

# MIXING OF CYCLIC VIEW WITH LINEAR VIEW: SEARCH FOR TRUTH

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## ABSTRACT

In eastern philosophy, the truth is found through the nature which has yet been communicated. They accept the truth as given by nature and finds the harmony of the opposing force of nature. This is evident through Yin-yang and Wu Xing, cyclic view of universe. There is problem with the cyclic view, which constrains the option for search of truth since there are discovered against-cycle truths. On one hand, western philosophy searches for truth and challenges the status quo. They view the universe as linear where one finds a starting point by breaking the status quo into components to arrive at the ultimate goal, the truth. However, there are truths in life that can only be found through finding balance and harmony in a cycle. The two are in contrast with each other and this paper aims to find a philosophy which attempts to combine the two contrasting views.

**Keywords:** *Chinese philosophy, linear way for search of truth, Chinese Cyclic Interpretation*

## Problem

The truth has been a subject of ontological philosophy since the classical time. Many philosophers are highly interested on the nature of truth. How can one say that a particular thing is true? What constitutes a truth? What is truth? What is the nature of it?

## Etymology

Truth came from the “Aletheia” which came from alpha suffix and word letho or lathano which mean to cause to forget or to escape notice. The etymology means to make something hidden into something open or unhidden.

## Western Way of Searching Truth

There were several ancient Greek Philosophers who tried to describe the nature of truth. One of it was Aristotle. Truth was defined by Aristotle as: “to say what is that is, and of what is not that is not, is true. “This definition has several assumptions list by priority from most important to least important. First, the nature of an object or subject is independent of its culture, language and history to be able to discern the truth. It must have a present form, identity and being on its own before one can say “what is, that is.” Else, there is nothing to say if there is no form present. Secondly, truth is a similarity on what is said and what there is while falsity is difference between on what is said and what there is; to which Aristotle said: ‘He who thinks the separated to be

separated and the combined to be combined has the truth, while he whose thought is in a state contrary to the objects is in error. 'It is up to people to have an imitation on nature's form which is independent of its culture, context and convention. Lastly, the symbol for communicating the truth such as linguistics must be in coherent with the form of non-signs that they stand for.

Aletheia is seen by some Greeks as truth, which is in contrast with just mere appearance. Paramenides differentiates the way of truth and the way of seemingly. Changes only happen in material world, which is realm of appearance. There is no way to know "what is not" and change is transition of what is to what is not or what is not to what is. Truth, as opposed to appearance, does not change. Sophists, particularly Protagoras, objected to this idea through his famous quote: "Man is the measure of all things." He refused to believe that material world is just an illusion. Some views might hold true for one person, but otherwise to another. A pinch of salt might be salty to one person, but otherwise for another person. This gave rise to existential truth. Plato rejected the notion of relativism, since there will be no standard. He cited a sample that if one person says Paramedes' philosophy is false, then it is false for him. For Plato, falsehood is just deception of the truth. It is just a mere copy of deception.

However, some theorists around 19<sup>th</sup> century came to criticize the thought. Ludwig Wittgenstein stated that everything in this world except for facts has special location e.g. the Eifel tower can be moved from Paris to Rome, but otherwise for facts. Facts, as he

observed, is people's belief that is taken as the truth. This leaves no room for forming new belief and test for its truth. This is detrimental to investigation and assessment where people will see things by seeing not the truth, but on just their interpretation and conceptualization of facts. This thinking led some philosophers to think facts to be not just an individual component taken as true but as a something that fits into system of logical interrelated belief known as web of belief. An individual component only makes sense if it is logically coherent with other rational facts. Yet, some philosophers disagree on this fact since they might be trapped in their system of belief and unable to think outside of it. There might be many systems of coherent ideas, but do not fit into a system of belief. This led to some pragmatic philosopher to only accept the series of logically interrelated belief which is the most useful. Only the useful will stay and others will go extinct. This led to Charles Sander Pierce saying:

*“The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real.”*

This thinking placed emphasis on scientific experimentation and curiosity. However, this would affect the society from reaching the ideal state if only the pragmatic ideas are accepted. This led to more open-minded notion of beliefs which adjusts endlessly. It is still pragmatic, but it lacks a definite endpoint 20<sup>th</sup> century led rise to formal logic. This led to philosophers such as Alfred Tarski on

how to construct a definition of truth based on truth condition; for example, A is before B only if B went after A. This gave some partial definition of truth on a particular object and the the sum of this truth will give rise to the whole truth of an object.

### Linear Way of Searching Truth

The western ontology of truth tries to find the absolute truth, something that is fixed and unchangeable through time. They try to find the truth from their current standpoint until they reach the absolute truth and this is called linear way for search of truth. They try to compare statement against a particular object to use it as their benchmark of comparison for truth. However, there are truths that is applicable to present time but not necessarily in the future or in the past. The comparison between the statement and the object might be same in a particular time but it is necessary the other time. A sample would be:

*“A” is true today only if “A” is true today; it does not necessarily mean that “A” is not true today if “A” is not true in the past or future. It does not mean that if “A” is only true today and not true in any other time that A’s nature or form is false.*

A similar statement would be:

“A” is true only if “A” might be interrelated to other systematic logic of belief today; it is not necessary that if A is not interrelated to other systematic logic of belief the other time, it is false today.

Also, the changeability of truth does not only pertain to time but it may also pertain to other point such as:

*“A “is true today only if “A” is in this “point.” It does not necessarily mean that “A “is not true in this “point” if “A” is not true at any other point. It does not mean if “A” is only true at a particular and not true in any other point that A’s nature is false.*

The “point “refers to any condition given to a truth situation.” “Point” or condition such as time is dynamic. The truth will also be dynamic if “point” is dynamic, since truth statements are heavily dependent on the point. The truth about a particular point changes if the condition for truth statement changes. Hence, there is no fixed truth as the “point “changes. The more one tries to find fixed truth, the more one gets lost finding it since condition changes variable along with truth.

### Chinese Cyclic Interpretation of Searching Truth

The Chinese philosophy has no ontological concept of truth, but several principles of it implies the definition of truth such as Taoism. Taoism emphasizes the concept of Tao/ Dao, which can mean path, way, route or principle. Every movement in this universe follows the Dao, even the way on how things behave follow Tao/Dao. It is not a thing, but it is the principle on how things behave in universe. It is beyond human comprehension to fully understand it. Learning to discern it can help one to discover

wisdom that leads to enlightenment. This concept can't be learned just by grasping the concept, but rather it is learned by the actual experience of it. The Tao is expressed in the principle of Yin-yang which states the following according to Chun- Su Yuan:

*“Yin and yang are opposites*

*Yin and yang are interdependent.*

*Yin and yang can be further subdivided into yin and yang.*

*Yin and yang consume and support each other.*

*Yin and yang can transform into one another.*

*Part of yin is in yang and part of yang is in yin”*

This kind of view along with Wu Xing implies that the universe is cyclic, and it is dynamic; Wu Xing principle is a principle where things go into a cycle from fire, earth, metal, water, wood and back to fire. The cycle of the universe moves between these five elements and the universe will be in harmony if the cycle is followed. Chaos will happen if the flow is disrupted between the elements. Wu Xing led to principles De and Wu Wei: De, which means virtue and power and Wu Wei, which means principle of non-forcing things. Dao is manifested through De and De follows Dao. Even if De is not manifested, Tao will always be there and it serves as guide for the behavior of the universe. Understanding the relationship between Dao and De will lead to Wu Wei, where one follows the path with the least construction and just go along with Dao rather than go against it.

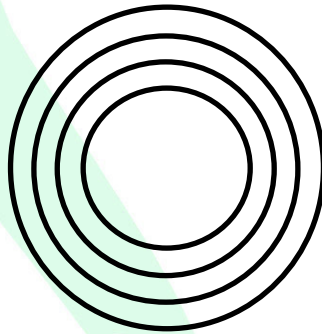
The Chinese principle stated above is that truth is something dynamic and it is not fixed. There exists a guiding principle, Dao, of things which can be interpreted as truth and it is manifested through the things that happen in the universe. It does not matter for truth to be manifested in order to be present. It will always be there. Despite its constant presence, it does not mean that truth is fixed and unchangeable. It is the same with Dao, Wu Xing and Yin and Yang. It is unfathomable for humans to fully understand the truth, Dao. What we can discern is that there is a guiding principle behind the truth; everything, including the truth, is dynamic and goes through a cycle. This is called cyclic view.

However, the cyclic view poses a problem. There will be no truths for humans to speak of, since nothing is truly true except for the dynamics and cycles of truth. This is not pragmatic, since there will be no common ground, truth, for humans to speak and everyone will have a different truth based on their interpretation of the principle behind the “movement of nature” and how they are in accord with it rather than going against it. Also, the truth behind the cyclic view is holistic that it may miss the specific details of a particular truth. It tends to emphasize looking things as a whole rather than its little details. It might miss the little details for a specific truth, and little details are still considered truth. Missing little details means there is something lacking for it to be considered true.



## Solution

Both linear and cyclic view pose their own problem; one of being too fixed, while the other being too dynamic. Hence, a concentric view of searching truth is proposed as shown below:



*Figure 1.* Proposed concentric view of searching truth

A concentric view proposes that for a particular condition, there exists a particular truth. However, the real world has its changing condition. Hence, truth changes as each condition changes. In the real world it is impossible to make conditions stagnant, since the only truth in nature is its dynamics and cycle. As each condition changes, the size of a circle changes and it might become smaller or bigger depending on the nature of the ascribed truth. The truth is only bound by the condition and knowledge that it is discovered. The boundaries of the circle represent the truth condition, while things inside the boundaries represent truth. There is no way to tell which among these truth tells the absolute. What can only be inferred is the ever-changing of truth based on the presented conditions for a set of time. For each set of time, there exists only

one circle which compromises the truth and its condition. However, there can be a new circle if the set time has passed. There will be new conditions as time passes. Hence, a new kind of truth. This does not mean that the previous circles/ truths were false after a new circle is formed. All are true for a set of time, but it becomes false after the set of time expires.

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