
Almost two thousand years ago (according to the Bible) Pontius Pilate asked the question, “What is truth?” This question remains an open one and today truth is still a central concern or pursuit of science. Higgs and Smith (2002) argue that although rethinking truth is not a new activity the exercise of rethinking truth is pertinent at present because humanity is faced with new realities such as starvation, Aids, illiteracy, serial killings which occur along side sophisticated digital technology, the human genome project, and so on. How we view these realities they argue will determine our responses to them. Also, if we change our views (rethink truth) we will alter the way we respond to the mentioned realities.

In their book Rethinking truth, Higgs and Smith (2002) critically examine truth(s) from/within various philosophical traditions, logical empiricism, hermeneutics, system theory, feminism phenomenology, critical theory, African philosophy, critical rationalism and postmodernism. They also introduce key philosophers/philosophical thinkers (both classical and contemporary) who have produced seminal works vis à vis truth. In my view the book is an excellent introduction to key philosophical perspectives on truth(s), which makes it an appropriate foundational text for all disciplines in the Human, Social and Natural sciences. As an introductory text the book of course does not provide great detail on philosophical works nor does it represent in detail the nuances of the ideas on truth within philosophical traditions. What the text does, however, is to initiate the reader into major philosophical traditions and facilitate their further exploration of philosophical ideas in relation to truth. The text is interactive and therefore is suitable for use by students learning in traditional, as well as in more open and flexible ways. The text makes for an easy read and is accessible to readers for whom English is a second or third language.

Rethinking truth makes the following important contributions: First it provides the reader with philosophical lenses so as to appreciate an array of perspectives on truth. This in turn might serve as a basis for readers to reflect on views of truth which dominate their thinking/lives and in so doing might lead them to rethink truth(s). Second the text opens space for critiquing philosophies underpinning views of truth that are eurocentric and adrocentric. Here I refer to the inclusion of chapters on Feminism and African philosophy. Third the text illustrates how philosophical ideas, in this instance in relation to truth, gives meaning, challenges and impacts on activities of everyday life. Higgs and Smith (2002) competently demonstrate how philosophical thoughts on truth influences critiques and is embedded in activities/concerns such as the money markets, the Aids crisis in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, marriage relationships, and so on. Fifth the text opens up dialogue within and between philosophical traditions. In so doing the authors draw to the attention of readers that philosophical traditions are not monolithic entities that we speak of African philosophies, critical theories, feminisms and postmodernism. Also, that truth claims from/within certain philosophical traditions view perspectives on truth from/within other traditions critically. For example, critical theorists might view truth claims made by logical empiricist as epistemologically flawed and political naive.

In conclusion Rethinking truth helps us to appreciate that truth is a complex area of human understanding, the subject of exploration, speculation and debate. Furthermore, that as human we all hold multiple truth (dis)positions (depending on the context), that we are not unitary rational actors and that our views of reality(ies) are constantly in process. Rethinking truth is a needed foundational text and a product of sound scholarship. I enjoyed reading it.

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REFERENCES