

# Knowers & Knowing

Truth & “Post-Truth”

TOK L11



## Theories of Truth

### The Correspondence Theory

A statement is true if it corresponds to a fact.

Example: you cannot know that a circle has four straight sides; your claim requires some justification. But:

- What, exactly, are “facts?” Consider *empirical facts*, *negative facts*, and *counter-factual facts*.
- Note that correspondence is never perfect. Consider the “gap” associated with *ethical facts*, *aesthetic facts*, and *mathematical facts*.
- Truth is independent of facts and relates more to beliefs.
- Truth cannot be determined in isolation.



## Theories of Truth

### The Coherence Theory

A statement is true if it fits in with our overall sense of beliefs.  
Example: if someone claims to have seen Abraham Lincoln at a Rock Hill Walmart, it probably isn't true. But:

- Coherence is not sufficient for truth.
- Coherence cannot exclude crazy beliefs.
- Coherence can lead to complacency.



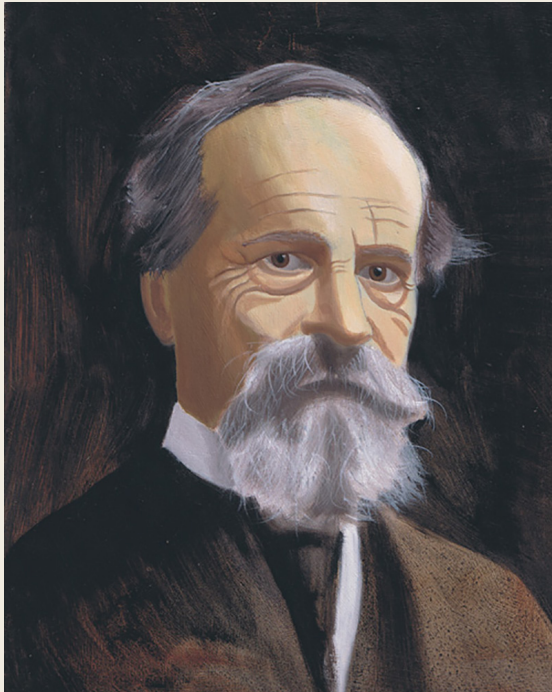
## Theories of Truth

### The Pragmatic Theory

A statement is true if it is useful or works in practice and is the best we can do at the current level of research and understanding. Truth, then, is scientifically verifiable belief.

But:

- A statement can be useful but not true, and true but not useful.
- “Useful” and “works in practice” are too vague to give us a definition of truth.
- Pragmatic theories are anti-realist.



## Theories of Truth

### The Consensus Theory

A statement is true if the majority of people agree that it is.

But:

- A majority of people may agree on beliefs that are false.
- Beliefs are culturally relative.
- Membership of a group may not imply an acceptance of knowledge.
- Consensus may be the product of coercion.

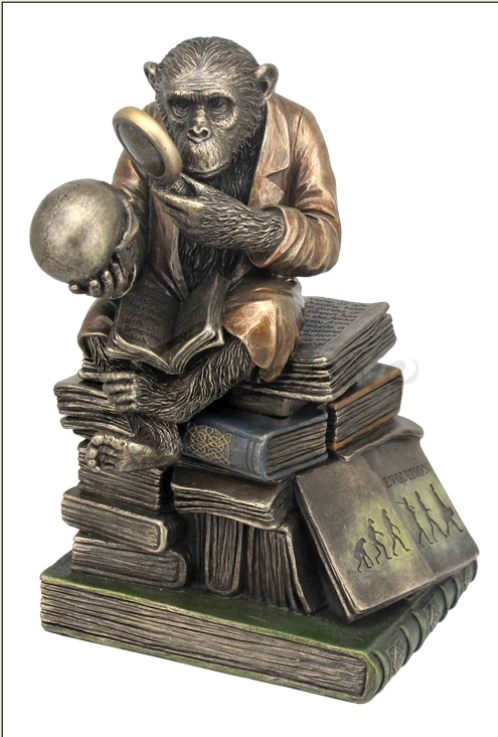


## Theories of Truth

### The Pluralist Theory

There are multiple truths, and various meanings of the word “truth.” But:

- Truth means different things in different contexts.
- One person’s truth could be another person’s lie.
- If I say there is no absolute truth, isn’t this a contradiction?



## Theories of Truth

### The Redundancy Theory

There is no truth. But:

- There's no distinction between wishful thinking and facts.
- If your beliefs are not disciplined by truth, they will likely be determined by prejudice, persuasion, or power.
- If there's no truth then you are the final arbiter of truth.
- Doesn't this statement refute itself? Ha!



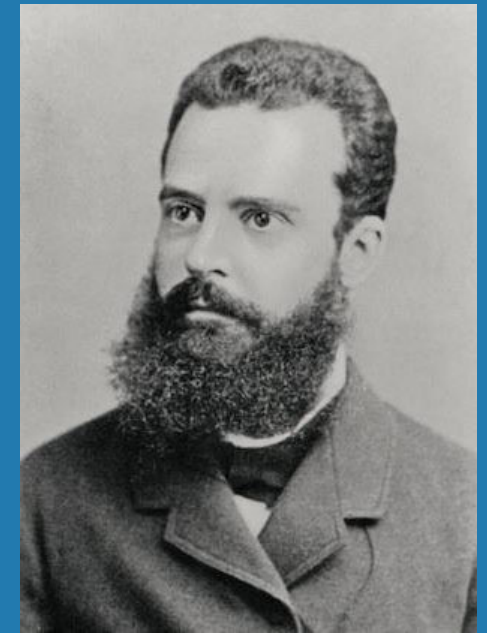
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# Post-Truth

Post-truth relates to or denotes circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) claimed that truth is established by power and authority. He used Machiavelli's analogy of lions and foxes to explain the interplay of establishment elites (lions) who are challenged by dissenters (foxes) in a cyclical struggle for power.

*Relativism* is the belief that truth is relative to the society, culture, or historical context in which you live (as opposed to *absolutism*). So, there is *my* truth, and there is *your* truth. **And yet: if you say you wrote that paper and your computer crashes, I guess we'll never know. But there is still a truth of the matter, isn't there?**





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# Does Relativism promote tolerance?



HW:

Try to answer this question by providing three examples. In each scenario, look past the face value of the matter to uncover the potential conflict.

*Example: I say God exists and you do not; we may tolerate each other's belief or unbelief because we both affirm our rights to free will in matters of faith. But is this as simple as it seems?*

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