

## CHAPTER TWO

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# THE RELIGIOUS WAY OF KNOWING

KNOWLEDGE OF ANY KIND REQUIRES THE ACCEPTANCE OF CERTAIN assumptions. Different kinds of knowledge require different kinds of assumptions. Religious knowledge assumes that something beyond the physical world exists. Scientific knowledge assumes that the physical world exists. Some religious people do not believe the physical world really exists. Some scientific people do not believe that anything exists except the physical world. What we can know depends upon what makes up the “real” world.

### Culture and Knowledge

The modern age had great confidence in the certainty of knowledge that comes from observing the physical world. The study of nature led to “laws” that describe how nature works. The absolute nature of truth which the modern age enjoyed, however, has begun to fade as the postmodern age dawns. This new age faces uncertainty where the modern age had confidence. This new age embraces relativism where the modern age embraced absolutism.

The modern age, which experienced so many scientific breakthroughs, grew out of a Christian worldview. A person does not have to be a Christian to have a Christian worldview. They need only share the assumptions about the world that come from the Christian faith. Islam and Judaism share some of these assumptions. Hinduism and Buddhism share virtually none of these assumptions.

The postmodern age, on the other hand, rejects many of the basic assumptions of the modern age. While Christianity provided the central intellectual foundation for the modern world, the postmodern world lacks an integrated worldview for its basis. It has

grown piecemeal from a variety of sources. In the past, philosophers played the major role in defining a culture's worldview, but as the postmodern world develops, philosophers tend to describe what is happening more than they define what will happen. The forces driving postmodernity have their roots more in popular culture than in the academic institutions, though these forces have begun to alter the academic institutions.

The music of the Beatles, movies like *Star Wars*, TV experiments like *Sesame Street* and MTV, and the success of the counterculture have created an ever-expanding worldview that has an increasing influence on the way people think. Without ever raising the questions about the existence of God or any particular religious doctrine, the postmodern worldview represents the development of a whole set of assumptions about what we can know. Popular music, movies, and books have introduced many of the philosophical assumptions of Eastern religions into Western culture. One of those assumptions is that the physical world is an illusion. The Buddha taught that desire causes suffering. A person achieves bliss when he or she realizes that nothing really exists, because we cannot desire what does not exist.

The scientific way of knowing did not arise in a culture where the physical world was regarded as an illusion. Every culture has its own approach to science and has certain "scientific" discoveries and technological advances, such as the discovery of the medicinal use of herbs. The scientific method and the scientific revolution of the modern age, however, developed in a Christian intellectual environment based on the assumptions of the Christian faith about what can be known. Over the last seven hundred years, modern science has developed some assumptions that limit its sphere of knowledge. In a sense, faith and science divided up the realms of knowledge which the Christian faith assumes. Originally, the scientists were also theologians, and science represented an aspect of theology just as ethics represents an aspect of theology. Though they now deal with different realms of knowledge, however, Christian faith and Western science intersect at certain presuppositions. Because of their subject matter, they may seem to be unrelated until they intersect.

### Basic Christian Assumptions

The Christian approach to knowing grows out of several basic assumptions about the nature of reality. These basic assumptions

appear in brief form in the Book of Hebrews, where the writer observed:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear . . . But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Heb. 11:1–3, 6 KJV).

The Christian approach to knowledge assumes that faith provides knowledge in the same way that sight or vision supplies knowledge. Faith provides knowledge of a different kind of experience. Faith provides knowledge about the spiritual realm or the *metaphysical* in contrast to the senses which provide knowledge of the *physical*. The Christian approach to knowledge assumes that both realms exist, but knowledge of them comes in different ways. The Christian approach to knowledge also assumes that the physical world has a metaphysical origin. God made it.

Knowledge of the physical and spiritual realms also relates to the Christian assumptions about what kind of God exists. This passage from Hebrews and many others like it scattered through the Bible declare that God intentionally created the physical realm. The idea of intentional creation has a number of built-in assumptions about what kind of God exists. The one who creates is separate from what is created. Thus, the Christian understanding of knowledge assumes a distinction between God and the physical world. Hinduism does not make this distinction. It views everything as a unity, making no distinction between its concept of the divine and all other aspects of reality.

The idea of a creator God who intentionally creates assumes a conscious God who has consciousness of other things. Buddhism and Hinduism do not share this view of the divine. They would regard the divine as unconscious or nonconscious, but they do not regard the physical world as the result of intentional creation by the divine. Intention implies purpose and meaning. Consciousness of the other, however, and intentionality also imply self-consciousness. Christian knowledge assumes a God who has self-awareness in relation to creation. Self-awareness involves character. All of these aspects of the Christian understanding of God culminate in the understanding of the divine which Christianity shares with Judaism

and Islam. God is a personal being. God is a person—not a human, but a person.

One of the most important dimensions of personhood involves the ability to communicate. Personhood requires both consciousness and self-consciousness before communication can take place. The Christian understanding of knowledge assumes that personal beings express themselves through communication. As a personal being, God communicates to other personal beings. Christians understand that God communicates in a variety of ways. Knowledge of God ultimately depends upon communication by God, who intentionally takes the initiative as a self-conscious act of expression to other self-conscious persons. The Christian understanding of revelation relates to the Christian assumption of what kind of God exists. God has at the least as much ability to communicate as humans, but faith assumes incomparably greater ability.

Besides revelation, however, a Christian understanding of knowledge assumes that people may know things immediately by a facility for knowledge other than the senses, though the senses may be involved. In cultures the world over, children have a fear of the dark. It is not so much the dark, however, as what the dark allows them to feel. Darkness takes away sensory perception of sight. Part of the fear of darkness, when nothing can be seen, is the frightful idea that “I am not alone; something is there.” Imagination supplies all sorts of explanations of what might be there, but a distinction must be made between knowledge of a presence and speculation about what that presence might be.

Rudolf Otto, a German theologian/philosopher of the last century, explored this idea in his book *The Idea of the Holy*, in which he examined the universal human experience of the spiritual realm, or what he called “the Holy.” Otto wrote at a time when the German rational approach to religion had embraced a method that attempted to study the Bible and religious experience “scientifically.” This scientific approach usually meant reducing religious experience to a rationalistic explanation of natural or physical forces and their social/psychological context. A spiritual or supernatural understanding of religion lost ground. In this context, Otto’s book called on an increasingly materialistic world to take spiritual reality seriously.

Otto described three dimensions of the universal experience of spiritual reality. He did not write to make a case for the Christian

understanding of God, so much as to demonstrate the validity of spiritual experience and spiritual knowledge. He made the case that humans have a capacity for awareness of the nonphysical. He used three Latin terms to describe the experience of "the Holy." *Mysterium* describes the mysterious or perhaps creepy feeling people have in the darkness when they feel they are not alone, but they do not know what is there. In ancient times people might have such experiences by the water or on the mountaintop. They then might associate the "spirit" with the water or the mountaintop. They might identify experiences in different locations with different "spirits." Polytheism may have arisen in this way. *Tremendum* describes the intensity of feeling a person has in the encounter with the Holy. The experience is tremendous in its memorability but also terrifying in its intensity. The Bible describes numerous encounters between people and the messengers of God in which people fell to the ground full of fear. *Fascinans* describes the irony that the experience fascinates people so much that they feel drawn into the encounter in spite of its terrifying dimension. People are attracted to the Holy. Nonetheless, the Holy remains hidden from Otto's perspective.

If the Holy remains hidden, what can anyone ever possibly know about the Holy other than that someone has had an experience with the Holy? A person can have the *mysterium*, *tremendum*, *et fascinans* experience and still know nothing about the source of the experience. Two people can pass in a hallway and be aware of the presence of each other. Unless communication takes place between the two, however, neither can know what the other is like. Are they friend or foe? It is possible to have a certain amount of knowledge about someone by observing their behavior, but until they open up and talk we cannot know them.

Communication is always a difficult matter. Teenagers complain that their parents do not listen to them. Wives complain that their husbands never talk to them anymore. Husbands complain that their wives do not understand them. Talk may occur in all of these situations, but communication does not. It takes practice to communicate well. This situation accounts in part for why so few Christians engage in meaningful prayer on a regular basis. It is difficult to communicate with someone with whom you are not used to talking.

A Christian understanding of knowledge assumes that some things about God can be known simply because people have a spiritual

dimension and the capacity for knowledge of spiritual dynamics as well as physical dynamics. Some things about God can be known simply by observing the physical realm in terms of what God has done as a creator. Most things about God, just as with people, cannot be known unless God speaks.

Nonmonotheistic religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Shintoism do not share the same understanding of revelation which Christians, Jews, and Muslims share because they do not understand God as a personal being. They have sacred writings written by religious leaders who have responded to their experience of Otto's *mysterium, tremendum, et fascinans*, but these books represent the writers' interpretation of the meaning of the encounter.

The interpretation of religious experience, the interpretation of revelation from God, and the interpretation of physical data represent one of the most difficult tasks of understanding the knowledge which people have. Both in the realm of scientific knowledge and spiritual knowledge, people interpret the meaning of the knowledge they have. People use some standard for interpreting their knowledge, and often they do not even realize that they are interpreting and imposing a meaning on the data. People bring unstated assumptions to their physical and spiritual experiences, and they often filter the data to fit the preconceived assumption.

### Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophy provides one of the leading filters by which people view data. On the basis of a philosophical view, we may exclude the possibility of some forms of knowledge without ever giving them serious consideration. Cultural norms like racial prejudice provide another kind of filter to some forms of knowledge which people will not consider. In terms of the dialogue between science and faith, however, the philosophical questions tend to be the leading issues. Everyone has a philosophy of life and knowledge, though most people do not realize it. Most people have philosophical views which they have acquired but never thought through critically. Often the philosophical view has come as a cultural norm expressed as "everybody knows . . ." A philosophy of knowledge might be expressed at the popular level as simply as "seeing is believing" (*empiricism*), "the proof is in the pudding" (*pragmatism*), and "if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it's a duck" (*rationalism*).

## 22 WHAT CAN WE KNOW AND HOW DO WE KNOW IT?

In the science and faith dialogue, Plato and Aristotle have probably exerted the greatest influence on the philosophy of knowledge in the West. In simplistic terms, Plato emphasized the spiritual while Aristotle emphasized the physical.

For Plato, the physical world represents only a shadow of the “real” world. For him the real things reside in the world of the *Ideal*. The Ideal, the Absolute, Perfection, and the Real all belong to the world of ideas. All efforts to translate the Ideal into a physical *Image* result in something less than the ideal. The Image has an imperfect, distorted quality about it in contrast to the Ideal which has perfection (see Fig. 2.1). People experience the physical world as the imperfect Image of the perfect spiritual Ideal.

To explain his view, Plato wrote a parable about a man imprisoned since birth in a cave. He lived his life chained to the wall with

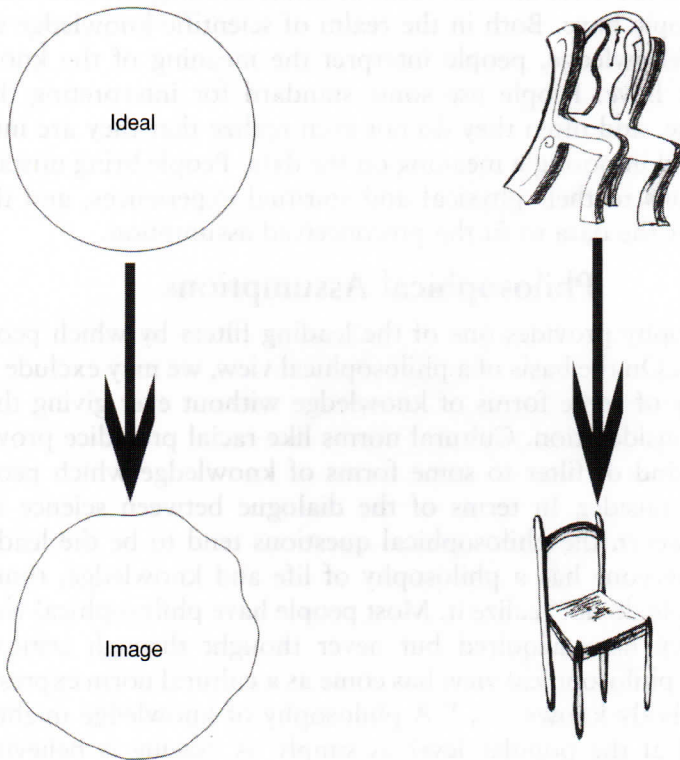


Fig. 2.1. Plato's Worldview. Plato believed that the physical world was composed of imperfect images of the perfect spiritual ideals.

his head clamped in a fixed position so that he could only look straight ahead. In front of him was a wall that stood just above head height but did not reach the roof of the cave. On the other side of the wall a fire was kept burning at all times, and men moved back and forth on a corridor. The flames of the fire cast a shadow of the men on the side of the cave which the prisoner could see above the wall. Because of the echoes within the cave, the sound of the voices had a muffled sound. In this condition, the prisoner would believe that the shadows on the walls were what men looked like (see Fig. 2.2). If the man were released, however, and made his way into the sunlight, he would be startled to discover what men were really like.

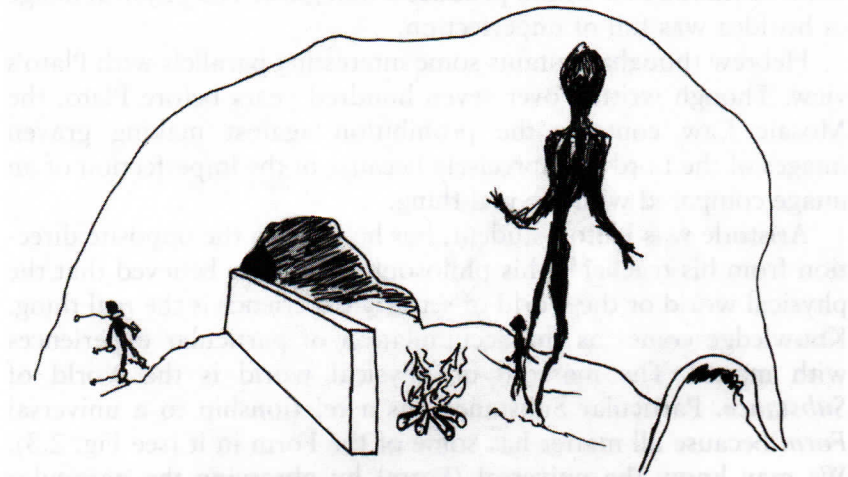


Fig. 2.2. Plato's Parable of the Cave. Plato imagined that the physical world, when compared to the ideal world, is like shadows on the wall of a cave.

Plato applied this story to reality in general. We have grown accustomed to the world of sensory experience so we accept it as the real world. Plato had a low view of sensory experience and equated it with mere opinion. Knowledge of real things came through reason, because reason involves the mind. The mind represents the point of continuity between human experience and the world of

ideas. Plato believed that people do not learn about their world so much as they remember what was placed into their minds before they were born. He called this understanding of knowledge *a priori*, which means that people are born with “prior” knowledge. Between reason as the highest form of knowledge and opinion as the lowest form of knowledge lie understanding and faith, which Plato thought of as *conviction*.

Plato’s description corresponds somewhat to the experience of Thomas Edison who had in his mind the idea that an electrical current could produce light if it passed through the right medium. The idea worked brilliantly in his mind, but it took more than three thousand attempts at different media before he hit upon a carbonized thread that would produce a dull glow. The physical image of his idea was full of imperfection.

Hebrew thought contains some interesting parallels with Plato’s view. Though written over seven hundred years before Plato, the Mosaic Law contains the prohibition against making graven images of the Lord God precisely because of the imperfection of an image compared with the real thing.

Aristotle was Plato’s student, but he went in the opposite direction from his teacher in his philosophy. Aristotle believed that the physical world or the world of sensory experience is the real thing. Knowledge comes as the accumulation of particular experiences with matter. The material or physical world is the world of *Substance*. Particular Substance has a relationship to a universal *Form* because all matter has some of the Form in it (see Fig. 2.3). We may know the universal (Form) by observing the particular (Substance). While the Form is perfect, Substance is still a reliable way to know about the Form because it contains the Form. Instead of being born with prior knowledge, Aristotle believed that the human mind is a blank slate. We only know what we learn about the world from our own experience. He called this approach to knowledge *a posteriori*, which means that knowledge comes “post-birth.”

Plato and Aristotle represent the two great pillars of Western philosophical thought. Plato represents rationalism which provides knowledge of the world through the reasoning process. Aristotle represents empiricism which provides knowledge of the world through sensory experience. Though neither of these understandings of knowledge has a Christian background nor assumes the existence

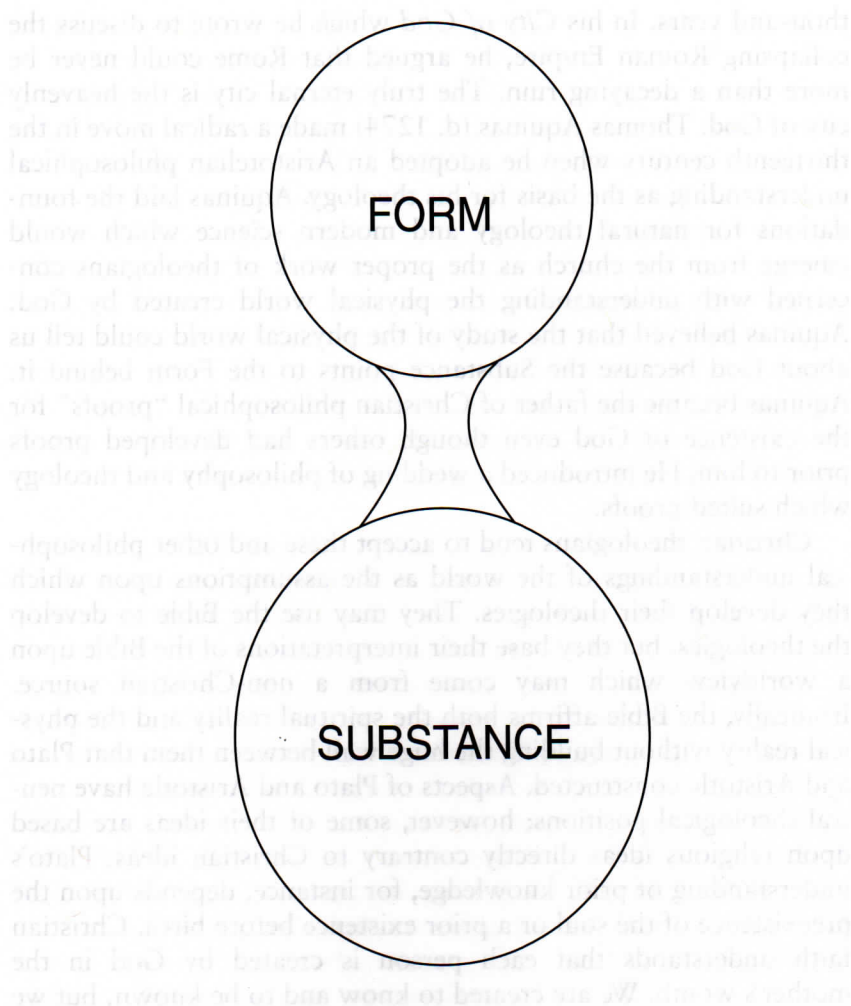


Fig. 2.3. Aristotle's Worldview. Aristotle believed that the eternal form is imbedded in the physical substance, therefore the physical particular can tell us about the spiritual universal.

of a creator God, both have supplied the primary philosophical basis for Christian theologians to develop theology over the last fifteen hundred years.

Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) developed his theological system around a Platonic philosophical understanding. His theological understanding formed the basis for the medieval world for the next

thousand years. In his *City of God* which he wrote to discuss the collapsing Roman Empire, he argued that Rome could never be more than a decaying ruin. The truly eternal city is the heavenly city of God. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) made a radical move in the thirteenth century when he adopted an Aristotelian philosophical understanding as the basis for his theology. Aquinas laid the foundations for natural theology and modern science which would emerge from the church as the proper work of theologians concerned with understanding the physical world created by God. Aquinas believed that the study of the physical world could tell us about God because the Substance points to the Form behind it. Aquinas became the father of Christian philosophical “proofs” for the existence of God even though others had developed proofs prior to him. He introduced a wedding of philosophy and theology which suited proofs.

Christian theologians tend to accept these and other philosophical understandings of the world as the assumptions upon which they develop their theologies. They may use the Bible to develop the theologies, but they base their interpretations of the Bible upon a worldview which may come from a non-Christian source. Ironically, the Bible affirms both the spiritual reality and the physical reality without building the huge wall between them that Plato and Aristotle constructed. Aspects of Plato and Aristotle have neutral theological positions; however, some of their ideas are based upon religious ideas directly contrary to Christian ideas. Plato’s understanding of prior knowledge, for instance, depends upon the preexistence of the soul or a prior existence before birth. Christian faith understands that each person is created by God in the mother’s womb. We are created to know and to be known, but we are different from God. Unlike Aristotle, Christian faith teaches that we do not have part of the eternal Form as an aspect of us. More like Plato, we are created in the “image” of God.

If all we can know is what we can learn from our senses, then many things cannot exist from the perspective of some people. Does color not exist because the blind person cannot detect it? Does music not exist because the deaf person cannot hear it? On the surface these questions contain a logical flaw in the conclusion they hope to draw. While the deaf person cannot hear music, some people can. It is not necessary for everyone to have sight in order for color to be accepted as a “real” thing. Of course, faith has been

assaulted as a valid way of knowing by those who do not have it. The argument then proceeds that faith involves something that cannot be verified. By analogy, a blind person could argue that vision involves something that cannot be verified. Things known by vision can only be verified by vision. If someone could verify color by tasting, then true verification would have taken place. If someone lacks the facility for receiving knowledge, however, none of the other means of knowing can verify that experience. The blind person could rely on the testimony of someone whom he trusts and believe that color exists, even though he or she may never have the experience of color. This line of thought suggests the validity of relying on *authority* as a valid way of knowing. The Bible would be one such authority, for it contains a collection of experiences with God by many people over many centuries.

The blind person represents an exception to the norm that people can see. Entire forms of life lack the capacity to see. Does this mean that light does not exist? Some forms of life have no sense of taste. Does this mean that flavor does not exist? Some forms of life have no sense of hearing? Does this mean that sound does not exist?

Does a realm of knowledge not exist if no one has the capacity for perceiving it? This question has been captured in the old philosophical question, If a tree falls in the forest and there is no one there to hear it, does it still make a sound? It certainly sets off vibrations in the earth which also travel through the air. Vibrations, however, are not sound. Sound is a perception the brain receives and interprets when vibrations reach the mechanism of the ear. Vibrations do not affect the nose or the eyes in the same way. Sound constitutes a form of communication between certain animals and the rest of creation. It is a feature of the animal, however, rather than the external situation to which it points. It is an internal interpretation of an experience. Faith constitutes another internal capacity for interpreting experience, like taste or touch. Rudolf Otto suggested that people may have an awareness of something which they cannot relate to one of the conventional senses, yet they know it nonetheless. When the apostle Paul said, "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7 KJV), he referred to this way of knowing.

Faith is another way of knowing that involves both revelation from God and an experience in the physical world. The physical

world in the Bible is not bad because it is physical instead of spiritual as Plato would argue. In the Bible, the physical world is the context in which people experience God, and God constantly affirms the physical world as valuable beginning with the first judgment: It is good (Gen. 1:4). From the Christian perspective, the ultimate revelation of God came when he took on flesh as a man: Jesus Christ. Thus, the physical world provides a medium for revelation. Using the same terminology as Aristotle, the author of Hebrews declared that "Faith is the *substance* of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1 KJV). Faith has a connection with the eternal that it recognizes.

Just as sight and smell deal with different kinds of knowledge, all of empiricism (sensory knowledge) and rationalism (reasoned knowledge) deal with different kinds of knowledge. Even more so does faith deal with a different kind of knowledge than either empiricism or rationalism. Faith is not a good way to determine the temperature. Nor is empiricism a good way to determine the difference between good and evil, or even if good and evil exist. The fact that rival religious views exist does not invalidate faith any more than the existence of rival scientific explanations for the same phenomenon invalidates science. The rival scientific theories do not prove the phenomenon never took place. They only prove that people can look at the same phenomenon and say different things about it.

Rival religious views do not prove that God does not exist and that faith has no objective reference. It only means that people can have an experience with God and give a different interpretation to that experience than someone else would give. Rival scientific views do not mean that all the views are correct any more than rival religious views mean that all religious views are correct. One of the greatest problems of knowledge is the interpretation of the meaning of the knowledge.

The biblical story of Job demonstrates the problem of interpretation as people allow their own prejudices and cultural presuppositions to color how they view the same phenomenon. Job was a wealthy and prominent man who lost his wealth, his children, his health, and his reputation. His friends came to comfort him and considered the question, Why do bad things happen to good people? One could also ask, Why do good things happen to bad people? The questions themselves reflect enormous cultural views that

are never discussed or recognized by most people because they operate in the background of “what everybody knows.”

Job and his friends ask the “why” question, which is essentially a religious question. It assumes order, meaning, purpose, rationality, justice, goodness, and evil—to name just a few. Rationalism and empiricism cannot address the why question. Rationalism and empiricism ask how and what, when and where. What is it? How does it work? What does it do? When does it happen? Where does it go? Rationalism and empiricism provide the philosophical foundation for science which is concerned with describing things.

Job’s friends observed his experience and concluded that God was punishing him for some great sin he had committed. God was angry, and he was getting even. People behave this way, so God must as well. A law of retribution which reflects human character has been introduced into the interpretation of events. By the end of the story, however, after Job’s friends have left Job alone on a trash heap, God comes to Job and asks him some questions. The questions revolve around the wonders of creation. God asks Job to consider the marvels of nature from the heavens to the seas. He points out the ironies of some of the creatures from the ostrich to the hippopotamus. God points out how little Job knows about his world.

Three thousand years ago the average person knew very little about nature, stars, animals, seasons, and plants. Priests, soothsayers, shamans, witches, and other religious personnel had made studies of these matters to identify patterns in the heavens and medicinal benefits from plants. Mixed with it all was a desire to seek power over nature. God was not telling Job that it was a bad thing to study nature as King Solomon did. God told Job that he did not understand the world he was most familiar with, so how could he possibly expect to understand God? The Book of Job does not end with a repudiation of knowledge. On the contrary, knowledge and wisdom are extolled as virtues. Job and his friends had the problem of ignorance. They attempted to impose empirical or physical laws on spiritual matters.

The problem of what can be known and how it can be known falls within the scope of *epistemology*. Epistemology refers to the study of knowledge and the theory of knowledge. The philosophies of Plato and Aristotle disagree about epistemology. More often than not, people tend to confuse this disagreement about philosophy with science and religion, particularly science and the

Christian faith. Philosophy provides an organizing principle for approaching both science and faith. One's philosophy can determine how a scientist will interpret data and how a theologian will interpret the Bible. In both cases the philosophical system stands above the scientific method and the Bible as a basic faith assumption. As often as not, however, the philosophical view is never expressed or acknowledged. It falls within the category of what everyone "knows."

When is it appropriate to speak of "knowing" something, and when is it appropriate to speak of "believing" something? In the philosophical debate over epistemology, belief often appears as the poor stepchild which lacks the certainty of knowledge. In modern society people frequently think of belief as a subjective experience without physical evidence or strong rational proof. It constitutes little more than an opinion. Knowledge, on the other hand, deals with facts. The modern world tends to view knowledge as little more than the accumulation of observable, and therefore objective, experiences.

The Apostles' Creed forms one of the oldest Christian statements of faith found outside the New Testament. Though its final form only dates to the early seventh century, its earlier forms date to the second century. The term *creed* comes from the Latin verb *credo*, which means "I believe." The creed begins, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." It goes on to present the fundamental assertions of the Christian faith. For the people who first began to speak the creed, belief in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, represented something worth dying for. Belief involves more than simple awareness of data. It involves confidence and even conviction.

In the Bible "knowing" has a personal or intimate dimension to it. The term is used to describe the most intimate of encounters between men and women. Sexuality forms a part of the encounter, but much more is meant by the term. Knowledge involves personal encounter at some level. In his Gospel, John declared that he had been a disciple of Jesus and that his Gospel contained the testimony of what he knew to be true (John 21:24). John had a personal encounter which he knew to be true. One must then decide if John is a credible, or believable, witness. Is John an authority who can be trusted? This personal dimension of knowledge raises the problem of subjectivity. Is religious knowledge just opinion?

Naturalistic philosophers have raised this objection to religious knowledge throughout the modern era as they pointed to science as the only way to real knowledge. At the close of the modern age, however, science finds itself asking the same question about its own observations: Is scientific observation just opinion? We will explore this issue at length in the section of this book on quantum theory.

More than mere opinion, the real culprit of uncertainty related to science and religion is emotion. Freud charged that the concept of God is just a projection of human need on the universe. Rather than dismiss emotion outright, however, perhaps we should realize that emotion actually functions to provide people with information. When I feel afraid, my emotions have supplied me with information that my senses alone do not tell me. My senses provide a certain body of information, but my emotions add something more. Emotions have been dismissed as irrational. In the sense that emotions operate without the need for deliberate thought, they are irrational. More properly, they are nonrational like vision. Sensory experience provides information, but it does not provide knowledge. Knowledge relates to understanding. Neither emotions nor sensory experience provides understanding. They only provide information. Fear provides information about me and my environment, but it does not dictate a course of action. Experience must be interpreted and organized before it becomes knowledge.

A naturalist view of people considers them as physical beings and nothing more. The fundamental distinction between a naturalistic understanding of knowledge and a Christian understanding of knowledge relates to the basic assumption each of these worldviews has concerning the nature of reality and the nature of people. For naturalists like Carl Sagan, the cosmos is all there is. For Christians, the spiritual realm is as real as the physical, and God created both. In terms of what can be known about reality, naturalists regard people as physical objects composed of a variety of chemical compounds which experience life for a time before decomposing into its components. Christians, on the other hand, believe that people have both a physical and a spiritual dimension, though these two dimensions are integrally related.

A study of the human spirit throughout the Bible indicates that the human spirit involves six distinct domains that are interrelated: the intellect, the emotions, the character, the will, the imagination, and vitality itself. Furthermore, the spirit affects the body and the

body affects the spirit. The senses of the body send messages to the brain which receives the information. The brain then interprets the data, but the interpretation is more than a mere machine calculating data. Emotions may color the data. The character may filter the data through a set of values. A weakened bodily state may affect the intellect's ability to reason and weigh the complex and competing factors. This spiritual dimension relates to the interpretation of physical or scientific data as much as it relates to the spiritual realm of religion. This complex interrelationship of aspects of what it means to be human only heightens the problem of subjectivity (see Fig. 2.4). It raises the problem of uncertainty for science as much

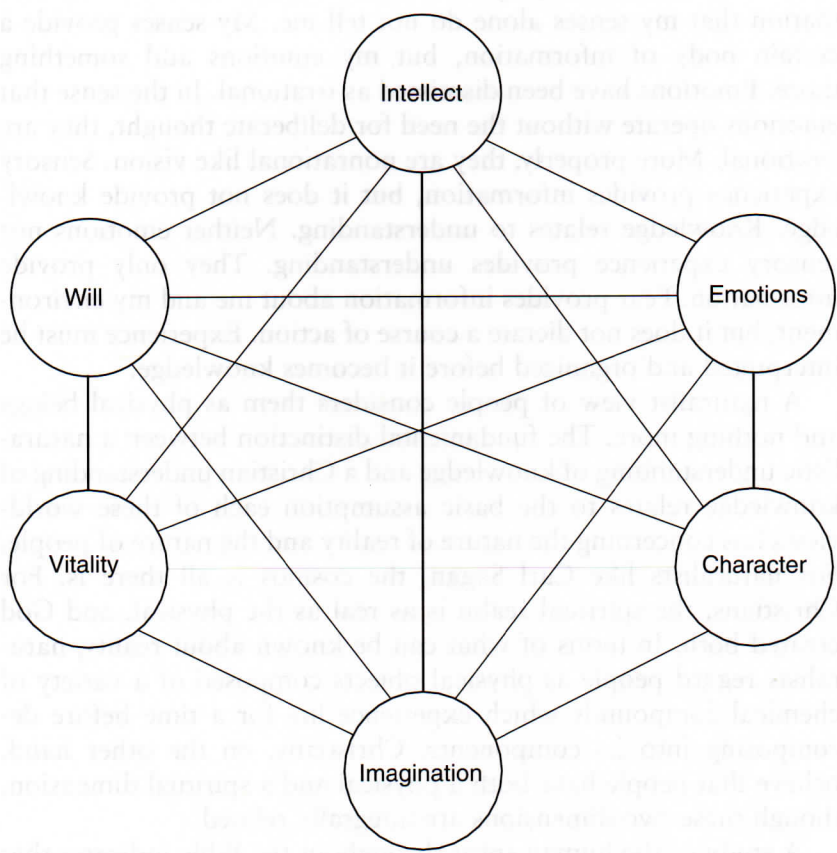


Fig. 2.4. The Human Spirit. The human spirit involves many aspects which affect each other.

as for religion. In this context, belief has a stronger force than mere knowledge. It becomes more clear why Plato relegated sensory experience to the realm of mere opinion.

In the Bible, knowledge is possible because of the kind of God who exists. A Creator God brought order out of chaos. This foundational understanding of reality means that a universe exists which can be known. Because the God who creates is personal and made people in that personal image, a relationship between Creator and creature exists. People have a spiritual dimension which allows for the perception of spiritual reality. General knowledge of God is possible because people are made in the image of God and have spiritual perception. Accurate, specific knowledge of God, however, depends upon God's ability to communicate instead of on human objectivity in its interpretation of spiritual experience. The same aspects of the human spirit which distort the interpretation of sensory experience also distort the interpretation of spiritual experience.

A Christian understanding of knowledge assumes that God has the capacity to communicate in a meaningful way with people. It assumes a real physical world which can be known. It assumes that the Bible represents God's initiative to communicate with people. It assumes a flawed human spirit that stands in need of repair.