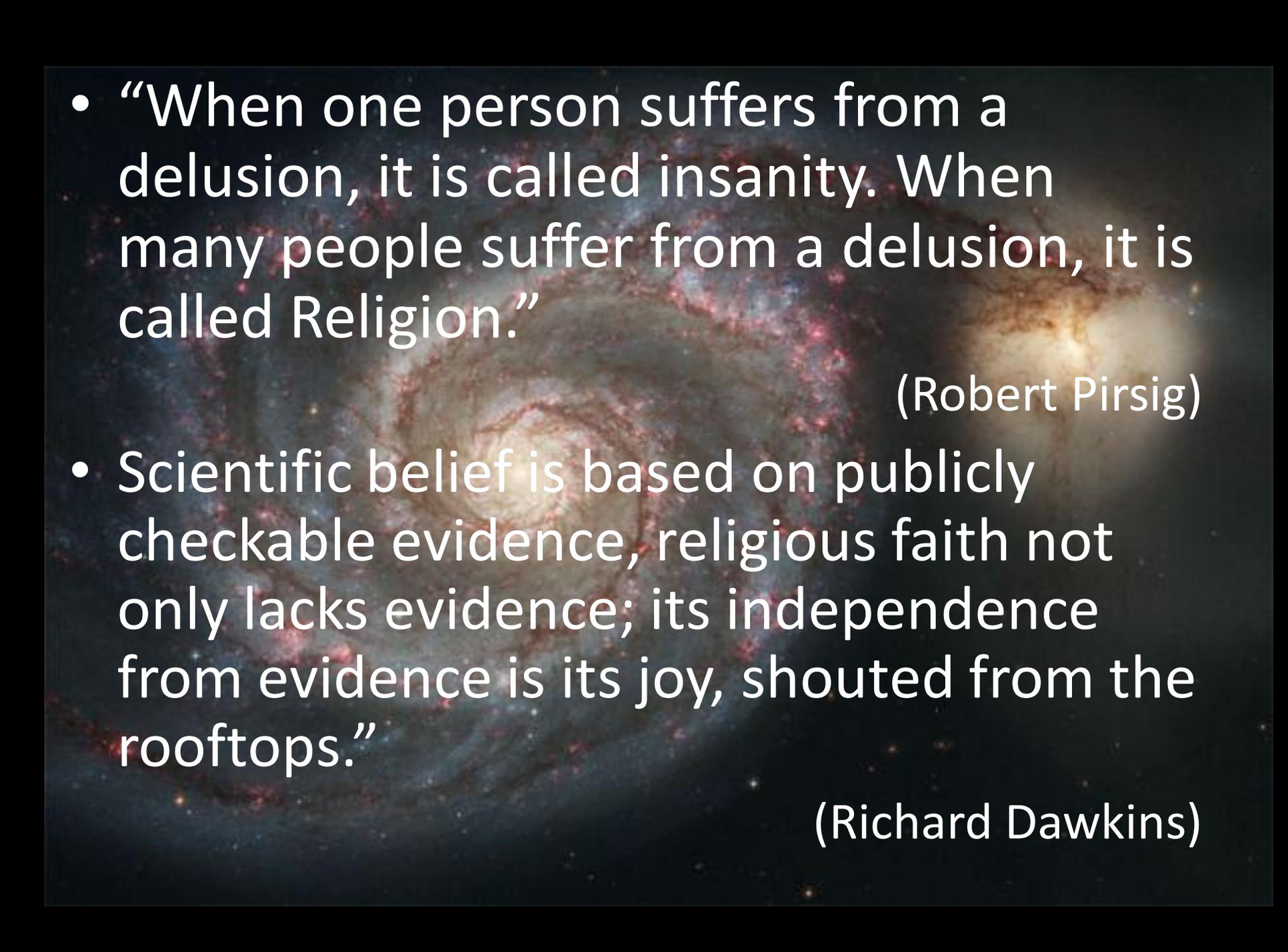


***A history of scepticism  
&  
the knowledge of God***

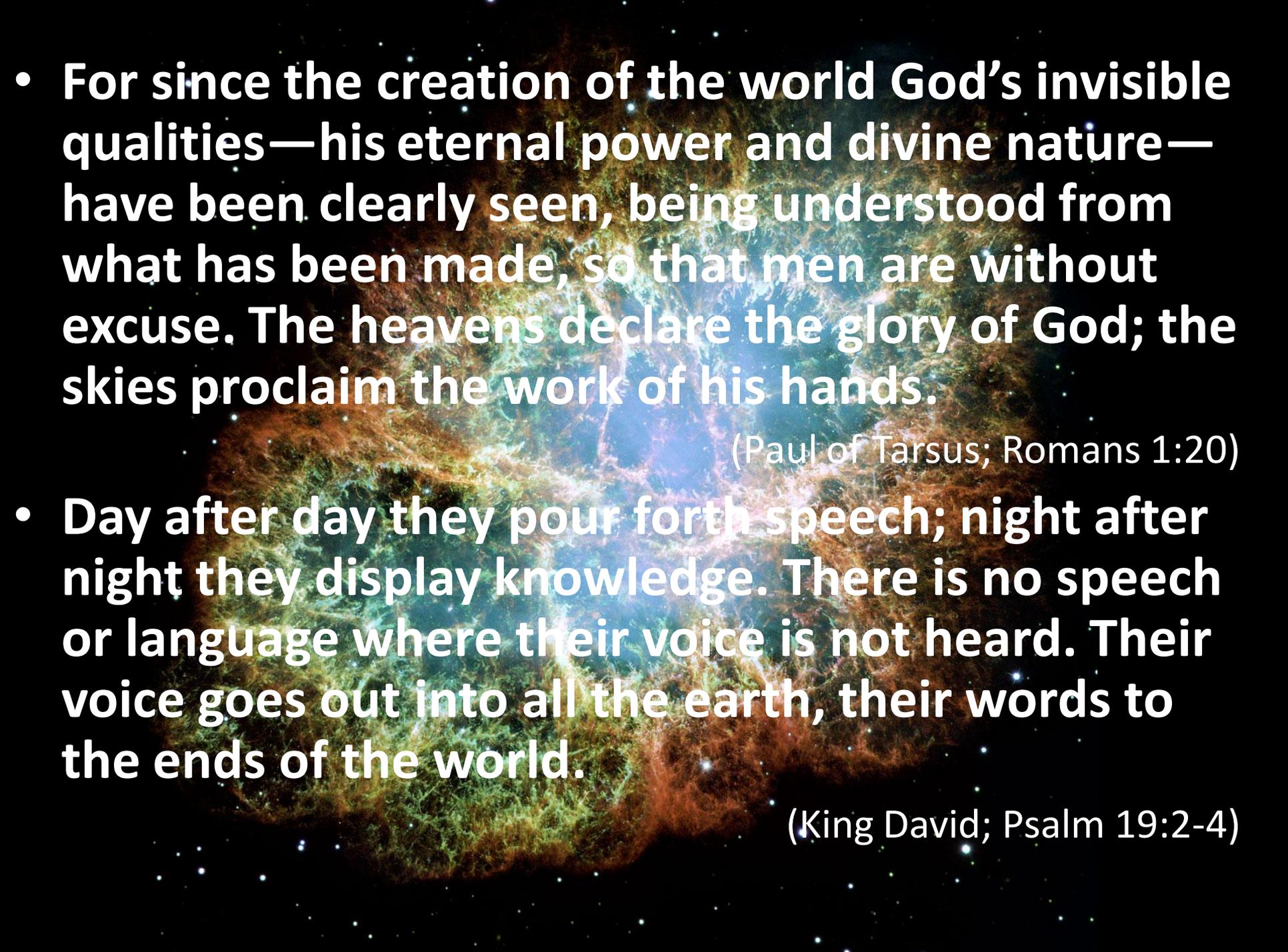
Philip Lewis

- 
- “When one person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity. When many people suffer from a delusion, it is called Religion.”

(Robert Pirsig)

- Scientific belief is based on publicly checkable evidence, religious faith not only lacks evidence; its independence from evidence is its joy, shouted from the rooftops.”

(Richard Dawkins)

- 
- For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

(Paul of Tarsus; Romans 1:20)

- Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

(King David; Psalm 19:2-4)

# Scepticism

*skeptesthai* = “to examine”

The philosophical view that it is impossible to know anything with absolute certainty, or to know the world as it “really” is

*or*

A general reluctance to accept anything without sufficient proof.

- 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C: Greek gods were seen as corrupt, vain, self-serving, interfering in human affairs, manipulating situations to the advantage of their favourites. Immortal in extension of their existence but limited in their spheres of power.

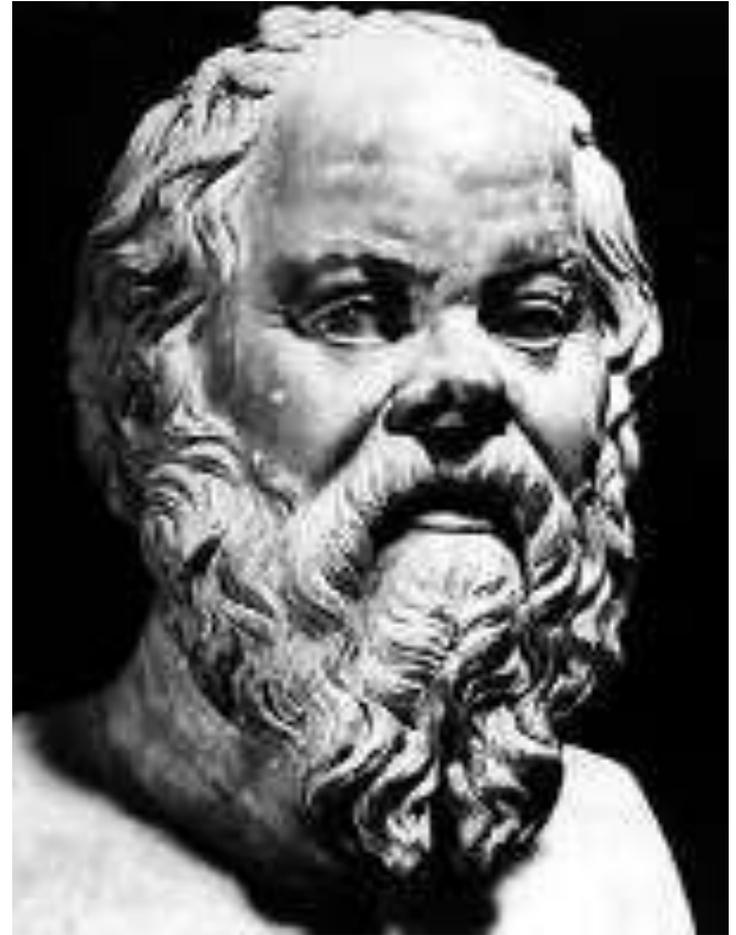
# Socrates (469-399 B.C.)

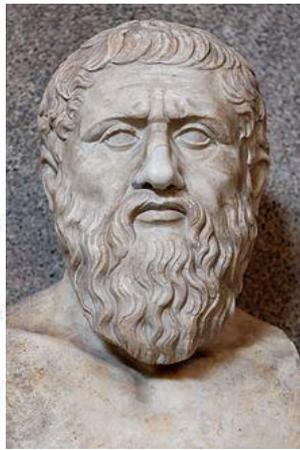
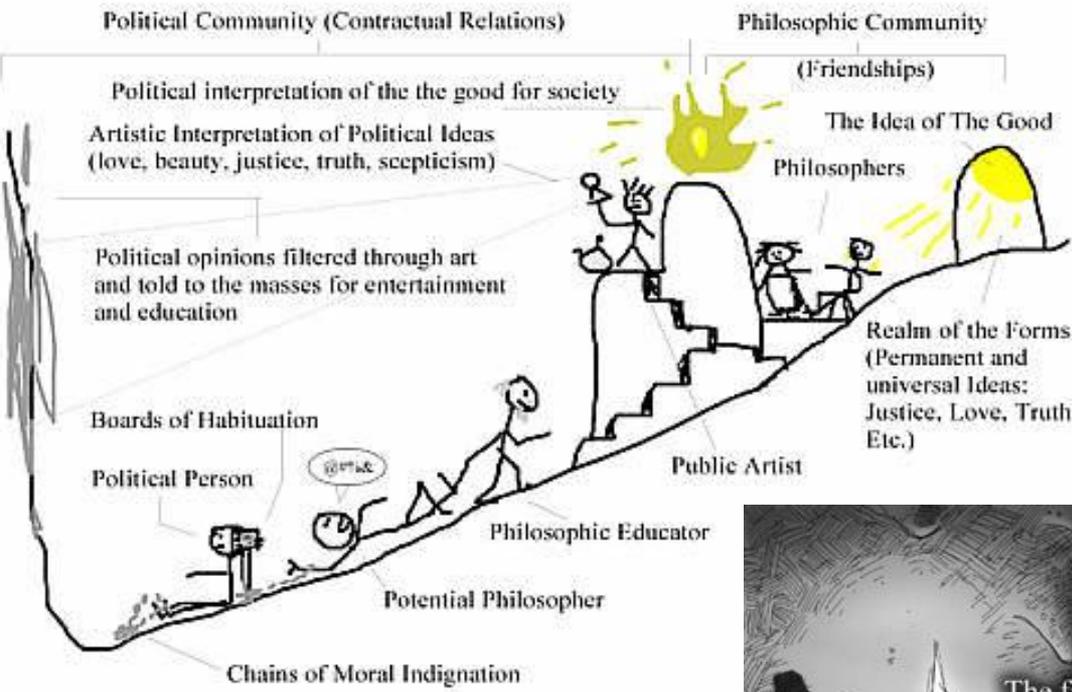
In Athens, religion was a matter of public participation under law, regulated by a calendar of religious festivals; the city used revenues to maintain temples and shrines. Socrates' irreverence, it was claimed, had resulted in the corruption of the city's young men. Evidence for irreverence was of two types:

1. Socrates did not believe in the gods of the Athenians (he had said on many occasions that the gods do not lie or do other wicked things, whereas **the Olympian gods of the poets and the city were quarrelsome and vindictive**)
2. Socrates introduced new divinities (indeed, he insisted that his *daimonion* had spoken to him since childhood).

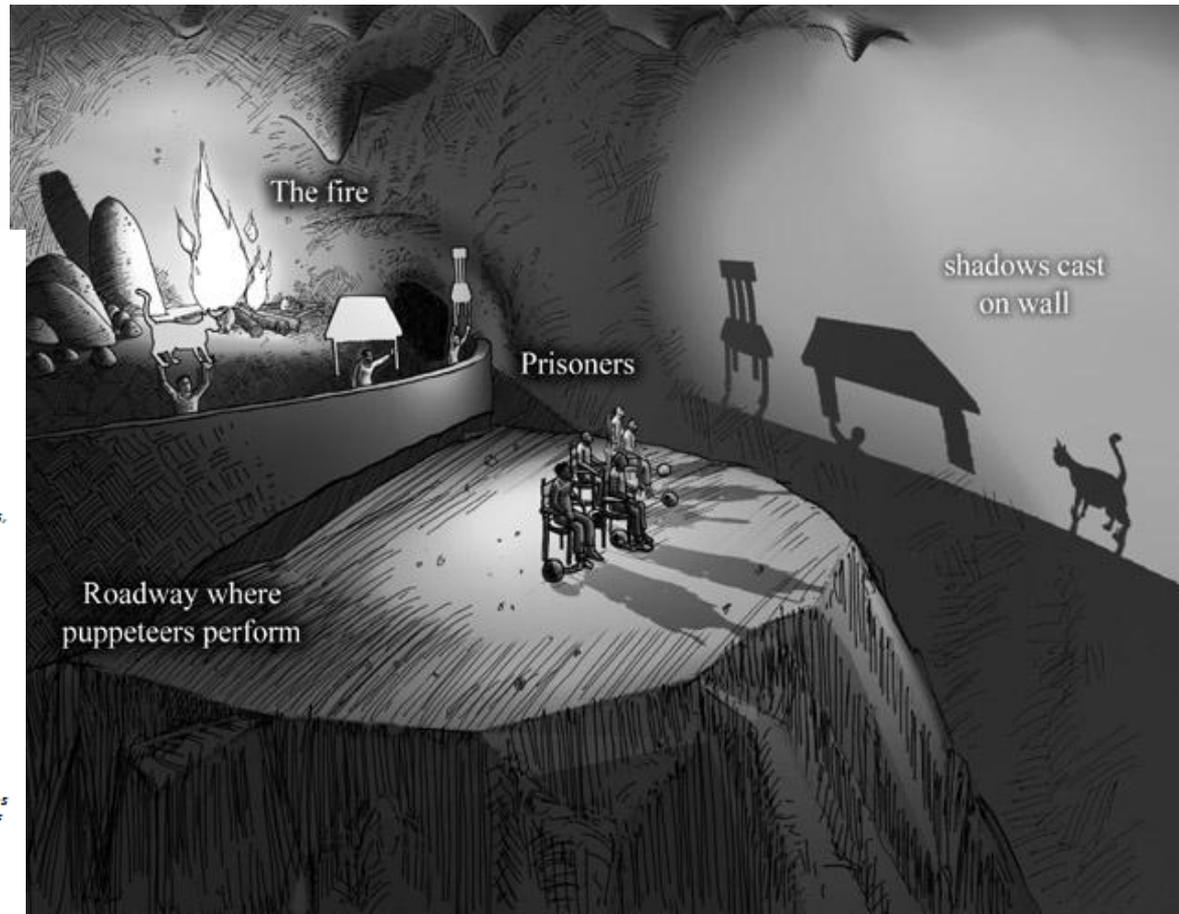
**With regard to certainty he said:**

**"This alone I know, that I know nothing."**



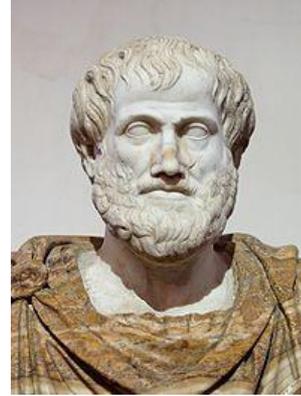


# Plato's Cave



Intelligible World <i>(things apprehended only by the mind)</i>	<b>Forms Ideas</b>	<i>The purest form of reality</i>
	<b>Mathematics Logic</b>	<i>enable us to know the forms, the highest goal of philosophy</i>
Sensible World <i>(things apprehended by the senses)</i>	<b>Objects Physical things</b>	
	<b>Shadows Reflections</b>	<i>appearances or perceptions as opposed to the reality of an object</i>

# ***Aristotle*** (384-322 B.C.)



A later pupil in Plato's Academy, developed laws of logic and of scientific method

Believed all knowledge begins in the 5 senses – an ascent from the particular to the essence

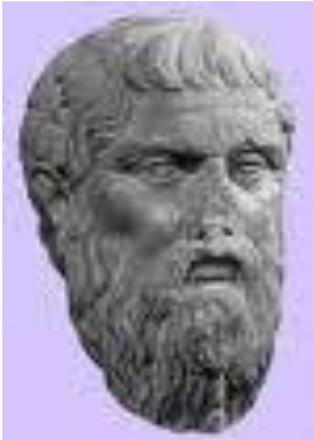
- ***Physics*** = study of being which is physical
- ***Mathematics*** = study of being which is quantifiable
- ***Metaphysics*** = study of being, things outside sensory perception. “God” is the first cause, a logical impersonal necessity required to explain the cosmos and then be discarded

# ***Stoic thought***

- The Stoics believed in the certainty that knowledge can be attained through the use of reason. Truth can be distinguished from fallacy; even if, in practice, only an approximation can be made.
- According to the Stoics, the senses are constantly receiving sensations: pulsations which pass from objects through the senses to the mind, where they leave behind an impression (*phantasia*). The mind has the ability to judge— approve or reject — an impression, enabling it to distinguish a true representation of reality from one which is false.
- Some impressions can be assented to immediately, but others can only achieve varying degrees of hesitant approval which can be labelled belief or opinion. It is only through the use of reason that we can achieve clear comprehension and conviction. Certain and true knowledge, achievable by the Stoic sage, can be attained only by verifying the conviction with the expertise of one's peers and the collective judgment of humankind.

# Sceptics

*maintained knowledge of things is impossible, ideas or notions are never true but there are degrees of probability and of belief allowing one to act*



**Protagoras of Abdera** (480-411 B.C.) insisted on public accountability of citizens on basis of mutually agreed values. Greece would honour its classical divinities despite their moral and intellectual credibility. *“Man is the measure of all things”*

**Gorgias** (485-380 B.C.) *“Nothing exists; if anything does exist it cannot be known; if anything exists and can be known, it cannot be communicated.”*

**Timon of Phlius** added *since equally good arguments can be made on either side it is impossible to decide*



**Pyrrho of Elis** (c.360-270 B.C.) *“We can never know true reality so we should refrain from making judgments.”*

# “The *logos* became flesh”

When John suddenly says this, it threatens to break all contact with Greek thinking. Jesus whose story he is about to tell seems nonsense since *logos* cannot be identified with a particular human being & especially one executed as a despicable criminal of the lowest order. This is a stumbling point for any wishing to read on or the point of departure for a completely new idea.

- *Ps 118:22 The stone [which] the builders refused is become the head [stone] of the corner. Isa 8:14 and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare.*
- *1Pe 2:8 and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.*

At heart of Christian message was a new **fact**  
*(fact = something done)* **God had acted.**

This could not fit into existing ways of understanding the world without fundamentally changing them. It could not form part of any worldview except one of which it was the basis but at the same time could only be communicated to the world of classical thought by using its language.

- John introduced **logos** – a word familiar to readers of eastern Mediterranean, whether Greek or Hebrew.
  - To Greeks it referred to the ultimate impersonal entity which was at the heart of all coherence in the cosmos.
  - To Hebrew readers it referred to the word of the living personal Lord, by which he had created the cosmos and continues to sustain it.

# ***Christianity presented itself to classical world as development of Jewish faith***

***BUT***

- Reached out among **all sectors of society**
- Offered its **scriptures in Greek**
- **Commentary and interpretation offered in Greek** (cf. Aramaic of emerging rabbinical tradition)
- Therefore in order **to engage cultural leadership** of classical world, **there had to be a diligent effort to relate biblical story to world of classical thought** - medium was Greek language – but without being absorbed into and neutralised by that world of thought.

# *The church fathers' reactions in their cultural milieu*

- **Tertullian** asked “*What has Jerusalem in common with Athens?*” assuming a negative answer.
- **Origen** of Alexandria – a scholar of the Bible and of classical thought, sought to find the greatest possible common ground.
- **Athanasius** was crucial to this, fighting the most powerful forces in the church and **safeguarding the affirmation of the Incarnation, not simply a likeness of God, but His very being**. Without this Christianity would have been absorbed into the general mix of pagan religiosity.

- If the *logos* had become flesh then two dualisms, fundamental to classical thought were no longer tenable.
  - One was dualism between “sensible” and “intelligible” or between material and mental or spiritual
  - One was between being and becoming
- John showed that in a precisely dated historical happening with witnesses available, the eternal God entered the physical world. This transforms the idea of God from the world of
- thought to that of current reality.

# ***The Cappodocian Fathers***

St Basil (329-379), his brother St Gregory of Nyssa (340-390) and his best friend, St Gregory of Nazianzen (329-389)

## **4 principles – which facilitated the development of European science – thanks to the reality of the Incarnation**

1. The cosmos is the creation of a rational God who has also made us in his image. It is in principle comprehensible by the human mind.
2. The cosmos is a creation by God as a free act of his will and not an emanation of God. It has a relative autonomy in which not everything that happens is the direct will of God. Thus, the way to knowledge of the cosmos is not opening the mind to ultimate reality through mystical contemplation but careful observation allows investigation of the empirical facts.
3. Scripture says that God created the heavens and the earth. Therefore the “heavenly bodies” are not (as Aristotle said) made of a different substance from the elements that comprise the earth, but are of the same substance.
4. Because of Christ’s work in the incarnation, we may use material means for the advancement of human salvation. Thus the church did not have to follow the Hebrew tradition of rejecting Greek medicine but could use Greek medicine in its ministry.

# ***Augustine of Hippo*** (354-430)

- Professor of rhetoric in the Imperial University - brought to faith in Christ through the influence of Ambrose and the circumstances of his own moral and intellectual struggles.
- Apprenticed in the tradition centred in the biblical story. This starting point required a radical reconstruction of his former ways of thought. His slogan *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order to know) defined a way of knowing that begins in the faithful acceptance of the given fact that God revealed himself in Christ.
- The dominant element in his classical background was Platonic in which the ultimate realities were ideas (of which the idea of the Good is the apex) which when grasped lead to salvation and the full realisation of the soul.

# ***Scepticism, Philosophy and Europe***

## ***– a history***

- Europe is effectively the western end of Asia – a *cul-de-sac* into which wave after wave of Asian migrants moved, pushing predecessors further into western peninsulas and islands. Europe's distinctive culturally and spiritually was because for 1000 years, invading barbarians were schooled in the biblical story and in Greek and Latin thinking.
- Greeks were aware of gods in whom they did not expect to find reliable truth there. Jews, with synagogues in every major city, were separate and their religion outside main currents of philosophical investigation

# The Nestorian Church

(“The Church of the East”)

- In the Middle East the language of Christian literature was largely Syriac, the centre of the “Church of the East” being Edessa. Here, Aristotle had been translated into Syriac and when the Arab/Islam conquests overwhelmed Christian civilisation, these “Nestorian” Christians eventually became the teachers of their Arab overlords. Aristotle was translated into Arabic and Islamic theology took Aristotelian rationalism to its heart.



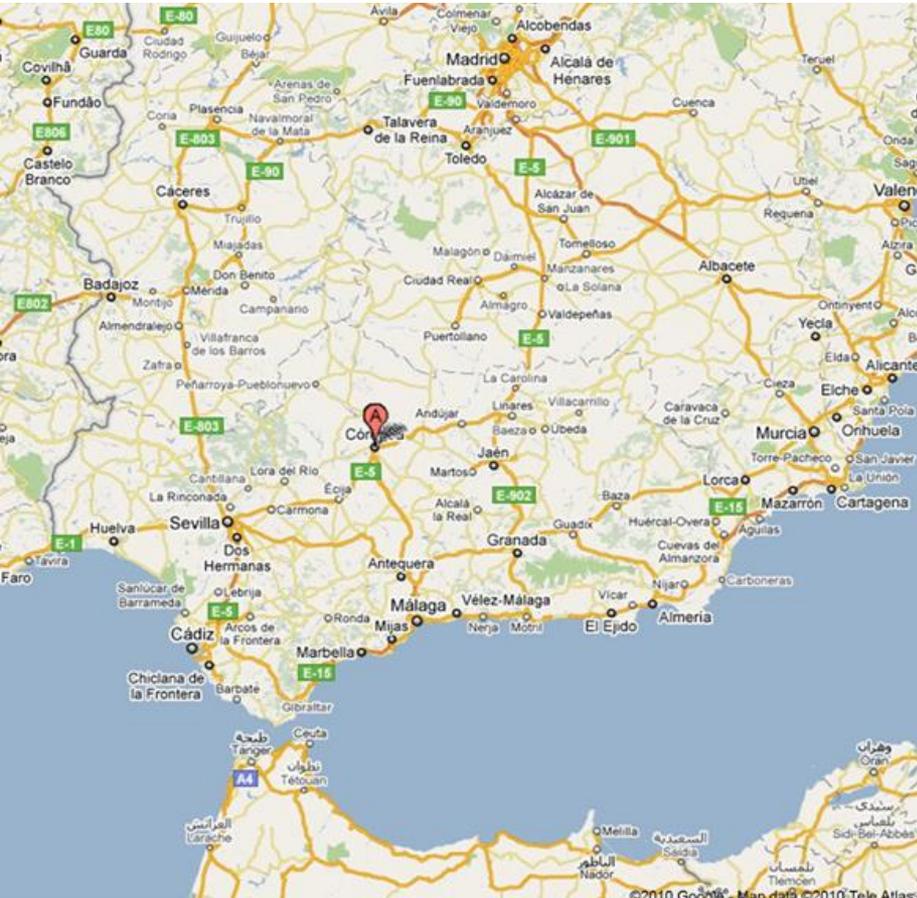
# The development of philosophy in the “Dark Ages”

## **Christianity was permeating Europe through Benedictine monastic teaching from 529:**

- The Benedictine monks received pilgrims and travellers, at a period when western Europe was almost destitute of inns
- The Benedictine monks performed many works of charity, feeding the hungry, healing the sick who were brought to their doors, and distributing their medicines freely to those who needed them
- The Benedictine monks provided education for boys who wished to become priests and those who intended to lead active lives in the world
- The Benedictine monks copied the manuscripts of classical authors, they preserved valuable books that would otherwise have been lost
- The Benedictine monks were the only scholars of the age
- The Benedictine monks kept records of the most striking events of their time and acted as chroniclers of the medieval history of the Middle Ages

**Greek (mainly Platonic) rather than Latin tradition predominated**

# Spain and the interface between Islam, Christianity and Judaism



In 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century Spain Islamic scholars opened rich dialogues with Jewish and Christian scholars in what can be seen as the start of “Universities” and here Aristotle was translated into Latin. The translation into Latin of the writings of the great Muslim theologians such as Avicenna (980-1032) and Averroes (Abu al-Walid Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Rushd)(1126-1198) introduced Western Christendom to a new kind of rationalism that challenged traditional thought.



# *Averroes* (1126-1198)

Abu al-Walid Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Rushd

- Not all people are able to find truth through philosophy, which is why the Law speaks of three ways for humans to discover truth and interpret scripture: the demonstrative, the dialectical and the rhetorical. These divide humanity into philosophers, theologians and the common masses. The simple truth is that Islam is the best of all religions, in that, consistent with the goal of Aristotelian ethics, it produces the most happiness, which is comprised of the knowledge of God. As such, one way is appointed to every person, consistent with their natural disposition, so that they can acquire this truth.
- Demonstrative truth cannot conflict with scripture (i.e. Qur'an), since Islam is ultimate truth and the nature of philosophy is the search for truth. If scripture does conflict with demonstrative truth, such conflict must be only apparent. If philosophy and scripture disagree on the existence of any particular being, scripture should be interpreted allegorically.

# *Averroism*

- The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw an intellectual revival in the Latin West, with the first great universities being established in Italy, France and England.
- At the University of Paris, a group of philosophers came to identify themselves with the Aristotelian philosophy presented by Ibn Rushd, particularly certain elements of its relation to religion. Later known as the “Averroists,” these Christian philosophers sparked a controversy within the Roman Catholic Church about the involvement of philosophy with theology.
- Averroists, their accusers charged, had promoted the doctrines of one intellect for all humans, denial of the immortality of the soul, claimed that happiness can be found in this life and promoted the innovative doctrine of “double truth”. Double truth, the idea that there are two kinds of truth, religious and philosophical, was not held by Ibn Rushd himself but was an innovation of the Averroists.

# ***Averroist consequences 1***

- The popularity of Averroist teachings at the University of Paris led the Pope in 1263 to reimpose an earlier ban on the teachings of Aristotle but this did not silence “The Philosopher”. In 1257 St Thomas Aquinas had begun his *Summa contra Gentiles* and his synthesis of the “new learning” with old biblical tradition was to shape the thinking of Western Christianity to this day.
- Thomas Aquinas accepted a distinction between what could be known by reason alone (e.g. the existence of God, the immortality of the soul) from things that could be known by faith alone through divine revelation (e.g. doctrines of the Incarnation, and the Trinity). He argued against Averroes that where divine revelation contradicts the teachings of philosophy, the latter are untrue or can be shown to be unnecessary. Theology was the higher discipline, but reason and faith had been torn apart.

# *Averroist consequences 2*

- Knowledge and faith are separate. There is a type of knowledge that does not depend on faith and there is another type which is only available by the exercise of faith. Thomas Locke defined belief as “pursuasion which falls short of knowledge.” Certainty is a matter of knowledge, not of faith. Faith is what we fall back on when certain knowledge is not available. This split referred to by C.P. Snow as “The Two Cultures” runs through every university campus separating science from the remaining faculties.
- There become two conceptions of God:
  - The God whose existence is demonstrable by the methods of philosophical argument
  - The Trinitarian God of the Bible

# ***Averroist consequences 3***

- If philosophy has to be called in to underpin the knowledge of God because the biblical foundation is insufficient grounds for certainty, then those other grounds must themselves be invulnerable, which they are not.
- The subsequent centuries saw the increasing influence of classical thought and the shaking of old and apparently secure foundations by the findings of the new science as developed by Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler etc.

# ***Christianity and the state***

Just as Socrates was deemed dangerous because he did not believe in the Athenian gods, so Christians were thought to be atheists because they refused to acknowledge the Roman Emperor as a god and were therefore threats to the establishment and social order.

After Constantine's assumption of Christianity as state religion, the influence of the church on the state was seen as a predominantly stabilising influence.

The power, influence and wealth of the church became an increasing source of scandal exploitation and oppression sometimes legitimising and perpetuating corrupt regimes

# ***Ways to deal with a corrupt church 1***

- Legal constraints limiting church power (in England)
- Preaching and translation of the bible (Wycliffe)
- Uprisings (Jan Huss in Czechoslovakia)
- Persuasion (Zwingli & Calvin)
- **Protestant Reformation:** Luther [1483-1546] (NE Germany), Zwingli [1484-1531](Zurich), Calvin [1509-1564](Geneva)

They argued that the church needed to rediscover its original vision, setting aside claims to power, wealth, status and influence, returning to more authentic and modest NT models. The success of this movement was at least partly due to liberation and empowerment of the emerging middle classes of Western Europe.

# ***Ways to deal with a corrupt church 2***

- Limiting and devolving church authority and stopping its military adventurism

- By military defeat e.g. Battle of Urbino 1517

- By treaty

A treaty signed between Francis II of France and Pope Leo X (who sold indulgences to reconstruct St Peter's Basilica) in 1516, placed the Catholic Church in France in a subservient role to the monarchy, while similar treaties with the rulers of other countries in Europe also slowly ate at the power of the pope, creating the political conditions under which theologians could start differing with the Catholic dogma without fear of being seized by the church police

# ***Church and the people in 18<sup>th</sup> Century***

- An age of optimism with a whiff of revolution in the air. The church was seen as the enemy of progress, lending a spurious divine authority to the traditions of the past and the corrupt monarchies that depended on them for what little credibility they possessed. The the extent of the problem varied
  - France demonstrated the most concerted and influential critique of the power of the church and the ideas on which it was based.
  - In North America, atheism was not taken seriously as a means of social transformation. There the solution lay in the separation of church and state.

# *Church and the people in England*



The restoration of Charles II as monarch in 1660 who was out of sympathy with radical Protestantism guaranteed no further government-imposed religious sanctions. It was believed that the reinstatement of the docile Church of England was safe since it was expected to be submissive to the expectations of the people and to keep its religious beliefs to itself rather than to impose them on others.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, most British intellectuals had lost their patience with institutional religion.

The English Civil War (1642-49) and the execution of Charles I was seen as the outcome of very un-British extremism. Memories of the Puritan Commonwealth (1649-60) – the nearest to theocracy ever seen in England – left bitter memories including the banning of Christmas and plum pudding.



# ***Scepticism – reborn***

## ***BACKGROUND 1***

- Scepticism had become dominant in intellectual life by the beginning of the seventeenth century in Western Europe. Indeed in France the question being asked was “Is there any escape from scepticism?” It was not primarily a matter of belief but of whether or not any knowledge was actually reliable. This kind of scepticism could co-exist with an abstractly omnipotent God of natural theology, above the jurisdiction of human logic.
- In a Paris conference about escaping from scepticism in 1628, a learned philosopher attempted to show that scepticism could be overcome by recognising the force of probability, which could, in turn be accepted as a sufficient basis for knowledge. This defence of probability, enthusiastically received by the audience upset Rene Descartes who demonstrated that on the basis of probability he could prove truth to be falsehood and *vice versa*.

# *Scepticism – reborn*

## *BACKGROUND 2*

- **Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle**, deeply impressed by Descartes intervention and being concerned about the threat of atheism, commissioned Descartes to deploy the philosophical method to prove, beyond doubt, the existence of God in order to defeat both scepticism and atheism.
- **Rene Descartes** (1596-) called to philosophy through dream in 1619 never had a period of doubt like Augustine but used it as a universal and methodical starting point.



# ***The Cartesian Method***

## **Doubt everything not provable**

- My senses deceive e.g. stick in water appears bent, I can dream I am awake, my memory can fail me
- At least I know definitely that I am doubting and therefore thinking and therefore I cannot doubt its existence although I can doubt my body and the world which are extended things.

## **Therefore**

- If I doubt, I am imperfect,
- then I must know the perfect exists
- a perfect idea cannot arise from an imperfect mind, so the knowledge of the perfect but arise outside of me
- therefore there must be a perfect mind which is the source of the perfect idea

# *Cartesian Test for Truth*

- only indubitably (clear and certain) ideas are true
- all problems should be reduced to their simplest parts
- reasoning should proceed from simple to complex
- rule of enumeration – check each step of the argument
- Error arises from the will (judgment), not from thought.

## ***Cartesian Proof that there is an external world via God***

- I am receiving a strong steady succession of ideas of a world that are not under my control
- Either God is deceiving me or that external world exists
- God will not deceive
- Therefore the world & similarly my body exists

# *Descartes' philosophy - evaluated*

## **GOOD**

Truth is

- objective
- knowable
- rational (he embraced “first principles of knowledge” e.g. law of non-contradiction)
- arguable

## **WEAK**

- Why doubt what is obvious and only what is necessary to doubt?
- He started with philosophy arising in thought and moved to reality
- He could have started I am, therefore I think
- Unbridgeable dualism between mind and body:
  - Mind is a thinking but non-extended thing
  - Body is a non-thinking but extended thing
  - Therefore he denies unity of human nature and sets up a dichotomy between material and spiritual
  - He did not espouse experience in the pursuit of truth

# ***Descartes' philosophy - consequences***

- Descartes attempted to create a structure of knowledge using processes of reasoning which were mathematical – this has become the *lingua franca* of science which has become the realm of *facts*
- the arts are merely *subjective*.
- This allowed Huxley in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to propagate the myth that science had replaced religion as the centrepiece of modern civilisation.
- Theory and practice became divorced and all truth claims became open to doubt.

# *Immanuel Kant*

(1724-1804)



- In *Critique of Pure Reason* he brought a synthesis between the rationalists like Descartes (who believed in innate ideas) and empiricists like John Locke or David Hume (who believed we were born with a *tabula rasa*).
- He argued:
  - We are born with a blank slate
  - The content of all knowledge comes from experiences which are perceived through the senses
  - These are categorised by forms of sensation and categories of the mind which already exist

# *Kant – consequences 1*

- When categories of understanding are applied to reality, antimonies result:
- E.g. Re causality:
  - *Thesis* - not every cause has a cause, otherwise the series would never begin. But the series has begun, therefore there must be a first cause
  - *Antithesis* – but the series cannot have a beginning, since everything has a cause. So, there cannot be a first cause
  - *Thus* reason, when applied to reality ends in contradictions. Reason can therefore only be applied to the *phenomenal* world (the world to me) and not to the *noumenal* world (the world in itself).
- He argued that we cannot therefore prove God
- But the statement we cannot know reality is self-defeating, presupposing knowledge about reality.
- Nevertheless the “ultimate reality is unknowable” has become almost self evident for “modern” people.

# ***Descartes - Kant : consequences***

3 dualisms have resulted :

1. Between the **thinking mind and material objects**. Therefore God (who belongs to mental or spiritual domain) cannot influence or interfere with the material world. In the world about us the dualism remains – the gospel cannot be accepted as public truth. However, in quantum physics, the observer and the observed belong to the same world and interact
2. **Objective vs subjective**. Despite our experience that all knowledge requires a knowing human subject and the object of enquiry, Descartes method has created a wide gulf – only science is true- religion is personal experience
3. **Theory and practice**. In this one develops an idealistic mental picture and the applies this to the “real” situation

# ***Descartes - Kant : consequences***

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2. **Objective vs subjective**. Despite our experience that all knowledge requires a knowing human subject and the object of enquiry, Descartes method has created a wide gulf – only science is true- religion is personal experience
3. **Theory and practice**. In this one develops an idealistic mental picture and the applies this to the “real” situation. *In the Bible there is a single process: hear, believe, obey. We are not detached but the mind and body need to link as one. The gospel does not become public truth by its ideas but by abiding in Christ and engaged in the life of the world.*

# ***2 forms of knowledge of our world***

## **CLASSICAL**

*(≡ Savoir)*

- Aristotelian
- Our agenda and questions
- We begin with questions formulated on our experience
- Our achievement

## **CHRISTIAN**

*(≡ Connaître)*

- What we seek in our relationships with others (not their C.V.)
- We are not in full control
- We have to answer their questions and be limited by their willingness to share

# We are talking about a third person who then enters the room...

- We either change into a different mode of talking or break off the discussion. (This is a proper analogy between the classical and Christian way of understanding the world).
- If *the Idea of God* enters the room and speaks, we have to stop our former discussion and listen. We have to answer as well as ask or dismiss the interruption.
- The one who has entered the room may be an imposter whom we can treat with justified scepticism declining to accept their claimed identity, but if they are genuinely who they claim to be, then one kind of talk has to give way to another.

# ***“Has Jerusalem anything in common with Athens?”***

- **SOMETHING**
  - We can understand from our observations, senses and yet be aware of our fallibility in listening, seeing, hearing, feeling and interpretation
- **BUT NOT ALL**
  - We can, by conceding to listen to the intruder, eventually find better answers than when all we had was our own formulated questions

*Western modernity has been shaped by the influence of the liturgical year, pictures, drama, culture and biblical values e.g. fidelity, honesty, reliability, paying a fair wage on time, trust*

## 2 WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING

1. If the ultimate truth is **an idea**, a formula, a set of timeless impersonal laws or principles, then we do not have to recognise that something unexpected may happen and, if our knowledge is accurate we might be able to predict the future and explain the past. This is *theoria*
2. If we look for ultimate truth in **a story** in which we are still in the middle, we walk by faith and not sight. This is not predictable and we walk depending on the faithfulness of the author. This invokes principles of purpose, promise, acceptance or ignoring, obedience, disobedience. **Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.** (The Bible does not mention *theoria and praxis*).

Genesis 1:1-4 **In the beginning God** created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then **God said**, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And **God saw** the light, that it was good

2:16-17 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;

- "but of the tree of the **knowledge** of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.
- 1b) discernment, understanding, wisdom

ted da`ath *dah'-ath* [93]

**knowledge, perception, skill**

AV-knowledge 82, know 6, cunning 1,  
unwittingly 2, ignorantly 1, unawares 1

# *Is scepticism OK?*

- The ability to question observation and inference is a safety feature
- To doubt everything until proven true is not practical for an individual
  - we all work on empirical premises in order to get things done
- Doubt assumes an absolute truth is present against which the premise may be judged
- *Our current concepts* of truth and non-truth are culturally transmitted
- In Christ the ideal, the truth and practical reality come together
  - *Pilate asked Jesus: "What is **truth**?" (John 18:38)*
  - *Jesus said: "**Your word** (logov) **is truth**. (John 17:17)*
  - *"**I am the way, the truth, and the life.**" (John 14:6)*

John 1:1-5 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Longing to Know

THE PHILOSOPHY  
OF KNOWLEDGE FOR



ORDINARY  
PEOPLE

Esther Lightcap Meek

# PROPER CONFIDENCE

*faith, doubt  
&  
certainty in  
christian  
discipleship*

LESSLIE NEWBIGIN

MICHAEL POLANYI

## Personal Knowledge

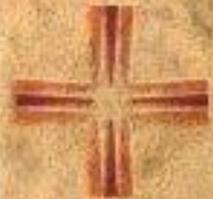
*Towards a  
Post-Critical Philosophy*

*A chemist and philosopher  
attempts to bridge the gap between  
fact and value, science and humanity*

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# BAKER ENCYCLOPEDIA *of* CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

*by*  
NORMAN L. GEISLER



# *Is science really so divorced from faith?*



**Michael Polanyi** (1891-1976) *outlined the important interaction knowledge and the individual.*

Born in Budapest where he qualified in medicine, studied physical chemistry in Karlsruhe and later directed the chemical kinetics research group in Berlin. He was involved in foundation of chemical dynamics, chemiluminescence, x-ray diffraction for analysis of fibres and metals.

He left and came to **Manchester** in 1933. He became disturbed by the effect of Soviet politics on the interpretation of some plant-breeding theories.

In 1948, he changed his chemistry professorship for a personal chair of “social studies” and retired in 1959 to become senior research fellow at Merton College, Oxford.



# Michael Polanyi *Personal Knowledge*

- **Science is not transmitted as a logical and rigorous method to be learned from textbooks but through practice, transmitted from master to apprentice, demonstrated and imitated rather than spoken.** (This similar to a boy's ability to ride a bicycle and judge speed, distance, angle of lean on a curve; or a woman to recognise a familiar face)
- It is a **social system of authority and apprenticeship**, which imposes discipline, values tradition and teaches expert skills
- **Most scientific work is accomplished within the framework of beliefs or dogmas** which provide problems and answers for ordinary scientific work. We have to trust in the existing “fiduciary framework” of tradition and our observations
- Recognition of a **problem is an awareness, an intuition that there is a pattern or harmony awaiting to be found, hidden in the apparent haphazardness of empirical reality. Personal judgment, commitment and risk is involved at every step combined with courage, prudence and patience.** It also stated that what matters in a scientific community's attribution of discovery and originality is not simply experimental or logical plausibility but intrinsic interest at the time within the scientific community.
- **It is an illusion that science will enable us to understand everything.** There are hierarchies of knowledge. Bone and muscle interactions are limited by chemical and physical laws but neither chemistry or physics explain biology. Understanding a machine **does not explain either motive or purpose or deny that the latter exist.**

# Polanyi – “The critique of doubt”

## 1) *The Doctrine of Doubt*

It has been taken for granted that the acceptance of unproven beliefs was the broad road to darkness...

- *Descartes* had declared that universal doubt should purge his mind of all opinions held merely on trust and open it to knowledge grounded firmly in reason.
- *Kant* said that in mathematics there was no room for mere opinion, but only for real knowledge =, and that short of possessing knowledge, we must refrain from all judgment.
- *Bertrand Russell* wrote: “...Crusaders and Muslims, Protestants and adherents of the Pope, Communists and Fascists, have filled large parts of the last 1600 years with futile strife, when a little philosophy would have shown both sides in all these disputes that neither side had any good reason to believe itself in the right. Dogmatism...is the greatest of the mental obstacles to human happiness.”

## ***2) The Equivalence of Belief and Doubt***

- **Tacit doubt:** e.g. Marksman taking aim may be in doubt until he pulls the trigger.
- **Explicit doubt** - an attempt to deny belief in favour of other beliefs which are not currently doubted: e.g.
  - Perpetual motion
  - Squaring the circle

*The difference between the positive statement and the denial of a positive statement is merely a matter of wording and the acceptance and rejection of either form of allegation are both decided by similar tests*

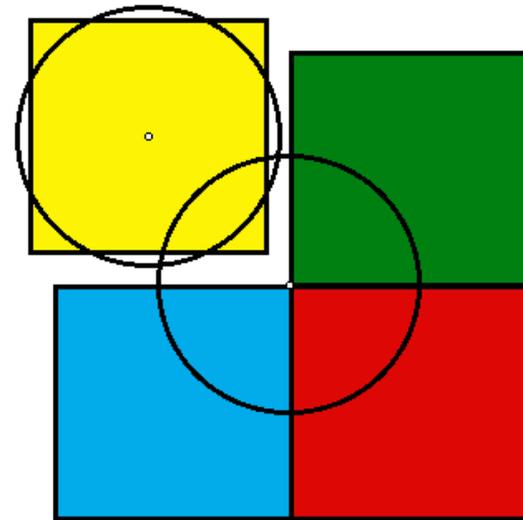
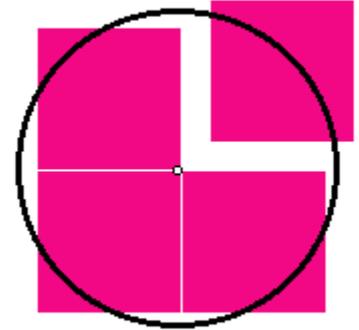
# Perpetual motion



**Study of Perpetual Motion. Designs of a perpetual motion machine date back to 1150. Bhaskara II, claimed a wheel could run forever. However, da Vinci drew a plan of the momentums & thus proved that perpetual motion could not exist. Photo Courtesy of EMS Exhibits, Vienna**

# Squaring the circle

is one of the three great problems of Classical Geometry, along with the trisection of the angle and the duplication of the cube. Since 1800 B.C. mathematicians have worked on the problem of constructing a square equal in area to that of a given circle. Whether or not this is possible depends, of course, on what tools you allow yourself. Plato insisted that the problem be solved with straightedge and compass only. To achieve this requires constructing a length equal to  $\sqrt{\pi}$  times the radius of the circle. Thus when Lindemann proved in 1882 that  $\pi$  is transcendental (not the root of any polynomial with rational coefficients) he effectively proved that the construction was impossible with only straightedge and compass.



## 2) *The Equivalence of Belief and Doubt ii*

- **Agnostic doubt:**

- *Contradictory doubt*

- Temporary: *“I believe P is not proven” – but may be demonstrated later*
- Final: *“I believe P cannot be proven” i.e. cannot be demonstrated later*

*BUT*

***Neither denial actually questions the credibility of P***

### 3) Reasonable and Unreasonable Doubt

- **Doubt is fiduciary** {A **fiduciary** duty is a [legal](#) or ethical relationship of confidence or [trust](#) between two or more [parties](#), most commonly a *fiduciary* and a *principal*. One party, for example a corporate trust company or the trust department of a bank, holds a **fiduciary relation** or acts in a fiduciary capacity to another, such as one whose funds are entrusted to it for investment. In a fiduciary relation one person, in a position of vulnerability, justifiably reposes confidence, [good faith](#), reliance and trust in another whose aid, advice or protection is sought in some matter}.
- **Reasonable doubt** indicates a reliance on something that cannot be doubted i.e. “a moral certainty” e.g.
  - *Natural scientists are more critical than astrologers because we regard their conception of stars and men as truer*
  - *Because people who witnessed falling meteorites tended to associate them with supernatural significance, the French Academy explained the facts away during the 18<sup>th</sup> century*
  - *The medical profession’s refusal to accept Mesmer’s hypnotic phenomena of painless amputations etc. was to defend science against an imposter*

**DOUBTS WE CURRENTLY HOLD MAY SUBSEQUENTLY BE SEEN TO BE EQUALLY BIGOTED AND DOGMATIC AS THOSE OF WHICH WE HAVE BEEN CURED**

# Scepticism in Natural Science

- Proof of an allegation cannot be as rigorous as in mathematics
  - Evidence for fermentation being due to living cells was disregarded by Wöhler & Liebig
  - Pasteur's evidence for absence of spontaneous regeneration was rejected by his opponents and even Pasteur admitted that the possibility was not excluded

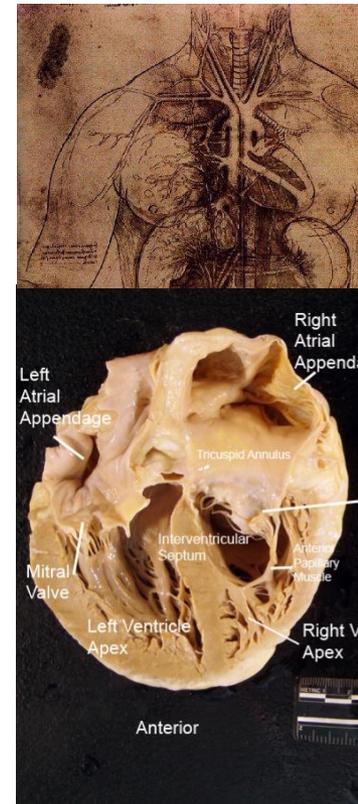
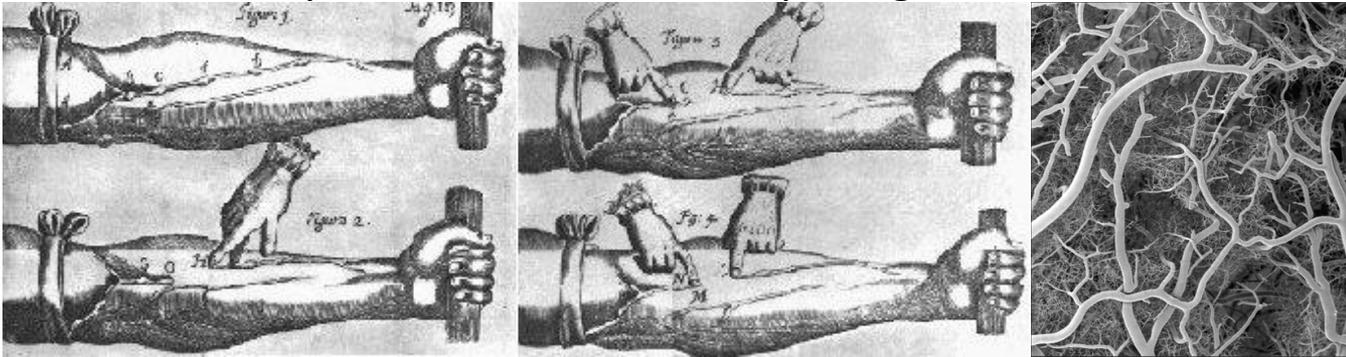
# Is doubt a heuristic principle?



- **Heuristic** (from the [Greek](#) "Εὕρισκω" for "find" or "discover") is an adjective for experience-based techniques that help in problem solving, learning and discovery. Archimedes is said to have shouted "*Heureka*" (later converted to "Eureka") after discovering the principle of displacement in his bath. A heuristic method is used to come to a solution rapidly that is hoped to be close to the best possible answer, or 'optimal solution'. A heuristic is a "[rule of thumb](#)", an educated guess, an intuitive judgment or simply [common sense](#), a general way of solving a problem.

## *There is no rule favouring belief or doubt as the path to discovery*

- Some discoveries are prompted by the conviction that something is lacking in the existing framework of science
  - Vesalius rejected the belief that the inter-ventricular septum was pierced by invisible passages
- Some rely on suspicions that there is more implied within the existing knowledge base
  - Harvey assumed that invisible passages connected arteries to veins



# Religious Doubt

- God cannot be observed any more than truth, beauty or love
- He exists in the sense that He is to be worshipped and obeyed...not as a fact – any more than truth, beauty or justice exist as facts
- “*God exists*” is not a statement of **fact** such as “*Snow is white*” but an **accreditive statement** such as “‘*Snow is white*’ is true’. It is **not descriptive** and cannot be subject to **explicit doubt** but uttered with varying degrees of confidence. Assertion may be subject to **tacit doubt** as a form of inarticulate hesitancy.

**Longing to know-**  
**the philosophy of knowledge**  
*Esther Lightcap Meek*

*KNOW is a success word implying we were successful at getting the truth right*

*KNOWLEDGE must be infallible and certain otherwise it is opinion or belief*

# Scepticism doesn't fit

“Nothing is certain but uncertainty”... ?

We constantly make advances from uncertainty ,  
unknowing to knowing

# emeth [127]

**AV-truth 92, true 18, truly 7, right 3, faithfully 2, assured 1, assuredly 1, establishment 1, faithful 1, sure 1, verity 1;**

- 1) firmness, faithfulness, truth
  - 1a) sureness, reliability
  - 1b) stability, continuance
  - 1c) faithfulness, reliableness
  - 1d) truth
    - 1d1) as spoken
    - 1d2) of testimony and judgment
    - 1d3) of divine instruction
    - 1d4) truth as a body of ethical or religious knowledge
    - 1d5) true doctrine
- 2) in truth, truly
- *2Sa 7:28 "And now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are **true** and You have promised this goodness to Your servant.*

# emuwnah [49]

**AV-faithfulness 18, truth 13, faithfully 5, office 5, faithful 3, faith 1, stability 1, steady 1, truly 1, verily 1;**

- 1) firmness, fidelity, steadfastness, steadiness
- *De 32:4 He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of **truth** and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.*
- *Ps 96:13 they will sing before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his **truth**.*

# omen

# [1]

## AV-truth

- faithfulness
- *Isa 25:1 ¶ O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect **faithfulness** you have done marvellous things, things planned long ago.*

# emuwn

# [5]

## AV-faithful 3, truth 1, faith 1

- 1) faithfulness, trusting
- 1a) faithful, trusty (as adj.)
- *De 32:20 And He said: 'I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end will be, For they are a perverse generation, Children in whom is no **faith***
- *Pr 13:17 A wicked messenger falls into trouble, But a **faithful** ambassador brings health.*
- *Pr 14:5 A faithful <0529> witness does not lie, But a false witness will utter lies.*
- *Pr 20:6 Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, But who can find a **faithful** man?*
- *Isa 26:2 Open the gates, That the righteous nation which keeps the **truth** may enter in*

# amen [30]

**AV-amen 27; truly 2, so be it 1**

- 1) verily, truly, amen, so be it
- *Isa 65:16 So that he who blesses himself in the earth Shall bless himself in the God of **truth** And he who swears in the earth Shall swear by the God of **truth** Because the former troubles are forgotten, And because they are hidden from My eyes. De 27:16 'Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt.' And all the people shall say, '**Amen !**'*

# omen *oh-men*' [1]

**AV-truth 1; 1**

- 1) faithfulness
- *Isa 25:1 ¶ O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect **faithfulness** you have done marvellous things, things planned long ago.*

# qoshet [2]

AV-certainty 1, truth 1; (from an unused root meaning to balance)

- 1) bow
- 2) truth, balanced verity
- *Ps 60:4 You have given a banner to those who fear You, That it may be displayed because of the truth Selah*
- *Pr 22:21 That I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, That you may answer words of truth To those who send to you?*

# showt (Aramaic) [2]

## AV-truth 2

- *Da 2:47 The king answered Daniel, and said, "**Truly** your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret."*
- *Da 4:37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all of whose works are **truth**, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.*

# buy y@tseb (Aramaic) *yets-abe'* [1]

- AV-truth 1
- 1) (Pael) to make stand, make certain, gain certainty, know the truth, be certain
- *Da 7:19 "Then I wanted to know the **true buy** meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws—the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left.*

# aletheia [110]

## AV-truth 107, truly 1, true 1, verity 1;

- 1) objectively
  - 1a) what is true in any matter under consideration
    - 1a1) truly, in truth, according to truth
    - 1a2) of a truth, in reality, in fact, certainly
  - 1b) what is true in things appertaining to God and the duties of man, moral and religious truth
    - 1b1) in the greatest latitude
    - 1b2) the true notions of God which are open to human reason without his supernatural intervention
  - 1c) the truth as taught in the Christian religion, respecting God and the execution of his purposes through Christ, and respecting the duties of man, opposing alike to the superstitions of the Gentiles and the inventions of the Jews, and the corrupt opinions and precepts of false teachers even among Christians
- 2) subjectively
  - 2a) truth as a personal excellence
- 2a1) that candour of mind which is free from affection, pretence, simulation, falsehood, deceit
- *Joh 18:38 Pilate said to Him, "What is **truth**?" Joh 17:17 "Sanctify them by Your **truth**. Your word is truth. Joh 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the **truth**, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*

# asphales [5]

from negative particle)and sphallo (to "fail")

AV-certainty 2, certain 1, safe 1, sure 1;

- 1) firm (that which can be relied on)
- 2) certain, true
- 3) suited to confirm

*Ac 21:34 And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the **truth** because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks*

# aletheuo[2]

AV-tell the truth 1, speak the truth 1;

1) to speak or tell the truth

- 1a) to teach the truth

*Ga 4:16 Have I therefore become your enemy because I **tell** you the **truth***

- 1b) to profess the truth (true doctrine)

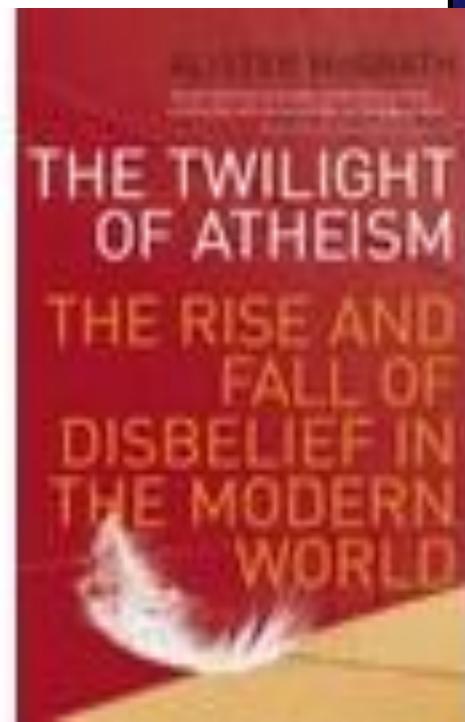
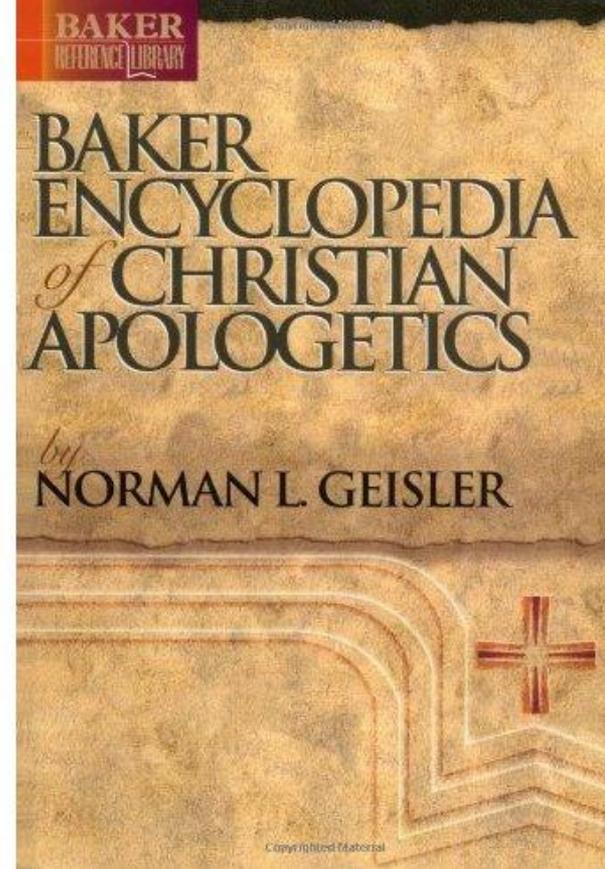
*Eph 4:15 but, speaking the **truth** in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ*

<i>The world is a “scientific” cosmos</i>	<i>Evidence</i>	The world created by God
? First cause unknown ?Multiverse	<b>Written</b>	Bible says God created it by his word
Present and <i>strangely</i> anthropomorphic	<b>Experiential</b>	Present
Mathematical presumptions	<b>Predictive</b>	Prophecy aligned to claim to truth 44/77 x in Gospels
Stable until Penzias & Wilson <small>The best data we have are exactly what I would have predicted, had I had nothing to go on but the five books of Moses, the Psalms, the Bible as a whole.” (Penzias, as cited in Bergman 1994, 183; see also Brian 1995, 163). Arno Penzias’ research into astrophysics has caused him to see “evidence of a plan of divine creation” (Penzias, as cited in Bergman 1994, 183).</small>	<b>Origin</b>	From nothing
None	<b>Purpose</b>	<p><b>For man to rule</b> <small>Gen 1:7 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.</small></p> <p><small>28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."</small></p> <p><b>Hope in Christ</b> <small>1Co 2:9 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."</small></p>
Described due to plate tectonics/ human aberrations/chaos	<b>Failures</b>	<p><b>Disasters happen</b></p> <p><small>Job; De 30:19 "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, [that] I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; oh 9:2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was <u>born blind?</u>"</small></p>
Slowly cools and ages	<b>Destiny</b>	Will be folded up followed by a new heaven and earth

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# Personal Knowledge

*Towards a  
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# Knowledge is...

- Information
- Factoids
- Statements and proofs

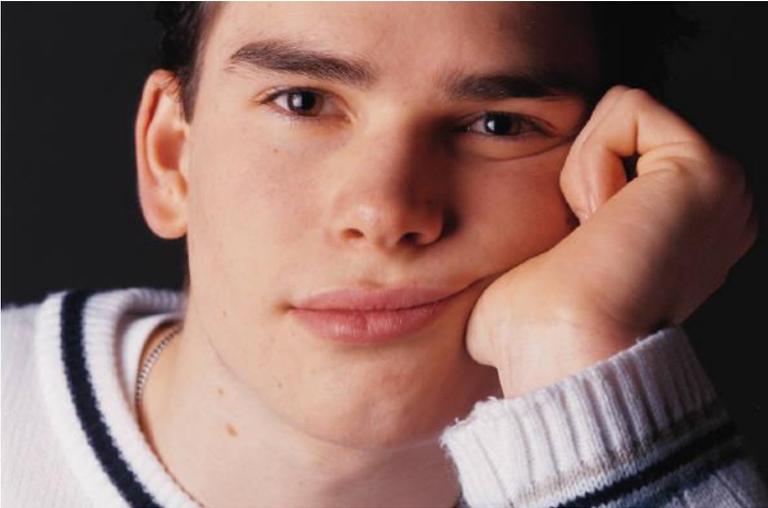


# “Esther’s Daisy of Dichotomies”



- Knowledge      Belief
- Facts            Opinions, Interpretations, Values, Morals
- Reason          Faith, Emotion
- Objective       Subjective
- Theory          Application, Action
- Science         Art, Imagination, Religion, Authority
- Public           Private
- Mind            Body
- Male             Female

# Your epistemic default : Consequences



- ⊙ Boredom
- ⊙ Indifference
- ⊙ Loss of Creativity
- ⊙ Loss of Productivity
- ⊙ Irresponsibility
- ⊙ Depersonalization
- ⊙ Compartmentalization
- ⊙ Fragmentation
- ⊙ Hopelessness
- ⊙ Distrust
- ⊙ Suspicion
- ⊙ Betrayal
- ⊙ Disembodiment
- ⊙ Cluelessness

# A Christian epistemic default

- ◎ Absolute Truth      Relativism, interpretation
- ◎ Reason              Faith
- ◎ Theory              Application
- ◎ Theology            Relationship with Jesus Christ

- ◎ *Where is the gospel heard*
  - —center or petal???
- ◎ *Shouldn't the gospel*
- ◎ *shape the categories*
  - --rather than the other way round??
- ◎ *Is the gospel epistemic? No? Why not?*
- ◎ *Is the gospel castrated??*



# We need a different approach to knowing, one which...

- challenges the dichotomies
- rekindles the longing to know
- accords with a deeper default mode--our humanness
- Restores creation and culture
- epistemically centers and unleashes the gospel

We need epistemological therapy.



**To know something or someone in truth is to enter troth with the known**, to rejoin with new knowing what our minds have put asunder.

**To know** is to become betrothed, to engage the known with one's whole self, an engagement one enters with attentiveness, care, and good will.

**To know in truth** is to allow one's self to be known as well, to be vulnerable to the challenges and changes any true relationship brings.

**To know in truth** is to enter into the life of that which we know and to allow it to enter into ours.

**Truthful knowing** weds the knower and the known; even in separation, the two become part of each other's life and fate. ...

**[T]ruth** involves entering a relationship with someone or something genuinely other than us, but with whom we are intimately bound. ...

**Truth** requires the knower to become interdependent with the known. Both parties have their own integrity and otherness, and one party cannot be collapsed into the other. ...

We find **truth** by pledging our troth, and **knowing** becomes a reunion of separated beings whose primary bond is not of logic but of love.

In **personal knowing**, the relation of the knower and the known does not conform to the stiff protocol of observer and observed. It is more like the resonance of two persons.

When we **know something truly** and well, that which we know does not feel like a separate object to be manipulated and mastered.

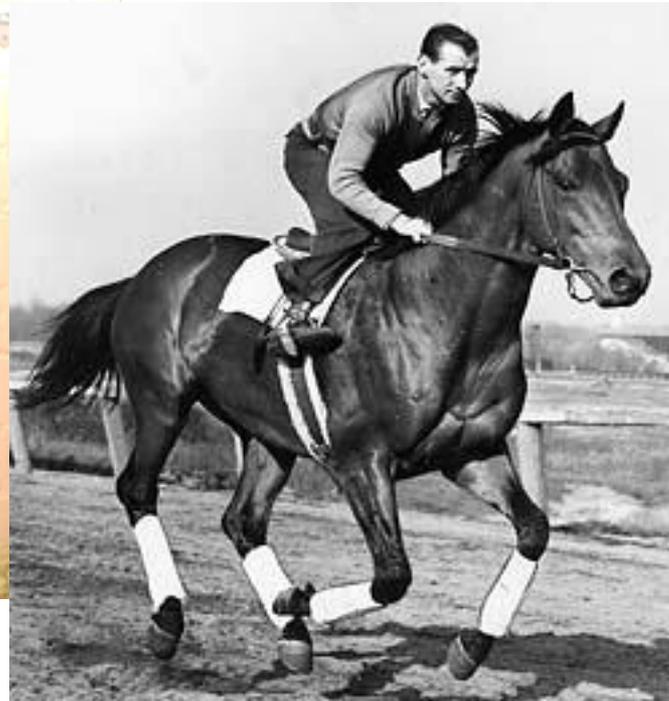
Instead, we feel inwardly related to it; **knowing** it means that we have somehow entered into its life, and it into ours.

Such **knowledge** is a relationship of personal care and fidelity, grounded in truth.

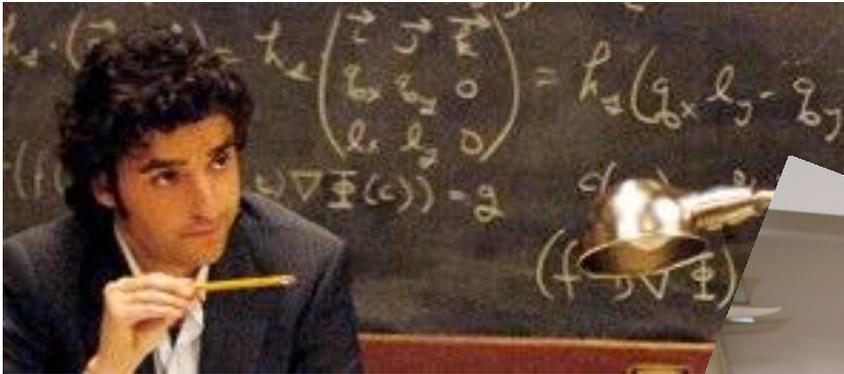
In the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel (another Jew who, like Buber, has a profound understanding of personal truth), “It is impossible to **find Truth** without being in love.”

In the words of St. Gregory, “Love itself is knowledge; **the more one loves the more one knows.**”

# Covenant Epistemology



- I propose that we take, as our paradigm of all acts of knowing, the interpersonal, transformative, covenantally constituted relationship.



Covenantally constituted  
interpersonal relationship

# Covenant Epistemology:

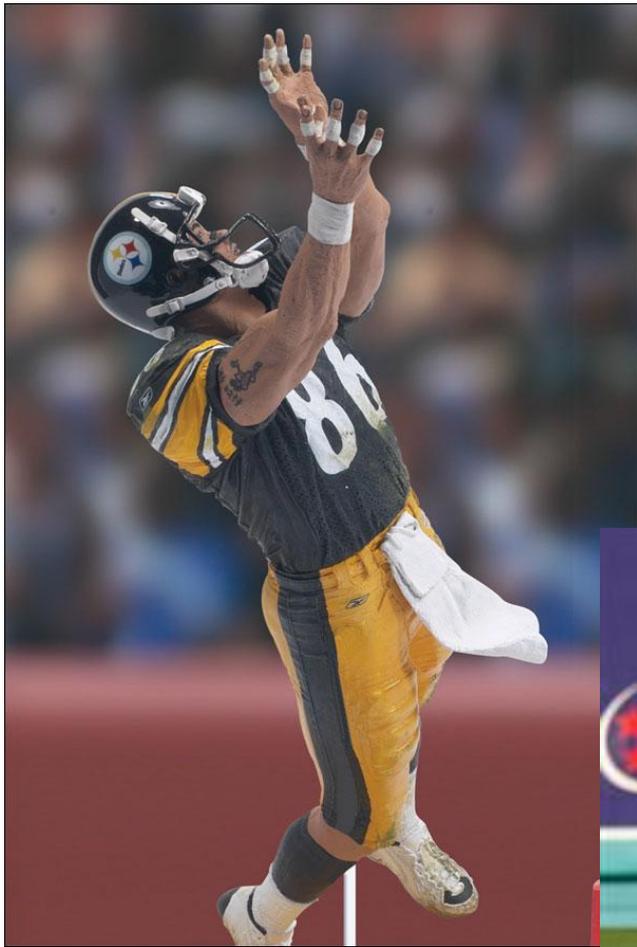
## 3 strands:

- Polanyian epistemology
- Covenant as pledged relationship
- Interpersonhood



# Knowing is... ...the profoundly human struggle...

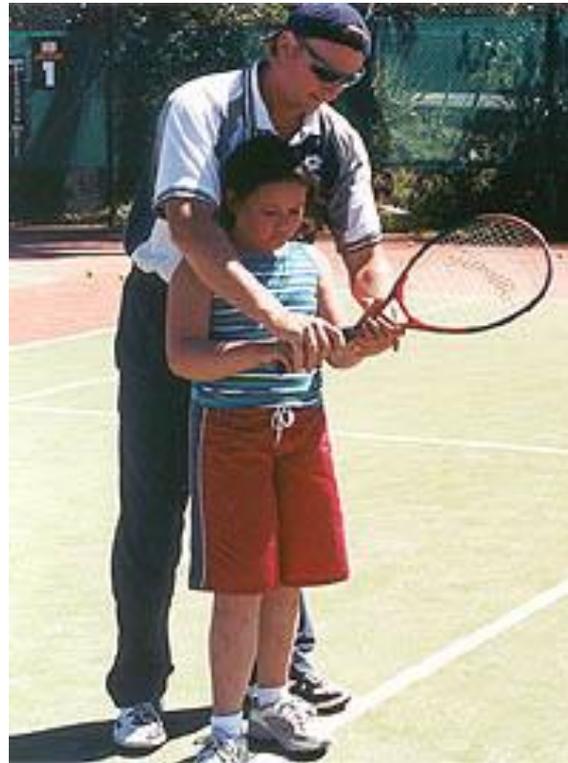
- = integration



Knowing is the profoundly human  
struggle...

...to rely on clues...

- = subsidiary



Knowing is the profoundly human  
struggle to rely on clues...  
...to focus on a pattern...

- = focal

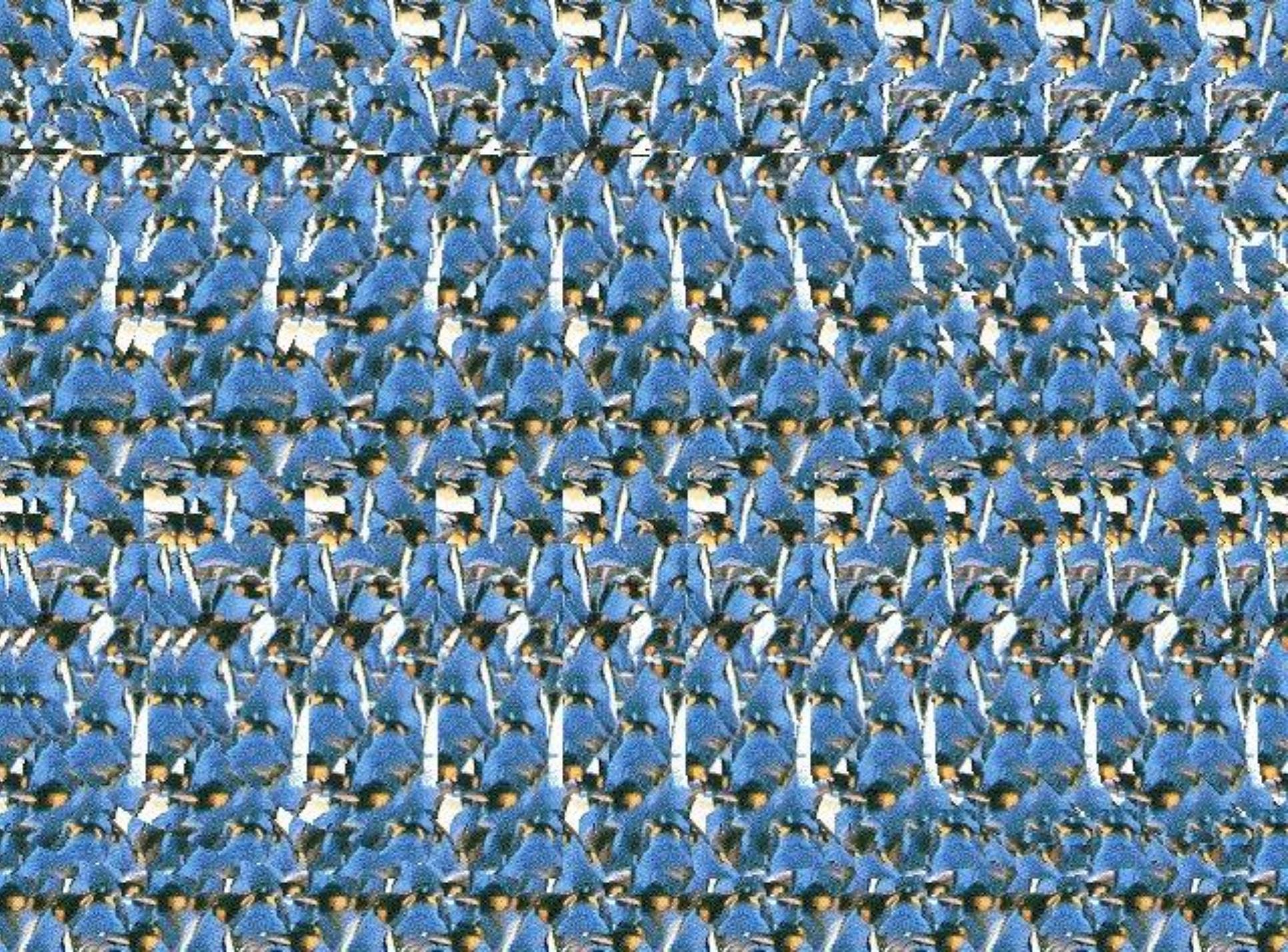


Knowing is the profoundly human  
struggle to rely on clues to focus  
on a pattern...

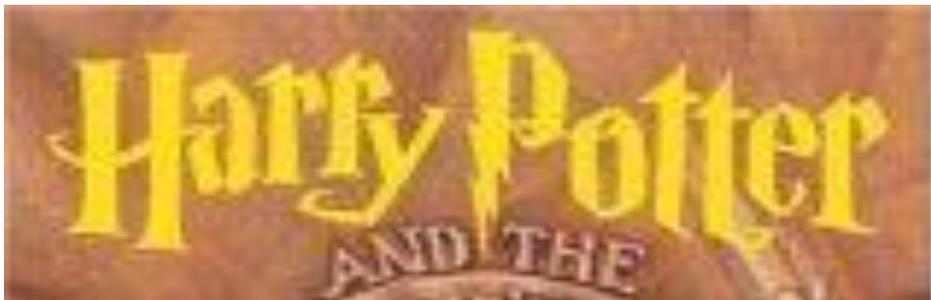
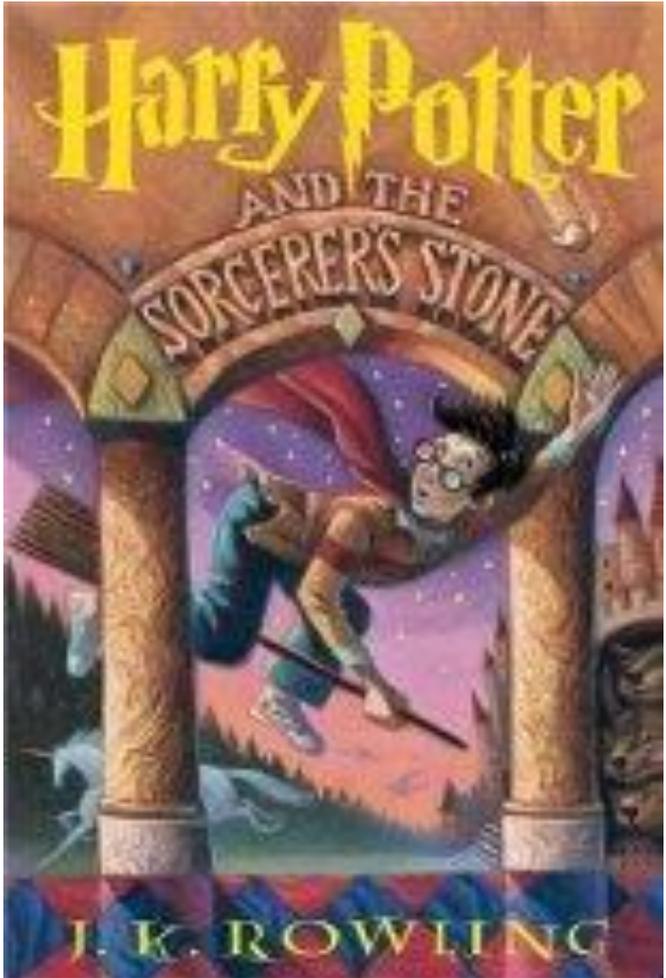
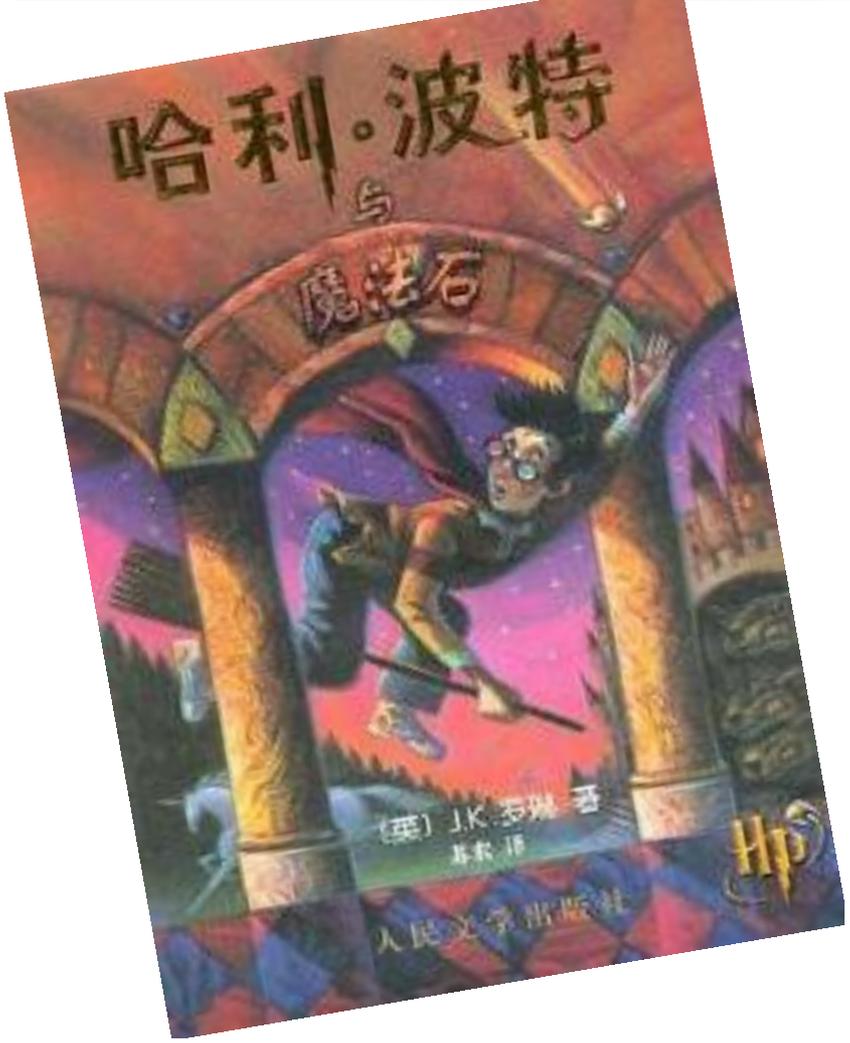
...which we submit to as a token of  
reality.





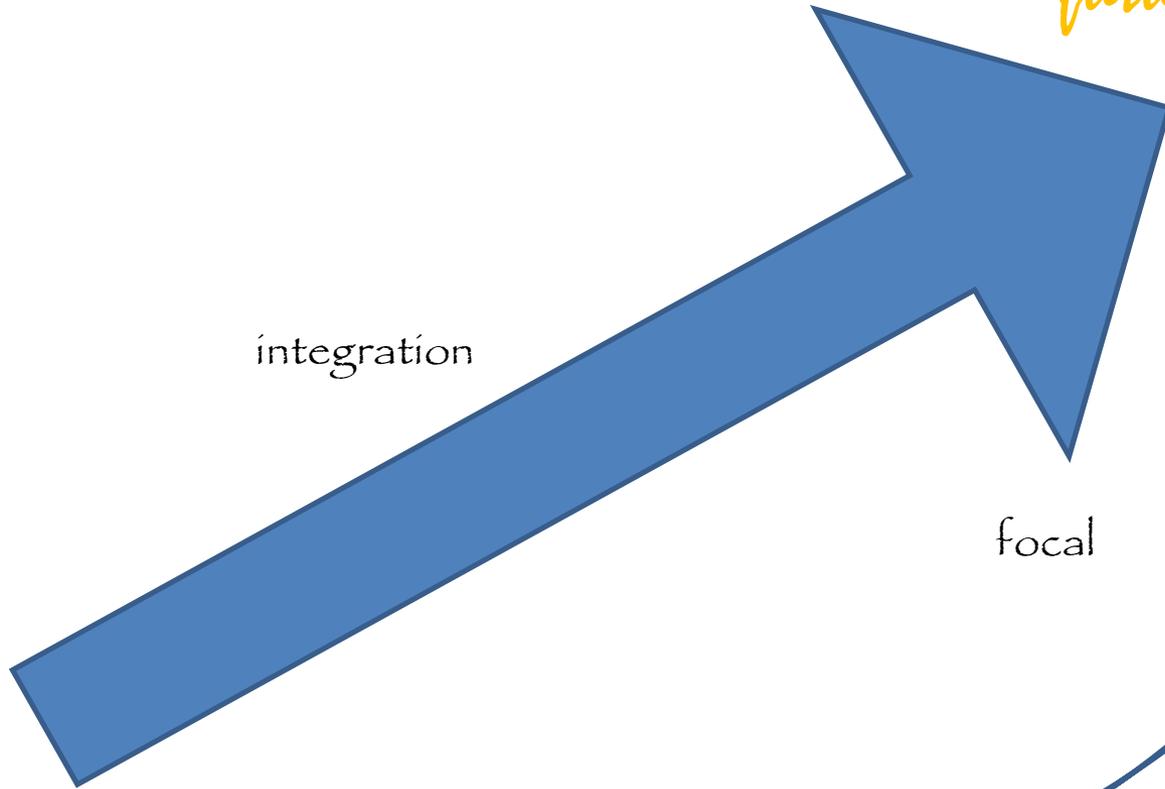


哈利·波特





*Indeterminate  
future prospects*



integration

focal

subsidiary

*Unspecifiable clues*

*Pattern  
transforms  
clues*