

Wisdom's Hiding Place

Reaching Beyond
Belief



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INTRODUCTION

When I was young, my fellow church members would regularly testify that our church was true. Some would claim it was the only true church. With so much importance being placed upon this belief, I asked how I could know this if I hadn't investigated other religions. I was told this wasn't necessary; all I had to do was to pray with sincere desire to know our religion was true. Furthermore, I shouldn't question, I should have faith. Faith, they said, doesn't rely upon proof, it requires acceptance and belief. Assuming for a moment that belief and acceptance amount to faith, how then does faith differ from the acceptance and belief that frauds and con artists require of us? How then do we determine who, when and what to believe? How do we know we aren't brainwashing ourselves? These questions were fair, they are important. What began as an innocent question gained momentum because nobody offered any reasonable reply that didn't fall back upon a circular logic that required a belief that their sacred texts are true. While calling these books true, however, they ignore the elephant in the room; There are many different religions and many different sects based upon the same books. This begs the question; How can any book be called true when the same words obviously mean different things to different people?

Let's back up and consider another circumstance . . .

At work, many of my coworkers constantly attest to the fact that Democrats are simply Socialists. "This isn't about belief", they assure me; they know the truth and have all the facts to prove it. With so much importance being placed upon this knowledge, I ask how they can know this without talking to Democrats and investigating their reasons from their viewpoint. I am told this isn't necessary, "The facts are before us in black and white if you have eyes to see. You don't have to question, it's obvious to your logic if you have half a brain. Democrats aren't logical.

They just don't get it". Still, since I've heard Democrats make similar claims, how do their convictions differ from conservative claims of truth? And how can any viewpoint be called true when viewpoint causes the same subjects, objects and concepts to appear so different?

All of this being said, what we are left with is inescapable while being ignored the world over: Christian or Muslim, Republican or Democrat, pick a belief, any belief; we insist upon *our* truths while dismissing *their* truths. *We* do this knowing full well *they* are doing exactly the same thing for the same reasons. So where do our reasons come from? Evidently we base our reasons more upon our sense of rightness than anything greater. Yet we dismiss this fact because, after all, we know we are right.

Now it might seem strange to laud this circumstance for the common ground it reveals, but it's there and there's more. A few steps before righteous belief, just prior to viewpoint and knowledge, more common reality exists even if we come to value our own rightness above it. So it is here we must begin.

A curious thing happened as I started to write about the problems with belief; these ideas were echoed in the Judeo-Christian Bible as well as the Chinese Tao Te Ching. I certainly didn't expect this. I thought religion and belief went hand in hand yet important verses in these texts seem to rail against belief. As I did more research on these books, the echoes developed into surprising parallels.

At first I hesitated quoting religious texts within a discussion of realism because they are so steeped in tradition and belief that my own words might be mistaken for a veiled defense of religious dogma, but this isn't my intent. Neither do I want to denigrate religious value. Furthermore, I don't quote these texts to lay claim to what they "really" mean. Regardless of what the authors intend within these texts, with no pretense I re-present what many people regard as religious myth through the eyes of realism simply for the intrigue it might inspire. When read this way, these popular religious stories look less like myth and more like

psychological parables with realism weaving in and out of these narratives while threading through our subconscious. Feel free to denounce these parallels if you are so inclined because I'll show how realism stands on its own while playing an important psychological role in our moral development.

Although there was no study of psychology, as such, thousands of years ago, popular religious stories about God, commandments, original sin, faith, the virgin birth of a savior, and even resurrection, can be read as addressing the psychology of perspective. Curiously, these stories are also the most mythologized and seem least realistic to many people.

We begin by looking at how perspective becomes knowledge and belief, and how belief then divides our mind's and our societies. Needless to say, the problems inherent within belief extend far beyond religion. Belief permeates our politics by becoming inflexible ideology. Belief interferes with our relationships causing us to overvalue our personal perspective at the expense of others. By looking at how perspective begins, ends, and what this means for us psychologically, we learn how some paths lead toward greater responsibility and morality while others tend to degrade into confusion and disunity.

Many people regard religion as their main source for personal or social values so atheists are often regarded as amoral at best, immoral at worst. Agnostics are thought of as not having enough conviction to be trusted with any real moral regard. Today, in America, many people view Islam as lacking morality or essentially evil somehow. People do this while ignoring places in their own Bible that speak of holy wars and call for the righteous stoning of sinners and the killing of non-believers. Some religious groups want to impose their religious values as a way to unify society. When others point out that morality doesn't arise from majoritarian pressure, they are accused of being anti-religious. Within the world of politics, many believe truth to be exclusive to their ideology so others are accused of being unpatriotic. These attitudes are prevalent in

the Mideast, and in the Midwest, and everywhere in between. Still, none of this finger pointing reaches beyond our beliefs. We seem to forget, ignore, or dismiss the fact that certain values support all of these attitudes. If we have realistic options, are these values something we really need to support?

As faith has become equated with belief, our beliefs have come to divide us, but when re-viewed through the eyes of realism, faith is opposed to belief. Faith, not belief, is an essential religious value. And as a principal of realism, faith becomes a valued part of reason as well as a valuable psychological tool whether we are religious or not. We will see how this understanding of value can affect our psychology and guide morality in lieu of belief. So, rather than disparaging religion, I intend to delineate exclusive belief from more inclusive value. This look at realism isn't concerned so much with specific values as it is with re-imagining our sense of value itself.

Once foundational value is ignored, narrowed or forgotten, important human values tend to get discounted because they then seem more arbitrary than real. American values such as liberty, personal responsibility, faith and unity are being called into question by some people because their very foundation, religious, political or otherwise, is coming to be viewed as divisive and unrealistic. With all the talk about values today, we hear plenty of people praising their beliefs and ideology but precious little about the value of humility, moderation, tolerance, patience, understanding, compassion, charity, social responsibility and graciousness. Instead we are left with a social, political and religious rhetoric that is often full of negative discourse that increasingly lacks civility. The Internet has at once broadened our ability to network cross-culturally through communities worldwide while also enabling us to efficiently search out only those who agree with and support our narrow ideas. We are like children in a great new land voicing our ideas as rudely as we would like, behind a veil of virtual anonymity. We've yet to

understand that such liberty exists only in proportion to the responsibility we bring to it. We must learn to listen before we lose the ability or opportunity to share values that represent something greater than ourselves.

Ultimately I hope to point out that whether the language sounds secular or religious, stories about human values can often be told in a remarkably similar fashion. While the search for answers is popular within our culture, this book leads us to something more valuable than answers; we stumble upon secrets. The wonder that these secrets provide, leads us to a more positive way of looking at life. Instead of digging in and entrenching ourselves in the defense of our beliefs, we find common ground that can bring us together. The chasm that separates the religious and non-religious might indeed be filled with this common ground. Tragically, those not finding unity here probably cherish beliefs that keep them from doing so. It's a difficult mission; a mission to shake ourselves out of our comfortable viewpoints, beliefs and prejudices so that we may come to better understand a realistic basis for faith and value. Because what we read will be filtered through our current beliefs and doubts, this task is very difficult to accomplish. You probably know some people who suffer from these problems of perspective but this book isn't about them, it's about you and me. We can do little for them but we must work on ourselves.

Though many of us favor the security provided by the certainty of our beliefs, this book is dedicated to the free spirit awakened within each of us when we explore the wonder within our questions. Remember when you were a child? The wonder? Where is your wonder now? Wonder is hidden from you. Hidden by your own doubts. Hidden by your beliefs. Before we can once again become filled with wonder, we must gain some perspective. The wonder is still there and it's begging to be explored.

Author's note:

Realism, as I use the term, refers to the common sense notion that whatever occurs outside our view should be valued at least as much as what happens before our eyes.

Idealism is another common sense notion suggesting that the only valuable reality is what we happen to be aware of. Idealism suggests that perception IS reality, and everything that matters exists within our minds. After all, if we didn't have a mind, nothing would exist for us. How could it?

Both views have their merits but realism takes us one step further. Realism suggests that my ignorance of reality beyond my senses can't negate unseen reality, it simply reveals the obvious limits of my own perspective. My ignorance of greater reality beyond my view promotes poor judgment. In order to think freely and not be bound by belief, we need to understand the deeper implications of realism and then act upon our understanding.

CHAPTER ONE

In the Beginning

Imagine for a moment that you are a very young child. Remember the wide-eyed wonder of a child? One clear day you look out toward the horizon and see a tree. The sight of a tree may not give you much to think about, the tree is simply realized. But as you scan the horizon line, you see more things and you may begin to compare these things with each other. Over time you may begin to notice relative size, "This is tall, this is small." Our sense of sight, sound, touch, smell and taste combine to form our *physical perspective*.

Soon our minds begin to group things together and distinguish them apart according to the way we view their similarities and differences. Just as the Bible begins by noting such distinctions, those who teach us to speak, define our world by pointing and naming, "This tall object is called a tree. This smaller object is called a bush. This we call the earth, and this we call the heavens." The process of isolating and naming happens over and over with everything we sense, and it puts us well on our way to amassing knowledge. As our wonder gives way to these distinctions, our definitions become a basis for knowledge and communication. Since we can then communicate our knowledge to others using this same process, over time we teach and are taught many distinctions that we or others haven't had any personal awareness of. Hopefully communication and our growing distinctions such as good from bad, will help to keep us safe while ensuring growth and progress.

The Tree of Knowledge

As we begin to distinguish things from each other, we quickly branch out into defining opposites. Many of these come to seem quite obvious to us. "This is light and now this is dark." Not only do we do this with things we physically sense, this begins to happen within our thoughts.

We soon come to decide that certain *ideas* are opposed to others. As we begin to consider how one idea might be opposed to another, knowledge takes on new dimensions; belief is born and begins to grow. "This is right and this is wrong." This *rational perspective* grows up alongside our physical perspective. With enough social support, our beliefs come to be expressed as opinion and are taken for granted; as if they contain more value than they do. As with physical perspective, our rational viewpoints are as definite as they are obviously "true". Before they have been challenged, our beliefs grow extremely rigid though their foundation is so narrowly based.

As our knowledge grows, it becomes less a matter of personal perception (physical and rational) than it is taught to us from a shared body of knowledge. We take this for granted because, for us, it's just common sense within our group. With constant input from family and society, many of the ideas we claim as our own are actually based upon popular opinion or the beliefs of the dominant social group.

Since I'm pointing out this circumstance, we see how this happens. Did you see it happen? Like a magician's slight of hand, unless it's pointed out, it's not at all obvious. Here we are, innocently perceiving, learning, communicating, growing and before we know it, we have placed too much value upon limited viewpoint. Though limited, we call our knowledge "true" while devaluing other views. Not only do we defend our common rationale, we seem to cheer for our limits and fight for them until they are permanently ours, as if worthy of some sort of victory. We do more than harm ourselves, as we devalue the viewpoints of others, we do harm to others as well as the world we must share.

A magician once said that people are easily deceived only because they have eyes to make them so sure of what they see. When we watch a skilled magician perform a trick of making something disappear and then reappear, we should realize that a trick has been played upon our seemingly infallible senses. The fact that these tricks appear so

convincing should tell us something important about our senses and our psychology. Our senses can easily deceive our mind.

So here we have it; our original error of value. It didn't take that long to discover where we went astray. The problem for us now is that this value has long been established as natural and good within our personal and cultural psyche. Like holding onto gold, we resist loosening our grasp. We value nothing higher than the currency of our common beliefs. What else do we have? Concerns have been expressed over this value fault dating back thousands of years through many cultures yet there's been limited success getting people to value this reality in any meaningful way. As hard as the issue has been to communicate, correcting the problem is all the more difficult. Still we must find a way to redirect our values from the clues we find here.

In America, slavery was once common but the same practice was viewed differently by slave and slave owner. For a long time a married woman wasn't allowed to vote and was considered to some degree to be property of her husband. Most Native Americans were relocated to reservations to make room for new civilization. Most of us look back on such traditions with horror yet, at the time, these practices reflected dominant social values. These values reflected common tradition and were considered normal, natural and, well, true. Now, just as then, many errors of value are defended by someone's interpretation of scripture. Today, many traditions remain current rather than being relegated to the trash heap of history for these same reasons.

New immigrant groups have often been regarded with suspicion by long established members of society. Immigrants may begin to form their own groups based up their common knowledge and their shared situation. This activity can seem clannish by more established *clans*, so the behavior is often viewed with suspicion. Established clans, especially those who come to represent majoritarian power, tend to take advantage of newcomers and then look for ways to deport them. Most of us don't

have to look deep into our own ancestry before we find such things within our own families. It has happened to the Irish, Jews, Chinese, Germans, Hispanics etc. Most of us, if we care to look, can see the same thing happening to friends, family or coworkers right now. Before we begin to think that *we* are much more enlightened now than *they* were, we shouldn't forget how obviously true our viewpoints are to us now. Your current point of view isn't wrong is it? It was the same in the past. We overvalue our perspectives but they are like fool's gold.

Of course, none of us strive to be wrong so we *must* think our views are right. We might well accept the fact that our physical viewpoints aren't right or wrong but merely convenient. When it comes to our rational views, however, we won't consider our rational truths to be merely convenient. Unfortunately, it is their convenience that is the greatest distraction to our reason. It is so strong that the "convenience factor" itself is reasoned away. If you live in the Midwest, it's more than likely that Christianity is most true. If you live in the Mideast, Islam is most true. If you are a white male in the United States, you'll more likely view "equal pay for equal work" as a needless distraction whereas women and minorities see your blind spot quite clearly. But if we are to look beyond right and wrong, true and false, we might come to recognize the shortcomings of viewpoint. Instead of dying to defend our viewpoints as true, we should simply note their value as well as the value found within other views.

Today as well as in yesteryear, those in the democratic majority believe in their own common good while ignoring (at best) those in the minority. If belief were not something we valued so highly, we would challenge each other to defend these perspectives in light of a greater, more common reality. If we fail to value a greater reality enough to humble us, we will simply value our common yet narrow beliefs more.

It can be hard enough to determine the basis and relevance of our own distinctions; realizing where they come from within a social situation is

all the more difficult. It becomes even less likely to question any basis or relevance when so many others share and support our view. If we do begin to look around and start to question, we are likely to meet with a social resistance we seldom have when simply considering our own perspective.

Consider the distinction of good from evil. It's obvious that knowledge can be valuable, but what about the dangers of its not so obvious limits? Due to the very nature of our thought process, once we look at one thing, we are often led to the opposite notion. For example, when we look upon something as "good", often the idea of "bad" seems automatically defined. The fact that we come to recognize opposites in this way can cause us to think that our small picture of the world is all the more complete when it isn't. Don't we normally think that things are true or false? We tend to say that there are two sides to every argument. We say that right vs. wrong. Though this dualism is natural and might sometimes be helpful, our feeling of completeness can also leave us even less likely to search for options outside of our current view. We must accept the value of what we don't see right now. Sound reason requires us to value reality's hidden presence and relevance.

Original Error

What we have been considering about the psychology of perspective and our resulting beliefs brings us to this summation: *The strength of our senses tells us a lot about our personal reality but they also are limited and must therefore fall short. Not only does our perspective fall short, it gets in its own way because we overvalue our viewpoints (physical and rational). Because so much reality exists beyond our limited perspectives, we must remember to value broader reality above our personal perspectives in order to foster growth and to regain balance in our personal and social values. It is our ignorance of reality beyond our view that removes us from greater value.*

This summation is about as close as we can get to defining this circumstance without saying too much and stepping into the trap we want to avoid. The lessons to be learned from this summation are more far-reaching than they might first appear. Without constantly looking toward a broader reality, our minds focus on differences in viewpoint rather than the connections outside of view. Perhaps the importance and foundational value of this summation is why most religious texts begin with, or at least include, creation stories. These stories might be read through the eyes of tradition, scholarship or belief but they can also be read through the eyes of realism. We don't have to change the stories themselves; once we change how we view them, they seem to read differently on their own.

Original Sin

The creation stories in the beginning of the Bible move into the second chapter by introducing us to the first two people in this world. Chapters two and three tell us how, like children, Adam and Eve were without knowledge; innocent yet aware of everything before their eyes; happy, naked and unashamed, just as God created them.

God provided for them a Garden of Eden that contained everything needed to sustain their life and God told them to be fruitful and multiply. God's *only* caution to them was that "death" would surely result if they partook from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Still, a "serpent" convinced them that rather than death, the knowledge of good and evil was valuable and would make them godlike. In spite of warnings provided by their Creator, Adam and Eve were tempted by this value so they partook of the tree. And so it was that their eyes were opened. But their newfound knowledge of "good" gave rise to the idea of "evil". They determined they were naked, became ashamed, and hid themselves from God. Now, separate from the Creator, God searched for them, found them and had them confess. When they

admitted to the obvious, God explained the unavoidable consequences of their newfound predicament. Separate from their Creator, theirs was a whole new world. Their Eden was essentially lost and this new world was one of enduring hardships caused by knowledge reigning untempered by broader reality.

Knowledge, of course, is natural and can't be avoided but once we become aware of its pitfalls we might be able to compensate for the errors in judgment we ourselves create through knowledge. Note that the story of Adam and Eve speaks to the specific dangers of a black and white sort of knowledge; the sort of thoughts that lead away from a common source and toward divisive belief. Belief overvalues dualism in our thought. There is plenty to lose and little to gain when we value our distinctions of "good" and "evil" above the source that gave rise to the ideas in the first place. Once we take responsibility for our natural faults, we can forgive ourselves as well as others since we are all the same. Forgiveness is preferable to defending our limited viewpoints while blaming others for their lack of vision. Because we all share the same errors of perception, this blame game seems quite effective. There is plenty of blame to go around and around in a never-ending vicious cycle.

Let's look at what the first two verses of *The Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching* have to say about the problems of human knowledge. (The term "Tao" represents reality beyond our limited views.)

VERSE ONE

*Once Tao is put into words,
Tao is no longer infinite.
Once rendered finite,
the definite becomes favored over infinite.*

Prior to the many viewpoints, the essence is common to

all.

Whereas individual viewpoint separates essence into many.

As if from a bird's eye view, imagination can reveal depth beyond the surface.

But personal viewpoint is limited to the view reflected off the surface.

*The viewed seems dependent upon viewer,
but these are separate.*

*Like clear waters appear dark due to the color of sky,
clarity only appears blue due to its reflection of blue.*

Beyond surface reflection is the gateway to hidden depth.

Notes:

The Philosophy of Tao

"Tao" isn't intended to be defined as a word. It stands-in as a representation of reality in it's infinite sense therefore Tao isn't a personal reality. The author tries very hard to explain the value of a term that can't be directly defined without negating the value he is trying so hard to make clear.

The Tao Te Ching was written in Chinese characters known as ideograms. These ideograms are like small pictures. Ideograms are compound diagrams consisting of several root components called radicals. Instead of attempting to offer a word for word interpretation, we do better by considering the picture as painted.

The inside ideogram for Tao might be called the *source or leader*. This ideogram can be broken down further into its three radicals: *human*, *eye* and, *every direction*. This complete ideogram is the then underscored

by the radical for *journey*.

In one part of this verse we find the term "kuan" often translated, "to observe". The ideogram breaks down into two radicals: "a bird" and "to see"; a bird's eye view. Now, toward the end of this verse is an ideogram for the term "hsuan". Translators tend to render the character as "darkness" or "mystery" so the line is often translated as, "darkness into darkness" or "mystery into mystery" etc. The ancient commentators, however, remind us that although "hsuan" points to the dark color of water, the term originally pointed to the dark color of sky. So, from a bird's eye view, the clarity and depth can be observed right past the reflection. This way of observing amounts to a revealing look beyond human viewpoint.

VERSE TWO

It is not until we first decide something is beautiful that ugliness is defined.

It is not until the very moment we define good as being good that evil comes into view.

What we 'now view' arises from what we 'may view' but this value is only reasoned back from viewpoint.

Therefore, difficulty and ease depend upon each other for our recognition of each.

In the same way,

Long defines short.

High makes us aware of low.

Ahead and behind follow each other.

The responsible person realizes this and acts without reaction and instructs without rigid definition.

Many things come into view but none are held to be absolute.

Not overvaluing relative distinction helps us maintain

more common value.

Notes:

The Psychology of Tao

The author points out how the realistic philosophy laid out in the first verse comes to affect us psychologically. The distinctions we make inform our values and influence our thoughts. We learn how dualistic distinctions not only divide our minds, they divide our societies. The conclusion is one of value rather than dualism; Greater value may be realized once we devalue rigid distinctions.

Within the field of mathematics we might learn how positive and negative numbers are called complements. It is understood that opposites complete each other because each is born out of the idea of the other. This notion is also vital in helping us solve problems outside the realm of mathematics. To value complementary thoughts is viewed by some as wishy-washy or confused within a society that values consistency of thought but we have an option; a choice between values. We are often taught to be consistent and to adhere to a particular viewpoint but our value of broader reality creates a bridge between opposites by exchanging the tension created by these opposites for unity. Paul seems to relate a similar story about how our recognition of opposites can negatively affect our psychology in the Bible's New Testament book of Romans. Chapter 7, verses 7-11 speak to the Ten Commandments (the law):

What follows? Is the law identical with sin? Of course not! Yet had it not been for the law I should never have become acquainted with sin. For example, I should never have known what it was to covet, if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' Through that commandment sin found

its opportunity, and produced in me all kinds of wrong desires. In the absence of law, sin is devoid of life. There was a time when, in the absence of law, I was fully alive; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. The commandment which should have led to life proved in my experience to lead to death, because in the commandment sin found its opportunity to seduce me, and through the commandment killed me. (REB)

And in 21-24:

I discover this principle, then: that when I want to do right, only wrong is within my reach. In my inmost self I delight in the law of God, but I perceive in my outward actions a different law, fighting against the law that my mind approves, and making me a prisoner under the law of sin which controls my conduct. Wretched creature that I am, who is there to rescue me from this state of death? (REB)

Notice that Paul uses the term "death" as a metaphor for sin. And what is his sin? In the context that Paul is presenting here, he seems to consider this dualistic thought process as sin. For Paul, the commandments seem to be a list of negatives providing no resolution to his thoughts and feelings. Each time he is told not to covet his neighbor's wife, all he can think about is coveting. Every addict will understand his words. The more you think about what you are being denied, the more you spend focus on it. Without realism to temper our psychology, we are imprisoned by dualistic thought that indeed leaves us in a wretched state. We are in a constant struggle against the forces of perspective that deceive us. For all the value they provide us, the desires of our physical senses effectively drag us down by dividing our minds and society. We must constantly struggle against this tendency. The concept mirrors how

some people speak about the devil. Devil or no, the fact remains that our fundamental knowledge conceals a humbling, more infinite reality. Perhaps it is no wonder so many religions concern themselves with the desires of our senses. But even though these sensual desires are often equated with sexual desires we needn't equate or confuse the two.

Rather than reflecting greater value, our beliefs can be anything, and they often are, if our sense of realism doesn't provide any boundaries. We might come to believe we are superior to other people who come from different lands, have different skin colors, heritage, religion or viewpoints. Beliefs come to be supported within many communities, and they gain strength in numbers, but because many beliefs lack essential value, they can become harmful. A lynch mob might represent the majority but its overwhelming numbers can't imbue a higher value of justice.

When we know that we are right we don't easily change our minds. Once we believe something is true we stop looking. Do you keep looking for something you've found? Our black and white distinctions tend to exclude shades of gray that we have missed. We often jump to the conclusion that if others don't agree with our view then they must hold the opposite the view. This mind-set leads to argument rather than discussion. More often it leads to conflict than to accord. We've all "known" things that we later found to be false. Learning is a good thing as long as it continues. Once we settle into belief, we stop learning, growing and progressing.

Are you always searching for answers? Answers and creative thinking are incompatible. When one begins the other ends. An answer is to creative thought as a period is to the end of a sentence. The quickness with which we arrive at our answers may only reveal our reaction to the questions. Once we determine "the answer", instead of giving any further consideration to the question, we simply seek to defend our answer. This may appear to be intelligence but it's actually based upon an ignorance of