The Logical Status of the Biblical Book of Titus

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to determine the logical status of the Biblical Book of Titus. It does this by exploring the philosophical problem of the definition of truth and how it is to be applied. It delves into St. Paul's usage of philosophy in the Epistle of Titus. A careful examination of the book reveals that there are apparent logical contradictions in St. Paul's usage of "truth". It is argued and concluded that the book of Titus is a classic example of very few philosophical treatises which can be easily shown to be dead and maybe raising questions of its religious value.

Keywords: Lies, Logic, Truth

I.   INTRODUCTION

One of the significant features of the Pauline Epistles is the philosophical interest that they elicit. The reasons for these are many but all of them can be attributed to the learning and subjects that Paul learnt in his training as lawyer. During that time it was mandatory that a student of law had to learn, among other subjects, philosophy. This is the reason why Pauline Epistles are replete with many soritistic arguments. The Book of Titus is one such example. In this Book, Paul has endeavoured to explain to Titus that Cretans do not know the Truth since "[12] *One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons",* and Paul confirms, [13]*"This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith* [14] *and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth."* The question which arises is: what was Paul understands of truth and to what extent was that prophet an authority in matters truth? Consequently, what is the logical status of the claims of Paul that the saying was true?

This article is a philosophical analysis of determining the logical status of the Book of Titus with specific reference to what Paul understands of truth as presented in Chapter one of that Book. It is a classical example of a paradox of self-reference which arises when one considers whether it is possible for Epimenides to have spoken the truth. Epimenides is credited with the saying in the Book of Titus, "All Cretans are Liars" (Horne, 1841).

The article is divided into three sections. In the first section, a general philosophical presentation of what truth is presented. In the second section, the Book of Titus is subjected to philosophical analysis to determine the logical status of the claims made by Paul. In the last section a general conclusion is drawn from the first two sections. The *International Version (*NIV) will be the point of reference.

1.1   The Truth

'Mr X is my true friend', 'this is Gospel truth', are some of the many phrases that touch on truth, commonly expressed albeit without concern over what truth is. The question of what Truth is has preoccupied philosophers from time immemorial; as testified by Glanzberg, Michael, in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (2008), "Truth is one of the central subjects in philosophy. It is, also, one of the largest. Truth has been a topic of discussion in its own right for thousands of years. Moreover, a huge variety of issues in philosophy relate to truth, either by relying on theses about truth, or implying theses about truth."

"Truth" can be seen as an abstract noun that can be used in   various ways. For example, it can be used to refer to the *concept* that "picks out" the property and is expressed in English by the adjective "true". Hence a question like, 'what is the true picture on the ground'. 'Truth' can also be used, to refer to some set of true carriers, as in: "The truth is out there", and: "The truth about the death of Mr X will be known soon".
Discussing what truth is requires that one bears in mind that there is a distinction between *definitions* of truth as in 'what is the meaning of truth' and *criteria* of truth as in 'what should something possess for it to be true'.

The definition of truth gives the meaning of the word' true', and a criterion of truth gives a test by means of which to tell whether something, for example a sentence, is true or not. There are, hence, theories of truth that count as definitional and others as criteria. Let's examine some of these theories.

First is the correspondence theory of truth which is the view that truth is correspondence to, or with, a fact. The theory is often traced back to Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher who in *Metaphysics* 1011b25 states, "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, and is true". Later, this view was embraced by among other philosophers Bertrand Russell, G.E. Moore and Thomas Aquinas. In general, correspondence is broadly applied to any view that suggests that truth consists in a relation or link to reality. This basic idea has makes correspondence be taken as conformity, congruence, agreement, accordance, picturing, among others (Dennett, 1998). The implication is that, correspondence theory is a fact-based theory. There has to be agreement between what is said and the fact. Hence, to say that 'it is raining in Kakamega' is true; it would mean that the facts accord with the proposition. It also means that a belief is true when there is a corresponding fact, and false when there is no corresponding fact. It can be concluded therefore that the Correspondence theory accounts for the truth of a proposition as arising out of a relationship between that proposition and features or events in the world *(Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*

There is also the coherence theory. Coherence theory accounts for the truth of a proposition as arising out of a relationship between a proposition and other propositions *(Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy).* It therefore takes truth to consist in relations of coherence among a set of beliefs. Hence, the truth of any proposition consists in its coherence with some specified set of propositions. It is about fitting beliefs together into a coherent system. Hence, a proposition is false if what it claims does not cohere with the agreed propositions. For example, it is agreed that goats don't speak, therefore, a claim there is a speaking goat in Kisumu would be false because it does not cohere with other propositions about goats in general. This is because, the theory claims that a proposition is true if and only if it coheres with o t h e r s .

Comparing Coherence and correspondence theories, the coherence theory differ from, the correspondence theory, in two essential respects. The two give conflicting accounts of the relation that propositions bear to their truth conditions. According to one, the relation is coherence, according to the other, it is correspondence. The two theories also give conflicting accounts of truth conditions. According to the coherence theory, the truth conditions of propositions consist in other propositions (propositions that a proposition should cohere with) but to the correspondence theory, the truth conditions of propositions are objective features of the world. Although the coherence and correspondence theories are fundamentally opposed in this way, they both present a substantive conception of truth. The two theories both hold that truth is a property of propositions that can be analysed in terms of the sorts of truth-conditions propositions have, and the relations propositions stand in to these conditions.

The other theory of truth is Pragmatic theory. Pragmatism has Americans, Charles Peirce, William James and John Dewey as the principal advocates. The general pragmatist maxim is practical consequences (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2008). According to the maxim, the meaning of a concept is to be given by reference to the 'practical' or 'experimental' consequences of its application. The maxim is applicable to the question of what truth is (Davidson, 2000). The pragmatists' approach to truth is to ask what difference it makes whether a belief is true. The Pragmatic Theory of truth determines whether or not a belief is true or not based on whether it has a pragmatic (useful) application in the world. If it does not, then it is not true.

According to Peirce, truth is the end of inquiry, that opinion on which those who use the scientific method will, or perhaps would if they persisted long enough, agree. Peirce takes belief to be a disposition to action, and doubt to be the interruption of such a disposition by recalcitrance on the part of experience; inquiry is prompted by doubt, which is an unpleasant state which one tries to replace by a fixed belief. Peirce argues that some methods of acquiring beliefs - the method of tenacity, the method of authority, the *apriori* method - are inherently unstable, but the scientific method enables one to acquire (eventually) stable beliefs, beliefs which will not be thrown into doubt. For the scientific method, Peirce argues, alone among methods of inquiry, is constrained by a reality which is independent of what anyone believes, and this is why it can lead to consensus (Frankfurt, 2006). So, since truth is the opinion on which the scientific method will eventually settle, and since the scientific method is constrained by reality, truth is correspondence with reality. ft also follows that the truth is satisfactory to believe, in the sense that it is stable, safe from the disturbance of doubt. In a way pragmatic theory agrees with coherence theory that truth in this is not to do with the way the world 'really is', but a function of whether an idea can be used as to have useful predictions about what is going to happen in the world. Hence, pragmatic truths can only be learnt through interaction with the world. Truth is not discovered by for example sitting in a field and thinking about it.

Lastly there is consensus theory of truth. Consensus theory entails the process of taking statements to be true simply because people generally agree upon them, meaning truth of something is premised on the consensus of people. Like correspondence and coherence theories, it is an ancient criterion of truth whereby,

that which is universal among men qualifies to be the truth. Consensus theorists of truth differ on the basis of the consensus principle. In some criteria the notion of universal consent is taken strictly, while others qualify the terms of consensus in different ways (Brown, 1986 and Barrett, 1962). There are for example, versions of consensus theory in which the specific population weighing in on a given question, the proportion of the population required for consent, and the period of time needed to declare consensus.

The consensus theory can be demonstrated using witchcraft as an example. If there is a community of 21 people and there is a claim that one of them who died was bewitched, consensus would apply in terms of time and numbers. Time here is how long it should take to declare consensus and of course how many out of 20 should accept for the consensus to be also declared.

Consensus theory is clearly a regulative ideal, not a normative one. A regulative ideal can be expressed in the form of a description, but what it describes is an ideal state of affairs, a condition of being that constitutes its aim, end, goal, intention, or objective. It is not the usual case for the actual case to be the ideal case, or else there would hardly be much call for a policy aimed at achieving an ideal.

Corresponding to the distinction between actual conditions and ideal conditions there is a distinction between actual consensus and ideal consensus. A theory of truth founded on a notion of actual consensus is a very different thing from a theory of truth founded on a notion of ideal consensus. Moreover, an ideal consensus may be ideal in several different ways (Chisholm, 1957; 1989). The state of consensus may be ideal in its own nature, conceived in the matrix of actual experience by way of intellectual operations like abstraction, extrapolation, and limit formation. Or the conditions under which the consensus is conceived to be possible may be formulated as idealizations of actual conditions. A very common type of ideal consensus theory refers to a community that is an idealization of actual communities in one or more respects.

In the next section we examine Paul's advice to Titus on "truth" as advised by the "prophet" to determine the logical status of the book of Titus.

1.3 Paul's Advice to Titus

1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness— [2] in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, [3] and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior,

[4] To Titus, my true son in our common faith:
Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.
Appointing Elders Who Love What Is Good
[5] The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. [6] An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. [7] Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. [8] Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. [9] He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.
Rebuking Those Who Fail to Do Good
[10] For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. [11] They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. [12] One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." [13] This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith [14] and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth. [15] To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. [16] They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

To understand this passage, we will first identify the claim, that is, the conclusion of the argument that Paul is advancing. Then we will show the premises by which he attempts to establish his claim.

Paul's central argument is to prove that Cretans are always liars. He gives his conclusion thus: "Cretans are always liars...and this saying is true." Let us untangle the argument by which Paul tries to establish his central argument. To do this, we will first give a first-reading of the passage.

A first-reading of the passage would go thus: all Cretans are liars since an authority who is also a Cretan himself has told Paul so. Paul then confirms the claim by saying that the claim is true. He then proceeds to advice Titus to shun the Cretans because they always lie. The justification offered for making this claim is, *"...so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth."* Paul then goes on to formulate his conclusion, *"To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and*

consciences are corrupted. [16] They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good."

From the foregoing "first-reading" of Paul's argument, we gather that Paul asserts that Cretans are liars on the basis of the Prophet. There are two technical terms that Paul uses in the above passage: lies and truth. Paul seems to indicate that "lie" is used as the opposite of "true". Paul seems to indicate to the classical liar paradox which occurs when a liar states that he is lying. If it is true that the liar is lying, then, he is telling the truth. The problem with this paradox is that it seems to show that common beliefs about truth and falsity actually lead to a contradiction (Irvine, 1992).

Let us consider this sentence from Irvine (1992) as an example that can easily lead to a contradiction.

This statement is false. (A)

If (A) is true, then "This statement is false" is true. What if it is indeed the case that "This statement is false" is false? Then, the claim becomes true. However, that the liar sentence can be shown to be true if it is false and false if it is true has led some to conclude that it is "neither true nor false".

This is exactly the situation we find ourselves when reading the book of Titus. A philosophical question arises concerning the logical status of the book under discussion. In particular is Paul's claim that what the prophet told him was true, that is, that all "Cretans are liars". If what the Prophet told Paul concerning the Cretans was true then that statement must apply to the prophet himself since "all Cretans are liar." If it is true that all Cretans are liars, then either the prophet was telling Paul the truth or since all Cretans are liars he was telling Paul lies.

One problem which arises with the above claim lies in the logical status of the statement itself. In philosophy there are statements which are so general that they apply to themselves. To understand better this argument, let us consider the example of the views of the *Weiner Kreis* concerning the principle of verification. The principle of verification was propounded by the logical positivists. *Logical positivism* is the philosophical movement initiated by a group of thinkers who lived in Vienna in 1920s. This group later became famous under the name of the "Vienna circle". Among its members were Moritz schlock, Hans Hahn, Fredrick Waisman, Herbert Feigl, Otto Neurath and Rudolf Carnap. The movement was propagated in England by A. J. Ayer in his book *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936).

The logical positivists' views, put in brief, are that philosophy does not produce propositions which are true or false; it merely clarifies the meaning of statements, showing some to be scientific, some to be mathematical and some to be nonsensical.

In drawing the above distinction, the logical positivists distinguished between "analytic" and "synthetic" propositions from which they drew the criterion of verification (the criterion for determining when a proposition is cognitively meaningful). According to Ayer, a sentence will be factually significant to a given person if and only if he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express, that is, if he knows what observations would led him under certain conditions to accept the proposition as being true, or reject is as being false.

Put more shortly, the verification principles can be stated as:

"Every genuine proposition must be either analytic or empirically verifiable" (Wheatley, 1970: p. 48)

One problem which arises with the "verification principle" lies in the logical status of the principle itself. For the statement "Every genuine proposition must be either analytic or empirically verifiable" appears to be neither analytic nor empirically verifiable, in which case it is self-defeating and the principle is literally meaningless and incapable of truth of falsity (Wheatley, 1970, Shand, 1993).

It is then a clear indication that the principle of verification as a criterion of truth is not infallible (and that is why the guarantee of truth is difficult to attain) and there is need for a sure criterion to be developed which would be used as a test of truth (as we shall see in the next section, the principle of falsification is itself not infallible). A careful examination of the statement indicates that it is neither a statement of science nor a statement of logic. In other words, the statement is too general to the extent that it refers to itself. That is to say that it is nonsensical.

The Book of Titus is exactly of this nature. The statement that the prophet makes is too general that it must apply to itself. If indeed all Cretans are liars then that must apply to the prophet since he was a Cretan. This argument is informed by the fact the usage of the term "all" in the statement "All Cretans are liars" does not give any exception to any other Cretan, whether prophet or not.

II. CONCLUSION

The book of Titus is a classic example of very few philosophical treatises which can be easily shown to be dead and maybe raising questions of its religious value. However, the fact that the logical status of the book

of Titus is suspect does not mean that all the other books by Paul fall into the same category. In order to understand statements in Philosophy, it is inadequate to simply label them, for example, as true. An examination must first be carried out to find out what truth is but also what truth does. Effort should be put to try and sort out obscurities and then see whether one statement can be true in one instance and false in another.

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