

The unexamined life
is not worth living |
discuss



“ The unexamined life is not worth living” (Socrates). The inquiry performed by those endowed with a rational element, consists of attaining an end towards which this inquiry directs itself towards. The life of inquiry is that experienced by human beings and not beasts; since beasts do not desire in a manner that seeks fulfillment outside of a bodily sense but rather live according to instincts and methods that allow for the preservation of their species. This examination or inquiry begins with the desire of attaining some effect produced by an object or perhaps the object itself; although the end in question may differ, the components that compel one to act in realization of the end are the same: action stems from desire which empowers a choice. A choice is a deliberate desire and is followed by a contemplation of the means that would direct the search towards its desired end. A commonly desired end by all of mankind is that of knowledge, acquaintance with facts, truths, or principles stemming from an investigation. One elicits knowledge from a source which is discovered through an investigation in which the vestibule for this inquiry as well as that which produces a result becomes the science. Science allows for the examination of truths and knowledge under a particular form, whether it be experiential or perhaps in an a priori manner. In philosophy as well as many other areas that involve inquiry and pursuit of such ends, the role of science makes possible the study of all that exists, because whatever we seek in existence has truth in that it exists. That which does not exist may still be desired and produced but does not become discernable by scientific methods and exploration. Rather, it occurs as a distortion of a truth that does in fact owe its existence to an efficient cause.

In order to conduct a meaningful and complete inquiry by use of a scientific approach, the sources of truth must not be mistaken for those which may provide some good for a temporary fulfillment as such misstep results in a deviation from knowledge and renders an individual restless since they cannot discern the falsehood contained in such an object which seeks to mirror the image of something greater. This new knowledge acquired is pernicious in that it has been attained not through an investigation in respect to a proper science but rather it has occurred under its pretensions. One may readily ask oneself what is the difference between a true scientific endeavor and that which falls under pretensions? Both of these endeavors begin with the same root of aspiration in which one seeks to expand the realm of knowledge which is contained in the mind, but the pretension occurs when one seeks to gain knowledge in order to gain some sort of appraisal or another effect. Although appraisal is a response that is merited after hard labor, one's pride may hinder the actual knowledge that can be gained from the object. Secondly, one who searches for the truths scientifically in a pretentious manner is not actively engaging in this search but assumes that nature holds the answers and therefore does not compel nature to answer the questions a man of interest would have. Man in this respect chooses to take the answer provided to him. This knowledge gained is superficial and those who speak of it speak without knowledge, they loquaciously speak about its content and perceive to understand its form but in fact have not united both for a complete understanding.

Although all philosophers and other individuals agree that true knowledge exists, many disagree on its nature and how it can be attained. David Hume

and many other empiricists believe that the source of any knowledge that a being may have comes about through his/her experience with objects of existence. These objects are perceived by human beings who create ideas after having had these objects impress themselves upon the facilities which make sensory experience and its translation possible. Other thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and Saint Augustine do not make such an emphasis on human experience but rather agree that humans possess forms of understanding within themselves so that they may be able to acknowledge the existence of everything outside of themselves. Experience does in fact relay information to beings about the earthly life but can any other sort of concept lying outside of this realm be known? Can it be made known through the use of human innovations or does it require a wisdom and spiritual intensity that only a select few possess?

Mankind has been compelled by his own physical existence as well as that of the physical world that exists around him to ask questions concerning his own existence and of its cause. In this journey one may not gain certainty, since human beings have not come into direct contact with its efficient cause. Human beings have sought ways to improve technology and other materials so that valuable information about their object in question may be learned which may lead them to finding certainty. Through this desire and ability to create and conduct such an investigation, humans have learned to conduct and at times manipulate the laws of nature in order to gain more information about the world they live in.

Through Saint Augustine's Confessions, the reader witnesses his struggle against the worldly things that sought to bring him asunder, and his quest for truth and complete knowledge.

This quest for knowledge although it began in the physical world, places its end in the heavenly realm, where God can be found. The source of the knowledge that Saint Augustine searches for would encompass methods of investigation that he has not been familiar with but ensures that his reason is purified and it does not intend "to expand it, and would keep our reason free from errors" (Kant 24). Saint Augustine drew knowledge about himself and the physical world by introspection, looking inward and reflecting about oneself in context with everything else. Although this may be perceived as quite boastful and an overly confident activity from human beings, this is not done in the same manner that Rene Descartes did. Conversely, Saint Augustine came to understand that he is limited and lacking in the being which is possessed in perfection, understood that he was created by Him and through his decree all things that exist were made possible. In coming to such an understanding of the Necessary Unconditional who is the cause of the existence of all else, he admitted human ignorance and praised the enigmatic nature of God. God needed no proof in the manner that humans proved the existence of other material things but rather contained in Him a self evident truth that radiates to those who sense with the mind and not the eye which is deceptive and creates illusory images if they are perceived as the origin of knowledge. He who believes in good is moved to attribute other forms of existence to such a creator, and Saint Augustine believed that this

was as much that human reason unaided by revelation can come to know about the existence of God.

Although this may seem as though Saint Augustine has regressed in his possession or amount of items which he has sustained as objects of his knowledge, the education which he has received provided perversions of the love that should be directed towards the Creator rather than things such as rhetoric, arithmetic and such. The love that one has for knowledge is the same that

one has for God since God is the source of truths and all that exists; however, pursuing things of the worldly realm is an empty pursuit for the things that exist do not contain him. The love expressed for these transient objects imitates that which is reserved for its expression with God and its limitless impression causes injurious effects to the one who seeks them: this love runs rampant without fulfillment and consumes man in an infectious manner leaving man to recover from the malady of misery that follows after. This friendship with the world is deceptive and perversely jealous in that it prevents man from seeing his proper end in relation to his Creator, it seduces the senses until one discovers the impurities contained in the physical world.

The manner in which he previously sought to prove the existence of an entity that cannot be described in words, understood by our limited capacity, nor imagined with our senses, was a manner that pulled him further from the source of truth and closer to the sources of heretical beliefs and sects which believed greatly in human power of reason. Under Saint Augustine's

confessional memoir, he abandons all sorts of superficial knowledge in search of pure knowledge which leads one not astray but fills the emptiness experienced when one places faith in fleeting objects. This kind of intellectual and spiritual labor requires that the mind be prepared in order to find truth, the best way to do such is by way of introspection which contemplates using the rational element which we have been gifted with and not our sense which provide limited understanding. Three crucial elements in the study of metaphysics and theology as well have come together in Saint Augustine's pursuit, the source of knowledge, the existence of God, and the role of science. These crucial elements provide the best proof possible for the existence of God which cannot be provided through the use of human innovations like technology because

the material cannot encompass or comprehend the immaterial which exists outside the constrictions of time and space.

The best existence comes not from the ability to prove him through the use of words, but it requires that one agree with the law of cause and effect and acknowledge that the modes of investigation conducted by man is only befitting to things of the physical world. God does not need to be proven for he is. One must possess faith so that he may come to acknowledge and attribute all that exists to Him. He who is certain and stable does not need to be secured by conducting a scientific investigation but rather it is the shaky human existence which needs this security to prove its existence and its purpose. The sciences, which derive its nature yet again from the Principal Cause, are intended to come to an adequate understanding of the world that surrounds humans and is not to be taken out of that context for such an

action is a misuse of a gift which is worthless if not attributed to its original creator and not to man who also owes his existence to God. Man participates in this unconditional knowledge not upon the recognition of the existence of the Supremely Perfect Being, but rather reason requires the aid of God himself which must make an impression upon the individual who engages his mind in this endeavor. The possibility of knowledge about God occurs not in this world but occurs after one's end has been fulfilled in the physical realm and it occurs through the doctrine of the Beatific Vision which is upheld by many devout believers and instructors of the faith. The best proof of the existence of God occurs through an intimate and personal experience and is also found in the words of Saint Augustine in his Confessions. This source of evidence in regards to God's existence is relative and faces an obstacle to prove itself to those who doubt that the existence of things outside of us can be definitively proven. Although many appreciate and admire the zeal and devotion Saint

such an entity which he referred to as God, it is not a sufficient way to prove God's existence according to thinkers like Kant who believe that

"...the required proof must show we have experience, and not merely imagination of outer things; and this it would seem, cannot be achieved save by proof that even our inner experience.... is possible only on the assumption of outer experience(Kant 245).

Although Kant in the Critique of Pure Reason attempts to save metaphysics from the destructive powers of skeptics like David Hume, he does not find sufficient proof for the existence of God; rather through his scientific inquiry,

he establishes the proper role of human reason in the phenomena which seeks to extend its boundaries towards the noumena. Things that exist in the noumena are perfect ideas and concepts which are contained in the forms of understanding so that a human being recognizes the concept of things such as duty from within, but God himself and what human beings has fabricated to describe the First Cause is not natural to the noumena. Therefore the existence of God per se is not so much grounded in that he is God but rather in the most perfect concepts and ideas.

The existence of God cannot be proven in that manner of introspection according to Kant. Many believers and magistrates in the Christian faith believe that human beings come to know about God, although in a limited sense, through their participation in the eternal laws, which is called the natural law or conscience which is imprinted in them. Through this participation one comes to know about the moral laws and attributes the strict adherence to such laws being worthy of heavenly compensation. This belief also follows the principle of cause and effect but to Kant this is not sufficient and the contingency of a perfect unconditional on a conditional undermines the perfection and absolute quality that it possesses. In making such a connection, the existence of a so called God is undermined in that because he is only recognized through the moral law and in order for the existence of God to exist in a perfect manner it cannot have a dependence on anything else for that it is chief and final needing no additions or supplementation.

Like Saint Augustine, Immanuel Kant believed that the content of the experience resulted in erroneous conceptions of certainty. Throughout the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant properly defines which subject matters fall under the category of a science, a study that is secure and in by no means pretentious, and examines the nature of knowledge which is comprised of three important components: understanding, judgment, and reason. Kant's endeavor in the Critique of Pure Reason equaled that of Saint Augustine, he sought to prove that we can have certainty in some aspects but not in others. Although their endeavors were similar in their quest, the conclusions that would be formed about the basis of knowledge in respect to that of God, who exists in a supernatural realm, would differ so much so on the basis of the power accredited to reason by both of these great thinkers.

Certainty can be found in the form of reason itself and not in the content of experience which is subject to changes and therefore fail to be reliable sources. The content of experience belongs to the phenomena whereas the concepts and ideas exist in the noumena. The forms of understanding can be analyzed, which we bring to each and every concept in order to come to certainty which produced by the mind in a logical sense and does not deal with the specific content of all experience. The mind analyzes concepts and ideas which form the basis for experiences. For example, the mind, without reference to experience can think of the law of

cause and effect and then find examples which fit such laws. Since this has been done independent of experience, it is natural for the mind to think that every effect derives its occurrence from a cause which is the effect to yet another cause until one understands that a singular cause is responsible for

this linear progression. In this respect, this is all that can be known about the First Cause by human beings because of the limitations that human reason comes across. Human beings have been given the power to explore within the phenomena and assert this claim: that the noumena does in fact exist but we cannot come closer to understanding in so much that it relates to the necessity of the things that exist in that realm. In this sense, the science which entails the study of God existence in the noumena as he is understood by Christians has yet to become secure because of the methods used, according to what Kant defines as a science in the Critique of Pure Reason. Although many are moved to believe that the Efficient Cause contains all the attributes described in the Bible and in the various monotheistic religions as well, humans are motivated to think of these qualities such as omnipotence, benevolence, and omniscience because they desire to do so. These desires to describe the Supreme Being in terms that describe the qualities of a human being's personality, character, and such arises from the need or want to identify and comprehend that which has been described as limitless yet fulfilling but both of these thinkers admit that human beings cannot come to such knowledge, either on their own or at all.

Works Cited Page

Kant, Immanuel. Critique of Pure Reason