

# Truth & Logic: Necessary Conditions for Doing Philosophy of Religion

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Philosophy of Religion discusses the rationality of claims regarding God, the possibility of an afterlife, the immortality of the soul, etc. Questions are asked and answers given as to if certain claims are *rationally defensible*. Is there a *good reason* to think that God exists? Is there a *good reason* to think human beings have immaterial souls? What *evidence* is there for thinking a certain view about God is *true*? Do you have an *argument* for why one should think that evil in the world is compatible with an all-powerful all-loving God?

Doing philosophy of religion then presupposes that there is a true and false answer to these questions and that we can arrive at some semblance of an answer using the powers of human reason apart from faith. Thus doing philosophy of religion presupposes the correspondence theory of truth and the principle of non-contradiction.

## Truth

“To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true” (Aristotle Meta. Book IV)

Basically, truth rests on the conformity or correspondence of our mind with reality, in other words truth is “telling it like it is”. The Latin phrase for this was *Veritas sequitur esse rerum* (Truth follows the existence of things) Truth is a correspondence to reality, conformity of the intellect to the thing - *when what's inside ones head harmonizes or squares with what is outside one's head, the judgment is true*. Error is the lack of conformity between what is in the mind and what is in the world.

We can checkout many fact-claims in by simple observation. Go see! Go touch! Go listen! Other times we infer something unperceived from what is perceived. If you get sick every time you eat sunflower seeds, you infer there must be something in those seeds that makes you sick. You may not know what it is, but it has to be something because you aren't getting sick from nothing.

Remember, however, some there are some judgments about which we are uncertain. At this point it is an opinion. Judgments may be expressed as an opinion, and some opinions are more informed than others. Opinions occur because we are not certain whether or not the judgment is true or false.

## But So Many People Disagree – Relativism Must be True, Right?

Reality doesn't change just because two people do not agree. In other words, *real things are what they are regardless of what anyone happens to think about it*. The Earth is round, in spite of one's inability to convince another that it is not flat. The Earth doesn't become flat just because someone thinks it is. So even if the flat-earthier doesn't know the Earth is round, or won't admit the Earth is round, or even if a poll taken indicates that most people believe the Earth is flat – still *the idea that the Earth is round is the true one and anyone who thinks the Earth is flat is flat wrong*. Truth is grounded in reality, and what people happen to think about it doesn't change what is real. To quote Paul Copan<sup>1</sup>:

**TRUTH IS TRUE – EVEN IF NO ONE KNOWS IT**  
**TRUTH IS TRUE – EVEN IF NO ONE ADMITS IT**  
**TRUTH IS TRUE – EVEN IF NO ONE AGREES WITH IT**

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Copan, *True for You but Not for Me* ()

## **TRUTH IS TRUE – EVEN IF NO ONE FOLLOWS IT TRUTH IS TRUE – EVEN IF NO ONE GRASPS IT FULLY**

In sum, it is the actual existing thing is the ground for the verification of judgments. Things do not change just because opinions do.

There are other ideas of truth such as the **coherence theory of truth** (when something corresponds or does not correspond with what we already know) and the **pragmatic theory of truth** (what works) but both of these presuppose the coherence theory.

### **The Principle of Non-Contradiction**

It's a commonly recognized fact that things exist in a certain way, and cannot exist in a way that is contradictory to that mode. For example, a window can be completely closed, or it may be completely open or somewhere in between, but the window cannot be both closed and open at the same time and in the same way. The window simply cannot exist in both states at the same time. Likewise, a square cannot exist as a circle, nor can a dog be "not a dog" at the same time and in the same sense. From this fundamental and necessary truth about any existence, we get what is known in philosophy as *the law of non-contradiction*; a thing cannot both be and not be at the same time and in the same sense. It's not a law that humans just made up out of the blue, it's a law we derive from the way things really are.

Of course this all sounds like common sense to most of us, and indeed it is. It is quite obvious, so obvious in fact that St Thomas Aquinas, following his predecessor Aristotle, called this principle *self evident*. In other words, it's a principle about which we cannot even be mistaken. Why? One cannot even deny the principle without assuming it. Think about it; to deny this is to say that a thing *can* both be and not be at the same time. So when they might say, "I think the law of non-contradiction is false" they really want that statement, that very denial of the principle, to be accepted as true. But if things can both be and not be, that very denial also can both be true and not-true! It would be like saying "square circle" or "my brother is an only child", the mere utterance of these phrases entails their falsity. Hence, that is why St. Thomas rightly says one couldn't even deny this principle without assuming it, and when they do that, they speak nonsense.

The truth of this principle seems all well and good, but some people start getting a bit nervous about it when it comes to religion. The modern tendency today is *religious pluralism*, the idea that somehow all religions are equally true. It's considered not nice, these people say, to consider another's religion as wrong. It is more "democratic" or more "tolerant" to think that all religions are equally true.

However it's not quite that easy. While the intentions of religious pluralists are good insofar as their desire is to not hurt anyone's feelings, the fact is that all religions are not true, and in fact cannot possibly be true.

Take the example of an atheist and a theist. The atheist says "God does not exist" and the theist says just the opposite "God does exist". Only one of these two can be right, but not both. God can't both exist and not exist at the same time. Between the atheist and theist, somebody must be wrong.

Now it may be that we do not *know* which side is correct, but that does not mean we do not know that there is a truth to the matter. *Knowing the actual truth of the matter and knowing that there is a truth to the matter are two different things.* Take the following:

4356 x 345 x 8 x 345,686 = even or odd number?

Without a calculator, most of us cannot say if the answer is even or odd. We may not know which one it is, but *that* the answer is either even or odd we do know. So even if we don't know whether the number is even or odd, we do know that it must be one or the other and not both. If Bill says it's odd and Sally says it's even, we at least know somebody is wrong and somebody is right.

**So even when we don't know something, we must not confuse an inability to *know* the truth of the matter with there not *being* a truth to the matter.**

Take another example of Islam and Christianity. Islam denies that Jesus is God. Christianity on the other hand says that Jesus is God. Both cannot be true. Either Jesus is God or he is not, but he cannot be both. Jesus cannot be God for some and not God for others and what people merely think about it is irrelevant. Thinking doesn't change reality. If Jesus isn't God, then all the thinking and wishing in the world isn't going to change that fact. Between Islam and Christianity – *somebody must be wrong*. Thus, the commonly parroted phrase, "that's true for you but not for me", is incoherent. This is why the idea that all religions are equally true, however good the intention of one professing it, is nonetheless a false position.

**When it comes to objective reality, contradictory views are *mutually exclusive*. Only one of them can be correct.**

***"But God is in another realm and so truth and logic do not apply to God."***

This is a self-contradiction. This statement itself wants to make a *true* claim about "that other realm" and since it denies at the same time that any true claim can be made about such a realm this claim cuts its own throat and is *self-refuting*. Secondly, there is no good reason to think such an assertion is true. There is nothing within the concepts of "truth", "cause", "existence" etc. that confines them to the material realm. These concepts are not in themselves limited, so any limitation imposed on them is arbitrary.