

Authority

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 28 July, 2003 - 08:06

Is the rejection of authority necessary?

The rejection of authority about any given issue is a precondition to solving problems related to that issue. So if a problem arises in any area in which we do not reject authority, we can never solve it. We remain chronically baulked.

But if we were to reject *all* forms of authority, we would have to reject the authority of our personal experience. Once we reject that, we have literally no place from which to speak authoritatively.

And that is a very good and necessary thing. Denying oneself, as well as others, a “place from which to speak authoritatively” is precisely the position taken by **Popperians** and **TCS** parents. Note that we do not say this authoritatively. You should accept it because, given the strength of the argument (which you will find elaborated in Popperian philosophical writings),

you will consider it true. To see this you may have to reject someone else's authority, though.

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Comments

Authority

Submitted by Collin Dyas on 29 July, 2003 - 14:49

Could you say more about this? What is irrational about the authority of our personal experience? The logic of your statement is to assert that I don't know my own experience. Was that your intended meaning?

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Re: Authority

Submitted by Elliot Temple on 29 July, 2003 - 17:59

You don't know your own experience with certainty. You can be wrong about it while others are right about it. If in some case you really do know what you're talking about, use your knowledge to persuade others instead of just telling them you're right.

-- Elliot Temple <http://curi.blogspot.com/> (<http://curi.blogspot.com/>)

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You don't know your own exper...

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 30 July, 2003 - 06:27

You don't know your own experience, you mean. Try coming off the drink.

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philosophy is fun :-)

Submitted by Elliot Temple on 1 August, 2003 - 01:22

A Reader wrote "I do know from my own experience that fire burns" -- I understand that this is a standard way of putting it in English, but the thing is this is a very imprecise statement. 'know' and 'from' are both causing large problems.

'know' has a history of referring to justified, true belief. now that we understand fallibility, we can see that is the wrong meaning for the word 'know'. but our language is going to take its time to adapt, especially because many/most people are still fairly clueless on the subject.

'from' is also unclear. you can't learn from experience (observations) all by themselves. but they certainly do *aid* learning.

so anyway, if you mean you have a tentative best theory that fire burns, and that observations played a role in the adoption of this theory, you're absolutely right. and this is entirely consistent with the TCS line that we cannot 'know' our own experience *with certainty*.

if you mean you have a justified, true belief that fire burns, and/or that you induced this from observation, you're wrong.

-- Elliot Temple <http://curi.blogspot.com/> (<http://curi.blogspot.com/>)

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It is quite possible to be ut...

Submitted by Christina Cat on 7 September, 2003 - 06:37

It is quite possible to be utterly certain of your own interpretation of events, with no self delusion, and yet when years later in a heart to heart with another person involved, you discover that one word you heard differently from what was said (they sound similar) creates an entirely new interpretation on the whole affair and in fact illustrates that what had been perceived to be a deliberate attack was in actuality a flukish accident. An unresolved problem

that had eaten at a relationship for years was solved - by being able to relate to someone else's dramatically difference perceptions, getting past the utter certainty of perception, but there had to be a willingness to allow the possibility that perception was just an aspect of reality, and that difference perceptions could be equally valid, without denying one's own.

to post comments

This is making more and more sense to me

Submitted by mammal_mama on 20 January, 2007 - 17:35

Yes, I really agree with Popper that ideas should be evaluated on their own merit -- not assigned more or less value depending on who they're coming from.

As a parent, I have a duty to protect my children and to allow them to benefit (in response to their interest) from the theories I've formed throughout my life. But I need to let them pick and choose between my theories: they shouldn't have to adopt or follow any that don't make sense to them.

I'm finding that when parents express concerns about a certain course of action being harmful, children care about what they think. Discussion, combined with lots of listening, is way more persuasive than coercion.

I'm starting to reject the idea of one person having authority over another. I receive my children's guidance in some areas, they receive my guidance in others. To me, a good parental guide is one who acts in response to the needs and preferences of his children.

Susan

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