

# 1. The Value of Truth

*Without truth, there is no genuine freedom and fulfillment.*<sup>i</sup> – Os Guinness

*The creep of post-truth is seen in how we gather information about the world to conform to what we want to be true, not to what actually is true.*<sup>ii</sup>

– Abdu Murray

*All too often, the things you want you don't need, and the thing you need, you simply don't want.*<sup>iii</sup> – Dr. Dennis Swanberg

“Jump in; let’s get on the road! The route we are driving has been reported to have many curves and hills, but I chose to believe it is straight and flat, so we should be fine. Sit back and relax. I have set the cruise control at eighty miles per hour, so we should arrive at our destination shortly...”

Yes, we can all agree it would be foolish to believe a winding road is straight and set the cruise control accordingly. But is it not just as foolish to indulge in selfish pursuits and assume we will not regret it? Or fabricate and support any other lie we imagine will make us feel better?

Has avoiding the truth not always been a cruel and disappointing road to travel?

I think we can agree we had better maintain an open mind to the truth and bravely pursue it. Is anything as secure as confidently standing on the solid ground of certainty? And is anything as repulsive as struggling through the swamp of falsehoods and error?

If we hold conflicting ideas we cannot both be correct, even if we convince ourselves we are right. Considering the countless contradicting opinions that abound, we can note that many people who are sure they are right are quite wrong. That could be us.

One might wonder, “If it is possible to know the truth about life, why are there so many contradicting opinions?”

Are diverse views not often the result of people (especially those who are highly influential) refusing to accept ideas that contradict what they want to think? This leaves them and those influenced by them with a dreadfully distorted perspective.

Many people attempt to avoid any truth that does not align with what they want to believe. These folks are not afraid to call what they want to think a fact, regardless of reality. Will we find the truth if our preferred view is more important to us than facts?

I also fight this tendency. I must repeatedly remind myself that accepting reality will be far more rewarding than believing only what I want to think.

How about you? Are you willing to discredit desirable opinions for the sake of truth?

Taking a thorough and honest look at a view that does not interest us is certainly challenging. Jonathan Swift wrote, “*Reasoning itself is true and just, but the reasoning of every man is weak and wavering, perpetually swayed and turned by his interest, his passions, and his vices.*”<sup>iv</sup> What we want to believe can easily influence our reasoning. No wonder folks are confused about reality when it is so common to allow our preferences to distort our view of the truth.

In *Time for Truth*, Os Guinness mentions, “*Truth is true even if nobody believes it, and falsehood is false even if everybody believes it. That is why truth does not yield to opinion, fashion, numbers, office, or sincerity—it is simply true and that is the end of it. ... In this modern age, more and more people are all surface, skills, and résumé—and no character. ... By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was widely accepted that old notions such as ‘true self’ had gone the way of common-sense reality.*”<sup>v</sup>

In his blog, Steve Simms shared, “*The exaltation of desire is leading our culture to sacrifice truth, reason, and conscience. It takes courage to be awakened enough to search for truth when the truth doesn’t contain what we desire.*”<sup>vi</sup>

For myself, I have clamored after my desires and tasted the discontentment that accompanies those who ignore the truth. At other times, I have pursued truth without reserve and experienced the resulting blessing of security and assurance of locating an accurate explanation. Oh, that I would never step away from the truth again. But I still get caught up in myself at times and once again enter that loathsome, despondent condition that accompanies such action.

If we are unwilling to accept the truth at any cost, we are unlikely to possess it. The Bible says, “*Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.*” (Proverbs 26:12) and also, “*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*” (1 Corinthians 10:12). Do these quotes not suggest if we are not open to the idea we might be wrong about what we believe, then we probably are wrong?

Will a display of evidence ever convince those unwilling to believe it? Barry Leventhal pointed out, “*There are none who are as deaf as those who do not want to hear.*”<sup>vii</sup> Blaise Pascal also noted, “*Truth is so obscure in these times, and falsehood so established, that unless we love the truth, we cannot know it.*”<sup>viii</sup>

Emotions can also be a hindrance when searching for the truth. Our emotions are unstable and inconsistent. For example, if Jim gets angry at his dog, Rover, and decides it would be nice to put Rover to sleep forever, does that make it right to do so? Should Jim kill Rover because his emotions tell him it would make him feel better?

Part of the reason we are confused is that we believe and act based on how we feel about things. Thus, for example, because Jane and her husband Jake’s emotions differ on some issues, they decide to get a divorce.

No matter how real, our emotions will never change reality. But that does not mean we cannot trust our sense of affection towards our friends. Although we cannot trust our feelings as a rule, we still need to consider them.

Some people may confidently retain their viewpoint, not out of self-confidence or emotion, but because they never considered that they might be wrong. Many people believe what their peers say without questioning the credibility of the information.

It is also the general environment that many folks are in that trains them to fend for themselves and avoid inconvenient truths.

Everybody makes mistakes, and it takes courage to admit our errors and pursue correct alternatives. Many times when I was sure my view was right, someone showed me I was wrong after all. For such reasons, it is best to recognize that on these controversial subjects, we could be wrong even when we think we have it figured out.

We humans have no desires that were not intended to be filled. Every craving we experience has a solution, and avoiding that remedy will only bring us despair. To find peace, we must accept reality and respond accordingly.

There are many contradicting views to be believed by anyone who will listen. The only sure method of locating truth is to dedicate ourselves to reality, no matter how revolting and challenging it may appear.

Many people find the truth intimidating, and I must admit it is not for cowards. Although accepting the facts is difficult, it is a vital step we must take on our journey toward locating the fulfillment we crave. I assure you, friend, the resulting serenity of having no bias to defend will be worth every effort.

I have discovered that unbiasedly standing for truth can lead to a coveted state of contentment available to everyone. However, submitting to the truth's authority can be a significant challenge.

We know many people avoid inconvenient truths as much as possible, and many are not feeling fulfilled. Thus, is it not likely the solution to our plight appears scary at a glance, causing folks to avoid the very thing they desire?

In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis suggests, "*Comfort is the one thing you cannot get by looking for it. If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end: if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth, only soft soap and wishful thinking, to begin with, and in the end, despair.*"<sup>ix</sup>

We must brave up and face our fear; seeking relief from our problems by drinking Red Bull, smoking, or doing drugs will not help us here.

(To read more on finding truth in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, check out Abdu Murray's book *Saving Truth*.)

### **The World's Deadliest Disaster—The Me-Virus Pandemic**

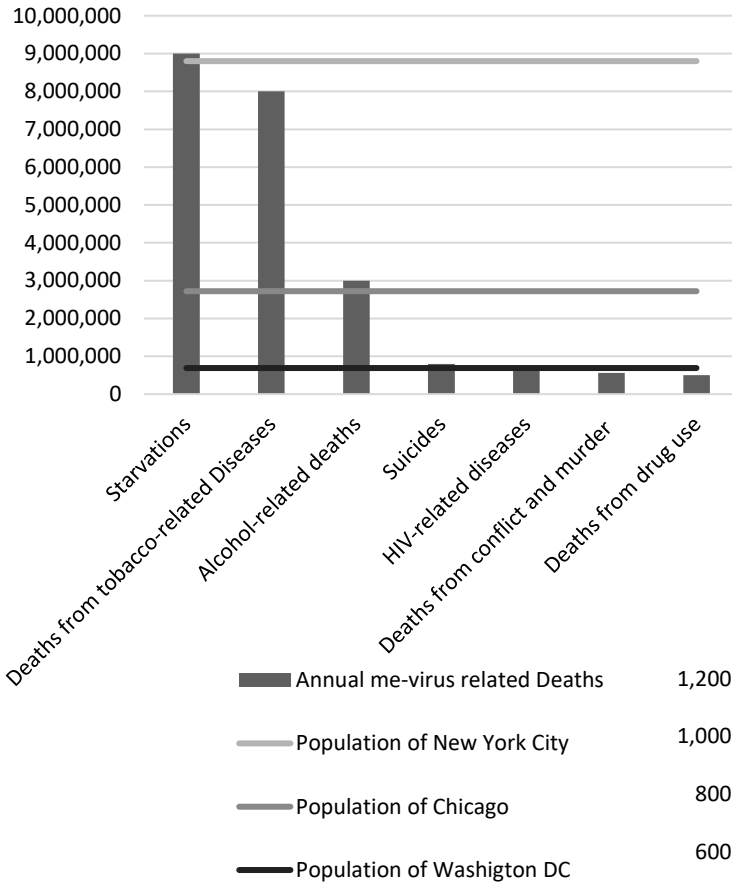
By defending the ideas we want to support and ignoring the ones we would rather not find, we can disregard the inconvenient facts in exchange for preferred opinions. Abdu Murray shares, "*The answers to life's questions no longer need to correspond to reality. They need only cater to our desires.*"<sup>x</sup> And Charles Caleb Colton noted, "*Men have discovered it is far more convenient to adulterate the truth than to refine themselves.*"<sup>xi</sup>

Multitudes seek and indulge in wealth, fame, thrill, and immorality, taking minimal consideration for the people around them as they pursue what they imagine will make them happy. We will refer to these people as me-folks because of their self-centered attitude, and we will refer to this attitude as the me-virus. This restless sensation of self-love has been moving through humanity for thousands of years. Indeed, have we not all been me-virus infected at some point?

Over the centuries, billions have suffered severe emotional and physical injury as me-folks brush past them in their rampant pursuit of personal desires.

Research revealed that over a third of the 60 million annual human deaths may result from selfishness, and millions more suffer me-virus-related agony. Below are some statistics on self-centered-related deaths and suffering. (I understand these cases are not all a direct product of the me-virus; still, these numbers help illustrate how prevalent and destructive greed is.)

## Me-virus related Deaths Compared to the Population of Three American Cities.



murder are around 560,000.<sup>xvi</sup> (That is not to mention conflict-related suffering...)

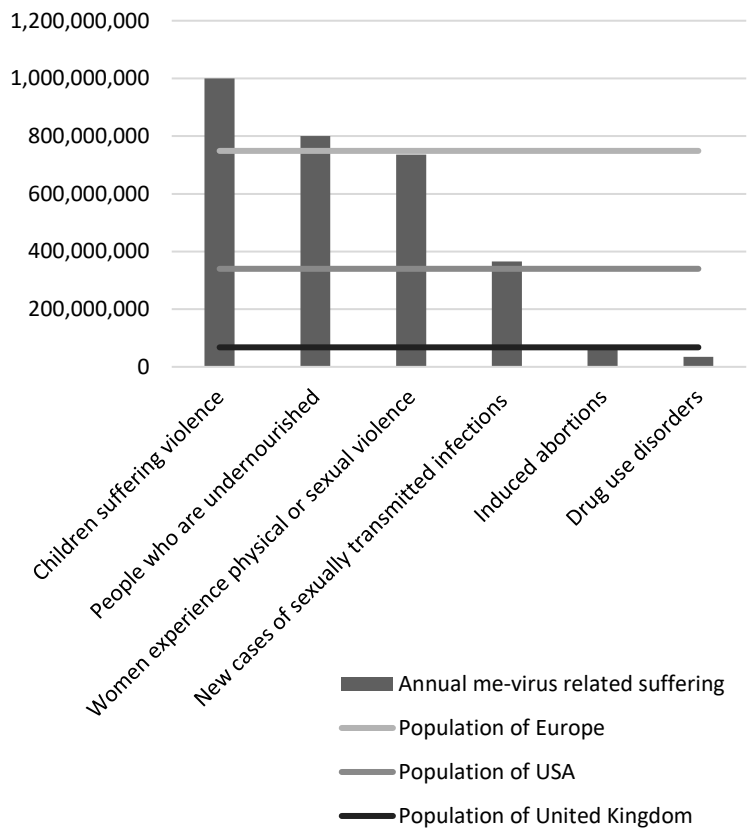
- About 500,000 deaths are due to drug use.<sup>xvii</sup>
- There are three million annual alcohol-related deaths.<sup>xviii</sup>
- About 45 percent of all marriages end in divorce.<sup>xix</sup>

Other deaths and suffering, of which the connection to selfishness may be more controversial, include:

- Eight million annual deaths occur from tobacco-related diseases. (1.2 million are from second-hand smoke.)<sup>xx</sup>

- There are nine million annual starvations, and 800 million people are undernourished.<sup>xii</sup> (That makes up 11 percent of the world's population.)
- Each year, one billion children suffer violence.<sup>xiii</sup>
- Each year, about 736 million women experience physical or sexual violence.<sup>xiv</sup>
- About 73 million induced abortions take place each year.<sup>xv</sup>
- Annual deaths from conflict and

## Me-virus related Suffering Compared to the Population of Three Major Regions.



- There are 800,000 suicides annually.<sup>xxi</sup>
- There are about 365 million new cases of sexually transmitted infections each year. (That is one million new cases each day.)<sup>xxii</sup> And there are 650,000 deaths per year from HIV-related diseases.<sup>xxiii</sup>
- Over 35 million people suffer from drug use disorders.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Thus, we find ourselves in the middle of a global and persistent me-virus pandemic.

The more one thinks about it, the more one realizes the seriousness and urgency of this frightful situation. Upon consideration, can you think of any intentional crime or heated dispute that did not likely result from an uncontrolled case of the me-virus? Is this circumstance not the root cause of political unrest, social division, family contention, and poverty? This makes the me-virus the most widespread and destructive epidemic in history.

(Is this self-centered appetite not part of our genetic makeup? But that fact does not mean we cannot overcome it. With God's help, we can rise above any less-than-ideal mindset or attitude.)

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<sup>i</sup> Os Guinness, *Time for Truth* (p. 85). Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.

<sup>ii</sup> Abdu Murray, *Saving Truth* (p. 17). Zondervan, 2018.

<sup>iii</sup> Dr. Dennis Swanberg & Ron Smith, *The Man Code* (p.27). Worthy Publishers, 2009.

<sup>iv</sup> Dr. Jonathan Swift, *Miscellanies. The Tenth Volume*, (ed. 1745).

<sup>v</sup> Os Guinness, *Time for Truth*, (pp. 79–80). Grand Rapids: Baker. 2000

<sup>vi</sup> <https://hopethoughts.com/2022/06/30/desire-doesnt-require-obedience/>

<sup>vii</sup> It is not known where this quote was said.

<sup>viii</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées (Thoughts)*. Digireads.com Publishing, 2018 (ed. 1910).

<sup>ix</sup> C. S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*, (p. 66). HarperOne, 2009 (First published in 1952).

<sup>x</sup> Abdu Murray, *Saving Truth*, (p. 23). Zondervan, 2018.

<sup>xi</sup> Charles Caleb Colton, *Lacon*. Hardpress, 2018.

<sup>xii</sup> <https://www.who.int/news/item/12-07-2021-un-report-pandemic-year-marked-by-spike-in-world-hunger>

<sup>xiii</sup> <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/child-maltreatment/global-status-report-on-violence-against-children-2020/who-gsrpvac-2020-magnitude-consequences-infographic-en.pdf>

<sup>xiv</sup> <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2021-devastatingly-pervasive-1-in-3-women-globally-experience-violence>

<sup>xv</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abortion>

<sup>xvi</sup> <https://www.who.int/news/item/29-11-2022-who-urges-more-effective-prevention-of-injuries-and-violence--causing-1-in-12-deaths-worldwide/>

<sup>xvii</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/opioid-overdose>

<sup>xviii</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/alcohol>

<sup>xix</sup> <https://btlfamilylaw.com/divorce-statistics/>

<sup>xx</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco>

<sup>xxi</sup> <https://ourworldindata.org/suicide>

<sup>xxii</sup> [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sexually-transmitted-infections-\(stis\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sexually-transmitted-infections-(stis))

<sup>xxiii</sup> <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/number-of-deaths-due-to-hiv-aids>

<sup>xxiv</sup> <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/press/releases/2020/June/media-advisory---global-launch-of-the-2020-world-drug-report.html>