

Defining Truth

(by: Joseph S. Rees)

I. What is truth

Albert Einstein said, “Whoever undertakes to set himself up as a judge of Truth and Knowledge is shipwrecked by the laughter of the gods.” The question, “What is truth?” has plagued mankind since the first question was asked. When was this question first asked, well, that is still the subject of great debate. This ought to be a clue to the difficulty in ascertaining truth through the art of debate. One thing is clear, as a whole, mankind seems powerless to agree.

Why? Einstein also stated, “No amount of experimentation can ever prove me right; a single experiment can prove me wrong.” Sir Arthur Conan Doyle put it this way, “Whenever you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.” With this understanding comes the great and solemn task of eliminating all that is false. This is a daunting task indeed.

For every set of observable facts, we may speculate as to how they fit into the puzzle as a whole. Unfortunately for us, for every set of facts, there is an infinite number of whole puzzles into which they may fit. Do you disagree? If so, consider this: If we reach the end of ways in which to describe the puzzle, based on the facts at hand, can we not always find another description? Another way to put it: How many stories can be told? How many books can be written? The answer should be obvious. If it is not, we have not studied our own history to see that questions over truth and reality have been philosophized over, fought about, and sometimes even killed for, since we could write about it and probably before that.

The Universe, it seems, is infinite. The description of reality, therefore, has its set as infinite. The problem is, only one of them is true. How can we possibly eliminate all that is infinitely false in order to determine the one truth? It would certainly take an infinite amount of time, which apparently, and based on some facts at hand, we don't have.

The most concise description of truth that I have found is this:
“And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come;” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:24)

II. How Do We Seek It

Throughout our known history, we have sought for truth in various ways. We have sought for it through the philosophies of the mind, the experimentation of the scientist, the logic of the rational, and through the faith of the religious. History has taught us that there are infinitely more ways to seek it. Each of these

ways seems to have its faults, or else, we would not be in our present dilemmas of philosophy throughout the world.

III. How Do We Recognize It

With so many different methods for seeking truth, is there any way to recognize it when we find it? Our discussion began with the assertion that truth cannot be proven except by eliminating all that is false around it. With this in mind, we must understand that even if we feel we have proof, the same facts with which we use to do so can be transfigured to prove an infinite number of “truths.” Do not be discouraged; however, as the founding fathers of America stated that some truths are “self-evident.” This would mean that some truths are evidence in and of themselves.

Mankind has generally accepted such truths. For instance, that we are alive, that we have the ability to think, and that we live on a planet called Earth. Unfortunately, again, there are dissenters to each of these self-evident truths.

We seem to be at an impasse. If we cannot disprove all falsehoods, and we can not all agree on things self-evident, how can we recognize truth. The answer, I believe, was also found by the founding fathers of America when they stated that it was, in fact, God who endowed them with all rights.

How can you say that? Well, I can, and I did. More importantly, it is the only way that we can know truth. We have already established that it would be impossible to eliminate all false descriptions of the Universe by ourselves. I submit that if there was a being in the Universe that had the understanding of it in all detail, He could relate the truth of it to us. This would, however, presuppose that He knew the truth of all things, and that He wished to share these truths with us. Why would He want to do that? Perhaps He loves us. Why? Maybe we are His children.

I realize that this may only appear to be yet another description of the truth among an infinite number of possibilities, but the actual truth would appear no different among the falsehoods. The difference here is that it would allow us to know the truth, and there could be evidence of it.

IV. How Do We Accept It

If there is a God, and He loves us, has he ever shown Himself or spoken to us? There are those who claim just that. Most cultures refer to these people as Prophets.

If we are to know truth via this methodology then, we must find and hear what these people have to say. Also, we must learn the method by which truth is to be revealed to us.

Truth revealed? Yes, revelation. I submit that the only way to truly know that something is true is via revelation, meaning, by inspiration directly from God to our own souls.

Even if we find these Prophets and hear what they have to say, the only way that we can know that they speak truth is by personal revelation. If God, who knows all, does not tell us, then we cannot know truth from conjecture (as we have already established earlier in the discussion). If He does reveal it to our very minds and souls, then we would know it. Indeed, we would even feel it. This very method is what the founding fathers of America realized and referred to as “self-evident.”

In conclusion, truth is unknowable without it being revealed to us by a Supreme Being, who chooses to do so. Anyone who tells you otherwise, is only guessing.

V. What Do We Do Now

Based on this line of thinking, we ought to look for things that have been and are revealed to us, personally, and through Prophets. Given this information, we should then find facts that would fit into this framework, in order to gain a better understanding of the world and Universe around us. I believe that this method ought to be implemented in all areas of our studies. When we find that something does not fit, we ought to refer to that God who possesses and disseminates all knowledge for the answer. This would insure success, rather than relying upon our own inadequate (and indeed, impossibly limited) sense of truth.