

WHAT IS TRUTH

Behind our thinking and approach to life lie some very profound issues. These issues are central to our thinking, our attitude on life and form the basis for the decisions that we make throughout our lives. In this section we will explore some of them.¹

Perhaps the most important question of our day is “What is Truth?” Kreeft and Tacelli point out the reasons for this

1 Christians hold to a view of truth that is absolute but live in a culture that is increasingly pluralistic and relative in its view of truth. It is not uncommon for the Non Christian once they have been confronted with all the evidence for Christianity to retreat to a relative view of truth rather than accept the Gospel message.

It may be helpful to help the Non Christian see that the relative argument of truth is usually used as a lost resource to avoid the consequences of accepting the truth.

2. A subjective relative view of truth leads ultimately no where as it is ultimately impossible to use sound principles of logic to present an objective case to one who insists upon a relative view of truth.

3. “The consequences of a subjectivism and relativism of truth are destructive not only to apologetics but also to intellectual honesty and to life. For if truth is objective, if we live in a world we did not create and cannot change merely by thinking, if the world is not really a dream of our own, then the most destructive belief we could possibly believe would be the denial of this primary fact. It would be like closing your eyes while driving, or blissfully ignoring the doctor’s warnings. (C. S. Lewis, “The Poison of Subjectivism” in *Christian Reflections*)

Of all the symptoms of decay in our decadent civilization, subjectivism is the most disastrous of all. A mistake can possibly be discovered and amended if and only if truth exists and can be known and is loved and searched for. If you close your eyes to the light in the operating room, there is no chance at all that the operation will work and that the patient will be saved. But prophetic warnings by themselves are not enough; we need careful definitions and analyses. And to that more modest intellectual task we now turn.”²

THE NATURE OF TRUTH AND ITS KNOWABILITY

¹ McDowell page 583-584

²Kreeft, P. (1994). *Handbook of Christian apologetics : Hundreds of answers to crucial questions* (Pages 362-363). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

McDowell introduces us to two very important fields of study. The first field is that of metaphysics, it has been referred to as “the philosophical study of being as being”³ Metaphysics is the study of the nature of reality. Epistemology is the study of how people acquire knowledge, the study of “how we know what we know.”⁴

McDowell defines truth as “that which corresponds to its referent (that to which it refers)”⁵ McDowell states that “Correspondence describes a situation where there is a fact and there is a belief about that fact. Correspondence means that the belief is true when it accurately reflects the fact.”⁶ In order to establish correspondence one has to be objective, by contrast subjectivism occurs when “truth is determined internally by the subject or person.”⁷

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle argued that “truth relies on the actual existence of the thing which a thought or statement is about...Aristotle suggests that a statement or belief can change from true to false only if that to which it refers actually changes”⁸.

Thomas Aquinas defined “truth as the matching together of both the understanding and the thing understood.”⁹

G E Moore suggested, “that truth is a property that can be common to any belief that corresponds to the facts.”¹⁰ The great English philosopher of the last century Bertrand Russell argued “that there is a world of objective facts independent of our minds.”¹¹ A statement can only be true if there is a thing or object that is outside and independent of our minds, which is capable of independent verification.

Relativists assert that no objective standard can be found by which truth can be determined, therefore truth is subject to variability by individuals and circumstances.¹²

McDowell points out that relativism is a self- defeating argument. The theory of relativism is “true either absolutely (for all people, at all times, and all places) or relatively. If the theory is absolutely true, then relativism is false, for at least one truth is true absolutely.”¹³

³ McDowell page 585

⁴ McDowell page 585

⁵ McDowell page 585

⁶ McDowell page 586

⁷ McDowell page 586

⁸ McDowell page 586 (Aristotle Categories, in The Complete Works of Aristotle Ed by Jonathan Barnes 2 2 Volumes, Princeton University 1984 14b 15-22)

⁹ McDowell page 586 (Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Volume 1 Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Allen, Tex, Christian Classics 1981 1.16.2)

¹⁰ McDowell page 587(Moore, Some main problems of philosophy New York, Macmillan 1953 page 277)

¹¹ McDowell page 587

¹² McDowell page 589 citing Trueblood page 348

¹³ McDowell page 592

For Christian the fact that their view of truth is absolute can easily become a source of pride. When a Christian seeks to present the truth he should do so with humility but should not hesitate to provide a logical presentation of the truth. The central themes of Biblical Christianity should be presented in a way that the hearer can both understand and respond to them. For the Christian true zeal and true piety should be linked. Groothuis states that

First, biblical truth is best defended when it is held both firmly and humbly...

Second, our knowledge of biblical truth should grow over a lifetime...

Third, Jesus said the meek, not the belligerent, shall inherit the earth. No matter how winsome the presentation, the Gospel will offend those with hardened hearts, but we should avoid increasing the offense through arrogance...

Fourth, no matter how adept our advocacy of the faith, we must glory in God not in our apologetic prowess.

Fifth, whatever our skill in defending the faith, any humble presentation of Christian truth is a powerful tool in God's hands. ¹⁴

McDowell enters into a discussion of the field of epistemology (the study of how we come to know what we know). If truth is what corresponds to reality then we must ask how do we know that what we know responds to reality. But McDowell argues that before we can do this we must ask a more even basic question. That question is do we know reality. McDowell argues

“This is an important distinction, because most of the modern philosophies that deny that we know reality and ultimately truth, make the mistake of constructing epistemological systems to explain how we know reality without first acknowledging the fact that we know reality. After they begin within the mind and find they can't construct a bridge to reality, they then declare we can't know reality. It is like drawing a faulty road map before looking at the roads.”¹⁵

At this stage it is important to ask “how certain can we be that we know the truth”

McDowell answers that question by stating that there are “different degrees of certainty about different truths”¹⁶. McDowell goes on to identify four different kinds of certainty

¹⁴ Groothuis D Apologetics , Truth and Humility article in Christian Research Institute <http://204.29.171.50/framer/1000/default.asp?realname=Google&cc=NZ&lc=en%2DNZ&frameid=1565&providerid=112&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Egoogle%2Ecom%2F> 23 February 2002

¹⁵ McDowell page 597-598

¹⁶ McDowell page 659

“Logical Certainty: Logical certainty is found in mathematics and pure logic. This kind of certainty is involved where the opposite would be contradiction. Something is certain in this sense when there is no logical possibility that it could be false. Since mathematics is reducible to logic it fits into this category. It is found in such statements such as $5+4=9$. It is also found in tautologies or statements that are true by definition. All circles are round, and no triangle is square.

Metaphysical certainty. There are, however, some other things of which we can be absolutely certain that are not statements empty of content. For example, I know for certain that I exist. This is undeniably so, since I cannot deny my existence without existing to make the claim. First principles can also be known for certain, since the subject and the predicate say the same thing: “Being exists”, “Nonbeing is not being” “Non being cannot produce being” is also certain since produce implies an existing producer.

Moral certainty. Moral certainty exists where the evidence is so great that the mind lacks any reason to veto the will to believe that it is so. One rests in a moral certainty with complete confidence. Of course, there is a logical possibility that things of which we are morally certain are false. However, the evidence is so great there is no reason to believe that it is false. In legal terms, this is what is meant “beyond reasonable doubt.”

Practical certainty, (high probability). Practical certainty is not as strong as moral certainty. Persons claim to be “certain” about things they believe have a high probability of truth. One may be certain she had breakfast today, without being able to prove it mathematically or metaphysically. It is true unless something changed her perception, so she was deluded into thinking she ate breakfast. It is possible to be wrong about these matters. ¹⁷

McDowell argues that for the most part Christianity has moral or practical certainty.

McDowell discusses some basic principles of logic, what he refers to as “The first principles of knowledge” ¹⁸. McDowell argues that basic to any conclusion in any field of science are first principles. “First principles do not need to be deduced from other principles, and they become the basis of all knowledge.”¹⁹ First principles are self evident, that is they are obvious observations about reality and

¹⁷ McDowell page 659 –660 cites Geisler Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics. Grand Rapids, Baker 1998

¹⁸ McDowell page 598

¹⁹ McDowell page 598

are so self evident that they do not require proof. First principles are the basic building blocks of all knowledge

The first to describe the significance of first principles was the ancient Greek Philosopher Aristotle. Geisler states “Aristotle showed that every science begins with certain obvious truths he referred to as first principles, explaining how these first principles form the foundations upon which all knowledge rests. First principles are the foundational truths from which inferences are made and on which conclusions are based.”²⁰

Lewis and Demarest identify the classical principles of logic as being

- 1) The principle of identity
- 2) The principle of excluded middle
- 3) The principle of non contradiction²¹

To these three principles, McDowell adds

- 4) The principle of causality
- 5) The principle of Finality.²²

First principles cannot be denied; they are self evident and universal.

Lewis and Demarest argue that

“The basic need for logic in religion and Christian theology is often challenged. Mystics think it inhibits experience – but logic only asks that they make sense when they interpret their experience and speak about it to others. Some Biblical theologians think it is alien to the Jewish mind. But it was not alien to Paul’s mind or the thinking of other Biblical writers. Differences between the Hebrew and Greek cultures may be exaggerated. Both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament assert that God is not a man that he should lie. Basics principle of logic may have been discovered and formulated by Aristotle, but they were not invented by Aristotle.

Logical principles, like moral principles, are rooted ultimately in the mind and nature of the Creator. Common intellectual grids enable people from vastly different cultures to overcome initial difficulties and eventually communicate with each other. Logic is as indispensable to

²⁰ Geisler and Bocciano page 19

²¹ Lewis and Demarest page 32

²² McDowell page 601

meaningful thought as grammar is to understandable language. In this God has made no exceptions, not even for born-again students of theology. Life can become very complicated and thought confused, but it will not help in those difficult periods to throw away such a valuable tool as logic. We may need to slow down, call for division of the question, and deal with one issue at a time.”²³

Now having established that the Christian view of truth is absolute and based on logical principles, let us now examine some of the influences on modern society that cause many to dismiss the absolute truth of the Bible.

A proof is an argument that is used in logic to determine the validity of a proposition, while it may be possible to derive a proof by inductive logic, normally a proof will require rigorous deduction.²⁴ To a sceptic the problem of deciding what standard of proof to apply is one of considerable difficulty as A P Martinich points out.

“What is at stake ... is “the problem of the criterion,” that is, the problem of deciding how one can determine a justifiable standard against which to measure judgments. Truth seems to need a criterion. But every criterion is either groundless or inconclusive. Suppose that something is proffered as a criterion. The Sceptic will ask what proof there is for it. If no proof is offered, the criterion is groundless. If, on the other hand, a proof is produced, a vicious circle begins to close around the dogmatist: What judgment justifies belief in the proof? If there is no judgment, the proof is unsupported; and if there is a judgment, it requires a criterion, which is just what the dogmatist was supposed to have provided in the first place.”²⁵

My observation is that the process Martinich describes above is precisely the dilemma that faced Muncaster at the beginning of his investigation. Muncaster solved this problem by deciding to apply the following standards of proof - analytical proof, statistical and legal proof.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines a mathematical proof as “being a finite sequence of well-formed formulas (generated in accordance with accepted formation rules) in which: (1) each formula is either an axiom or is derived from some previous formula or formulas by a valid inference; and (2) the last formula is that which is to be proved.”²⁶ Muncaster describes the process involved in formulating a mathematical proof when he writes; “we define a numerical system (for instance 1 “means, while “2” means and so forth). Absolute proofs can be based on these definitions. Indeed far more complex mathematical relationships can be proven using the analytical method.”²⁷ Muncaster provides the following example of a mathematical proof from algebraic law.

$$“(A+B)*(C+D) = (A*C)+(A*D)+(B*C)+(B*D)”²⁸$$

Muncaster notes “This law has been proven analytically through the definition of the components and the convention of symbols like parentheses and order of computation.”²⁹

Scientists like Einstein and economists like John Nash use far more complex mathematical proofs to prove their breakthrough contributions in their fields. Muncaster argues that analytical analysis can provide hard evidence if the components forming part of the formula can be carefully defined and measured or if a repeatable experiment can be

²³ Lewis and Demarest page 33

²⁴ Derived from Encyclopaedia Britannica 2003 article “Proof” no author is identified

²⁵ A P Martinich article in Encyclopaedia Britannica 2003 “Epistemology”

²⁶ Encyclopaedia Britannica 2003 article “Proof” no author is identified

²⁷ Muncaster page 56

²⁸ Muncaster page 56

²⁹ Muncaster page 56

conducted to verify the components. Soft evidence occurs when the subject of study cannot be precisely defined, measured or verified but can only be observed or the evidence is obtained through experience alone.

The second type of proof Muncaster considers is statistical proof that demonstrates that a theory is so probable that any other explanation of a phenomenon is “deemed virtually impossible.” Statistical proof can never provide 100% certainty but can be heavily reliable if sufficient observation and experimentation of the subject being studied has taken place. Muncaster observes that when it comes to probability theory that “the standard benchmark is that anything with a probability of less than 1 in 10^{50} is impossible or absurd (without the intervention of an outside force) therefore humans accept such probability as “proof.”³⁰ It seemed logical to Muncaster that if God existed he would provide some form of statistical proof that he existed, after pondering this Muncaster decided to “test the probability of His existence by testing for something that only God could do... God’s ability to foretell the future with perfect precision and accuracy.”³¹

The third type of proof that Muncaster decided to employ in his deliberations was legal proof. Like statistical proof legal proof is generally speaking considered to be soft evidence. However “an overwhelming number of consistent and credible testimonies about an event can move the evidence into hard proof.”³² Under the heading of legal evidence one can include eyewitness testimony, rebuttal eyewitness testimony, reports that confirm the eyewitness testimony and circumstantial evidence. Muncaster considered that if the existence of God could be established analytically and statistically, then that God would leave some legal evidence to clarify who He was otherwise everyone would be free to define who God was in his or her own eyes and consequently we would all land up worshipping a different and therefore false God.

What Muncaster discusses under the heading of proof Norman Geisler discusses under the area of certainty. Norman Geisler states “certainty exists where there is objective reasons or evidence that are commensurate to the degree of certainty claimed”³³ Geisler goes onto recognise four different types of certainty. 1) Logical certainty is to be found in the fields of pure logics and mathematics, something is said to be certain when there is no logical or mathematical possibility that it could be false. “It is found in statements such as $5 + 4 = 9$. It is also found in tautologies or statements that are true by definition: All circles are round, and no triangle is a square.”³⁴ 2) According to Geisler metaphysical certainty occurs in “things of which we can be absolutely certain that are not statements empty of content. For example, I know for certain that I exist. This is undeniably so, since I cannot deny my existence without existing to make the denial.”³⁵ Metaphysical certainty also occurs in statement of first principle. Geisler uses the following example ““Being exists”; “Nonbeing is not Being.” “Nonbeing cannot produce Being” is also certain, since *produce* implies an existing producer.”³⁶ 3) Moral certainty occurs in situations when the evidence “is so great that the mind lacks any reason to veto the will to believe it is so”³⁷. Legally the expression “beyond reasonable doubt” is based on the principal of moral certainty. 4) Practical certainty occurs when people believe they have a high probability that a certain event will occur if a certain action is taken, that belief need not be based on mathematics or metaphysics. Geisler goes on to suggest that spiritual certainty exists in situations when God speaks directly to a person in such a way that they are certain God has spoken to them.

Leaving aside spiritual certainty the highest forms of certainty or proof according to Geisler and Muncaster are mathematical and logic. In order to test mathematically whether God existed Muncaster determined all he needed to do was demonstrate “a mechanism for the development of “first life” that didn’t require God, and by definition God

³⁰ Muncaster page 60

³¹ Muncaster page 60

³² Muncaster page 61

³³ Geisler, N. L. (1999). Article “Certainty” in *Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics* Baker reference library (Page 124) Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books.

³⁴ Geisler, N. L. (1999). Article “Certainty” in *Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics* Baker reference library (Page 124) Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books.

³⁵ Geisler, N. L. (1999). Article “Certainty” in *Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics* Baker reference library (Page 124). Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books.

³⁶ Geisler, N. L. (1999). Article “Certainty” in *Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics* Baker reference library (Page 124). Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books.

³⁷ Geisler, N. L. (1999). Article “Certainty” in *Baker encyclopedia of Christian apologetics* Baker reference library (Page 124). Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books.

would not be necessary for the creation of life.”³⁸ If Muncaster could prove that life could begin without God, God would cease to be necessary and therefore the possibility of His existence could be dismissed. In order to access these possibilities Muncaster decided to narrow his definition of God to that of “the originator of first life, an intelligent designer”³⁹ Muncaster would be justified in drawing the conclusion that there was no God if there was a high probability that the origin of first life could occur through naturalism or without a specific creator. Logically Muncaster was able to draw up the following logical equation.

“If first life occurred by chance” Evolution = cause.
If life required design: God = cause.
If God = cause: God = real.”⁴⁰

It should be remembered that at that point Muncaster was a confirmed atheist, he had come to the point of accepting what the evolutionist taught concerning evolution as truth and sincerely believed that he would have no problem finding ample evidence to dismiss the notion of God once and for all. However Muncaster was sufficiently honest to admit that if naturalism could be disproved then the only other logical mathematical sound conclusion was that God existed and then he would have to set out on a journey to discover who God truly was. From the outset Muncaster determined to employ methods that were truly scientific and that would test both sides of the argument equally and without prejudice. At this point Muncaster met a Christian on a plane trip who for the first time introduced him to the concepts of microevolution and macroevolution⁴¹, the field of apologetics and the research of Christian apologetic organizations. This short plane trip opened Muncaster for the first time since university to scientific evidence that pointed to the existence of a first creator.

³⁸ Muncaster page 67

³⁹ Muncaster page 67

⁴⁰ Muncaster page 68

⁴¹ Pensgard on page 136 distinguishes the two terms “Microevolution uses genetic information already present in the animal to allow small changes in the animals characteristics while macroevolution depends on new information forming by accident. Sometimes, an information losing mutation may give an animal a survival advantage over its peers, but macroevolution depends upon having, not only a survival advantage, but also an increase in information and complexity.”⁴¹