

DECIPHERING TRUTH: A JOURNEY
THROUGH PERCEPTION, OPINION, AND CONVENIENCE

By: Gregory Makuch

Jerry, just remember, it's not a lie if you believe it.

--George Costanza, *Seinfeld*

Within every field of study man grasps at one simple objective...truth. For mathematics, the truth is in the solution to the equation; in science the truth results from experimentation; and in philosophy the truth is found in understanding. Philosophically, what is meant by truth and the converse, untruth? Children are taught to tell the "truth;" there are legal implications of "truth;" and religious tenets assign "truth" as a factor in salvation. Truth inundates our lives. While most believe they know what is meant by truth, the version of truth we understand is in fact a fallacy. The quote from *Seinfeld* which opened this examination shows exactly how subjective the idea of truth can be. As this article will show, the idea of personal belief factoring into the concept of truth is not far-fetched and the impact of individuality and personal bias on truth are tremendous. These influences can alter what is meant by truth and by what means truth is derived.

Truth is a necessary component of exploration as it serves as both the goal and the guidelines. Within science, truths establish the constants in experiments and allow for the experimentation process to create results which become new truths. But is this truth? What if the constants believed to be true were in fact untrue? What if what was identified as untrue, was in fact truths hidden by perception? These questions are the core of this article. I have found truth to be a term in liberal application throughout philosophical musings, yet the implication of the meaning of truth affects man's understanding of his very existence.

At the forefront of this undertaking is the question, “what is truth?” The construct of this article will not allow an attempt to answer something of such magnitude. However, I will attempt to show how truth is used in philosophical writing. Taking four key works: Mary Douglas’ *Purity and Danger*; Georges Bataille’s *The Accursed Share (Volume 1)*; Martin Heidegger’s *Poetry, Language, Thought*; and Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, I will examine the role of truth within each. What must be understood is that I am not looking to discredit any of these authors as their truths are just that, *their truths*. I am however going to attempt to demonstrate the importance of perception and opinion as it pertains to truth because the application of one’s own truth enables that truth to validate a philosophical opinion. Without a truthful foundation, the structure of the argument is weak. The very core of these authors’ positions lie in the perception that their truths are in fact the only truths.

Throughout the article, I will explore Douglas, Bataille, Heidegger, and Foucault with the intent on separating *their truths* from what I will refer to hereinafter as concrete truths. Concrete truths are those truths which can be considered infallible. By that I mean their validity cannot reasonably be argued. These may also be considered natural laws, but I must be careful in the use of “laws” as our authors apply the term “law” to mean truth very liberally. To establish a baseline for concrete truth, I find Heidegger’s definition appropriate:

The true is what corresponds to the real, and the real is what is in truth. The circle has closed again.

What does “in truth” mean? Truth is the essence of the true. What do we have in mind when speaking of the essence? Usually it is thought to be those features held in common by everything that is true. The essence is discovered in the generic and universal concept, which represents the one feature that holds indifferently for many things.¹

¹ Martin Heidegger. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Harper Publishing, London (1994), p. 49

Concrete truths are universal; they apply without differentiation. This provides a starting point for exploration of the concept of truth derived from perception or opinion; I will refer to these as abstract truths.

An abstract truth is not untrue; it is a state of truth which is applicable to the owner of that truth. Abstract truth is well depicted by George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: “If he *thinks* he floats off the floor, and if I simultaneously *think* I see him do it, then the thing happens.”² The law of gravity, a concrete truth, would not allow one man to simply float; but an abstract truth allows it because it is the truth as they know it. The complexity of what is and is not true can impact thinking. The perceived abstract truth can influence philosophical perspective. It is the presence of abstract truth that I seek to understand and to see truth within philosophical examination of the difficult questions considered by man.

Heidegger and the Truth of Things

Since Heidegger’s definition of truth lies at the center of *Poetry, Language, Thought*, it is logical to begin with his work. *Poetry, Language, Thought* is a journey into what it means to create truth and by what means truth is exposed. Heidegger moves through different mediums of truth transmission in order to demonstrate the manner in which man can find truth. The truth created in Heidegger’s examination is an abstract truth. Because man exposes truth through a creative process, the exposed truth is the truth of the creator, not a concrete truth. The challenge in interpreting these truths is understanding truth from the creator’s perspective not through the interpretation of the observer. The observer will never see the creator’s truth from their own perspective; the observer cannot see beyond his own truths. As a result, this creates two truths from one work: the truth of the creator and the truth of the receiver.

² George Orwell. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Plume Publishing (1949), p. 288

Heidegger asserts that to find truth one must look beyond things and determine the thingy-ness of that thing to identify its truth. While this might seem confusing, it is in essence identifying that the truth of an object is not found in that object but in the very essence of what that object signifies. The abstract truth behind a creation cannot be discovered if it is viewed through the lens of preconception. Heidegger makes note that in order for [abstract] truth to be discovered one must, “avoid any attempts that again immediately entail the encroachment of the usual interpretations.”³ To find the creator’s truth, our own lens of interpretation must be changed to those of the creator less we continue to exist with two truths instead of one. As one delves deeper into the concepts of the creator, they begin to see the creator’s truth instead of their own.

The process by which truth is revealed is a result of conflict between what Heidegger calls concealing and unconcealedness or *aletheia*. This struggle exists as the truth is not readily accessible; it is in fact an elusive objective often mistaken within the concept of concealing. Unconcealedness results from a “revelation of the whole and its relation to the world and earth as truth.”⁴ The battle between concealing and unconcealedness is necessary as truth does not simply exist in its present form; truth is actually a happening, an active revelation.⁵

Heidegger spends a great deal of time exploring the process for truth to be revealed through *aletheia*. It is the process by which the truth of a thing is imparted upon that thing by the creator, allowing the abstract truth to exist. Without an understanding of the creation process, the truth of the creator cannot be discovered. One does not need to understand how Van Gogh paints or Michelangelo sculpts. One must understand a process takes place and that the creator’s truth is imparted during this process, not in the finished product. Truth does not lie in these

³ Martin Heidegger, p. 32

⁴ Ibid, p. 54

⁵ Ibid, p. 52

things; “truth is found beyond the thingly structure.”⁶ Their truth will be revealed through the creation of the thing and the relation of the thing within the world.

When the sculptor takes chisel to stone, the abstract truth of the object lies in the sculptor, not the stone. One can say it is still a stone, no matter the form and this would be a concrete truth; those who see this way are locked in concealing and will never see beyond the concrete. The reality is they are not seeing truth at all and are deceiving themselves. The stone is not a stone, it is an abstract reality created through a process to reveal a truth unknown before its *aletheia* and one that could only be created by the artist. The creative process by which an abstract truth is brought forth from concealing to unconcealedness is known as *techne*.⁷ Within the artist’s mind, the concept is formed; through creation, whatever the medium, truth is brought forth. The object’s truth only exists because of the abstract or personalized truth of the creator.

To this point, the focus has been limited to material creations. Non-material creation also needs explanation to demonstrate the importance of abstract truth for Heidegger. Unlike the previous examples, truth revealed through writing does not have a physical sense. There are words on paper and one could argue that this creation is in fact a truth and would not be wrong; it is a truth, a concrete truth. However, the creator’s truth does not lie in the physical manifestation of the work, but in the meaning of the created. For composers, their composition is a concrete truth. Anyone who can read music and play an instrument can play a great work. But is this revealing the creator’s truth? Unconcealedness of this type lies beyond the physical construction of the symphony. Simply playing the notes will not reveal the composer’s truth; one must become the music and feel the relation of the work to the world. In this way, the composer’s truth will undergo *aletheia*. This applies not only to music, but anything created in which

⁶ Ibid, p. 37

⁷ Ibid, p. 57

language is the means of creation. As Heidegger states, truth does not lie in the words, but in the meaning assigned to the words. The examination of language validates that truth does not exist with the words themselves, it exists in the creator's application of the word.⁸ This concept will be of primary importance in the examination of Douglas, Bataille, and Foucault.

At this point, cynicism must rear its ugly head. I have noted that this application of truth allows a very ambiguous interpretation in which one could conceivably create their own truths. Heidegger also sees this and points out that truth as he defines cannot be proven through science. In essence, truth that is based on a personal perception cannot be validated or proven. Yet, as I discovered, this is the strength in Heidegger's argument. The application of perceptual truth enables complex philosophical questions to be contemplated. By removing the concrete truths which do not allow for abstract reasoning, philosophers are able to examine questions that do not necessarily comply with natural law.

What came first the chicken or the egg? If one applies conventional logic based on concrete truths, they will move in logical circles without ever reaching a conclusion. The concrete truth is that an egg cannot be laid or naturally incubated without the chicken, but the chicken cannot be there to lay the egg without first having come from an egg. These are concrete truths which inhibit a logical solution. However, dispelling with a concrete truth for an abstract truth opens the door for a definitive solution. What if an abstract truth is provided, in this case by religion? The religious doctrine of creationism is an abstract truth which enables this philosophical quagmire to be solved. For those who believe, creationism allows for the chicken to be "created" without first having been an egg. The creation of a chicken is feasible under these conditions and the chicken would be able to then lay and incubate an egg. In this sense, the abstract truth allows philosophy to examine the issue without the previous

⁸ Ibid, p. 145

preconceptions. Not to debate creationism and evolution, this simply provides an example of abstract truth's application in philosophy following Heidegger's logic.

Mary Douglas and the "Truth" of Pollution and Taboo

As shown with Heidegger, the real strength in abstract truth lies in its ability to allow for explanation of the most difficult questions facing mankind. Previously, I stated that truth is necessary for exploration as it sets the constants by which new truth can be developed. This is how Mary Douglas explores pollution and taboo in her book, *Purity and Danger*. She utilizes her own abstract truths to create a foundation on which to base her argument. For Douglas, her perception creates an abstract truth which reveals the conditions under which taboo and pollution exist in primitive and non-primitive man.

For Douglas, her perception of truth enables a rational argument in which abstract truth is woven together with concrete truth, much like the chicken and egg analogy used previously. The strength of engaging philosophical examination in this manner is the difficulty in separating where concrete truth ends and abstract truth begins. That is not to say that Douglas' truths are invalid; they are in fact more valid because they represent the truth through her perception. The application of this perception allows her to formulate her argument and dispute the truths of other philosophers. She explores this idea in her book:

A group of philosophers who could no longer accept revealed religion, and who could not either accept or live without some guiding transcendental beliefs, set about providing that formula. Hence began that still continuing process of whittling away the revealed elements of Christian doctrine, and the elevating in its place of ethical principles as the central core of true religion.⁹

Unsatisfied with existing beliefs in philosophy, Douglas examines the concepts of pollution and taboo in order to create a new truth, *her truth*. The intermingling of concrete and abstract truths throughout *Purity and Danger* aligns with the mythological concept of "extra embroidery on

⁹ Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger*. Reprint, London: Routledge, 1984, p. 14

more solid beliefs.”¹⁰ She is not saying that mythology is untrue; she is saying that the truths as perceived by those who believe the myths are strengthened by concrete truths within the tale.

A key aspect of Douglas’ examination lies in the concept of society. For Douglas, many truths are revealed through the social interaction of man. Within society, man progresses through three stages of development: magic, religion, and science;¹¹ each of these developments allows new truths to emerge and these truths supplant the old truths. The new truths enable man to better understand the societal values in which he now resides. As these societies develop, man must have a means to transmit these new truths. In Heideggerian fashion, Douglas explains how rituals, symbols, and language play key roles in helping man understand these new social norms.

For primitive man, his truths are founded in magic. Magic provides the means in which man can establish abstract truth to better understand concrete truth. That is, the abstract truths exist without opposition to the concrete truths.¹² Douglas’ very book is an example of abstract truth redefining what is understood about concrete truth. Within primitive societies, rituals enable the transmission of truth. The use of ritual would be *aletheia* as described by Heidegger in that it allows for the societal truth, an abstract truth accepted by the society, to be revealed.¹³ Like other truths, these truths are concealed, but are revealed through ritual. The understanding of the meaning of ritual is where truth is found. Much like art or poetry, the perceivable truth cannot be gained by the receiver through their own lenses; it must be received through the lens of the creator. For example, !Kung ritual cannot be understood through a conventional perspective; one must perceive the ritual through its meaning to the world and universe as viewed by the !Kung.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 16

¹¹ Ibid, p. 23

¹² Ibid, p. 58

¹³ Ibid, p. 64

Rituals are not the only way in which truths are revealed. Douglas also explores how symbols provide a means to communicate truths as well. These, like ritual truths are not concrete, as they represent societal truths. Through symbols left by primitive and to a lesser extent non-primitive man, it is apparent that interpretation can mask truth. From the pyramids of Giza to the step pyramids of the Mayans to the cave paintings in the south of France, symbols provide clues to a society's values and taboos. Symbols and rituals expose the beliefs on which cultural taboos are based.¹⁴ These values and taboos are the truths displayed in the symbols, and like rituals cannot be viewed through our own lens. For the unconcealedness of an abstract truth, it must be seen through the lens of the creator.

As Heidegger has opined, language can also reveal truth. The emphasis is on “can” not “will;” Douglas points out that the availability of truth through language is only available to the users of that language.¹⁵ From language, however, perceivable truths can be exposed if the receiver understands the meaning beyond the words. But many never see beyond the ambiguity of the words. Douglas points out that poetry “depends” on this ambiguity,¹⁶ in fact, it is this ambiguity that conceals the truth. Seeing through this ambiguity allows the language of poetry to reveal the abstract truths which the creator intended. The use of language to reveal truth also allows man to define differences. This creates new perceivable truths which will alter social interactions. Abstract truths established through language are the first step in societal separation. From the perceivable truths about society, social awareness is formed and with awareness, differentiation develops. This differentiation can lead to “social coercion, special monetary incentives to conform, special types of punitive sanctions, specialized police and overseers and

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 87

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 23

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 37

progress men scanning our performance, and so on...”¹⁷ From social awareness, social control is born. The revealing of abstract truth does not always benefit the entire society.

To summarize Douglas and truth, it can be said that individuals within society create their own truth through ritual, symbols, and language. For non-primitive man, religion and science forms the basis for these truths. These truths create their reality. This individualized reality is rooted in their experiences as they pertain to the standardized values of their society.¹⁸ Because abstract truth is based on perception, there is in fact no reality, but an illusion of reality formed by those very perceptions that enabled abstract truth to exist.¹⁹ Truth therefore cannot lie in the essence of thought or thing; truth lies in the perception of meaning as provided by the creator and understood by the receiver in their work. In the end, man cannot even agree to the concrete truthfulness of death as abstract truth creates differing interpretations as to the finality of this act.

The Economy of Truth-Examining Bataille

Through the common language of economics, Bataille engages the philosophical question of why man does what he does. On the surface, these two topics seem at odds; how can fiscal discussion lead to a philosophical truth about man? The answer is: they cannot unless the truths of economics change to allow for this discussion. From Bataille’s perspective, economic movement is governed by laws;²⁰ these laws however, are not concrete truths as one might believe, they are in fact abstract truths. These are abstract truths because they are created by man and enable a truth to be revealed in accordance with the intent of the creator. Bataille will use these truths to allow the language of economics to account for the creation and expenditure of energy, a key factor in man’s action. In fact, Bataille notes that the extension of economic

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 91-92

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 38

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 89

²⁰ Georges Bataille. *The Accursed Share (Volume 1)*. New York: Zone Books, 1989, p. 21

growth on which his premise resides requires the principles of economics to be overturned.²¹

Energy through his economics is how Bataille explains the actions of man.

The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of the a system (e.g., an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically.²²

And with that, Bataille establishes his first truth in how the economic principles can apply to energy. From this basic premise, Bataille will develop a robust argument compiling concrete and abstract truths to substantiate his beliefs. As with Heidegger's principles, Bataille's cannot be proven by science. The examination of the totality of energy is of a magnitude that makes its very determination impossible. This is the strength of Bataille's argument in that one must see *his truth*. He acknowledges that this view of energy is paradoxical in that it conflicts with typical perception, but that is by nature truth according to Bataille.²³ But abstract truth is almost always paradoxical because one must remove their own preconceived notions in order to see the truth from the creator.

Bataille recognizes the need to establish truths in order to substantiate his economic ideas. To do this, Bataille assigns his own principles to general economy to have it support his philosophical perspective. As with Douglas, this does not weaken Bataille's arguments, it in fact strengthens them since the economic principles Bataille is manipulating were abstract truths to begin with. From one abstract truth, another can be revealed and this new truth can either supplement or supplant the previous. To create the illusion of concrete truth, Bataille refers to his principles as "laws" and establishes the criteria for their use. What is noteworthy is that

²¹ Ibid, p. 25

²² Ibid, p. 21

²³ Ibid, p. 37

within Bataille's laws, which are simply his abstract truths, he provides himself an avenue to further manipulate these laws to suit his own needs. "Of course man is not definable once and for all and these laws operate differently – their effects are even neutralized – at different states of history."²⁴ Bataille establishes a means to meet any objection to his principles in that they can, at time, be neutralized. So any example in which Bataille's laws do not hold true denotes a period of neutralization. His abstract truth creates an infallible argument.

Like Douglas, Bataille recognizes the value of ritual; he applies the concept of ritual to energy consumption and power. Within his construct of ritual, Bataille's justification for religion and war is found. Bataille spends a great deal of time dealing with the energy produced and consumed by religion. As with Douglas, religion provides a means for man to find truth. Religion provides a commonality for man, a bonding agent for society. "War means consumption."²⁵ This consumption is a necessary component of Bataille's economic principles as excess energy must be utilized. This becomes an abstract truth within Bataille's argument. He weaves in historical examples to add validity to his argument. As with Douglas, the connection of historical facts to abstract truths increases their apparent strength. Ritual does not just expend energy, ritual can create power. Many societies have gift giving rituals as part of their social fabric. Cultural norms establish when it is appropriate to give another a gift. Gift giving is much more than simply offering something to someone else; Bataille argues it creates power for the giver.²⁶ In the old saying, "it is better to give than receive," we see an application of this empowerment based on Bataille's abstract truth. Bataille's central premise is built around the idea that energy is created and expended to create equilibrium. If man does not naturally

²⁴ Ibid, p. 72

²⁵ Ibid, p. 49

²⁶ Ibid, p. 69

expend all the energy that is created he will find ways to expend that energy. This is Bataille's truth.

A constant in Heidegger, Douglas and Bataille is the use of *thing* within their books. Each applies *thing* as an object lacking truth; in *The Accursed Share*, a thing becomes that which man uses to create or expend energy. The *thing* is a tool of man and in and of itself possesses no truth. However, the understanding of *things* allows man to reduce them to what they are.²⁷ But as Bataille further explores the concept of *thing*, he admits that there is more ambiguity to what constitutes things than previously thought. Bataille settles on, "We cannot penetrate a *thing*, and it has no meaning other than its material qualities, adopted or not to some useful purpose, in the productive sense of the word."²⁸ A *thing* is only a material *thing* and the truth of that *thing* lies not in what it is, but within the owner or user of that *thing*. Quite simply, truth lies within.

Language, Signs, and Perception-Foucault and Truth

Michel Foucault explores the relationship between classical knowledge and the roots of modern sciences in *The Order of Things*. This in and of itself is a vast undertaking and the purpose of this article is not to dispute or refute his findings, it is to examine the root of the truths he utilizes to accomplish this objective. As with the previous authors, Foucault's examination is centered on his perceived truths which allow him to utilize his own ideas to validate existing or known concepts. In this case, his abstract truths relate directly to the use of language and signs as applied to modern science. As the constructs of modern science are well established and accepted, they appear concrete, but are in fact abstract truths as well. Foucault acknowledges that these constructs are interpreted by man. This gives him the latitude to reconstruct the

²⁷ Ibid, p. 57

²⁸ Ibid, p. 132

relationship between classical thinking and modern science. It is through the reconstruction that Foucault's abstract truths are presented.

At the center of Foucault's study is the understanding of language's role in classical knowledge. Before he even addresses modern science, he spends a great deal of time exploring the role of language on knowledge and understanding. Since knowledge and understanding are perceptions gained from language, this is a logical starting point. To set the stage, Foucault uses what I consider to be the most important analogy in his work, the examination of Don Quixote. For Foucault, Don Quixote is not merely a tale, but an example of the impact language has on perception. Don Quixote lives within his own reality created by the illusions of what things are. Things take on a truth relative to man and do not possess a truth of their own, much like the musings of our previous authors. Foucault argues that language allows man to assign truth to these objects.²⁹

Language however is not truth; it requires man's utilization to enable it to represent truth. Of course this is an abstract truth for it is the perceived truth of the individual that uses the language. Don Quixote, is continually assigning truth to objects that otherwise would have a different meaning. Barns become castles, bar maids become maidens, windmills become adversaries. The object did not change, the same woman is assigned two different categorizations: bar maid and by Don Quixote, maiden. Neither is untrue; both are abstract truths assigned through language. Language enables Don Quixote's reality to endure, transmitted to others through his book. Eventually, people read his book and understood his truths; they understood him.³⁰ The result is that Don Quixote's language creates a new reality.

²⁹ Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things*. Reprint, New York: Random House, 1994, p. 54

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 48

The first step in understanding how Foucault takes classical knowledge, in this case language and applies it to science can be seen in categorization. The nature of language allows man to categorize and compare. In Don Quixote, language allowed one woman to be both barmaid and maiden; but is this in fact truth? To answer with ambiguity: yes and no. It is truth, but not one truth. Categorization allows for one truth to exist for one person and another truth to exist at the same time. In other words, the categorization of *things* can be “absolute according to one relation and relative according to another”³¹ at the same time. To simplify, if I say it is “hot” outside, this is an absolute truth to me. I perceive the air to be hot. You however do not agree. The idea of hot is understood, but the truth is perception; you do not consider it hot outside. We each create an abstract truth from the same thing, the air, and both our truths are absolute for us and are measured relative to our understanding of hot.

The next step in understanding language’s relation to modern science is to understand what just happened at the end of the previous paragraph. Language allowed comparison of one truth to another. My truth of hot was compared to my truth of cool in order to determine if a thing (the air) was in fact hot. The result was a classification that the air was hot. This analysis is a function directly related to language and one which is necessary for modern science. So, language allows for analysis and from this analysis, according to Foucault, two types of comparison can be conducted: “relations of equality and inequality” and “differences according to the smallest possible degrees.”³² Analysis and comparison are necessary components of modern science and allow truth to be revealed. This will however be the abstract truth of the examiner who conducted the analysis.

³¹ Ibid, p. 54

³² Ibid, p. 53

Foucault does not limit his examination of truth to language; he recognizes the impact that signs have on classical thinking as well. “On the threshold of the Classical age, the sign ceases to be a form of the world; and it ceases to be bound to what it marks by the solid and secret bonds of resemblance or affinity.”³³ Again, a connection between truth and *things* is made. The sign is a *thing*, yet it ceases to exist as simply a physical entity because it represents a perceivable truth. Relating signs to truth occurs in three ways: the certainty of the relationship, the type of relationship, and the origin of the relationship.³⁴ This allows interpretation of the meaning of signs in an attempt to determine truth. This is not to say that all men will interpret the signs the same, but Foucault argues that empirical knowledge will allow some uniformity within their interpretation. This allows signs to form part of classical understanding or classical truth, if you will. The ability to differentiate, analyze, compare, contrast, categorize, and represent permits modern science to function. Together, language and signs form the basis for these things to happen and for the truth of modern science to be unconcealed.

The Implications of Truth on Reality

It is one thing to understand the philosophical implications of truth, but it is also necessary to understand how truth impacts reality. Given that reality is in fact an abstract truth, in this case *my* abstract truth, I will briefly discuss the implications of categorization, differentiation, and inequality on man. For each of these abstract truths, they are revealed through a process of unconcealedness. The revelation is not as significant for this discussion as is the acceptance of these ideas as truths. Just because *my* truth is revealed, it does not have to become *your* truth; you have to accept it. The idea that we have free will to make our own determinations and create our own realities allows us to choose which truths we will accept.

³³ Ibid, p. 58

³⁴ Ibid, p. 58

Since man is by nature a social animal, accepted abstract truths can quickly become part of a societal structure making these the truths of the entire group.

A by-product of these social truths is often prejudice and discrimination; generally behavior created on the concept of differences. Language enables us to categorize and establish differences; these differences become the basis of inequality. Even among the previous authors, people (slaves) were categorized as things.³⁵ The U.S. Constitution even differentiated making “other persons” only worth three-fifths that of a white man; this was eventually abolished with the 14th Amendment. But the perceptible truth existed and to a lesser extent continues. This illustrates the complexity of changing truth from one idea to another. Once a truth is established, particularly within a societal construct, it is very difficult to enact change.

This idea is discussed at length in Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. In his study, he examines the consequences of societal truth as they apply to colonization. Said contends that the very concept of colonization is based on the assumed truth that the colonizing power understood the people better than they did themselves.³⁶ To believe such a truth creates arrogance within a society and enables justification of dominance over another, not for the sake of power, but to the betterment of the subjugated. Said’s book reads like a treatise on abstract truth in which a concept of differentiation or inequality permitted the most heinous behaviors among men.

The problem begins as society changes. When the “us and them” mentality attempts to remove the rift; old truths can hinder this process. For the United States, the integration of African Americans as full members of society took more than a hundred years and there are still those who hold onto old truths. Within the world community, the acceptance of colonialism changed; no longer were the colonial powers viewed as helping the colonies, but rather

³⁵ Georges Bataille, p. 56

³⁶ Edward Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, 1978, p. 32

exploiting them. With this change a new social truth was born. This truth replaced the old truth yet it took approximately 50 years for colonies to achieve independence and this was often following war; it took war to change truth. Today the implications of abstract truth in the perversion of religion can be seen. Religious zealots use the tenets of their belief to validate their perceived truth. The fervor by which man possesses his own truths guides his actions and relations in both positive and negative ways. The difficulty in changing truth should serve as a warning to what truths man creates.

Conclusion

This article has focused on the concept of truth. Not looking to explore the “what is truth?” dilemma, I sought to determine how truth impacted philosophical reasoning. Using a base line definition from Heidegger, I explored the idea that truth could be concrete and abstract. Concrete truths were those infallible truths that man cannot dispute. Abstract truths were the perceived truths of man. It was the abstract truths I focused on, but quickly determined there was a need to integrate concrete truths to add validity to arguments. In order to better understand how truth factored into thought, I utilized *Poetry, Language, Thought; Purity and Danger; The Accursed Share; and The Order of Things*. These books provided not only the framework for truth, but also demonstrated the application of truth in the author’s philosophical contemplation. Truth did not simply display itself for all to see; it had to be revealed through a process of unconcealedness. But from this process man did not always gain the truth, he often gained his own truth. The idea that one can restructure the truth to create their own reality must be understood if the deeper questions of life are to be answered.

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