

What is Truth?

By

Steve Phillips

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+234 816 284 8242

What Can Be Known About Truth?

[1] Truth is Knowable

To deny this is self-defeating. That is, to state “No truth is knowable” is to make a statement about truth which is either true or false. If true, then a knowable statement about truth has been made which nullifies the claim that “No truth is knowable.” If false, then obviously, truth can be known.

[2] Truth is Not Perspectival

To deny this also self-defeating. For to claim that “All truth-claims are perspectival” is itself a claim to absolute truth which, if true, falsifies its original assertion.

[3] Truth is communicable

That is, inner subjective propositional communication and objective knowledge of propositions is possible. In other words, there can be exact decoding of what has been encoded, though not exhaustively. To deny that truth is communicable is self-defeating by the fact of affirming by the very statement that which is being denied.

[4] There exists absolute truth

Obviously, to aver that “All truth is relative” is to implicitly contradict what is being propounded.

Summary

“True” truth, including absolute truth, can be objectively known, communicated, and apprehended by minds of differing perspectives. This is undeniable.

How Do We Know Truth?

Only a limited number of options present themselves to awareness in attempts to justify claims to comprehensive and universal truth.

[1] Rationalism

Rationalism as a comprehensive world-view is self-defeating. That is, to claim that all phenomena must be justifiable by logical or rational principles self-destructs since there is no way to logically justify the very canons of logic themselves without engaging in hopeless circular reasoning.

In other words, to employ logic to prove logic is unjustifiable due to circularity. Presented to awareness are certain innate self-evident truths or universal givens. These include the principle of non-contradiction [i.e. A is not non-A], rationality norms or the canons of logic themselves, the existence of the external universe, sensual perceptions, and other categories which are cognizable non-discursively.

Further, the canons of logic or rational justification can only demonstrate with certainty what is actually false. They cannot, in and of themselves, establish what is real beyond a possibility. Hence, even though it may be undeniable that certain realities do, in fact, exist, this is not demonstrable on the basis of logical necessity since, on the basis of logic alone, it is just as conceivable that nothing need exist at all.

[2] Existentialism or Experientialism

These fail as an overall world-view to establish a test for truth, as experience itself is neither true nor false. Only propositions about experience can be shown to valid or invalid, and these are adjudicated, not on experiential, but upon rational bases.

To posit experience as the determinant of a truth-claim tacitly reverts to rationality norms to substantiate the truth of this claim, which, ipso facto, denies experience as the basis of knowing truth. That is, to claim “I know, or I can prove that experience is the basis of knowing truth” is to indirectly deny that assertion. If one postulates that “Experience demonstrates that experience is the basis of knowing truth,” a patent appeal to self-nullifying circularity has been proffered.

[3] Mysticism

An appeal to experiences of an inner subjective personal nature cannot be a legitimate part of a publically adjudicable test of truth. Viz, one may have in fact had an experience of some type but there is no final way for another to be able to prove that the communication of the experience is itself accurate and thereby whether the experience described eliminates competing truth-claims.

Within the purview of the mystical experience some advocate that consciousness and/or existence is illusionary resulting from a projection of one's own imagination, emotions, or inner subjective awareness. But a claim of this nature presupposes cognizance of reality outside of one's own consciousness, for unless one knows more that the limits of one's own consciousness, there can be no certainty that this constitutes the limits of reality.

[4] Pragmatism

Pragmatism is insufficient as a comprehensive truth-claim since competitive truth claims may also be shown to "work." As well, the very tests presented to demonstrate what "works" cannot escape the charge of arbitrariness.

Who or what determines what "works"? How long must it "work" before it is established as true? What are the criteria of "workability"? Are there consistent objectives sought in the determination? What makes this a valid end? Picking locks "works" to gain access to a locale, but does this thereby make it a legitimate or "true" means of entry? In some sense everything "works" thereby by making everything true which is manifestly false.

Thinking currently in vogue among atheist humanists in the Western world manifests the arbitrary base of a pragmatic test for truth. A proponent of this persuasion in his public debate on the campus of Cal Poly Pomona in 1986, outlined four tenets that enumerate what society has determined to constitute good and evil on the basis of cumulative observed consensus of what "works." Dr. Gordon Stein, the then president of the American Atheist Society, stated:

- 1) Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- 2) Self-actualization. That is, an atmosphere of "liberty" must be allowed and maintained for individuals to pursue, develop, and realize their potentialities, goals, aspirations, and objectives.
- 3) Others are not to be hurt in the process of my self-actualization.
- 4) Always strive for the greatest good for the greatest number.

Dr. Stein further stated that these four tenets must be maintained in conjunction with each other in a comprehensive holistic system of morality if it is to "work" and that the pragmatic humanist has a "moral obligation to make the world a better place."

Several questions naturally present themselves as to both the viability and validity of such a foundation of moral action. The parochial perspective of tenet #2 must readily be admitted. If “society” has determined this to be “good,” why then are there vast populous societal groups that neither operate on this principle nor acknowledge it to be true or good? The caste system in India, the oligarchy of Russia, and the oppressive degradation of women in Islam do not allow, much less foster, such a self-actualizing environment.

If it is claimed that these societies are in error in not following this principle, then the statement that “Society determines what is good and evil” is patently false since appeal is being made to a principle transcending society to demonstrate its waywardness. If it is maintained that these systems “work” within their respective societies, then one is embroiled in hopeless self-contradiction since opposites cannot both be true in the same manner at the same time.

Tenet #3 prescribes that others must not be “hurt” in the process of self-actualization. What does “hurt” mean? Is it to be defined physically, emotionally, economically, intellectually, sexually, genetically, or by a combination of factors? Has society, in fact, determined what constitutes “hurtness” in these categories?

More pointedly and pertinent is the question, of whom is comprised the category “others”? Does this encompass all Homo sapiens? Are the senile elderly, the unborn fetus, imbeciles, derelicts, handicapped, and the intellectually, physically, economically, or genetically disadvantaged included in the sanctum of “other”? Or is it justified to “painlessly hurt” select ones within these classes as is currently practiced in our environs?

On an arbitrary pragmatic base, rationalization may be proffered for virtually any atrocity conceivable, all within the confines of the aforementioned tenets. Carried to its logical conclusion, a society could determine that life is evil and death is good within the purview of these premises since:

- 1) All desire death, therefore killing each other is justifiable since this is what each desires the other to do unto himself.
- 2) Death is the realization of the goals, aspirations, objectives, and the final expression of each one’s potentiality.
- 3) Others will not be hurt since this is what they desire and even welcome. Death will be executed painlessly upon all so that actually happiness ensures, not hurt.
- 4) Death is the greatest good for which we unitedly strive.

It may be further queried, how can a pragmatic humanist make the world a “better” place when he cannot provide any coherent or comprehensive definition of good and thereby appeal to a certain state of affairs as “better” than what now exists?

The manifest failure of Rationalism, Empiricism, Mysticism, and Pragmatism, either independently or collectively, to establish a comprehensive base to test truth-claims does not, however, leave us with a conundrum. As has already been ascertained, “true” truth, including absolute truth, is objectively knowable, communicable, and capable of apprehension by minds of differing perspectives.

Yet even this undeniable postulate does not lift us from the morass of moral ambiguity as it does not pontificate as to what these moral verities are, only that truths of some nature may indeed be known. How then may absolute reality or “true” truth be known? The only valid philosophical foundation for certainty of this category is if there be revelation from an infinite, personal, and non-arbitrary source.

Revelation

Revelation from an infinite, personal, non-arbitrary source alone obtains as a comprehensive test of truth-claims. Several particulars need be observed:

- 1) Truth must be revealed, that is, objectively communicated in propositional form within the context of normal linguistic means employing semantical, grammatical, syntactical, logical, contextual, and categorical sense.
- 2) The source must be infinite, from that which transcends the bounds of the space/time continuum and therefore is aware of all possible actualities and potentialities at any point and at any time.
- 3) The source must be personal because “good,” “true,” and “right” are moral properties that adhere to personalities alone. That is, we cannot coherently speak of a generous chair or of an unrighteous magnetism.
- 4) The source must be non-arbitrary else it has forfeited any legitimate claim to absoluteness. The revelation of what is true must originate in that which innately is and not from a determinative function of reason and volition. That is, it must reflect ontological moral necessity and not capricious dogma.

Apart from revelation of this nature, all discussions of good and evil, right and wrong, and ultimate truth and falsity dissolve into unjustifiable opinion swapping. Even in a limited utilitarian sense among the mundanities of life, unless there exists an absolute standard that definitively establishes

the length of one foot, it is irrelevant, rather it is incoherent, to discuss whether 11 inches or 2 inches are closest to or equivalent to one foot since no denominative criterion of that identity exists.

When grappling with questions of ultimate truth value, standards of morality, and existential purposefulness, it is imperative that there exist an absolute unchanging reference point else meaningful, consistent, and final evaluation of truth-claims in these categories is futile. In absence of such a standard, man is abandoned to a virtual quagmire of moral ambiguity in which every vicissitude sinks him yet further in the mire of uncertainty unto despair.

Yet, though it may be demonstrated that logically there must be an absolute reference point in order to adjudicate between competing truth-claims without the charge of arbitrariness, this does not, in and of itself, substantiate the proposition that there indeed exists such a standard or that we actually know of it or if we are even able to do so. The question remains; has there been Revelation as described or are we left with a perennial carrot of logical feasibility dangling tauntingly before us, yet without reality?

Ample justificatory evidence exists to substantiate that there is an infinite, personal, non-arbitrary source that has revealed, not only absolute moral truth, but Himself as well. This source is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ

A personality who is infinite is, by definition, God. To be the actual, tangible, incarnated revelation of the infinite God in toto is precisely what the Lord Jesus Christ claimed.

In His own words He stated that He is infinite in time¹, infinite in space², Lord³, equal with God⁴, the final Judge of all men⁵, the source of life⁶, the absolute truth⁷, infinite in knowledge⁸, possessed of all authority in the universe⁹, and that He did the works of God¹⁰. He acknowledged and received worship as God from men¹¹, and accepted the appellation of God and Lord¹². So unmistakable was His declaration, that even His antagonists recognized His claim to be God¹³.

Though some propositions are self-attesting [e.g. A is not non-A], many are not. The truth or falsity of those within this latter class must be corroborated on other evidential bases. There are conclusive grounds upon which one may verify the truth or falsity of the propositions made by the Lord Jesus.

As noted, He claimed to possess infinite knowledge, total authority or power, and absolute truth. Prior to the event, He had pre-cognition of His ensuing death by crucifixion, His burial, and bodily resurrection on the third day following¹⁴. He further stated that He Himself had power and authority to raise Himself from the dead¹⁵.

As is the case with any proposition, it either veridically refers to a given state of affairs or it does not. Hence, either the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ are true or they are false. If it therefore can be evinced that these events transpired as predicated, we have the clearest and strongest forensic proof of that which is attested, viz., that we do in fact have Revelation from God-the infinite, personal, non-arbitrary source.

In the historical documents that comprise the New Testament are four biographical books devoted exclusively to the person and life of the Lord Jesus Christ. An examination of these affords the following facts regarding the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

He was beaten with fists¹⁶, scourged [whipped on the back until raw]¹⁷, beaten on the head with a reed¹⁸, and crucified [by having hands and feet nailed to a cross to hang thereupon until dead]¹⁹. He died²⁰, His side was thrust with a spear²¹, His body was bound in linen wrappings with about one hundred pounds of spices according to Jewish burial custom²², and was laid in a tomb cut out of the rock²³. A large stone was rolled against the entrance²⁴ while several of His followers looked on²⁵.

The Jewish leaders asked of Pilate, the Roman governor, and received permission for a guard at the tomb in order to prevent theft of the body²⁶. They made the tomb secure and set a seal on the stone [in order to verify any tampering]²⁷. On the morning of the third day, His followers found the tomb empty²⁸ and were informed by an angelic spirit that the Lord Jesus was risen from the dead²⁹.

This was confirmed by the Lord Jesus' bodily appearance³⁰ to Mary Magdalene³¹, the two Marys³², two men on the road to Emmaus³³, Peter³⁴, ten disciples³⁵, disciples and others³⁶, eleven disciples including Thomas, a doubter³⁷, six disciples and a fisherman³⁸, five-hundred people at one time who still were alive as eyewitnesses in 55 A.D., twenty-two years after Christ's resurrection³⁹. These convincing proofs continued over a period of forty days to these and other eyewitnesses⁴⁰.

The guards, as well as the two Marys, saw the angel and heard the announcement of Christ's resurrection⁴¹. The guards told the Jewish leaders what happened⁴², and the leaders then bribed them to fabricate and spread a lie that Christ's body had been stolen by His followers⁴³.

The fact that arrests our attention immediately is that the tomb in which the Lord Jesus was laid subsequent to His death did not contain His body on the third day following. And that on this third day and successively for forty days thereafter, He showed Himself to be alive by many convincing proofs to a wide variety of eyewitnesses, diverse both in number and disposition.

To an unbiased inquirer, the explanation for these phenomena naturally follows from the facts as presented. However, there have been those who have objected to this explication, especially in more modern times. Those who deny the reality of Christ's resurrection typically argue along one or more of the following lines.

The entire scenario never occurred.

This denial claims that the person of the Lord Jesus Christ did not exist. Several insurmountable difficulties are raised by adopting this posture.

- 1) The disciples charged the Jews with rejection and crucifixion of Jesus, their Messiah or Christ⁴⁴. Yet how could they coherently accuse them of a crime against a non-existent person? No serious attention is paid to madmen. Yet,
- 2) Some three thousand of these Jews felt remorse, sought forgiveness for their actions against the Lord Jesus, and joined the Christian community⁴⁵. What would motivate antagonists to capitulate to the opposing stance when they avowedly knew that there was no such person and thus no crime perpetrated?
- 3) The verbal and written messages of His life, deeds of beneficence, and teachings publicly in Israeli villages and in Jerusalem's temple would have been totally repudiated by a wide audience of thousands who could immediately discount any claim to His existence, much more His works or discourses. But this was not, nor could it be, done by this myriad of eyewitnesses to His life and activities.
- 4) What then motivated His followers to speak and write known lies in their recounting of Christ's life and teaching since they themselves taught that liars shall not obtain the very eternal life they espoused by their "spurious" messages?⁴⁶
- 5) Most of the disciples experienced repeated and intense persecution during their lifetimes and suffered cruel and torturous deaths simply for the fact of obstinately maintaining the "myth" of Jesus Christ and His resurrection. Men may and do die, at times with fanatical zeal, for that which they believe to be true. Yet it is incredulous that men would willingly die for a percept that they themselves had knowingly and perniciously fabricated.

The documents are unreliable.

This denial asserts that we have no final way of determining what actually occurred. At least the following observations must be made in refutation of this disclaimer.

- 1) This is a gratuitous supposition that does not accord with the voluminous attestation to the historical integrity, accuracy, and preservation of the text of the New Testament documents. The authenticity and reliability of the New Testament text has been incontrovertibly corroborated by numerous publications devoted to this subject. To delineate the proffered justifications here would exceed the scope of this treatise.

Suffice it to say the text of the New Testament is overwhelmingly the most well documented literary record of the ancient world. Those who object to its validity do so groundlessly and arbitrarily since these very same individuals place credence in other documents with far less substantiation than that of the New Testament.

- 2) Skeptics of our modern era, far removed from the actual events, may pontificate of ignorance of what in fact transpired. Yet, this is precisely what the contemporary audience of the disciples could not do. We may say we do not know what occurred, but this they could never do for they themselves witnessed the very things they were being told by the disciples' messages, both verbal and written.

The news about Him went out everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee⁴⁷. On another occasion the whole city had gathered around and many were healed⁴⁸. Great multitudes from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, and outside of the bounds of Israel proper crowded to Christ and He healed many⁴⁹. He, at one time, miraculously fed a crowd of five thousand men, not including the number of women and children present who also experienced this⁵⁰.

These citations exemplify the widespread knowledge and experience firsthand of the person and deeds of Christ. It is impossible to embellish or fraudulently contrive stories when your audience are the very ones who experienced the things you are speaking of! Succeeding generations may be hoodwinked into believing untruths, but not the initial eyewitnesses. If the message was not a reliable and accurate account of the actual events, no one would have placed any credence in them.

- 3) Why did antagonists join the ranks of the Christian community if they knew by firsthand experience that the message spoken to them was indeed false?

Jesus Christ did not actually die.

This denial suggests that He merely lapsed into unconsciousness and later revived in the coolness of the tomb. The implausibility of this proposal is obvious.

- 1) A review of the particulars surrounding the death of Christ as enumerated previously should suffice to indicate the absurdity of this hypothesis.
- 2) If true, then the Lord Jesus Himself is both perpetrating and perpetuating lies about Himself and, in the final analysis, is tantamount to a devil, not God.

- 3) Surely the guards would have been aware of the stone rolling back from the entrance to the tomb and would have apprehended Him on the spot since it was He whom they were responsible to guard.

The disciples were misled and/or deceived.

This objection urges us to imagine the disciples to have either mistaken the tomb of another for that of Christ or were experiencing some type of visionary or hallucinatory effect.

If this were the case, all the opponents of Jesus Christ and Christianity needed to do was produce the body of Jesus to irrefutably disprove the claims of the Christians as to the resurrection of Christ. This, however, they could not do.

The disciples stole the body of Christ.

That this is ludicrous is patent from these observations.

- 1) It is highly unlikely that devout Jews would steal as this is strictly forbidden in their Ten Commandments.
- 2) What were the guards doing while the disciples were thus occupied? If it is asserted that they were sleeping, who then observed the disciples in the act?
- 3) Why would the disciples propagate a known lie?
- 4) Why then did their Jewish antagonists afterwards join Christian ranks in response to the message of Christ's resurrection when it was undisputed common knowledge that the disciples stole the body and their message a manifest hoax?
- 5) Rather, the invention of this lie proves that the body indeed was not in the tomb, else no explanation need be proffered other than producing the body itself.

Why is the tomb of the Lord Jesus Christ empty? Because He is Lord and God. How do we know this? Because we have Revelation from this very One who is infinite, personal, and possesses absolute truth.

It is the conviction of the author that an intimate knowledge of and relationship with the personal infinite God as revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ is not only possible, but is the highest and ultimate purpose for man and is the sincere and loving desire of God for each individual.

All footnotes in the preceding essay may be found in the New Testament of the Bible.

Footnotes:

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| 1 Jn.8:58 | 2 Mt.28:20 | 3 Mt.22:42-45 |
| 4 Jn.10:30 | 5 Jn.5:22,27-29 | 6 Jn.5:21 |
| 7 Jn.14:6 | 8 Mt.11:27; Jn.1:48 | 9 Mt.28:18 |
| 10 Jn.10:37-38 | 11 Jn.9:38 | 12 Jn.20:28 |
| 13 Jn.10:33 | 14 Mt.20:18,19 | 15 Jn.2:19-22; Jn.10:17,18 |
| 16 Mt.26:67 | 17 Mt.27:26 | 18 Mt.27:30 |
| 19 Jn.19:18; Jn.20:25 | 20 Mk.15:44,45; Jn.19:33 | 21 Jn.19:34 |
| 22 Jn.19:39,40 | 23 Lk.23:53 | 24 Mt.27:60 |
| 25 Mt.27:61; Lk.23:55; Jn.19:40 | 26 Mt.27:62-65 | 27 Mt.27:66 |
| 28 Lk.24:1-3 | 29 Mt.28:5,6 | 30 Lk.24:36-43 |
| 31 Jn.19:16-18 | 32 Mt.28:1,9 | 33 Lk.24:13-35 |
| 34 Lk.24:34 | 35 Jn.20:19,20 | 36 Lk.24:33-36 |
| 37 Jn.20:26-29 | 38 Jn.20:1-3 | 39 I Cor.15:6 |
| 40 Acts 1:3 | 41 Mt.28:1-10 | 42 Mt.28:11 |
| 43 Mt.28:12-15 | 44 Acts 2:22-24 | 45 Acts 2:36-41 |
| 46 Col.3:5-9; Rev.21:27 | 47 Mk.1:28 | 48 Mk.1:33,34 |
| 49 Mk.3:7-10 | 50 Mt.14:21 | |