

Holly Bristol  
Philosophy 101  
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### **What is the Truth**

When a person goes to court and is asked to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth, can we assume that the person giving the statement is telling us facts that are based on a past occurrence or are they actually giving us what they think is the way something happened during that past occurrence? The main problem that we see here is that someone's truth is someone else's false. If someone testifies that the sky is blue is it really blue or is blue the only part of the sky that they can see. This is where some problems start to arise.

The notion that someone's truth is someone else's false can be a little hard to understand at first. The best way that it can be explained is that in some cultures our truth is not going to be the same as theirs. For example John Locke said "that whatsoever is, is" this would not be the same truth as Socrates "idea" of a chair (or Plato's "eidos"- the ideal form of the chair). By Locke's statement we have to accept the chair as being there as truth. By Socrates statement we have to accept that the chair really is not there but the Idea of the chair is. Socrates statement leads to many other questions about truth, because many times, Socrates, himself, tended to doubt that he knew anything at all. But, if you follow his idea to the end then you will find nothing but more questions. For example his idea of a chair is a bunch of molecules bound together to form a shape that one can perceive as a chair. You can take this even further by saying that the molecules

are formed of atoms that are positive or negatively charged to form an “idea of a molecule”. We are still trying to determine what the truth of the chair really is.

Locke’s stand is that we need to accept the form of the chair as it is and not question what the ideal form of the chair is or was or is going to be. This is one of the many problems that can arise out of different times and/or schools of thought. If you take Socrates side on this argument you will probably never find the truth in our court system. However if you take Locke’s side of this argument then you still probably will not find the truth either, although it may be more likely.

To tell the truth you have to know what the truth is. The definition of truth is “Conformity to fact or actuality” what this means is that a person who is telling the truth must not elaborate or use any adjectives to describe a situation they must state facts. For example if the question is what color is the sky? Then the reply must be the color of the sky that I could see was blue. This lets the questioner know that although the sky is blue it is many other colors that the eye can not perceive. For any person to know the truth the first thing that they have to admit to is that they really only perceived certain situations that they saw, heard, or seen to be true. Once they do this they can start to understand what the truth actually is. Hence all human truth is limited.

Take for instance the movie “The Matrix”. Is Neo seeing the truth when the machines have him plugged up to a computer program? Or is he seeing the truth when Morpheous unplugs him and shows him “the real world”? In either case you could say that Neo is seeing the truth because he can taste, see, touch, hear, and feel in both places. As you can see it is going to be rather difficult to tell the truth.

A question about how truth is developed also arises in the movie The Matrix. How did Neo even before he was contacted by Trinity sense that something was wrong? Was it because he was born with a second sense or is everyone able to sense this wrong if they just open up their minds. Immanuel Kant said that if a person undermines his foundation on his house and watches it fall he probably knew that it was going to happen anyway. So even though Neo took the pill and found out that his life was not real according to Kant he already knew that.

The next part of the Question is to tell the whole truth. Already we have seen how difficult the truth is, but now it seems that this part of the phrase already assumes that you have lied about the first part of the phrase” to tell the truth”. If you told the truth then you would not have to go back and retell it. An example of not telling the “whole truth” is if someone gave witness to a murder, and they did not tell the whole scene that they witnessed. If they told a lawyer that they saw a person getting stabbed with a knife forty nine times, and the lawyer did not let them finish their thought or accounts of the murder then they gave false witness to the “whole truth”. The reason that they would have given false witness is that they did not finish telling the lawyer that after they saw this person stabbed forty nine times that he got up and bowed because it was all part of some street corner magician’s act. So how can we tell if the whole truth we here is actually the whole truth and not a lie?

The “whole truth” is almost impossible to achieve. The reason that this is so is because if someone tried to give the whole truth of a situation then they would be there for a very long time trying to give factual evidence of something they saw. On the other hand if the court had time and listened to the Whole truth then many cases would never

be overturned in an appeals court. Not only those two, but everything is constantly changing (Heraclites vs. Parmenides, with his notion that things are still and trustworthy).

The really interesting part of the statement “to give the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth” is the last part. If taken in context with the whole phrase you will see that this part assumes that you have lied again, and now someone wants you to give them “nothing but the truth”. The definition of no thing is “Something that has no.... independent..... existence”. If you take this definition of nothing and add it to the rest of the phrase you get no existence of anything except facts or actualities. So in theory the person asking this statement asks you three times for the same thing just in different ways.

All in all there seems to be many intricate problems with the statement “To tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” I find it hard to believe that our court system gives the people a fair chance to be heard and represented in a fair and truthful trial. One of the reasons is that we all have prejudices and tend to hear and see only what we want to hear and see.