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Empiricism

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These difficulties occur on the lower levels of sensation. Now you remember some of these arguments. The white cardboard with some black on it that looks purple and green and blue and red and so on. If you get a good size psychology book on perception, you ought to find many such illustrations in its first chapter.

Well, these difficulties occur on the lower levels of sensation. Further difficulties arise as we rise higher. The question is, how can we confidently develop sensations into perceptions? Nearly all Christian apologists of the empirical variety totally ignore this essential link in their chain of reasoning. And I say that on the basis of conversing with a number of such. They evade the question. They won't answer it. But to make their theory complete, they must answer it.

How do you get from sensations to perceptions? A secular answer, not given by any Christian apologet that I know of, a secular answer is that perception is an inference from sensation. Yet a very competent philosopher, secular philosopher, who went into great detail to show how these inferences were made never was able to distinguish a valid inference from an invalid one. Until someone does so, empirical apologetics is unacceptable. And so I present this challenge to all empirical apologetes. Show me how you validly infer a perception from a sensation or a group of sensations. And I have asked this question over and over again and they won't answer.

The next step an empiricist must take is the development of abstract ideas. You see, we have sensation, perception, and then abstraction.

In the springtime the Arizona desert blossoms not like the rose but even more spectacularly. Educated people, however, are not satisfied with the visible beauty. They also want to know why a saguaro is a cactus and why a ocotillo is not. People wish to distinguish between bull terriers and English setters. What is a star and what is a planet? Eventually they want to understand the meaning of justice, theft, pride, and the square root of minus one. These are all abstract ideas.

So far as I know the only empirical attempt to explain abstract ideas has been to pass from perception through memory images to the abstraction. And that is the way Aristotle did it and the way John Locke did it and the way Berkeley did it.

Eventually they want to understand the meaning of justice, theft, pride, and the square root of minus one. These are all abstract ideas. At least on the empirical position. So far as I know the only empirical attempt to explain abstract ideas has been to pass from perception through memory images to the abstraction. Since the sensations and perceptions are momentary, they must produce images of longer duration from which the idea is abstracted. Both Hume and Bertrand Russell assert, emphatically assert, that all men have such images.

Now let me ask you a few questions. How many of you dream in technicolor? Well, half a dozen of you. But I judge the rest of you do not dream in technicolor. How many of you dream in black and white? Then I expect to see a number of hands who don't dream. Is that right?

Audience: We don't know.

Let me ask you this question. Can you shut your eyes and see, in a metaphorical sense, see the face of someone you know quite well? How many cannot do that? And yet you dream in technicolor and but you can't do that? Well, alright, simply shows how queer some people are.

*[Audience Laughter]*

I'll adumbrate that explanation in a minute because I know something queerer. When you recognize some people when you're walking through the hall. Do you look at a image and then look at the person and say oh yes I know him because he's the image. Is that the way you recognize people? But then what good are images? Well I'll go on anyhow.

Some of you apparently cannot see the face of someone you know very well, but let me give you just on or other two little tests. How many of you cannot see, that is have a memory image of your kitchen or your bedroom or something or other? How many cannot? You cannot. But the rest of you can, apparently. Even if you don't dream. Even if you can't see a face, you can see a room. All right, then let me ask you this question. How many of you cannot hear, that is imagine a tune? How many of you cannot hear My Country Tis of Thee or something like that? Anybody cannot? Everybody can sorta hear tunes? Well, all right. If you say so nobody can disagree with you. Let me ask this question. How many of you here in this room can smell bacon and eggs frying? How many cannot smell bacon and eggs frying? Well, there are three or four, five, six, maybe some more, eight or nine.

How many of you cannot feel something between your fingers as if you were feeling leather or silk or paper or something? How many of you cannot feel sensation or image of that sensation in your fingers? How many cannot? Only about three? Well at any rate, this should show to you that not everybody has five different types of images. Did I give all five? No, I guess I omitted olfactory images. How many of you cannot smell gasoline here in this room? Well there are several. You see, not everybody has all five types of image. All five types of imagination. And maybe there is somebody in the room who doesn't have any of these five types. I noticed that one or two people put up their hands more than once, so they are deficient in two or three

different respects. And maybe, though this wasn't done in a very scientific manner, not careful enough, it is quite possible, isn't it, there is someone here in this room who doesn't have any of the five types of imagery.

Now, since empiricism depends on imagery to produce abstract ideas, how are you going to explain the extensive scholarship of people who have no imagery at all?

Audience: ??? subconscious rather than conscious. Maybe it can't be consciously ???

How can an image be subconscious?

Audience: ??? Plato's cave.

What about Plato's cave?

Audience: Well, ???, sense perception ??? shadow...

We're not talking about sense perception, we're talking about memory images.

Audience: I was talking about ???

The empirical theory is that you begin with sensation...

Audience: No, ???

The empirical theory begins with sensation, goes on to perception, then through imagery to abstract ideas. And yet, number of very highly educated people have no imagery whatever. There was a questionnaire that was sent out by a psychologist by the name of Galton and this was sent out to scientists, to politicians in high offices, not the lower ones, and to various very well educated people. And quite a number of them, not just a few, but quite a number of them not only said they didn't have such images, they were astounded to hear that other people did. They thought that the notion of imagery was just a literary metaphor and had no literal meaning. And they didn't realize people do have such images.

Now, if you're queer, I'm queerer because I have no images at all.

Audience: ???

Well, then you do have visual and auditory images.

Audience: No I don't.

Well, if you have color, isn't that visual?

Audience: I can not picture...

You can do it when you're asleep, but not awake.

Audience: Yeah, right.

All right.

Audience: Maybe it is a function of the subconscious.

There is no such thing as subconscious. Things are either conscious or unconscious.

*[Audience Laughter]*

How can they be half?

Audience: Don't you think it is possible to have knowledge that one cannot recall at the moment.

Well, then you're unconscious of it.

Audience: Right. ??? What category then would you put that knowledge in?

Unconscious.

Audience: Ok, then there is something that is knowledge that exists outside of the conscious.

Yeah, I guess so.

Audience: It seems to me what you're trying to evoke here is conscious response to that.

No, what I am interested here is to show an impossible difficulty in the empirical theory. They assert that abstract ideas can only be obtained through memory images. And I have given examples, and you can check with the history of psychology if you wish, Galton's experiment. And here are people who are highly educated who have no images at all. And my question, how can a person accept the empirical philosophy when he has to admit that this is so. Yeah?

Audience: It is possible that unconsciously our minds could process information?

Well you either have an image or you don't.

Audience: Yeah, but if you don't recall it, it doesn't mean necessarily that you don't have it.

These people never have them. And if they never have them...

Audience: ???

Well, if you're not aware, you don't have it.

Audience: How do you know that?

Because I don't have it.

Audience: But how do you know it's not unconscious? Part of the innate equipment...

Can you have a pain without feeling it?

Audience: No. Yeah.

No you can't. It either hurts or it doesn't hurt.

Audience: But at every moment, every nerve ending in our body senses something but very much of the time we're not aware of it at all.

Well, it's not sensing it.

Audience: Sure it is.

No, of course it isn't. Let me give you...

Audience: Did the nerve endings cut off?

Tell me, it's about time to quit, tell me to talk about tuning forks and music when we come back.

One of the little experiments that we did in our psychology laboratory was with tuning forks. And the professor struck a tuning fork and we heard a sound. And then he struck another tuning fork and asked if the sound was any different from the first sound. And nobody said no, everybody said yes, it is the same. They were just the same sound. Then he struck the second tuning fork again and after it a third tuning fork and said now are those two the same sound or are they different? And everybody agreed that it was the same sound. Then he struck the first tuning fork and the third tuning fork and everybody said the two sounds were different.

This illustrates what is called the threshold of sensation. I don't suppose there is anybody in the world, at least nobody has been discovered, who can distinguish the tones that differ by three vibrations a second. But nearly everybody can distinguish two tones that differ by six vibrations a second. So far as the experiments have gone, very few people, a few, but very few people can distinguish a difference of four vibrations. And a great number can distinguish six vibrations

and very few people are so tone deaf as to be unable to distinguish seven vibrations. Well this shows you don't always hear what the sound is. Or at least, we can't distinguish between two tuning forks that differ by only three, and most of us can't distinguish between two that differ by four vibrations.

The same is true with regard to eyesight also. If you take a circular piece of cardboard and it's a bright yellow and then you take another piece of cardboard and it's a bright blue, and these circles have a slit in them from a point on the circumference to the center. There is a machine on which you can put them so that even when they're turning at high speed you can shift the back cardboard over the front cardboard. So that when you've shifted it a little bit, you'll have say 99% blue, but 1% yellow or whatever the other color is. And then you can move it gradually and so on. And, nobody will recognize the coming of the back color, whatever it may be, yellow or blue, until it has progressed a finite distance. And then you begin to see it. This is called the lower threshold of sensation. And it means that your sensations develop in jumps and not continuously. And that the stimulus, which is continuous, does not register continuously, but in finite steps. Which is just another way of saying, your senses are not very accurate.

Well, now we'll go on. That's just another idea.

We were talking about abstract ideas, and Aristotle, and Locke, and Bertrand Russell insist that all people have memory images, in spite of the fact that Bertrand Russell ought to have known better. But he makes that assertion. And that is essential to the empirical view. This position, however, is untenable. In fact, empirically untenable. And further, doubly untenable. First, if a hundred of Hume's and Russell's acquaintances had such images, one cannot validly conclude that all men have. In so saying, Hume and Russell commit a logical fallacy. That's the fallacy of induction.

Now, second, further inquiry has discovered many well-educated people who do not have these images. Hence, empiricism has used a logical fallacy with an empirically false premise. Nothing more is really needed to refute empiricism. But since certain Christian apologists, and all logical positivists are so insistent, objections on a still higher level are in order. These have the added advantage of interesting the general public who are unfamiliar with psychological and epistemological technicalities. Perhaps the first of these three points is still a little technical but it is very important.

The principle by which logical positivism dismisses all metaphysics and all theology as meaningless nonsense is their verification principle. They hold that nothing can be true or even false unless it can be verified or falsified by sensory experience. What is unverifiable is neither true nor false, but completely meaningless. Our objection now is that this verification principle cannot itself be verified, and hence it is meaningless. But if their basic principle is as much nonsense as they think theology is, they have no basic principle on which to impune theology.

The second point, unlike some of these technicalities, is well within the range of the general public. It is derivative and subsidiary, but it is more a matter of daily life. This second point is that empiricism cannot establish any norm of morality. I am not saying that secular morality and Christian morality are different. A recent defense of abortion, a TV interview, was that the government should enforce only rational morality and not revelational morality. My point is that so-called rational morality does not exist. The reason should be easily understandable. Empirical philosophy claims to base all its truth on observation. Therefore, any evaluations or moral judgments empiricism makes must be inferred from observations. Now, observations at best can only give statistical information as to what is the case. It can record how many murders occurred in Philadelphia last month, how many divorces were granted in Washington, and how many cases of arson there were in Boston. But a simple logical principle prevents the empiricist from concluding that murder is unjustifiable. One of the essential requirements for a valid argument is the presence in the premises of every term found in the conclusion. If any term in the conclusion is missing from the premises, the argument is a fallacy. For example, if all cows are wise animals, and if all wise animals are beautiful, it logically follows that all cows are beautiful. It does not follow that all cows are lame, or that all dogs are beautiful. Neither lame nor dogs are found in the premises. Therefore, they cannot be allowed in the conclusion.

The point of this example is that empirical premises contain nothing but statements of empirical facts. They give observational data. They state what is. Hence, nothing but observational data can be put into the conclusion. If the premises state only what is, the conclusion cannot state what ought to be. There is no way of deriving a normative principle from an empirical observation. The logical positivists generally acknowledge this. They agree that that is so. And they dismiss moral judgments as meaningless emotional outbursts. I wish all empiricists were as clear-headed and consistent as the logical positivists. But some of them try to defend some sort of morality, but they're not able to do so.

And let me report one point. In this argument I'm not interested in any distinction between Christian morality and secular morality. I'm trying to point out, there is no secular morality.

The third point is merely an extension of the second, namely theological propositions are as meaningless as ethical propositions. Empiricism cannot support any theology. This may be illustrated by the history of religious theories from Schleiermacher to humanism. As before stated, Schleiermacher retained, perhaps weakly, but nonetheless tried to retain some Protestantism. As his followers became more and more consistent, they saw that experience supported less and less. I'm talking about the development from Schleiermacher to Albrecht Ritschl. The result, after Ritschl, was secular humanism. And this humanism, in my view, cannot escape these arguments against all empirical theories. That is to say, empiricism cannot support any morality whatever. It's not a question of supporting Christian morality against some other kind of morality, it is a matter of not being able to obtain any moral, any normative judgment at all.

It is now time to attempt something constructive. I spent a lot of time opposing empiricism because it presents as common sense and people sorta automatically take this point of view because they think they can see trees on the campus, when of course they can't possibly see trees on the campus. And until they learn that they can't see any trees on the campus, they won't be interested in presuppositionalism. But now having totally destroyed all vestiges of empiricism, I'll conclude with a short constructive view. For this is very short, it is just introductory to other things I'm going to say. Anyhow. It's time to attempt something constructive.

If empiricism is impossible, what sort of apologetics can there be? One thing is tautologically certain. There must be a non-empirical starting point. And the starting point must be chosen in view of a goal. The goal of apologetics, call it philosophy or theology if you wish, the goal apologetics must be intelligibility or understanding.

If the world appears disjointed to us, if the doctrines of Christianity seem to lack connection, if we are paralyzed by paradoxes, difficulties, and contradictions, we have failed to understand and our interests remain unintelligible to us. We can't put things together. Our world and our minds are confused. Now to understand a particular idea, be it an idea of astronomy, psychology, or religion, one must see how it fits into a system.

If you can remember as far back as the opening pages of this lecture, you'll remember I talked about a system. Truth is a not a haphazard aggregation of random propositions. This is particularly true of Christian theology. God is rational, not insane. His mind is orderly, not scatterbrained. His truths are intelligible because they are logically connected. If then the aim of apologetics is to understand God's systematic truth, our theology must have a logical starting point. What I am about to say surprising many people. The secularists think it absurd and some Christians are non-plussed. Nevertheless, if one stops to think, the solution will appear inevitable. To put it in its simplest form, one can say that every system of philosophy must have a starting point, for otherwise it couldn't start.

Now that's a profound statement isn't it?

*[Audience Laughter]*

No, it is profound. It is so hard for people to understand it. I'll read it again. Every system of philosophy must have a starting point, for otherwise it could not start. Even empiricism has a starting point. It may be the assumption that sensation is infallible. Or it may be that only statements verified by sensation are meaningful. Such starting points, since they are starting points, could not possibly have been demonstrated by any prior reasoning, for nothing is prior to the start. Hence, every system of thought must be based on an indemonstrable axiom. Since no secular system can avoid an initial assumption, the propriety of making such an assumption cannot be denied to Christianity. Therefore I shall set down as the basic principle of Christianity the doctrine of Scriptural inerrancy.



Well do I know the objections that this immediately raises. Evidentialist apologists and secular philosophies alike exclaim, "But that assumes the point at issue, you're begging the question, you are arguing in a circle." The reply to this should be obvious. The opponents, both secular and religious, assume the authority of experience, the inerrancy of sensation, the validity of induction. But this is the point at issue. This begs the question. And the one is as circular as the other.

We shall, therefore, take the Bible as our starting point. Inerrancy is the axiom. Or, to expand it somewhat, the Biblical teachings are the set of axioms from which the theorems of Christianity are deduced. Since it may take the secularist several seconds to recover from cultural shock and since Christian evidentialists may shake their heads for several minutes, I must immediately pass on to the next step, namely, from the axioms the theorems must be logically deduced.

Led by Barth, Brunner, Bultmann and other neo-orthodox theologians, many religiously-inclined people disparage logic and deduction. Kierkegaard insisted that Christianity is self-contradictory. Barth has always emphasized paradox. Brunner says that God and the medium of conceptuality are mutually exclusive. Bultmann depends on the vagaries of mythology.

Some apologists, more orthodox than neo, think that the method of geometry, a subject which if they are recent graduates from high school they probably never studied, some think that the method of geometry exalts logic above God. They seem to fear the emphasis on logic or correct thinking would deprive God of the unlimited freedom of insanity. Some of these men even deny that God can think in propositions. Apparently it would ruin his sovereignty if he understood the relation between a subject and a predicate. How these men can justify systematic theology is more than I can understand. And one doctrine in particular, the doctrine of the image of God in man must embarrass them seriously.

You can consult this infinitely extended bibliography and find in it an article on the image of God in man which I published somewhere sometime, but I have no idea when or where. And if you're very ambitious you can maybe find it somewhere and read it on the image of God. It is very important. I mean the doctrine is very important. Maybe my article is...

The doctrine of the image of God in man must embarrass these Christians seriously. These apologists, if they are indeed more orthodox than neo, can be covered with confusion by a short conversation. Ask the gentlemen if he believes in the deity of Christ. He will say "Yes, I am a Trinitarian, I believe that Jesus is the same in substance with the Father." Then you reply, "Oh, I see, you believe that Jesus was merely a man and nothing more." Without the law of contradiction he cannot answer.

The lecture will now conclude by considering two objections that confuse ordinary honest Christians and perhaps some professionals as well, who may not be so honest you know. The man in the pew, the Sunday school teacher, the pastor now out of seminary for some years and

distracted by congregational troubles, will ask, "What place do archaeological evidences have in this system? And how in the world is evangelism or evangelization possible?" Archaeological is empirical and evangelism requires us to make contact with other people. Now, first with respect to archaeology, let me preface, I think I'm going to talk a little bit on archaeology next Tuesday morning in Chapel, I think.

Now first with respect to archaeology, let me preface my remarks by noting one of its limitations. If archaeology should convince us that three or thirty historical statements in the Bible are true, this would not prove that 300 others are true. Archaeology has hope whatever of proving the truth of Genesis chapter 36. Or the truth of 1st Chronicles 26 and 27. And, if archaeology cannot prove these historical statements, all the less can it prove the far more important doctrinal statements. Nonetheless, the advances of archaeology in the last 80 years are of great value to Bible believers. Especially if Bible believers know a little geometry.

In geometry there is a form of argument called *reductio ad absurdum*. And in logic there is a form called *argumentum ad hominem*. The first of these, wishing to prove a given theorem, assumes its contradictory. From this contradictory it validly deduces some absurdity. This erases the assumed contradictory and thus demonstrates the desired theorem. An *argumentum ad hominem* accepts an opponent's position and deduces conclusion he will not accept.

By these arguments we can show that if the higher critic denies an event recorded in the Bible, he must by the same reasoning deny other events he wishes to assert. Or vice versa. If he believes that Brutus murdered Caesar, he should also believe the resurrection of Christ because its historical evidences are greater.

Unfortunately, very few secularists have been converted by such arguments. They have however been forced to retract many of their criticisms of Biblical accuracy. While the advances of archaeology have not and can not prove the truth of the Bible, they have shown the falsity of much higher criticism. Now, with much higher criticism clearly untenable, we do not have to be too much concerned with what still remains. The logical point is that the liberals have been proven false by their own methods.

The second objection that puzzles the ordinary Christian and the academic professor as well, is the the method of evangelism. Evangelists or person workers often say that must begin their efforts on the basis of something the prospect already accepts. There must be some common ground on which both the evangelist and his prospect can stand. How, otherwise, can one approach an unbeliever? But note, if the unbeliever accepts one set of axioms and rejects the Bible, and if the evangelist accepts a different set of axioms as he must, there can be no common ground. And the empirically-minded evangelist concludes therefore there can be no evangelism. The answer to the this objection must for the point of the lecture, if it is not to be extended interminably. The answer is this: evangelism, if truly Christian, does not, can not, will not argue from a common epistemological ground. The task of evangelism is to explain the system as the Scriptures present it.

These empirical evangelists must be reminded that it is not within their power, nor within their authority, to produce faith in the mind of an unbeliever. The evangelist's only responsibility is to present the truth, the whole counsel of God, the message of the Bible. Faith, or belief, is a gift of God. And it is the Holy Ghost who regenerates the sinner and causes him to believe the truth the evangelist has presented. We never *share* our faith. That's a crazy phrase that has come up in the last 10 years. You can't share your faith. It is the Holy Spirit who gives a man faith. The evangelist can't do it. You can't argue a man into being a Christian. The task of the evangelist is to present the gospel.