

Fitting: A Case of Cheng(誠) Intentionality

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[1] What does it mean to say that one understands an utterance? There have been many attempts to try to answer the question of language understanding in terms of notions like denotation, truth, verification, life forms. I would consider them to be effective in the restricted areas of human experiences which one may call "substantial". But these do not appear to be sufficient in helping us to understand utterances in areas of complex diversities. This paper is looking for an alternative by examining a notion of fitting which can be characterized more in terms of "contextuality".

[2] Fortunately some philosophers have discussed the notion of fitting. I would like to pay attention to some of them. Wittgenstein used "fitting" in various ways. Perhaps the most important element in his idea of fitting may be the notion that fitting is prior to use. One may be helped to understand the idea by his discussions for this. First, when we want to know the subject of a sentence we ask "who or what . . .?" Wittgenstein suggests that the connection between the question and the subject as an answer is determined not by uses but fitting.¹⁾ Second, we understand a word or a sentence "in a flash"(PI, #138) or tangentially. What this implies is that understanding is not an act of some extended time but of an instant moment. Though use allows an evolution of a language community in a way to communicate with each other effectively but it is the notion of fitting which permits understanding in such a context. Third, if one is permitted to, she may use a word in a way different which she is accustomed to. But we don't ask whether two cases of the two different uses are consistent. We seem to be rather concerned with whether her present use fits or fails to fit(PI, #139).

Goodman likes to think that it is more inviting to subsume truth under the notion of fitting than to count descriptive correctness under the notion of truth.²⁾ Goodman declined an idea that fitting is a physical notion or a formal one. For fitting appears for him to be not a relation of, correspondence, pairing, reflection or coherence. He opted for a view that fitting is a linguistic notion, which is working among components in a language.³⁾ To Goodman, Fitting is not a passive state but a positive stance, through a process of fitting in, fitting into and fitting together, so that a new predicament comes to get in one's system.⁴⁾

Goldman tends to explain the notion of truth by synthesizing a realistic interpretation and constructive interpretation, of the world. Goldman distinguished Truth Correspondence Theory into the strong version and the weak one. While the former claims to interpret the world as the

totality of facts Goldman observes that facts of the kinds like those which reflect forms of disjunctions, conditionals, counter-factuals are counter-examples to the claim. Goldman thinks that the world does not come to us as a precategorized whole. Though truth is non-epistemic he believes that we construct criterion of fitting so that we know, for an example, whether clothes I wear are fitting. Human epistemic endeavor starts in the world not yet conceptualized but ends in the world readily conceptualized.⁵⁾

These three philosophers, how different they may be from each other, share something in common, I believe. When Wittgenstein made a sharp distinction between reason and cause in explaining human action it must be a notion of rational fitting which guides human language uses. When Goodman rejects a room for physical fitting or formal fitting he limits the notion of fitting merely to the category of the human invention. Goldman takes the notion of fitting as some sort of our human conceptualization.

What they all reject is that there is some human-independent categories of the world. In this denial they located themselves in allowing to construct some human-laden-categories of the world. Thereby they find natural the dichotomy model of human-nature; intentional-nonintentional⁶⁾. They started to seek an alternative to the notion of truth but landed in the situation which can be explained only in terms of subject-object dichotomy. This is something like physicalism which started as an alternative to Cartesian dualism but which realized that it took some variant of one conjunct of dualism.

[3] If one can doubt whether the notion of fitting can work on the dichotomous model of intentionality then it may be natural to seek the notion on a different model. I propose that the notion of cheng(誠) may provide such a possibility.

The notion of cheng is important in the Doctrine of the Mean⁷⁾. "Cheng" literally means moderation, rectitude, propriety, equilibrium, sincerity, devotion. One may take a look at the root of the word. Cheng(誠) consists of two components, yan(言) and chheng(成). "Yan(言)" means language, metaphoric principle or objective, whereas "chheng(成)" connotes fulfillment, realization, or arrival. There have been many kinds of exegeses of cheng, but I would like to offer 5 propositions in order to arrive at an interpretation of cheng(誠) which may better be understood as a notion of integration:

2.1 The cheng(誠) of an entity is the power to realize the embedded objective of it in the context where it interacts with all others.

What is integration? A third person point of view may take it to mean "harmonizing" of two things or more and this is sometimes called "syncretism". But the first person point of view accepts the word to mean one's own bringing of elements of other systems together into one's own body or system. Then, what one may call an "integrator" is everywhere and all things in the world are integrators which process informations given by their surroundings. The Cartesian tradition used to call this integrator "mind" and limited the scope of its function to only humans, but the

Confucian tradition(性即理) calls "mind" any agent that does integrate. This is another element of the notion of cheng(誠) which can be expressed in the following statement:

2.2 "Mind" refers to the ability of not a single kind of entity but to that of all entities of complex degrees in processing informations.

The difference between the two traditions is obvious. Cartesian school would argue that a human is a thinking being but other, non-human things are not, whereas Confucian students entertain an organic view of the world, holding a thesis of continuity between humans and all other things.

2.3 Cheng(誠) is a power of mind not only of humans but also of all other things.

The continuity thesis is strengthened when evolution theory is presented as an option for the explanation of the origin of species. Suppose that the theory is taken as a hypothesis. Then, one is forced to accept not only the evolution of our bodies but also that of our minds. We come to land in a position to see that the human history is continuous with the histories of other entities.

2.4 If evolution reflects a history of species of what is better fit then history presents an evolution of life forms of what is flourishing and intelligent.

The evolution theory is apparently an optimistic one. This is perhaps because it was developed from the view point of the survivors of that processes. Certainly, there have been struggles and pains in the processes of evolution. But the wholesome results of the evolutionary processes in nature is such that survivors have become organically related with each other. When we come to see nature from this perspective, we can't help but perceive an eventual harmony in it, perhaps a cosmic harmony. The notion of cheng(誠) expresses such an internalistic optimism:

2.5 Cheng(誠) is realizing what can be the best in a given situation in which a subject is involved with its surroundings at the time.⁸⁾

[4] Suppose that we accept the cheng intentionality. Then the notion of fitting may be lighted anew from this perspective, coming to be alive as a holistic value. Fitting may be a value to explain the human action and to explain the non-human phenomena as well. Of course, there are many notions of fitting which are recognized to be distinct and respected as seen in the present realities of various sciences. Yet, they are connected in their roots and are traceable to one and the same in the eventualities of their origin. For the notion of fitting has various elements in it, both primitive and complex, narrow and wide. This claim needs at least three elaborations.

How could a primitive community come to have its original natural language? One may imagine that formations of primitive languages should be like constructions of primitive cottages. Suppose that they are. Then, building of a primitive language could not be done by truth computations or anything like them. Rather it would be reasonable to entertain that it may be done by fittings of primitive expressions which came out of people's basic needs and desires.

Suppose that human language arises out of people's forms of life. One can accept that forms of life arise from concrete ways of living. But what is it to conduct an ordinary human life? Isn't it consistent of phenomena like obtaining food, shelter, clothing; recognizing others and at the same time being recognized by others; communicating with each other? Then, conducting a life is a business not of one particular mode but of modes of totality; not of intelligence alone but of wholesome relations.

Of course, we believe that we say what we presume to be true. But the notion of truth supposition in this belief does guarantee neither truth primitivism nor truth realism. Then the epistemic truth seems to be the alternative. But is it? If epistemic truth is some kind of construction of experiences would it take place mysteriously? If it requires some sort of basis what would that be? The notion of truth is not allowed to come in again. Then, what else? How do we say what we say?

[5] Sentence used to be taken as the basic unit for meaning valuation since the notion of truth was accepted as the primary value. But if it is not settled whether the questions about the notion is fully answered the alternative value needs to be sought. The place to seek an alternative may be seen in the area of identification of objects and of recognition of facts. Here the notion of fitting may be seen working in its full sense.

What do we mean by saying that one identifies an object? To say that $a=a$ does not involve any in identification of anything since it simply says that something is identical to itself. But to say that $a=b$ takes one to many issues of identification. Then, the distinction between ontic identity and epistemic identity appears to be vacuous in this contest. Any significant issue of identity seems to be epistemic.

How does one identify an object? If a is similar to b , then does this guarantee that they are identical? We know that similarity criterion for identification is not sufficient. Then many suggested a further condition, that is, "in some important respects." But it is granted that any formalization of the notion of "some important respects" is not ready to be given.

What does this situation suggest? Many philosophers are puzzled with this problem. It is reasonable to make conjectures that what's called "important respects" cannot be recognized apart from relevant contexts.

In other words, this "important respects" can be understood not to refer to some relevant set of properties but to a relevant context where a particular perspective is paid attention. This perspective requires us to ask a question, that is, whether it would be more fitting to identify two objects in the present context than not to; and also allows a basis to enable to answer the question. Most of ordinary identification questions would be answered at the first stage. But if the question is not answerable, the second stage will be introduced: whether two objects share properties which the context requires to have for the identification. The second question

is distinct from the traditional question, that is, whether two sets of important properties in two objects are identical or similar. Questions of identification cannot be handled formally by any criteria of similarity of properties. They are rather to be approached contextually by asking which aspects of objects the given context requires to pay attention to.

What is involved in our recognition of a fact? It is widely accepted that a fact depends on a language chosen, yet is constrained by the reality shared. But a context where a fact is recognized is not simple as it appears to be. One may take time to consider the notion of a context.

What is a context? A context may not be believed to be given as it is. It is neither naturally given or nor a thing in itself. Rather a context is constituted out of a situation as a speaker and his hearers share not only informations but also various attitudes and interests.⁹⁾ The same situation at time-place t1 may result as different contexts as different interests of people come in. Then, sharing an interest may take place at the end of numerous fitting ins and fitting outs of people involved. Through such a process a context may constitute a kind of life form or some quasi-grammar.

But the context does not dictate one single description. As to any context we are in, any number of descriptions are possible in relation to the context. Any description with which some sincerely try to fit in for the context is not out of place. Some of them are more or less fitting and others are more or less unfitting. It may take time for the community to come to a more fitting description. But such a description is possible for they constituted the context with the shared interests.

Isn't it the case that one of those descriptions is true and others of them are false? Yes, it is, I think. But only if the community wants to keep up with the interest they started with and to keep it in the way they judge to be more fitting. That description will eventually come to be placed in a grammar for the community where it is classified as true and others as false.*

Notes

- 1) Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell, 1958, #137.
- 2) Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1978, pp. 132, 138-140.
- 3) Nelson Goodman and Catherine Z. Elgin, *Reconceptions in Philosophy*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1978, pp. 46-47, 158.
- 4) Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction and Forecast*, pp. 84-124; Nelson Goodman and Catherine Z. Elgin, op. cit., pp. 99.
- 5) Alvin Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition*, Harvard University Press, 1986, pp. 151-154.
- 6) Daihyun Chung, "Intentionality of Cheng(誠): Toward an Organic View", *Philosophy and Culture, Volume 2 Metaphysics*, Korean Philosophical Association, 2008.
- 7) Confucius(孔子), *Analects: The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean(論語 Lyunyu, 大學 Daxue, 中庸 Zhongyong)*, tr. James Legge, Dover 1971(Clarendon, 1893).
- 8) The notion of Cheng(誠) does not exclude elements of conflicts. It rather requires the process of "sharp complains or great earthquakes" if necessary before it eventually arrives at the stage of peace or harmony.

9) Stalnaker's notion of context as body of informations shared by discourse participants and Caplan's notion of it as collections of elements which enable to determine the content of an expression are much propositional, whereas Lewis' notion of context as that of scorekeeping including psychological ones is more holistic. One can argue in favor of the holistic stance as what follows: "I am not in, leave a message" voiced by an answering machine may be informational, but "I will not answer to the phone of the present number" voiced by the same machine expresses more than what is informational. See: Stalnaker, Robert C., "On the Representation of Context", *Context and Content*, Oxford University Press, 1999(1998), pp. 96-114; Ben Caplan, "Putting Things in Contexts", *Philosophical Review*, April 2003: 191-214; Lewis, David, "Scorekeeping in a Language Game", *Philosophical Papers*, Oxford University Press, 1983(1979), pp. 233-249.