

Epistemology

The Theory of Knowledge: How do you know what you know?

e·pis·te·mol·o·gy
/əˌpɪstəˈmäləjē/

Learn to pronounce

noun

PHILOSOPHY

1. the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope. Epistemology is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion.

Section 1—

Questions for Christians:

- 1) What makes something true or false?
- 2) How do you know when something is true?
- 3) How do you know when something is false?
- 4) Can there be any truth apart from God?
- 5) Can there be any truth that opposes God's word?

Considerations for Christians:

As you ponder the questions in section 1 consider what it means to know something. What is knowledge? We will start with a textbook definition and expand from there.

knowl·edge

/'näləj/

noun

1. 1.

facts, information, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject.

"a thirst for knowledge"

2.

awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation.

"the program had been developed **without his knowledge**"

Knowledge can best be described by philosophy as a familiarity, understanding or awareness of an object: a person, place, thing, skill, or fact. Knowledge is gained through experience, education, reason, memorization and many other ways. We learn, or come to know, that something hot will inflict pain if we touch it through our experiences with heated objects. We gain knowledge of our family and friends through observation, study, and inquiry. We talk to each other and ask questions but we also see other people's reactions to events and information as we learn them as an individual. Knowledge encompasses every aspect of life.

What is truth?

38 Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" ... - John 18:38

Have you ever considered what it means for something to be true? We will once again draw out a textbook definition before we proceed.

Truth

\ 'trüth \

Definition of *truth*

(Entry 1 of 2)

1a (1): the body of real things, events, and facts: ACTUALITY

(2): the state of being the case: FACT

(3) *often capitalized:* a transcendent fundamental or spiritual reality

From a secular humanist approach man can only seek to describe truth as that which corresponds to reality (the body of real things, events, and facts: Actuality). If you continue to define words from a secular perspective you will find that actuality can only be described in terms of human experience.

Actuality

ac·tu·al·i·ty

/,ak(t)SHə'walədē/

noun

1. actual existence, typically as contrasted with what was intended, expected, or believed.

"the building looked as impressive **in actuality** as it did in magazines"

For the secular thinker, actuality is that which we can experience together. Actual items would be sticks and stones and physical bodies which can be experienced or have been experienced by human senses or reason.

If truth is that which corresponds to actuality and actuality is that which we can experience through our senses or reason, then human reasoning reigns supreme. Through this reasoning we determine what is real or not based on our senses. We don't believe in flying pigs because we've never seen one. We get into airplanes because collective human experience has taught us that they are reasonably reliable. You have more than likely been taught to primarily rely on your reason and logic throughout your entire life. You understand reality as that which fits your experience or is reasonable to you when you apply your logic to it. You don't presume pigs will fly tomorrow, or gravity will fail tomorrow and resume on Tuesday because pigs have never taken off and you've never floated from the earth once in your lifetime.

What is truth for the Christian?

The Christian thinker is not confined by the limits of human experience. If you believe in the inspiration of scripture then you have more than experience—you have revelation.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. — John 1:1-2

John's gospel starts off by exalting Christ(God) as the creator of all things. Genesis gives us the initial creation account in which we see:

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. —Genesis 1:1

For the Christian thinker truth cannot be that which corresponds to our experiences. Truth must be that which corresponds to God's reality, not only our perception of it. We have a reference point in God to what truth is. God has created all things and determined what is good and right and just in His sight. Things were created by Him and their purpose was built into His creation.

"The fact that something functions in a specific manner doesn't mean it was designed to."

I have often laughed about the way that we misuse certain tools to perform tasks for which they were never intended. The best example I can possibly give is the adjustable wrench or "crescent wrench" as we often call them. I cannot tell you how many times I have picked up a large adjustable wrench and then proceeded to wield it as a hammer or mallet. I always jokingly refer to them as my "adjustable whammer" because that is the use I find for them most often, it seems. The point is this—the adjustable wrench was never intended to be a hammer, and the fact that I frequently misuse one does not change the intended purpose of the tool. Likewise, are the truths of God.

If we have misunderstood the truths of God, even for our entire lives, it does not change His truths. Our experiences cannot be the final authority in analyzing what is true from a Christian perspective. I may sin daily and never incur physical sickness in this lifetime. My experience may lead me to believe God really does not mind sin; the truth revealed in God's word is He abhors sin but is patient and longsuffering. My inability to rightly interpret God's truth does nothing to alter what He has declared. If I close my eyes in a well-lit room, I cannot rightly declare that the room is dark merely because I have not rightly observed it. The room is in fact well-lit, I am just ignorant of the truth of that fact because of my own inability to see the light. God's truth is much the same; My perception or misperception of that truth does nothing in the way of altering the truth itself.

I argue that as Christians our epistemology should first and foremost come from the revelation we have received. God has revealed Himself through scripture and in doing so He has given us an

extraordinary fount of information concerning His purpose for the world and mankind. He has also given us His law, which describes to us the things which He considers good and right and just. The secular humanist views the world through the lens of human experience and understanding. I argue that the Christian should seek to view the world through scripture lest he be found hammering with a proverbial wrench and misusing or abusing God's purpose. The word of God is infallible and authoritative.

16All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, - 2 Timothy 3:16