

Writing about Truth

With all my essay assignments, I tell the students they must do three basic things: 1) organize and write well; 2) incorporate significant philosophical material from the course; and, 3) connect it to their life and everyday experience. The following epistemology essay topic offers two contexts in which to write about "truth". I have received some of my most interesting essays from these assignments.

"What is truth?"

Choose one of the following two options. Do some outside research to help you connect the text to your life.

Truth and Law

What do you think a judge means when she says, "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?" Which theory of truth best represents the intent of the judge: the correspondence theory, the coherence theory, or the pragmatic theory? Might a lawyer, a witness, or the accused understand truth differently? Touch on the strengths and weaknesses of the theories in regards to how well they apply to the legal system.

Truth and Art

How might the three theories of truth (correspondence, coherence, pragmatism) explain what we mean by truth when discussing art? Do different types of art express truth in different ways? Can a painting, a poem, or a play be true or false? Is beauty objective or subjective, or neither?

In writing either essay, you may want to consider some of the following questions: Can you know the truth? Can you explain truth? Can you explain a part of truth? Is truth an ideal you aim for but never hit? Can you know truth of some types of knowledge but not others? Is truth objective or subjective? Also, consider the thought pieces at the end of each section to add a twist to your essay. You need not discuss all three theories of truth. If you go into conceptual depth, you may focus on a single theory.