



TRUE TRUTH and Why It Matters— “Is Truth Real and Can It Be Known?” Part 3

WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING ABOUT THE ISSUE OF TRUTH?

Christian writer, lecturer and social scientist, Dr. Os Guinness on a talk he gave at Cambridge University, considers whether there is any truth and if so, how we can come to know it, and says:

"...the most common motto in all the universities of the world is 'the truth shall set you free'. But while that adorns the walls, it no longer animates the minds of many people in the West. Truth is highly controversial."

"The fact is the higher the education, the more brilliant the mind, often the slipperyer [sic] the rationalisations [sic]. In other words, humans are not only truth seekers we're also, let's be honest, truth twisters. And there's two ways you can always handle truth. We can try and make the truth conform to our desires of reality or make our desires conform to the truth of reality." ⁱⁱ

The Apostle Paul in the book of Romans speaks of what Guinness says we do and are: *truth twisters*. Consider these ancient words:

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who *suppress the truth*ⁱⁱⁱ in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them" (Rom.1:18-19)

According to the God of Scripture truth matters and suppressing it is cause for his wrath. These propensities lie within all human beings. Its' part of what Christian theologians call "The Fall" where Adam and Eve rebelled against God's holy command and thus sin entered the world. Despite this tragic event, God's gift of logic while tainted nevertheless remains to aid our discovery of the real.

Thus to answer the question: is truth real and can we know it? , we must first consider the nature and utility of logic and then define what we mean by truth.

WHAT IS THE NATURE AND UTILITY OF LOGIC?

What is logic and how does it help us discover truth? Logic can be described in many ways two of which is a map and a referee, let me explain.

Logic is like a map the mind uses in order to get at the Truth—what's actually real. You may think (wrongly) you're headed north on PCH toward Big Sir but after looking at the street signs and the map, your actually headed south to Mexico. Logic much like a map helps us (rightly) get a sense of direction on reality.

Logic can be compared to a referee that calls the game rightly, without bias and makes sure the coaches and players are playing *according to the rules*—this is discovering truth. Whenever either side gets out of order (i.e., not playing according to the rules) he blows his whistle and corrects the situation by awarding the appropriate side justice (i.e., correcting the wrong with the right).

LOGIC DEFINED

When it comes to discovering what is true, logic is indispensable. It maintains order where chaos would rule, it sets right what is wrong and frees one from darkness into the light.

The term *logic* comes from the Greek word, *logike*, or *logikos*, and pertains to that which belongs to intelligent speech or to a well-functioning reason, it is

ordered, systematized, and intelligible. It's the study of the rules of exact reasoning, of the forms of sound or valid thought patterns. It's the study and the application of the rules of inference to arguments or to systems of thought.^{iv} This may sound erudite, but every human being uses logic as will be demonstrated.

In order to understand the nature and necessity or/and utility of logic we must first start with the four primary laws of logic. These are the law of: non-contradiction; excluded middle; identity; and logical or rational inference.

THE FOUR LAWS OF LOGIC

The Law of (non-) Contradiction

This is the first of the primary principles of logic. It states that "A is not non-A." In other words, no statement, proposition or assertion, can be both true and false at the same time and in the same sense. Don't miss the *same time* and the *same sense*. This is important because its usage signals to the hearer that there's a falsehood. There are worldviews that deny such a law exists.

Many Buddhists, Hindus, and New Agers hold to a belief called *monism*—where God is all, and all is God. In this case all distinctions are illusory, they are not real. But in order for *monism* to refute these laws, they must use them. They must make the distinction that these laws of logic aren't real, but they use what they are denying and thus refute their own statement.

Why is this? Are we playing word games here or is something truly going awry? This is not a game of "semantics" but an example of the force of logic. The reason for this is that it is *a first principle of thought or epistemology* (i.e., the study of how we know what we know). Thus, whenever this law is violated, there is a falsehood.

An example of the law of non-contradiction is found in Matthew 12:30 where Jesus says; "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters." That is, one can't say that they are *with* Jesus and *against* him at the *same time* and in the *same sense*.

The Law of Excluded Middle

This is the second primary law of logic. It states that it's either "A or non-A." In other words, a proposition or statement is *either* true *or* false. It must be one or the other, it can't be both. This distinction is important because it helps us understand whether something is in fact taking place or not. For example I my wife Trish that "It's raining outside" so don't forget the umbrella. Why? Because if it actually is raining outside, then it is true that it is raining outside—an umbrella will be useful—and the opposite is false (i.e., that it is not raining outside).

The same example for the prior law also applies to this law of the excluded middle when in Matthew 12:30 Jesus says; "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters." That is, we're *either* for him, *or* we're against him.

The Law of Identity

This is the third primary law of logic. It states "A is A," in other words, if any statement is true, then it is true. The value of this law, among other things, is that it helps us distinguish *who* or *what* for example; committed a certain crime, should be praised or punished.

Recall the movie "*Home Alone*" where Kevin, played by McCauley Culkin, steals a tooth brush from the drug store and a boy who chases him points him out to a police officer with his *index finger* and screams, "Shop lifter." Here Kevin is *identical* to the "Shop Lifter". Theologian and Apologist Craig Hawkins writes on the importance of this law:

"...it's the difference between Sound Doctrine Versus the Cults/Occult: Christ is Christ (i.e., the Christ of the Bible: fully divine—God the Son, the second person of the Trinity—and fully human) and not non-Christ (e.g., the Christ of the Bible is not the "Christ[s]" of the cults and/or the occult)".^v

The Law of Logical or Rational Inference

This is the fourth primary law of logic. It states “if $A=B$, and $B=C$, then $A=C$.” This is weighty epistemologically (i.e., the study of how we know what we know) because it helps us navigate through all discursive or non-axiomatic knowledge. For example: “If Trish is *my wife*, and *my wife* is the mother of Alexandra, then the *mother of Alexandra* is Trish”.

WHAT’S THE NATURE AND INDISPENSABLENESS OF LOGIC?

The four primary laws of logic are not the creation of man, but these have been discovered. These laws are part of the furniture of the universe,^{vi} humans cannot help but use them, and to *deny them* is to *use them*. We can’t get away from logic because to communicate we use it. Let me explain.

First, the primary principles/laws of logic/reason are first principles of epistemology.^{vii} First principles are, “Statements that are self-evident and/or fundamental to the explanation of a system and upon which the system depends for consistency and coherence.” These principles are axiomatic (i.e., self-evident propositions), they are first principles, which cannot not be used, much like water and wetness there’s no “getting around them.”

Second, distinctions between true and false or what is applicable and not applicable is meaningful only if logic is true and applicable. If there were no law of contradiction, the concept of true or false could not obtain. That is, no topic could obtain a true or false application, for we could not call something false, without first assuming that there is a state of affairs that is true (non-contradiction).

In other words, the law of (non-) contradiction states that “A is not non-A,” in other words, no statement, proposition, assertion, etc. can be both true and false at the same time and in the same sense. This law draws the lines between what is false and true.

Third, a statements meaningfulness or significance or truthfulness depends on logic. For example, if logic is not true, nor can it be applied to the topic we are

covering, it then follows that the statement is meaningless. The fact however, is that a statement has meaning specifically because logic is true and applicable. In other words, logic must obtain if *statements* or *significance* has meaning.

Fourth, to deny or try to disprove the need, necessity, and truth of logic a person must use it. By saying, “logic is not true,” they affirm that it is true, namely that it is the true state of affairs that logic is not true. By doing this they disprove their original assertion “logic is not true”.

In other words, if one uses logic in order to refute it, it is self-evidently not true, for they use it in order to deny it. An example would be, “I can’t even write one word in English,” is obviously false because I just wrote eight words in English.

Fifth, one cannot, not use logic in the real world because life without logic is like jumping in the water without getting wet. It cannot, not be the case. Let’s say I tell my wife “Trish Let’s go to the beach” does not make sense if logic is not true. To which beach do we go? , Manhattan Beach, Newport Beach, Torrance Beach, Zuma Beach, the options are many. If logic were not true, we couldn’t even begin going to say Manhattan Beach, for there is no *distinction* to make.

If logic is not true, how is it that your creditors call *your* phone and *not* your neighbors? If logic is not true, how is it that your paycheck does not say Bill Gates on it? Logic is part of the furniture of the universe, that is why you get the call, and your neighbor does not, and the reason your check does not say Bill Gates on it—is because you’re not him!

We’ve defined what logic is, how it’s used and our inability to escape it. Now let’s turn to the issue of truth and defining our terms.

HOW IS TRUTH DEFINED?

Truth is what corresponds to reality. This is called the correspondence view of truth.^{viii} In other words, we tell it like it is. For example, if I were to say, “This

podium in front of me is made out of a see-through substance,” how would this statement be true? This is true if, and only if it actually is made out of a see-through substance—Plexiglas.

How would this statement be false? For this statement to be false, you would have to show that what I assert to be true does not correspond to reality (i.e., the podium is not made of Plexiglas but out of walnut wood).

Consider the statement, “the grass is green.” If the grass is indeed green, then that statement is true because it corresponds to reality. This is easy enough for a child to understand.

So, truth is what corresponds with reality. Yeah ok, but you might be thinking, “It’s true for me that Adam Sandler is the funniest comedian in the world but my Dad thinks he’s awful.” So, how do we respond to this objection? There’s a difference between objective truth and subjective truth. The former is true whether I like or not, believe it or not, know it or not. The latter is true according to individual personal preferences. Let me explain.

OBJECTIVE TRUTH VS SUBJECTIVE TRUTH

Objective Truth

When we are talking about truth, inevitably the confusion arises between the objective and the subjective aspect of truth. According to Philosopher Peter Kreeft, when we speak of objective truth, there are three things that we do not mean.^{ix}

First, objective truth is not an unemotional, impersonal, detached attitude to the facts much like the character Spock from the television show *Star Trek*. Remember truth is not an attitude, but it has to do with what we know. Second, objective truth does not mean “known by everyone” or even “believed by all.” Just because everybody believes that there is a purple lion flying over my head, does not make it true. That is, counting noses does not always rule when it comes to truth.

Third, objective truth does not mean “publicly provable.” For example, secret sins done in private are known by the perpetrator, but may not be publicly provable. Fourth, objective truth is that which is “independent of the knower and his consciousness.” For example, The Los Angeles Lakers won back-to-back NBA Championships in ‘87-88 & ‘2000-2001 seasons. This is true whether or not my family in Argentina knows it or not, or whether or not they believe it. What about subjective truth, what is it like?

Subjective Truth

Unlike objective truth, subjective truth deals with personal preferences or tastes. For example, I like on my burrito hot sauce, the spicier the better and if it makes me cry, it has been an incredible experience. Because it makes the eating experience more enjoyable for me. My wife thinks I’m crazy. She likes some hot sauce on her Mexican food but crying because of spice makes her eating experience a miserable one. What’s true for me here is not true for her.

Thus, the difference between *objective* truth and *subjective* truth is that the former is true whether I feel like it or not, believe it or not, approve of it or not, aware of it or not. Whereas the latter specifically deals with my personal tastes. In this case what is true for me may not be true for another person.

WHAT’S THE VALUE OF THIS DISTINCTION?

I don’t think we can underestimate the value of the distinction between objective and subjective truth. Let me ask you, the reader, “If you need heart surgery, do you want Moe, Larry and Curly who subjectively believe they can heal you, or a genuine doctor to perform the procedure?” You probably want the *true* doctor as opposed to the Three Stooges because your life depends on the objective truth that the surgeon knows his craft.

Let’s bring the analogy over to ultimate questions like, “Is there life after death?” or “Does God exist?” or “Are we here by Chance or Design?” or “Is Jesus really the only way to be saved from damnation?” Too often when these questions are posed, people are indifferent, don’t want to be bothered, think the

answers are unknowable, etc. That's grievous because that's just not the case, even when it comes to religious truth claims, we can know many true things.

Truth is real and can be known. Through the effective use of the four laws of logic, understanding what the correspondence theory of truth is, and making the proper distinctions between subjective and objective truth, we can demonstrate that truth is not only real (religious or not) but also attainable.

Unfortunately truth is not often welcomed in society but has many enemies. In Part 4 of *True Truth and Why it Matters*, we will consider Three Enemies of Truth: relativism, technologies, and the faith/reason *misunderstanding*.

ⁱ Os Guinness lecture "Truth—How Can We be Sure about Anything" <http://www.bethinking.org/truth-tolerance/intermediate/truth-how-can-we-be-sure-about-anything.htm> (accessed 2/19/2014)

ⁱⁱ Ibid. (accessed 2/19/2014)

ⁱⁱⁱ Emphasis added

^{iv} Angeles, Peter A., *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd edition, p.170, © 1992 by Peter A. Angeles

^v Article by Craig Hawkins: <http://thecollegeoftheology.com/god-and-logic/>. This article on *God and Logic* is worthy to be read for its comprehensiveness, depth and brevity on the subject (accessed 2/18/2014)

^{vi} A verbal quote I borrowed from Professor Scott Smith at Biola University in 2002.

^{vii} This section is taken from, *Primer Chart on Logical Fallacies*, by Sergio Tangari 2003, from Craig Hawkins class "Logic" taken at Biola University, Fall Semester of 2002. The sources used for chart: Angeles, Peter A., *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd edition, (1992 by Peter A. Angeles); Geisler & Brooks, *Come Let Us Reason: An Introduction to Logical Thinking*, (1990 by Baker Books); and Hurley, Patrick J., *A Concise Introduction to Logic*, (7th Edition, 2000 by Wadsworth).

^{viii} Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p. 742.

^{ix} The following three examples are taken from Peter Kreeft & Ronald K. Tacelli's, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, p. 363.