

The Test for Truth

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Nothing moves the human mind more than the reality of Truth. The question posed by Pontius Pilate, "What is truth?" still haunts our psyche. Today Truth is questioned by the Skeptics, ignored by the Mystics, condemned by the Existentialist, and redefined by the Post-Modernist. But truth is foundational to the human soul. Without it, we cannot make a meaningful choice in a world of conflicting ideas. Plato insists, "As the heart is designed for love, the mind is designed for the truth." In the mind of Augustine, three elements will never die - Love, beauty, and truth. As the Sun shines the light, the mind reflects the Truth. At the depth of our being, there is a quest, a longing to know the answer. Truth is priceless. We may deny it but we cannot avoid it. We may ignore it but we cannot escape it. We may reject it but we cannot silence it. We are designed for it and our hearts are restless until we find it. It is too valuable to be trivial, too profound to be simple, too precious to be mindless. Sir Winston Churchill understood it when he wrote "Truth is incontrovertible. Panic may resent it, ignorance may deride it, malice may distort it, but there it is."

The Chicago philosopher Mortimer J. Adler declares, "Truth is a correspondence or agreement between our mind and reality." Truth is fundamental to any form of thinking. No thinking is meaningful unless our thinking is grounded in truth. Thinking would be pointless if there was no truth to think with. Truth is the essence of life. But in our complex world of ideas, how do we choose between Truth and falsehood, Reality from fantasy, and facts from fiction? How do we know what is true? How do we discover it? What is the nature of Truth?

As we reflect on the subject, it is worth recalling Plato's wisdom - "People's beliefs are often formed by persuasion rather than by rational reflection." Easy-Believism is the greatest mental disease of our time. People approach the House of Truth through various doors, The Door of Faith, the Door of Experience, the Door of Reason, and the Door of Science. We will examine the four doors and test their credibility.

1. The Door of Faith.

Today many try the Door Faith. For those who take this approach, truth is not a matter of the mind (logic) but a matter of the heart (emotion). Philosophers use the term “Fideism” to describe the approach of these believers. Soren Kierkegaard, Joseph Campbell, Shirley MacLaine, W.T. Stace, D.T. Suzuki, Alan Watt, Karl Barth, and Madam Blavatsky, to name a few, knock on the door of faith. For the fideist truth is not a matter of reason but beyond reason. Truth is not something to reason but a reality we encounter. Not a matter of the mind but a matter of the heart. They suggest reason is inadequate, irrelevant, and impersonal. In light of this, one must not look to reason for help but turn away from it and trust one’s subjective senses. The fideist believes faith is greater than reason. Faith creates its own justification. Reason is irrelevant and cannot lead us to faith, therefore the path of faith is better than the path of reason. Soren Kierkegaard, the father of Existentialism, notes “Faith is an objective uncertainty held fast by an infinite passion.” Following his Guru, Karl Barth declares, “Faith takes reason by the throat and strangles the brute.”

Is the door of faith valid? Is faith a sufficient ground for truth? In reality to accept faith without reason is blind. If reason is a valuable guide in all areas of life why reject it on ultimate matters? If common sense makes good sense why seek nonsense? How do we choose the right faith? How do we know we are not mistaken? How do we escape the charge of self-delusion? How do we choose between sanity and insanity, belief in God & Satan, between KFC & KGB? The fideist cannot know if his faith is true and he cannot convince others that his faith is worth believing. If beliefs cannot be tested they cannot be trusted. You have no logical ground for knowing if your faith is true. The fideist shouts without reason, invites without evidence, and believes without proof. An untestable faith is untrustable.

- a) The faith of the fideist is arbitrary and subjective.
- b) There are many competing and conflicting faiths.
- c) No evidence is provided for faith.
- d) A Blind faith is no better than a false faith.

“One who holds a true belief or faith without understanding is like a blind man who happens to take the right road.” Plato

2. The Door of Experience

Since the birth of Existentialism and the rise of dogmatic scientism, people have moved to the realm of nonreason to support their beliefs. This Touchy-feely, better-felt-than-told has a wide following.

Experience is better than reason. Ernest Hemingway states, "What is good is what I feel good after, what is bad is what I feel bad after." Existentialism argues that Reason is cold, dry, and impersonal. Too abstract, not concrete enough. Considering this one must not look to reason for guidance but turn away from it and trust his subjective senses. What matters is not the light in one's head but the heat in one's heart. One philosopher calls it "The liver quaver syndrome." I believe because of the shiver in my liver or the blessing in my bosom. For the experientialist truth is not a matter of the mind but a matter of the heart. The burning in the heart is greater than the thinking in the mind. Truth is not what you think but how you feel. The experience of God is far greater than the mere talk of his existence, so goes the thinking. Existence precedes essence. Karl Jaspers the existential philosopher declares, "A proved God is no God."

Experience is too subjective to act as an objective truth. It is conflicting and contradictory. An experience is not the truth but the result of the truth. It is an effect, not the cause. Therefore, it cannot act as a proof. Experience is not self-evidence or self-interpreting. Truth is non-contradictory. The problem with the existential approach is not its emphasis on the personal, subjective, and existential but the rejection of reason. It commits mental suicide and invites people to take a leap of faith into the unknown. It is obsessed with the heart but ignores the head. It focuses on the subjective at the expense of the objective. The either-or rather than the both-and. To glorify the "How at the expense of the what" is dancing in the dark. If the object is uncertain what hope do we have that we are worshiping the true God? What ground do we have that our object is worthy of our trust? Feeling is not the master of truth but a slave of human emotion. A faith without reason is a faith without hope.

a) Experience is subjective

- b) Experience is conflicting
- c) Experience is Individualistic
- d) Experience can be misleading

3. The Door of Science

There is an old story in Europe about a priest meeting a scientist. After a long dialogue, the scientist candidly remarked, "You give me your faith and I will give you my reason."

Horst Symanowski tells the story of a factory worker who says to his fellow worker, who is also a pastor, "Don't say God. That means nothing to me. When you say Coffee I see before me a color, perceive at the same time a smell, and have already with the sound of the word a taste on my tongue. With the word God, I don't notice anything. Therefore, better not say it at all"

- a) Science has no moral or value base. It is descriptive not prescriptive.
- b) Science is limited to the observable reality; it studies only one aspect of reality.
- c) The Empiricism of science implies reductionism.
- d) Reality is multi-dimensional and science cannot handle business in other domain.

Science has no monopoly on truth. Science cannot prove science. Only that which can be proven by science as true is unprovable by science.

4. The Door of Reason

Reason is common sense. But what is common sense? Common sense is what makes good sense. It involves every human activity. Since the beginning of time, the human mind has played a vital role in the business of life. Reasoning is an essential part of our existence. Reason is our human ability to make distinctions. It is our ability to infer, think, and choose. Plotinus was right when he said, "He who would rise above reason falls outside of it." We could say "He who

would destroy logic will by logic be destroyed.” Reason is the light that shines the way to truth. Reason is not the truth but the means to the truth. Reason is the servant that guides faith to the house of God. Reason does not cause faith but reason supports faith. Faith without reason is blind. Reason without faith is empty.

- a) Reason is universal
- b) Reason is necessary
- c) Reason is objective

An event from New York illustrates the point. One cold night a drunkard was seen walking around a lamppost. A man stopped and asked him what he was doing. The drunkard replied, "I am looking for the key to my house." The man joined in the search but they found nothing. "Are you sure you lost it here?" the man inquired. "No! I lost it a block away." "Then why are you searching here?" demanded the man. "Because there's more light here." There is more light in the Christian faith if we would only open the door and see the wonder of truth.