



# Chapter Six – Truth Tests

## Do You Swear to Tell the Truth...?

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Chapter Review



# The Issue Defined

- In this chapter, we explore how we determine which of the many things we believe deserve the label *true*.
- We will look at several tests for truth and how they work.
- Once we have established a few ground rules, we turn to the fields of religion, science, history and literature to see how questions of truth are addressed in each of them.

# Laws of Thought

- Law of noncontradiction: A and non-A can't both be true simultaneously
- Law of the excluded middle: a thing is either A or non-A
- Law of identity: A is A (a reformulation of the law of noncontradiction)

# Warrantability

- Offers a form of evidence or justification for a proposition. Examples include logic, semantics, systematic coherence, testimony and empirical evidence
- Warrants have no necessary relationship to truth; something can be both warranted and false or unwarranted and true

# Correspondence

- To be true, a proposition must match with objects or events in the outside world
- Bertrand Russell championed this view; W.V.O. Quine challenged it
- The egocentric predicament also challenges this view; an example is the unknowability of Kant's noumena

# Coherence

- To be true, a proposition must be consistent with a larger body of other propositions – the whole system is true or false
- Coherent falsity can be difficult to distinguish from coherent truth, and coherent systems begin with initial propositions that must pass the correspondence test

# Pragmatism

- To be true, a proposition must be able to produce the desired results – it must work
- What is true makes a difference, clarifies our understanding, changes our lives
- Truth is not a fixed or static quality, but a part of the unfolding meaning that lived experience gives to something

# Ewe Creativity

- Truth understood in terms of “nyano,” (“planting the truth”), i.e., its generative capacity.
- Begins with pragmatism and adds the extension that truth will “grow” and bear fruit, whereas falsehood (being dead) does not have the power to germinate and flower



# Truth in Zen

- Practices such as zazen (sitting meditation) and the use of koans understood as affording ordinary persons an opportunity to change the operation of their minds such that they can directly apprehend reality.
- Truth is the present moment – past and future do not exist – and truth is the everyday, the mundane, the earthy
- The only warranty is one's personal experience

# Truth in Religions of the Book

- Sacred texts are regarded as the source of truth, and a divine being can be seen as providing the ultimate warranty
- Revealed materials can be available potentially to anyone
- Mystical experience and revelations are restricted to private experiences of particular individuals

# Truth in Science

- Paradigms are tightly coherent models for understanding reality. Because they are widely held and reflected in all texts and curricula, they tend to be invisible – until an experiment does not produce the expected results
- Thomas Kuhn has argued that moments of scientific revolution amount to changes in paradigms, the foundational sets of assumptions that underlie periods of “normal science”

# Truth in History

- History also operates according to paradigms that reflect our current understanding of the world
- As our understanding changes, our conclusions about the meaning of past events also change
- Social history has in recent decades redirected attention away from the “great men” of history to the experiences of all persons in historical periods, drawing on an array of evidence, including court documents, geological data, and material culture

# Truth in Texts

- According to the deconstruction test of truth, meaning occurs only through experience and texts are being reinterpreted continuously
- Derrida's deconstruction offers ways to question texts and take apart their artificial constructions to reveal their hidden meanings.

# Elusive Truth

- N. Scott Momaday has argued that one can speak in terms of “the native [i.e., Native American] perspective” regarding time, and that this perspective is at odds with notions of time as moving constantly at a regular rate; this raises the possibility of asking questions regarding the truth about time
- Anthony Damasio has proposed that a covert system in the brain is responsible for the “truth” gained in having hunches about good or bad decisions

# Key Terms

- Law of noncontradiction
- Law of the excluded middle
- Law of identity
- Warrant
- Correspondence test
- Theoretical posits
- Realist/representationalist view
- Antirepresentationalist view
- Coherence test
- Pragmatic test
- Creativity test
- Sitting
- Koan
- Beginner's mind
- Paradigm
- Deconstruction