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Pegasus

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Introduction

Welcome to July *Pegasus*. As ever, we seek to provide edifying content that will help drive our community conversations.

In this month's edition, we have an essay from Michael W. Wright about the very current debate about artificial intelligence (AI). He smartly writes about the distinction between AI and human intelligence. AI has driven much anxiety. But in the end, AI is a vehicle to gather and distribute information more quickly. It is just the latest example that workers and companies need to move up the value chain.

As Wright says, "The differences between disembodied intelligence (machines) and embodied intelligence (humans) are significant."

He adds, "In a relationship between AI and human intelligence, the key is to treat both as having distinct agency. Allowing us to leverage the strengths of each form of intelligence, while acknowledging their limitations."

Associate editor Michael Hartoonian writes about our pursuit for truth. It is a frustrating, but very important journey that we all must pursue.

He writes, "Knowledge, in the service of belief, is a waste of time and a waste of knowledge. Knowledge in the service of understanding, whether a belief has been fully tested ontologically, is the highest use of reason and this reason is our best guide in truth's pursuit. And then there is faith, a necessity in the search for natural laws, the search for self, the search for meaning and of course, for truth."

Michael's survey of the search for truth and knowledge, incorporating an acknowledgment to the value of faith, underscores the importance of seeking and always to find truth and knowledge, even though it can be quite challenging.

Lastly, we give a salute to Liz Collin of Alpha News, the recipient of our Dayton Award for 2023. I've been a journalist for more than 30 years. Things have changed. The power of narrative has come to dominate what gets reported and written. And with subscribers being more important than advertisers, new organizations feel a need to feed their readers what they want to read. Liz and her colleagues have pushed against that, seeking to report facts and truth, often against great defiance.

I recently worked on a project to fight the alarming rise of antisemitism. Before I took that role, I sat my kids down to tell them what I was pursuing. My 11-year-old daughter asked, "Will we be in danger?" I said, "No, we'll be okay." But that conversation made me appreciate how much courage is required to do great journalism. And that's why we are very happy to appreciate and award Liz. We all need news from multiple viewpoints to inform our

thinking and Alpha News is an important part of that firmament.

David Kansas
Editor-at-Large
Pegasus

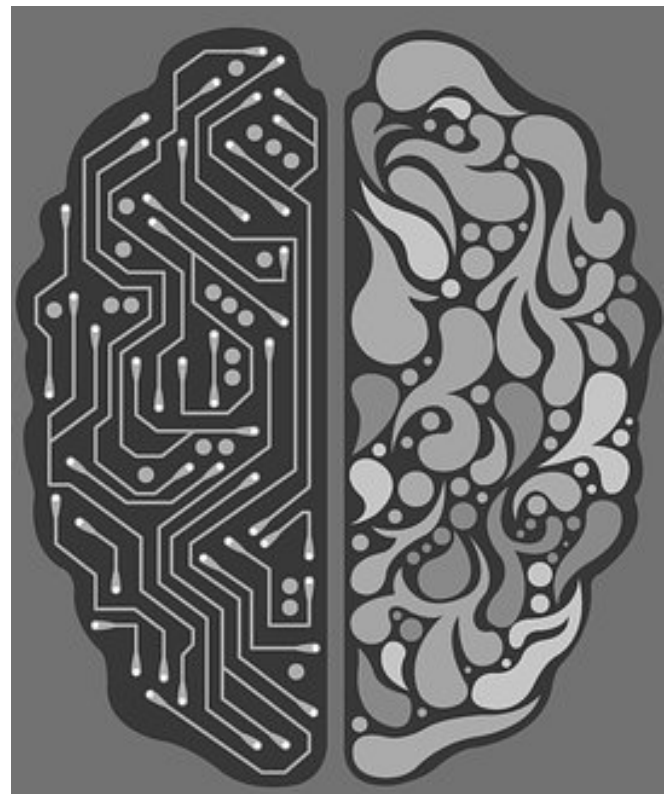
Notes on Truth and AI

Michael W. Wright

When considering the determinants of truth in the context of a relationship between artificial intelligence (AI) and human intelligence, it is crucial to acknowledge the fundamental differences between disembodied intelligence (machines) and embodied intelligence (humans) (our thanks to Tom Fisher at the University of Minnesota for helping find this important distinction). These distinctions play a significant role in how truth is perceived, processed and applied in various scenarios.

AI excels in statistically measurable activities and observed or observable events, where the relevance of truth can be near absolute. Keeping in mind that AI models are built on mathematical relationships, they are neither emotional nor intuitive. They are strictly probabilistic. Machines are adept at processing vast amounts of data, identifying patterns and making accurate predictions based on predefined rules and algorithms. In these domains, AI can provide highly reliable and consistent results, as it operates within a framework of data derived objective facts, validated sources and quantifiable information. This makes AI an invaluable tool for tasks such as data analysis, pattern recognition and decision-making in fields like finance, healthcare and scientific research.

However, when it comes to speculation, conceptualization, imagination, belief systems, or discernment, the embodied intelligence of humans takes precedence. These aspects of intelligence are primarily associated with 'life form' intelligences and are not easily replicated or simulated by machines. Human intelligence is shaped by subjective experiences, emotions, intuition and the ability to navigate complex social and cultural contexts. Truth, in these domains, becomes more fluid and open to interpretation, as it is influenced by individual perspectives, beliefs and values. While AI can assist in generating ideas or exploring possibilities, it lacks understanding as a dynamic embodied entity and nor does it possess the ability to grasp the multi-dimensional nuances of human experience that are essential for genuine speculation and imagination.



It is important to recognize that there exists a fact-based truth that can be rule-based, but it may not necessarily represent the entire truth. AI can excel at processing and applying these rule-based truths, such as the example of a human using a crosswalk and the associated traffic rules. However, the embodied intelligence of humans understands that the actual truth of the situation is based upon the reliance on drivers obeying those rules. Human intelligence considers the unpredictability of human behavior, the potential for errors in judgment and the need for situational awareness. There are limitations associated with relying solely on rule-based truths and we ignore the importance of integrating human discernment and contextual understanding at our own peril.

In a relationship between AI and human intelligence, the key is to treat both as having distinct agency. Allowing us to leverage the strengths of each form of intelligence, while acknowledging their limitations. AI can provide the foundation of objective facts, statistical analysis and rule-based processing, while human intelligence contributes the contextual understanding, creative thinking and ethical considerations necessary for a comprehensive understanding of truth. By combining the precision and efficiency of AI with the depth and adaptability of human intelligence, we can work towards a more holistic approach to determining truth in various domains.

I call this *symbiotic decision intelligence*, which has the potential to enhance decision-making, problem-solving and knowledge discovery because it uniquely harnesses the complementary strengths of both forms of intelligence.

And my favorite quote of all time:

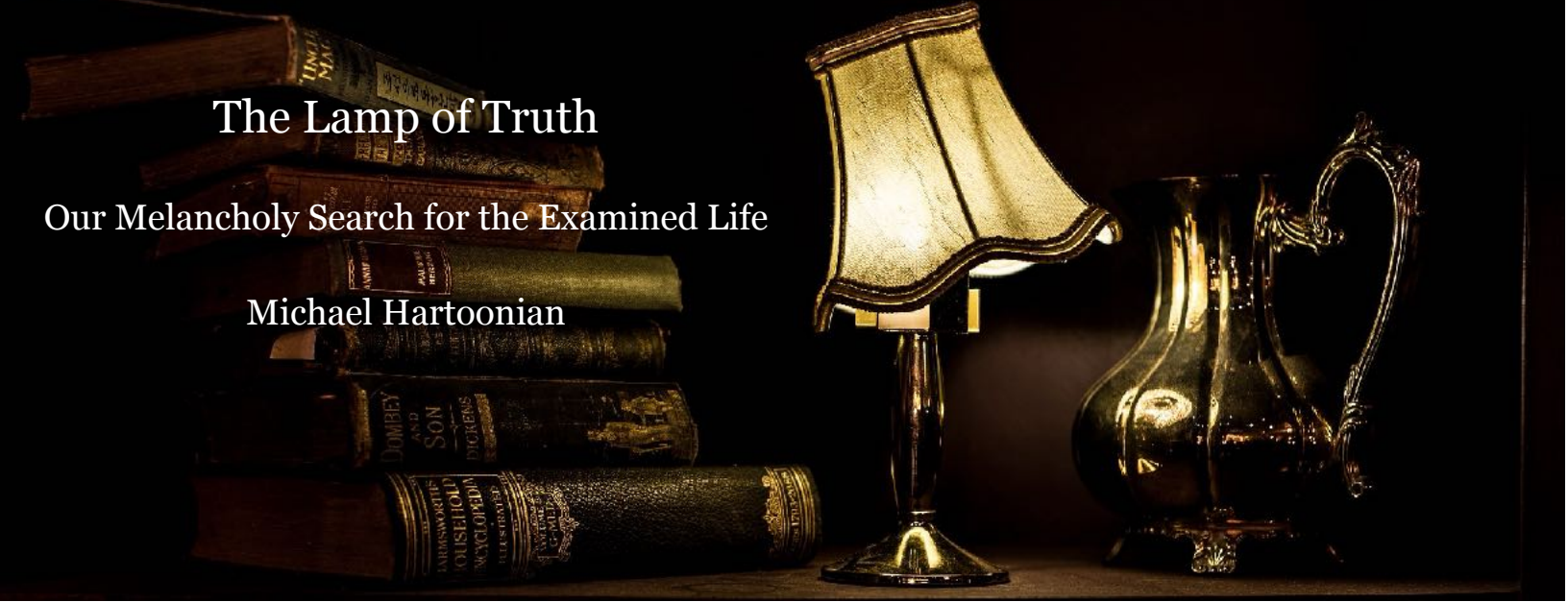
“The growing complexity of our times makes certainty about any move or any position much more precarious. And in this networked world, where information moves at the speed of light and ‘truth’ mutates before our eyes, certainty changes and speeds off at equivalent velocity.” – Margaret Wheatley, in the essay “Willing to be Disturbed,” from Kaos Pilot A-Z by Uffe Ubaek (Aarhus, Denmark: Kaos Communication, 2003)

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The Lamp of Truth

Our Melancholy Search for the Examined Life

Michael Hartoonian



*Time's glory is to command contending kings,
To unmask falsehood and bring truth to light.*

—William Shakespeare

Introduction

What you see is not what others see. If this is so, is truth hopelessly subjective? Is truth about power? As Winston Churchill said, “The greatest thing about winning the war is you get to write its history.”

Is truth simply about trusting the individual or institution? Or is truth only tied to celebrity and money?

If truth is, indeed, the lamp of life, are we without the courage or grace to even want to live in its light?

Whatever the meaning of truth and its pursuit, rationality demands the following ideas be considered:

- The pursuit of truth may provide clues for living the good life, but does not make for a comfortable life's journey.
- The pursuit of truth is just too hard and also interferes with one's ego.
- Truth is always contested. Always was and always will be.
- The pursuit of truth can bring harmony, as well as tension between a person's natural animal instincts and innate moral sentiments.
- The pursuit of truth is only operationalized in reason.
- In the pursuit of truth, there is and must be an understanding that a perceived fact is not a truth.
- The pursuit of truth, when done with integrity, gives life a point and a relational purpose to the existential human soul or what some have called our better angels.

The Pursuit of Truth as an Exercise in Logic

The laws of nature act on all animals. For example, the law of gravity. If a human and a horse together fall from a tall building, they will both fall at the same rate – 32 feet per second. But there are other things, beyond nature, that uniquely act on humans and not on other animals. There is nature and then there is human nature. Animals can certainly perceive nature, as well as see other animals. Humans also have this ability. But what makes a human being a different kind of animal is the learned ability to distinguish between perception and perceptions and the deeper ability to experience, understand and classify first (general) principles necessary for life in a special community. If taken, the human animal has the agency and freedom of will to choose to live in a community with a civic face. However, in order to do this, human beings must pursue the elusive virtues of truth.

The first precept on the path to the search for and research for truth is to understand why a fact is different from truth. Consider that it was once a fact that the earth was flat. That is what our eyes could see, but the truth was beyond our vision, reason or quality of mind. It was once a scientific fact that some races of people were superior to others. How do such things come to pass? There is a large and significant literature debating the essence of a fact and an understanding of what might be true. Is truth only what we witness through our senses? Is it, thus, only a biological phenomenon? Does truth hide behind a curtain accessible only through a divinity of numbers (Pythagorean theorem, statistics, AI, etc.). Is truth found within the individual's innate moral leanings? Is it found through agreed upon experimental experiences? Is truth beyond human understanding? Is the path to truth guided by reason or emotion?

The answer, of course, is all of the above. But the search for truth along life's journey is basically defined by character and the application of virtue to one's mode of conduct. Those virtues must include humility, manors, gratefulness, curiosity, honesty, hard and good work and a developing sense of aesthetics for an awareness of the elegance found in a life working to engage and evaluate relationships regarding the world and self. More than anything, the pursuit of truth is a beautiful, applied art. With apologies to Norman Maclean, truth comes by grace and grace comes by art. The art does not come easily. The point of the search is to come to know the fullness of life's relationships, to practice rightful behavior and to be a reflective, self-correcting, self-governing citizen.



Given the above, it must be clear that searching for truth is an ongoing task. This is the case regardless of the logic employed. For example, in the experience-based, objective, scientific logic of induction, the conclusion might follow from the premises. It is not guaranteed. The future has no obligation to mimic the past. It might, but it might not and thus, the experiments continue because in inductive logic, (the) science is never finished. Certainty and science cannot live in the same intellectual house. The true believer is certain and thus, an insult to experience and even herself. Truth is always a step ahead of you... encouraging you to work on, absent any desire of loyalty, fear or ego. However, the inductive mode is a necessary tool in truth's pursuit. And what about deductive logic, where the conclusion must follow from the premises? Well, yes, but this is only a useful form of logic if and only if the premises are true. We may have to use induction again to see if there are truths in the premises, which of course, will always fall short. Given these conditions, we can say that the two main forms of logic are necessary in the pursuit of truth, but not sufficient.

The Sufficiency of Deontological Ethics and the Role of Reason

Knowledge, in the service of belief, is a waste of time and a waste of knowledge. Knowledge in the service of understanding, whether a belief has been fully tested ontologically, is the highest use of reason and this reason is our best guide in truth's pursuit.

Philosophers and theologians have separately and collectively debated the idea of the existence of truth, as well as God, since the beginning of human curiosity. What has been clear from the start is the caution to not confuse the pursuit of truth with Truth itself. Many have and do still think that truth is within us, like the kingdom of God or the sentiments of morality, awaiting to be unleashed through discourse. Others believe that truth is simply a matter of what is (verified), not what ought to be and it can be measured and pictured to be understood by all. In all these cases, what we find is the truncation of reason. Reason is not empiricism. Reason is not deontological. Reason is not formal logic. Reason is all of this and more and it is the necessary guide to pursuing truth.

Reason does not play well with the human psyche. Often, without enlightenment, human beings want to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, even if that tendency is contrary to their self-interest. Like Croesus, many want to measure their money or property as a way to assume happiness. "These are the facts of my happiness," they might say. But is it true? Facts are only one attribute of reason, as reason also must deal with definitions of concepts, which are not facts and issues of values and emotion. Although many make claims that this or that is the reason for X or Y, with selected facts to bolster their argument, reason, in this context, is a rationale for fear, tribal loyalty or some existential notion of God, demi-god or self-worship.

And then there is faith, a necessity in the search for natural laws, the search for self, the search for meaning and, of course, for truth. If the truth were known, there would be no need for faith. Armed with reason, faith encourages us to explore, to not fear being off course



and to continue, simply because there is meaning in the search itself. For its own sake, as it were. One of the chief factors in discerning truth is the need to have faith in both the author and the receiver of knowledge. That is, there is the assumption that one speaks what he knows to be true and the listener accepts that utterance as normal communication. Certainly here must be skepticism, but skepticism in the service of the search for truth, transcending person and institution. Skepticism is not about just winning an argument. Skepticism, in the pursuit of truth, puts us at peace with self-analysis and self-correction. These steppingstones on the road to truth give life a point.

The Unity of Truth in Meaning, Love, Criticism and Aesthetic Discourse

The argument is advanced here that the essence of searching for truth is found in the habit of love, the knowledge and practice of criticism and the search for meaning. And all are grounded in aesthetics. The knowledge, skills and dispositions that are necessary for the search for truth are found in these fundamental themes of philosophy. These ideas, however, do not represent a layer cake, as it were, but a marble cake, where it becomes impossible to tell where one idea ends and the other begins. For example, within this discipline, the concept of *We the People* in the Preamble of the Constitution of the United States can be understood as another branch of government, assimilated with the legislative, executive and judicial branches. The quality of the first three branches of government is dependent upon the quality of the fourth, that is, the people, (see *Federalist*, 51, James Madison) and that quality is defined in the attributes of love, criticism and meaning spoken with an aesthetic voice.

Thus, love, criticism and meaning are parts of the same whole, the same relationship. Each of the three ideas defines itself in terms of the others. The notion is not unlike the trilogy advanced by Plato in regard to the concept of justice. In the dialogue between Meno and Socrates, Socrates defines justice in terms of temperance and courage. He asserts that an understanding of justice is possible only within the context of temperance and courage. That to be just is to be courageous and temperate. That to be courageous is to be just and temperate and so on. The defining qualities of one value are held within the other values. This notion of defining one value in terms of other values holds for the qualities of truth, as well as for the elements developed within the discipline of philosophy (see any edition of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Plato's *Republic* and their other works). If we address

the three themes of love, criticism and meaning as an inclusive set that defines the necessary attributes needed for the pursuit of truth, we can better understand the significant concepts and issues that tie together search with purpose. As a condition of human behavior, it should be understood that the search for truth, as a human field of study, is tied to the contexts of time, place, will and chance. While truth is a (more) stable or constant construct than facts, for example, it is still dependent on the vagaries of natural law (psychological evolution, for example) and innate human moral leaning. Here, nature and mind are “synergistic” only when studied and seen as an interactive unity. A human being is not a machine and a machine is not a human being. Once this is not clear, the search for truth stops and because of the novelty of the machine, it will take control of the “search.” In the pursuit of truth, separation is, indeed, sin.

The Habit of Love

Let us begin our journey into the integrated qualities needed to search for truth through the theme of love. Montesquieu, writing in *The Spirit of Law*, stated, “A community is like everything else. To preserve it, we must love it.” (p. 31) Within Western thought, the ancient Greeks provided us with language that exercised great influence on the modes of expression and discourse associated with the concept of love. The Greeks had many words for love, which relates to its importance in Greek life. From friendship (*philia*), to passion (*eros*), to high affection (*agape*), the Greeks – from Heraclitus in the sixth century B.C. to Empedocles in the fifth century B.C. – established love as the physical principle (unifying agent) of the universe. Heraclitus added and believed that there were two forces in nature – repulsion and attraction – and he suggested that love (*harmonia*) results from the tension of opposites. Empedocles held that similar phenomena attracted and the result of this process of attraction is also love. The notion of the same and other, of Greek and barbarian, of the one and the many, is still at the center of the debate over what is true and manifests itself in questions of freedom, equity and justice. It was also at the center of Plato’s arguments on human discourse, namely, the problem of opposition between the singular and the “infinite” dyad and of their reconciliation and unity. Love was the agent of true discourse and the function of unification was its definition. The role of love, if we can think of the concept as playing a role, is one of unifying the parts from the reconciliation of singular and dyad, referring to the concept of many in one (*e pluribus unum*). Love is necessary in keeping the complexity of the many, one. In this sense, love is both complex and gentle.

Within the concept of love lives the important attribute of loyalty. The understanding of loyalty, as an attribute of love, can be traced back to Deuteronomy (6:5, KJV): “You shall love your God with all your heart.” Israel is to have one loyalty – one love or unifying force. In Leviticus (19:18), this idea is extended to one’s neighbor: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” (Also see Matthew 22:37-40 and Luke 10:27-28). The individual was to be loyal and love God and her neighbors. (See also: The encyclical letters [DEUS CARITAS EST](#) and [CARITAS IN VERITATE](#) by Pope Benedict XVI)

The concept of love and its application to the state or country (other citizens) and even the land has been made explicit over time.

It is also true that the victorious man's conduct is often guided by the love of his friends and of his country and that he will, if necessary, lay down his life on their behalf.

-Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (p. 121)

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now deserves the love and thanks of men and women.

-Thomas Paine, *Crisis* (1777, p. 23)

That land is a commodity is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics.

-Aldo Leopold, *Sand County Almanac* (1966, p. xix)

While love and loyalty to one's soul, one's self, one's neighbors and one's environment are necessary attributes of the search for truth, it is also the case that the whole business of loyalty or what Weber (1917) called the "ethic of conviction," must be viewed with skepticism. Great injustices can be perpetrated in the name of love. So, if citizens are to pursue truth, to say nothing of friendship, our second theme in the necessary attributes of enlightened reason must be employed – criticism.

The Practice of Criticism

Criticism, within the context of the pursuit of truth, yields a more comprehensive understanding of nature/experience/reality. It presupposes a philosophical worldview that lends direction and predisposes methodology in the pursuit of certain goals and relationships between the individual and questions of knowledge. Criticism is concerned with judgments about self, education, existence, values and thinking itself. Criticism, by definition, means clear communication among citizens. That is, criticism is only possible when citizens respect standards of clarity, truth and human dignity. Empathic listening is as important as the right of free speech. But criticism goes beyond clarity to embrace the concept of courage.



Criticism carries at least three interrelated behaviors. First, the citizen must value, observe and absorb the social culture of the state or society so as to bring in a more complete picture or a more experimental impression of the situation. This calls for the ability to take in information, impressions and arguments and conceptualize the setting within temporal and spatial contexts (history and geography), complete with explicit, as well as subtle issues, promises and problems. Next, the citizen must be able to react to the setting. That is, they must be a countervailing force or at least an asker of questions. These questions should probe the consciences of self and others as part of the search for truth. Finally, the citizen must judge. Judgments must be made of science, policy, political leaders and self. It is particularly important that the citizen develop a critical view of the political economy, even though it is extremely difficult. As Pierre Bayle (1697) noted, however:

Most men decide to accept one notion rather than another because of certain superficial and extraneous traits which they consider to be more in conformity with truth than with falsehood and which are easily discernible; whereas solid and essential reasons which reveal truth are difficult to come by. Hence, since men are prone to follow the easier course, they almost always take the side on which these superficial traits are apparent. [p. 376]

It is this proneness for superficiality that is dangerous to the search for truth and it is why criticisms, even of personal behavior, are so vital to the health of discourse. But people will lovingly criticize only those institutions, ideas and people in which they find meaningful relationships. This can never happen with the self-centered. One must care for something beyond self. The English word idiot comes from the Greek (idiotes), meaning “private person” or man alone, out of relationships. Such people will find the search for truth so distasteful that we call them narcissists.

The Search for Meaning

As with love, meaning is achieved through engagement. Engagement means being intensively involved with others in common activities, commonly perceived as good for self, as well as for others so engaged. Meaning may be at the heart of happiness, as well as the heart of looking for truth. We know that meaning is linked, as well as limited, in two significant ways. One has to do with settings of time and place and the other with rhetoric. Conceptual limitations are defined by place and time or in terms of receiving meaning from the utterances of others, by convention and circumstance. Cherryholmes (1985) suggests that meaning resides in what the speaker is engaged in and what the hearer is counting on. Is the mind open enough to consider another point of view, another theory, another experience? Being meaningful means communication must rest on truthfulness and comprehensibility. But these elements of rhetoric will only “work” within people with a relatively high base of homogeneous knowledge and a context where they have shared norms and expectations. We could even add discipline and logic to rhetoric to obtain a more complete notion of discourse and still fall short of a definition of meaning that ties it together with love and criticism. Meaning within this more

complete sense addresses not only the context of discourse, but discloses those human visions or theories of social systems that illuminate, as well as disguise and conceal, the ethical acts of people. Meaning cuts through to the moral bone of society, baring the collective nerve and exposing such questions as who rules the search process? Why? What rules and methods should we follow? Why should we obey them? Will obeying rules lead me closer to the truth and to the good life? And do I really care about finding out what is true or knowing anything about the good life? Isn't one person's treasure another person's trash?

Any discussion about the relationship between the search for truth and the good life is usually stated in the sequence of "rules, then virtue" (character). That is, rules cause a person to be good and virtue follows from the practice of rules. The belief is that the house of virtue is entered through the door of rules, as the temple of reason is entered through the courtyard of habit. However, meaning is brought to life when we first focus upon virtue and how it is taught and discovered and let virtue help create modes of conduct. Rules and virtue do work together, but "good" rules and the good life will simply follow from virtue. The philosophical questions at issue, then, are what is the nature of virtue? Can virtue be taught? And what is the relationship between virtue and meaning, virtue and common learning and virtue and the search for truth? In defense of the new U.S. Constitution, James Madison in 1788 (Federalist 51) stated:



I go on this great republican principle, that the people will have virtue and intelligence to select men of virtue and wisdom. Is there no virtue among us? To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people is an absurd idea. [p. 42]

The problem with Madison's assertion is that he is only half right. While science and philosophy tell us that moral sentiments are an innate human quality, the understanding of the relationships among ideas such as beauty, meaning, the good life and the search for truth must be grounded in common instruction and modeling. There is poor comprehension without common history, common conduct or without common or basic knowledge of the aesthetic, experimental and synoptic epistemologies. Indeed, meaning is a team sport.

Is the Pursuit of Truth Possible in a Post-Truth World?

This question is poorly framed. The deeper question is: *is it possible to pursue truth without properly understanding self-interest and its relationship among the concepts of beauty, love, criticism, meaning and common knowledge, conduct and governance?*

If we take seriously the duty, discipline and joy of pursuing truth, the answer must be no. It is not possible.

It is almost laughable to hear people talk about “fact checks,” believing that that will lead to truth. People of the world are generally confused about understanding subtleties between love and sex, eating and dining, talking and communion, science and belief, machines and humans, even among words like humus, Hamas and hummus and on and on. It may seem like we live in a post-truth world, but we really live in a post-enlightened world. People seem to have lost interest in how we can come to know what is true or, for that matter, how we come to know anything. Absent the pursuit of truth, we will never understand how to conduct our lives, nor how we should be governed. These are the questions that should energize the search for truth. In the end, the search for truth is a moral imperative. This search is the creator of the larger human narrative providing perspective, harmony and beauty to people so engaged and giving life a purpose, its point.

Michael Hartoonian is Associate Editor of Pegasus.



Liz Collin Receives The 2023 Dayton Award

The American people do not trust the institutions that sustain their Constitutional Republic. As of last April, 23% of Americans say they trust the government in Washington, D.C. to do what is right “just about always” (2%) or “most of the time” (21%). Last year, 16% said they trusted the government just about always or most of the time, which was among the lowest measures in nearly seven decades of polling. Only 8% of Americans Congress. Only 14% trust television news and 18% trust newspapers. Only 26% trust public schools and the presidency.

Without trust, social capital evaporates. Without social capital, human capital withers.

Without social and human capital, constitutional republics collapse.

Trust emerges when people tell the truth, when what they say can be relied upon.

Telling the truth, then, is necessary for the success of constitutional democracy.

Telling the truth, then, is the moral obligation of leaders in a free society.

For 2023, our board selected from among those nominated Liz Collin of Alpha News to receive the Dayton Award for her documentary, *The Fall of Minneapolis*. In recommending her for the award, she was described as focused on mission, community and government impact, as well as having the vision and prudence of a level 5 leader. She was credited with having a “powerful mixture of personal humility and indomitable will.” “Her ambition is first and foremost for the cause of truth, not for herself.”

The award was presented to her at a lunch at the Minneapolis Club on Wednesday, July 17. Following are some photos from the event.











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