



**Is the belief you can fly subjective or objective truth?**

And since there is no eternal value, we must will the eternal recurrence of the same state of affairs.”

*Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)*

## **2. Is Truth Subjective or Objective?**

The morality of humanity (choosing right from wrong), is based on the concept of *truth*. When we examine the Holocaust and question the “wrongness” and the “rightness” of the event we are confronted with the basis of wrong and right. What makes Hitler’s Nazi Germany wrong in wanting to conquer the world and kill innocent people in the process? After WWII, the Nuremberg trials faced this question. Under what basis can the world prosecute the Nazi’s for war crimes?

The basis of truth used by Germany was the Darwinian principle of survival of the fittest. The leaders of Germany saw their nation as a superior group a “Stronger People” and the rest of the world as an inferior people, a “Weaker People”. The source of truth derived from the Friedrich Nietzsche taught that man is the source for good and evil.

“Since there is no God to will what is good, we must will our own good.

And since there is no eternal value, we must will the eternal recurrence of the same state of affairs.”

*Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)*

Hitler adopted Nietzsche view of truth and incorporated this in his own view of what is truth. The Holocaust and the death of millions was the result of this truth.

The stronger must dominate and not mate with the weaker, which would signify the sacrifice of its own higher nature. Only the born weakling can look upon this principle as cruel, and if he does so it is merely because he is of a feebler nature and narrower mind; for if such a law did not direct the process of evolution then the higher development of organic life would not be conceivable at all...If Nature does not wish that weaker individuals should mate with stronger, she wishes even less that a superior race should intermingle with an inferior one; because in such a case all her efforts, throughout hundreds of thousands of years, to establish an evolutionary higher stage of being, may thus be rendered futile. **Adolph Hitler, *Mein Kampf***

The questions faced by Nuremberg trials, are the same questions we face today. What truth is the basis of *Moral Law*? and is truth subjective or objective?

*What does subjective and objective mean?*

*Subjective:* 3 a : characteristic of or belonging to reality as perceived rather than as independent of mind : phenomenal

*Objective:* of, relating to, or being an object, phenomenon, or condition in the realm of sensible experience independent of individual thought and perceptible by all observers : having reality independent of the mind <sup>2</sup>objective reality<sup>3</sup>

Jesus claimed to be objective Truth,

<sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. John 14:6

Is it possible to know what “Truth” is? To find truth we can begin at the most basic premise, it is undeniable. In fact, if you are reading or hearing this you have proved this first basic premise of truth. “Being”, the mere fact you can question truth or yourself means you exist.

### *First Principles*

This is an “Axiom” or “First Principle” according to Aristotle. First principles are self-evident points, demonstrating their existence without proof. For example Rene Descartes famous, “I Think therefore I am”, proves you exist even if someone told you did not exist, you would still have to think about your existence, therefore proving the one who told you did not exist is wrong.

This proves two points in the search for truth.

1. Existence (To be aware of yourself proves existence)

## 2. Reason (To think about yourself proves reason)

We can logically conclude we *exist* and we have *reasoned* thought about our existence.

Aristotle notes that these first principles are necessary if there is to be any rational thought. In fact, he listed several laws in order to have rational, logical thought.

- **The Law of Non-Contradiction: (A is not non-A)** Opposite truth claims cannot both be true. For example if an atheist believes God does not exist and a theist believes God does exist, it is impossible for both to be right. Another example of how the LNC works,

If someone were to say, "There is no such thing as truth, and the LNC is meaningless" he has done two things. First, he has assumed that his view is true as opposed to false, and thus he uses the LNC (which of course, implies that the LNC has meaning, because his view is assumed to be meaningful). Second, he has violated the LNC by suggesting that there is no such thing as truth while at the same time and in the same sense insisting there is such a thing as truth—"The truth of his own view by doing so, he automatically validates the LNC."<sup>1</sup>

- **The Law of Excluded Middle: (Either A or non-A)** This asserts that it is either A or non-A but not both. God cannot exist and not exist. In other words, there is no middle ground, opposites cannot be the same, nothing can hide in the "cracks" between being and not being.
- **The Law of Identity: (A is A)** This law simply states that something is what we say it is: A is A. When someone says, "I loved the book" it is understood to mean "Book". Without the law of identity, there would be chaos and language would be incoherent.

Using these basic laws of rational thought, we can examine the logic of truth claims; is truth objective or subjective? Can we find truth?

### **What is Truth?**

Is it true that we exist? To think about the answer proves we exist. Existence proves the state of reality. Moreover, to think about yourself proves reason. These are two axioms or undeniable facts; *I exist*, and *I reason*.

**Truth:** is an expression, symbol or statement that matches or corresponds to its object or referent. Truth must correspond to reality in order to be true.

**Absolute Truth:** "Something true for all people, at all times and in all places"

### **Can Truth be relative? (Subjective)**

The question, "is morality relative?" is linked to its source of truth. If truth is relative then morality can be relative. "Relative Truth" means that truth is subject to the holder of truth.

A great test for relative or subjective truth is the "Gravity Test". To administer this test one climbs to a high tower such as the Eiffel Tower. If the holder of subjective truth, believes he/she can fly, and since truth is subject to our beliefs then the person should be able to fly. Once the person jumps away from the tower the test begins. They will fly or fall. If they fly without aid then subjective truth is true, if they fall and connect with the ground then objective truth is true. Those on the ground will witness "Correspondence". If the person flies then subjective truth will correspond to reality (The flight being real). If the person falls, objective truth will correspond to reality. (Gravity being real)

Subjective truth is a popular view held by many people, could all these people be wrong?

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<sup>1</sup> Unshakable Foundations, Norman Geisler, Bethany House, Pg. 24

What are the main reasons people give for holding the subjective view.

### **Arguments for Subjective Truth**

1. *Things appear to be true only at some times and not at others.*

At one time people believed the earth was flat but today we know it's a sphere. Someone might say you see truth has changed.

The world was a sphere even when people believed it was flat. Truth did not change, rather we changed from holding a *false belief* to a *true belief*. Our belief now corresponds with the facts.

2. *Things appear to be true only for some people but not for others.*

Janice Smith lives in New York City and she feels cold at 9:00 AM Eastern Time on October 1, 2003. Oliver Jones lives in Hawaii at the same time and day but he feels hot. Isn't this an example of relative truth?

No, the fact is, "Janice Smith is cold on 10/1/2003 at 9:00 AM, in New York City" is true for Oliver Jones and for the rest of the universe. The fact stands on it's own it is "absolute". One hundred years from now that fact will still be absolute for everybody who has ever lived. Oliver feelings of heat have nothing to do with the *fact* regarding Janice. They are two separate facts.

### **Problems with Subjective Truth:**

1. Relativism is self-defeating:

The relativist believes that subjective truth is true for everyone, not just from them. This is the one thing, they cannot believe, if they are relativist. Therefore, if a relativist thinks it is true for everyone, then he believes it is an *absolute truth*. Therefore, he is no longer a relativist.

2. Relativism is full of contradictions.

If Billy Graham believed God exists and an Atheist believes God does not exist both would be right. God would have to exist and not exist. If the Christian believes Jesus died on the Cross and Muslim believes Jesus did not die on the Cross, both would be right.

3. Relativism means no has ever been wrong.

With Subjective truth, no one could ever be wrong since there is no standard for right and wrong. As long as something is true to holder of truth, it is true even if it is wrong for someone else.

### **Objections to Absolute Truth**

Some reject the idea that "Truth" is absolute because of the following arguments.

1. *Some things are relative to others:*

Joe is 5'10 and is short compared to Shaquille O'Neal and tall compared to Willie Shoemaker a horse jockey. Therefore, the relativist would say truth is not absolute.

The fact is that Joe is short, compared to O'Neal. Joe is tall, compared to Shoemaker. Those are two absolute facts.

2. *No new truths or progress is possible.*

If truth were absolute then no new truth would be possible.

Relativist often mistake discovery with truth. The earth was a sphere even when people believed it was flat. All we did is discover the absolute fact. We are merely discovering an "Old" Truth.

New truth is constantly happening. Every second new Truth is coming into existence all over the world as the past meets the future in the present. Once it is true, it is always for every one everywhere.

3. *Truth changes with our growth in knowledge.*

Our understanding of truth changes not Truth.

#### 4. *Absolute truth is too narrow.*

Truth corresponds with facts.  $4+3=7$  is narrow because its not 1,2,3,4,5,6, but its fact. Any "Truth" claim is narrow because truth by its nature means the other option is non-truth (LNC). If that were not the case, then no one could claim to have truth, including those who believe relativism is true.

#### 5. *Absolute truth is dogmatic*

Everyone who claims something is true is dogmatic. The claim of truth excludes non-truth.

#### 6. *How can you know something is true?*

Most people who believe in "Absolute Truth" would admit they do not have a complete grasp on Absolute truth, but knowledge is in degrees. There are things we can be absolute sure; I exist and I can reason. We might logically conclude God's existence but apart from his revelation, our knowledge of God is limited to what we can observe.

"Absolute Truth" is true regardless of what we believe and think. Absolute truth stands on its own. Absolute truth is true no matter what evidence there is for it. Truth is what corresponds to the facts. Truth does not change just because we learn something about it.

### **Agnosticism**

This word comes from two Greek words meaning, "A" No and "gnosis" meaning knowledge. This word was coined by T.H. Huxley and means "no knowledge". An agnostic is someone who claims not to know. There are two types of Agnostics "*Hard*" and "*Soft*".

The hard could be labeled *agnostic* and the soft *skeptic*.

The Agnostic says, "I can't know" while the skeptic says, "I doubt if I can know".

### **David Hume The Skeptic:**

#### **David Hume, (1711-1776)**

Hume conceived of philosophy as the inductive, experimental science of human nature. Taking the scientific method of the English physicist Sir Isaac Newton, and building on the epistemology of the English philosopher John Locke, Hume tried to describe how the mind works in acquiring what is called knowledge. He concluded that no theory of reality is possible; there can be no knowledge of anything beyond experience.<sup>2</sup>

David Hume wrote,

If we take in our hands any volume, of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.<sup>3</sup>

He believed any statement, which is not mathematical or factual is meaningless. All statements by God would fall outside these categories. All our experiences are just a series of separate sensations. Hume acknowledged the logic of cause and effect. He said,

"I never asserted so absurd a proposition as that anything might arise without a cause"

Hume believed there wasn't any way to establish the *principle of the cause*.

### **Immanuel Kant, The Agnostic (1724-1804)**

Kant's Agnosticism was based on the understanding that there was no way to get outside one's own being and know what reality is, therefore since we cannot know we must be agnostic.

He believed there was an unbridgeable gulf between knowing and being, between our understanding and the nature of reality. What was the cause of the cause? If everything had a cause.

<sup>2</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica, 2003

<sup>3</sup> David Hume, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding.

### **Reply to Agnosticism:**

There are different forms of Agnosticism the weak form admits it is possible to know God, and that some might know God. The strong form claims God is unknowable, "God cannot be known".

This leaves us with three options;

1. We can know nothing about God..... (Agnosticism)
2. We can know everything about God.... (Dogmatism)
3. We can know something about God.....(Realism)

### *Agnosticism is self-refuting*

If one knows enough about reality in order to affirm that nothing can be known about reality, then one knows something about reality, he cannot affirm in the same breath that all of reality is unknowable. So if one knows nothing about reality then he can't make a statement about reality. Total agnosticism is *self-refuting* because it assumes some knowledge about reality in order to deny any knowledge of reality.

Kant argued that categories of thought do not apply to reality, because we can't know what reality is. This argument is also self-defeating for two reasons.

1. Unless the categories of reality corresponded to those of the mind, no statements could be made about reality, including the very statement Kant made.<sup>4</sup>
2. To say that one cannot know any more than the limits of the phenomena or appearance is to draw an unsurpassable line for those limits. But you cannot draw such firm limits without surpassing them. It is not possible to contend that appearance ends here and reality beings there unless one can see at least some distance on the other side. In other words, how can one know the difference between appearance and reality unless he already knows both, so as to make the comparison.<sup>5</sup>

In conclusion, it is possible to find partial "Absolute Truth" by using reason and logic. However, to find the ultimate source for truth is beyond Man's finite ability. If Truth is to be found it must be revealed.

### **A Christian Response:**

As Christians how can we respond to those believe, truth is subjective and God is unknowable? In discussing truth, absolute and relative, (Objective and Subjective) we first need to define the terms of what "Truth" is. Many often repeat statements without really thinking about the implications. The reason subjective *truth* is often equated as fact is because it's so often repeated. The repetition of a statement does not make it true. Asking questions can help those seeking truth, find truth.

For example using the gravity test of truth is good way to establish the fallacy of subjective truth. If truth were subjective, people who believed they could fly would fly. Since this is not the case, Truth cannot be subjective.

Once we understand that Truth is not subjective, the next question often asked is, "How can we know what truth really is?" Most people will not deny they exist or can reason. So since *we know exist*, and *we are aware of our existence*, is there a logical to find truth? Truth corresponds to facts, we are aware of some facts such as matter and reality. Is there a way to know the source of this reality? Since, even the most hardened agnostic admits to the, "logic of cause and effect" this is a logical place to start. What was the "First Cause"? How did the Universe begin? Is God a logical concept? Without God, where did matter come from? These are great questions to start a dialogue to communicate truth.

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<sup>4</sup> Norman Geisler, Why I Believe Truth is Real and Knowable, Why I Am A Christian, pg.43, Baker Books

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

The Bible claims to be, God's (a.k.a. *The First Cause*<sup>6</sup>) communication with his creation. When we examine the evidence of scripture, do facts "Correspond" with reality?

### **Dialogue: Between a Christian and Subjective Truth**

Mike Skeptic and Joe Christian meet again after the party to follow up on their conversation about Morality and its source.

**Joe Christian:** Mike, have you had a chance to think about our conversation?

**Mike Skeptic:** Joe, I thought about it and I just don't think there is anyway anybody can know what the truth really is. There is no way; we can possibly know who God is.

**Joe:** How do you know we cannot know who God is?

**Mike:** Joe, just look at all the religions of the world, Islam, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Atheism, Christian and a hundred more are you telling me you can possibly know which one is true?

**Joe:** Mike, can they all be true?

**Mike:** Why not, each may have a part of truth?

**Joe:** Mike for example, Atheists believe there is no God and Christian's, Muslims and Jews believe there is God. It is not logical or possible for both groups to be right. Would you agree?

**Mike:** Ok Joe, for the argument's sake lets say there is a God out there and the Atheists are wrong. Don't all religions believe the same thing, isn't it just the matter of loving and accepting those around you, that's what God wants us to do.

**Joe:** God does want us to love people, but even if we for arguments sake admit God exists, not all these different religions can be true. For example, Muslims believe Jesus did not die on the cross, Christians believe he did die on the cross. Muslims believe Jesus is just a prophet and only a man, Christians believes Jesus is not only a man but also the Son of God. Just looking at Islam, and Christianity we see contradictory beliefs.

Jesus could not be Die and Not Die on the Cross-, both Islam and Christianity and Islam cannot be true. Jesus could not be the Son of God and Not the Son of God. It's just not logical. With Jesus, we have two options: He was the Son of God or He was not the Son of God. He died on the cross or did not die on the cross. But both Islam and Christianity cannot be right.

**Mike:** Joe, truth is subjective, to the Muslim's Jesus did not die on the cross and to the Christian's he did die on the cross.

**Joe:** Mike if truth was subjective, and you believed you could fly and you climbed to the top of the Eiffel Tower, and really believed you could fly and jumped, what would happen?

**Mike:** I would fly for about 5 seconds and probably hit the ground.

**Joe:** You mean you would fall for about 5 seconds, but if truth were subjective that would mean you should fly. Truth was not subject to your belief but you were subject to the objective truth of gravity. It did not matter what you believed you still fell. Mike the truth is what the facts are, if Jesus is not who he said he was he would be a liar, wouldn't you agree?

**Mike:** I would, and some people think Jesus was a liar and some do not, it is not possible to know what the truth is until after we die.

**Joe:** I do not think we have to wait until death to find the truth; all we really have to do is examine the evidence. Jesus said, "I am the way the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except through Me." If Jesus is not the Son of God, then don't worry about it, but if He is then he is saying he is the only way. Don't you think eternity is worth spending the time investigating?

**Mike:** Sure, I would love to know what the truth is, but How can anyone find God?

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<sup>6</sup> The First Cause is a term used to describe, the original cause, since everything that exists is dependent and finite and can be traced back to a source cause. Therefore, there must have been a first cause, for the agnostic or atheist this is an unknown or an unknowable subject to speculation. For the Theist, the first cause is God.