

# The difference between truth and belief



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The word truth can have a variety of meanings, from honesty and faith to a verified fact in particular.[1] The term has no single definition about which a majority of professional philosophers and scholars agree, and various theories of truth continue to be debated. There are differing claims on the roles that revealed and acquired knowledge play; and whether truth is subjective, objective, or absolute. Though truth is generally believed to be both subjective and objective, belief is assumed to be objective which means it differs from person to person. For example, I believe that the sky is blue entails that I think that this proposition is “ true”.

The ways by which we acquire knowledge, can be differentiated into four broad categories, sense perception, language, emotion and reasoning. The four ways of knowing help us to identify and differentiate between subjective and objective truths. It is generally assumed language gives us access to subjective truths while reason gives us access to objective truths. For example, the various mathematical proofs, theories and formulae that are in use today are in practice because of they have been proved by reason and are considered as objective mathematical truths. However, some theories and formulas are axiomatic truths. Axiomatic truths are self evident truths or basic facts which are accepted without any proof. On the contrary, perception and emotion are believed to result in subjective truths. From past experiences, I have generalized that objects left out in the rain get wet. Through reasoning I apply this understanding to tonight’s rainfall, and conclude that my own bicycle will get wet if it is left out in the backyard. Reason can help us to identify both subjective and objective truths. For example, reason can help to distinguish between objective mathematical

truths and subjective artistic truths. Thus, from the above examples it can be seen that the various ways of knowing, alone can help to identify truths. But, the ways of knowing may also work together to give us the truth. For example, in science the way of knowing of reason and sense perception may work collaboratively to give us the objective truths. Some examples are objects falling on the ground with an acceleration of  $9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$ . However, if reason helps us to identify and distinguish between objective mathematical truths such as the sum of the angles of a triangle is 180 and subjective artistic truths such as Beethoven's 9th symphony is his best, it does not mean that reason is superior to the other ways of knowing because each of the ways of knowing has its own limitations and may not necessarily give us the absolute truth. The way of classical inductive reasoning can lead to false claims. Consider this example, I saw a duck and it was black. I saw a second duck and it was black. I saw a third duck and it was black. I saw an Nth duck and it was black. A general statement becomes the conclusion "All ducks must be black". After tens of thousands of instances of black ducks in Africa, Asia and North America I go to the UK and see a white duck, right in the middle of a lake. One false instance is enough to topple over the general conclusion I had painstakingly reached.

In the wake of the development in sciences and the extensive use of reason in daily life, a question is raised "Is reason the most superior way of knowing?". Reason has given rise to many scientific explanations and theories such as the formulae of mathematics and the laws of physics. In the AOK of science, the various laws of gravity in physics have been defined after reason and research. For example, if I observe that the gravity is always

same when I undertake an experiment, by inductive reasoning I will assume that this will always be the case if I measure gravity on any X place in the world. The general statement becomes the conclusion “ The acceleration due to gravity is  $9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$ . But, if I were to conduct the same experiment at the North or the South pole I would find that the value of gravity is more than what I had found before, as the earth is elliptical and the poles are closer to the earth’s core. Also, the value of gravity would be quite different if I were to conduct the same experiment at the equatorial regions . Thus, as we can see, the reasoned assumption can sometimes lead to a paradigm shift i. e. true in specific environments so not a universal truth. Even if the experiment is conducted hundreds of times, there is always a possibility that an exception will be found and the theory would be falsified like in the case of the white duck. Thus, it is suggested that a hypothetical deductive method should be used, which is a continual interplay between deductive and inductive reasoning, mediated by testing done in the real world, whereby false hypotheses are discarded through trial and disproof. However, there is a possibility that somebody may stumble upon a case that falsifies the conclusion.

The other knowledge issue raised is ” How far do our cultural beliefs distort our attempts to distinguish between subjective and objective theories?”. For example, a recent case in India, where cultural beliefs are followed on a large extent, the idols of Lord Ganesha in temples all over the country were believed to be drinking milk from the offerings by visitors and followers. Thus, the subjective truth of all the followers was that the idol of Lord Ganesha was drinking milk. However, scientists conducted various

experiments on the idols thereafter and came out with an objective explanation whereby the subjective truth of the followers was falsified. The rationalists and the scientists proved that the result was because of the surface tension and the absorption capabilities of the materials of which the idols were made . Thus, the cultural belief in India that the offerings by devotees are consumed by the god , gave rise to the subjective truth and distorted the objective truth.

Also , another knowledge issue which is raised is “ How to do we get from our subjective beliefs to our objective truths ? ” . Darwin’s theory of evolution was based on his observations and is believed to be true especially by most of today’s scientists. Darwin’s subjective belief in evolutionary theory was transformed into an objective truth. He proposed that all of the millions of species of organisms present today, including humans, evolved slowly over billions of years, from a common ancestor by way of natural selection[1]. However, certain counter-claims make us believe that the theory of evolution is false. According to the theory of natural selection birds could never evolve to fly[2]while this is certainly not the case. Though subjective beliefs can be and have been transformed into objective truths by repeated experimentation, it is possible that a single counter-claim could forge the conclusion and prove the theory to be wrong.

The distinction between subjective and objective truths also raises the knowledge issue “ Is emotion an effective way of distinguishing between subjective and objective truths ? “. For example, in Ethics we may use reason effectively to distinguish between the reasons why we should switch off a life-support machine on a family member and why we shouldn’t, but

reason may not take into account the emotional pressures we feel in the moment of flicking the switch, or emotion may even over-rule reason to some extent.

The ongoing debate between subjective and objective truths also raises the knowledge issue " Are there any absolutely certain objective truths independent of what we believe to be true? ". This knowledge issue takes into account absolute truths. An absolute truth, sometimes called a universal truth, is an unalterable and permanent fact[3]. Many religions contain absolute truths. For example, a Christian might believe Lord Jesus to be his savior." To the Christian this may be an absolute truth. While many may agree that the Christian believes absolutely that Jesus is his Lord, they are unlikely to agree that Jesus is everyone's Lord is an absolute truth. Centuries of missionary work is evidence of the human sense of infallibility in this area and is shown by the movie " the mission" in which a Spanish jesuist travels to the south American wilderness in the hope of converting the Indians into Christians . When a person's absolute truth is extended to all other people, it can be viewed as a philosophical statement of exclusion. Those who do not endorse the absolute truth of another are either pitied or attacked[4]and results in war and oppression.

The method of the natural sciences involves perception as part of the collection of data to prove or disprove theories about the natural world for example , the development of the big bang theory by Edwin Hubble was based on his investigation of mysterious masses of stars called Nebulae. However, the problem is that a scientist's observations may be limited by the instruments they use to make their observations. However, several of <https://assignbuster.com/the-difference-between-truth-and-belief/>

these theories are considered as absolute truths today inspite of what we believe. Again, Historians might provide primary sources to represent the absolute objective truth of the horrors of Stalin's reign of terror, but the problem is this: how do we know that those sources haven't been tampered with - if Stalin's regime was capable of doctoring evidence during his rule, isn't this even more rife in an age where everyone has access to Photoshop?