

We need a concept of truth in order to distinguish good opinions from bad. True, we employ other concepts than "true/false" to do this, such as "justified/unjustified," "reasonable/unreasonable," "based/not based on evidence." But these other concepts are all linked to "true/false." We think it's good to have some evidence for our beliefs *because* we think beliefs based on evidence are more likely to be true.

But if having a concept of truth allows us to sort correct from incorrect beliefs or opinions, it evidently has an important social and political value. It allows us to think that something might be correct or incorrect even if others and especially those in power disagree. On the other hand, without the concept, we wouldn't be able to distinguish between what others and especially those in power say is the case and what really is the case. We would lack the very idea of standing up for truth over against others and especially speaking truth to power.

Liberalism traditionally is concerned that government treat all citizens with equal respect. But critics of liberalism as well as "relativistic liberals" themselves have argued that liberalism doesn't require an objective notion of truth, "truth" being, as they say, just whatever passes for truth in one's shared community. The question, then, is whether, on the contrary, the traditional liberal concern for equal respect for all citizens requires a concept of objective truth and a concern for it.

Clearly, the liberal conception of equal respect for all requires a system of rights, including fundamental rights that are matters of principle rather than simply of policy. Such fundamental rights are fundamental just because they can't be taken away whenever a government—or a majority—decides it would be convenient to do so. But, then, a necessary condition of there being fundamental rights is that there be a distinction between what the government or the majority may believe to be so and what really is so. Then, too, a necessary condition for people to *believe* they have such rights is that they also believe that there is a difference between what the government or the majority believes and what really is so.

(Tracking the main argument of the last chapter of Michael Lynch,
True to Life)