

Searching for—and finding—necessary truths, or, in other words, metaphysics, is not the same as “escaping from time and history.” A truth is necessary only if it characterizes time and history as such, otherwise not.

Moreover, our human knowledge of the necessary is not itself necessary in the same sense. If we arrive at a correct understanding of the necessary, this is a contingent achievement, conditioned by historical factors, even as the same is true if our understanding is mistaken. Mistakes can be made even in arithmetic, how much more so in metaphysics. Knowledge of necessary truths is not infallible except in the divine case, which is infallible with respect to contingent as well as necessary truths. Human knowledge, by radical contrast, is fallible with respect to knowledge of both types of truths. There is a very important difference between the logical necessity of the proposition and the epistemological certainty of our knowledge of it.

Also, by their very logic, contingent truths cannot be deduced from necessary truths alone; therefore, necessary truths cannot be “foundational” for contingent truths in that sense.

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There seem to be only three possible positions:

- (1) There are no necessary truths.
- (2) There are necessary truths, but we cannot reasonably know them or sensibly search for them.
- (3) There are necessary truths, and we can—to some extent, or with whatever qualifications as to precision and certainty—sensibly search for them.

Against (1), one can urge the principle of contrast, arguing that “contingent truths” loses its meaning if “necessary truths” has no application.

Moreover, the necessary is easily explicated as what all possibilities have in common, or what will obtain no matter what possibilities are actualized. And it seems extravagant to suppose that possibilities have nothing at all in common.

If one accepts (2), one implicitly admits that we do not know what we are talking about when we speak of contingent, in contrast to necessary, truths.

(3) is evidently the most credible. This may be missed by some because the necessary (eternal, absolute, ultimate) has been badly misconceived as “the most real,” instead of as the extreme abstraction it really is.

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