

The Nature of Truth—Part Two

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What Truth Is. *Correspondence with Reality*

Now that the inadequate views of the nature of truth have been examined, it remains to state an adequate view. Truth is what corresponds to its referent. Truth about reality is what corresponds to the way things really are. Truth is “telling it like it is.” This correspondence applies to abstract realities as well as actual ones. There are mathematical truths. There are also truths about ideas. In each case there is a reality, and truth accurately expresses it.

Falsehood, then is what does not correspond. It tells it like it is not, misrepresenting the way things are. The intent behind the statement is irrelevant. If it lacks proper correspondence, it is false.

Arguments for Correspondence.

All noncorrespondence views of truth imply correspondence, even as they attempt to deny it. The claim: “Truth does not correspond with what is” implies that this view corresponds to reality. Then the noncorrespondence view cannot express itself without using a correspondence frame of reference.

If one’s factual statements need not correspond to the facts in order to be true, then any factually incorrect statement is acceptable. It becomes impossible to lie. Any statement is compatible with any given state of affairs.

In order to know something is true or false, there must be a real difference between things and statements about the things. But correspondence is the comparison of words to their referents. Hence, a correspondence view is necessary to make sense of factual statements.

Communication depends on informative statements. But correspondence to facts is what makes statements informative. All communication ultimately depends on something being literally or factually true. We cannot even use a metaphor unless we understand that there is a literal meaning over against which the figurative sense is not literal. So, it would follow that all communication depends in the final analysis on a correspondence to truth.

The intentionalist theory claims that something is true only if what is accomplished corresponds with what is intended by the statement. Without correspondence of intentions and accomplished facts there is no truth.

Objections to Correspondence.

Objections to the correspondence view of truth come from Christian and non-Christian sources.

When Jesus said “I am the truth” (John 14:6), it is argued that he demonstrated that truth is personal, not propositional. This falsifies the correspondence view of truth, in which truth is a characteristic of propositions (or expressions) which correspond to its referent. But a person, as well as a proposition, can correspond to reality. As the “exact image” of the invisible God (Heb. 1:3), Jesus perfectly corresponds to the Father (John 1:18). He said to Philip, “when you have seen me, you have seen the Father” (John 14:9). So, a person can correspond to another in his character and actions. In this sense, persons can be said to be true, or express the truth.

God is truth, yet there is nothing outside of himself to which he corresponds. Yet accord-

ing to the correspondence view, truth is that which correctly represents reality. Since God lacks correspondence, this argument goes, the correspondence theory denies that God is true, as the Bible says he is (Rom. 3:4). However, truth as correspondence does relate strongly to God. God's words correspond to his thoughts. So God is true in the sense that his word can be trusted. God's thoughts are identical to themselves, a kind of perfect "correspondence." In this sense, God is true to himself. If truth is understood as what corresponds to another, then in this sense God is not "true." Rather, he is the ultimate reality and so the standard for truth. Other things may correspond to him in a limited way in order to be called true, not he to them.

The basic fallacy in this objection that God is truth yet not correspondent is that it equivocates in its definitions. If correspondence relates only to something *outside* oneself, then God cannot be truth, but the ultimate reality to which truth corresponds. If correspondence can also be *inside oneself*, God corresponds to himself in the most perfect way. He is perfect truth by perfect self-identity. Consider the following fallacious thinking:

1. All who submit to the authority of the Pope are Roman Catholic.
2. But the Pope cannot submit to himself.
3. Therefore, the Pope is not Roman Catholic.

The mistake is in the second premise. Contrary to the claim, the Pope can submit to himself. He simply has to follow the rules he lays down for Roman Catholics. Likewise, God can and does live in accord with his own authority. In this sense he is true to himself.

The Absolute Nature of Truth.

The relativity of truth is commonly a premise of current thought. Yet orthodox Christianity is predicated on the position that truth is absolute. Thus, the defense of the possibility of absolute truth is crucial to the defense of the historic Christian faith. According to theories of relative truth, something may be true for one person, but not for all people. Or, it may be true at one time, but not at another. According to the absolutist view, what is true for one person is true for all persons, times and places.

As argued above, there is only one adequate view of the nature of truth—the correspondence view. Other views, such as coherence and pragmatism, describe tests for truth, not an explanation of the nature of truth itself. *Factual truth is that which corresponds to the facts.* It is that which corresponds to the actual state of affairs being described.

Relative Truth.

The relativity of truth is a popular contemporary view. However, truth is not determined by majority vote. Let's take a look at the reasons people give for belief that truth is relative.

Of all, some things appear only to be true at some times and not at others. For example, many people once believed the world to be flat. Now we know that truth statement was wrong. It would seem that this truth has changed with the times. Or has it? Did the truth change, or did beliefs about what is true change? Well, certainly the world did not change from a box to a sphere. What changed in this regard is our belief, not our earth. It changed from a false belief to a true one.

Within a statement's universe of discourse, every truth is an absolute truth. Some statements really apply only to some people, but the truth of those statements is just as absolute for all people everywhere at all times as a statement that applies to all people generally. "Daily injections of insulin are essential for continued life" is true of persons with some life-threatening

forms of diabetes. This statement has an applied universe of discourse. It isn't purporting to be a truth that applies to everyone. But if it applies to Fred, then it is true of Fred for everyone. The caveat that this statement is false for people with a normally functioning pancreas does not detract from the statement's truth within its universe of discourse—diabetics to whom it is properly addressed.

Some statements appear to be true only for some. The statement, "I feel warm" may be true for me but not for another person, who may feel cold. I am the only one within the statement's universe of discourse. The statement, "I [Norman Geisler] feel warm" (on July 1, 1998, at 3:37 P.M.) is true for everyone everywhere that Norman Geisler did feel warm at that moment in history. It corresponds to facts and so is an absolute truth.

A teacher facing a class says: "The door to this room is on my right." But it is on the left for the students. Relativists argue that surely this truth is relative to the teacher since it is false for the class. But on the contrary it is equally true for everyone that the door is on the professor's right. This is an absolute truth. It will never be true for anyone, anywhere at any time that the door was on the professor's left during this class on this day in this room. The truth is equally absolute that the door was on the student's left.

It seems obvious that the temperature frequently is relatively high in Arizona and relatively cold at the North Pole. So, apparently some things are true for some places but not for other places. Right?

Not so. Some things are true concerning some places, but not true in other places where the conditions are different. But that isn't the point. Within the Arizona weather report's universe of discourse, the statement corresponds to the facts. So it is true everywhere. The statement: "It is relatively cold for earth at the North Pole" is true for people in Arizona in the summer, or on Pluto where it is colder than on the North Pole. Truth is what corresponds to the facts, and the fact is that it feels cold at the North Pole.

All truth is absolute. There are no relative truths. For if something is really true, then it is really true for everyone everywhere, and for all time. The truth statement $7 + 3 = 10$ is not just true for mathematics majors, nor is it true only in a mathematics classroom. It is true for everyone everywhere.