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Selected bibliography on the Theories of Truth in Latin Middle Ages

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Bibliography

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Inaugural address on the occasion of his taking up the chair of Medieval philosophy of the Free University in Amsterdam on November 9, 1984.
"There are certain basic words which form the undertone of our thinking and of the manner in which we experience things. These basic words are not unchangeable; they often receive a different content . . . One such basic word is 'truth'."
This is the start of the report of the Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, issued in 1981, "On the nature of the authority of Scripture".(1) How does it happen that the Bible is read so differently? In searching for an answer to this problem, the report adopts a course remarkable within the Reformed tradition. It poses a truly philosophical question: "What is truth?" That the Bible is read differently is related to the fact that not all people mean the same by what they call "truth".
If I want to raise this same question today, then I am in good company - though I must add at once that it is the matter rather than the company that motivates me. From the outset, that is, as early as with the Greeks, philosophy and truth are seen in an intimate connection. Aristotle, for example, describes philosophy as the "theory" of truth.(2) It is in the Middle Ages, however, that for the first time treatises appear under the title of *De veritate*, where truth itself is explicitly made the object of reflection. I would like to draw your attention to medieval observations on the query about truth.
'Adaequatio rei et intellectus' as the medieval formula of truth and the criticism of it. Is an exposition on this theme worthwhile, though? Do we not already know what truth was in the Middle Ages? Probably there is no formulation in scholastic thought that has become more widely known. Even those who did not enjoy the privilege of a classical education are able to say that truth is *adaequatio rei et intellectus*. What is meant by that seems to be clear. The formula appears to express the "natural" idea

of truth, i.e., the correspondence between thought and reality. The determination of truth as *adaequatio* has become so self-evident that, as the *Handbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe* states, it is the point of depart and reference for all contemporary discussions on truth.(3) It can be added that this occurs mostly in a critical sense. Two examples may suffice.

In the above-mentioned synodal report the first chapter sketches the changes in the concept of truth over the course of time. The so-called subject/object relation underlies the entire exposition, apparently from the unquestioning presupposition that this relation is fundamental to the phenomenon of truth as such. The changes in the concept of truth, then, are described in three phases. Successively the report speaks of "objective truth", "subjective truth" (in systems of thought like idealism and existentialism), and finally, of a newer conception called the "relational" concept of truth - the objective and the subjective in one. This means that "truth always occurs within a relation, within the 'relatedness' of man to something else." (4) As the report claims, moreover, this relational concept of truth links up with what the Bible calls truth.

The objective concept of truth - the most current idea of truth - is represented by the medieval formula, phrased "truth is the correspondence of the human way of picturing things with the matters themselves." The human way of imagining things, the human consciousness, is like a mirror able to reflect "the objective state of affairs". This conception of truth is not only ascribed to Thomas Aquinas, but to a great variety of people: "... Greek philosophers, ... the classical Reformed theologians, ... the logician Bertrand Russell, ... the Marxist Lenin". The drawback of this conception, in the assessment of the report, is that man is very passive. Does knowing the truth not demand man's activity, research; and wrestling? Without a human spirit there is no truth.

An entirely different criticism can be found in Heidegger, who dealt most thoroughly with the western conception of truth. The lectures he delivered at the University of Freiburg during the winter semester of 1942-43 appeared in 1982 in the *Gesamtausgabe* of his works under the title *Parmenides*.(5) Strictly speaking, the title is misleading for actually these lectures deal with the essence of truth, the identical subject that engaged Heidegger in writing *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, which dates from the same time. In the lectures, however, there is "a more direct confrontation with the history of western thought".(6) In his view a change in the essence and "locus" of truth has evolved in philosophy. Truth becomes "rightness" (*Richtigkeit*) of knowing and asserting; it is no longer "unconcealedness" (*aletheia*) of being, as it was for the early Greek thinkers. The medieval formulation fixes this essential transformation. " *'Veritas est adaequatio intellectus ad rem' Im Sinne dieser Umgrenzung des Wesens der Wahrheit als Richtigkeit denkt das gesamte abendländische Denken von Platon bis zu Nietzsche*. "(7) Truth becomes a characteristic of a mental act within man. Inevitably the problem then arises how a psychical process in the inner man can be brought into agreement with things outside.(8) This traditional and current conception of truth, however, is derivative (*abkünftig*). Parmenides' thought reveals "the road of truth, far away from the beaten track of men". (*Fragm. B 1, 27*). It can give us a reminder of the forgotten "primordial" sense of truth, the unhiddenness of being, which is the ground of the possibility of rightness.

But when the proper function of philosophy is to "re-mind", we are also allowed to ask of this twofold criticism: do we recall the meaning of truth as *adaequatio rei et intellectus* at all? Does it have a merely derivative sense, i.e., the rightness of thought? On the other hand, does the formula imply that truth is "reflection" and leave the human mind out of account? These questions lead, me this afternoon to focus on medieval views of truth, in which the idea of the *adaequatio* plays a central role." (pp. 3-5)

Concluding observations.

Looking back over the course of this discussion, we may conclude that the criticism of the medieval *adaequatio*-formula, outlined at the beginning, did not grasp its original meaning. Neither is this conception concerned with truth in a merely

derivative sense, nor does it ignore man's activity. For in the previous analysis we observed that Thomas's notion of true includes first, transcendentality, second, relationality, third, anthropocentrism, fourth, the fulfilment in an act of the intellect, fifth, the necessity of a norm and measure, sixth the intrinsic connection with the word, seventh, the relation to the divine Logos, and finally, the identity with God Himself. These moments are implicitly or explicitly expressed in the formula *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, in which every term is charged with meaning. Compared to the breadth of this conception, modern theories appear to be a reduction of the integral process of truth. It is philosophically important to note that in the medieval approach what is fundamental to truth is not the duality of subjective and objective from which then their togetherness has to be conceived. Rather, it is the primordial conformity of being and intellect that is fundamental to truth. Indeed, as we have seen, being and thinking are the same in the Origin. Another remarkable aspect in this medieval view is the attempt to integrate philosophical and religious truth. This endeavour runs parallel to the philosophical introduction of the synodal report of the Reformed Churches, with which I began this address. Its intention is that the "relational" concept of truth links up with what the Bible calls truth. Thomas's conception lies concretely in the notion of word, a good example of the way in which his understanding of truth is deepened by a theological reflection. But that which fundamentally enables the integration is the basic idea of the transcendentality of truth. This conception underlies his entire discussion.

The medieval doctrine of the transcendentals - being, one, true, good, and beautiful - forms "the heart of scholastic ontology and metaphysics." (93) This doctrine will be the subject of my research over the coming years. Today I wanted to present you with a sample of it. (94)

Notes:

(1) In the Dutch original, the report carries the title *God met ons . . . over de aard van het Schriftgezag*, published in: Kerkinformatie, nr. 113 (Febr. 1981). The report was translated into English by the Secretariat of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, Grand Rapids, Mich., U.S.A.

(2) *Metaphysica* II, c. I, 993 a 30. Cf. 993 b 20.

(3) L.B. Puntel - Wahrheit, in: *Handbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe* III, München, 1974, 1651. Cf. Th. de Boer - *De eendigheid van de mens en de oneindigheid van de waarheid. De geschiedenis van het fenomenologisch waarheidsbegrip van Brentano tot Levinas*, in: *De eendige mens?*, Bilthoven, 1975, 55 f.

(4) o.c., 10 (in the English translation).

(5) Frankfurt am Main, 1982 (Gesamtausgabe II. Abteilung, Bd. 54).

(6) Vom Wesen der Wahrheit, in: *Wegmarken*, Frankfurt am Main, 1967, 73-97. See also for Heidegger's view of truth *Sein und Zeit*, VIII ed., 1957, 212 f.; Vom Wesen des Grundes, in: *Wegmarken*, 25 f.; Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit, in: *id.*, 109-144; *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, Frankfurt am Main, III ed., 1965, 31 f.; 107 f.; 112 f.

Cf. W. Brettschneider - *Sein und Wahrheit. Über die Zusammengehörigkeit von Sein und Wahrheit im Denken Martin Heideggers*, Meisenheim, 1965; J. van der Hoeven - Heidegger, Descartes, Luther, in: *Reflecties, Opstellen voor Prof. dr. J.P.A. Mekkes*, Amsterdam, 1968, 71-116; Th. de Boer - o.c., 78 f.; E. Tugendhat - Heideggers Idee von Wahrheit, in: G. Skirbekk (Hrsg.) - *Wahrheitstheorien. Eine Auswahl aus den Diskussionen über Wahrheit im 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt am Main, 2nd edition, 1980, 431-448.

(7) Parmenides, 73.

(8) *id.*, 74.

(93) J.B. Lotz - Zur Konstitution der transzendentalen Bestimmungen des Sein nach Tomas von Aquin, in: *Die Metaphysik im Mittelalter* (Hrsg. P. Wilpert), Berlin, 1963, (Miscellanea Mediaevalia Bd. 2) 334.

- (94) Cf. my essay "The Convertibility of Being and Good in St. Thomas Aquinas" to be published in *The New Scholasticism* [59, 1985, pp. 449-470]
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