnant rather they are complementary, with each addressing specific dimensions within society and serving different societal needs.

Inter-Subjective Agreement as a Method of Objective Verification of a Correspondence Claim

Inter-subjective agreement touches upon the argument of objective verification in correspondence theory. Objective verification or verifying the claim of a statement is the act of verifying a claim of correspondence within a statement. Without such verification, what is claimed as true is less reliable because of the uncertainty over its relation to the world. Thus, verifying a claim is key to whether it is dependable and useful information. Therefore, objective verification is practically necessary for the Correspondence Theory of Truth to be applicable.

Inter-subjective agreement endeavours to increase the credibility of a statement's claim in relation to reality. In doing so, the thought follows that if multiple people with no apparent bias or illusory error were to agree with a statement's correspondence, then the statement one claims to be true is more likely to be true and is likely to be treated

as true. This is because the increase in credibility is derived from the idea that in multiple people agreeing about a claim, that claim is more likely to be objectivity based rather than based on a subjective perception. In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas (1981/1984) viewed inter-subjective agreement as a necessary condition for objectivity, that as a result of a rational discourse, subjective viewpoints end up converging into a more objective understanding.

In taking a strict approach, one can argue that in what we perceive there is no way to guarantee that in which we agree on is in fact collectively viewed as the same thing. Say there was a rock on a table. Multiple people agree that there is a rock on a table. That would under standard inter-subjective agreement improve the statement's correspondence claim as the likelihood of someone's supposedly incorrect perception is reduced. However, in multiple individuals agreeing that there is a rock on the table, there is the assumption that someone identifies the language of "rock" to relate to the portion of reality which is in fact a "rock" in the same way as another would. The idea that a "rock" to one, can be both different in language and in form from another individual, leads to the conclusion that inter-subjective agreement fails to prove or improve a statement's correspondence claim as there is no guarantee that perceptions of a portion of reality are equal.

Furthermore, I contend that, irrespective of the number of people agreeing, inter-subjective agreement fails to increase the credibility of a statement's claim. Each individual in weighing up the soundness of the statement looks to their own ideas, perceptions, and thoughts. In doing this, they look to whether the statement relates to their own ideas of the world. Therefore, in inter-subjective agreement there is no direct effect to the claim of the statement, instead one is agreeing that one another share a similar perception of the world in that way.

Orchestrating inter-subjective agreement aims to provide credibility through collective subjective agreement, in which the belief holds that the amalgamation of aligned subjective viewpoints will draw closer to the idea of objectiveness compared with the subtractive nature of a single subjective viewpoint.

I argue that inter-subjective agreement satisfies the practical implementation of objective verification. In everyday life we rely on that assumption of what we see, and what we agree on seeing, is what is. The difference in classification between a perceived reality or a "true" reality, in a pragmatic view, is minimal. As in one or the other, there would be no difference in how operate our lives as what we perceive dictates how we act. As a consequence of that, inter-subjective agreement serves the purpose of increasing the reliability of a statement's claim through reducing the probability of a spurious claim or illusory perception, meaning the information they are claiming to be true can be reasonably relied upon.

Additionally, I argue that the bar one has to cross in order to rely on a statement's claim is whether a group of individuals genuinely confirm that the claim does in fact relate to a portion of reality. Subsequent reliance on a claim does not necessarily guarantee its truth. Nevertheless, I follow the practical argument in which the creditability of the correspondence claim has increased as a result of collective agreement. With a sceptical approach to verification, one essentially makes it impossible to progress fields in which reliance on observed and inter-subjectively verified measurements is key. Whilst one may not be sure of the truth of the claim, as a result of our uncertainty over the extent of our access to the world, one will not find a perfect solution to whether we know the truth or can accurately verify it. Therefore, I hold that the practical approach of inter-subjective agreement suffices in terms of objective verification of a statements Correspondence claim.

Scientific Progress in Light of Correspondence Theory

Scientific theories can be summarized as a series of statements which in principle can be falsified using empirical observations (Popper, 1959). The advancement of science, and the development of theory relies on truth which is objectively verifiable and replicable. Replicability ensures that the claimed facts are not coincidental or false because of malpractice and error, thus increasing the reliability of the claim. Objective truth is essential to achieve a consistent framework in science from which the foundational security derived can be used to develop scientific ideas.

If one was to endorse relativistic truth, then there would be a different and disjointed framework for science where replicability and verification is less of a concern. I argue there is little sense in a Relativistic framework in science as such would result in a flawed, incoherent foundation in which the development of scientific ideas is practically impossible. Therefore, a relativistic truth is less dependable and thus is less trustworthy in terms of providing a coherent scientific or other truth driven approach framework (Bikfalvi, 2023).

In a sense, scientific development is based on the idea of agreement between individuals on the merits of the observations, measurements, and quality of the replica compared with the original. Scientific development is reliant on the idea that in perceiving the same thing, scientists agree that this thing is in fact existing in the way they believe and the way they perceive the evidence is together the same. This assumption of what they collectively observe, and measure is in fact reasonable when viewed practically. Without this assumption there would be little progress in science as nothing could be accepted as solved or foundational due to the doubt cast on the observations.

A counterpoint to the assumption that we are reasonably accurate in our perceptions is that we cannot directly access what we claim to be true. Holding that we cannot directly access that which we wish to claim as truth, we essentially verify what we believe or perceive as what is. Therefore, there is the possibility that we are not verifying what is but what we perceive reality to be which may be different from reality itself.

However, this idea, I contend, does not affect scientific development. In a scientific and objective truth driven approach, practically it makes no difference. For the difference is not between if we perceive but to what extent we perceive whether it is the world as is, or our idea of the world as is. If it is one or the other, then that appears to be irrelevant as in agreeing with one another, we are agreeing over the same world, whether that is the one that is, or the one which is collectively perceived. If what we build on in science is but a perception, say not what is, then that perception is the one in which our system is built on and whatever the "real" world is, is but a different perception.

Conclusion on the Correspondence Theory of Truth

Overall, across the broad range of aspects discussed, Correspondence Theory of Truth, I contend provides the most benefit. In Science, Correspondence provides a strong foundation for which to build upon compared with a relativistic truth. Whilst an argument for coherence truth is the stronger of the two oppositions, I hold that it makes little practical difference to scientific progress whether you esteem correspondence theory or coherence theory as the definition of truth. In how the Correspondence Theory of Truth can operate in reality, I argue that the practical verification offered by inter-subjective agreement is sufficient for the reasonable reliance on a proposition's claim. This is the most realistic, as there is but a few scenarios where such a verification would not be sufficient for reliance.

In Law, Media and other fundamental institutions of a society, the Correspondence Theory of Truth, I proclaim is the most effective in providing for institutional stability and the derived societal benefit from such stability. Where public confidence and trust in such systems is reliant on an objective standard – a blind examination of the facts, correspondence theory provides for this but also in such a way to espouse a broad societal equality in such. The promotion of verified propositions bound not by preference but by Correspondence is by its very nature equal.

We shall now turn to the effect which the Correspondence Theory of Truth has on another area of Epistemology: Knowledge. I will analyse this effect as this is an important implication of any definition of truth.

The Consequence of the Correspondence Theory of Truth on Epistemology

Truth is intricately involved with the idea of knowledge such that they are part of the same field of research. Similar to perspectives on truth, in Epistemology there is an objective knowledge reminiscent of correspondence theory, and a phenomenological knowledge approach akin to the concept of a relativistic truth.

The consequence of correspondence theory on the idea of phenomenological knowledge is comparable with the contradiction between an objective based truth and one which is relative. The antipodal nature of the holding of correspondence theory simultaneously with phenomenological knowledge will now be demonstrated.

Objective Knowledge

Objective knowledge consists of those things which are not inherently changing from person to person depending on personal preference. Objective knowledge, much like correspondence theory in truth, offers a coherent and clear framework for the classification of knowledge.

We will illustrate a particular type of objective knowledge below named empirical knowledge using the example of someone who believes that the TV is turned on. In illustrating they have knowledge of this belief, I will use Justified True Belief, which is one of the standard, though not problem free, methods for analysing if a belief constitutes knowledge (Gettier, 1963). When considering objective knowledge, the Correspondence Theory of Truth will be used as criterion for truth in this standard Justified True Belief analysis.

For example:

P believes "The TV is turned on."

P is justified in this belief because the light is on, the screen is on, and they are watching something on it.

P is true in their belief.

Their belief satisfies the criteria for empirical knowledge. Particularly, the belief is true because in reality the TV is actually on. This correspondence to what is changes the belief to fact. Objective knowledge is not dependent on P's preference about the TV, it is a matter of fact, as contrasted with phenomenological knowledge.

Phenomenological Knowledge

Phenomenological knowledge contrasts with objective knowledge because it contends with beliefs which are not necessarily factual or can be justified using reality. It is knowledge, which is inherently perspective based and a value judgement, thus the truth of that belief will be relative to the person who believes it and the preferences they hold. In *Being and Time,* Heidegger (1927/1996) explores how humans (*Dasein*) engage with the world to understand their own existence. He argues that truth is not solely the result of abstract, objective thought but emerges through lived experience and the process of revealing or uncovering meaning (*Aletheia*). Dissimilar to approaches that prioritize detached knowledge, Heidegger contends that understanding arises from our situated and practical involvement in the world. Therefore, phenomenological truth is not about the correspondence of a statements claim to reality, rather the disclosure of being through one's engagement with the world. Therefore truth, in terms of phenomenological knowledge, is defined as whether one's belief is an accurate reflection of one's mental state.

Exempli gratia, they believe the car is beautiful which means that for it to be true they need to hold an actual feeling of beauty, and they need to genuinely believe that it is beautiful.

P believes "The car looks beautiful."

P has a right to believe this is justified in believing this as "They find the patterns, the colour, and the design of the car overall aesthetically pleasing."

P's belief is true because they get a feeling of beauty from the car and for assumption, it accurately reflects their mental state.

They satisfy the adapted truth criterion for "knowing" their belief that the car is beautiful.

However, for a person to verify if their belief is knowledge (phenomenological), they must self-reflect on whether their belief genuinely reflects their own mind. Humans are inherently flawed when it comes to self-reflection (Leary,2004). There is no guarantee that someone can accurately reflect on what they say they believe is what they believe. Additionally, no-one else can yet validate their mental state, meaning it is impossible to verify the truth. The idea of truth as a value which can be easily allocated to those beliefs which are sometimes incoherent in one's own

mind, let alone conflict within an inter-subjective scenario is inconsistent with the criterion laid out in the Correspondence Theory of Truth.

Some advocate for separate "categories" of knowledge with different truth criterion such as that for the scientific and empirical (objective truth) and another for that which is personal (subjective, contextual truth) (Davidson, 2001). This aims to grant an importance and greater credibility to truth which is objective whilst still understanding that personal beliefs can differ in interpretation while still being relativistically true. Relativistic truth, whilst not useful in traditional scientific field frameworks, can still be useful in aiding the understanding of human behaviour (Hayes et al., 2012).

As the criterion for phenomenological knowledge is in the form of a flexible, relativistic definition of truth, one cannot both hold truth to be that which is defined within the Correspondence Theory of Truth and the existence of certain personal beliefs which classify as phenomenological knowledge to be classed as such. *Summatim dicere,* phenomenological knowledge cannot exist simultaneously with the acceptance of the Correspondence Theory of Truth.

Knowledge, I affirm, must be kept objectively based to provide a solid foundation. For if personal belief about things that do not exist in nature constitute knowledge, then knowledge itself can be described in innumerable ways that are equally valid, for knowledge as a concept has no correspondence. Thus, the need for a strong, objective form of knowledge is needed to ensure a stable, unified framework collectively with the correspondence criterion of truth.

Conclusion

In light of the foregoing discussion, it is evident that the Correspondence Theory of Truth presents a model of truth which, in its application, is pragmatic and efficacious in the promotion of a framework which brings forth an opportunity for a more equal and stable society. In knowledge, the Correspondence Theory of Truth provides a stable framework by anchoring it in objective reality, ensuring its non-preferential and verifiable nature. In uniting this framework, the idea of knowledge based on viewpoint I contend cannot exist under correspondence theory as the practical verification of its truth claim is unviable. Therefore, as a result of the acceptance of the Correspondence Theory of Truth, Phenomenological knowledge is deemed personal belief. A relativistic notion of truth, by contrast, risks fostering incoherent frameworks which undermines institutional stability and alienates individuals from the very systems which are functioning off their trust. Whilst correspondence theory and its arguments are not without flaws - its rigidity and the challenge of having certainty in what one claims as true – it is still the most effective model. Across science, history, and society, we rely on the assumption that there is certain objective, universal, unchanging, and enduring facts. The Correspondence Theory of Truth may not encapsulate truth in the absolute sense; however, its application facilitates development and underpins the foundations of societal advancement.

Acknowledgments

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