

# Truth and Illusion

## The Truth about Truth

Johnny Tebou, 6th grade, Archimedean Middle Conservatory

Since the dawn of its creation, philosophy has birthed many questions. One of these questions asks if access to objective truth is even possible. I believe that such access is possible, but we can't know *completely* that this is true; there will always be doubt. Let's observe this from a skeptic's point of view, where nothing is real and truth is simply an illusion. Well, to start things off, no one is really sure what "the" truth is. Philosophers haven't yet been able to bridge the gap between subjective and objective truth. Subjective truth is truth which varies depending from person to person. Objective truth is truth that corresponds with the reality "out there". For example, if your teacher explains that distance is speed multiplied by time, will this equation vary depending on the person? The answer is no. If this teacher tells her students that all humans have 32 teeth, the students will simply count and reveal that most don't have 32 teeth. What does this mean? This simply means that the teacher's claim wasn't the truth, not that it was true for the teacher but not the students. Now, if the teacher had told the students that *most* adolescents have 32 teeth and had evidence supporting her statement, her statement would be considered to be corresponding to objective truth. While we each have our own subjective experiences that hold true for ourselves alone, objective truth is simply broader and more reliable. Even skeptics must acknowledge the distinction between these two types of truth, and that the scientific method seems to give us access to at least some objective truths.

Another common philosophical question is whether there are degrees of truth. I believe that there are indeed degrees of truth: A statement can be truer than another. For example, pretend we have a man named Richard. If Richard says, "I am unable to speak," that is just plain false. Why? Because the words were spoken by him! If he says, "My iron rod is really hot," some problems occur. Since humans have different sensibilities to the environment surrounding them, being very hot is considered an opinion. It'd be a

risky move to use an opinion in a sentence seeking evaluation of truth. Instead he could deliver a more simplified sentence, such as, "My iron rod is 2,850 degrees Fahrenheit." This would be a simplified, true sentence. So how can sentences be *truer*? A sentence becomes truer when it contains greater specification. For example, "The iron rod, smelted in a cabin called 'Rox' and mined in Australia, is now rapidly melting due to the intensified heat exerted in the chamber it was kept in." This sentence is truer than the previous one. Why? The main cause of this is because it is narrower in scope, elevating its degree of truth.

A third question commonly asked in philosophy is of the role of authority or expert status in claims to knowledge. I believe that authority and higher "social ranking" play a major role in claims to knowledge. And the name of that role is *bias*. Let's face it; the powerful are most often believed. That's why leaders, educators, philosophers, etc. attempt to appear as professional as possible. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry used an example of such a case in his book, *The Little Prince*. A scientist had discovered an asteroid which was habitable. Other scientists didn't believe him and made a mockery of his ingenuous thoughts since he was dressed in foreign garb, to them like a clown. He returned a couple years later with his same theory, successfully clinching their support. The difference? This time he wore a tuxedo. In addition to appearance, those who have already provided these theories and laws successfully continue to be looked on as credible sources of information. Thus, those with less authority are often ignored when sharing their thoughts. This remains true until they successfully challenge someone with more credible beliefs than them, as many philosophers and scientists have done in the past. This is of course the gift of philosophy, that we all have a quest to pursue the truth for ourselves whether we arrive at it, or are accepted for it, or neither. It is ours for the taking.



How does the world appear to us?