

EPISTEMOLOGY

T H E J U S T I F I C A T I O N O F K N O W L E D G E

The ancient Chinese philosopher Chuang Tsu or Zhuangzi lived around the 4th century BC (between 399 and 295 BC). He came to face a great dilemma.

Once Zhuangzi dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Zhuangzi. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuangzi. But he didn't know if he was Zhuangzi who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuangzi. Between Zhuangzi and a butterfly there must be some distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things.”

(Watson, Burton (translator). (1968). *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*. New York: Columbia University Press. 49)

The question of the source and justification of human knowledge is one of the most fundamental issues in the study of worldviews: How can we know anything at all?

God and the Mandate on Knowledge

As Christians, we assume that God created us with the capability to both attain knowledge and make us of it.

Several mandates from God could not be pursued if we were incapable of knowing:

- + The mandate of God to “have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen 1:28) could not be fulfilled unless we are capable of acquire and using knowledge.
- + The mandate of Jesus that we love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength (Mark 12:29-30) could not be fulfilled unless we are capable of having a knowledge of God Whom we are to love.
- + The mandate on worship of God presupposes a knowledge of God; for how can we worship someone we do not know. In Acts 17:22,23 Paul stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.”

- + The same goes for all the demands God make on human people. Without knowledge, we cannot obey God and please Him; and therefore could not be held responsible for failing to do what He desires of us.

Starting Point

To make sense of reality, we need a starting point.

- + If we are to go to Wellington, we not only need to know where Wellington is but where we ourselves are. Not only that but there needs to be some medium, whether earth, water, ice or air by which we can make that journey.
- + In the same way, in order to know anything at all, where need to know where we are, where we want to go and the means by which we will get there.
- + James Sire uses the term *ground zero* to refer to where we are when we begin to think. It is *terra firma*, a solid ground which does not shift from which we launch out to other places. If ground zero shifts, we will not be able to make a successful launch to even get going; and consequently, everything else shifts too. It is most vital that we locate our ground zero in our thinking; and consequently, knowing.

Every worldview has its own ground zero.

The Naturalist and Ground Zero

- + The naturalists locate their ground zero within the confines of the human mind. Rationality is not to be grounded on anything outside the human person. For there is nothing out there that is self-conscious about their thinking, and without self-consciousness, there can be no rationality.
- + The naturalist will find Zhuangzi's riddle insolvable. His scientific methodology will not help for every piece of information could be part of a grand illusion. Every thought could be part of a dream. In the end each person is caught in the web of her own subjectivity.
- + As Doug Powell has so persuasively argued, if reason is to have any force at all, it cannot be a set of conventions or culturally-agreed-upon rules of thought, because they would simply be arbitrary and therefore could not be imperative.
 - + There could be no laws of logic.
 - + And if reason were simply a Platonic form, a piece of furniture of the universe then it cannot impose its rules onto thinking beings. For reason to be intelligible, it must find its source in a transcendent, personal, perfectly-

ordered non-contingent being who has revealed himself to us. And that is the theist's ground zero.

- + If reason cannot be accounted for by a source outside of itself, then you end up trying to ground reason by using reason and that is begging the question.

The Pantheist and Ground Zero

- + If the naturalists locate their ground zero within the confines of the human mind, the pantheists locate theirs on the subjective self. For them it makes no difference whether Zhuangzi is a butterfly dreaming it is a man or a man having a dream that he is a butterfly. There is no real need to solve the riddle because all perception is ultimately self-perception. Reality is what you perceive and make out of it.
- + Zhuangzi rejects any distinction between the knowing subject and the object to be known; in fact between reality and non-reality. This leads him to see no ultimate distinction between this and that, right and wrong; good and bad.

It is no wonder that many scholars consider Zhuangzi's thought to be a precursor of moral relativism.

- + His relativism led him to even doubt if life should be preserved, since for him, this presupposes that life is good and death bad. In the fourth section of "The Great Happiness" (至樂 zhìlè, chapter 18), Zhuangzi expresses pity to a skull he sees lying at the side of the road. Zhuangzi laments that the skull is now dead, but the skull retorts, "How do you know it's bad to be dead?"
- + Zhuangzi's thought resonates with the Hindu non-dualistic view expressed by the phrase "*Atman is Brahman*"

Sire made the point that it is no wonder that "science did not develop within a culture undergirded by pantheism – either China or India. Science is predicated on very careful distinctions"

(James Sire, *Discipleship of the Mind*, IVP Books, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, USA, 1990, p.82)

The Christian and Ground Zero

- + We need to initially confess that we are all shaped by our history, families and our culture. You ask this question as an English-speaking person (not an African), living in the twenty-first century (not in the medieval period); from a unique personal history.
- + By the time I came to ask myself basic ground zero questions, I do so with an almost fully formed epistemology of my own, shaped by my own ethnic values, history and

culture. How will I ever know that what I claim to know has any validity outside my own cultural and historical context?

- + Inside Ahmed Zaoui's mind he has a set of very different values and a radically different epistemology from that of my own.

The point is this.

- + We need more than simply assert our worldview to be the right one to hold. We need to be open to the basic question of the ground from which we make knowledge claims – our ground zero.
- + Zhuangzi' question cannot be pondered upon for too long before ones goes stark starring mad! For how can you "prove to yourself right now that you are not a butterfly dreaming that you have been challenged to prove to yourself that you are not a dreaming butterfly." It leads to total scepticism.

(Sire, *Discipleship of the Mind* p. 83)

The question still begs to be answered. What is the Christian's ground zero?

Before we can seriously explore that vital question, we need to start with basic epistemology.

Introduction to Epistemology

Our whole enterprise hinges on our attempts to show grounds for thinking that our beliefs (about the world or about metaphysical truths) are true.

- + We claim to know many things. But we must not only claim to have some knowledge of some things. We must be able to provide reasons for our claims to knowledge. All kinds of people claim to know all kinds of things without the ability to provide justification for what they claim to know. So far as I am able to tell, no justifiable warrant for the Chinese belief in the philosophy of *feng-shui* has been offered.
- + People will not hesitate to lay down their lives for their beliefs even when they are quite unable or unprepared to provide justification for their beliefs.

Our beliefs are unjustified beliefs if we fail to provide legitimate grounds for them.

Some important questions therefore must be asked:

- + Who legitimises the grounds for beliefs?
- + Can we know anything for certain?
- + Of what sort of things can we be sure?

- + Where can we locate the bedrock of certainty?
- + Is certainty a myth as some have suggested?

Some Major Epistemologies

1. Empiricism

- + There are knowledge we gained from experience. Philosophers tells us that such knowledge is gained *a posteriori*. It is knowledge gained “post” experience; “after” experience.

Empiricists, as a rule, deny the possibility of *a priori* knowledge; i.e. knowledge derived not from experience but derived from just thinking about it.

- + Empiricists have argued that at birth, the human mind is like a blank slate, what is called a *tabula rasa*. Like a new white-board, nothing has ever been written on it before. Humans are born with virtually no innate knowledge of any sort. As humans grow, the senses supply the mind with information. What the mind does with this supply of information turns it into knowledge.
- + Proponents of this view says that we find certainty when there is something we can see, feel or hear.
- + We seem to have no doubt when we have a pencil in our hands when it is the case; or the fact that the sun is shining outside; or that you are now in this class attending this seminar. There seems to be no room for doubt in our claims to know such phenomena.
- + The testimony of the senses is so highly rated that evidence of eyewitnesses are held to be valuable in court.
- + This also explains the high view we have for the scientific enterprise in general and the status of scientific proofs in particular.
- + On this basis some philosophers have proceeded to formulate theories about the nature of knowledge on the understanding that our sense perceptions are an adequate tool comprehend truths about the world. Our knowledge of this world can be empirically validated through the experiences of our sense.

To put it crudely, empiricism is the epistemological position that says "Seeing is believing".

- + The empiricist holds that the test of truth is experiential; that what we find in the report of our senses is enough to allow us to construct a picture of truth and that our

beliefs about it will not need to be justified in terms of anything else.

- + The view that experience itself is self-authenticating has led some religious thinkers to ground justification on their religious experiences alone.

In short, the empiricist affirms that through experiences, we may derive a knowledge of:

- i) the world and physical objects; ii) other minds: and iii) the transcendent God.

Some Critique of Empiricism

But is it possible to trust our senses totally, absolutely? The answer seems to be "No".

1. Isn't it the case that our sense experiences have played tricks on us? Through opaque window panes, the image behind appears distorted. A stick in basin of water looks bent though it isn't really the case.

2. Can we naively compare our beliefs with the materials found in the world?

- + Do we have direct access to the outside world?

- + Surely it is the case that all the judgements we make about the world (e.g. the grass is green, there is a computer in front of me etc. etc.) is shaped by certain categorizations we put on our observations.

3. The empiricist will be hard put to explain how two people with the same experiences can furnish two diverse viewpoints about the phenomenon which was experienced.

- + Each particular religious experience has resulted in contradictory views of its conception of the transcendent. If experience is the ultimate touchstone in that it is self-interpreting, we will not witness the radical nature of the various accounts that are given.

- + Surely we need some way of testing the report of one sense against another.

- + What is taken as self-evident seems to be something that the perceiver brings to his experience.

- + Today, historians, philosophers of science, linguists and others agree that "factual statements are conceptually contaminated."

4. There are areas that are inapplicable to the application of the senses.

- + There are areas of experience where our judgements seem to compel us to go beyond the report of our senses, although they are opened to the intuitive aspect of man. We think of issues of ethics and aesthetics not to mention spirituality.

One Hard-Nose Empiricist

David Hume

The most important philosopher ever to write in English, David Hume (1711- 1776), the last of the great triumvirate of “British empiricists” — was also well-known in his own time as an historian and essayist. A master stylist in any genre, Hume's major philosophical works, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740), the *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding* (1748) and *Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), as well as the posthumously published *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779), remain widely and deeply influential. Although many of Hume's contemporaries denounced his writings as works of scepticism and atheism, his influence is evident in the moral philosophy and economic writings of his close friend Adam Smith. Hume also awakened Immanuel Kant from his “dogmatic slumbers” and “caused the scales to fall” from Jeremy Bentham's eyes. Charles Darwin counted Hume as a central influence, as did “Darwin's bulldog,” Thomas Henry Huxley. The diverse directions in which these writers took what they gleaned from reading Hume reflect not only the richness of their sources but also the wide range of his empiricism. Today, philosophers recognize Hume as a precursor of contemporary cognitive science, as well as one of the most thoroughgoing exponents of philosophical naturalism. [William Edward Morris, *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*.]

So an appeal to immediate experience of the senses fails to serve as a way of providing justification for our beliefs. Experience is not immune to challenge. It is not evidently infallible or self-authenticating

2. Rationalism

One of the most controversial and important issues in philosophy is this:

“Are there or are there not any truths about the world, empirical truths, that can be known to be true just by thinking about them?”

- + Is experience the only source of our knowledge about the external world?
- + Or is the mind, on its own, capable of grasping some truths about the world?

When confronted with the above question: The rationalists say: “Yes!”

- + The rationalists say there are truths about the world (empirical truths) that can be known to be true just by thinking about them.

+ Such knowledge that is gained, is gained prior to experience; they are independently of observation. They are called *a priori*. This is opposed to knowledge gained empirically, which we call *a posteriori*.

- + Some rationalists are unwilling to call empirical knowledge "knowledge".
- + Empiricists, as a rule, deny the possibility of *a priori* knowledge.

+ The rationalists say the approach lies in the use of the human rationality.
"In the use of my rationality, I am able to carefully reason my way to a conclusion in matters which do not rest on the uncertain report of my senses."

They claim to derive knowledge that go beyond any measure of doubt:

1. Mathematics $2 + 2 = 4$
2. Geometry "All circles are round"
"All Euclidean triangles have three straight sides."
"The sum of the angles of a triangle is 180 degrees"
3. Logic "Bachelors are unmarried males"
"It cannot be raining and not raining at the same time, in the same place and in the same sense"

On the side of the rationalists, we must admit that there seems to be some initial unavoidable necessity here. We seem unable to deny the validity of truth-claim of the above three categories.

Two times two, cannot not make four. It is not a matter of relying on our senses.

- + How then do we know (this truth) that "every circle is round?"
 - We know it intuitively. It is self-evident and needs no verification.
 - Sensory experiences can only illustrate it. They cannot prove it.

The rationalists claim safe haven in these categories of thought. "Would that we could find the same certainty elsewhere." mourns H.D. Lewis

+ Descartes gives us an example of how we can use the basis of rationalistic approach to truth and arrive at other forms of truth.

- + He began by not entertaining ideas which in principle it is possible to doubt.
- + World - can be doubted - possible an evil genius deceiving him.
- + But couldn't doubt his own existence - for if he did he would have to be there to do the doubting.
- + Hence his famous dictum "I doubt, therefore I am"

- + Doubting is a form of thinking. Consequently, "I think, therefore I am."
- + Descartes added other *a priori* axioms
 - "Nothing can come from nothing"
 - "All effects have causes"
 - "A cause must at least be as great as its effects"
- + From here he argued:
 - "I have an idea of a perfect being. How do I come to such an idea. I could not have produced it because I'm imperfect. Since nothing can come from nothing, this idea of a perfect being must have a cause. And the cause of my idea of a perfect being must at least be as great as this idea. So the cause of my idea must be a Perfect Being itself. So a Perfect Being exists. If he is a perfect being - he would not deceive us about the existence of this physical world. So this world exists."

The basic, minimal claim which all rationalists hold in common is that the mind has the power to know with certainty various truths about the universe which outward observation can never give us.

Some Critique of Rationalism

Not all is well with rationalism.

Take the knowledge claim: "Every event has a cause". How does the rationalist know this?

1. Surely it is only by experiences can we know that all circles are round.

- + The rationalists say we can never know this through experience. If we relied on experience we should have to test the truth of this belief by examining every circle to ascertain whether or not each one is round.

- + It is true that we cannot examine an infinite number of circles.

- + But this merely goes to show that we can never know with certainty that such general or universal principles are true.

Example: We have no direct access to past circles that were drawn or constructed. Maybe in the court of Genghis Khan, a sage of the court managed to come up with a circle that wasn't round!

2. Secondly, we have no apparatus to determine the status of future circles.

+ All we may presently affirm is that, empirically, we have always found the given principle to hold; and that there is every reason to believe it will continue to hold.

+ Consequently, the rationalist is inconsistent when he denies that there is any empirical knowledge.

2. The argument of the empiricist carries an inherent contradiction.

He argues:

"Empirical judgements are merely opinions."

"They involve judgements that rely on the use of our sense organs but the capacity and efficiency of these organs are limited and variable."

"Experiences vary."

"Interpretations are person-oriented."

But this is self-stultifying.

The unreliability which the rationalist points us to should rightly characterise his own statements (those that he uses against the empiricists).

He does not realise that those statements purport to be true statements about the empirical realm and indeed derived from the empirical realm.

He employs statements derived from empirical observations, in order to conclude that no true statements can be derived empirically.

He is assuming knowledge of the very sort of things which he is denying. He is founding his argument on the very sort of empirically-grounded claims that he purports to dismiss as mere opinions.

So the rationalist necessarily smuggles in assumptions from experience. Otherwise his proof could never even get off the ground.

3. Even if we knew with absolute certainty that "every circle is round", we really did not derive this knowledge from any *a priori* intuition into the nature of things.

+ We only know it to be true in the sense that it would be true by definition.

+ The above statements from mathematics, geometry and logic are analytic statements.

- + An analytic statement is one in which the predicate found in the subject term. Such a statement cannot be denied without generating a contradiction
- + Analytic Statements are true by virtue of the meaning of its terms.
- + To test the truth of this category of knowledge-claim, there is no necessity to check it out in the empirical realm to see if they were so.
- + No empirical facts are relevant to the truth or falsity of the statement.
- + The statement: "All Euclidean triangles have three sides" is an analytic statement.

+ Its truth depends upon the meanings that have been assigned to the terms "triangle" and "three-sided". If you knew the meaning of these terms, you will know all you need to know in order to know that triangles have three sides.

Example:

If a boy from Mozambique should run into our class right now, huffing and puffing and says to us "Whew! Finally I have found a triangle that has eight sides!", you should not be flustered in any way. You needn't even have to check it out. We feel secure that such a state of affairs will never eventuate because we have conclusively so defined a triangle as necessarily having three sides.

- + The statement "A bachelor is an unmarried male" is true only because of the terms of the definition. Simply put, bachelors are prohibited by logic to get married !!
- + The truth is evident apart from the facts of experience.
- + The statement "2 mermaids + 2 mermaids = 4 mermaids" is true regardless of whether mermaids existed in the first place.

+ Examine some of these statements:

"Every object is either round or not round"

"Everything that has shape has size"

"Everything that ascends, rises"

"Twice two are four"

+ All the above statements give us no information at all about any fact whatever. They tell us nothing about the real world

+ $2 + 2 = 4$ can apply both to coffee mugs and to unicorns.

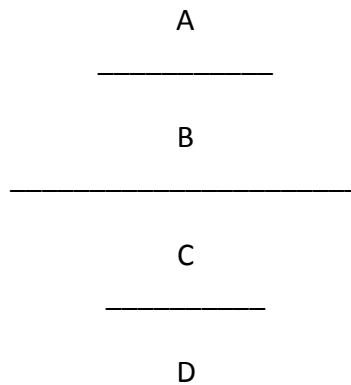
- + Those statements merely state the condition for the use of rational speaking. If there is anything *a priori* about it, it is only *a priori* in this trivial manner.

So there are general statements known to be true *a priori*, i.e. known with certainty without the need for empirical verification. But they are not truths about empirical objects or other real entities. They are not empirical facts. They are disguised definitions.

EPISTEMOLOGY AND WORLDVIEWS

Beginning from Plato, there has been an exaggerated distinction between knowledge and belief.

Plato made a harsh distinction between knowledge and beliefs. He illustrated this by using a divided vertical line. The top half represented knowledge. The bottom half, opinion.



- (A) Knowledge gained by careful conceptual analysis after all inconsistencies have been removed. This knowledge is derived from a direct contemplation of the truth.
- (B) Knowledge gained by deduction, in a mathematical style, and derived from transcendent and eternal forms. They are independent of sense experiences. They are innate ideas of the mind
- (C) Beliefs. Opinions formed for practical purposes but they are uncertain. Like experiences they are changing
- (D) Illusions. These are even more changeable. They are devoid of truth-value.

- + To Plato, knowledge is an unchanging apprehension of universal truth. Belief and opinions are based on insufficient evidences in changing world. Little wonder, Plato had little patience for the arts in society.

Arthur Holmes makes the point that in the history of philosophy, we seem to have two extremes of claims to knowledge.

(Arthur F. Holmes, *Contours of a Worldview*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1983, Chapter 9)

- 1) Platonic and Enlightenment rationalists claimed a kind of knowledge that is certain and objective
- 2) Romanticists and Existentialists have overreacted in the direction of subjectivity rather than objectivity; of feelings rather than reason.

+ On the one hand

+ Enlightenment philosophy insisted we are capable of knowledge that is completely objective and certain

+ Current scientific humanism is an extension of that kind of rationalism

+ On the other hand

+ Romanticism and existentialism overreacted in opposite direction emphasizing subjectivity rather than objectivity.

+ Marxist humanism also overreacted and looked at truth as something historically relative because it depended on socioeconomic conditions.

+ The mistake of Enlightenment epistemology is that it overstressed the rational to exclusion of the human aspect of knowing

+ The mistake of the reaction was to stress the non-rational aspect to the detriment of the rational.

Same Dichotomy in Religious Thoughts

Holmes made the point that the same two extremes have appeared in religious thoughts.

+ On the one hand, those who take the approach of natural theology usually take the more rational approach of evidential apologetics. They furnish their arguments for theism with objective logical proofs.

+ On the other hand we have religious existentialists (even fideists) who accept “a subjectively elicited faith devoid of appeal to objective controls.”

The Relationship between Subjectivity and Objectivity

It would be helpful to make a brief foray into the distinction between the subjectivity and objectivity aspects of knowing.

- + It does not seem that we can draw sharp a distinction between the rational and the emotive.
- + We make the maximum mistake when we rigidly categorise knowledge as all rational and devoid of any element of the emotive; and belief as all emotion and not the least rational.

Kierkegaard rightly complained that the age of Reason was an age without passion.

- + Recent epistemologies see knowledge as a subset of belief, part of a larger whole.

The Bible makes no sharp demarcation between knowledge and belief. Paul said he *knew* whom he *believed* and was *sure* (2 Tim 1:12)

Blaise Pascal said: "The heart has reasons that reason cannot know."

The present arrogance found in some scientists, who assert that that sure and objective knowledge can come from the scientific method alone has arisen from the empiricists who considered the sense impressions as totally capable of providing a core of irreducible and objective data on which rationalistic proofs are founded.

- + Some scientists still conclude that an observable regularity of antecedents and consequences is proof of a cause-effect relationship.
- + But after Hume's insistence that observable regularity alone can never prove that a causal connection exists, philosophers are now more cautious.

How we perceive things and draw conclusions about it truth-value depends as much on the knowing subject as it is on the objective data.

- + German idealists here strongly stressed the creative role of the perceiving, knowing subject in "making belief"
- + The psychological and sociological accounts of knowledge came to be appreciated
 - Schopenhauer "The world is my idea"
 - Nietzsche treated philosophy as the projection of subjective drives for power rather than as an objective inquiry
 - Freud furnished us with psychoanalytic accounts of belief in God
 - Thomas Kuhn gave a sociological account of science
 - Paul Feyerabend, a philosopher of science, reduces scientific arguments to

something subjective and relativistic. He was more radical than Kuhn.

- + It seems quite clear that the 19thC relational model has displaced the mechanistic objectivity.

An Inescapable Tension

There is an obvious tension here

- + On the one hand, the human knower is a person with inwardness, values, and interests and assumptions - he may not even be conscious of these. These, he cannot throw away without ceasing to be a person.

Complete objectivity is an illusion.

- + On the other hand, complete subjectivity is neither desirable nor logically implied. We are morally obligated to weigh each question from all sides, make honest evaluation and assess the evidence carefully.

Through sieving the issues this way, some prejudices, ignorance and blind spots can become apparent and removed. But the inherent inward passion as a knowing subject will not be totally eradicated.

As Kierkegaard says, this is good, as it keeps us from "endless indecision".

A Viable Epistemological Alternative

Complete subjectivity and complete objectivity will not do.

Holmes proposes an epistemological alternative called "interpretive realism"

He proposes that we be "realistic"

- in affirming the independent objective nature of the things known (metaphysical objectivity).

He proposes that we be "interpretative"

- in affirming that to know is always to interpret the facts that are given (epistemological subjectivism).

Metaphysically:

A "fact" is an objective state of affairs that

- pertains at a given time and a given place

- in a given set of relationships
- independent of whether anyone of us know it or not
(e.g. an unseen alpine plant growing on an unapproachable flank of the Himalayas)

Epistemologically:

A "fact" is a "fact of experience".

- related to the whole flux of inner and outer experience.
- subjectivity intrudes and shapes it.
- facts we know are not bare facts but they are "interprefacts"
- perceived and understood by a human person.

Holmes makes a distinction between two different senses of objectivity and subjectivity.

(Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth is God's Truth* Wm Eerdmans, 1979, pp.5-7; *Contour* p.14-,148)

Holmes makes the distinction between what he calls

Metaphysical objectivity
Epistemological objectivity

and

Metaphysical subjectivity
Epistemological subjectivity

+ **Metaphysical Objectivity** means that objects have real independent existence and the truth is independent of whatever we may wish and think; whether or not we know or believe anything about it at all.

+ Objective reality has an independent existence.

+ The truth is independent of whatever we may know or think.

- Sticks and stones; cabbages and kings exist objectively.
- So does God.
- God knows it to be so that He exists whatever we mortals think.

+ Unicorns and centaurs have no such metaphysical objectivity.

- So is my son, for I have none.
- His existence is metaphysically subjective.

+ Atheists claim that God, like Santa Claus is metaphysically subjective.

- + **Epistemological Objectivity** is the knowing person's attitude of unconcern, detachment, uninvolvedness in the regard to the object of inquiry.
- + Holmes does not think anyone can be totally objective, epistemologically, and holds *Epistemological Objectivity* to be "patently false".
- + This was what prompted the Romanticists to complain that reason is necessarily cold and impersonal.
- + To be sure the Enlightenment may have idolized a cold version of epistemological objectivity, but it need not necessarily be the case at all.
- + This rigid epistemology spawned such reactionary movements as the 19th century Romanticism and Existentialism that followed.
 - + Romanticism is a complex artistic, literary, and intellectual movement that exalted passion over reason.
 - + Existentialism took the acting and feeling aspects of the human person as a starting point for philosophical thought. Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre are among well-known existentialists. They embraced the passionate rule of the will over reason.
- + **Epistemological Subjectivity** is the involvement of the knowing person – his attitude and values - in his thinking and knowing. Holmes believes this to be an "unavoidable" aspect of the knowing process
 - + This admission of passionate subjective involvement on the part of the human knower, does not necessarily mean a compromise of metaphysical as well as epistemological objectivity.
 - + Certain objective realities can be passionately believed by a person without violating the objectivity of the truth believed.
 - + It is possible to believe in God, neighbour and oneself with all of one's subjectivity intensity without compromising in the least, the universal truth of theism.
 - + Further, my knowledge of what is independently real may well be subjectively influenced. But that does not affect its metaphysical status.
 - + Just because there are personal and cultural influences which we

bring to our thinking about truth, it does not necessarily follow that what we think and believe to be true cannot be necessarily so.

+ We need to be aware of genetic fallacy of thinking that the biographical influences which helps shape a certain belief must necessarily determine the truth or falsity of that belief. Bertrand Russell argued against Christianity on account that some Christians have believed due to fear of their place in the afterlife.

+ **Metaphysical Subjectivity** holds that there are no object that has any real objective status outside the mind of the knower. Apart of our belief, nothing is true independently. Regardless of whether we believe it or not, there is nothing out there is objectively true.

+ Philosopher and Bishop Berkeley, for example, believed that objects have no real tangible status apart from the perception of the perceiver.

“Berkeley held that what we perceive really is as we perceive it to be. But what we perceive are just sensible objects, collections of sensible qualities, which are themselves nothing other than ideas in the minds of their perceivers . . . There is no need to refer to the supposition of anything existing outside our minds... So long as some sentient being, some thinking substance or spirit, has in mind the sensible qualities or objects at issue, they do truly exist. Thus, even when I close my eyes, the tree I now see will continue to exist, provided that someone else is seeing it. Even when none of us is perceiving this tree, god is. The mind of god serves as a permanent repository of the sensible objects that we perceive at some times and not at others.

(Berkeley :Immaterialism, <http://www.philosophypages.com/hy/4r.htm>)

Holmes believes that *metaphysical objectivity* and *epistemological subjectivity* are quite compatible with each other.

He concludes that “Knowing is in every case an individual mix of subjective and objective factors”

+ The personal and cultural influences on our thinking

+ This is what the Enlightenment missed. The Enlightenment confined itself to objectivity, both metaphysical and epistemological.

+ The Enlightenment epistemology allowed only impersonal logical, mathematical and demonstrable facts to be true.

- + This allowed David Hume and other sceptical philosophers to relegate personal beliefs in areas of morality and religion to the domain of feelings rather than reason.
- + By insisting that reason requires epistemological objectivity, it failed to allow other more subjective, tacit, and intuitive aspects (i.e. epistemological subjectivity) of the process of human quest for universal truth (i.e. metaphysical objectivity).

Holmes calls this the “creational approach” and argues that this fits well with the biblical view that we come into this world with a “creaturely dependence and finiteness” which prompts us to ask questions, inquire, to think and search for truth.

While philosophers have constructed objective arguments for the existence of God, epistemologically it is significant that, as Augustine observed, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God.

A Christian Epistemology

It looks like what is needed is an epistemology that has both in its equation.

1. a premium on universal truth (metaphysical objectivity) and
2. a liberating personal commitment (epistemological subjectivity)

We need to hold the two in a delicate balance.

Reformed Epistemology

- + This approach seeks to hold both reason and revelation in due balance.
- + Alvin Plantinga pointed out a vital similarity between the role that God-given categories of thought play in human knowledge and what Reformed thinkers affirm about belief in God.
- + Plantinga holds the view that it is fully rational to hold beliefs that arise naturally provided our minds are functioning properly in an appropriate context.
 - + He calls them basic beliefs, from which other beliefs may be logically derived.
 - + He derives his thinking from Calvin’s *Sensus Divinitatis*.
Calvin affirmed that God has implanted in us a tendency to accept belief

in God. He speaks of “a sense of deity inscribed in the hearts of all”.

+ Calvin's grounds for his *Sensus Divinitatis* thesis is rather simple:

1. Simple Observation: Belief in God seems to be Universal
2. The diversity of religious practices and beliefs all presuppose some basic conception of divinity or a Supreme power in the Universe.
3. Those who are impious and object to the existence of God nonetheless have in their minds an idea of such a being, so even they are aware of God.

+ The idea of God is a natural and spontaneously thought arising in our hearts, because He created us in His image to think His thoughts after Him.

+ Plantinga makes use of Aquinas' views of reason's purposiveness to drive the point that there is an inner witness of the Holy Spirit, that affirms Holy Scripture to be God's revelation indeed.

+ Plantinga discards the need for any other rational apologetic for faith in the Christian God. However, he makes room for a defence of what he calls “defeaters” of its truth-claims.

+ But even that, he does not see a need for an aggressive defensive apologetics because to him the basic reluctance to belief in God is not due to the lack of reasonable evidences, but sin that makes the one's belief function defective.

(Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Can truth be known

Leslie Newbigin in his attempt to encourage humility and vulnerability comes close to suggesting that ultimately we cannot know the truth.

“We can never claim that either our understanding or our action is absolutely right. We have no way of proving that we are right. That kind of proof belongs only to the end. As part of the community that shares in the struggle, we open ourselves continually to Scripture, always in company with our fellow disciples of this and former ages and in the context of the struggle for obedience; and we constantly find in it fresh insights into the character and purpose of the one who is “rendered” for us in its pages.”

(Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986, p.60)

Thomas Kuhn, in his classic work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, so emphasised the idea that knowledge is theory-dependent that truth seems to be forever subsumed under paradigms.

- + Under the rubrics of his understanding of truth, what we purport to know is so completely shaped by our own predispositions and theories that true objectivity is unattainable.

"There is, I think, no theory-independent way to reconstruct phrases like 'really there'; the notion of a match between the ontology [the study or idea of being -- true existence] of a theory and its 'real' counterpart in nature now seems to me illusive in principle."

(Thomas S. Kuhn *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd Edition; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970, p.206)

Making distinctions between truth and error

The Christian must not only insist on the knowability of truth but provide the means of how the truth may be known.

- + The point is not whether truth can be known. The question rather is whether we can know the truth in the smorgasbord of competing truth-claims.
- + The Christian affirms that truth is out there objectively and that it can be discovered and known; and that only the Christian worldview offers the necessary preconditions of intelligibility.
- + The Reform perspective of the Christian faith affirms that the revelation of Scripture is our basic epistemological starting point and that the method for recognizing this truth is reason. Plantinga holds the view that belief in God is properly basic. If by this, Plantinga meant that atheistic evidentialism must be refuted by refuting classical foundationalism, then we need to affirm that the Christian faith is grounded in reasons regardless of whether those reasons are expressed or not.
- + We hold that logical consistency and coherence together form the test for truth. If on this score we are accused of being rationalists, we may affirm that God is both rational and relates to us rationally and having made us in His image, He expects us to be rational. The categories of reason does not have its source in some inanimate, non-personal Platonic form; not in some personal consciousness. The categories of reason is derived from God Who is rational and Who endows us humans being with rationality as people made in His image.

+ Carl F.H. Henry, a formidable theologian, ethicist, and strategic thinker has argued that in contrast to Kant, the mind does not necessarily bring to the experiences of life reason's categories of thought; in contrast to the pragmatists, the mind does not conceptualize the object of knowledge; and in contrast to the radical empiricists, knowledge could not be derived from sense experience alone. The human ability to know comes from the epistemic equipment given to humans at creation.

+ Carl F. H. Henry writes:

"Without non-contradiction and logical consistency, no knowledge whatever is possible. Christianity insists that verification answers the question, "How can I know that this claim is true?"...To rational minds, the credibility of a religious claim, like any other, rests upon the availability of persuasive evidence and adequate criteria. ...Some decry rational emphasis on logic and consistency in considerations of divine revelation...without appeal to sufficient reason, the mind of man has no basis for discriminating between mysteries, paradoxes and contradictions."

(Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, I:232; 6 vols. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1983, 1999)

+ It is the case that short of any logical and rational test criterion that must be brought upon our claims of knowledge, we may make no meaningful distinction between truth and error.
