Truth vs. Reality: Exploring the Worlds of Fiction and Fact

Reference: https://academiaworldnews.com/truth-vs-reality-exploring-the-worlds-of-fiction-and-fact/

by **Stavros Sindakis, PhD**

May 30, 2023

in **Philosophy & Religion**, **Articles**, **Society**

Reading Time: 20 mins read

Truth vs. Reality

The distinction between truth and reality is a central issue in philosophy, yet the problem has taken on a new urgency in recent years with the development of modern science because the issue of truth and reality is complex and has a wide-ranging impact on our lives. The question is how these two concepts relate to each other. Does reality conform to truth, or is truth a product of our perceptions of reality?

Highlights:

1. Truth is often subjective and relative to what one believes and experiences, while the reality is often objective and absolute.

2. Fact-based knowledge is an advancement in science and helps us form rational thoughts and behaviors.

3. Fiction helps us imagine different possibilities and alternatives for ourselves, others, and events happening in the world outside of our own perceptions and experiences.

4. Facts can help create a verifiable worldview, but only when trusted by an individual can they serve their intended purpose.

5. The ability to trust commonly established facts has been threatened by the creation of fringe ideologies and conspiracy theories.

When you read a book, you are not just consuming words on a page but also immersing yourself in another world where the characters behave in ways that make sense based on their personalities and motivations. But is this world as real as it seems? In some cases, the lines between the two worlds are clearly drawn: in others, they are blurred. The distinction between truth and reality is a central issue in philosophy (Rhees & Tessin, 1994). Thinkers have debated it since antiquity, and the problem has taken on a

new urgency in recent years with the development of modern science (e.g., Guthke, 2019). The question is how these two concepts relate to each other. Does reality conform to truth, or is truth a product of our perceptions of reality?

I distinguish five main positions that can be taken on this issue: correspondence theories, coherence theories, pragmatist theories, constructivist theories, and deflationary theories. The Correspondence Theory of Truth holds that the truth or falsity of a proposition is determined by how well it corresponds to the facts (David, 2018). This theory has been advocated by some of the most influential philosophers in history, including Plato (428-7 – 348-7 BC), Aristotle (384 – 322 BC), and Aquinas (1225 – 1274) (David, 2022). Correspondence theorists maintain that an objective reality exists independently of our minds and that true statements correspond to this reality (e.g., Fumerton, 2002).

The Coherence Theory of Truth holds that the truth or falsity of a proposition is determined by how well it coheres with other propositions, meaning reality is cohesive, i.e., the various parts of reality are interconnected and form a coherent whole (Baudet et al., 1994). In coherence theories, the truth is relative to a set of beliefs or systems of thought; for something to be true, it must cohere with the rest of our beliefs (Davidson, 2008). This means that true statements tend to be consistent with each other and that we can use common sense to determine whether a statement is true or false.

The Pragmatist Theory of Truth holds that the truth or falsity of a proposition is determined by how well it works in achieving its goals (Haack, 1976). This theory was developed by Charles Sanders Peirce (1839 – 1914) but popularized by the American philosopher William James (1842-1910) (Capps, 2019). James (2001) believed that truth is based on our practical needs and objectives and that truth is contextual and changes depending on the situation. Pragmatist theories hold that truth is relative to the person or group who believes it. For example, different cultures may have different definitions of truth, and what one person considers to be true might not be considered as such by another. In other words, pragmatists support that what is true depends on what works best for us; the Truth is whatever belief leads to the most successful actions.

Social Constructivism is the belief that truth is constructed by social processes. The theory states that these processes depend on various factors, such as history and culture (Gergen, 1992). It also says truths are not absolute but contingent upon convention, human perception, and social experience (Hay, 2016). Furthermore, representations of physical and biological reality are socially constructed—for example, gender and sexuality. Giambattista Vico (1668 – 1744) was one of the first philosophers to say that knowledge is socially constructed. He stated a position that truth could be seen as constructed (Vico, 1990), and this argument was taken up by Hegel and Marx. For Marx, knowledge is true when it is based on historical understanding; otherwise, it can be distorted by power or ideology (McCarthy, 1994).

The Deflationary Theory of Truth holds that the truth or falsity of a proposition is meaningless. Deflationary theories claim that there is no objective reality apart from our perceptions. We create our reality by interpreting the events and objects around us in a way

that supports our beliefs and values (Stoljar et al., 2018). This means that different people can look at the same event and see it in different ways, which can lead to disagreements about what actually happened.

The debate is still ongoing today about the nature of truth as well as aspects of defining truth. In the early 20th century, many philosophers were drawn to formal logic and were interested in creating a system of logic that would be acceptable as a scientific assessment. For instance, Tarski's semantics is a formalism for defining the truth of statements in a given language. The approach is called model-theoretic because it defines truth in terms of a model, or structure, that satisfies a set of conditions (Heck, 1997). In particular, Tarski's semantics says that a statement is true if and only if it is true in all models that satisfy the conditions. For example, a model is a set M together with an interpretation I of the non-logical symbols of the language. The interpretation must satisfy certain conditions. Most importantly, the truth value of every sentence in the model depends only on the elements of M assigned by I to the non-logical symbols occurring in that sentence. Likewise, Kripke's semantics is a model of interpretation in which the truth value of an assumption is relative to a world. Kripke's semantics is a system of formal semantics for modal and intuitionistic logic developed by American philosopher Saul Kripke. It is based on the idea of possible worlds, which are used to represent the set of all states of affairs that are compatible with a given set of assumptions (Orłowska, 1990). The possible worlds are then connected by means of a relation called accessibility, which represents the ability to move from one world to another. In other words, an assumption may be true in one world and false in another.

This debate has important implications for many areas of human life, including the way we think about science and our understanding of the world. For example, correspondence theories tend to be associated with traditional forms of learning, such as classroom learning (Apple, 1979). In these settings, students are typically taught to accept what they are told as true and rely on teachers to provide accurate information. Coherence theories, on the other hand, can help to promote skepticism and critical thinking skills (Ludwig, 2007). They can also help students to develop their own beliefs system, which can lead to a more individualized understanding of the world. Pragmatist theories have a particularly strong impact on the way we think about knowledge in the digital age (Russill, 2008). In a world where information is constantly changing, pragmatists argue that we need to be flexible and open-minded when it comes to our understanding of the world. We should not rely on rigid definitions of truth or facts but should be prepared to change our views as new information emerges. Further, deflationary theories have the potential to provide a more accurate and complete view of the world. They can help us dispel many of the myths and misconceptions we harbor about the world and lead to a more realistic understanding of our place in the world.

As you can see, truth and reality are complex and have a wide-ranging impact on our lives. This article provides an overview of the four main positions that can be taken on the issue and explores the implications of each theory for different areas of human life.

Definition of Truth

Truth has been a central question for philosophy and religion since antiquity. The concept of truth is also addressed in other fields, such as science, art, and mathematics. Truth has been a topic of discussion throughout history with many different definitions. In classical philosophical usage, the term 'truth' refers to the property of being in agreement with fact or reality (Davidson, 1969). In logic and mathematics, a statement is considered true if it corresponds to the facts. This correspondence theory of truth is widely accepted among philosophers and mathematicians (e.g., Benacerraf, 1973). However, some argue that this definition is too narrow and that other types of truths (such as ethical truths) cannot be reduced to correspondence with facts (e.g., Shi, 2017).

There are differing opinions on what constitutes truth. Some believe that an objective reality exists independent of our minds (e.g., Mukhopadhyay, 2014), while others believe that truth is relative and depends on our perceptions (O'Brien, 1958). Truth is often defined as the quality or state of being true (Kwan, 2003). It can also be defined as 'agreement with fact or reality' (Bela, 2007) or 'fidelity to an original' (Blodgett et al., 2011). Philosophers debate what the nature of truth is. Many have suggested that there are different types of truth, such as absolute truth (which corresponds to reality) (Nowak, 1975), logical truth (which is independent of opinion) (Hellman, 1985), and empirical truth (which can be verified by observation) (Suppe, 1973).

Truth is the aim of belief; falsity is a fault. People need the truth about the world in order to thrive. Truth is important. Believing what is not true is apt to spoil people's plans and may even cost them their lives. Telling what is not true may result in legal and social penalties. Conversely, a dedicated pursuit of truth characterizes the good scientist, historian, and detective. So, what is truth that it should have such gravity and a central place in people's lives?

Definition of Reality

The term 'reality' has a wide range of meanings, including the actual physical world as we experience it and the way we experience the world. It can also refer to our mental models or representations of the world.

In philosophy, the reality is the state of things as they actually exist rather than as they may appear or be imagined (Collins, 1967). In the broader definition, reality includes everything that exists, whether observable or comprehensible. A broader definition includes all of existence, including the universe and non-physical beings such as ghosts or gods (Mendie & Udofia, 2019).

In the physical world, the reality is defined as the actuality of a situation (Csordas, 2004). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as "the state or quality of being real" (Stein, 1967, p. 744). In other words, the reality is what exists and can be perceived by the senses. It is everything that makes up the material universe. For instance, everything that exists has a specific nature, which means it has certain characteristics that make it what it is. These characteristics are its physical properties (mass, shape, size), chemical properties (composition), and/or biological properties (function). All these properties together define an object's reality. But what about the non-physical world? Is there a different definition of reality for things like thoughts, feelings, and emotions? Can these things be considered real even though they cannot be seen or touched?

Philosophers have debated this question for centuries, and there are a variety of different interpretations of what constitutes reality. Some believe that only physical objects are real and that everything else is just an illusion (Taylor et al., 2018). Others believe physical and non-physical things can be real (Swami et al., 2007). Nonetheless, most philosophers agree that there is a distinction between what is real and what is apparent or merely seeming. The question then becomes: what is the relationship between reality and appearance? Some philosophers (such as Plato) believe that a realm of abstract objects exists outside space and time, which we access through our reason (Wetzel, 2009). Others (such as Aristotle) think that reality consists solely of material objects located in space and time (Miller, 1974).

There are also different ways of understanding what it means for something to be real. For instance, some people think that things only count as being real if they can be observed by multiple people (this is called empirical realism). Others think that things can be real even if they cannot be observed by anyone (this is called metaphysical realism).

Reality is the sum of anything real or existent within a system instead of imaginary. The term can also refer to the ontological status of things, i.e., existence. In physical terms, reality refers to the totality of a system – known and unknown. Questions about the nature of reality or existence are considered under ontology and are a major branch of Western philosophy.

The Differences Between Truth and Reality

In daily life, we often encounter various facts. Some of these may be unimportant and quickly forgotten, while others may have a lasting impact on our lives. But what exactly is a fact? And what role do they play in our lives?

A fact can be defined as a piece of information that is accurate, valid, and confirmed (Lucassen & Schraagen, 2011). In contrast, an opinion is a subjective view or belief that cannot be proven to be true (Lederman et al., 2002). Facts are important in our lives because they provide us with the foundation upon which we build our beliefs and opinions. They help us make sense of the world, understand how things work, and make informed decisions. This information can help us make sense of what we are seeing, hearing, and feeling. Additionally, facts can challenge our preconceptions and force us to re-evaluate our beliefs. Furthermore, facts can be used to determine the truthfulness of statements. For example, if someone claims to have been at a certain location at a certain time, they may need to provide factual evidence to support their claim. The statement may be considered false if the evidence is not factual. Facts can also help us make decisions. For example, if we want to buy something, we may need to know the cost of the item and whether it is in stock. Facts can also help us solve problems. For example, if we are trying to find our way home after getting lost, facts about the area can help us find our way back.

The role of facts in our lives is crucial, but it is not limited to simply providing us with information. Facts can also help us to connect with others, build trust, and form relationships. They can give us a sense of understanding and community and help us feel like we

belong somewhere. Therefore, facts are integral to our lives and play a significant role in our ability to make sense of the world and navigate through it.

The Role of Facts in Our Lives

In daily life, we often encounter various facts. Some of these may be unimportant and quickly forgotten, while others may have a lasting impact on our lives. But what exactly is a fact? And what role do they play in our lives?

A fact can be defined as a piece of information that is accurate, valid, and confirmed (Lucassen & Schraagen, 2011). In contrast, an opinion is a subjective view or belief that cannot be proven to be true (Lederman et al., 2002). Facts are important in our lives because they provide us with the foundation upon which we build our beliefs and opinions. They help us make sense of the world, understand how things work, and make informed decisions. This information can help us make sense of what we are seeing, hearing, and feeling. Additionally, facts can challenge our preconceptions and force us to re-evaluate our beliefs. Furthermore, facts can be used to determine the truthfulness of statements. For example, if someone claims to have been at a certain location at a certain time, they may need to provide factual evidence to support their claim. The statement may be considered false if the evidence is not factual. Facts can also help us make decisions. For example, if we want to buy something, we may need to know the cost of the item and whether it is in stock. Facts can also help us solve problems. For example, if we are trying to find our way home after getting lost, facts about the area can help us find our way back.

The role of facts in our lives is crucial, but it is not limited to simply providing us with information. Facts can also help us to connect with others, build trust, and form relationships. They can give us a sense of understanding and community and help us feel like we belong somewhere. Therefore, facts are integral to our lives and play a significant role in our ability to make sense of the world and navigate through it.

The Role of Fiction in Our Lives

Our lives are shaped by our perceptions of reality. Our beliefs, values, and actions are based on what we believe to be true. While a physical reality exists independent of our minds, our individual realities (i.e., our own truth) are created by our thoughts, feelings, and experiences. This means that each of us lives in a unique world partially determined by our minds.

Truth is a fundamental aspect of our lives, the foundation upon which we build our beliefs and values. It allows us to communicate with others and form relationships. But what is truth? And what role does it play in our lives?

This question has been debated by philosophers for centuries, with no apparent consensus reached. Truth can be thought of as the cornerstone upon which our beliefs and actions must stand. Truth can provide us with a sense of stability and certainty in a world that often feels chaotic and unpredictable. It can help us make sense of our experiences and find meaning in the events of our lives. The question of whether we should always seek out and tell the truth is one that each of us must answer for ourselves. But it is worth considering how important truth is in our lives and what its role should be.

The Benefits of Trusting Facts

Since the 2016 U.S. presidential election, there has been discussion about "fake news" and alternative facts and their impact on people's opinions.

There are many benefits to trusting facts over opinions. For one, we can avoid being misled or manipulated by false information. Secondly, basing our opinions on facts helps us have more informed discussions with others about current events and controversial topics. Thirdly, facts do not change based on who is looking at them, but opinions can vary greatly depending on a person's worldview. Finally, relying on accurate information allows us to make better decisions in our personal and professional life.

But how can we tell if a fact is reliable? And why does it matter if we cannot trust the information given?

There are a few key things to look for when trying to determine whether a fact is trustworthy. First, consider the source. It is more likely to be accurate if the fact comes from a reputable source, such as a well-known news outlet or government website. Second, look at the evidence. Does the fact have supporting evidence? Are there any holes in the argument? Third, think about your own biases. Do you have any reasons to doubt the fact?

Despite the obvious advantages of trusting facts over fake news, some people still choose to believe in conspiracy theories and misinformation. In some cases, this may be due to confirmation bias – people tend to seek information that supports their beliefs. In other instances, people may simply find it more entertaining or exciting to believe in unlikely stories than boring old reality.

If you cannot trust the information you are given, it can lead to all sorts of problems. You might make bad decisions based on inaccurate information or miss out on opportunities because you do not have all the facts. Trustworthy information is essential for making informed decisions in all areas of life.

The Role of Education in Creating a Verifiable Worldview

In a world with myriad sources of information, it is essential to have a verifiable worldview to make sense of the constant barrage of data. Here, education plays a vital role in creating this verifiable worldview by helping us understand our place in the world and appreciate how we fit into its grand design. Education should not be used simply to regurgitate information but rather to help us think

through issues and problems and develop critical and analytical thinking skills necessary to evaluate information and come to our own conclusions.

A strong educational foundation allows people to understand how the world works and makes them better equipped to deal with its complexities. It also helps instill values that guide an individual's actions and choices. For example, consider the concept of empathy. Empathy is the ability to feel what another person feels. It is a cornerstone of human interaction and can be used to effectively understand and communicate with others. Likewise, another important aspect of a verifiable worldview is the ability to critique and question accepted assumptions and beliefs. This critical thinking skill is developed through rigorous education and is essential in understanding how the world works and evolves.

Moreover, individuals need to have the ability to adapt and change their views as needed considering that we live in a world where information is constantly evolving and new perspectives are emerging. A well-rounded education enables people not only to think critically but also to relativize information, equipping individuals with the skills necessary to examine complex situations and problems from different perspectives and produce solutions that are both innovative and equitable. Finally, learning and reflection allow us to verify the information for ourselves instead of blindly accepting what we are told. This is important because it helps us to become more informed and independent thinkers. It also allows us to question authority figures who might try to manipulate or mislead us.

In sum, a verifiable worldview is vital for making sound decisions in life, both personal and professional. We must be willing to question everything we think we know and be open to new ideas. Only then can we develop a comprehensive understanding of the world around us.

The article argues that there is a distinction between truth and reality and that we should be careful not to conflate the two. Reality is what exists, while truth is what we believe to be true. Our beliefs are often based on our subjective experiences, which may not always be accurate. Similarly, our perceptions of reality can be influenced by our own biases and perspectives, which is why it is important to seek out multiple sources of information when trying to understand an event or issue. Hence, it is important to be aware of the distinction between truth and reality because our beliefs about reality can influence our behavior in ways that may not always be accurate or helpful.

The author provides several examples to illustrate the difference between truth and reality. For instance, we may believe that a place is dangerous because of what we have heard from others, even if we have never been there ourselves. Thus, our beliefs about reality are sometimes based on something other than the actual facts of the situation.

The article concludes by urging readers to question their beliefs about reality and be open to new information that could challenge those beliefs. Only by constantly examining our own assumptions can we hope to see the world more clearly and act in accordance with what is truly real rather than what we merely think is real.

Works Cited

Apple, M. W. (1979). What correspondence theories of the hidden curriculum miss. The Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies, 5(2), 101-112.

Baudet, S., Jhean-Larose, S., & Legros, D. (1994). Coherence and truth: A cognitive model of propositional truth attribution. International Journal of Psychology, 29(3), 319-349.

Bela, B. (2007). Narrative and reality. Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society, 32(4), 24-33.

Benacerraf, P. (1973). Mathematical truth. The Journal of Philosophy, 70(19), 661-679.

Blodgett, M. S., Dumas, C., & Zanzi, A. (2011). Emerging trends in global ethics: A comparative study of US and international family business values. Journal of Business Ethics, 99(1), 29-38.

Capps, J. (2019). The Pragmatic Theory of Truth. In E. Zalta, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.

Collins, A. W. (1967). Philosophical Imagination. American Philosophical Quarterly, 4(1), 49-56.

Csordas, T. J. (2004). Evidence of and for what?. Anthropological Theory, 4(4), 473-480.

David, M. (2018). The Correspondence Theory of Truth. In M. Glanzberg, The Oxford Handbook of Truth. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.

David, M. (2022). The Correspondence Theory of Truth. In E. Zalta, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.

Davidson, D. (1969). True to the Facts. The Journal of Philosophy, 66(21), 748-764.

Davidson, D. (2008). A coherence theory of truth and knowledge. In E. Sosa, J. Kim, J. Fantl & M. McGrath, Epistemology: An Anthology (2nd ed., pp. 124-133). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Fumerton, R. A. (2002). Realism and the correspondence theory of truth. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Gergen, K. (1992). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. In R. Miller, The restoration of dialogue: Readings in the philosophy of clinical psychology. (pp. 556-569). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Guthke, K. S. (2019). The Last Frontier: Imagining Other Worlds from the Copernican Revolution to Modern Science Fiction. New York: Cornell University Press.

Haack, S. (1976). The pragmatist theory of truth. The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, 27(3), 231-249.

Hay, C. (2016). Good in a crisis: the ontological institutionalism of social constructivism. New Political Economy, 21(6), 520-535.

Heck, R. G. (1997). Tarski, truth, and semantics. The Philosophical Review, 106(4), 533-554.

Hellman, G. (1985). Determination and logical truth. The Journal of Philosophy, 82(11), 607-616.

James, W. (2001). The Will to Believe. In S. Brown, Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction with Readings (pp. 177-188). London, U.K.: Routledge.

Kwan, K. L. K. (2003). The ethical practice of counseling in Asia: an introduction to the special issue of Asian Journal of Counselling. Asian Journal of Counselling, 10(1), 1-10.

Lederman, N. G., Abd-El-Khalick, F., Bell, R. L., & Schwartz, R. S. (2002). Views of nature of science questionnaire: Toward valid and meaningful assessment of learners' conceptions of nature of science. Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 39(6), 497-521.

Lucassen, T., & Schraagen, J. M. (2011). Factual accuracy and trust in information: The role of expertise. Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 62(7), 1232-1242.

Ludwig, K. (2007). The epistemology of thought experiments: First person versus third person approaches. Midwest Studies in Philosophy, 31, 128-159.

McCarthy, E. D. (1994). The uncertain future of ideology: Rereading Marx. The Sociological Quarterly, 35(3), 415-429.

Mendie, J. G., & Udofia, S. N. (2019). Language and the conception of reality. International Journal of Humanities and Innovation (IJHI), 2(4), 121-124.

Miller, F. D. (1974). Aristotle on the Reality of Time. Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie, 56(2), 132-155.

Mukhopadhyay, R. (2014). Quantum mechanics, objective reality, and the problem of consciousness. Journal of Consciousness Studies, 21(11-12), 57-80.

Nowak, L. (1975). Relative truth, the correspondence principle and absolute truth. Philosophy of Science, 42(2), 187-202.

O'Brien, V. (1958). Contour perception, illusion and reality. JOSA, 48(2), 112-119.

Orłowska, E. (1990). Kripke semantics for knowledge representation logics. Studia Logica, 49(2), 255-272.

Rhees, R., & Tessin, T. (1994). The fundamental problems of philosophy. Philosophical Investigations, 17(4), 573-586.

Russill, C. (2008). Through a public darkly: Reconstructing pragmatist perspectives in communication theory. Communication Theory, 18(4), 478-504.

Shi, W. (2017). The Quest for Ethical Truth: Wang Yangming on the Unity of Knowing and Acting. Comparative Philosophy, 8(2), 7.

Stein, J. M. (1967). Random House dictionary of the English language. New York: Ballantine Books.

Stoljar, D., Damnjanovic, N., Armour-Garb, B., & Woodbridge, J. (2018). The Deflationary Theory of Truth. In E. Zalta, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.

Suppe, F. (1973). Facts and empirical truth. Canadian Journal of Philosophy, 3(2), 197-212.

Swami, V., Greven, C., & Furnham, A. (2007). More than just skin-deep? A pilot study integrating physical and non-physical factors in the perception of physical attractiveness. Personality and Individual Differences, 42(3), 563-572.

Taylor, N. B., Brake, M., Kolstoe, S., Robertson, B., Leontieva, N., & Clackson, A. (2018). Question of the Month: Is The World An Illusion?. Philosophy Now, 129, 54-56.

Vico, G. (1990). On the Study Methods of Our Time. New York: Cornell University.

Wetzel, L. (2009). Types and tokens: On abstract objects. MIT Press.