AN EXPOSITION OF THE COGNITIVE PROBLEMS IN RESCHER'S COHERENTIST TRUTH CRITERIOLOGY

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Abstract

Perhaps the most influential proposals in the recent literature on the problem of truth in epistemology is Rescher's version of the coherence theory of truth. Daring to save the theory from sinking under the weights of traditional criticisms, Rescher adopts an approach that differs significantly from the traditional method to re-present the theory. Primary in this is his departure from the traditional *definitional* emphasis to the *criterial* route in determining truth under coherence considerations. To further validate his theory, he ingeniously advances the process of validating coherence on pragmatic grounds. Adopting the expository, analytic and critical approaches of study, this paper takes a critical look at Rescher's rebranded coherence theory of truth. It concludes with the view that, though Rescher's theory exhibits some epistemic merits, yet due to certain inherent cognitive problems, it does not meet the demands of rational success either in justifying the coherence theory or resolving the problem of truth in epistemology.

Keywords: Criteriology, Criterial, Truth-Candidates, Cognitive, Coherence**.**

Introduction

One of the givens in epistemology is that, for the attribution of knowledge, a belief must not only be appropriately justified, it must also be true. That is, "knowledge must be certain, indubitable, apodictic and incontrovertible" (Ozumba 76). A complete account of knowledge must, therefore, necessarily involve an account of the truth of what is said to

be known. But the question is: What is truth? Generally, truth is attributed to statements by which beliefs are expressed. But what, for instance, do we mean when we say that a certain statement such as "It is raining", is true? Simply put, "*P* is true if and only if what? This question, which though appears simple, yet bodes a great deal of controversies, is at the heart of the problem of truth in epistemology.

Over the long intellectual history, epistemologists, among other issues, have been concerned with a constellation of debates over this question, which borders on the exact nature of truth. Emerging from the intellectual scuffles is a variety of theoretical proposals known as theories of truth, which include the Correspondence, Coherence, and Pragmatic theories of truth. Among the more recent ones are the Semantic, Dialectical, Redundancy, Relativistic and Functionalist theories of truth. However, deemed to be fraught with a variety of cognitive and epistemic defects, none of these theories enjoys common acceptance as a theory of truth. Rather, their proponents tend to call forth criticisms from those of opposing views, making it difficult to end the controversy about the nature of truth. Describing this challenge, Godfrey Ozumba says: "To define truth is one of the most difficult things to do philosophically" (53); for truth is "an enigmatic concept…a riddle, a many-faceted concept and a complex term with strings of controversy" (53).

The Coherence theory – our major concern in this paper – which holds the view that, the "truth of any (true) proposition consists in its coherence with some specified set of propositions" (Young 1), is not an exception to the objections, most of which border on the purely *idealistic* nature of the concept of coherence. However, convinced that the theory has a better chance and that most of the objections can be addressed, Rescher defends and re-presents this theory with new insights within his framework of 'pragmatic idealism'. This paper exposes and critically examines his arguments, to determine the extent of the rational success of his new theory of coherence in resolving the problem of truth in epistemology.

Coherence Theory of Truth

The Coherence theory of truth traditionally maintains that, "a judgment is true, if it is consistent with other judgments that are accepted as true" (Titus, Marilyn and Richard 204). Capturing the Coherentist (proponents of the theory) thesis, Allen White says: "to say that a statement (usually called a judgment) is true or false is to say that it coheres or fails to cohere with a system of other statements considered as true" (130). Traditionally, the coherence theory of truth adopts a holistic approach to truth and judges the truth of a belief by its "coherence" with some specific sets of beliefs known to be true within a given epistemic circumstance. The concept of 'coherence' here, simply refers to "a situation in which all parts of something fits together well" (Hornby 275), or more specifically, logical consistency of our beliefs with other beliefs in a given belief-set in case of truth determination. In William Sahakian and Mabel Sahakian, "to be coherent, all pertinent facts must be arranged in a consistent and cohesive fashion as an integrated whole" (10 – 11). Ozumba says: "To cohere means to agree, to fit into a logical system or systems of beliefs…." (*Philosophy and Method of…* 78). The traditional Coherentists have always considered reality as "a collection of beliefs"; and so, they hold the view that, it is the coherence of a belief with other belief known to be true within a set, which determines its status as true. Otherwise, it is false. For them also, there is no way of getting to know reality in such a way as to make it possible to compare our judgments with it. Rather, all that we can do is "compare one judgment or set of judgment with others" (Hamlyn 124).

The Coherence theory of truth took shape in the 19th century as a rival theory to the pre-modern view of the Correspondence theory, which defined truth in terms of correspondence of thought to reality. Like most influential philosophical positions, the Coherence theory of truth has a robust heritage, complete with founding ancestors including the Rationalist Metaphysicians such as Benedict Spinoza, and Gottfried Leibniz; as well as the British Idealists such as Georg Hegel, Gottlieb Fitche; and the more immediate forebears and British Idealists such as Bernard Bosanquet and Francis Bradley. The Logical Positivists such as Otto Neurath and Carl Hempel share in the tradition, as well as its

notable contemporary advocates as Laurence BonJour, Keith Lehrer, Gilbert Harman, Wilfred Sellars and Nicholas Rescher.

Traditional Objections to Coherence Theory

Despite its seeming popularity in the long history of epistemology, however, the coherence theory of truth has been criticized and rejected by many epistemologists as rationally unsatisfying due to certain perceive inherent cognitive defects. Famous among these are as discussed below:

Plurality Objection

This objection holds the view that truth has no monopoly of coherence, and so, the linkage of coherence to truth is too loose for coherence to produce the definitive standard of truth. Here, critics object to the Coherentists' direct linkage of mere *coherence* (of beliefs in a set) with truth a as too loose an idea; since just as many things as possible (plurality) can cohere with each other: even fiction can be made as coherent as fact, and falsehood can be as coherent as truth. In such a case, between two different but equally coherent systems or sets of beliefs, there would be in the coherence theory, no way to decide which of them is true and which is false (White 31). Bertrand Russell points to this in his objection to the theory stating that, "there is no reason to suppose that only one coherent body of beliefs is possible" (71). White maintains that the coherence theory of truth is "patently unsatisfactory because it is logically possible to have two different but equally comprehensive sets of statements, between which, in the coherence theory, there would be no way to decide which was the set of true statements" (31). It on this account that many critics reject this theory. Susan Haack, for instance, submits that, "the coherence of a set of beliefs is manifestly insufficient to guarantee or to be an indication of their truth" (Haack 26).

Realism Objection

This is another traditional objection against the coherence theory. It charges the theory with the cognitive error of rejecting realism about truth. Realism about truth involves the *principle of bivalence* (according to which every proposition is either true or false) and the *principle of*

transcendence (according to which a proposition may be true which coheres with no set of propositions). On the whole, this argument maintains that truth is an absolute reality that transcends any set of beliefs or propositions and it is not *yielded* by the 'degree' of coherence of beliefs or propositions with one another as the Coherentists propose.

According to critics here, the coherentists' position contradicts this essential principle of realism about truth, because it sees truth not as an absolute and transcendent reality, but as that which "comes by degrees" (Young 2). It is argued that, we do not for instance, reject such mathematical statements error as 2+2 = 5, because it fails to cohere with any other statement but because it is not in harmony with reality. This objection is implied in Ozumba comments that, "If we are looking for truth that is certain, transcendent, and fundamental, we cannot rely on truths derived merely by coherence" (61).

Relativism of Truth
Antother popular objection to the coherence theory of truth is the charge of the relativism of truth. Here, critics often accuse the Coherentists of negating the absolute nature of truth and of rendering truth simply as a relative phenomenon. A relative truth is opposed to absolute truth, which is believed to be eternal, objective, immutable, static and independent of human whims or situations" (Young, *Relativism…*68). Absolutism of truth states that the truth-value of propositions or beliefs cannot change, so long as their meanings remain constant. On the other hand, a relative truth is subjective, mutable, depending on situations, circumstances and variables of places, people and time. Thus, relativism of truth sees the truth-value of propositions or beliefs as dependent on certain recognizable situations or conditions.

Critics argue that the result of defining truth in terms of mere coherence of beliefs is that, it makes truth relative, since what "coheres" can be subjectively understood or interpreted. This leads to the relativistic situation of being "true for me" and "false for you". For Colin McGinn, linking truth with coherence of beliefs amounts to saying that how things are depends on what is believed about them which makes truth relative (194). For Bradley Dowden, "if 'true for me', means 'true', and

'false for me' means 'false', as the coherence theory implies, then we have a violation of the law of non-contradiction, which plays havoc with logic (I).

Idealism Objection

Again, pointing to the purely *idealistic* nature of the concept of coherence, critics have often raised the *Idealism Objection* against the coherence theory of truth to the effect that, it is incapable of furnishing us with an adequate test for the judgment of everyday experience. Accordingly, the coherence theory is "idealistic, rationalistic and intellectualistic and deals mainly with the logical relations among propositions" (Titus, Marilyn, and Richard, 205); and for that reason, "the coherence of judgment does not guarantee correspondence of judgment with facts" (Hammond 78). The contention here is simply that, coherence deals more with logical relations among propositions than with facts of everyday life; and so, it cannot be the yardstick for definitive truth determination in practical terms.

Rescher's Coherentist Truth Criteriology

Nicholas Rescher, is a German-American philosopher with the University of Pittsburgh, United States of America. He is a modern Coherentist and a prolific writer with over 100 books and 400 articles to his credit. His new version of the coherence theory of truth is discussed in his work, *Epistemology: An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, under the title, "The Pursuit of Truth: The Coherentist Criteriology". The labyrinth of his thoughts here is as summarized below:

Coherence as a 'criterion' not "definition" of Truth.

Rescher is of the view that truth as such, is an ideal concept, whose definitive ontological essence (sought by way of *definition*) cannot be attained in actual situations of human inquiries. According to him, "… actual inquiry presents us with estimates of truth, …the real truth as such is realizable only under ideal conditions" (147). In other words, for him, real or conclusive truth is realizable only by way of idealization, and our practical inquiries can only yield the best available estimates of the real truth of things, or what he calls "truth-estimates" (147). For this reason, he maintains that if we wish to define truth, we should be able to give a

criterion of truth; and this can be determined by the coherence *criterion*, without necessarily bothering about the *definition* of truth in terms of coherence, as maintained by earlier Coherentists (146). Thus, from the very beginning of his presentation, Rescher advances the conception of coherence as "a criterion rather than definition of truth" (150).

Rescher considers this shift of emphasis from the *definitional* to the *criterial* standard of truth determination with coherence as necessary because of its importance in addressing especially the traditional charge of plurality objection against the coherence theory. According to him, if we focus on the definition of truth, that is, linking coherence with truth (or defining truth as mere coherence), as traditionally obtained, "then coherence would remain disqualified as a means for identifying truth, for coherence cannot of and by itself discriminate between truths and falsehoods" (139). In fact, "it would be senseless to suggest that a proposition's truth resides in its coherence alone" (138). Rescher, therefore, believes that the *criterial* approach, would save the theory of this major objection, "since this would imply making coherence to specify the test-condition, which allows us to determine whether (or not) there is warrant to apply the phrase 'is true' to propositions" (135). That is, coherence does not necessarily define truth in this case (as previously held), but determines it: coherence is not the ultimate *definition* of truth, but the *criterial* test of the qualification of truth.

Coherence with "Data" not Truth

However, whether as a *definition* or a *criterion*, one might still justifiably ask: "Why should mere coherence imply truth?" To this question, which Rescher himself had anticipated, his reply directs us to another new element in his theory, namely, "data", as the target domain of coherence or the specified set of propositions with which the truth of a particular proposition is to be judged through its coherence consideration. According to him, "What is at issue here is not mere coherence, but coherence with data" (138). That is, since coherence must always be "coherence with something", this "something", in Rescher's view, cannot be "certified truths" (137) as traditionally held by Coherentists, but with "promising truth-candidates" (131), which he tactfully dubs, "data" (132). Data are "claims, beliefs or propositions

that are substantially plausible in a given epistemic circumstance (132). They are serious contenders for the status of true propositions, but they are not *bona fide* truths (131). They are *prima facie* truths in the sense that they are information or beliefs that have initial credibility on the basis of their sources. They may arise as historical reports, probable consequences of a given information, implication of counterfactual hypothesis or by some other means. It is, therefore, not with bare coherence as such or coherence with definitive truths, but it is with data-directed coherence that truth-making capacity enters on the scene. Rescher adopts this fallibilist approach with regard to the target domain of coherence, with the view to further saving the coherence theory of truth from sinking under the weight of the plurality objection.

Coherence Analysis of Data Machinery

However, one may still ask: "How can coherence with data yield truth if the data themselves are not individually true?" How can something so tentative prove sufficiently determinative? Rescher had already envisaged this question; and his answer to it is found in the discussion of his machinery for the coherence analysis of data. For him, we start with a superabundance of data or truth-candidates, which are in a position to make some claims on us for acceptance as true, and which need to be reduced to order in the process by coherence considerations. We would along the line grant them acceptance as true if and only if there are no countervailing considerations on the scene after subjecting them to coherence analysis in the circumstance. For instance, we begins with gathering in all the relevant data within a given epistemic system as exemplified with a datum-set $S = [p_1, p_2, p_3,....]$ of suitably given propositions. These data are not necessarily true or even consistent. They are merely plausible truths-candidates – and in general are competing ones that are mutually inconsistent. The task of analysis by coherence here, is that of "bringing order into the system designated by S by distinguishing what merits acceptance as true from what does not" (132). This is done through a compatibility screening of the data in the set on the basis of mutual attainment with the rest of data. Mutual coherence thus becomes the arbiter of acceptability of the data, which makes the less plausible give way to those of greater plausibility. In other words, by means of coherence with each other, the data in the set

must be reduced to order and their truth-value determined based on "'best-fit' considerations" (133). On this approach, a truth-candidate or data comes to make good its claims to recognition as a truth through its consistency with as much data as possible from among the rest of the data in the set. Based on this approach Rescher views the problem of truth-determination as a matter of "bringing order into a chaos comprising of initial "data" that mingles the secure and the infirm" (134).

In this way, coherence serves as a *criterion* to validate an item of knowledge as true by way of exhibiting its interrelationships with the rest in a set. It affords the criterial validation of the qualification of "truth-candidates" or "data" for being classed as genuine truths. Thus, coherence simply "yields truth as outputs without requiring that truth must also be present among the supplied input" (138). Here, coherence assumes an inward orientation, such that, it does not seek to compare the "truth-candidate" or belief directly with "facts" obtaining outside the epistemic context; rather, having gathered in as much information about the facts as possible, it seeks to sift the true from the false within this body. In this way, coherence. Rescher strongly believes this successfully addresses the charge of the plurality objection against the coherence theory, because, in this way, it is not the status of the individual datum in the set (since they are not *bona fide* truths, but mere truth-candidates) but their mutual relationships of systematic accord that is the determinative consideration for truth. It is only through the mediation of coherence consideration that we move from truth-candidacy to genuine truths. And we need make no imputations of truth at the level of data to arrive at truth through application of the *criterial* machinery in view.

Pragmatic Validation of Coherence

Another novel approach Rescher adopts to address most of the traditional objections rooted in the perceived *idealistic* nature of coherence, is his emphasis on the pragmatic validation of coherence. Foregrounding this approach is his aim to show that his new approach to the coherence cognitive systematization specifically meets the demands for an effective standard of quality control between truth and falsehood in practical terms. To undertake this, he develops a system of "pragmatic

idealism" that combines elements of continental idealism and American pragmatism, by which "valid" knowledge or truth contributes to practical success. On this approach, coherence is not self-validating as previously maintained by the traditional Coherentists. Rather, it is validated on pragmatic grounds such that, a belief is said to be *coherent* (and so genuinely true) with other beliefs in a set if it is not only logically consistent with such beliefs, but satisfies certain pragmatic warrants. Such warrants include: "contributing to the dramatic success of science or inquiry in terms of realizing its conjoint purposes of explanation, prediction and control over nature" (140).

In other words, rather than the static view of system-validation customarily portrayed by the coherentists' picture of interlocked circle of the theoretical validation, Rescher is of the opinion that while coherence is the *arbiter* between truth-candidates, coherence must itself also satisfy the requirement of *pragmatic efficacy*, upon which its justification and evaluation depend. For Rescher, the key pragmatic considerations here are: "effectiveness and efficiency, purposive adequacy and functional economy, acceptability of product and workability of procedure" (142). Rescher is more concerned with presenting coherence as a dynamic concept that enables us to use our beliefs to approximate the truth in the temporal order of development than to consider what the idealized final result might look like or to focus on its justification by purely abstract idea of coherence. Hence, for him, coherence, must contribute to pragmatic success in our cognitive systematization and evolution of knowledge for the benefit of man. A belief is only adjudged to be coherent on these pragmatic grounds, which ultimately implies success-promotion and practical benefits in any given epistemic circumstance. A quasi-economy of costs and benefits is operative here. And the question of system-choice or truth determination of a belief can ultimately be seen as a matter of "survival of the fittest", with fitness of beliefs ultimately assessed in terms of their theoretical and practical (*pragmatic*) efficiency. Accordingly, "the articulation of cognitive systems is a matter of historical dynamics of the matter – the evolution process of system development" (140). Hence, always, we are faced with a fundamentally repetitive process of the successive revision and sophistication of our ventures at cognitive

systematization, a process that produces by way of iterative elaboration an increasingly satisfactory system – "one that is more and more adequate in its internal articulation or effective in its external applicability" (140). The legitimatizing process here, according to Rescher reflects a temporal and developmental process of successive cyclic iterations where all the component elements become more and more attuned to one another and pressed into smoother mutual conformation.

The overall legitimation of Rescher's methodology of pragmatic idealism for the substantiation of our beliefs must therefore unite two distinct elements: (1) an apparatus of systematic coherence at the theoretical level (a belief must be rationally cogent, cognitively satisfying, aesthetically pleasuring, conceptually economical, and so forth); and (2) a controlling monitor of considerations of pragmatic efficacy at the practical level (surely belief is efficient, effective, successful, if "it works", and so on). Neither of this, according to Rescher, can appropriately be dispensed with for the sake of an exclusive reliance on the other. It is a complex of two distinct but interlocked cycles – the theoretical cycle of cognitive coherence and the pragmatic circle of applicative effectiveness. Only if both of these cycles dovetail properly – in both the theoretical and the applicative sectors – can the overall process be construed as providing a suitable rational legitimation for the cognitive principles at issue. Only then can the truth of a proposition be effectively determined.

Cognitive Problems in Rescher's Coherentism

Rescher's novel theory of coherence certainly deserves some plaudits and attention for its bold effort in seeking a definitive solution to the problem of truth in epistemology, through his rebranded version of the theory. His analysis of the concept of coherence, data as the target domain of coherence as well as pragmatic validation of coherence, are ingenious steps worthy of note in salvaging the theory from the vortex of criticisms and making it more justified. However, as compelling as his effort it might appear, his theory is not without some epistemic challenges. In fact, a critical assessment of his arguments discussed above, reveals a miscellany of inherent cognitive problems that seriously

mar the rational success of his theory. Some of these identifiable cognitive problems are:

Sceptical and Reductionist Approaches to Truth

The first identifiable cognitive problem in Rescher's coherentist truth criteriology is his sceptical and reductionist approach to the concept of truth, which detracts from the essence of the problem of truth in epistemology, summarized in the question: What is truth? Generally, philosophical scepticism doubts the possibility of knowledge or truth (Kreeft and Tacelli 367); and reductionism is a diversionary approach at understanding the nature of complex things by reducing them to the interactions of their parts or to simpler or more fundamental things. It is "a philosophical position that a complex system is nothing but the sum of its parts, and that an account of it can be reduced to the accounts of its individual constituent part" (Mastin 1). It is opposed to "Holism", which claims that complex systems are inherently irreducible and more than the sum of their parts, and that a holistic approach is needed to understand them (Carrol 292). The principle of holism was concisely articulated by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* when he stated that: "The whole is more than the sum of its parts" (10f – 1045a).

Rescher sceptical conception of truth as an idealization, paves the way for his flat rejection of the tradition route of seeking to explain the nature of truth by way of definition, and his adoption of the reductivistic criterial approach. With such a sceptical/reductivistic appraoch, Rescher does not seem to be embarking on the defense of reason but its destruction, because his views could lead to cognitive suicide, or what Putnam terms "mental suicide" (*Realism and Reason…* 483). Granted that human knowledge is partial, it does not necessarily follow that it is objectively untrue, or that truth is attainable only in an ideal situation, as Rescher argues.

It is this view that seems to inform his peculiar inversion of principles of logic, evident in his emphasis on the *criterion*, rather than definition of truth. Hence, for him, if we wish to define truth, "we should be able to give a criterion of truth" (146). This shift of emphasis might possess in some way the potency to address the charge of plurality objection

against the coherence theory, but it comes with a serious price of epistemological reductionism about the concept and concern with truth in epistemology. By this approach, Rescher seeks to understand the seemingly complex nature of truth not holistically, but by reducing it to what might constitute its 'coherence" *criterial* constituents or formation. This approach appears to be a matter of deliberate abandonment than a studied attack of the problem; it is more like taking an apathetic cognitive flight and deserting the 'mansion' of truth than capturing its stronghold!

Besides, this seems a diversionary and of course a fallacious mode of reasoning concerning the problem of truth in epistemology, as it avoids a direct approach to truth or essence of truth itself, but rather, reasons from the attribute of the part of truth (coherence criterion) of truth itself. It is an invalid argument, guilty of the fallacy of composition, which describes reasoning fallaciously "from attributes of the individual elements or members of a collection to attributes of the collection or totality of those elements" (Irving Copi 115). This fallacy turns on the confusion between the "distributive" and the "collective" use of the word "coherence", since it assumes that, it is the coherence of "truth-candidates" with each other in a set, and the sufficiency of their pragmatic validation in the evolution of knowledge that constitutes truth as a whole. The error here is manifest when we consider that truth is more than mere coherence of truth-candidates or data with each other in a set, even if such coherence criterion satisfies the condition of pragmatic efficacy, as Rescher supposes. Of course, a whole like a machine has its parts organized or arranged in a definite way. But organized wholes and mere collections are distinct, for a very *heavy* machine may consist of a very large number of *light* weight parts. Thus, just as a mere collection of parts is no machine, truth, like a machine is more than a mere collection of pragmatically efficacious coherent data. This is evident in the fact the human mind simply discovers truth and does create truth, judges according to truth but does not judge truth (Augustine, ii.18.47). And this shows that truth is not only higher than the human mind, but also more than a mere collection of pragmatically efficacious data, coherent with each other in a given system. Popper affirms this when he submitted that, "truth is one of such notions whose

nature or importance, is unimpaired by the fact that there exists no general criterion of its applicability in specific cases" (320).

Anti-Realistic View of Truth

Rescher's work portends an anti-realistic view of truth. His conception of truth in transformational terms whereby data or truth-candidates eventually yield truth by *degree* as an output in any epistemic circumstance based on their coherence considerations, leads to his unfortunate rejection of metaphysical realism about truth. Metaphysical realism about truth presupposes that the truth-value of things is ontologically absolute and independent of our conception or perception of them (Allen 519). Hence sentences, claims, beliefs, assertions, states of affairs, propositions, etc., are said to be either absolutely true or absolutely false, independently of our beliefs about them. It is thus essentially based on the principles of bivalence and transcendence, earlier discussed above. To be sure, Rescher's position that truth is "yielded" by the degree of the coherence of data in an epistemic circumstance seems to goes contrary to this seeming commonsense idea about truth. In so far as every judgment is merely partial when separated from the whole, it is one sided and possess only a degree of truth. Based on this understanding by Rescher, truth grows and it would never be complete or final until it encompasses all of reality. Pushed to its logical conclusion, Rescher holds the view that there are partial truths! This seems to be a serious cognitive mistake with an incorrect view of the essential nature of truth. Rescher's position simply negates the absolute nature of truth and presents truth as a partial phenomenon. But we understand that truth is an absolute reality, since it transcends the human mind, which only simply discovers truth, but does not create it.

There is nothing like partial truths, for such is no truth, as that would inherently embrace "untruth" or falsehood. That would also mean part of the "whole truth". But truth is not delivered in parts or series. Truth is simply "whole". Half-truth will lead to false conclusion. This would be against the principle of non-contradiction as well as the law of excluded middle. Haig Khatchadourian strongly agrees with this view as he declares that, "Truth does not admit of degrees; statements are either fully true or are not at all" (65). To disbelief in absolute truth is self-

contradicting because the very assertion that, "Nothing is absolutely true
or absolutely false", is an absolute truth itself. Thus, when we say that a
thing is somehow true and somehow false, then we have a problem not
only with the complete truth of the matter, but also with the knowledge
that arises therefrom, which requires nothing but complete truth in all
situations. Without such complete truth, the knowledge therefrom
remains shrouded in uncertainties.

Subjective-Idealistic View of Truth

Rescher's idea of the pragmatic validation of coherence is equally
seared with some cognitive problems. Of particular note is that, it leads
to subjective-idealistic view of truth. Idealism is a philosophical position
that "emphasizes that all entities are composed of mind or spirit"
(Robinson 1). Subjective idealism is the view that the only reality that an
object of knowledge has is the idea of the object in the mind of the
knower. On this view, the natural world has no real existence as such. It
only exists in the mind of those who perceive it. Contrary to subjective
idealism, objective realism asserts that reality is in the objects
themselves that we find in the external world, and which are objects of
our cognition. Rescher's introduction of the pragmatic validation of
coherence aimed at addressing the challenge of idealism imputed against
the theory of coherence. But this inevitably leads to subjective idealism
about truth, because, if as he argues, a coherent and true belief is to be
judged by what is believed to be its "pragmatic efficacy" (141), then
everything rests on what the individual believes about a thing, namely,
whether it coheres with other things in the epistemic circumstance under
pragmatic conditions!

This is tantamount to saying that the truth of things depends on what we
believe about them in our minds! Of truth, there are no generally
acceptable grounds for the evaluation of what is "pragmatic" or the test
of workability that applies universally. So long as the process begins
with such subjective belief about the expected state of affairs, then this
is a clearly a case of subjective idealistic view of truth. This seems to be
a rather dangerous doctrine because, what brings about a satisfactory
result to one, or what works for one person, may not work for another.
Thus, the issue of "whose desire?" that is involved here, needs to be

adequately addressed. Unfortunately, Rescher's theory has not done this. Thus, based on his view here, truth loses its intrinsic nature as an objective reality. Truth rather becomes a pawn in the chessboard of an individual subjective ego.

Truth as Usefulness

Rescher's pragmatic idealism obviously makes coherence the arbiter between particular truth claims under pragmatic conditions of usefulness or workability. Certainly, this procedure seems to overcome the charge of circularity against coherence theory as it affords one a way of determining the truth-value of any belief or proposition qualifiedly on pragmatic grounds. However, this sort of cognitive program creates a serious epistemological and cognitive problem of identifying truth with *usefulness*. The question is: Why should pragmatic success or usefulness of a belief count as an index of its cognitive adequacy for truth? Can we justifiably attribute truth to a belief simply because it is useful to us? Are there not many beliefs that fortify and comfort people but which are plainly untrue? Is "usefulness" a demonstration of a belief's truth or its comfort-value?

For certain, "usefulness" cannot be used as a yardstick to determine truth. For it may be useful for someone to belief a particular proposition but also useful for another person to disbelief it. Besides, untrue ideas often lead to what many people call "satisfactory results". Thus, the truth of a proposition cannot be reduced to its usefulness – since this might vary with people; and while beliefs that are true tend to work in the long run, it is not necessarily the case that the beliefs which work are therefore true. Besides certain beliefs are undeniably useful, even though on other pragmatic criteria, they are judged to be false.

All these simply show that by reducing the validation of coherence to pragmatic grounds, Rescher over-estimated the strength of the connection between truth and usefulness. What is true is not necessarily "useful" as Rescher's pragmatism conceives it in terms of workability and problem-solving. In other words, pragmatic success or "usefulness" of a belief is not a sufficient index of its cognitive adequacy as truth. In fact, he directly attempts to change truth into usefulness, which is

essentially connected with satisfying the will's desires and reaching the pleasure. With this approach, Rescher is no longer dealing with truth as an independent cognitive value with its own right, but only as a measure to reach further purposes of satisfying contingent human needs. This leads to the conclusion that there is no permanent, enduring or objective truth.

Conclusion

Rescher's attempt to rebrand and re-present the coherence theory of truth in ways the render it immune from most major traditional objections, is unarguably, a bold step in seeking to lay to rest the long-standing problem of truth in epistemology, through the theory. His insightful conceptual analysis of the word "coherence", and his idea of the need for an extra-propositional basis (pragmatic grounds) upon which to validate coherence – to address the purely idealistic nature of coherence, deserve some commendations. This seems to be in line with the reasoning of most other contemporary Coherentists such as Stout, who insists that there must be a way of ascertaining truth otherwise than through mere coherence, for "truth cannot be recognized merely through coherence of propositions" (33).

Besides, Rescher's idea of "data" as the target domain or specified set of coherence is quite ingenious and in line with the scientific process and tentative concept of reality. It can therefore serve as an *organon* for scientific reasoning, which experiments with plausibly observable data concerning a given issue. However, the identified cognitive problems in his theory, as discussed above, which include, sceptico-reductivistic view of truth, anti-realism about truth, subjective-idealistic view of truth and erroneous conception of truth as usefulness, tend to mar the rational success and adequacy of his theory. They all conduce to the inevitable fact about Rescher's failure to present a rationally satisfying theory of coherence that satisfactorily answers the paradigmatic epistemological question: What is truth?

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