


2006

What Are You Thinking?: The Stuff of Wisdom in a Postmodern World

John Ingram

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/alum_books

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ingram, John, "What Are You Thinking?: The Stuff of Wisdom in a Postmodern World" (2006). *Alumni Book Gallery*. 383.
https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/alum_books/383

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Cedarville, a service of the Centennial Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in Alumni Book Gallery by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Cedarville. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@cedarville.edu.

What Are You Thinking?: The Stuff of Wisdom in a Postmodern World

Disciplines

Christianity | Religion | Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion

Publisher

AuthorHouse

Publisher's Note

Taken from *What Are You Thinking: The Stuff of Wisdom in a Postmodern World* by John Ingram, © 2006.
Published by AuthorHouse: Bloomington, IN. Excerpt used by permission of the author.

ISBN

9781425948153

What Are You Thinking?

The Stuff of Wisdom in a Postmodern
World

by

John R. Ingram

Bloomington, IN



Milton Keynes, UK

AuthorHouse™
1663 Liberty Drive, Suite 200
Bloomington, IN 47403
www.authorhouse.com
Phone: 1-800-839-8640

AuthorHouse™ UK Ltd.
500 Avebury Boulevard
Central Milton Keynes, MK9 2BE
www.authorhouse.co.uk
Phone: 08001974150

© 2006 John R. Ingram. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means without the written permission of the author.

First published by AuthorHouse 8/4/2006

ISBN: 1-4259-4815-4 (sc)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2006907218

*Printed in the United States of America
Bloomington, Indiana*

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Jesus Said, You will know the truth and the truth will set you free
How Do We Know the Truth?
What is Truth?

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” “What is truth?” Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him” John 18:37,38).

Dedication

To

My bride, my friend, my love, my helpmate,

Sharon,

My wife of 42 years

Whose unwavering commitment to Christ

Has challenged me in my thinking

Foreword

James Thurber, in his volume of satire, *Let Your Mind Alone*, recalls that during 1929 when the Great Depression began, Walter B. Pitkin announced, "for the first time in the career of mankind happiness is coming within the reach of millions of people."¹ Pitkin's view was that six or seven persons out of every ten could attain happy living, but that only one person in a thousand was actually reaching that goal. According to Pitkin, the obstacles standing in the way of the remaining nine hundred and ninety-nine unhappy ones was they did not know themselves, did not understand the "science of happiness" and had no "Technique of Thinking." It is apparent from the title of Thurber's book he did not agree with Pitkin's evaluation of the times. Thurber's assessment after referring to many "success experts" of the day was "man will be better off if he quits monkeying with his mind and just lets it alone."²

Thurber may have found greater homogeneity in today's world. Our postmodern world has a similar direction; instead of attempting to make sense out of philosophy, art and literature let's just celebrate 'nonsense.' The current postmodern belief is that a correct description of Reality is impossible. Truth is limited, constantly evolving and no theory can ever be proven true or explain all things. Therefore

celebrate the 'freedom' from trying to make sense of anything. It goes without saying that underlying contemporary thought is a broad band of skepticism.

Often the philosophy of both the Christian and the non-Christian is akin to Thurber's conclusion. It is often expressed in such terms as, "Religion is a personal matter" or "I never discuss religion or politics." Although we may claim to 'know' our own minds, the mind is still very mysterious. "How do we know?" "What is the process of knowing?" What is it in my Psyche that guides decision-making? In an age of incredible advancement in technology, especially in the area of communication, with global information at our fingertips -as close as the web browser on our computer- it seems that we have not made any great strides in understanding how to think. In the area of understanding faith, unfortunately for many it has become something relegated to the area of experience and emotion, subjective and totally divorced from reason.

In this work I want to acknowledge Dr. J. Barton Payne, a scholar, a gentleman, a gracious Christian, A humble professor, a mentor, one I considered my friend, who taught me how to think. His untimely death in the seventies took him to be with the Lord he worshipped and adored. His passing left a great void.

It is the earnest desire of this author that the journey taken in these pages will lead to an understanding of the revelation of God's truth, which can give clarity to the mind and escort the seeker to a coherent world and life view. Thinking patterns of the world continue to be hazy and ambiguous. God has provided a path to find His truth and to have guided and focused thinking in all of life's decisions.

John Ingram

Endnotes

- ¹ James Thurber, "Let Your Mind Alone. Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York:1937, p. 3.
- ² Ibid.

Contents

Chapter 1	The Stuff of Wisdom.....	1
Chapter 2	What Were You Thinking?.....	7
Chapter 3	Wholeness of Life.....	25
Chapter 4	Branches of the Tree.....	33
Chapter 5	Don't assume too much.....	43
Chapter 6	The Meaning of Truth.....	59
Chapter 7	The Nature of Knowing.....	67
Chapter 8	The Nature of the Universe.....	79
Chapter 9	Where Did it All Come from?.....	99
Chapter 10	Are you in Your Right Mind?.....	113
Chapter 11	What Has Value.....	127
Chapter 12	The Problem of Purpose.....	141
Chapter 13	Natural Theology and Religion.....	151
Chapter 14	Empirical World Views.....	163
Chapter 15	The Christian Philosophy of Life.....	177

1

The Stuff Of Wisdom

Measuring Life

Value is often measured in terms of dollars and cents, forgetting that what matters most in life is not found in the market place. For many, hard work and toil is the totality of life. The potential end product of earthly labor is a few material gains. Material focus is compounded with the pressure of performance. Charles Reich, in 1987, identified three levels of consciousness existing in our society, one being the “loss of self” or the sacrifice of individuality to the corporate “good.” Success and love is measured by how well you perform. The play, “Portnoy’s Complaint” graphically portrays the struggle against the performance-oriented world. Love is received only for accomplishments according to society’s terms. The ever-present danger for the performer is taking one wrong step and slipping beneath the thin veneer of success into “an abyss...where one becomes a non-person.”³ The recent “Survivor” series on television seems to support this emphasis and bombards us with the philosophy that it really is winning that counts, not how you run the race.

Sadly, within the realm of professing Christian ministries many are also subject to the performance-value system, fearful of not measuring

up to self-imposed or church-imposed standards of “excellence.” Many churches have made meticulous methods, not ministry the holy grail of faith. True biblical faith challenges us to step off the performance treadmill and take stock of our relationship with God and with people. The bible is not a guide to excellence in spiritual performance.

In the midst of our daily efforts, sometimes little thought is given to moving beyond the monotony of the moment. The song by the group, Alabama, gets right to the heart of what many are feeling:

I'm in a hurry to get things done oh I,
rush and rush until life's no fun.
All I really gotta' do is live and die
But I'm in a hurry and don't know why.⁴

Performance orientation leads ultimately to burnout. There is a better way of thinking that leads to restive and exhilarating contentment in the midst of life's storm. There is reality beyond our physical routine that is not a realm of fantasy. Can this reality be reached by human effort and determination alone? Can the wholeness of life be reached apart from power and insight beyond ourselves? A modern philosopher asks this question: “Can we understand the whole of things?” He directs the reader to the viewpoint some hold that we may have a theory of *anything*, but not a theory of *everything*. He observes that such a theory would have to be too general and must come from a standpoint outside the world.⁵

When we delve into these questions of life, we are indulging in philosophy. What is philosophy? Philosophers have struggled with this question throughout the ages. The author of *Modern Philosophy* (1995) makes the astute observation that the history of philosophy has been one long search for its own definition.⁶ Perhaps a better way to answer the question, or arrive at a definition, is to ask, “What is the subject matter of philosophy?” The following answer may prick a few ears of the scientific world: “Philosophy studies everything. It tries to define a theory of the *whole* of things. In contrast, to the ‘bittiness’ of science, philosophy attempts an integrated account of the world, in which all truth will be harmonized.”⁷ Many so-called philosophers disagree; they want to make science the God of all life, moving it beyond the realm of analytical investigation to become the harmonizer and dictator of all truth.

Although an excellent synopsis of philosophy, the same author abrogates religion to the realm of myth and storytelling, believing the primary goal of religion and moral interpretation is not truth, but consolation.⁸ The one discipline –if we may use that term of religion– that has hope of bringing a prospective to philosophy from beyond the realm of human experience and give us a total integration of life experiences becomes a scrap on the philosopher’s cutting floor. A. J. Ayer, in his book, *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, expresses this divorce of religion and philosophy:

...the common belief that ‘it is the business of the philosopher to tell men how they ought to live, although it has the authority of Plato, is based upon a fallacy. The mistake is that of supposing that morality is a subject like geology, or art-history, in which there are degrees of expertise, so that just as as one can look to an art-historian, in virtue of his training, to determine whether some picture is a forgery, one can look to a philosopher to determine whether some action is wrong. The philosopher has no such training, not because of any defect in his education but because there is no such thing as an authoritative guide to moral judgment, of which he could have obtained the mastery.’⁹

Understanding of life *is* the work of philosophy. We cannot put together all the pieces of life merely by our human experience. If in fact there is no such thing as an “authoritative guide to moral judgment,” then any discussion of philosophy is futile. True wisdom must come from someone who transcends our mortal existence. Philosophy derives from two Greek words, that may be interpreted, “love of wisdom.” God want us to know His wisdom. Solomon, credited with being a man of great perception, wrote, “For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”¹⁰ Thinkers throughout history have searched for the “stuff of wisdom.” Unfortunately, many have not been willing to seek the One who has a viewpoint from beyond our world and can see the whole.

It is difficult to see life beyond our environment and day-by-day existence without understanding the process of thinking. Thinking

involves more than daydreaming. Man was created to know God, and have a true understanding of life. God wants to lead us to that insight. The path will lead to a spiritual connection of faith and reason. Although mankind now struggles with the blindness of a sinful nature, God has provided a way back to His wisdom. The apostle Paul wrote, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."¹¹ Paul speaks of renewing the *rational* mind. God wants to redeem us from confusion, bring clarity to thinking, and restore our rational minds with solid faith. God offers the opportunity of studying His divine truth so we can make sense of life, and not be tossed to and fro upon the stormy sea of experience.

"How do we know truth?" Mankind was originally deceived into thinking that it was possible to have the true wisdom of God by disobedience; that God was withholding his wisdom from the very ones created in His likeness. This was the beginning of Gnostic belief; believing there is somehow hidden special knowledge that will connect us with wisdom and make us gods. This was the beginning of confusion not wisdom. That confusion still reigns today in this very complex postmodern world and confounds both skeptical scholars as well as spiritual seekers. The prating political Pilate who turned Jesus over to be crucified struggled with this perplexity. He confronted the one who is the origin of all wisdom: "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." "What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him" (John 18:37,38). Though dubious of finding truth, Pilate could not find anything false in the one who stood before him. Pilate could only acknowledge the complete absence of deception in Jesus Christ.

Thinking Questions

1. How would you measure the value of life?
2. Do you believe it is possible to understand all of reality?
3. Do we know what is reality?
4. What value does science bring to understanding the value of life?
5. Do you believe it is possible to have an authoritative moral guide to all moral issues?
6. Do you understand your own thinking process? How you make decisions?
7. Have you ever asked the question, "What is truth?"
8. Read John chapter 18 and discuss Pilate's view of truth? What world pressures do you believe influenced his thinking?

Endnotes

- ³ Charles Reich, "The Greening of America, p. 68.
- ⁴ Alabama, Copyright © 1998 - 2006 Lerenti.com . All Rights Reserved.
- ⁵ Roger Scruton. *Modern Philosophy: An introduction and Survey*. Allen Lane The Penguin Press, New York, NY, 1995, p. 7
- ⁶ Ibid, p. 3.
- ⁷ Ibid, p.7
- ⁸ Ibid., p.65
- ⁹ A.J.Ayer, "Philosophy in the Twentieth Century. Random House, New York: 1982, p. 15
- ¹⁰ Proverbs 2:6
- ¹¹ Romans 12:2