

WHY TRUTH MATTERS Fauzia Rahman-Greasley

- I. Self-interest trumps truth,
- II. Pragmatism trumps truth.
- III. Preference trumps truth.
- IV. (Combining I – III): Pragmatic Preference for Ignorance: (A) there is little or nothing you can do with these facts; (B) knowledge of the plight of others can be psychologically distressing; and, therefore, (C) it is better not to know.
- V. Pragmatic preference for lying
- VI. Pragmatic preference for Truth elimination: (1) Lying trumps truthfulness in terms of usefulness in desire-fulfilment; (2) desire fulfilment trumps non-fulfilment; (3) if there is no objective Truth then truthfulness does not matter; and, therefore (4) Truth elimination trumps Truth retention.
- VII. Hume: use of reason to argue for what one wants
- VIII. (5) No one knows what truth is or where it comes from; so it is unexplained, unanchored and mysterious; (6) Truth is a relative concept; (7) The widespread notion of objective truth can be explained without resorting to mysterianism; (8) The concept of Truth is a human construct; (9) The human construction explanation trumps any other because it is more preferable and useful than the non-testable and non-provable theory of objective truth; (10) Therefore, objective truth is a redundant myth.
- IX. The world does not conform itself to our wishes.
- X. Denying objective truth, whilst possibly psychologically protective in the short-term, is in the long-term destructive.
- XI. Benson and Stangroom: We are the only species for whom truth matters and the only species we know of that has the ability to find it out and, thus, we have a kind of duty to do so (p.162).
- XII. If it is true that we are the only species for whom truth matters and the only species we know of that has the ability to find it out, then no moral imperative logically follows.
- XIII. Benson and Stangroom: “We are the kind of creatures for whom matters of morals; of values; of justice; of ought rather than is; are of greater importance than facts”.
- XIV. Benson and Stangroom: “just about everybody already knows that [scepticism and relativism] are false; and know it in a visceral, primal, almost physical way that precedes reflection” (p.40). “as we move through our daily lives, we rarely question the epistemological status of those things we take to be more than probably true”; and “We hold beliefs of this kind in a ‘they are true all the way down to the bottom’ sort of way”; and “Beliefs that we think really certainly true, rather than just probably true, trump other fuzzy, may be true, may be false beliefs we hold” (pp.41-42).

- XV. It does not follow from our natural lack of scepticism in *some* situations that we can always readily distinguish between truth and error.
- XVI. Benson's and Stangroom's: "[W]e have to think that there is something to find in order for enquiry to be genuine enquiry and not just an arbitrary game that does not go anywhere. We like games, but we also like genuine enquiry. *That's why truth matters*⁷ (p. 180).
- XVII. It is true that some people do indeed like enquiry: but not everybody does. Hurrah if you are an intellectual: too bad if you're not.
- XVIII. Benson and Stangroom:
"Too much attention to 'points of view' with too little scepticism can get innocent people convicted of crimes, on the basis of people with points of view but no evidence. A number of US court cases dealing with putative recovered memory, Satanic ritual abuse and child abuse in day-care facilities have achieved just such a result in the past two decades: law-enforcement officials and juries were solemnly instructed 'to listen to the children', and long prison sentences were handed out to people who were not, in fact, Satanists or child- murderers. The dangers seem obvious, but not everyone sees them" (p.173).
- XIX. Thought experiment: You know with absolute 100% certainty. The jury are forced to guess on the basis of the statements presented to them. Undeserved punishment.
- XX. Objection 1: It is impossible for you to know how you would feel because you have not experienced that situation.
- XXI. Response to Objection 1: It is sufficient for you to imagine what it would be like. Art proves the empathic faculty of *Homo sapiens*.
- XXII. Objection 2: It doesn't matter what it would be like because you would never be in the situation of being falsely convicted. Those convicted of crimes must have done something to justify the conviction.
- XXIII. Response to Objection 2: It is not necessary for there to be a reason for a conviction. It is sufficient for the jury to believe the accused is guilty even if there is no incontrovertible evidence to support that belief.
- XXIV. Truth matters because the person falsely accused could be you or someone you love. Truth matters because you would not want others to judge and punish you for a crime you did not commit. Truth matters because you do know it is true, even if you would prefer it to be false, that you could be falsely accused. You know this because there is abundant evidence of miscarriages of justice.
- XXV. Objection 3: Our current system of trial by jury is the best means for safe-guarding

society even if a few innocents are undeservedly punished.

- XXVI. Response to Objection 3: Political expediency does not justify concealment of truth. If punishing innocents doesn't matter then the concept of punishment is undermined. The best of the currently available is not the same as *the* best. Improvement is possible.
- XXVII. Objection 4: Those who have been harmed by others deserve retribution and this need trumps the harm inflicted on the falsely convicted.
- XXVIII. Response to Objection 4: An 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth' philosophy is self-defeating. Healing does not come from harming another. Two wrongs do not make a right.
- XXIX. Miscarriages of justice result from too much attention to points of view and insufficient scepticism. Miscarriages of justice occur when people believe they know the truth when
in fact they do not, and cannot, know. We cannot know truth simply by feeling it in our bones. Nor can we get to truth by examining evidence because when we evaluate evidence we inevitably do so in the light of our personal experiences, viewpoint and prejudices. It is not that truth is not out there. The person falsely convicted knows that their conviction is based on false assumptions and not true statements.
- XXX. Socrates "know thy self".
- XXXI. Descartes methodology: (a) truth can be attained by using a combination of senses, memory and intellect; (b) the will extends further than the intellect and can be extended to things not understood); (c) errors occur when judgements are made without a clear and distinct understanding, including an understanding of the will as the source of errors; (d) humans are habit-forming creatures; (e) from combining a-d: by attentive and often repeated meditation it is possible to acquire the habit of remembering to abstain from making judgements whenever the truth of a given matter is not apparent; (g) therefore, it is possible to avoid error.
- XXXII. Descartes: "[M]an is apt to commit errors regarding particular things, and we must acknowledge the infirmity of our nature".
- XXXIII. Descartes: "I should never judge anything I do not clearly and distinctly understand"
- XXXIV. Objection: Descartes moral imperative is simply asserted rather than argued for. There is ample evidence in support of the view that the human faculty of judgement is selectively advantageous. Humans are the kind of creatures that make judgements and, thus, it would be un-natural for us to do otherwise.
- XXXV. Perhaps, for Descartes these objections are irrelevant because what matters for him is establishing something firm and lasting in the sciences. In other words, he seeks satisfaction of his ambition. Surely, personal fulfilment is not a good enough reason for justifying the claim that truth matters?
- XXXVI. I concur that truth probably (but not necessarily) matters for science and enquiry.

However, I think the groundwork for science is not the only reason, and certainly not *the* most important reason for why truth matters. Science may have aided our understanding of the natural world, but has failed to provide a better understanding of human nature or to offer protection from the recklessness of other humans.

XXXVII. The exploitive and ego-centric side of human nature is not generally acknowledged.

This

acknowledgement is especially important in law courts where revenge and the possibility of compensation can motivate false accusations and result in false convictions.

XXXVIII. Humans judge each other without clearly and distinctly understanding the consequences of their actions.

XXXIX. Truth matters because we do not want to be undeservedly punished. Truth matters because we do know that individuals are being unnecessarily penalised. Truth matters because we are not safe: we know anyone of us could be undeservedly convicted. Truth matters because we could prevent injustices. *That* is why truth matters.

XL. We have a moral duty to discover and reveal the truth. The duty arises not because we want it, or because we like enquiry and get a biochemical kick from it. Rather it arises because although we might want to deny it, we do know that we have moral responsibilities towards others. We know this by examining the evidence in conjunction with our faculty of imagination, rather than by feeling it in our bones.

XLI. We know our current ethics are less than perfect because we can imagine a better scenario: one in which everybody is treated fairly and no one is undeservedly punished. Ignoring truth in favour of personal preference is dangerous for both our self and others. That is why truth really does matter.

There is a lack of robust research regarding the effects of false accusations and convictions.