

Background Information on Seeking Truth

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The [*Catholic Curriculum Standards*](#) focus heavily on the pursuit of truth in all content areas. A simplified definition of truth is the *correspondence of the mind with reality*.¹ This is called logical truth or the truth of knowing.² Aristotle defined truth as, “To say of what is that it is or of what is not that it is not, is to speak the truth or to think truly; just as it is false to say of what is that it is not or of what is not that it is.”³

A challenge in the pursuit of truth is how we can be sure that our mind is in accord with reality. One way we can assert truth is to use the Principle of Non-contradiction.⁴ This principle states that two things, or statements, cannot be true if they contradict each other. A child cannot be both 2 years old and 3 years old at the same time. Nor can a person be both 5’4” tall and not 5’4” tall. One statement must be correct and the other false. For us to comprehend the correctness of age and height, presupposes a correspondence between our mind and reality. If reality itself were of a contradictory nature, then the Principle of Non-contradiction would not be a test!

But how do we know which statement in our examples are true and which are false? How can we solve this problem?

We can compare these statements to other propositions that we know of as *self-evident* or *unquestionable truths*, or as *truths of perception*. Aristotle says the mind uses these two kinds of principles to perceive matters of fact. Both types of truths can be used as standards and applied to propositions to uncover truth.

Unquestionable truths or self-evident truths are objective truths that are true for all times, places, and persons such as, “The whole is greater than the parts,” and “Man is a mortal being.” These truths are universal truths. Truths of perception are facts we can see, hear, touch, smell, or taste and are verified through our senses when they are properly functioning, attuned, and checked by reason. “Here is a book. Here is a rose” are examples of truths of perception.

¹ Adler, M. (2000). *The great ideas*. Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing. See pages 1-10. There are many other definitions and theories of truth, but we will use a classical realist perspective.

² Sullivan, D. (1957). *An introduction to philosophy: The perennial principles of the classical realist tradition*. Rockford, IL: Tan Book Publishers, pp. 79-87.

³ Adler, M. p. 5.

⁴ Spitzer, R. (2011). *Ten universal principles: A brief philosophy of the life issues*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, pp. 11-14.

An important aspect of truth involves the application of the words we speak to what we hold in our thoughts. When we speak the words that correspond to our thoughts, we are said to be speaking the truth. When we speak contrary to what we think, we are said to speak falsely. This is moral truth.

Is truth eternal or does it change? Truth itself is eternal and immutable.⁵ Certainly, our perception of things changes over time. For instance, the belief that the world was flat until it was discovered to be round does not change the truth that it had always been round. Or our belief that the sun revolved around the earth did not negate the truth that the earth and all the planets always revolved around the sun. Things are either true or they are not.

Truth which is viewed from a certain perspective is said to be viewed proportionately. “The higher we go in the state of being the more truth we find, until at the very summit of being we find Truth itself, the Absolute Truth”⁶ who in Christianity is God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is called ontological truth and is the “correspondence of things with their idea in the mind of the God.”⁷

⁵ Adler, M. pg. 10.

⁶ Sullivan, D., pgs. 209-211.

⁷ Ibid.