

Quid est Veritas ('What is Truth') and Can we Know it?

Quid est veritas? What is truth?

Pontius Pilate's question is one of the most famous ever asked. It is also one that has proved difficult to answer. It has baffled and confused some of the world's most celebrated philosophers. It remains the most important of all questions, the one we must ask in order to make sense of anything else. It is, however, not a question that should only be asked. It must also be answered. It is not merely a rhetorical question to which there is no answer and it must not be asked in the tired and dismissive way in which relativists ask it, as something intrinsically unanswerable and therefore meaningless. Nor is truth synonymous with opinion. They are not the same thing. An opinion may or may not be true. Truth, on the other hand, is always true and can be nothing else. Truth is synonymous with reality; it is the touchstone by which opinion is tested. If opinion fails the test of truth, the opinion should be abandoned.

If truth cannot be dismissed as unknowable, nor can it be affirmed on the basis of blind faith. Something is not true simply because we believe it; nor is it untrue because we don't believe it. Truth simply is, whether we like it or not, believe it or not, or know it or not. This being so, and since we live within the realm of reality and are subject to its laws, it would be well to understand the laws by which we live.

If the knowledge of truth is the beginning of wisdom and the necessary prerequisite for the living of a life that conforms to reality, the importance of the original question is reaffirmed.

The first step in answering the question "*what is truth?*" is the asking of the preparatory question: How do we *know* what is truth? What are the means necessary to achieve the end?

We discover truth through the use of reason and only through the use of reason. There is no irrational path to truth. The so-called mystical paths to truth, such as the experience of the kiss of beauty or the goodness of love, are merely rational paths by another name, and by any other name reason smells as sweet. The good, the true and the beautiful are nothing other than the triune splendor of truth itself, each of which conforms to, and is an expression of, the rational foundations of reality.

The great pagan philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, arrived at the conviction of the existence of the Divine through the use of reason. The great pagan writers, Homer, Sophocles, Aeschylus and Virgil, arrived at the same conclusion through the rational observation of the follies, foibles, virtues and vices of humanity and their respective consequences. These great pagans came to an understanding of the natural law through the rational observation of humanity's place within nature and saw it as a logical and ultimately theological expression of the Divine law.

Although reason leads us to an acceptance of the existence of the Divine, and also to a rudimentary understanding of certain attributes of the Divine, such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, justice, goodness, beauty, truth and love, it cannot tell us much more. In order for our reason to grasp the reality of the Divine on any deeper level, it needs the Divine to reveal itself.

Does the Divine reveal itself? Clearly there are major religions who claim and believe that it does. This is, however, beyond the scope of the present discussion. The point is that reason is sacrosanct because the Divine is both rational and sacred.

