

THE  
PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

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THE PROBLEM OF TRUTH.<sup>1</sup>

IN speaking on the same subject as that selected for the Discussion that is to take place to-morrow morning, I do not seek to forestall the results of that discussion. Nor shall I attempt to deal with what to many may seem the more profound and significant aspects of the problem, such as, for example, the relation of our finite knowing to absolute knowing, or the place which our particular truths must have in a final and complete metaphysical system. My aim is rather to set forth simply and clearly some of the more general considerations that ought, in my judgment, to be kept in mind when this subject is under debate.

Now the first requisite in this discussion is surely a definite understanding as to what truth the discussion is about. 'True' and 'false' are adjectives like 'red' and 'sweet' or 'good' and 'bad,' and, like them, must be taken to qualify some object or objects. But the objects they actually are taken to qualify are various, and hence an ambiguity in the conception of truth. We not only apply the terms to ideas, supposals, judgments, propositions, beliefs, and the like, but we also meet with true and false friends, true courage and beauty, false modesty and honor, and, alas, sometimes false dice, hair, and teeth. In this sense falsity may be itself a character of truth: "his faith unfaithful kept him falsely true." In the Hegelian philosophy we have another use of the term, according to which the higher category is truer than the lower, teleology is the truth of mechanism, spirit the truth of nature. We shall avoid at least one source of confusion if we

<sup>1</sup> Delivered as the Presidential Address before the American Philosophical Association at Cornell University, December 27, 1907.