

Lesson Three: Our Religious Impulse

Does evidence have to be 'tangible' to be of value? Is it possible to 'know' something without proving it 'scientifically'? Is 'religious' knowledge of lesser value than 'hard' knowledge?

Can We Ever Really Know Anything For Sure?

A Truth Statement

That which corresponds to reality.

Can we ever really KNOW anything? Is it possible that we are all dreaming, or really living inside the 'Matrix'? What are the ways that we can KNOW things? And, more to the point, what is Truth and can it be known?

In this modern age, we sometimes assume that we can only KNOW what is 'testable'. But is that true? Can I KNOW something outside of the 'Scientific Method'?

Absolutely! There are many things that we can know beyond the testable and the provable / disprovable—things that are **SELF EVIDENT**. Here are a few examples:

-**Mathematics**: We do not need to test to know that $2+2=4$. There is no possibility that $2+2=5$, no matter how many ways I test it, or how often. There is no need to prove it or disprove it!

-**Internal Knowledge**: I know that I exist. I also know what I ate this morning, and that I love my wife. Any evidence you show me to disprove what I assert that I ate this morning is not accepted, because I KNOW what I ate this morning! It is a result of 'internal knowledge'.

Logical Propositions—There are many logical propositions that can be known without proving them. They are true, and can be known, by definition. For example: 'A' does not equal 'non-A' (e.g. I know that this chair is not this table.)

Ethical Propositions—I KNOW that there are things that are wrong, and that there are things that are right. A common example is that 'torturing babies for fun is wrong'. This is innate; we just know it to be true.

Faith Is At The Root Of All Knowledge

Last week we learned that faith is synonymous with 'trust'. Properly understood, this gives us insight into our pursuit of Truth. Yet many insist to only trust facts that are obtained by use of the Scientific Method. However as exemplified above, this is clearly NOT the only source of Truth. In addition, the Scientific Method is ONLY qualified to examine Truth claims that are 'material' (testable in the natural world. It by definition cannot test for Supernatural Truth.)

The Scientific Method

- 1) Observe a phenomenon
- 2) Formulate a hypothesis
- 3) Make predictions
- 4) Test the predictions

A Study in Christian Apologetics – What We Believe & Why

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But while the Scientific Method is invaluable, and certainly has its place in the pursuit of Truth, we must realize that it is itself based upon FAITH! The pursuit of science relies upon several accepted axioms – each unprovable by using the Scientific Method. Yet the Scientific Method relies (trusts) on them to work! Just like in geometry class, there exist several ‘self evident’ truths that Scientists must assume in order to advance knowledge – yet they cannot be ‘proven’. Attempting to prove them by utilizing the scientific method would be circular (in effect using science to prove science.) Take any of these assumptions away, and the Scientific Method fails. Some examples of the assumptions of science are:

- That truth exists
- A world exists independent of our theories, that we can test
- The reliability of our senses to tell us what we are observing
- The orderly nature of the external world
- The adequacy of language to describe our findings
- The use of values in investigation (test fairly, report honestly)

So What Do We Do If We Cannot ‘Prove’ Anything?

In a word, we TRUST. We have to step out with properly placed assumptions, or we could not live a life of normalcy. Obviously included in these assumptions are ‘supernatural’ items (things that we trust outside of the Scientific Method.) The question now becomes: ‘what are the proper assumptions?’ And, in our pursuit of Truth, ‘how does God fit into this picture?’ Can we ‘know’ that God exists? Since we know now that we are not limited to the Scientific Method, can we utilize our ‘internal’ knowledge to help ‘prove’ the existence of God?

A Consideration of the Human Condition

Our pursuit of Truth can be started with an understanding of the nature of humanity, which comes largely from ‘internal knowledge’. See if the following sounds familiar to you...

- Everyone wants to make sense of our existence. This is our religious impulse.
- We feel that we have some kind of moral significance to our lives.
- We have lots of troubles that face us in our lives that keep us from being ‘happy.’ These include sickness, betrayal, limits to our willpower, war, and finally death!!
- We realize that we are amazing creatures when we consider design and functions. We also realize that there is much more to us than that which seems physical - we usually call it our soul. There seems to be more than just the ‘physical’ world around us that someone can test or measure, and this ‘soul’ is one example.
- Despite our complexity and wonder, we are still concerned with the dark sides of ourselves and of the world, and would like to eliminate them if possible.
- When we consider all of the above items, we sometimes wonder ponder the eternal question: ‘why.’ Why are we here?; Indeed, why does the whole world exist at all?

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-We intuitively know, and see evidentially everyday, that everything has a beginning – and this must apply even to the universe.

-We reason that if the universe (including us) had a beginning, it must have had a cause. But this regression cannot go on forever – it must have started somewhere and sometime. So, to end the progression the cause of the universe must be uncaused - by definition it must be something that is not created.

-That original cause must be a personal being in the sense that this being is aware of itself, make decisions and have purposes, and yet must have capabilities that far surpass ours.

-We find that we have many desires that we cannot satisfy on our own or through things or other people, including the desire to know the meaning of the universe.

“...we all have a fundamental dis-ease. It is an unquenchable fire that renders the vast majority of us incapable in this life of ever coming to full peace...all great literature, poetry, art, philosophy, psychology, and religion tries to name and analyze this longing.”

Huston Smith; Why Religion Matters

So What Are We Looking For?

These issues, thoughts and feelings are common to all people. They are a part of the Natural Revelation which includes the cosmos, the world we live in, everything we see in nature, as well as the aspects of our human nature. It serves as a pointer to a supernatural reality that we now know can and must be true. It gives us hints of the existence of God and of His nature.

So we are looking for answers. We are looking for a Special Revelation that will answer and fulfill our questions. Assuming that the Natural Revelation is True, and that there is a being who created us and provides purpose, we could logically expect to find a specifically delivered message, intended to answer the questions we obtain from observing the Natural/General Revelation. The message must answer the issues that prompt the desire for the special revelation in the first place, and it must be compatible with what is revealed in the general revelation. And, to make sure we are not being duped, the message must be corroborated independently, to validate itself when compared to other messages that may be false or misleading.

The Bible Confirms It!

We will consider the Truth claims and answers of other religions later; for now we will consider the claims of Christianity, since it is the most evidential and therefore the most provable/disprovable worldview.

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Christianity confirms that the Creator is drawing us toward Him, and that God has placed this awareness within each of us, creating a natural vacuum – or thirst for knowledge – that leads us to consider Him. Indeed, God explains to us that He has done just that:

"He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end...God does it so that men will revere Him."
Ecclesiastes 3:11b, 14b.

"From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us." Acts 17:26-27

"There is within every soul a thirst for happiness and meaning."

Thomas Aquinas

"Two things fill the mind with admiration and awe, the starry heavens above and the moral law within."

Immanuel Kant

God has given us a 'sense of ought' that not only exists in all times and cultures, but drives each of us to a standard that seems independent of us. We all have a clear sense of this 'obligation', whether we live in the United States or the remotest reaches of Africa. They may not all be exactly the same beliefs and obligations, but their universal existence demands explanation. It sure seems more complicated than just attributing this (and others like it) to 'just the result of chemical reactions in the brain!' We feel this urge so strongly that we will even try to pass laws to enforce

our internal desires for justice and morality. So we should not be surprised that our internal moral law reflects that of the law of God:

"Indeed, when Gentiles...do by nature things required by the law [of God], they are a law for themselves...since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." Romans 2:14-15.

How Does Christianity Answer Our Questions?

Considering the requirements for providing answers, and being corroborated, let's briefly consider the answers from traditional Christian belief. We'll discuss these in much more detail in a later lesson:

'God' is revealed as the great Creator, with personal attributes, who takes an interest in the universe and for our estranged relationship.

The reason for the estrangement, as well as a means of reconciling it is presented.

The answers are corroborated by special revelations spreading over 1500 years, by over 40 different persons in 3 different continents.

Proof of the good news is validated in these historical documents by the occurrence of supernatural events, most notably a resurrection from the dead.

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Thinking Points

How much 'evidence' is needed, to have a well-founded belief?

Do numbers, colors, or emotions 'exist'?

What is the alternative to belief in God? Is it viable intellectually?

Is Atheism / Agnosticism the 'default' condition?

What sort of requirements must a 'Special Revelation' have to be credible?

Lesson Summary

We can have reliable knowledge, internally.

One of these internal knowledge items we have is our religious instinct—and it is universal.

Our religious instinct causes us to look beyond ourselves and our world for answers.

Christianity provides a Special Revelation that adequately answers the questions we seek from the General Revelation

Christianity confirms that God placed these desires inside us, so we would seek Him out.

Next Lesson: The Evidences For God's Existence

Resources:

[Miracles](#); C.S. Lewis; Simon & Schuster; 1996

[Scaling The Secular City](#); J.P. Moreland; Baker Book House; 2000

[Intellectuals Don't Need God \(and other modern myths\)](#); McGrath; Zondervan;

[Does God Believe In Atheists?](#); John Blanchard; Evangelical Press; 2000