

The Functions of Deity: Epistemology

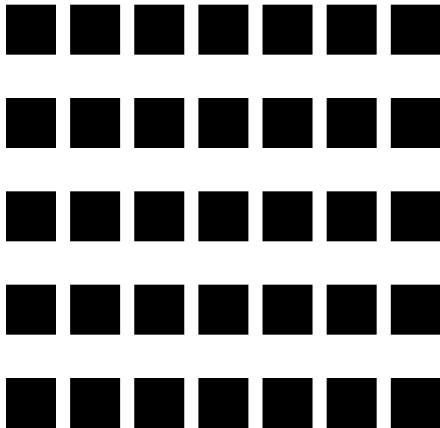
Why we must trust Jesus alone tell us what is true.

A sermon by Nate Wilson for Christ the Redeemer Church 28 March 2010, 31 March 2024

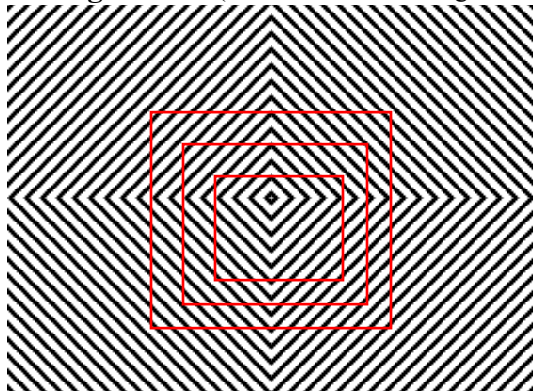
As Jesus stood before Pilate, Jesus claimed to bear witness to the truth. That's when Pilate cynically asked the famous question, "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38) *What is truth? Can it be found? If so, where?*

Can you trust your eyes to determine truth?

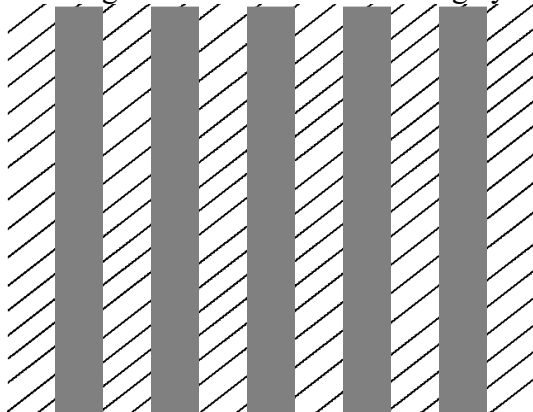
- **Hermann Grid** (There are no grey dots printed in this drawing.)



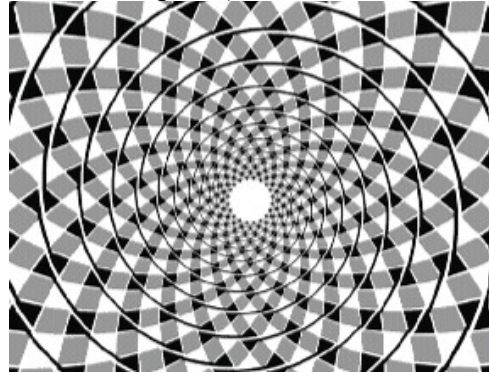
- **Hering's effect** (Are the red lines straight? Yep!)



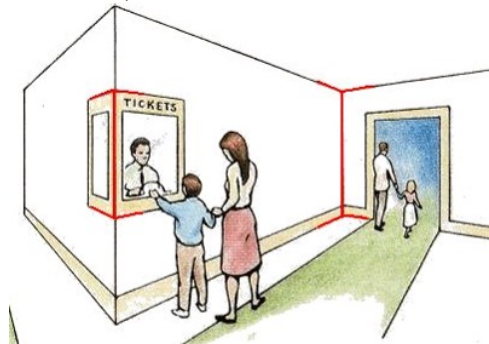
- **Poggendorf effect** (The black diagonal lines are straight & continuous behind the grey bars.)



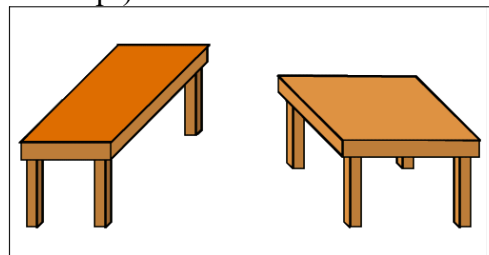
- **Fraser's Spiral** (They are actually all circles, not a spiral!)



- **Muler-Lyer effect** (The red line at the corner of the ticket-window is the same length as the red line at the corner of the wall by the door!)



- **Shephard's Tables** (Both tables in this drawing have the exact same size and shape tabletop!)



The three drawings on this column came from Michael Bach's website <http://www.michaelbach.de/ot/index.html> and are used with his permission.

The Myth of Objectivity

- If you cannot trust your brain to interpret correctly what you see in these optical illusions, can you trust your brain to distinguish what is true from what is false in any other area of life?
- Everything we observe is interpreted, so it is impossible for any human being to be objective when it comes to determining reality.
- Each of us starts with a different set of assumptions and a different set of experiences.
 - Dr. Kent Hovind, in his video lectures on *Dinosaurs, Creation, and Evolution*, tells the story of the city kid who went to visit his uncle in the country. Out in the country he was far removed from his familiar environment of streets crowded with crazy drivers. One the first day, the uncle took him out in the field to watch a cow give birth. After a minute of watching the little calf struggle to get out of its mother, the city kid remarked, “Wow, how fast was that little cow running when he ran into her?” The presuppositions he brought to the event totally changed his understanding of what was going on!
 - A similar kind of thing happens when two people with different worldviews take a walk through the Grand Canyon. A uniformitarian might marvel at how many years it must have taken for the river to slowly erode such a vast canyon, assuming that the canyon was millions of years old and that things have remained as they are for all that time. Meanwhile a catastrophist might look at the Grand Canyon and marvel at power of hydrolic movement, assuming that the canyon was carved out in a matter of days by the flood of Noah. What we believe colors what we observe so that we cannot be objective.
- This makes it impossible for one human being to accurately and authoritatively define reality for another human being.

Choose this day whom you will serve (Joshua 24:14-15)

- We all function with boundaries as to what is true and what is false.
It is impossible to function without a set of assumptions about reality.
- These boundaries can only be defined by either you, by God, or by some other person.
We have seen some of the problems so far with having ourselves or some other person define reality; we must consider submitting to a transcendent, personal God to define reality.
- The great war hero of the Hebrews, Joshua, when Moses died and he took leadership of his nation said, “Now therefore fear Jehovah, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt; and serve Jehovah. And if it seems bad to you to serve Jehovah, choose this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served... but as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah.” (Joshua 24:14-15, ASV/NAW)
- The ancient gods of the Egyptians and Arabs and Persians do not hold much appeal to a Western audience. In the modern and post-modern age, the choice is pretty much between God or Man.

If you believe that man is the arbiter of truth:

- If you want to know whether the earth around you is real, and if you believe that truth comes from man, you will probably get one of two answers.
 1. Some of the more philosophical types might tell you that it is all an illusion,
 2. and more practical types will tell you that what you see is all there is.
- Marcelo Gleiser wrote on the American National Public Radio page on “Cosmos and Culture,” around the time of Easter in the year 2010 that, “...as science progressed, it has threatened God's traditional role in the world [as something we can use to explain the things we don't understand] ... In my opinion,” he went on to write, “there are two kinds of people: the naturalists and the supernaturalists. The supernaturalists see hidden forces acting behind shadows, dictating the affairs of men, explaining all that we can't through mysterious and law-defying cause-and-effect relations beyond what we call the real. They live a life of fear, enslaved by apocalyptic beliefs, oppressed by their

gods and death. The naturalists humbly accept that we will never have all the answers, that knowledge is an ongoing process, and that it's okay not to know. Instead of embracing fear, they embrace our ignorance as a means to inspire personal and collective growth, as a challenge and not a prison.” www.npr.org/blogs/13.7/2010/03/science_belief_and_the_search.html *Our tax dollars are supporting this rhetoric that says that naturalists are humble, but religious people are fearful, enslaved, and oppressed.*

- This man-centered worldview was held by the ancient Sophists. Plato described the position of one of these Sophists named Protagoras, in his book *Theaetetus*. Protagoras held that “Man is the measure of all things,” arguing that the sense perception of human beings defines reality, so that no one can ever be wrong; everybody is right if they define their own reality. So when the wind blows and it makes one man chilly and another man exhilarated, both have defined wind, one as something disagreeable, the other as something agreeable. Plato pointed out, however, that what the two men perceived were not qualities existing objectively in wind, but rather the limited interaction of their sensory organs with the wind. They came up with two different descriptions of the wind because neither man can know the wind for what it really is through the senses. In fact man cannot know anything at all through the senses. (Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, p.57ff)
- Around this time of year in 2010, TV New Zealand conducted an interview with Richard Dawkins, who summed it up like this, “The world... is quite simple – if science can prove it, it is real. If not, forget it.” (<http://tvnz.co.nz/close-up/science-religion-which-reigns-supreme-3420317>)
- Science has a major problem, however. Every scientific hypothesis is based upon unproven assumptions. The way the scientist pursues his/her method is as follows:
 - He hypothesizes that if p then q.
 - He then goes on to demonstrate q.
 - Finally, he deduces q therefore p.
 - P, however has never been proved.

For instance, I could make a hypothesis that water would make a good lubricant for door hinges. I could pour water over a thousand door hinges, and – what do you know – the squeaks disappear and the hinges move well.

Therefore I conclude that water makes a good lubricant for door hinges.

I then go on a year-long tour selling my new book on my discovery and come home to find that my front door hinges have rusted so badly from all the water I poured over them a year ago that I can't open the door!

- The scientific method cannot, in fact arrive at any truth because any event heretofore unobserved could prove any scientific hypothesis wrong, and often does prove scientists wrong after a while, like my hypothetical door-hinge-watering man.
 - That is why centuries ago, Joseph Butler in his book *Analogy of Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature* asserted that probability is the only basis of knowledge. The scientific method can only conclude that a certain average result has happened a certain number of times out of a certain number of tries and that it therefore has a certain percent likelihood of happening again given the same circumstances.
 - That's why weather forecasts are made in terms of percentage of probability, and we all know how accurate they are!
- Today, we have the same sort of problem from another direction. We live in a media-saturated culture that is driven by political power and commercial sales, such that it is hard to tell what is real from what is spin designed to win us to a particular political leader or get us to purchase a certain product or service. In his book, *The Trouble with Paris*, Mark Sayers writes:

“Our culture has a corrosive impact on the quality of our life and faith... The combination of a hyper-consumer culture, mass media, and rampant individualism has created a world of hyper-reality. (p. 5) Our culture promises things that are better than the real thing. It has overextended our expectations of life... [For example the models you see on many magazines are so Photoshopped that you

wouldn't recognize the real woman if you passed her on the street.] Hyperreality means that often we cannot tell the difference between what advertising tells us about products, places, and people, and what they are like in the real world. (7)... But the lifestyles we see on[-screen] are not real... We are entrusting the task of making our lives happy to the hands of a corporate culture that has a vested interest in keeping us unhappy. Advertising makes us dissatisfied so we will buy to meet the need (71)..."

However, "Since Jesus' incarnation, God's reality has been breaking out into our world. We do not see it because we assess life with the wrong tools (prosperity and satisfaction) rather than by God's agenda. (155) Whenever we see justice, beauty, or goodness, there is a good chance the light is shining through from heaven. (157) If we act in the ways of the kingdom, we will see benefits in our lives... To sin (to choose to live in a way that runs contrary to God's reality) is to punish ourselves, to fight against the inherent laws of the universe as God has created them. (173) Those who choose to live according to God's reality, who pursue wisdom, find life." (pg. 177)

Problem: Total Depravity

- Just as our mind turns straight lines into crooked lines in the Poggendorf illustration, so our minds also bend and twist the truth. This is called the Noetic effect of sin.
- The Bible tells us that humans naturally "suppress the truth in unrighteousness... and exchange the truth of God for a lie" **Romans 1:18ff** "...the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hinder the truth in unrighteousness... knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks; but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts unto uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonored among themselves: because they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever... (28) And even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up unto a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness... they that practice such things are worthy of death..." (ASV/NAW)
- **Colossians 1:21-23** "And you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, He has now reconciled in the body of his flesh through death..." (ASV/NAW) *It took the death of Christ to pay the price of our sin, and it took the transformation of our minds by the Holy Spirit to overcome the crookedness that sin made in our minds.*
- **1 Corinthians 2:12-14** "Now, as for us, we received – not the spirit of the world, but rather – the Spirit, the one which [came] out of God, in order that we might know the things freely given to us by God... Now, a natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are stupidity to him. He is not even able to know because it has to be figured out spiritually." (NAW)
- SUMMARY: The question raised by the optical illusions – as well as the questions raised by other philosophers and by the Bible itself, as to the ability of people to figure out the truth for themselves, should raise serious doubts in your mind as to how good you (or any other human being) would be at playing god and determining reality from falsehood. What alternative does the Bible give for our source of truth?

If you believe that God is the arbiter of truth

- You can be sure of the truth:
 - **1 John 3:19-20** "...And by this we will know that we are of the truth, and, in front of Him, we will assure our hearts, because if the heart is condemning of us [we will know] that God is greater than our heart, and He knows all." (NAW)
 - **1 John 5:13** "These things I write to you in order that you may know that you have life forever – to [you] who are believing in the name of the Son of God." (NAW)

- **1 John 5:20** “And we know that the Son of God is coming and He has given to us insight so that we may recognize the True One, and we are in the True One – in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the True God and eternal life..” (NAW)
- **You will be a tremendous threat to those who do not wish to accept the truth (and who pretend that they are still searching for the truth).**
 - “All who are willing to live in a godly way in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” **2 Tim. 3:12**.
 - Why? **1 Peter 4:1-5** explains, “Therefore, since Christ suffered for y'all in flesh, y'all also must start arming yourselves with the same resolution, because the one who has suffered in the flesh has been stopped from sin, in order to live the remainder [of his] time in flesh no longer in the lusts of men, but rather in the will of God. For the time of life which has gone by is enough for y'all to have accomplished the will of the nations, having proceeded into immoralities, lusts, alcohol-binges, orgies, parties and illicit idolatries – in regard to which they are alienated, uttering hurtful [epithets] when y'all do not run together into the same flood of dissolute behavior. Those guys will render an account to the One who is preparing to judge the living and the dead.” (NAW)
 - **Matthew 5:11-12** Jesus taught, “Y'all are being blessed whenever liars reproach you and hunt [you] down and speak every evil against you for my sake. Keep rejoicing and leaping for joy, because your reward is bountiful in heaven...” (NAW)
- (If you believe that God is the final arbiter of truth, you can be confident, you will be persecuted, and...) **The Bible will be precious to you:**
 - **Psalm 19:9b-11** “...Yahweh's judgments are altogether justly true. They are desirable beyond gold – even beyond lots of fine gold – and sweet beyond honey – even flowing from honeycomb. Moreover your servant is being warned by them. When keeping them there is a lot of reward!” (NAW)
 - Peter called God’s word His “valuable and greatest promises” (**2 Peter 1:4**, NAW)
- **The Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth:**
 - **John 16:13** “...when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth: for He will not speak from Himself; but whatever things He hears, these shall He speak: and He will declare to you the things that are to come.” (ASV/NAW)
 - **1 John 2:27** “And the anointing [of the Holy Spirit] which you yourselves received from Him remains in you, and you have no need for someone to be teaching you. But as His anointing is teaching you concerning everything – and it is true; it is not a lie – just as it taught you, you remain in Him.” (NAW)
- **You will not merely intellectually accept the truth, but you will obey it:**
 - **James 2:19-20** “You yourself believe that God is one; You do well. The demons also believe and shudder. But, you want to know something, O empty man? The faith without the works is dead!” (NAW)
 - **1 John 1:6** “If we are saying that we are in fellowship with Him, yet we walk in the darkness, we are deceiving ourselves and do not [practice] the truth.” (NAW)
 - **1 John 2:4** “The one who says, ‘I have been knowing Him,’ while not keeping His commandments, he is a liar, and there isn't any truth in this!” (NAW)
 - **John 3:36** “He who believes on the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” (ASV/NAW)
- **You will be blessed by the true God**
 - **John 8:31-32** Jesus said... “If you abide in my word, then you are truly my disciples; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (ASV/NAW)
 - **John 5:24** “Truly I say to you, whoever believes in the Son of God has eternal life” (ASV/NAW)
 - **Ephesians 1:13** “Having heard the word of the truth in Him – the good news of your salvation, and having believed in Him, you were sealed in the Holy Spirit of the promise” (NAW)

I have a bit more to say about epistemology, but as we have looked at the contrast between having man define truth or having God define truth, let me repeat the words of Joshua: “Choose this day whom you will serve.”

Whom do you want to define reality for you? Yourself/Man, or God?

- Trust God,
- learn what the Bible says,
- obey it,
- endure the persecution,
- and receive Jesus’ extravagant blessings of
 - confidence,
 - personal presence through His Spirit,
 - freedom,
 - and eternal life.