

Is There Universal Truth?¹

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine whether Universal truth (UT, hereafter) exists, and, by extension, if it exists, the nature of its existence, and its features. As such, the paper seeks to provide a response to the question, “Is there Universal Truth?” In this vein, the paper’s first task is the provision of an understanding of what is implied by the question. Following this, it is also required that the paper provides either an affirmation or a denial as response. In the light of this, the paper provides an affirmative response, after which it shows that the ontological status of UT is that it qualifies an entire expression as a *second-order predicate*, and exists in the cognition. Having done these, the paper concludes with a few remarks on the epistemic discourse of truth. For its method, the paper employs the critical and conceptual analysis typical of philosophy.

Keywords: Universal truth, *First-order* predicate, *Second-order* predicate, Coherence theory of truth, Correspondence theory of truth.

Introductory Remarks

Alongside alternative titles considered for this paper, I settled for the present one for two reasons: (i) the current title represents the predominant phrasing of the students who asked

¹ I acknowledge the contributions of those students, particularly at the Major Seminary of Ss. Peter & Paul, Bodija, and the Dominican Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Samonda, both in Ibadan, Nigeria, with whom the ideas in this paper were first discussed. Though it was with them I first began to put together the ideas contained in the paper, I bear full responsibility for the arguments and submission that the I make in the paper. I also feel indebted to the anonymous reviewer whose comments also helped to improve my analysis in the paper.

questions about Universal truth (hereafter, UT) in various introductory classes of epistemology I taught; and (ii) I suppose that it would be more helpful in getting readers straight at the crux of my aim in the paper: viz, to determine whether UT exists, and, by extension, if it exists, the nature of its existence as well as its features. Let me add a further consideration – related to (i) – that explains my preference for retaining the phrasing of the question by students as the title of the paper. This is my expectation that the paper will be a more convincing answer for those students who raised the question in my classes. So, while my intent in the paper is to examine whether UT exists, I do this bearing in mind the students who have raised the question in my classes. This, the reader may note, is the context of origin of the paper that may serve to aid their appraisal of my submission. In this vein, therefore, I take my first task to be to provide an understanding of what I suppose these students had in mind in raising the question. To this end, I would attempt, in the paragraph that follows, an explication of how I understand the question giving the context within which it was raised.

In the discourse of epistemology, reference is usually made to truth as a condition for knowledge, particularly, in the traditional account where knowledge is seen to be sufficiently and necessarily defined by belief, truth and justification. As regards truth, there are however several accounts – correspondence, coherence, pragmatic, semantic, just to mention a few – that students often become puzzled and wonder which theory of truth suffices; leading them to eventually ask if there is UT.² As

² In classes where I have elicited suggestions from students in response to the question, I have often noticed the tendency to describe Jesus Christ, who referred to himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life in the Christian Scriptures, as Universal truth. But I contend that this is mistaken. My argument here is grounded on the understanding that our conceptualisation of ‘universal’ comes closest to, or equates, the Forms of Plato. And the Forms, which were archetypes through which things were made by the Demiurge (the creating entity) in Plato’s philosophy, does not compare with the Christian understanding of Jesus Christ. Otherwise, to equate universal truth to Jesus Christ is to equate the archetypes (or

I understand it, the question bothers on whether there is an understanding or conception of truth that may not be pass for a relative or subjective theory as other theories of truth are oftentimes taken to pass for: that is, these other theories being individual or particular, as against being general or universal, conceptions of truth. An illustration of the character of these other conceptions of truth may suffice here. With respect to correspondence theory of truth, for instance, advocates insists that truth is the relation a judgement bears with facts or state of affairs, such that “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true.”³ In this conception of truth, there is a certain limitation to the understanding of truth in qualifying a judgment as true if it matches some fact. It leaves off, for instance, the relation a judgement may bear to another pre-existing (and, sometimes, more fundamental) judgment that eventually makes the current judgement true. This is what supporters of the coherence theory of truth suppose truth to be. So, the sense in which I understand the question about UT – a sense which I think is quite obvious – is that in raising the question, these students are interested in knowing whether there is a conception of truth that go beyond the many variant conceptions of truth portrayed in different situations and circumstances where reference is usually made to truth.

If my understanding is correct, then, I reason that any response requires first an affirmative or negative answer; and if affirmative, an explication of its (UT's) ontological status (whether it is extra-mental or mental), as well as its features or characteristics should follow. And this denotes my focus, and

the seminal idea as Augustine described them) to him, who, again, the Christian Scriptures refer to as the One (that is, the Logos) through whom the world was created not as an archetype but as creator (See John 1). To however expatiate on what Jesus Christ meant by referring to himself as ‘the Truth’ is a matter that I am not proficient to speak about.

³ The correspondence theory is often traced back to Aristotle's well-known definition of truth in the *Metaphysics*, 1011b25. He also makes allusion to this in the *Categories*, 12b11, 14b14 and *De Interpretatione*, 16a3.

represents how I intend to attempt a response in the paper. I will begin, in Section I, with examining the aspect of the title-question that requires affirming or denying the existence of UT, and if I am successful with affirming its existence, as I intend to do, I will, in Section II, proceed to explicate the features of UT. I will conclude the paper with a few remarks on the implication of my analysis for the epistemic discourse of truth. It is instructive that I note here that whereas the former section bothers on the ontology of truth understood as universal, the latter concerns the epistemology of truth taken as universal.

I

A, perhaps, useful point to begin this section that examines the ontological status of UT is to identify what truth is not. As such, my analysis of UT begins with an examination of truth, in terms of the way it is deployed in qualifying expressions, and then proceed to an explication of the ontological status of UT. Let me note that I am aware that my approach in beginning with the identification of what truth is not breaches the logical principle that guides the definition/clarification of terms: which is that if ‘sometime’ can be said or defined/clarifies in the affirmative, it should not be given in the denial. To however proceed here I crave the understanding of my readers that I do this for the reason that it allows me, at the onset, to clear misconceptions that would otherwise impede the sort of clarity that my subject-matter requires. Assuming that this is granted, I would carry-on by beginning with examining the rather often linguistic circumstances wherein reference(s) is(are) made to truth. In this context, when reference is usually made to ‘truth’, it is not usually in the sense of truth standing in the subject-predicate relation. That is, ‘truth’ is not usually, in this context, taken as the predicate of an expression that qualifies the subject of that expression; for short, ‘truth’ is not taken to fill the predicate position, or stand as the predicate term of an expression. As an illustration, it is a linguistic error to make such expression as “Lagbaja is truth” or “the dog or house is truth.” This is because

‘truth’ is not a *first-order* predicate. Simply put, *first-order* predicates are expressions that can take the place of a predicate in the subject-predicate relation of an expression. For example, in the subject-predicate expression, “Lagbaja is 6ft tall,” ‘is 6ft tall’ is a *first-order* predicate. Compared to our first expression, “Lagbaja is truth,” it (our second expression, “Lagbaja is 6ft tall”) does not commit a linguistic error because it contains a *first-order* predicate, and not *second-order* predicate, that such expressions require so as to be meaningful.⁴

Having made the foregoing point regarding what ‘truth’ is not, with reference to what ‘truth’ may be taken to be, a first stab would be to note that truth is deployed to discriminate between expressions that are taken to meet certain requirements and, hence, are said to be true, and expressions that do not meet such requirements and are taken to be false.⁵ Let me connect this to the last point that was made in the preceding paragraph. There is a relation between a statement possessing the attribute of being meaningful and being true. That is, that a statement is meaningful implies in certain circumstances that the statement is true. But note that in saying that a statement is meaningful extends beyond that allusion of this in the existential sense; it also refers to the sense of taking truth as universal. Whereas, in the existential sense, the statement being meaningful would imply that a factual relation exists between the subject and predicate terms, in the sense of truth being universal, the meaningfulness of the statement would refer to the quality of the entire expression. Let me make it clear that in

⁴ For clarity, I have elected to use the expressions, ‘*first-order* predicate’ and ‘*second-order* predicate’ to refer to predicates that operate in the subject-predicate contexts and predicates that qualify an entire expression respectively. This helps me make some movement from the logical to the ontological use of the word, ‘predicate’.

⁵ For clarity sake, ‘truth’ is taken to be the quality or state of *something* being true, while ‘true’ denotes something agreeing with fact or reality. Though grammatically, they are different parts of speech, I have used them quite interchangeably in this paper.

this sense, the concern is not the sort of relation that exists between subject and predicate terms, whether it is the case that the subject and predicate terms bear such relation. This is what I am trying to point out here: the expression, “Lagbaja is 6ft tall” may not be existentially true – and, so, in the existential sense, the expression would be described as false – but in the sense of ‘truth’ as Universal, referring to the expression as such comes from the expression possessing ‘certain features’ that are taken to denote Universal truth. In this vein, ‘truth’ stands in a qualifying relation to the expression, indicating that it (the expression) possesses ‘certain features’ that make it true. For an expression as “Lagbaja is 6ft tall,” ‘truth’ is taken to qualify the entire expression by, perhaps, if the sort of relation that exists between the subject and predicate parts of the expression meets the requirement(s) of truth. And so, in a subject-predicate expression, truth describes the entire expression and does not stand in a subject-predicate expression as the predicate: for short, truth does not function as *first-order* predicate, such as ‘is 6ft tall’ does in the expression above. Rather, in qualifying an entire expression, it acts as a *second-order* predicate. It is in functioning as a *second-order* qualifier that we refer to truth as universal.

As such, in also beginning here as I did with ‘truth’, let me state first what UT is not. UT is not a *first-order predicate* but a *second-order* predicate. Whereas a *first-order* predicate is grammatical, as a *second-order* predicate, UT is an ontological predicate or attribute that qualifies an entire expression and not just the subject term of the expression as in *first-order* predicates. For some distinction between *first-order* predicates and *second-order* predicates, in the former case, there are more semantic control than there are on the latter.⁶ An implication of this is that in the logical/semantic context, *first-order* predicates that are part of sentences follow grammatical rules and the

⁶ James Thomson, “Is Existence a Predicate?” *Philosophical Logic*, ed. by P. F. Strawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 103.

values of such sentences (that is, the sentences being correct or wrong) are determined by how the stated relation between the subject and predicate of sentences follow the rules of grammar. But in the context of examining UT, sentences are the linguistic support for judgements that bear truth-values (true/false) that are non-linguistic, but world-dependent. Sentences that bear truth-value judgements have referential values that go beyond the referents of their subject-predicate components. Having indicated what UT may not be, I will turn attention to examining the nature of UT.

To begin the examination of the nature of UT (whether it is extra-mental or logical) is to ask what makes for the acceptance or rejection of particular instances where, say, statements are described as true or otherwise. The question that comes to the fore is: how is judgement (of a statement said to be true or false) in an instance possible? As it appears, in referring to a subject-predicate expression or statement as true, reference is made to some reality. If the following expressions: (i) Lagbaja is 6ft tall; (ii) the dog is beautiful; (iii) Ibadan is a big city; (iv) the statement is true; are taken to represent the 'truth', what is it that makes them so? There seems to be a *common reality* to which all the expressions make reference and which makes them accepted as true. To be sure, it is this *common reality* that is seen to ground the references we make in several statements about involving distinct entities as we do in (i) to (iv). As such, UT is seen to exist as the abstracted common and crucial reality from the mass of different expressions that are described as true in particular instances, which, in turn, permits valid judgements on the basis of the features so abstracted. In this regard, UT extracts (abstracts) the shared features or elements that are found to be common to the various circumstances wherein such reference has been made; it is actually on such common features that any valid judgements are predicated and evaluated to be correct. The point (put as a conditional question) made here is that if UT is taken to be non-existent, how is value-judgement in particular instances possible? As it seems, the

possibility for value-judgement arguably provides warrant for affirming the existence of UT. As such, because truth as universal is a more fundamental reality, it is possible to decipher attribute agreement or commonality of features that make a certain judgement accepted as true. So, instances of the truth-reference of statements or expressions partake of the essence of what truth is. A general outline for truth (GT) as universal may be formulated thus:

GT: Where a number of statements, $a, \dots n$, are judged to be true, because they are taken to posse certain features, μ , then it is correct to affirm the existence of *that*, β , whose features $a, \dots n$, share, and a relation, R , by which $a, \dots n$, are individually said to relate to β . The understanding here is that it is by each of $a, \dots n$ sharing μ and standing in R to β that truth as universal is affirmed. This is so even though it is the case that because each of $a, \dots n$, bears R to β explains why they share μ .

Furthermore, in describing or qualifying the expressions, “Lagbaja is 6ft tall,” “the dog is beautiful,” and “Ibadan is a big city,” as true statements, the referential force in terms of their truth-value holds for both cases. This would become more obvious when we examine what features are taken to account for their being true. By describing both statements as true, a single entity is referred, “such that in virtue of being related to it,”⁷ both expressions are true. The same applies to other expressions that are described or taken as true; in such expressions, a referential force by which they are true is picked out. The claim in the paper is that UT denotes the ‘single entity’ which is picked out and thus accounts for several statements, though diverse, being accepted as true statements. As indicated in the schema, the individual expressions are true by virtue of a relation between components of the statements and some

⁷ Michael J. Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 23.

referent. It is the repeatable relation that the components of various statements have with some referent that designates UT, and accounts for how concrete/existential statements are true by being exemplified by such particular statements.

In affirming truth to exist by how reference is made to it in value-judgements, it is assumed or implied that truth qualifies in a *certain way*. That is, the reference to truth as universal adds *something* to the expression that is accepted to be true: it qualifies the expression in a *certain way*, though not in the way a predicate is said to qualify its subject in a subject-predicate expression.⁸ In qualifying an expression in a *certain way*, truth adds the *quality of being true* to the subject-predicate expression. To say that truth adds *something* is to say that truth is a referent and accounts for the reference that expressions make. As such, truth appears to be an attribute (and not a grammatical predicate) of an entire statement gleaned from certain relation(s) the entities in the statement bear to themselves or to other non-linguistic entities. This implies that only statements or claims can be described or qualified as true or otherwise. In the expressions, (i) to (iv) above, only (iv) can be so grammatically represented with truth/true as its predicate; to substitute it ('true', in iv) with 'is 6ft tall, 'is beautiful' and 'is a big city' in (i), (ii), and (iii) would make the resulting expressions grammatically incorrect and meaningless. So, UT is not a grammatical predicate; rather, it is a *second-order* (ontological) predicate (that is, an attribute). To so describe UT seems common-sensical; for, if I say "x is true," my expression would make sense if by 'x' I refer to a claim or

⁸ That 'truth' qualifies a subject-predicate expression in a *certain way* may be gleaned from understanding how *something* is added to the subject in a subject-predicate expression. For example, in the expression, "John is tall," *something*, that is, being 'tall' or 'tallness', is added to the subject, John. In the case with how 'Universal truth' adds *something* to an expression, it is to be noted that the addition is not to the subject in the way it is in the expression, "John is tall,"; rather, the addition is in how the parts of the expression, which relate one to the other, are qualified.

statement or complex entity/expression and not a single or atomic entity/expression, such as ‘Lagbaja’ or ‘a dog’ or ‘Ibadan’.

As an ontological predicate, the existential status of truth is immaterial. UT refers to an immaterial condition or state of being of cognition; though, its immaterial existence may be exemplified in material reality when, for instance, an expression or sentence is value-judged to be true or otherwise.⁹ An illustration will suffice here. Take for instance, the practice and existential experience or observation of seeing students seated in a library preparing for their examinations. This may be interpreted as indicative of UT expressed by the statement, “proper preparation for examinations results in success in such examinations.” The allusion here is that UT as expressed in statement, though likely to have been derived from observations of several instances, is seen to be expressed or exemplified in the concrete or material reality of students seated in the library preparing for their exams. I am awake to the possible rejoinder here that in the way I have taken UT expressed in the statement, “proper preparation for examinations results in success in such examinations,” to have emerged fails to appreciate that it is because in several instances it has been observed that when students properly prepare for examinations, they come out successful. I will retort by stating that the point made in this possible rejoinder concerns the issue of the existence of UT in relation to the observation of attribute agreement which I will examine in a while now.

My claim that UT is a more fundamental reality that makes the discernment of, say, a claim true or otherwise as a result of its possession of the repeatable attributes of UT requires some

⁹ Whether in an instance an expression is value-judged to be true or false, as in “the statement is true” or “the statement is false,” truth as universal is predicated of both instances as ontological predicate. In the first instance, the description is that it is *true* that the statement is true, and in the second instance, the description is that it is *true* that the statement is false. So, truth as universal qualifies an expression by attributing to the expression the quality of being true.

validation. In my account of the ontological status of UT, it appears I have taken it (UT) to pre-exist those instances that are judged or qualified as true, even though in the manner I have argued for the existence of it (UT), I have proceeded from particular instances of judgments that are accepted as true to affirm the existence of UT simply by the observation of various instances where the judgment results from perceptible attribute-agreement of such instances. And by doing so, I have taken UT to be a more fundamental reality that accounts for the attribute-agreement that are observed to exist among numerically diverse expressions. So, it seems my supposition of the existence of UT as basic to the phenomenon of attribute-agreement is superfluous, as it is more apt to suppose that the phenomenon of attribute-agreement is a basic fact that it is not susceptible to further analysis.¹⁰ It is pertinent to note that both aspects – the former that raises the charge of my analysis subtly presuming UT, though beginning from particular instances where truth is referred, and the latter regarding the superfluous reference to UT as being a more fundamental reality – are interconnected; viz, if I have presumed the existence of UT as distinct and standing in some common and overall relation to particular instances where truth is referred, then I have sort of assumed that UT is a more fundamental reality. For short, the charge is that in the first instance I have fallen foul of supposing that attribute agreement implies the existence of a single reality that explains it, and in the second aspect proposing a redundant notion that does not explain the matter at hand.¹¹

Though, the charges have somewhat been levelled on different points, I suppose it is evident that there is a point

¹⁰ This represents a possible dissenting response of nominalists who take universals to be words that do not denote any real thing. In the light of this, my argument for the existence of universal truth may equally be taken to denote the existence of nothing of the sort.

¹¹ These dissenting claims to my analysis of universal truth are the more prominent responses from colleagues with whom I have shared my thoughts on the subject.

where they meet – for, if I claim that UT is a more fundamental reality, I have equally claimed that UT exists and its features are instantiated in particular circumstances where truth is referred. And so, in my response, I will take the charges as two aspects of one counter-argument of my analysis of UT. To begin here, I interpret the former aspect of the charge as raising the question of whether it is the existence of UT that makes for our being able to observe attribute agreement or whether UT exists and we cognise it when we eventually observe instances of attribute agreement. I aver that a convincing response regarding the ontological nature of UT is intractable independent of inferring the existence of UT from our observing attribute agreement. As such, if it is claimed that UT pre-exist the particular instances where reference is made to it without inferring its existence from our observing attribute agreement, the challenge that results from this resembles that which has accompanied Plato's supposition of the nature of the existence of Forms in his theory of the World of Forms; viz, UT would be taken to have existed *somewhere* before it is observed to be replicated in particular things; and this would equate to what I see as the mythical assumptions in Plato's theory of Forms. On the other, if we do not consider our knowing UT in relation to the repeatable instances where we observe attribute agreement, then we simply do not arrive at a knowledge of UT or perhaps affirm the non-existence of UT. This takes me to a consideration of the latter aspect of the charge: that the affirmation of UT is a mistaken assumption of the existence of a more fundamental reality beyond the particular things that exists before us.

One way to interpret this objection is that it assumes that the features of UT which are referred in talking about the attribute agreement that various statement share are located where the exemplifiers (the concrete particulars) of such features are located.¹² That is, the objection is that since the

¹² See Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 46-62, for in-depth exposition of this debate.

many particulars that supposedly exemplify a universal occupy discontinuous regions of space, defences of the existence of UT are committed to the necessarily false claim that a single thing is wholly and completely numerically different in places at one and the same time. The objection just assumes, however, that the realist is committed to the claim that universals have spatial location, that a universal is itself located where its exemplifiers are located. Following Bertrand Russell who denied that universals have any location at all, claiming that though the universal expression, 'north of', relates Edinburgh and London, "there is no place ... where we find the relation 'north of';] It does not exist in Edinburgh any more than in London; for it relates the two and is neutral between them,"¹³ it is tenable to say that whereas the particulars exemplifying the features of UT may have spatial location, UT itself never does. As such, from the strength of the intuition that informs the supposition of UT, and from the observation of attribute agreement in particular entities, it is plausible to affirm the existence of UT. Supposing that I have had some success in the analysis of the existence of UT, I will now turn attention to what I take the features of UT to consist in.

II

As a first shot, an instance of a judgement is true because it is a repetition, through the characteristics or properties of UT. What is derived from the experience of instances that are judged as true is that they broadly either espouse features or characteristics that make them agree with facts or make them consistent with other judgements. In the former instance, we talk of the correspondence of the judgement with facts and in the latter, the coherence of the judgement with (pre-existing) judgements.¹⁴

¹³ Bertrand Russell, *Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 98.

¹⁴ I have limited myself to talking about the correspondence and coherence theories of truth because by some method of *reductio ad absurdum*, I take the theories to represent the broad categorisations by which we can examine truth.

To further explicate these features, I will like to state that my initial stance about UT was a sceptical one. I recall sneeringly asking one of my professors during my undergraduate classes to describe UT for me so that when “I ‘see’ it I will know it.” This display then was because I wondered that if UT exists, then it must be known and this meant that it was possible for one to identify it when one ‘encountered’ it. But I thought to myself that it was not possible to identify the features of whatever may be accepted as UT; hence, it was more rational to admit that there was no such thing as UT. If I recall rightly, the first dint that led to the gradual change from my sceptical disposition to the affirmation of UT is my realisation of the distinction between *something existing*, on the one hand, and *knowing the something to be existing*, on the other. This happened in the course of several discussions I had with colleagues. Indeed, I realised that it was the case that there are somethings that exists that are not now known, but are knowable and somethings that exists that are not now known and may never be known. I just thought to myself then that it was mistaken to determine the ontological status of *something* from the thing’s epistemological status; that is, whether it is known. This however gained more argumentative force when I realised that it is more rationally appealing to suppose the existence of UT given how several particular things agree in the sort of attributes they possess.

The change in my initial sceptical disposition explains an alternative title, “Knowing Truth,” I first considered for this paper. The title reveals aspects of my understanding of what

While correspondence is synthetic, coherence is analytic. I take, ultimately, the pragmatic and semantic theories as variants of correspondence; as regards the pragmatic theory, I take it so for its *a posteriori* conception of truth, and for the semantic theory, I refer to the sense of taking it as a philosophical doctrine, rather than as branch of mathematical logic. In this former sense, the major proponent of the theory, Alfred Tarski, is noted to have derived his analysis from that of Aristotle, who is taken to be the major explicator of the correspondence understanding of the meaning of truth.

answering the title-question of this paper required: an exposition of the features or characteristics of UT. I supposed, in affirmingly answering the question, that if UT exists, it would be in the human cognition defined by features/characteristics by which judgement is possible. My assumption in this regard is that in the instances where we identify attribute agreement, and so affirm the existence of UT, it is the presence of certain features and/or characteristics that has informed our judgement in the particular instance of a claim or an event as either true or false. And in parsing an instance of a claim or an event as true, or as true that the claim is false, it is the features or characteristics of UT that the intellect espouses and, hence, it is able to make such judgement; the intellect cognises these features and gives accent to the instance as true.¹⁵

To now unfold the features earlier mentioned that I identify to be those of UT, let me return briefly to the explication of how truth is deployed in qualifying sentential expressions according to the subject-predicate relation. In the subject-predicate expression, the role of the subject and predicate components is “to make contact with the world by referring to or picking out an object.”¹⁶ So, if the statement, ‘Lagbaja is 6ft tall’, is taken to be true, the implied meaning is that the statement’s subject (Lagbaja) and predicate (6ft tall) terms have referents and the referents are related in a way that what is expressed by the statement is (factually) true. When the reference they make is a contact with *something* in the extramental world, such reference typifies the feature of ‘correspondence’. In the conceptualisation of realists, a subject-predicate expression is true because what is expressed (the linguistic component) corresponds with the way the world is (the non-linguistic component). So, the

¹⁵ I take ‘intellect’ to refer to the cognitive or mental powers of man to comprehend things; and not essentially a substance (like the mind) that exists within the human person, even though this may be the case. Taking it as such suffices for my intent in the paper without the burden of having to defend my allusion to the intellect.

¹⁶ Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 22.

correspondence of the linguistic structure of the subject-predicate expression to the non-linguistic structure of the world makes the expression true. In this vein, we glean UT in the synthetic or contingent context. But when the referent of an expression is not directly according to the way the world is, as is observed with ‘correspondence’ as a feature of UT, but it is to the network or relation of ideas, we talk of ‘coherence’ as another feature of UT. Here, UT reveals itself in the analytic context (with no particular recourse to contingent context). An often-stated expression in this regard is: “a bachelor is an unmarried man.” An understanding of the idea/concept signified by the subject term and that signified by the entity occupying the predicate term is enough to determine the truth-value of the expression. So, in the case of ‘coherence’ as a feature of UT, there is also the linguistic structure and the non-linguistic structure. But unlike with ‘correspondence’ the non-linguistic understanding is not (immediately) the referent of a concrete reality/fact, but the referent of an idea.¹⁷

And so, In the case of correspondence, as with coherence, there is usually a fact (with correspondence) and an idea (with coherence) correlated with the entities expressed in the subject and predicate positions. Taking these as representative features of UT by which UT may be described and known, they, again, indicate that UT is a quality (*second-order* predicate) of an expression. It may be added here that whereas ‘correspondence’ affiliates with *a posteriori* referencing in denoting truth, ‘coherence’ aligns with *a priori* referencing in denoting truth. It is to be noted that I have carefully avoided the use of the expressions, ‘correspondence theory’ and ‘coherence theory’; this is to enable me draw attention to the idea the concepts denote, rather than to the systematic formulations of these into their respective theories.

¹⁷ Supporters of extreme realism may however retort that in the long-run, by some *reductio* method, the network of warrants or web of beliefs that statements or expressions derive in the coherence setting is provided by reference to a fact, and is, hence, a variant of correspondence.

Concluding Remarks

Let me begin my concluding remarks by highlighting the main points of my response to the question-title that informed this paper. Following the understanding of universals, UT signifies the phenomenon of similarity or attribute agreement among numerically different statements or expressions.¹⁸ It is an abstract reference that is exemplified in statements or expressions that affirm a given reality. Knowing UT starts from the experience of numerically diverse things that we are able to classify into groups, not merely by some personal preference or bias, but because the features and qualities we observe in the various things themselves impact our perception that way, leaving our language and thought to reflect them as they are apprehended. And so, there seems to be objectively identifiable facts and features that make the classification of diverse things possible. As Michael Loux notes: “This is not a claim born of any metaphysical theory. It is, on the contrary, a pre-philosophical truism, but one that has given rise to significant philosophical theorising.”¹⁹ Understood thus, UT represents repeatable qualities and features that are wholly exhibited or exemplified by several different spatially discontinuous particulars.²⁰ And so, I take it that we come to a knowledge of UT when we observe instances of attribute agreement. UT denotes some relation between judgement and fact. This relation is what is in the cognition, exemplified by the features of UT; the relation bears the features of truth as universal.

There is a fallout of my analysis of UT thus far; this regards the long-standing debate regarding the more probable theory of truth, particularly in the cognitive context where truth is taken as a condition for knowledge. As evident from the stated focus of the paper, it is not my intention to wade into the debate on what theory of truth, whether the correspondence theory or the

¹⁸ Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 17.

¹⁹ Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 8.

²⁰ Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 19.

coherence theory or one of the other theories usually referred to, passes for the correct conceptualisation of truth. But if my analysis speaks to the debate as to enlighten it in some measures, then the paper would have achieved an all-important task, though unintendedly. An attempt to explore how this may be the case will take the paper beyond the permitted length; however, my submission here is that UT incarnates as, now, correspondence, and as, now again, coherence.