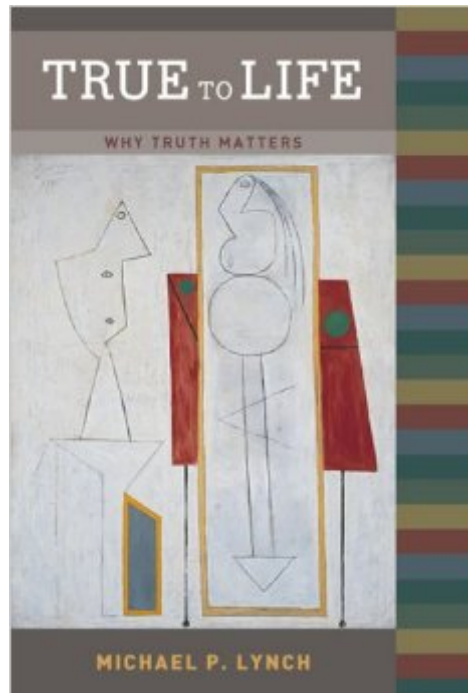


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True To Life: Why Truth Matters (MIT Press)



Synopsis

Why does truth matter when politicians so easily sidestep it and intellectuals scorn it as irrelevant? Why be concerned over an abstract idea like truth when something that isn't true -- for example, a report of Iraq's attempting to buy materials for nuclear weapons -- gets the desired result: the invasion of Iraq? In this engaging and spirited book, Michael Lynch argues that truth does matter, in both our personal and political lives. Lynch explains that the growing cynicism over truth stems in large part from our confusion over what truth is. "We need to think our way past our confusion and shed our cynicism about the value of truth," he writes. "Otherwise, we will be unable to act with integrity, to live authentically, and to speak truth to power." True to Life defends four simple claims: that truth is objective; that it is good to believe what is true; that truth is a goal worthy of inquiry; and that truth can be worth caring about for its own sake, not just because it gets us other things we want. In defense of these "truisms about truth", Lynch diagnoses the sources of our cynicism and argues that many contemporary theories of truth cannot adequately account for its value. He explains why we should care about truth, arguing that truth and its pursuit are part of living a happy life, important in our personal relationships and for our political values.

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Customer Reviews

I suspect my comment comes too late, but, having finished Professor Lynch's book and enjoyed it, I am motivated to write, even if no one reads what I say. Professor Lynch does commit both the naturalistic fallacy and the is/ought fallacy. But he does not conflate them. Indeed the key to his

argument is that he doesn't. Instead he applies a pollster's or psychologist's empirical approach to the "ought" problem. Maybe the better way to put it, he applies a kind of Delphi method to the "ought" problem. But he does not use a naive "intuitionist" or "sentimentalist" approach, as does Hume. Professor Lynch is more thoughtful than that. So Mr. Heersinki's criticism is solid, and would be even more so were he to make the following distinctions in Professor Lynch's methodology. Rather than committing straight-forwardly the naturalistic fallacy, a simple confusion between "is" and "ought," Professor Lynch is more provocative. He repeatedly founds his "ought" statements on what he believes most people think or almost instinctively feel. So he asks if he or we would like to be brains in vats, and he is correct to say neither he nor I nor most of the rest of us (probably) would choose that option. He argues therefore, what most people think is an indication, empirically valuable data, of whether the truth is an objectively existing "ought." In other words, he is saying, "XXX million people must be on to something for them to all feel alike." But it is here he makes a fundamental error, not of logic but of empiricism.

I recently began delving into philosophy and am reading a number of books on philosophical subjects. I read and reviewed the *The Dream Weaver: One Boy's Journey Through the Landscape of Reality* (Anniversary Edition) (2nd Edition) and am currently reading *Sophie's World: A Novel About the History of Philosophy* (FSG Classics) and *The Philosopher's Toolkit: A Compendium of Philosophical Concepts and Methods* (CourseSmart). I firmly believe that philosophy has a lot to offer to get a better understanding of reality and to form sound beliefs. At the same time this new endeavor is a challenge and yet another reason why I should have paid more attention while in college, particularly since I attended Columbia where the required core curriculum course *Contemporary Civilization* covered all of the major works in the subject. *True to Life* attempts to make the case that not only is truth something good to strive for its own sake but also something necessary for a well-functioning liberal society. For each of his own arguments, Lynch presents possible opposing views as well as his refutations to those views. Overall, I think he makes a convincing case that the pursuit of truth is necessary because it is both instrumentally good and because it is good for its own sake.

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