

Plato's Allegory of the Cave (Republic)

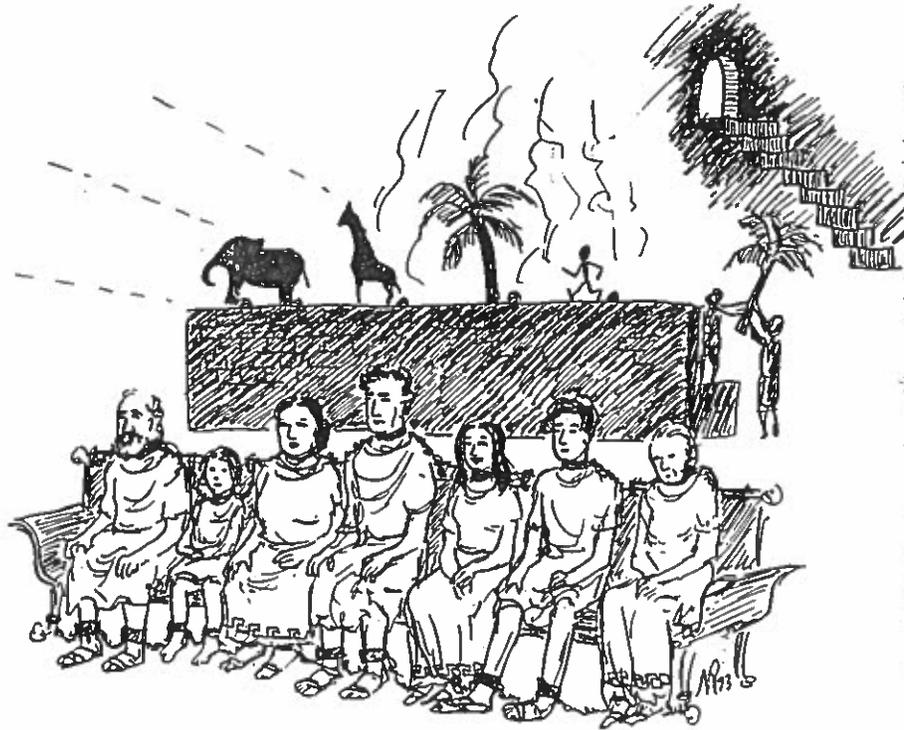


FIGURE 8.4 In Plato's "Myth of the Cave," a group of prisoners is placed so they can only see on the wall of the cave reflections of objects carried back and forth in front of a fire behind them. Since this is all they see, they assume it to be reality. Had Plato been acquainted with movie theatres, he might have chosen the movie screen as a metaphor for the shadow-world of the senses.

Next, said I, here is a parable to illustrate the degrees in which our nature may be enlightened or unenlightened. Imagine the condition of men living in a sort of cavernous chamber underground, with an entrance open to the light and a long passage all down the cave.⁹ Here they have been from childhood, chained by the leg and also by the neck, so that they cannot move and can see only what is in front of them, because the chains will not let them turn their heads. At some distance higher up is the light of a fire burning behind them; and between the prisoners and the fire is a track¹⁰ with a parapet built along it, like the screen at a puppet-show, which hides the performers while they show their puppets over the top.

I see, said he.

Now behind this parapet imagine persons carrying along various artificial objects, including figures of men and animals in wood or stone or other materials, which project above the parapet. Naturally, some of these persons will be talking, others silent.¹¹

It is a strange picture, he said, and a strange sort of prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied; for in the first place prisoners so confined would have seen nothing of themselves or of one another, except the shadows thrown by the fire-light on the wall of the Cave facing them, would they?

Not if all their lives they had been prevented from moving their heads.

And they would have seen as little of the objects carried past.

Of course.

Now, if they could talk to one another, would they not suppose that their words referred only to those passing shadows which they saw?¹²

Necessarily.

And suppose their prison had an echo from the wall facing them? When one of the people crossing behind them spoke, they could only suppose that the sound came from the shadow passing before their eyes.

No doubt.

In every way, then, such prisoners would recognize as reality nothing but the shadows of those artificial objects.¹³

Inevitably.

Now consider what would happen if their release from the chains and the healing of their un wisdom should come about in this way. Suppose one of them was set free and forced suddenly to stand up, turn his head, and walk with eyes lifted to the light; all these movements would be painful, and he would be too dazzled to make out the objects whose shadows he had been used to see. What do you think he would say, if someone told him that what he had formerly seen was meaningless illusion, but now, being somewhat nearer to reality and turned towards more real objects, he was getting a truer view? Suppose further that he were shown the various objects being carried by and were made to say, in reply to questions, what each of them was. Would he not be perplexed and believe the objects now shown to him to be not so real as what he formerly saw?¹⁴

Yes, not nearly so real.

And if he were forced to look at the fire-light itself, would not his eyes ache, so that he would try to escape and turn back to the things which he could see distinctly, convinced that they really were clearer than these other objects now being shown to him?

Yes.

And suppose someone were to drag him away forcibly up the steep and rugged ascent and not let him go until he had hauled him out into the sunlight, would he not suffer pain and vexation at such treatment, and, when he had come out into the light, find his eyes so full of its radiance that he could not see a single one of the things that he was now told were real?

Certainly he would not see them all at once.

He would need, then, to grow accustomed before he could see things in that upper world.¹⁵ At first it would be easiest to make out shadows, and then images of men and things reflected in water, and later on the things themselves. After that, it would be easier to watch the heavenly bodies and the sky itself by night, looking at the light of the moon and stars rather than the Sun and the Sun's light in the day-time.

Yes, surely.

Last of all, he would be able to look at the Sun and contemplate its nature, not as it appears when reflected in water or any alien medium, but as it is in itself in its own domain.

No doubt.

And now he would begin to draw the conclusion that it is the Sun that produces the seasons and the course of the year and controls everything in the visible world, and moreover is in a way the cause of all that he and his companions used to see.

Clearly he would come at last to that conclusion.

Then if he called to mind his fellow prisoners and what passed for wisdom in his former dwelling-place, he would surely think himself happy in the change and be sorry for them. They may have had a practice of honoring and commending one another, with prizes for the man who had the keenest eye for the passing shadows and the best memory for the order in which they followed or accompanied one another, so that he could make a good guess as to which was going to come next.¹⁶ Would our released prisoner be likely to covet those prizes or to envy the men exalted to honor and power in the Cave? Would he not feel like Homer's Achilles, that he would far sooner "be on earth as a hired servant in the house of a landless man"¹⁷ or endure anything rather than go back to his old beliefs and live in the old way?

Yes, he would prefer any fate to such a life.

Now imagine what would happen if he went down again to take his former seat in the Cave. Coming suddenly out of the sunlight, his eyes would be filled with darkness. He might be required once more to deliver his opinion on those shadows, in competition with the prisoners who had never been released, while his eyesight was still dim and unsteady; and it might take some time to become used to the darkness. They would laugh at him and say that he had gone up only to come back with his sight ruined; it was worth no one's while even to attempt the ascent. If they could lay hands on the man who was trying to set them free and lead them up, they would kill him.¹⁸

Yes, they would.

Every feature in this parable, my dear Glaucon, is meant to fit our earlier analysis. The prison dwelling corresponds to the region revealed to us through the sense of sight, and the fire-light within it to the power of the Sun. The ascent to see the things in the upper world you may take as standing for the upward journey of the soul into the region of the intelligible; then you will be in possession of what I surmise, since that is what you wish to be told. Heaven knows whether it is true; but this, at any rate, is how it appears to me. In the world of knowledge, the last thing to be perceived and only with great difficulty is the essential Form of Goodness. Once it is perceived, the conclusion must follow that, for all things, this is the cause of whatever is right and good; in the visible world it gives birth to light and to the lord of light, while it is itself sovereign in the intelligible world and the parent of intelligence and truth. Without having had a vision of this Form no one can act with wisdom, either in his own life or in matters of state.

So far as I can understand, I share your belief.

Then you may also agree that it is no wonder if those who have reached this height are reluctant to manage the affairs of men. Their souls long to spend all their time in that upper world—naturally enough, if here once more our parable holds true. Nor, again, is it all strange that one who comes from the contemplation of divine things to the miseries of human life should appear awkward and ridiculous when, with eyes still dazed and not yet accustomed to the darkness, he is compelled, in a law-court or elsewhere, to dispute about the shadows of justice or the images that cast those shadows, and to wrangle over the notions of what is right in the minds of men who have never beheld Justice itself.¹⁹

It is not at all strange.

No; a sensible man will remember that the eyes may be confused in two ways—by a change from light to darkness or from darkness to light; and he will recognize that the same thing happens to the soul. When he sees it troubled and unable to discern anything clearly, instead of laughing thoughtlessly, he will ask whether, coming from a brighter existence, its unaccustomed vision is obscured by the darkness, in which case he will think its condition enviable and its life a happy one; or whether, emerging from the depths of ignorance, it is dazzled by excess of light. If so, he will rather feel sorry for it; or, if he were inclined to laugh, that would be less ridiculous than to laugh at the soul which has come down from the light.

That is a fair statement.

If this is true, then, we must conclude that education is not what it is said to be by some, who profess to put knowledge into a soul which does not possess it, as if they could put sight into blind eyes. On the contrary, our own account signifies that the soul of every man does possess the power of learning the truth and the organ to see it with; and that, just as one might have to turn the whole body round in order that the eye should see light instead of darkness, so the entire soul must be turned away from this changing world, until its eye can bear to contemplate reality and that supreme splendor which we have called the Good. Hence there may well be an art whose aim would be to effect this very thing, the conversion of the soul, in the readiest way; not to put the power of sight into the soul's eye, which already has it, but to ensure that, instead of looking in the wrong direction, it is turned the way it ought to be.

Yes it may well be so.

It looks, then, as though wisdom were different from those ordinary virtues, as they are called, which are not far removed from bodily qualities, in that they can be produced by habituation and exercise in a soul which has not possessed them from the first. Wisdom, it seems, is certainly the virtue of some diviner faculty, which never loses its power, though its use for good or harm depends on the direction towards which it is turned. You must have noticed in dishonest men with a reputation for sagacity the shrewd glance of a narrow intelligence piercing the objects to which it is directed. There is nothing wrong with their power of vision, but it has been forced into the service of evil, so that the keener its sight, the more harm it works.

Meditation I

It is now some years since I detected how many were the false beliefs that I had from my earliest youth admitted as true and how doubtful was everything I had since constructed on this basis; and from that time I was convinced that I must once and for all seriously undertake to rid myself of all the opinions which I had formerly accepted, and commence to build anew from the foundation, if I wanted to establish any firm and permanent structure in the sciences.

Now for this object it is not necessary that I should show that all of these are false—I shall perhaps never arrive at this end. But inasmuch as reason already persuades me that I ought no less carefully to withhold my assent from matters which are not entirely certain and indubitable than from those which appear to me manifestly to be false, if I am able to find in each one some reason to doubt, this will suffice to justify my rejecting the whole. And for that end it will not be requisite that I should examine each in particular, which would be an endless undertaking; for owing to the fact that the destruction of the foundations of necessity brings with it the downfall of the rest of the edifice, I shall only in the first place attack those principles upon which all my former opinions rested.

All that up to the present time I have accepted as most true and certain I have learned either from the senses or through the senses; but it is sometimes proved to me that these senses are deceptive, and it is wiser not to trust entirely to any thing by which we have once been deceived.

But it may be that although the senses sometimes deceive us concerning things which are hardly perceptible, or very far away, there are yet many others to be met with as to which we cannot reasonably have any doubt, although we recognize them by their means. For example, there is the fact that I am here, seated by the fire, attired in a dressing gown, having this paper in my hands and other similar matters. And how could I deny these hands and this body are mine, were it not perhaps that I compare myself to certain persons, devoid of sense, whose cerebella are so troubled and clouded by the violent vapours of black bile, that they constantly assure us that they think they are kings when they are really quite poor, or that they are clothed in purple when they are really without coverings, or who imagine that they have an earthenware head or are nothing but pumpkins or are made of glass. But they are mad, and I should not be any the less insane were I to follow examples so extravagant.

At the same time I must remember that I am a man, and that consequently I am in the habit of sleeping, and in my dreams representing to myself the same things or sometimes even less probable things, than do those who are insane in their waking moments. How often has it happened to me that in the night I dreamt that I found myself in this particular place, that I was dressed and seated near the fire, whilst in reality I was lying undressed in bed! At this moment it does indeed seem to me that it is with eyes awake that I am looking at this paper; that this head which I move is not asleep, that it is deliberately and of set purpose that

I extend my hand and perceive it; what happens in sleep does not appear so clear nor so distinct as does all this. But in thinking over this I remind myself that on many occasions I have in sleep been deceived by similar illusions, and in dwelling carefully on this reflection I see so manifestly that there are no certain indications by which we may clearly distinguish wakefulness from sleep that I am lost in astonishment. And my astonishment is such that it is almost capable of persuading me that I now dream.

Now let us assume that we are asleep and that all these particulars, e.g. that we open our eyes, shake our head, extend our hands, and so on, are but false delusions; and let us reflect that possibly neither our hands nor our whole body are such as they appear to us to be. At the same time we must at least confess that the things which are represented to us in sleep are like painted representations which can only have been formed as the counterparts of something real and true, and that in this way those general things at least, i.e. eyes, a head, hands, and a whole body, are not imaginary things, but things really existent. For, as a matter of fact, painters, even when they study with the greatest skill to represent sirens and satyrs by forms the most strange and extraordinary, cannot give them natures which are entirely new, but merely make a certain medley of the members of different animals; or if their imagination is extravagant enough to invent something so novel that nothing similar has ever before been seen, and that then their work represents a thing purely fictitious and absolutely false, it is certain all the same that the colours of which this is composed are necessarily real. And for the same reason, although these general things, to wit, [a body,] eyes, a head, hands, and such like, may be imaginary, we are bound at the same time to confess that there are at least some other objects yet more simple and more universal, which are real and true; and of these just in the same way as with certain real colours, all these images of things which dwell in our thoughts, whether true and real or false and fantastic, are formed.

To such a class of things pertains corporeal nature in general, and its extension, the figure of extended things, their quantity or magnitude and number, as also the pace in which they are, the time which measures their duration, and so on.

That is possibly why our reasoning is not unjust when we conclude from this that Physics, Astronomy, Medicine, and all other sciences which have as their end the consideration of composite things, are very dubious and uncertain; but with Arithmetic, Geometry, and other sciences of that kind which only treat of things that are very simple and very general, without taking great trouble to ascertain whether they are actually existent or not contain some measure of certainty and an element of the indubitable. For whether I am awake or asleep, two and three together always form five, and the square can never have more than four sides, and it does not seem possible that truths so clear and apparent can be suspected of any falsity [or uncertainty].

Nevertheless I have long had fixed in my mind the belief that an all-powerful God existed by whom I have been created such as I am. But how do I know that He has not brought it to pass that there is no earth, no heaven, no extended body, no magnitude, no place, and that nevertheless [I possess the perceptions of all these things and that] they seem to me to exist just exactly as I now see them? And, besides, as I sometimes imagine that others deceive themselves in the things which they think they know best, how do I know that I am not deceived every time that I add two and three, or count the sides of a square, or judge of things yet simpler, if anything simpler can be imagined? But possibly God has not desired that I should be thus deceived, for He is said to be supremely good. If, however, it is contrary to His goodness to have made me such that I constantly deceive myself, it would also appear to be contrary to His goodness to permit me to be sometimes deceived, and nevertheless I cannot doubt that He does permit this.

I shall then suppose, not that God who is supremely good and the fountain of truth, but some evil genius not less powerful than deceitful, has employed his whole energies in deceiving me; I shall consider that the heavens, the earth, colours, figures, sound, and all other external things are nought but the illusions and dreams of which this genius has availed himself in order to lay traps for my credulity; I shall consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, nor any senses, yet falsely believing myself to possess all these things; I shall remain obstinately attached to this idea, and if by this means it is not in my power to arrive at the knowledge of any truth, I may at least do what is in my power (i.e. suspend my judgment), and with firm purpose avoid giving credence to any false things, or being imposed upon by this arch deceiver, however powerful and deceptive he may be....

Meditation II

The Meditation of yesterday filled my mind with so many doubts that it is no longer in my power to forget them. And yet I do not see in what manner I can resolve them; and, just as if I had all of a sudden fallen into very deep water, I am so disconcerted that I can neither make certain of setting my feet on the bottom, nor can I swim and so support myself on the surface. I shall nevertheless make an effort and follow anew the same path as that on which I yesterday entered, i.e. I shall proceed by setting aside all that in which the least doubt could be supposed to exist, just as if I had discovered that it was absolutely false; and I shall ever follow in this road until I have met with something which is certain, or at least, if I can do nothing else, until I have learned for certain that there is nothing in the world that is certain. Archimedes, in order that he might draw the terrestrial globe out of its place, and transport it elsewhere, demanded only that one point should be fixed and immovable; in the same way I shall have the right to conceive high hopes if I am happy enough to discover one thing only which is certain and indubitable.

I suppose, then, that all the things that I see are false; I persuade myself that nothing has ever existed of all that my fallacious memory represents to me. I consider that I possess no senses; I imagine that body, figure, extension, movement and place are but the fictions of my mind. What, then, can be esteemed as true? Perhaps nothing at all, unless that there is nothing in the world that is certain.

But how can I know there is not something different from those things that I have just considered, of which one cannot have the slightest doubt? Is there not some God, or some other being by whatever name we call it, who puts these reflections into my mind? That is not necessary, for is it not possible that I am capable of producing them myself? I myself, am I not at least something? But I have already denied that I had senses and body. Yet I hesitate, for what follows from that? Am I so dependent on body and senses that I cannot exist without these? But I was persuaded that there was nothing in all the world, that there was no heaven, no earth, that there were no minds, nor any bodies: was I not then likewise persuaded that I did not exist? Not at all; of a surety I myself did exist since I persuaded myself of something [or merely because I thought of something]. But there is some deceiver or other, very powerful and very cunning, who ever employs his ingenuity in deceiving me. Then without doubt I exist also if he deceives me, and let him deceive me as much as he will, he can never cause me to be nothing so long as I think that I am something. So that after having reflected well and carefully examined all things, we must come to the definite conclusion that this proposition: I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it.

But I do not yet know clearly enough what I am, I who am certain that I am; and hence I must be careful to see that I do not imprudently take some other object in place of myself, and thus that I do not go astray in respect of this knowledge that I hold to be the most certain and most evident of all that I have formerly learned. That is why I shall now consider anew what I believed myself to be before I embarked upon these last reflections; and of my former opinions I shall withdraw all that might even in a small degree be invalidated by the reasons which I have just brought forward, in order that there may be nothing at all left beyond what is absolutely certain and indubitable.

David Hume A Treatise of Human Nature

'Tis a general maxim in philosophy that *whatever begins to exist, must have a cause of existence*. This is commonly taken for granted in all reasonings, without any proof given or demanded. 'Tis suppos'd to be founded on intuition, and to be one of those maxims, which tho' they may be deny'd with the lips, 'tis impossible for men in their hearts really to doubt of. But if we examine this maxim by the idea of knowledge above-explain'd, we shall discover in it no mark of any such intuitive certainty; but on the contrary shall find, that 'tis of a nature quite foreign to that species of conviction.

All certainty arises from the comparison of ideas, and from the discovery of such relations as are unalterable, so long as the ideas continue the same. These relations are *resemblance, proportions in quantity and number, degrees of any quality, and contrariety*; none of which are imply'd in this proposition: *Whatever has a beginning has also a cause of existence*. That proposition therefore is not intuitively certain. At least any one, who wou'd assert it to be intuitively certain, must deny these to be the only infallible relations, and must find some other relation of that kind to be imply'd in it; which it will then be time enough to examine.

But here is an argument, which proves at once, that the foregoing proposition is neither intuitively nor demonstrably certain. We can never demonstrate the necessity of a cause to every new existence, or new modification of existence, without shewing at the same time the impossibility there is, that any thing can ever begin to exist without some productive principle; and where the latter proposition cannot be prov'd, we must despair of ever being able to prove the former. Now that the latter proposition is utterly incapable of a demonstrative proof, we may satisfy ourselves by considering, that as all distinct ideas are separable from each other, and as the ideas of cause and effect are evidently distinct, 'twill be easy for us to conceive any object to be nonexistent this moment, and existent the next, without conjoining to it the distinct idea of a cause or productive principle. The separation, therefore, of the idea of a cause from that of a beginning of existence, is plainly possible for the imagination; and consequently the actual separation of these objects is so far possible, that it implies no contradiction nor absurdity; and is therefore incapable of being refuted by any reasoning from mere ideas; without which 'tis impossible to demonstrate the necessity of a cause.

Accordingly we shall find upon examination, that every demonstration, which has been produc'd for the necessity of cause, is fallacious and sophistical. All the points of time and place, say some philosophers, in which we can suppose any object to begin to exist, are in themselves equal; and unless there be some cause, which is peculiar to one time and to one place, and which by that means determines and fixes the existence, it must remain in eternal suspense; and the object can never begin

to be, for want of something to fix its beginning. But I ask; Is there any more difficulty in supposing the time and place to be fix'd without a cause, than to suppose the existence to be determin'd in that manner? The first question that occurs on this subject is always, *whether* the object shall exist or not: The next, *when* and *where* it shall begin to exist. If the removal of a cause be intuitively absurd in the one case, it must be so in the other: And if that absurdity be not clear without a proof in the one case, it will equally require one in the other. The absurdity, then, of the one supposition can never be a proof of that of the other; since they are both upon the same footing, and must stand or fall by the same reasoning.

The second argument, which I find us'd on this head, labours under an equal difficulty. Every thing, 'tis said, must have a cause; for if any thing wanted a cause, it wou'd produce *itself*; that is, exist before it existed; which is impossible. But this reasoning is plainly unconvincing; because it supposes, that in our denial of a cause we still grant what we expressly deny, *viz.* that there must be a cause; which therefore is taken to be the object itself; and *that*, no doubt, is an evident contradiction. But to say that any thing is produc'd, or to express myself more properly, comes into existence, without a cause, is not to affirm, that 'tis itself its own cause; but on the contrary in excluding all external causes, excludes *a fortiori* the thing itself which is created. An object, that exists absolutely without any cause, certainly is not its own cause; and when you assert, that the one follows from the other, you suppose the very point in question, and take it for granted, that 'tis utterly impossible any thing can ever begin to exist without cause, but that upon the exclusion of one productive principle, we must still have recourse to another.

'Tis exactly the same case with the third argument, which has been employ'd to demonstrate the necessity of a cause. Whatever is produc'd without any cause, is produc'd by *nothing*; or in other words, has nothing for its cause. But nothing can never be a cause, no more than it can be something, or equal to two right angles. By the same intuition, that we perceive nothing not to be equal to two right angles, or not to be something, we perceive, that it can never be a cause; and consequently must perceive, that every object has a real cause of its existence.

I believe it will not be necessary to employ many words in shewing the weakness of this argument, after what I have said of the foregoing. They are all of them founded on the same fallacy, and are deriv'd from the same turn of thought. 'Tis sufficient only to observe, that when we exclude all causes we really do exclude them, and neither suppose nothing nor the object itself to be the causes of the existence; and consequently can draw no argument from the absurdity of these suppositions to prove the absurdity of that exclusion. If every thing must have a cause, it follows, that upon the exclusion of other causes we must accept of the

object itself or of nothing as causes. But 'tis the very point in question, whether every thing must have a cause or not; and therefore, according to all just reasoning, it ought never to be taken for granted.

They are still more frivolous, who say, that every effect must have a cause, because 'tis imply'd in the very idea of effect. Every effect necessarily pre-supposes a cause; effect being a relative term, of which cause is the correlative. But this does not prove, that every being must be preceded by a cause; no more than it follows, because every husband must have a wife, that therefore every man must be marry'd. The true state of the question is, whether every object, which begins to exist, must owe its existence to a cause; and this I assert neither to be intuitively nor demonstratively certain, and hope to have prov'd it sufficiently by the foregoing arguments. . . .

Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours' amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther.

Two Kinds of Truth

Necessary Truth - based on reason

- is necessarily true regardless of any observation of it or experience with it

- cannot be imagined to be false

- a priori - knowledge occurs *before* an observation (but not innately);

- e.g. $2 + 2 = 4$; logical syllogisms; analytical truths

(rationalists do not reject testimony of the senses, but insist that observation, experiments, and experience alone cannot give us philosophical truths)

Empirical Truth - a matter of facts

- can only be known to be true once we have looked at the world

- a posteriori - knowledge occurs *after* an observation; based on facts

- the "then" portion of any "If...then..." statement - contingently true

- e.g. If it looks like rain, then I'll bring my umbrella. - (bringing my umbrella is contingent on the appearance or possibility of rain forming) - can imagine it not being true

- e.g. There are no rabbits living in the ocean.; synthetic truths

(empiricists believe in reason as it applies to logic or the structure of our language, but do not believe that reason has anything to say about big philosophical questions - rationalists can make only trivial statements or generalizations - many big questions are unanswerable)

Which kind of truth is...

A triangle has three angles.

There are tigers in India.

God exists.

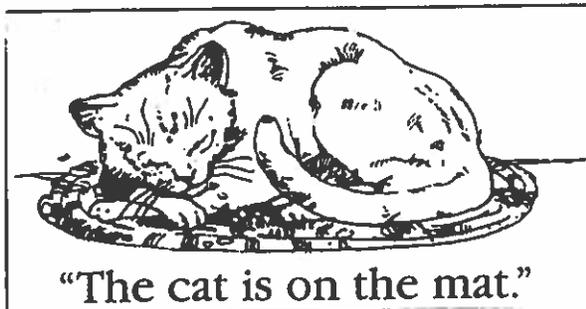
Life is good.

Love never lasts.

The Nature of Truth: Four Theories

Correspondence Theory of Truth

- a statement is true if and only if it corresponds to the facts; it can be verified through observation, or experimentation; or reason which can be verified (how we commonly refer to truth)

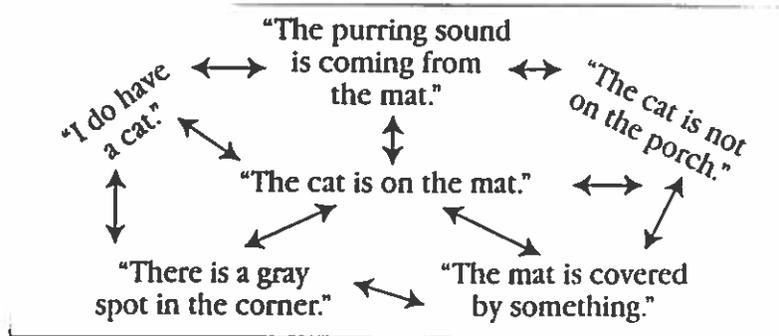


BUT some statements are true whether or not they correspond to the facts

- some principles of philosophy are not "matters of fact" but "truths of reason" (according to rationalists) or "matters of opinion which cannot be justified" (according to skeptics)
- we often consider a statement to be true before we examine the facts;
- does not account for truth in mathematics, logic, nor even some factual truths
- need theories that will shift the emphasis away from the facts, and toward reasons for accepting certain beliefs:

Coherence Theory of Truth

- completely rejects the correspondence theory
- what is true is simply that statement or belief which best coheres with, or fits into the overall network of our experience and beliefs;
- evidence is always incomplete, but this is not to be taken as an inability to reach the truth
- truth is within our grasp, and with experience we change our beliefs precisely to grasp it more exactly



Pragmatic Theory of Truth

- a supplement to coherence theory - among the reasons for accepting a statement or a belief as true is whether it allows us to function better, whether it "works"
- "What is the truth's cash-value in experiential terms?" - William James
- one scientific hypothesis may not have any more evidence for it than another, and it may fit into our overall beliefs no better than do a number of others, but it may well be more easily testable, encourage further experimentation, or suggest more interesting possibilities
- truth is what is most valuable to us



Kant's synthetic a priori truth: (attempt to reconcile rationalism and empiricism)

e.g. $7 + 5 = 12$ - 12 cannot be derived from mere analysis; an act of intuition is necessary in order to achieve synthesis

THE ENEMY WITHIN

BY RICHARD BURNETT

I held a candle at an Amnesty International vigil outside the Egyptian consulate in Montreal last month just days after Egypt sentenced 23 gay men to one to five years of hard labour for "practicing sexual immorality."

In my other hand I held up the name of Ahmed Yassin Zaki, one of 29 additional men also arrested by Cairo police that same evening last May, caught dancing the night away

on the Queen Boat, a floating gay disco on the river Nile.

Except Zaki was lucky — he was acquitted on Nov 14.

"Egypt has not and will not be a den for the corruption of manhood, and homosexual groups will not establish themselves here," prosecutor Ashraf Helal said during the trial, which was monitored by French and Canadian diplomats, trashed by German parliamentarians and unanimously denounced by the Quebec National Assembly last month.

But back in the United States,

despite calls from Amnesty International and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) to condemn Egypt's ongoing persecution of gays, George W. Bush remains conspicuously silent.

Bush has yet to criticize Egypt, America's strategic Muslim ally in the war against terrorism. The nation receives \$2 billion (U.S.) in military and economic assistance annually, and is the world's second largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid.

"We note that this assistance comes from the people of the United States, including a great number of taxpayers who are gay and lesbian, and it is approved by members of Congress, many of whom are fully supportive of the right of gay and lesbian people to be free from discrimination and violence," U.S. Democrat congressman Barney Frank stated in an open letter to Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak.

"Given this, it is troubling for us to hear that these Egyptian men are not only facing trial and possible jail sentences, but also may have been mistreated, beaten or tortured while in detention."

The letter should have also been addressed to President Bush, but we all know America's foreign policy

basically boils down to "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."

Then just when I thought things couldn't get worse, they did. America's other great Muslim ally in the war against terrorism, Saudi Arabia, executed three gay men on New Year's Day. Ali bin Haran bin Saad, Muhammad bin Sulieman bin Muhammad and Muhammad bin Khalil bin Abdullah — all in their 20s and reportedly caught having sex — were publicly beheaded.

Now, this doesn't surprise me from a nation where mainstream Saudi newspaper Al-Jazeera recently stated terrorism against the United States does not stem from Islamic extremism with roots in Saudi Arabia.

But as NYC-based IGLHRC program director Scott Long told me last week, "It's not just the death penalty which is horrible and wrong but the impossibility of getting information from Saudi Arabia, which makes me wonder why the United States does not criticize the extraordinarily closed, brutal and corrupt Saudi government — basically a family business that sits on 20 per cent of the world's oil reserves — a government that gave us Osama bin Laden."

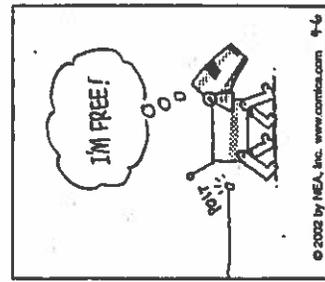
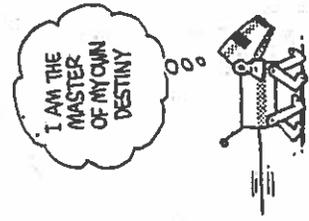
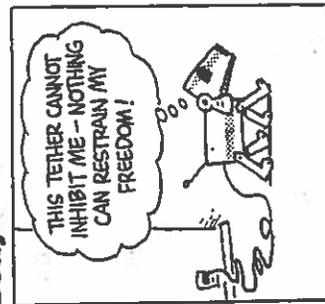
Long was also in Egypt in November to monitor the sensation-

alized Queen Boat trial. "The trial was just the tip of the iceberg," Long says. "I met and saw men afraid of being rounded up by the vice squad for being too feminine. Authorities are using the law against prostitution since Egyptian law doesn't target gay men. That kind of repression is what drives Osama bin Laden and I don't think the United States government understands this. Instead of encouraging governments to create open societies, we are using Sept. 11 to encourage authoritarian governments to crack down further."

When the Taliban ruled Afghanistan, men caught having sex with one another had stone walls bulldozed over them (the death sentence was commuted if you crawled out alive). I've written about the Taliban's repression of gay life in this column for years, but no one paid any attention until Sept. 11.

The irony is now that gay men in Afghanistan are once again free to love one another — Kandahar, with its centuries-old Pashtun tradition of male teens loving their sugar daddies, has been dubbed by many the gay capital of South Asia — the United States is now supporting other nations that want to wipe gay life off the face of the Earth.

Betty



© 2002 by MEA, Inc. www.comics.com 46

If we enforce human rights in Afghanistan, isn't it cultural genocide, and isn't that bad?

It's becoming harder than ever these days to follow the thinking of our liberal friends. Consider, for instance, the phenomenon they call "cultural genocide," which they assure us is totally unacceptable. They cite, as especially horrible examples, the 19th-century Christian missionaries who went into less "developed" countries with their Bibles and/or crucifixes, opening schools and luring Native parents to put their children into them, preaching their dogmas about God and Jesus Christ, insisting upon new modes of dress, destroying the ancient social traditions of the people and imposing instead uncongenial foreign ones. All this, we are assured by enlightened liberal thinkers, was an unconscionable invasion of centuries-old indigenous cultures, and ought never to have happened.

On just these grounds, Canadian aboriginals are suing the churches that "missionized" them; well over 75% of their complainants claim "cultural abuse," meaning that as a people and as individuals they were deprived of their culture and languages. (There are three classes of complaint against the churches. A few charge sexual abuse, a criminal offence then and now. More charge physical abuse, usually spanking, something practised until 40 or so years ago in almost every Canadian school. But most complaints are of "cultural abuse," as described above.) So churches, despite abject apologies, are being bankrupted by Native lawsuits, while the liberal media look on approvingly.

Most conservatives, certainly Christian ones, emphatically rejected this kind of thinking. While they heartily agreed that sexual abusers of all kinds (clerical, pedagogical and other) should long ago have been prosecuted, and also acknowledged that spanking doubtless went too far on occasion, they considered the concept of "cultural abuse" ridiculous. To sustain Canadian aboriginals in their stone-age society would have been impossible, they contended, and also clearly wrong. (Besides, just think of the present-day howls if the Indians had actually been denied "white" education.) But liberalism loudly disagreed. No one culture, they insist, can be considered any "better" than, or "superior" to, another.

Imagine, therefore, my astonishment when I read the following in Canada's voice of liberality, the *Globe and Mail*. Nigel Fisher, special representative for Unicef in Afghanistan, was given close to half the op-ed page to extol Unicef's plan to ensure that Afghan children attend state schools, boys and girls together, whether their parents like it or not. "Even with the departure of the Taliban," he wrote, "not every parent in rural Afghanistan places a high value on schooling, especially of girls."

Columnist Margaret Wenté went further. Citing historic allegations of female mistreatment in Muslim countries—rape, torture, abduction and forced marriage (much of which may indeed be factual)—she called on the American government for armed enforcement of women's rights in post-war Afghanistan. "Mr. Bush will have to use all his warrior clout to make sure women are heard as partners in nation-building," she wrote. And he must go further still, she said. The task is to enforce women's rights in all Muslim countries: "The job won't be done until women in Saudi Arabia are allowed to drive and women in Kuwait are allowed to vote. It won't be done until women who don't cover up are freed from beatings by religious police, and women who displease men are freed from honour killings by their fathers and brothers. The West cannot tolerate terrorists



TED BYFIELD

against women or those who harbour them."

Point of confusion: which *Globe and Mail* columnist are we to believe? Current religion editor Michael Valpy, approvingly quoting a University of British Columbia professor to the effect that Islam is "the most tolerant religion in the world"? Or Ms. Wenté's demands, based (to put it mildly) on a somewhat different impression? Both are advanced as factual.

Margaret calls for massive cultural genocide across the Muslim world.

But even more confusing for us conservatives is this radical new liberal take on cultural genocide. "Will we sell out Afghan women?" queried the head on the Wenté column. "Margaret calls for massive cultural genocide across the Muslim world" would have been more accurate, however. For Christians to

have educated Native Indians in new ways is still condemned as invasive, despicable and cause for immense financial penalty. But for the Americans to re-educate Afghans (forcibly, at that) is suddenly not only praiseworthy, but absolutely obligatory. How do we reconcile this with the revered liberal dogma that no culture can be considered "better" or "superior" to another?

It remained for columnist Robert Fulford, a liberal increasingly inhibited by lapses into the rational, to bite the bullet by recognizing profound differences between cultures. The fact is, he wrote, that "Islamic political life remains a scandal. Islam has spawned no democracies, and no Islamic countries have joined the developed world." His column heading sums it up: "Why deny the obvious? The West is best."

True enough, we agree, but this conclusion carries implications. If one culture may be "better" than another, whence comes the standard of comparison? What authority lies behind it? Who or what sanctions this comparison? God, maybe? Perhaps Mr. Fulford will set about addressing this question too, now that he has raised it. ■

tedbyfield@pobox.com