

Comparing truth and falsity philosophy essay



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Can truth and falsity be compared to immiscible water and oil, where one can see the clear divide between each element? This was the hard question that I was faced with when beginning my quest to prove and disprove this claim. Although not often thought about, this inquiry made me self-evaluate what I believe is 'truth' and what separates this loosely defined term from its counterpart, falseness. I believe truth and falsehood comes in many forms, each dependent on the area of knowledge in which 'knowers' approach truth and falseness through their different ways of knowing. Truth is built off of numerous factors such as our beliefs, experiences, emotions, language, reasoning, and perception. Similarly, what is false is dependent on many of the same factors: our senses, reasoning, and our past experiences. What is considered true and false is relative to the system that decides it. As individuals, we are able to distinctly distinguish between what is true and what is false in our minds and in our daily life. However, in a community, what is true and what is false seems to be blurred.

Truth and falseness, I believe, is dependent on the areas of knowledge. In art, truth is subjective; it is merely based on one's personal interpretation. Each piece of art will prompt many expressions of truth through one's perception, and emotion. For example, in English class, we had a huge debate on the famous soliloquy, "To be, or not to be" from William Shakespeare's Hamlet. Many of my classmates believe that Hamlet is contemplating suicide. Contrarily, through my reasoning, and perception, I think Hamlet is considering the idea of killing his stepfather. Although, my perceived truth of the piece may be false to others, my interpretation is still what is true for me. In my opinion, truth and falseness in art is relative,

meaning that a piece of art is not limited to a single truth. However, one may argue that what is true and false in art is not simply based on personal truth, but on some standards by which all art is measured by. If our society really believes that there are no standards in art, than how is it possible to teach, study, examine, and grade artwork? The fact that art critics exist, suggests that there are some valuable opinions that artists adhere to. As a student studying literature, I have always been reminded by my teacher to structure my writing in a certain way. For example, when writing a news article, we are reminded to structure our work into the ‘inverted pyramid’ style where all the important information is organized in the beginning of the piece and the less significant information towards the end. All of the language teachers I have had, expressed that an effective piece of literature conveyed emotion. The fact that our society classifies works of art as good and bad suggests that people distinguish between true and false art. True art would adhere to the guidelines of critics whereas false art would be emotionless and does not follow the standards of art.

Art is language that can easily be lost in translation. For example, my parents speak Chinese and I have picked up a few phrases from the Chinese lessons that I take, and my parents’ constant nagging. One of the phrases I have learned from my parents is ‘你沒有手尾’ which literally translates to ‘you don’t have hand tail’ in English. When I first heard it, it was true to me that she was saying ‘you don’t have hand tail’ by the coherence theory of truth. However in her context, it meant something else that is hard to translate to English; it may express something such as: ‘you are messy and you don’t clean after yourself’ which to my mom, is her truth,

but would be false to me at that time. Because translations are not exact when translating from one language to another, truth and falsity is blurred, as one may interpret something differently than someone else.

In the natural sciences, scientific truth is the relationship between theory and reality. If a theory or idea happens to stand in agreement with objective reality, it is accepted as truth; if not, the idea/theory is regarded as false. In this area of knowledge, it seemed to me that what is true and what is false was easily distinguishable. The sky is green is obviously false while one stating that the sky is blue would be true based on my observation of what I see. The fact that we build scientific knowledge from previous knowledge, and disregard other claims suggests that there are certain truths and falseness which must have been absolute to form the basis of reality.

However, when further examining this area of knowledge, I recognized that many of the 'truths' we regard in science, originated from 'lies' or 'false ideas' that were outside the boundaries of thought of the community at that time, blurring the distinction between truth and falsehood. For example, Sir Isaac Newton famously used inductive reasoning to develop the theory of gravity. At the height of his discovery, many scientists regarded his claim as false. Through the course of many observations and trials of experiments, theories evolve through refinery and modifications as the arrival of new discoveries and technology prove or falsify the accepted 'truth'. For example, Albert Einstein built upon and revised Newton's law of gravity which we universally accept today. Although Newton's theory is widely regarded as 'truth' to the scientific community, inductive reasoning allows for the possibility that the conclusion is false even where all premises are

true.[1]Through applying the principle of falsifiability-the idea that no theory is completely correct, but can be accepted as truth, if not falsified, we are able to filter truth from falseness. In spite of this, many scientific theories such as ones pertaining to atoms and the string theory cannot be applied to Karl Popper's principle of falsifiability. So would these theories be regarded as false science, although widely accepted? This, I believe is subjective truth. To those who regard these ideas as true, follow the pragmatic theory of truth.

However, I came upon a thought experiment known as 'Schrodinger's cat' that neatly illustrated objective truth. In this experiment, a cat is put in a closed box with substances that have a probability of killing the cat. We would not know the state of the cat- whether it is exactly alive or dead. The cat is dead is either true or false, it cannot be both. That is, it has exactly one true value.

In TOK class, we were introduced to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights that outlined 'universal beliefs' which all participating countries agreed upon. In this context, I believe that 'truth' on a world stage, is in accordance to the coherence theory of truth where the majority's belief is considered 'truth'. What is considered false is a deed that goes against the majority of the whole world's belief. It is evident that the declaration reflects Kantian philosophy which Western societies have adopted in which the declaration has sometimes clashed with the beliefs of non-Western countries. So does that mean that Western beliefs on human rights are the 'truth'? Many non-Western countries have openly criticized the declaration for the universality of human rights. Many of the articles clashes with their

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values and beliefs. For example, article three states that “ everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person”.

In Canada, our judicial system believes that capital punishment is wrong despite any circumstances. Our system believes the fact as a firm truth that never changes despite any situation. On the hand, the Chinese government believe in capital punishment to those who have committed a big offence. This practice would be absolutely false to the Canadian government, as they adhere to their belief of never killing in any context, but would be true to the Chinese government. So which practice is true and which is false? I believe it depends on one’s truth. Since I was raised in Canada, my parents as well as the society influenced my belief in the Canadian judicial system. Therefore through my reasoning, and authority, I find truth in the Canadian practice which has shaped my modern paradigm.

Buddha once said that: “ in the sky, there is no distinction between east and west; people create distinctions out of their own minds and then believe them to be true.” The concepts of truth and falsehood are created to help us translate our world that we live in. Relativists would agree, but absolutists would seek evidence to disprove it. Plato once argued against relativists saying, “ If you believe the truth is relative then you believe all views are correct. And if you believe all views are correct then you believe my views are correct. And since I believe truth is absolute, you must therefore believe truth is absolute.” The argument is never-ending. Absolute distinction between what is true and what is false is based on personal truth in different areas of knowledge. What is true and false to me, may not be what you view as true and false. The differences in our opinions in art, natural science, and <https://assignbuster.com/comparing-truth-and-falsity-philosophy-essay/>

ethics prove that there is no absolute distinction between what is true and what is false in a world perspective. Perhaps truth and falsehood is internal which we invent to help us translate the world into our own mental view.

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