

## **The Modern Split of Knowledge**

In relationship to the issues we have been discussing, there is one issue that has come up over and over again, and that is the separation of religious knowledge or knowledge of God from every other aspect of human thought. That fundamental issue is behind many of the things we have talked about, as we have talked about the ways the evangelical church has been tempted to accommodate its understanding of Scripture to the culture.

Now, in order to see the issue that is underlying this, one has to go back and look at some of the major philosophers who have been very influential on the development of Western thought and, we could say, whom Schaeffer sees as having helped to create the modern world with its problems. Here I do not mean by the modern world only the West, but everywhere in the world, because these ideas have become increasingly influential everywhere as Western culture and the Western educational system have gone around the world. The fundamental issue we will try to think about is a difficult subject. We will have to try to think very carefully, and I will try to explain it very simply, for myself and for you. The fundamental issue is this: how do we know anything? Where does our knowledge come from? Our knowledge of nature, our knowledge of ourselves, our knowledge of morality, our knowledge of God—where does it come from? What I want to do is to look at the way four different thinkers answered parts of this problem. Each of them was very influential in their own time and has been very influential ever since.

The first is the English philosopher John Locke. His dates are 1632-1704. We could choose many other thinkers, but the four I have chosen are, I think, fundamental to any kind of understanding. Locke, answering this question—how do we know things?—answered like this: he said that the mind of a child is like a blank piece of white paper. And onto that blank piece of white paper come impressions from the world around. You could call these impressions “ideas.” Another way of saying what his view was is to say as he said, “All knowledge is discovered by experience.” A second image he used, along with the image of the white paper, is this one, which perhaps will help us to understand. He used the image of a photographic box that is completely dark inside. And this box has a tiny opening through which the light comes in—this is his image of the human mind. And the light coming in is the light of experience, the light of impressions. That is how we get our knowledge. What he was saying is that there are no innate ideas in the human mind. People are not born with ideas about reality, about nature around us, or anything like that. They are born blank, like that dark box. What is also important to note, though, is that without saying so, Locke still assumed that our minds in their dark boxes have innate faculties. We are born with faculties that enable our minds to process the impressions that come in and enable our minds to order the experiences that come in. Now, Locke’s view is described as empiricism, that all our knowledge is based on experience, our experience of reality.

The second thinker I want to look at very briefly is David Hume, a Scottish philosopher who lived from 1711-1776. One of Hume’s major contributions is that, in reflecting on our understanding of what goes on around us, he had this to say about causality—the relationship between events that take place in the world—it cannot be demonstrated by reason. Let me read a passage of his, because it will help you to understand:

When I see a billiard ball moving towards another, my mind is immediately carried by habit to the usual effect and anticipates my sight by conceiving the second ball in motion. [He sees one billiard ball moving toward another, and he knows that when it hits that billiard ball the other one will move.] There is nothing in these objects, abstractly considered and independent of

experience, which leads me to form any such conclusion. And even after I have had experience of many repeated effects of this kind there is no argument which determines me to suppose that the effect will continue to be conformable to past experience. The powers by which things around us operate are entirely unknown. What reason have we to think that the same powers will always be there? It is not reason which is the guide of life but custom. That alone determines the mind in all instances to suppose the future conformable to the past. However easy this step may seem, reason would never to all eternity be able to make it. This is a very curious discovery.

Try to understand what he is saying. Think about a billiard ball going across the table and hitting another ball. We just take it for granted that when one billiard ball hits another, the other will move because it has been hit by the first. He is saying, "You cannot demonstrate that. All you have is custom and habit." His point is simply this: causality exists in the human mind. It does not exist in objects. Now, just imagine our camera again, our photographic box. This, of course, is Locke's image, not Hume's. Locke has spoken of those events taking place outside the box, such as one billiard ball hitting another one and the second moving, depending on what angle it is hit at and how hard it is hit. This is taking place outside of the mind in the external world. And the mind sees it through the eyes (or, in our image, through the little opening in the box) and understands what is happening—this is experience, the experience of this event. Locke assumes this exists in the eternal world, and the causality is in the external world. Hume is saying something quite different. He says that causality is only inside the mind, and it is simply custom or habit that interprets causality as taking place outside in the external world. We simply observe that one ball hits another and it moves off. It is only our mind that makes the connection and suggests that one is the cause of the other.

You may ask why this is important. Hume recognized that this leads to a profound skepticism about all knowledge. You cannot really know anything for certain. You cannot really know about what is happening in the external world. You cannot even prove it exists. Perhaps the billiard balls themselves are only in the mind. Perhaps there is no external world at all. Does it really exist? As he applied his reason as well, Hume had to say, "Perhaps I do not exist either." He could not by reason demonstrate his own existence. He could not demonstrate the existence of the world outside him, or of himself. So he had to question not only the existence of the billiard balls, the external world, and his own existence, but he even had to question reason itself. "I cannot demonstrate reason," though that was his only source of knowledge. That is our second thinker.

Now, most people in Hume's day did not take the skepticism very seriously. It remained until the twentieth century to take Hume seriously in the sense of saying, "Yes, he was right. Can we know anything at all with any kind of certainty?" But we can, in a way, put Hume in a kind of bracket. And even he himself did not take it seriously. There is that famous quotation where he says, "When I go back from my study to sit down with my friends and talk with them or play a game with them, these appear such absurd, such cold speculations. I think, 'Do they have any importance?'" And that is how everyone else seemed to think of them as well: this is an interesting thought, but.... You see, you have to understand that he was living at a time when a Christian view of reality still dominated the whole culture. There was the general understanding that yes, there is an external world, we do have real knowledge, and reason is an important faculty that has been given to us from God. And, of course, Locke was operating from that worldview that it is God who has made us this way. So they had a certainty that real knowledge could be found.

Let us move on to our next thinker. I am not doing any of these men justice at all. But I am just trying to give you some idea of some of the basic elements of their thinking so that we can understand where we

are today and why Schaeffer keeps referring to Kant and Hegel in particular, who we will come to in just a moment.

Our third man is Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher who lived from 1724-1804. He was intrigued by Hume's problem: how do you demonstrate causality? And this is how he answered it. He said this, "We can only understand nature if we see that behind our experience of events lies a framework in our minds of knowledge that is already there, our prior knowledge." Let us use our little box again to represent the human mind. Nature is outside the box, billiard balls and all the rest. So we have the human mind, and outside of it is nature. He says, "We must see that behind our experience [the light and vision that comes through the hole in the box], there lies within the mind an innate [that, is inborn] framework of knowledge." Knowledge is already there in our minds, the knowledge that understands nature. Another way he put it was to say that man and nature are in profound accord. Man and nature are in profound accord. Man and nature are no longer separate. You see, in Hume's understanding, man and nature are pulled completely apart so that I cannot even know whether anything is really out there. Well, Kant says that man and nature are profoundly in accord. Man and nature are so much in accord that man is born with a knowledge, innate ideas about nature, within himself. Thus every child is born into the world already with a knowledge of nature, of causality, etc.

But Kant went further than this to say that also within a person when he or she is born is a knowledge of morality. Thus there is knowledge of both nature and morality in the human person already. The expression you may have heard if you have read any philosophy at all is that there are imperatives, things that we must do and must not do, within the human mind at birth. That is who we are as humans. There are these imperatives inside the person. You might say, "Well, from a Christian perspective, that is fine. Is that not what we believe, that this is how God has created people, with the law written on the heart? That is not what Kant is saying. What he is doing is saying, "Yes, there is this profound accord between man and nature," that is one thing. Second, he is saying that there is a new status, a new dignity, given to the human person. God is not needed for any of this knowledge, either the knowledge of nature or of morality. God is not needed at all. We do not need God, and we do not need the Bible, God's revelation, to understand either the world or morality, because we have that dignity within us, simply in ourselves. He put it this way, "Man's reason and moral nature need no guide but their own dignity." That is a very modern-sounding statement, because that is where our culture is today. "Man's reason and moral nature need no guide but their own dignity.

Now, again, you must understand that when Kant wrote this and it began to be very influential among his contemporaries and the people immediately following, it did not immediately bear the kind of fruit that we see in our culture today. When he made these statements, there was still a consensus in the society about the nature of the universe and about what is morally right and wrong. And that consensus was shaped by a biblical, Christian understanding both of the nature and order of the world around us as a created universe with a real structure that can be discovered—relationships between events, and so on—and that there is an objective morality given by God, because God exists and stands behind that. Thus these statements by Kant were made in the context of a Christian consensus. And that makes all the difference. Even though you may say, "Yes, man's reason and moral nature need no guide but their own dignity," in the eighteenth century, to say that does not necessarily dramatically alter anyone's life, because they were still living within a culture that assumed that what Scripture says is true across all of life. This was the consensus concerning moral issues, the nature of the universe, and who we are as human persons. When you make this statement in the twentieth century, where our culture is far more consistent to it and the Christian consensus has begun to disappear, we realize that what this leads to is that knowledge becomes personal. If you say, "There is no guide but man's reason and man's moral nature, and his own dignity is sufficient for him," what you are saying is that the individual knows that

the individual can choose, whoever they are. But when you no longer have a moral consensus, what you have is moral relativism. That is what you have, because you have said that these things are innate in the individual.

Let us move on to our next thinker. Our next thinker is Hegel, another German philosopher. Hegel's dates are 1770-1831. Hegel asked the question, what is the accord, what is the agreement, what is the unity between the mind of man and nature or the external world? Kant said there is a unity of man and nature. Thus Hegel asked the question, what is it that binds these two together, the human person and nature or the external world? He assumes there must be a unity between the knower and what is known. Actually, everyone assumes that. As soon as you get into a car and drive down the road, you assume that there is a knower and the known. Otherwise you could not drive anywhere, if you did not assume there was a unity. But he is asking the question what is that unity between the knower and the known? This is where Hegel is so interesting, the way he made his profound contribution. He said, "This unity is a unity of opposites." A unity of opposites—what does he mean? Man (or humanity) is seeking to know—that is Hegel's thesis. So we could picture a person looking out the window in the box we have used as an image for the human mind, a person looking out of the window of the mind into the world around—that is his thesis. Over against this person seeking to know is nature, which is his antithesis. Hegel's thesis is the knower, the person seeking to know. The antithesis is nature. Why is nature the antithesis? Because nature is impersonal. Man is a personal knower, or one seeking knowledge. Nature is impersonal. Thus there is man, the thesis, and nature, the antithesis. The impersonal world resists the knower. The person wanting to know has to work hard to understand nature. You might say nature is moving away from man, resisting his desire to know. That is why there is this conflict as you seek to understand. Knowledge is a struggle. Between nature and man, there is a conflict. And that conflict is resolved only by a synthesis that fuses the two and generates knowledge. Thus eventually out of the conflict comes the third step of Hegel's dialectic, which is the synthesis. That synthesis is knowledge, human knowledge. That is how knowledge is generated. These opposites are united in each step of human progress. Each step of knowledge, which is a fusion of the two opposites, becomes a new thesis, which has over against it again its antithesis. Then there is a new struggle for knowledge, and a new synthesis is discovered.

That was Hegel's understanding of how knowledge advances. He used a very famous image of a bud and a blossom. Let me read it to you. What he is saying is that life is not simply a matter of being; it is a matter of becoming. Life is a process. From that, today we even get the idea of process theology, of God in the process of becoming. But for Hegel, life is a process not of being—it is not static—but of becoming. That is how life progresses. There is this constant conflict and resolution. I will read what he says:

The bud disappears when the blossom breaks through. We might say that the former, the bud, is refuted by the blossom. In the same way, when the fruit comes, the blossom may be explained to be a false form of the plant's existence, for the fruit appears as its true nature in place of the blossom. These stages are not merely differentiated. They supplant one another as being incompatible with one another. [...] However, the ceaseless activity of their own inherent nature makes them at the same time moments of organic unity where they do not merely contradict one another, but where one is as necessary as the other. This equal necessity of all moments constitutes from the outset the life of the whole.

He uses an image there of the bud, the blossom, and the fruit. The bud and the blossom are all necessary in the realization of the fruit. In one sense you can say that they contradict each other. They are radically different from one another. And each one as it comes means the extinction of the other. Each one gives way in turn to the other. But all are necessary to bring about the final end. Now, he applied this to

history and to the evolution of life and to just any kind of advance. He saw all progress, whether in human history or in the history of nature, as a succession of revolutionary steps.

Now, let us think about that for a moment. What he has suggested is that everything is true at different stages. So what is true for me at one moment in my life will be contradicted at a later point. And that in a turn will be contradicted. This means that truth is entirely relative to where you are. Again, this leads to relativism of a different kind, because instead of speaking about opposites and contradictions, all apparent contradictions find their unity. Thus the fact that people disagree, or that one moment in history seems to be a revolution compared with what went before, does not mean that you therefore say what went before was wrong or invalid or anything like that. It was true in its own moment of time. What you believe today is true for you where you are. You will be somewhere else in 10 years, and then that will be true for you then.

I hope you understand the importance of this. Truth is something that is always being discovered, is always in process, but it is never final. There is always more truth ahead. You never can fully arrive. Thus this philosophy does two things at the same time. On the one hand, it says that things that seem different, that seem opposite, can be equally true or equally valid. Thus it establishes relativism in that way. But at the same time, it says that any knowledge we have is incomplete because there is still more to find. It is just a process of becoming. You can see what a radical difference this has made in philosophy departments. If you study philosophy at almost any university today, philosophy is not seen as a discipline that finds out what is true, but simply a road that you are traveling. It is the process that is important, not the end that you arrive at. You may not arrive anymore—in fact, you probably will not. On the one hand this theory seems to give tremendous importance to everything for where I am right now—this is the truth now. Thus it supports that kind of emphasis on the individual and the truth the individual knows for themselves. It puts every person in possession of the truth for himself or herself. At the same time, it encourages a radical skepticism in another kind of way, because what I have discovered will not remain true for long. It will be supplanted by something else.

As we think about all of this, about how we know anything, Kant was leaving knowledge of God totally outside of all of this. Knowledge of God, religion, comes in a different way altogether. Now, where has this led us to today? Why are these thinkers so important? I have suggested some points as we look at our culture in general, in terms of the kind of relativism of truth being found in the individual that we have come to. This arises both from Kant's and from Hegel's understanding. I have also noted our skepticism about knowledge at all, which goes back to Hume. But for the church, what is the influence of all of this? Or why is this important?

Let us think about the effect of what Kant says on the sciences. Basically, he is saying that all of the sciences are sources of knowledge that are totally autonomous from God. They are completely independent from biblical revelation. You do not need the Bible, you do not need the Word of God, to understand the physical sciences. Now, as the nineteenth century progressed and we come into the twentieth century, when we talk about the sciences, we are speaking not only of the physical sciences (physics, chemistry, biology, zoology, and so on), but we are also talking about the social sciences, all the human sciences (psychology, sociology, and anthropology). This is because in our world, man is seen as part of nature. Even in Kant's day man was still seen as separate, in a sense, from nature. Kant was still operating from a consensus that saw man as having a unique dignity within nature. But that is no longer true. The sciences now see a human person as a part of nature just as much as a rat is part of nature or a tree is part of nature. Thus whether we are looking at the individual person in psychology, whether we are looking at groups of people in sociology, or whether we are looking at whole cultures in anthropology, man is simply an object to be studied like any other object. It is that, of course, that

existentialism reacts against, because it wishes to hold on to the unique dignity of the human person. If you include psychology, sociology, and anthropology in the sciences, these now are all subjects that operate entirely independent from any knowledge in the Bible. This is the important point here. These studies are completely autonomous from Scripture. Our knowledge of the human person and our knowledge of human morality (Kant would have agreed with that) are not dependent on God. They are not dependent on revelation. That is why these men like Kant are so important. Vast areas of our life, of the life of the modern world, pursue their existence and their knowledge without any regard whatsoever for what God's Word, for what the Bible, has to say. Thus the Bible is a different category, giving religious knowledge, while over in another category we have man and nature, man with his own dignity and accord with nature, gaining knowledge about himself, human society, and human culture. The two are in completely separate categories.

Now you understand why Jack Rogers, for example, who taught for many years at Fuller Seminary, accuses Schaeffer of wanting everyone to become pre-Kantian. That is an accusation he makes against Schaeffer. That is a very profound accusation, and it is quite true. Schaeffer did want us to become pre-Kantian in that sense, because what Schaeffer was saying is that we must have a unity of knowledge. Knowledge is one. All truth is God's truth. Every discipline, every science—whether the physical sciences or the human sciences, the social sciences—must all be subjected to Scripture, because truth is one. And God's Word is true. But Jack Rogers says that we cannot any longer hide ourselves from the fact that these two areas of knowledge—knowledge of and from God and knowledge of man and nature—are now totally separate. Religious truth is over here, and the knowledge of the sciences is over there. They are autonomous from each other. Jack Rogers is an evangelical who says this. And we cannot understand the evangelical church in the West today unless we realize that we are living in a moment where the church is largely shaped by this split of knowledge.

You have those who acknowledge this openly. In England there is a famous book written by an evangelical, Malcolm Jeeves, called *Christianity and Psychology: the view both ways*. Do you see what he has done? He has put Christianity over in one section and psychology over in another, and then he explores the view from both ways. He even says in his book at one point, "When I am working as a psychologist, if someone comes to see me and asks, 'What is the meaning of life?' and says, 'I need to know God,' when I am wearing my hat as a psychologist I will not tell them about Christianity, because I have to deal with their question in psychological terms within the bounds of psychology. Outside of my office, on another occasion, I would answer the question differently." Do you see what he is saying? He makes it very, very clear what he is saying.

Another example would be Donald Mackay's book, *Christianity in a Mechanistic Universe*. Again, here even in the title of the book you have Christianity and the universe set apart, as well as the acknowledgement that we live in a mechanistic universe. Now, I would say that Christians can never say that we live in mechanistic universe. We live in a universe that is orderly, yes, because God created it and God upholds it. But this is a created universe. This is a universe into which God acts all the time. He does not just act into the world occasionally, as if He were throwing a spear into it, as in the Deistic understanding, when some miracle happens. But God is acting into this universe all the time. This universe is upheld by the power of God. But here what you have basically is an enormous split between the two halves of reality. That is why Donald Mackay really hated what Schaeffer used to do with the book of Genesis and Romans 1. Mackay rejected it out of hand. Schaeffer would say that from Genesis and Romans 1 we can show that human beings are unique, that humans are in fact made in the image of God. As we study people and see that people love, are moral, are creative, that they are significant and not machines, we can demonstrate that Christianity actually fits. It makes sense of the real world. MacKay says, "No, no! There is nothing about man that can be used in any kind of apologetic argument.

You can never bring the two together. This is an absolute gap.” Thus he criticized Schaeffer so strongly because Schaeffer tried to say, “What we understand in the physical universe, whether it is about nature or about man, it will truly lead us to Christianity, just as Christianity interprets truly and faithfully the world that is actually there, which science discovers.” Schaeffer was saying that there must be a unity of truth, that Christianity is not operating in a separate universe. There is only one universe, the universe that God has made.

We will take this up again in the next lesson. I want you to be thinking about this, to try to think of examples yourself. This is why it so important for some people to deny inerrancy. If you deny inerrancy, then you can say, “Well, the Bible is true in all that it affirms, and it only affirms things in the religious area. It does not make statements of affirmation about truth in the areas that the sciences touch—psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc.” But I want you to think of examples not only of people who deny inerrancy in order to uphold this division, but also of people who uphold inerrancy and yet still live by this division. That is what we will move to in the next lesson.