

Truth, Conscience, and the Limits of Scientific Objectivity

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Introduction

In modern discourse, "truth" often defaults to scientific repeatability and empirical evidence. However, such a narrow framework overlooks entire realms of human experience, particularly those tied to history, religion, and moral philosophy. This paper explores the relationship between truth, repeatability, conscience, and science—arguing that a holistic understanding of truth must include both objective and subjective elements. Throughout history, *freedom of thought* has often co-existed within, and sometimes despite, the prevailing religious or secular paradigms or worldviews of the time. Furthermore, we contend that modern education has undermined this balance by suppressing freedom of conscience in favor of a narrow interpretation of science.

Freedom of Conscience: A Foundational Principle

"Freedom of conscience" emerges as a critical starting point. Etymologically, "conscience" derives from the Latin "con-scientia," meaning "with knowledge" or "together with science." Here, "science" refers to the observation of evidence—the very basis of empirical inquiry. Freedom of conscience, then, is the freedom to observe, reflect, and respond to reality in both empirical and moral dimensions.

Conscience encompasses several layers of awareness: a perception of one's surroundings, a moral compass, and a personally held conviction. It is inherently subjective yet deeply informed by objective realities. When education or society imposes a rigid scientific orthodoxy, it compromises this freedom, replacing inquiry with bias.

Objective vs. Subjective: Clarifying the Terms

The terms "objective" and "subjective" are often misunderstood. "Objective" implies a "thing aimed at or sought; a goal"—it suggests an imposition, a demand for a specific result. By contrast, "subjective" involves influence, interpretation, and personal perspective. Both have value, and both are operative in fields as diverse as science and religion.

While *objective* classically means truth independent of personal bias, in practice, it often involves frameworks with predetermined goals. This can limit inquiry, as studies tend to yield results only within the boundaries they define. Thus, objectivity sometimes functions less as neutral observation and more as an imposed direction or expectation.

Science often claims objectivity through repeatability. However, this is not always the case. Many phenomena remain unknown, untested, or untestable—whether due to complexity, rarity, or ethical boundaries. Thus, science can be both objective and subjective, much like religion.

When science presupposes repeatability as the only valid path to truth, it risks invalidating historical or religious truths that are non-repeatable yet observable. For example, a singular historical event, such as the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, cannot be repeated in the lab but may still be examined historically through documents, witness accounts, and effects on culture.

Truth is *not* subject to repeatability when it falls into domains where **unique, non-recurring events** or **subjective experiences** are central. Here are some key areas where this applies:

1. Historical Events

- The **assassination of Abraham Lincoln** happened once. It cannot be repeated.
- We accept it as true based on documents, eyewitness accounts, artifacts, and scholarly consensus.
- Truth here relies on **evidence and coherence**, not repetition.

Truth in history is **reconstructive**, not repeatable.

2. Subjective Experience

- If someone says, “*I felt immense peace during that moment,*” that’s a **truth of experience**.
- You can’t repeat that exact moment with all its emotional and mental context—even if you mimic the external factors.
- Yet, it’s a real truth to the person.

These truths are **introspective and personal**, not empirically reproducible.

3. Singular Art or Literary Interpretations

- A novel like *1984* may evoke a specific interpretation in one context (e.g., post-WWII), but a different one in another (e.g., modern surveillance culture).
- The **truths** drawn from art shift with the viewer’s lens.

Here, truth is **interpretive**—not fixed or subject to strict repetition.

4. Theological or Metaphysical Claims

- Statements like “*God exists*” or “*The soul is eternal*” are not testable through repeated experiment.
- Their truth depends on **faith, tradition, logic, or personal revelation, while sometimes historically verifiable or reconstructible**.

These are **transcendent truths**, often claimed to be timeless, and not empirically verifiable.

5. Moral Judgments

- Saying “*Slavery is wrong*” is a moral truth that doesn’t need repetition to be validated.
- It stands as a principle, even if societies have historically violated it.

Moral truths are often based on **reason, conscience, and collective reflection**, not testability.

So, in short: **Truth is not subject to repeatability when it deals with the unique, the personal, the interpretive, the moral, or the metaphysical.** In these spaces, **truth is often discerned, revealed, or understood—rather than measured or repeated.**

If religion makes **historical claims**—like *the Exodus*, or *the Resurrection (as potentially evidenced by the Shroud of Turin)*—then it should be evaluated, at least in part, like other historical claims. That doesn't mean it has to meet the standards of lab science—it means we look at **textual evidence, witness tradition, cultural continuity, and historical plausibility.** The Resurrection of Jesus, for instance, is not repeatable, but it can be examined **as a historical event with consequences**, like any pivotal moment in time.

The crucial distinction: ***Truth can be non-repeatable yet observable.***

Observation doesn't require repetition—it requires *recognition*. Think of a total solar eclipse. It may not happen often, but when it does, we know what it is. We don't demand that it be repeatable on demand to accept its reality.

Similarly, **religious truth often hinges on singular encounters**—a burning bush, a prophetic vision, a miraculous healing, a transformative spiritual experience. These are *observed* by individuals or communities, and then carried forward through tradition, testimony, and interpretation. They are **not repeatable, but they are remembered**—and sometimes, that memory itself becomes part of the truth.

If religion is to be evaluated honestly, it deserves the **historian's tools**, the **philosopher's logic**, and the **human heart's openness**—not just the scientist's method.

The Fallacy of Exclusive Scientific Presupposition

Rejecting religious or historical truth on the basis that it is non-repeatable constitutes a fallacy. History, by nature, is reconstructive. Events like the signing of the Declaration of Independence or the visions of prophets are not repeatable, yet they are accepted as true based on evidence, coherence, and testimony.

To claim that belief in Jesus Christ lacks objectivity presumes that all truth must be scientific. This presupposition dismisses the observable impact of religious belief on individuals,

cultures, and civilizations. Conversely, if scientific studies are skewed by an ideological agenda—a “thing aimed at”—then the supposed objectivity collapses into subjectivity, and the integrity of the findings is compromised.

Historical Context: From Christendom to the Enlightenment

The foundations of modern science were laid in the intellectual soil of Christendom during the Middle Ages. It was within monastic and cathedral schools—centers of theological and philosophical education—that the earliest forms of empirical inquiry and logical analysis were cultivated. Figures such as Thomas Aquinas and Roger Bacon emphasized that faith and reason are not adversaries but partners in the pursuit of truth. However, with the rise of the Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries, a shift occurred. Enlightenment thinkers, reacting against ecclesiastical abuses and dogmatism, began to elevate reason and empirical science as the sole arbiters of truth. While this movement advanced knowledge in many ways, it also marginalized the moral, spiritual, and historical dimensions of truth, ushering in a form of scientific absolutism that persists in many educational institutions today.

The Crisis of Modern Education: Suppression

Modern education has largely removed the “freedom of conscience” and replaced it with an imposition of scientific bias. This shift has resulted in a one-dimensional understanding of truth. Rather than nurturing students' ability to discern and evaluate both objective data and subjective meaning, education often imposes a framework that excludes moral, religious, or historical insights that do not conform to repeatable methods.

This suppression of conscience leads to a mechanistic worldview, devoid of the rich moral and spiritual dimensions that have historically grounded human culture and identity. Without conscience, education becomes not a path to wisdom, but a system of intellectual compliance. Results are an unhealthy loss of conscience and perspectives.

Conclusion: Reclaiming a Holistic View of Truth

Truth is not the sole domain of repeatable science. It also exists in the singular, the moral, the historical, and the spiritual. To be fully human is to engage with all dimensions of truth—with evidence, with conscience, and with open inquiry.

Reclaiming freedom of conscience means restoring a balanced view of truth—one that embraces both the repeatable and the unique, the objective and the subjective, the empirical and the spiritual. In doing so, we return to a more integrated and authentic understanding of reality.

When we challenge the false dichotomies between science and faith, objectivity and conscience, repeatability and uniqueness, we open the door for a **renewed vision of knowledge**—one that breathes life into both intellect and soul. These insights are a confluence and bring balance to the conversation—*not to tear down science*, but to **restore the wholeness** of human inquiry that taps into the divine source for deeper exploration and connection to the natural. If education can embrace this again, it won't just fix a problem—it will *revive a tradition* that once gave rise to some of humanity's greatest achievements.

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