

W.E.C. #5 – Understanding Epistemology

Word Association

- When a word is difficult to remember
 - Relate it to something familiar
- **Epistemology** is similar to the word “**epistle**”
 - Describe how we come to understand one of Paul’s epistles (Romans)
 - What are the multiple ways we come to know and understand the text?
 - Natural:
 - Reason / logic / life experience / historical context / original language – semantics / commentaries / journal articles
 - Supernatural:
 - From God to the author (Paul)
 - By means of inspiration through the Holy Spirit
 - Understood and comprehended by the supernatural illumination given through the indwelling Holy Spirit
 - The eyes of faith

Its important to know and understand the epistemology of other worldviews

- How would an atheist come to know / interpret the text?
 - Natural only
- How would a Hindu / Buddhist / Pantheist come to know / interpret the text?
 - Exoteric
 - Esoteric
- How do Christians come to know / interpret the text?
 - All the above

What is Epistemology?

- **Epistemology**
 - *episteme* (“knowledge”)
 - *logos* (“word” / ”discourse”)
 - The study of the nature and limits of human knowledge
 - True belief with an account / justification / warrant
 - To what extent is knowledge possible, or is it even possible?
 - How do we come to know anything?
 - Who sets the standards and boundaries?
 - Who is the authority over knowledge:
 - God / humanity / spiritual hierarchy?
 - We *interpret* the information in accordance with a set of background beliefs.
 - In our Western academic philosophy, religious belief is understood to be unreasonable and is viewed with condescension or even contempt.

- Religion is simply a refuge for those who, out of weak intellect and character, are unable to confront the harsh reality of this world

Common Epistemological Questions

- *What is the nature of truth and of objectivity?*
- *What is the nature of belief and of knowledge?*
 - *What are their relationships?*
 - *Can we know something and yet not believe it?*
- *What are the standards that justify beliefs?*
- *How do we know what we know?*
 - *What is the proof or evidence that is acceptable?*
- *What are the proper procedures for science and discovery?*
 - *How is information to be evaluated?*
 - *What standards do we use?*
- *Are people who hold to certain beliefs irrational?*
 - *If so, on what basis do we make such judgments?*
- *Have your passions (however admirable they might be) overridden your sound judgment in this case, and perhaps other cases as well?*
 - *Or have your passions instead given you powers of moral perception that are lacking in your fellow jurors?*
- *Where did the rules of good intellectual discussion come from?*
 - *Do any such rules even exist?*
 - *If so – who sets the rules?*
- *Is there agreement in the academic world, philosophical community, and faith-based organizations as to the understanding of right reason?*
- *What if instead of answering the religious skeptic's demand for more evidence*
 - *A person was to argue that one may be perfectly rational believing in God in the absence of evidence?*
- *Must all of the things I believe be supported by evidence?*
 - *And what is evidence?*
 - *How much evidence is necessary?*
 - *Is evidence even necessary?*
 - *Who decides what is acceptable and not an acceptable amount of evidence?*
 - *How is the value of the evidence to be determined?*
- *In what circumstances is a person intellectually irresponsible in accepting a belief?*
- *What are the minimal requirements of rationality that all our beliefs must satisfy?*
 - *Who determines this?*
- *Should everyone accept the same standards across the board?*
 - *If so – who is to impose these standards*
- *When I accept or reject a belief, is this within my control, or is it something that just happens to me?*

- Even the definition of knowledge is a serious epistemological issue.
 - *How does knowledge and belief work together?*
 - *Do we need knowledge to believe?*
 - *If so, how much*
 - *How is belief to be determined?*
 - *How do we know it is not conjecture?*
 - *How do we know belief is sound?*
- *Where does information come from?*
- *Where does knowledge come from?*

Every system of thought has its authority it rests upon that is self-sufficient

- Rationalism – reason through human thought
- Irrationalism – knowledge gained through *feeling* and the *human will* because reason is incapable of knowing and understanding the universe
- Idealism – ideas in the human mind rather than in material objects
- Empiricism – sensory experience
- Subjectivism – the knowledge is within ourselves
- Existentialism – subjective experience of thinking, feeling, and acting
- Humanism – human beings are the starting point for morals and philosophy
- Christian Theism –
 - Faith in God’s Word alone is certainty
 - Everything but faith in God’s Word is subject to doubt
 - Jesus Christ is the certainty of faith in God’s Word

In Christian theology epistemology corresponds with **divine revelation**.

- **Revelation** is the personal, supernatural act of God’s self-communication by which He actively makes Himself and His will known to man.
 - We have knowledge of God and the world revealed to us through three basic means
 - General Revelation / Special Revelation / Personal – Incarnate Revelation
 - We *receive* this knowledge
 - We do not *discover* it
 - We are *passive* in this area – not active
 - **God dictates** to us what reality, knowledge, and morality is
 - **We do not** come up with this on our own
 - We are to *interpret* the world around us through God’s general and special revelation
 - We do not *determine* this or *define* it on our own
 - By our own reason, knowledge, wisdom, or experience
- Not one single fact in this universe can be known truly by humanity without the existence of God and His Revelation to us.