Philosophical Arguments

- Truth - HG Bishop Youssef
- Problem of Evil and Suffering

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Truth

What is Truth?

- Pontius Pilate asked this question to the Lord Jesus Christ (John 18:38)
- 2000 years ago, Truth was put on a trial and judged by people devoted to lies. Truth faced six trials in less than one day - 3 religious, 3 legal. In the end, few people involved in these events could answer this question
  - After the Truth was arrested, the Truth was led to a man named Annas - a corrupt former high priest of the Jews. Annas broke numerous Jewish laws during the trial (e.g. holding the trial in his house, trying to induce self-accusation from the defendant, striking the defendant who had been convicted of nothing at the time).
  - Then, the Truth was led to the reigning High Priest, Caiaphas (Annas' son in law). And before Caiaphas and the Jewish Sanhedrin, many false witnesses came forward to speak against the Truth, yet nothing could be proven and no evidence of wrongdoing could be found. Caiaphas broke many rules - at least seven laws - while trying to convict the Truth (e.g. the trial was in secret, the trial was carried out at night, bribery, the Defendant had no one present to make a defense for Him, the requirement of 2-3 witnesses could not be met, using self-incriminating testimony against the Defendant, carried out the death penalty against the Defendant on the same-day). Caiaphas declared the Truth guilty because He claimed to be God in the flesh - which Caiaphas called blasphemy.
  - In the morning, the third religious trial of the Truth took place with the result that the Jewish Sanhedrin pronounced that the Truth should die. During Roman Law, the Jewish council had no legal right to carry out the death penalty, so they were forced to bring the Truth to the Roman Governor at the time - Pontius Pilate.
  - Pilate was appointed by Tiberius as the fifth prefect of Judea (26-36 AD). According to the Roman Law, he had the power of life and death and could reverse capital sentences passed by the Sanhedrin. As the Truth stood before Pontius Pilate, more lies were brought against Him. His enemies, the chief priests said "we found this Man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He, Himself is Christ, a King." (Luke 23:2). This was a lie as the Lord Jesus Christ, the Truth, had told everyone to pay their taxes and never spoke of Himself as a challenge to Caesar.
  - After this, a conversation between Pilate and the Truth took place: John 18:33-38

    - [33] Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?”
    - [34] Jesus answered him, “Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?”
    - [35] Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?”
    - [36] Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”
    - [37] Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?”
      Jesus answered, “You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”
    - [38] Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?”
- The question that Pilate asked - "What is truth" has been repeated throughout history (from the beginning of Creation until now).
- We don't know if Pilate had a sincere desire to know the truth, or if he intended an insult, or if he spoke from irritation, or if he was indifference.
- Nowadays, the post-modern world which denies that the Truth can be known, "what is the truth?" is asked more and more. Can we know the truth? Can we find the truth?

What is Truth

We may find it easier to describe what Truth is NOT

1. Truth is NOT "whatever works"
    - We don't believe that ends justify the means
    - Lies sometimes work, but they are still lies - not the truth
2. Truth is NOT what is understandable
    - Many deny the Trinity because they don't understand it... how can Three in One and One in Three?
    - People deny the reality of the change of bread and wine to the Body and Blood of Christ because it is not understandable
3. Truth is NOT what makes people feel good
    - Bad news can be truth and people won't feel good about it
4. Truth is NOT what the majority says is true
    - Majority can reach a wrong conclusion like in the time of Noah and the time of Lot
5. Truth is NOT what is comprehensive
    - A lengthy, detailed presentation can still result in false conclusions
6. Truth is NOT what is intended
    - Good intentions can still be false
7. Truth is NOT what is believed
    - Some people may believe a lie... but it is still a lie
8. Truth is NOT what is publicly proved
    - The location of a hidden treasure can be privately known - but it is still true
9. Truth in Greek is αλήθεια

    - This means "to unhide" or "hiding nothing" - the Truth is always there and always open and available to see
10. Truth has existed before the Creation of the World
11. Truth in Hebrew is תֶּמֶא
    - This means "firmness" or "constancy" - implying everlasting substance, something that can be relied on

Can We Know the Truth?

- The Lord said "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6)
- There are many who challenge the truth in this era
    - "every belief system is equal"
    - "every belief system has some truth in it"
    - "we cannot know the truth because there is no absolute truth"

Philosophies that Challenge Absolute Truth

- Relativism
    - There is no such thing as absolute truth - all truth is relative
    - Response:
        - Ask them "Is all truth relative?"
        - If all truth is relative and there is no absolute truth, then their claim that "there is no such thing as absolute truth" is also relative. And if their claim that "there is no such thing as absolute truth" is absolutely true, then there is absolute truth.
        - It is a self-defeating argument
- Skepticism
    - They simply doubt all truth - "maybe this is truth" - we cannot be sure of anything
    - Response:
        - Same as Relativism
        - Are you skeptical of your skepticism? Are you sure that we cannot be sure of anything?
        - If it is yes, then he believes in absolute truth. If he says no, then why should I believe your skepticism?
- Agnostic
    - γνῶσις (Gnosis) is Greek for knowledge - with the a prefix, agnostic = without knowledge
    - Agnostics say "You cannot know the truth"
    - Does God exist? I don't know
    - Response:
        - This mindset is self-defeating because they claim at least one absolute truth - that we cannot know the truth
        - You are affirming at least one absolute truth... that no truth should be affirmed
- Pluralism
    - Want to consolidate all the beliefs - all truth claims are equally valid
    - The spirit behind pluralism is open-armed attitude of "tolerance"

    - The world wants right now to be "one world religion"
        - Whether you are Christian or Muslim you are both right
        - People say "religion divided the people" or "people are fighting because of religion" and they propose that if you dilute the differences between the religions, everyone will live in peace
    - Response:
        - This is not logical
        - I cannot say the sun rises from the East and the sun rises from the West and these two claims are equally valid
        - I cannot say that Jesus is God (as the Christians say) and Jesus is not God (as the Muslims say) and both are valid
        - I cannot say that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ (as the Orthodox say) and it is not real, just a symbol (as the Protestant say) and both are valid
        - The non-denominational protestants subscribe to this philosophy "whether you are Orthodox, Baptist, Catholic, etc. you are welcome" and claim it out of "love"
        - "God is not the author of confusion" (1 Cor 14:33)
    - Pluralism confuses the idea of everyone having equal value and every truth claim being equally valid.
        - Everyone has equal value regardless of religion or anything... but we cannot say that all truth claims are equal.
        - There is a difference between your opinion and absolute truth
        - The applications can be different but not the principle
            - We all believe in the importance of fasting and prayer
            - But if you see how people apply fasting and prayer, it can be different
            - A young child will fast differently than a man, than a monk, than a priest, etc.

Objections to the Truth

- Why are people against the Absolute Truth? Why do people criticize the Truth?
    - Because of the offensive nature of truth
    - To tell someone they are wrong, will irritate them
    - To tell someone that their religion is off, will irritate them
- You would be accused of being Narrow-Minded
    - Is a math teacher who is holding the belief that 2+2=4 narrow minded? To be open minded does he have to say 2+2 can be 5 or 8?
- You would be accused of being Arrogant
    - You think you're the only one going to heaven?
    - They have a joke about Coptic Orthodox who sit in their own room in heaven because they think they're the only ones there whereas everyone is there but outside that room
    - Is a math teacher who insists there's only one right answer to 2+2, arrogant?
    - "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36) It is very clear
        - Are we arrogant to say this?

    - "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed." (John 6:53-55)
        - When we say that Communion is essential for salvation, are we arrogant?
- You would be accused of excluding people
    - When you say "We reject homosexuality" then we are excluding people
    - Is Christianity exclusive or inclusive?
        - Christianity calls everybody to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ because He is the Way to the Father and there is no other Way.
        - Everybody is called, but not everybody will enter.
        - "Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled." (Luke 14:23) - Parable of the Great Supper
            - Everyone was invited... but if someone is not wearing the garment, he is expelled
            - Everyone is invited, but to enter and to follow, there are requirements
            - In the same chapter, the Lord found Himself being followed by great multitudes... anyone who looks around and sees the church is full would be very happy! Our first thought might be "how can I keep them" but see what the Lord did
                - He turned and said to them "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. [27] And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. [33] So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."
                - Some servants would bring someone to Church, and he may even have compromised many things. Then the person sits with Abouna and Abouna tells him that to commune, he must be baptized, believe in the Trinity, believe in Jesus Christ as God, the Sacraments, etc. It might be too much and the person leaves. And the servant comes and says "we brought him all the way to the Church just for Abouna to drive him out" - he expects the Church to compromise all the rules.
                - But are you bringing him to the building of the Church? Or to Christ? To bring people in the building is easy - a party with fun and music and dancing and the church will be full. But is this our goal? Or is our goal that they come to the knowledge of the Truth?
        - We are not excluding people, but they are excluding themselves because they refuse to follow the requirements
            - One time, someone married outside the church and then came to receive Communion... Abouna told him that he cannot take Communion because he married outside the church. And he argued and said "why are you rejecting me? I am a son of the Church" - and Abouna told him "the truth is, YOU rejected the Church and not the Church rejected you. On your

marriage day, you turned your back on the Church and married some other denomination."
        - Who rejected whom here?
- Truth is offensive and divisive
    - Many from other denominations get upset when we say that they are wrong... they accuse us of being void of love.
    - They argue that sincerity is what matters
        - If he is sincere in knowing God (regardless of if he is Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Protestant) that is all that matters
    - Truth is immune to sincerity
        - If you are holding a wrong key to your door and you sincerely believe that this is the right key, it won't open your door (regardless of how sincere you are)
        - If you have a bottle of poison and you sincerely believe that is juice, and you drink it, you will die
- Absolute Truth exists only in the area of Science (not in the matters of faith and religion)
    - Logical Positivism
    - Science cannot prove the discipline of mathematics and logic
        - You cannot prove that 2+2=4 - it's a fundamental truth
    - Science cannot prove metaphysical truths
        - Using science, can you prove that there are minds other than my mind?
    - Science cannot provide truth in the area of morals and ethics
        - Using science, can you prove that terrorism is evil?
    - Science is incapable of stating truths about beauty
    - Science cannot prove or test the claim that Science is the only source of objective and absolute truth
- Absolute Truth does not exist in the area of morality
    - Social construction - to reconstruct the society
        - If the whole society says that homosexuality is sin, then it is sin... but if we change society to say that homosexuality is good, then it will be good
        - For example, to convince a child of transgenderism, they bring him a pen that is black on the outside and tell them to write with it, and it contains red ink. And they tell them - this red color is constrained within this black pen. From outside it looks black, but in reality it is red. The same way in reality you can be a female although on the outside you look male. Or you can be male although from the outside you look female. This is how they are poisoning the minds of our children.
        - To reconstruct and reprogram our minds to accept falsehood as true
    - Response:
        - Is it moral to torture and murder an innocent child? Definitely not
        - How can you prove this using science? What's the scientific experiment?
    - HG was debating with someone once who believes in homosexuality and transgenderism who said "I'm not a homosexual but I support them in their right" and HG said "I am not a murderer but I support murderers in their right to kill" and they said "no..." but if you don't believe in the Scripture and its authority, then who is the judge? Who can judge that killing people is wrong and homosexuality is right? That's why there has to be a final authority... and the Final Authority is God and the

Scripture
    - Nowadays people are allowing and pushing for FULL TERM ABORTION - a boy who has spent 9 months in his mothers womb... kill him.

Why is Truth Important?

- It is important to understand and embrace the concept of absolute truth in all areas of life including faith, religion and morality simply because life has consequences for choosing wrong
    - If I choose to take the wrong amount of medication, it can kill me
    - If I choose the wrong amount for investment, it can impoverish my family
    - If I board the wrong plane, I will end up in a different destination
    - If you make a wrong choice, this can put at risk your eternal life and eternity is an awfully long time to be wrong
    - "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32)
- When one of our sons intends to marry a woman from outside the Orthodox Church, sometimes they are worried about her meeting with HG that he might complicate things or make them difficult. So they coach her - "when you go to HG, say I am agreeing to baptism, I am ready, I am faithful, etc." and she goes to sit with HG and she starts to recite everything they told her to say. And he looks at her and says "what if we're a cult? Are you just gonna follow a cult? What do you know about Orthodoxy?" - she thinks HG will be happy that she wants to join! But they find out that she doesn't know anything! But before you decide to go into a new faith, you have to be sure that it is the Truth. You have to study.
    - Many people were concerned about the vaccine. They read and read and had conversations and studied.
    - When someone goes in for surgery, they are reading all the information they can find
    - Before taking medicine, anyone will read about the side-effects and doses, etc.
    - What about the faith that will determine your eternal life? Doesn't it deserve to sit and read and know the Truth?
- We shouldn't be Orthodox because we were born into it - but we should be Orthodox because we studied and learned and God revealed to us that this is the Truth. This is the Truth and I will hold onto it and not let go no matter what happens. "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

What is Truth?

- Truth and Righteousness
    - Going back to Pilate's question, "what is truth?"
    - During the six trials of our Lord, the contrast between truth with righteousness, and lies with unrighteousness was unmistakable.
    - The Truth stood and was judged by those whose every action was based on lies.
    - The Jewish leaders broke every law designed to protect defendants from wrongful conviction

    - They fervently tried to find any testimony to incriminate the Lord Jesus Christ and in their frustration, turned to false evidence by liars... but even with this, they could not reach their goal.
    - They lied in front of Pontius Pilate and convicted Him of blasphemy... but he didn't care about that. So they lied again and claimed that He was a challenge to Caesar and breaking Roman Law. And even Pontius Pilate detected their deception and said "I find no fault in Him at all"
    - The sad fact is that until today, the unrighteous persecutes the righteous; the falsehood persecutes the truth as Cain killed Abel. The links between truth with righteousness, and falsehood with unrighteousness, is demonstrated many times in the New Testament.
    - "And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12)
    - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18)
    - And when accused of lacking love, let us see what the Scripture teaches about love: "[love] does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6)
        - If you truly love someone, you wouldn't be happy that they are going to Hell... you wouldn't encourage his sin so that he lives in Hell for eternity
        - The Samaritan Woman when she knew the Truth, went and spread it to all in her city
- Pontius Pilate asked 2,000 years ago "What is truth" and overlooked the fact that he was standing in front of The Truth
    - Pilate and the Jewish leaders thought they were judging Christ, but in reality they were the ones being judged. They condemned Him to death... but He rose and death could not contain Him. In reality, they were the ones being judged by the Lord Jesus Christ - the Truth. In the last day, the One whom they convicted, will be their Judge on the last day and He will be the Judge of all those who suppressed the truth in unrighteousness.
    - Eusebius of Caesarea, the historian, recorded for us that Pontius Pilate, unfortunately, did not repent - but died by suicide. A sad ending, but a reminder for everyone ignoring the truth/
- Can we know the Truth?
    - Yes because the Truth is the Lord. If you know the Lord and you abide in Him, then you shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free.
    - God sent His Holy Spirit to guide us to all truth - the Spirit of Truth who will teach us and remind us with all Truth.

Question and Answer

- If someone is not strong in the Bible, how do we know when we are given religious information if it is true or not, if that person is from church that gives that information?
    - "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." (Acts 17:11)

    - Be like those in Berea - search the Scriptures daily and read the Patristic writings and read what Orthodox fathers like Fr Tadros Yacoub Malaty, Fr Daoud Lamei, etc. are writing
- How can someone know the Truth without the Holy Spirit helping them to understand and accept?
    - The logic here is that we receive the Holy Spirit in Chrismation after Baptism... what about the unbelievers? No. The Holy Spirit works in the non-believers but from outside. The Holy Spirit works in the non-believers and guides them to believe that Jesus is Christ, and then after he believes and is Baptized and receives Chrismation, the Holy Spirit will dwell in him.
    - "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit"
- The Lord said that He came to fulfill the Law not abolish it... if the Old Testament is foundational in Christian faith, then why do we ignore much of the Old Testament and Jewish teaching like regarding the Sabbath (whereas we regard Sunday)
    - Differentiate between three types of Commandments in the Old Testament
        - Symbolic that points to something in the New Testament
            - Circumcision --> Baptism
            - Sacrifices --> Eucharist
        - Moral Commandments
            - Honor your father and mother
            - Don't commit adultery
            - Don't commit murder
            - We are obliged to keep them in the New Testament, but God took us to a higher level
                - “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ [22] But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment."
                - “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ [28] But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
                - “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ [34] But I say to you, do not swear at all
            - Why did God take us to a higher level?
                - In the Old Testament, there was no grace - the Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ
                - In the Old Testament, the starting point is I am a sinner and God gave me commandments to keep them - no grace. That's why everybody failed to keep the commandment.
                - In the New Testament, God gave us grace ("The Holy Spirit - The Helper"), now the starting point is that I am
                - Grace is like I get a child and say "lift this table alone" - he won't be able to. But if I give him two or three guys to help him, they'll lift it. This is grace.
        - Cultural but serving a spiritual purpose

        - Leprosy in the houses (i.e. mold)
        - Why would God tell them that?
            - To protect them from being killed as a nation if it spread among them
            - To teach them the difference between clean and unclean; holy and unholy
                - E.g. See what this leprosy does to a person who has it? This is what sin does to you too.
- How about the New Testament?
    - The symbolic are fulfilled
    - The moral are brought to a higher level
    - The cultural - who decides what to follow and not follow?
        - The Fathers of the Church and the Holy Tradition
        - For example, 40 days and 80 days after birth for the mother to enter the Church. When we see that all the Churches East and West (including Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox) for the last 2000 years have been doing this, we cannot come now and change it. This was passed down to us.

Problem of Evil and Suffering

It is really two problems:

- Moral Evil (e.g. 9/11)
- Natural Evil (e.g. Ebola)

Those problems are logically distinct, although they can intermingle... e.g. malnutrition can be caused by deforestation which is caused by greedy corporations. So you sometimes can't separate them but have to think about them together.

There are also two different perspectives:

- It's one thing to study cancer as a professor of oncology
- It's another thing to have cancer and be told you only have 2-3 months to live

These are very difficult questions and have two sides. The professor of oncology needs to have a certain detachment, intellectually rigorous if he's going to help the suffering patient... but the suffering patient may need a great deal of empathy, emotional counseling, care and help.