THAT TRUTH EXISTS IS MORE LOGICAL

Noriaki Iwasa

Postmodernists claim that there is no truth. However, the statement 'there is no truth' is self-contradictory. This essay shows the following: One cannot state the idea 'there is no truth' universally without creating a paradox. In contrast, the statement 'there is truth' does not produce such a paradox. Therefore, it is more logical that truth exists.

Bonaventure, a medieval scholastic theologian and philosopher, formulates a paradox used by Augustine as follows: 'If there is no truth, then it is true to say: "There is no truth." But if this is true, then something is true. And if something is true, there is a first truth.'[1] On the other hand, if the statement 'there is no truth' is false, then there is truth. In either event, the statement 'there is no truth' is self-contradictory. Philosophers call this paradox a 'reflexive paradox,' 'self-referential paradox,' or 'performative self-contradiction (contradiction between what one says and what saying it implies or intends).'

One might claim that 'the only truth is that there is no truth.' Let us call the entire statement in the single quotation marks (1). According to (1), the only truth is the following: 'there is no truth.' However, (1) itself intends to be true. Thus, there is at least one more truth other than the claim 'there is no truth.' Therefore, (1) is self-contradictory. Also, the claim 'there is no truth' contradicts the truth of (1) itself. Besides, since 'there is no truth,' there is no room for 'the only truth' from the beginning. In these senses too, (1) is self-contradictory.

Let us think about the claim 'the only truth is x' in general. Let us call the entire statement in the single quotation marks (a). Now, (a) itself intends to be true. This contradicts what (a) says unless x is (a) itself. Even if one

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claims that 'the only truth is (a)' in order to admit the truth of (a) itself, the same paradox appears. This attempt to avoid the paradox leads to infinite regress, and cannot avoid it forever.

One might try to express the truth of a statement itself in the statement. For example, 'the only truth is this statement in the single quotation marks.' Let us call the entire statement in the single quotation marks (2). Surely (2) avoids the paradox as in (1) and (a). Yet (2) simply admits the existence of truth.

Then one might try to combine (1) and (2) so that he can express the truths of the claim 'there is no truth' and of a statement itself which includes the claim at the same time. For example, 'the only truths are the claim "there is no truth" and this statement in the single quotation marks.' Let us call the entire statement in the single quotation marks (3). According to (3), there are two truths: the claim 'there is no truth' and (3) itself. However, the claim 'there is no truth' contradicts the truth of (3) itself. Besides, since 'there is no truth,' there is no room for 'the only truths' from the beginning. Therefore, (3) is self-contradictory.

Let us return to the statement 'there is no truth.' One might claim that the statement is not self-contradictory because it is a statement at a meta-level. This simply admits the existence of truth at the meta-level. However, one cannot claim that 'there is no truth' universally without creating a paradox. Hilary Lawson writes,

> In the case of a statement such as 'There is no truth', a paradox arises as soon as the self-referential character of the claim is recognized. If there is no truth, then it cannot be a truth that there is no truth. Thus if this claim is to be maintained a distinction has to be introduced so that 'There is no truth' refers to a limited region of statements, allowing the statement itself to be asserted as a truth. So long as the statement can belong to a higher order,

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> a meta-level, the self-reference can be avoided and the paradox evaporates.
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> This form of reflexive problem is less easily dispatched when the introduction of another level itself generates a further paradox. Suppose we wish to say of sentences at the meta-level that 'There is no truth.' To avoid paradox we would have to resort to a meta-meta-level. This would successfully avoid the paradox in this instance, but if we wish to claim that 'There is no truth' generally, we are left with an endless hierarchy of meta-levels.[2]

Lawson also says, 'an endless hierarchy of levels might enable us to avoid paradox on any particular occasion but in the end there must be a level at which the claim "There is no truth" no longer applies.'[3]

One might make the following claim at a meta-level: 'there is no truth below the meta-level.' This claim simply admits the existence of truth at the meta-level and higher meta-levels. Suppose the claim is true. Then there are an infinite number of truths at the meta-level. For example, it is a truth that 'there is no truth below the meta-level.' And it is a truth that 'it is a truth that there is no truth below the meta-level,' and so forth indefinitely. However, when there are an infinite number of truths at the meta-level, what is the point of establishing the meta-level in the first place?

Empirically speaking, the claim 'there is no truth below the meta-level' is wrong. Let us think about the following Cartesian example: the existence of consciousness which understands this claim. Is not the existence of the consciousness true? If not, how could one understand the claim in the first place?

Thus, one cannot state the idea 'there is no truth' universally without creating a paradox. No one can refute this conclusion without committing a performative self-contradiction because any attempt to refute it intends to be true. If not, why do we have to care about it? In contrast, the

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Notes

[1] Bonaventure, *Saint Bonaventure's Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Zachary Hayes (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, 1979), p. 113.

[2] Hilary Lawson, *Reflexivity: The Post-Modern Predicament* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985), p. 17.

[3] Ibid., p. 18

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