

# **TRUTH, THE REAL, AND REALITY**

## **A Journey Beyond Reality: The Boundaries of Truth and the Real**



**Emrah BOZKURT**

May 2025

## **Abstract**

This article aims to reveal the differences between the concepts of “truth, the real, and reality” by examining them on etymological, ontological, and epistemological levels. *Truth* represents what is absolute, universal, and unchanging; *the real* refers to what can be experienced within a particular context; and *reality* expresses the relative perceptions constructed by an individual’s mental frameworks. Truth exists on a transcendental plane inaccessible to the human mind and points to an absolute form of existence that can only be associated with God. The real, on the other hand, is perceived through the senses and exists on a phenomenal plane that can vary depending on context. Reality is a temporary and pluralistic system of knowledge built through subjective mental models. In this regard, the human relationship with knowledge is not a pursuit of absolute truths but an effort to model reality through interpretive processes.

**Keywords:** Metaphysics, Philosophy, Truth, The Real, Reality, Ontology, Epistemology, Phenomenology, Paradigm, Mind, God, Objective, Subjective, Objectivity, Subjectivity, Theory of Knowledge

## Introduction

Throughout history, the human mind has produced numerous concepts in its effort to understand existence, and through these concepts, it has attempted to approach truth. Some of these concepts are often used interchangeably, yet they actually refer to vastly different planes: *truth*, *the real*, and *reality*. Each offers a distinct perspective regarding the source, limits, and nature of knowledge. These distinctions are not merely conceptual; they also become evident on ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological levels. For this reason, it is essential to define and position these concepts in accordance with their essence in the process of making sense of existence, knowledge, and perception.

This article aims to clarify the boundaries between these three concepts by examining them both etymologically and philosophically. *Truth* denotes what is unchanging and absolute; *the real* indicates what is valid within a specific context; and *reality* refers to the relative representation constructed by the individual mind. In this way, it will be demonstrated that the human relationship with knowledge is shaped not through fixed constants but through interpretive and multilayered structures.

## Truth (Hakikat)

The word *hakikat* derives from the Arabic root “**hak**”, which carries meanings such as “to be true, to be fixed, unchanging, to be just.” The term is commonly used to denote the “absolute truth.” In this sense, *truth* represents an existence that is unchanging, independent of time and space, universal, and absolute. Truth is understood not only as the correctness of what is true, but also as the fixed, just, and internally coherent form of being itself.

Viewed in this way, truth has often been approached within a metaphysical plane in philosophical thought, because it emphasizes an “absoluteness” that transcends the sensory and the experiential. In my view, neither the earthly realm nor the human intellect can directly access this absolute plane. The human mind is epistemologically limited. It can make sense of the world it observes only through knowledge—that is, through mental images, concepts, and experiences. Since this process of understanding always involves transformation, interpretation, and mental construction, reaching absolute knowledge directly is impossible.

Truth expresses what is fixed, unchanging, and valid under all circumstances. Yet as human beings, we observe that the world we live in and our systems of thought are in constant change and transformation. Existence itself is always in a state of becoming. For this reason, we can only grasp “relative constants” within this becoming; but we can never be entirely certain whether these are absolute constants.

Within this framework, we can only approach truth through what may be called *a priori* knowledge—knowledge considered necessary and universal independent of experience. Logical truths such as “the part is smaller than or equal to the whole” or fundamental principles like “something cannot both exist and not exist at the same time” may be counted among these. Yet even these are philosophically open to debate regarding whether they belong to the level of absolute truth.

For this reason, truth must be seen as a form of reality that exists outside of us and on a plane that transcends us. In this context, I hold the view that truth is identical with God. Only a being that has created all existence can contain within itself the absolute knowledge of all existence. The idea that God is the cause and sustainer of everything positions Him as the very essence of absolute truth. For human beings, approaching truth becomes possible through turning toward this absolute being and approximating His knowledge; yet even this does not mean that truth can ever be fully comprehended.

## **The Real (Gerçek)**

The word *gerçek* derives from the Old Turkic verb meaning “to see” and carries the meanings “that which is visible” and “that which exists.” As a term, it refers to entities or situations that can be perceived through the senses, verified through experience, and possess a specific spatiotemporal context. Philosophically, the real belongs to the phenomenal plane—meaning it gains significance within the realm of phenomena that are perceived, observed, and experienced by consciousness.

The real is often evaluated within a phenomenological context. A *phenomenon* is something that appears in consciousness, is experienced, and is represented through perception. Therefore, what we call “the real” emerges through the relationship the subject establishes with objects via the senses and various instruments. This relationship is empirical—based on experience. For this reason, knowledge of the real is formed through the combination of observation, experiment, and social consensus. Although it may appear objective and universal, it is always tied to a particular temporal and spatial context; thus, it carries a changeable and transformable character.

At this point, it can be said that knowledge of the real is, by its nature, valid but not absolute. The real expresses knowledge that is valid within a particular paradigm and a particular era. When the paradigm shifts—for example, as in the transition from *Newtonian physics to quantum physics*—the definition and perception of the real also change. Therefore, the real exists not at the level of *noumenon* but at the level of *phenomenon*. The noumenon, in the Kantian sense, refers to the “thing-in-itself,” which exists prior to and beyond experience and carries a meaning closer to truth; yet what we call the real cannot access this level.

Ontologically, the real is the experienceable aspect of what exists. Epistemologically, it is one of the ways through which knowledge is reached. However, it is crucial not to overlook that knowledge itself is the product of an interpretive process. When humans assign meaning to the real they experience, they always do so from within a particular paradigm. This perspective—the epistemological framework itself—directly affects the knowledge obtained. This means that knowledge of the real is never independent of context; on the contrary, it is shaped by it.

Regularities that recur consistently, such as the laws of nature, may be considered “fundamental constants.” Likewise, certain patterns observed in human and social behavior fall into this category. Yet even such constancies are not absolute, because they are created. A law of nature may be valid today but may lose its validity under different cosmic conditions. Here the distinction between what is valid and what is absolute becomes clear: the real is what is valid; truth is what is unchanging and absolute.

In this sense, the real is not a representation of absolute truth; rather, it is a type of knowledge that seeks to approach it and traces its signs within the phenomenal plane. It is a level of knowledge derived from phenomenological experience, empirically verifiable, but always contextual.

## **Reality (Gerçeklik)**

Reality is, at its core, an individual, subjective, and epistemological construction process. Every individual interprets ontologically existing objects, events, and phenomena within their own mental framework, and this process of interpretation is determined by the epistemological paradigm the individual possesses. In this respect, reality can be explained through a phenomenological attitude. That is, we look at the world of phenomena—*the world of appearances perceived through our senses*—but never in its pure form; rather, we construct it through the conceptual networks within our own minds.

This constructive process is shaped by a person's level of knowledge, conceptual capacity, and breadth of perspective. Therefore, each individual models the external world through their own mental categories and attributes reality to these models. We can never directly access "the things themselves." What we access is the phenomenal reality we construct within our minds.

Thus, reality becomes not an absolute existence but a temporary and relative structure. Knowledge that gains validity within a specific time, place, and paradigm is accepted as reality for that moment. However, this validity can transform as paradigms shift over time. For this reason, reality is not fixed but fluid, dynamic, and plural.

The reason societies construct shared realities lies in common experiences, similar epistemic structures, and cultural codes shaped through collective consciousness. Individuals exposed to similar phenomena develop similar mental models and thereby construct a shared reality. Yet this does not mean that the reality formed in each individual's mind is identical.

Individuals with broader perspectives and access to multiple paradigms can approach reality from more dimensions, allowing them to construct models closer to the real. At this point, epistemological pluralism becomes essential. If an individual adheres solely to one epistemological framework, their reality remains confined to that framework. In contrast, a person nourished by different disciplines and paradigms can model the external world in a more holistic way.

In this sense, reality is not merely a mental representation of the outside world; it is also a reflection of the individual's mental structure. And this reflection is directly related to the *logos*, the capacity for generating meaning.

To illustrate this mental modeling process further, consider how two people exposed to the same physical event may perceive and interpret it differently. A physicist and an artist do not see the same sky. The artist may notice the aesthetic structure of the clouds or the dance of light with color, while the physicist may think about atmospheric density, light refraction, or meteorological data. The phenomenon is the same, but the perception of reality differs, because each interprets the world through different epistemological foundations.

This shows that reality is directly connected to the conceptual map within an individual's mind. Some people construct reality primarily through emotional intuition, others through analytical reasoning, and still others through religious or mystical assumptions. Thus, a person's epistemic tools determine how they produce reality. For example, for a mystic, "reality" may not be the sensory world but a spiritual truth reached through inner intuition. For a positivist, reality is confined to what is measurable and testable.

From this perspective, attempting to define reality as absolute is essentially declaring one's own epistemic position as universal. But accepting that reality is a constructed structure provides a much more inclusive philosophical approach. In this case, no individual's reality is wholly "right" or "wrong"; it is meaningful only within its own context.

Reality is also connected to the functional aspect of the mind. The human mind seeks to perceive the world as an orderly and meaningful whole. Therefore, the mind processes raw data not randomly but by organizing it into meaningful structures. We form concepts, categories, and causal relationships. This shows us that reality is essentially an organized process of "narrativization." The mind makes sense of the external world by turning it into a narrative. For this reason, everyone's reality is, in a sense, a "story" written within their own mind. But these stories are woven through the individual's education level, social background, experiences, and worldview.

For instance, a child who interprets an earthquake as "the wrath of a giant under the ground" is creating a mental model just as a geologist interpreting it through fault-line movements is. One model is mythological; the other is scientific. Both are meaningful within their own epistemological contexts. And these differences also show how collective perceptions of reality are shaped.

Finally, this diversity offers us an important insight: the healthiest way to approach the real is not to absolutize our own model, but to develop a pluralistic understanding that can take different epistemological positions into account. The model that is "closest" to the real is the one built from the broadest perspective, nourished by the most data, and filtered through the greatest number of paradigms. And even this model is never complete; it is a continually reconstructed and evolving structure—and I argue that this ongoing reconstruction is made possible through philosophy.

## Differences

Although *truth* (hakikat), *fact/reality-as-event* (gerçek), and *perceived reality* (gerçeklik) are often used in very similar ways, in philosophical and epistemological contexts there are quite distinct differences between them.

**Truth** refers fundamentally to what is unchanging and absolute. It expresses a plane that is independent of all subjective interpretations and individual perceptions—beyond time and space. It is the state of existence as it is in itself, its "being what it is." For example, if God exists, then God's existence is a truth. It does not depend on human perception or understanding. Truth exists independently of the human mind, yet the human being cannot access it directly—only attempt to understand or interpret it.

**Fact (gerçek)**, on the other hand, is the form in which truth becomes visible within time, space, and context. It has a more concrete and observable structure. Still, a fact is something a person can directly experience or witness. For instance, when we say “it is raining today,” this is a physical fact. A fact may reflect truth, but it is still limited and subject to change depending on context.

Now let us come to **reality (gerçeklik)**. Reality is the perceptual and conceptual structure formed in the individual’s mind—an interpreted version of the external world shaped by mental models. It is the world constructed through processing external data with one’s knowledge, conceptual framework, perception, and epistemological background. Reality is essentially a mental representation or model of the outside world.

We can clarify these three concepts with an example:

- **Truth (Hakikat):** The existence of the Sun and its physical properties are, at the level of existence, a truth.
- **Fact (Gerçek):** The Sun rising at eight o’clock today is a fact.
- **Reality (Gerçeklik):** A farmer interpreting the sunrise as “productivity,” a poet as “inspiration,” and a physicist as “a source of light” are examples of their individual realities.

Here an important point emerges: Although the human being cannot directly access truth, they witness facts—and through these facts they construct their own reality. We build a mental world by looking at the reflections of truth. This constructive process is shaped by our level of knowledge and our perception. In other words, *we* construct reality; it is a model formed within our minds.

In conclusion, the human being plays an active role in the stage of reality. Because reality is directly related to how the individual perceives, interprets, and mentally structures the external world. Truth and fact may exist independently of the individual, but reality is formed through human participation. Therefore, every individual’s reality is unique, singular. And through these constructed realities we communicate, try to understand the world, and shape our lives.

## **Truth, Reality, and the Mind: Intuitive Contact**

In this article, the possibility of human access to truth is discussed within the framework of the relationship and distinctions between the concepts of truth, the real, and reality. The main thesis is that reality is perceived as an individual and subjective phenomenon that the human being constructs through an epistemological framework shaped by both the external world and the inner world. In this context, reality is formed not by directly grasping ontological entities but through mental models and systems of knowledge.

The concept of truth, on the other hand, is a higher level of being and knowledge that lies beyond the veil of reality. It is acknowledged that the human mind cannot directly reach or fully comprehend this level. Due to epistemological limitations and mental structures, human beings cannot transcend their own constructed reality and therefore cannot directly experience truth.

However, an important exception can be mentioned here: intuitive experiences. Intuition emerges in the mind as an instantaneous and sharp spark of awareness; in this momentary experience, one may come into indirect contact with truth. This contact is not a mystical acquisition of direct knowledge but can be described as a phenomenological moment of comprehension—akin to a flash of lightning. The experience itself is a temporary and limited state of awareness within human consciousness.

The data gained through intuitive contact loses its truth-quality as it is transformed into knowledge through the epistemological framework and instead becomes a part of the individual's model of reality. Thus, the moment of contact with truth evolves from objective truth into subjective reality through the process of being converted into knowledge. This demonstrates that while truth itself is inaccessible to humans, momentary and limited contact is still possible through intuitive experience.

Human efforts to access truth are ultimately unsuccessful in the absolute sense due to epistemological limitations. Yet, momentary and limited states of awareness through intuition are possible. These moments may enrich one's perception of reality, but they do not amount to a direct grasp of truth. Human beings play an active role in constructing reality; they do not experience truth, but rather the reality shaped within their own epistemological boundaries.

## **Conclusion**

Although the concepts of truth, the real, and reality are often intertwined both in our intellectual world and in our language, they in fact correspond to different levels of knowledge and layers of existence. "Truth" represents that which exists on an absolute and transcendent plane, inaccessible to the human mind; this plane, which can be associated with the knowledge of God, points to the unchanging essence of existence. "The real" refers to phenomenal modes of existence that humans can perceive with their senses and verify through experience, yet are subject to change depending on time and context. "Reality," on the other hand, is the variable and subjective representational layer constructed by the individual's mental models; this plane, shaped by the individual's epistemological capacity, is also influenced by social and cultural interactions.

These distinctions are not merely terminological; they are also the key to developing a deeper understanding of the human relationship with existence, knowledge, and meaning. For knowledge to be interpreted in a coherent and meaningful way, the boundaries and depths of these concepts must be correctly grasped. Therefore, this text emphasizes the necessity of consciously distinguishing these three concepts both in personal intellectual practice and in academic language.