Philosophy: Truth, Simplicity And Complexity Essay, Research Paper

Simplicity and Complexity

“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:4).” This seems to be a very simple scripture talking about simple ideas. Children understand the little things that adults have a tendency to exasperate inherent truths. The Bible shows us that children understand right from wrong without trying to convince everyone that there might be a loop hole. Why is it that adults complicate matters so much?

In order for us to understand how the ancient philosophers have gone astray from simple concepts we must take a look at truth and their views on the complex idea. Do we ever come to an understanding of what truth is or is it still out there for people to wonder about?

Truth exists and is an absolute. Contrary to the mush-minded meanderings of modern educators, truth is not relative. If my truth differs from your truth that can only be because either one or both of us is unaware of the truth and has called something true which is not. Truth must not have the slightest touch of “maybe” to it. Maybe is dishonesty to truth and if it touches truth, then truth becomes maybe. Truth is more and beyond that which is true. Truth is a concept in philosophy that treats the meaning of true and the criteria by which we judge the truth or falsity in written and spoken statements. For thousands of years, Philosophers have attempted to answer the question “What is Truth?”

Truth is the quality of being true, and anything that is true is a truth, the concept of truth is uncommonly complex and variable. Thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and opinions are said to be true or false. An idea makes a truth claim and is true when the character of what is thought about upholds its claim. Forms of words or statements are also said to be true or false. This can be explained by saying a set of words is true when it expresses a true thought. “Truth” should be replaced by the “facts”, “reality” or the “way things are.”

Truth is often imagined as consisting in a speaker’s honesty with respect to what he believes. Mohandas Gandhi spoke of “The Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle, that is God” and said, ” I worship God as Truth only.” Jesus said, ” I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.”

God is truth and the essence of it. All of his ways are truth and all truth stands or falls as it is measured against Him. If we love truth and seek after it, we cannot help but run into the outstretched arms of God. He wants us to know the truth, which is to know him.

God places the truth before us and gives us complete freedom to choose how to respond to the truth. If we turn to God and ask him to instruct us in the truth and to lead us to salvation, we will surely receive that which we ask because our prayer will be in line with God’s desire for us. The word truth is mentioned in the bible 235 times.

Plato developed an early version of the correspondence theory. He sought to understand the meaning of knowledge and how it is acquired. Plato wanted to distinguish between true and false belief. His theory was based on intuitive recognition that true statements correspond to the facts, while false statements do not. Plato recognized this theory as unsatisfactory because it did not allow false belief. Plato stated that if a belief was false because no fact proved it to be true, then it would be a belief about nothing, or not even a belief at all. He then thought that the grammar of a sentence could offer a way around this problem. But how, he asked, are the parts of a sentence related to reality? One suggestion is from the 20th-century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. He stated that the parts of a sentence relate to the objects they describe much like the way the parts of a picture relate to the objects pictured. But false sentences pose a problem. If a false sentence pictures nothing, there can be no meaning in the sentence.

The correspondence theory of truth is really no more than an expression of how the word “truth” is defined. Some criticisms focus on the limits of a problem that is involved in knowing whether or not a proposition does indeed agree with the facts. We clearly do classify propositions as true or false in everyday life, but we cannot securely do so on the basis of their conformity to reality.

William James defined the pragmatist theory of truth, as “an idea is ‘true’ so long as to believe it manifestly false.” It is obvious to any person that a proposition is either true or false separately of the utility of our belief in it. Pragmatist philosophers twisted the meanings of words, so we have to make logical sense of pragmatism. William James, qualified his attitude by saying that a proposition’s the premise of being true consists of being useful in the widest possible sense.

I believe that Locke and Hobbes could be considered pragmatist philosophers. Man has no innate ideas and that makes truth arbitrary. Mental manipulations of words would exist because ideas are innate. Basically there are no simple ideas and everything could have multiple meanings. Does that make sense to you? Lets look back at the first sentence of this paper, man should humble himself as a child. If Locke and Hobbes had done this they would be singing a different tune. Its too easy to use that argument so let’s use a war analogy to see how Locke’s innate principle holds up. If a grenade is thrown into a bunker and I instinctively throw myself upon the grenade to save my platoon, I would have killed myself to save human life. That explains to me that there are innate ideas and that there is right and wrong.

Hobbes believes that truth is no where to be found. This is either a very ridiculous notion or a very scary concept if he is correct. Since men create words and the words create the truth, truth then is a relative term.

The coherence theory also concerns the meaning of knowledge. It states that a proposition’s truth consists in its fitting into a coherent system of propositions. Beliefs cover everything and do not contradict each other. The coherence theory is undoubtedly the better theory even here if only because there is an elegant economy in having a single over-arching theory of truth that encompasses all situations.

I believe that Marx has stayed consistent with the coherent theory. Whether he was right or wrong is not necessarily the point here, the point is that he did not contradict himself within his own writings. Instead of following all the historical writings, Marx decides to institute a whole new system by eliminating all truths and establishing a system without any truths. Since Communism contradicts all the previous philosophies, Marx creates this system so that there is no grey area. Many who found themselves in the grey area were usually not heard from again. This brings us to a philosopher that followed the ideas of Stalin or even Clinton when it comes to truth.

Machiavelli views the nature of man as a selfish animal. If we are selfish then it only makes sense that all truth would be distorted and vague. Truth is never simple with Machiavelli and will always be construed as a man’s weakness. Simple virtues make a man vulnerable while a mans vices will help him to survive. Embracing non-truths is the key for success according to Machiavelli. If my notion is correct that most of the truths that we come across are inherent is correct, then Machiavelli is very wrong. His methods are accurate, however he has us to believe that stealing could be worse than murder.

Truth has been linked with the Good and the Beautiful as one of man’s supreme values. The pursuit of truth is indistinguishable in practice from the pursuit of knowledge, whether about the environment, nature, ethnical duties and ideas, or the relation to the divine.

It has been doubted whether knowledge, or known truth, is humanly attainable. The truth is often disagreeable, because it fails to support prejudice or myth. The pursuit of truth tends to be suppressed as a dangerously revolutionary force.

Some philosophers reject the question “What is truth?” with the observation that attaching the claim “it is true that” to a sentence adds no meaning. The use of the word true is essential when making a general claim about everything, nothing, or something, as in the statement “most of what he says is true.”

Rousseau believes that truths only come out in social situations. He developed a political system so that these truths will come out. I guess if we do not understand something we just change it so that it fits what it is that you believe. Isn’t that the opposite of truth? If we devise a new system so that we can develop new truths than we are rejecting the truths that are already in place.

Aristotle would have us believe that truth exists within the combination of ideas. The same would go for falsity. Truth or falsehood cannot exist when the ideas are isolated. So according to Aristotle there are only a handful of truths in the universe. The rest are just relative depending upon the context in which you use them.

When I think of simple truths I think of the book “All I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten.” Everything was so simple when we were young. Right from wrong was always inherent and if we were ever questioned for something, we usually knew we were wrong before the teacher questioned us. The older we are the more complicated everything gets. That is why God refers to children when he tells people to come to him. They are so humble and can tell right from wrong, generally speaking.

Lets break down the philosophers from complex to very simple notions, in terms of truth. Locke believes there are no truths because there are no innate ideas. Hobbes believes that words are arbitrary and because words create truth, truth is arbitrary. Rousseau would have us believe that truths can only be established in social situations, along with Aristotle who believes that truth cannot be isolated. Machiavelli brings us a little closer in a twisted way. He believes in telling lies to get what you want. He doesn’t try to throw vague ideas at you, he just wants you to use effectual truths. Karl Marx gives us clear ideas of what he wants us to do. Just throw out the whole system and start over. He wants to create a system that does not involve truths. No more deception, everyone is on the same playing field.

Truth is a very simple and handy concept. It is correspondence of a pictorial or symbolic representation to the thing being represented. We may search for the answer until the end of time, when God says to us that the only truths are in him. He may tell all these philosophers that the answer was right in front of them and that they should have never led his children astray. All I know is Jack Handy said it best when he said:

“To me, truth is not some vague, foggy notion. Truth is real. And, at the same time, unreal. Fiction and fact and everything in between, plus some things I can’t remember, all rolled into one big “thing.” This is truth, to me.”