

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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## Truth and Foreign Policy

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Whenever people discuss any subject – even if the discussion is only gossip over the back fence or on the telephone – the question, "How do you know?" usually arises. In gossip, it is usually answered by saying something like, "Well, I read it in the paper," or "I was talking to Mildred just the other day." But when the discussion is more serious than gossip, and as serious as foreign policy, a better answer must be given to the question, "How do you know?" One of the major sources of disorder in American foreign policy is the failure even to discuss, let alone answer, this fundamental question in any satisfactory way. Several possible answers to the problem of knowledge have been suggested, and brief notice must be taken of them here.

### *Experience*

The first of these answers is experience. In discussions of foreign policy, experience is probably the most popular answer. Experience, we are told, is the best teacher. In her famous book, *Dictatorships and Double Standards*, the former United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Jeane Kirkpatrick, spends several pages attacking rationalism in foreign policy and praising the virtues of experience. Her experience left her totally unprepared for the events in the Communist world in the period 1989-1990. In his book, *A World Restored: Castlereagh, Metternich, and Restoration of Peace, 1812-1822*, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger asserts flatly that "Nations learn

only by experience." Do they? Is experience the best teacher? Is it the only teacher? Is it a teacher at all?

We are also told (and usually by the same people) that we learn nothing from history, yet isn't history the recorded experience of earlier generations? If experience is the best teacher, why is history such a total failure? And when we have "experiences," what lessons are we taught? For centuries men learned from experience that human flight was impossible. They learned from experience that the Sun goes around the Earth. They learned from experience that heavier objects fall faster than lighter objects. Interpreting experience can be a very tricky experience. How do we know when we have done it correctly? Perhaps experience is not such a good teacher after all.

### *Common Sense*

A second answer to the question is common sense – foreign policy must be guided by common sense. Yet common sense seems to have as many difficulties as experience. Some people rely on their common sense in deciding which job offers to accept. Suppose that you are looking for a job and you receive two offers from reputable companies. The work would be similar and equally interesting in each job, the fringe benefits would be the same, and each job pays a starting salary of \$20,000 per year. The only difference between the two offers is that Company A gives an automatic annual raise of

\$2,000, and Company B gives an automatic semi-annual raise of \$500. Which job should you take? Common sense unhesitatingly says to take the job with Company A and get the annual \$2,000 raise. It is obviously the better offer, is it not?

Perhaps what is obvious, though, may not be true. This can be seen quite easily by comparing the salaries received during each successive six month period.

### **Company A**

(Starting salary: \$20,000;

annual raise: \$2,000)

Salary:

First six months: \$10,000

Second six months: \$10,000

Third six months: \$11,000

Fourth six months: \$11,000

Fifth six months: \$12,000

Sixth six months: \$12,000

### **Company B**

(Starting salary: \$20,000;

semi-annual raise: \$500)

Salary:

First six months: \$10,000

Second six months: \$10,500

Third six months: \$11,000

Fourth six months: \$11,500

Fifth six months: \$12,000

Sixth six months: \$12,500

By now the pattern is obvious: Each year the job at Company B pays \$500 more than the job at Company A. A \$500 semi-annual raise is the equivalent of a \$2,000 annual raise, and since the raises begin six months earlier at Company B, its employees are always \$500 ahead of Company A's employees. Assuming that one stays at this job for twenty years, the common sense choice of Company A will cost one \$10,000, plus interest. It occurs to me that employers might want to offer job applicants a choice of whether they wish to receive annual raises of \$2,000 or semi-annual raises of \$500. Whatever the response, they should hire the applicant: If he prefers the annual raise, the employer is saving \$500 per year; if the applicant prefers the semiannual raise, the employer is probably getting a sharp employee who knows better than to rely on common sense, and is surely worth \$500 more per year.

In the much more complex subject of foreign policy, common sense is equally unreliable. Does common sense say, "Make the world safe for democracy," or "Stay out of foreign wars"? Does common sense suggest "no entangling alliances" or membership in political and military alliances like NATO and the United Nations? Has anyone ever drawn up a list of common sense principles that apply to daily life, let alone to foreign policy? And if they have, did they tell how they decided which principles to list? Did they take a poll to see whether they were common or not? Perhaps *common sense* is just a phrase used to support opinions for which there is no evidence: "Why, that's just common sense!"

## *Philosophy*

Still a third answer to the question, "How do you know?" is **philosophy**. Philosophy, at least in its more rational forms, tries to produce systematic arguments. This is a big step beyond experience or common sense. Because it tries to be more systematic, philosophy can help us in thinking through problems of foreign policy. But how do we know that a particular philosophy is true? After all there are many philosophers to choose from: Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Cicero, Thomas Aquinas, Rene Descartes, Immanuel Kant, David Hume,

G.W.F. Hegel, John Dewey, and Gordon Clark, to name a few. Which one is right? More specifically, which of the thousands of statements each of these men made are correct? How do we know?

## *Success*

A fourth answer to the question, "How do you know?" that is very popular in America is success: A statement or principle is true if it works. So we learn by doing; we learn by trial and error. If we succeed, we must be right.

Tyrants have succeeded for thousands of years. Civilized, free societies are a rarity in human history. They have been relatively short and small. Tyrannies have been large and long. Is it true, then, that tyranny is right and freedom is wrong? Or perhaps they are both right since they both work?

Christians have usually been a tiny minority of the world's population. They have been persecuted and killed by the millions. Religions like Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, Islam, and Communism have been far more visibly successful than Christianity. Are they therefore right and Christianity wrong?

What is success anyway? History holds that all the apostles except John died violent deaths. Were they successful? Did Stalin, who died in his bed after murdering forty million people, fail? How do we define success? If we can't tell failure from success, how can we say, If it works, it's true.

There is a further problem with pragmatism: If the mark of truth is success, then one cannot know the truth until after one has acted. But the purpose of knowledge, or one of its purposes, is to permit a person to make an informed choice, and choices are always about the future, not the past. Even if pragmatism, the idea that the mark of truth is success, were true, it would offer us no guidance in foreign policy. On the pragmatic theory of knowledge, one always knows too late. If one is a pragmatist, one never knows. Pragmatism doesn't work.

## *Intuition*

Because all these theories of knowledge have fatal defects, still another has been suggested: intuition. In his book, *A World Restored*, Henry Kissinger (with obvious debts to Immanuel Kant) wrote the following paragraph:

The statesman is therefore like one of the heroes in classical drama who has had a vision of the future but who cannot validate its "truth." Nations learn only by experience; they "know" only when it is too late to act. But statesmen must act *as if* their intuition were already experience, as if their aspiration were truth. It is for this reason that statesmen often share the fate of prophets, that they are without honour in their own country, that they always have a difficult task in legitimizing their programmes domestically, and that their greatness is usually apparent only in retrospect when their intuition has become experience.

"Intuition" is a synonym for "vision," and statesmen are visionaries. Their wisdom cannot be perceived by nations, for "nations learn only by experience." Statesmen must be creative; they must belong to a mystical elite that sees visions and dreams, dreams that others are not privileged to dream. Dr. Kissinger assures us that this aristocracy of visionaries in foreign affairs will be beneficial, but he does not say why. Nor does he say how we are to recognize these statesmen before the fact and allow them to try to implement their visions.

Intuition is not a source of truth at all; it demands blind faith on the part of a nation in its seers. And because it is blind, the faith might be placed in a Hitler as well as in a Kissinger. It is only in retrospect that statesmen can be distinguished from madmen. By then it is too late, as Germany, but not Kissinger, learned by experience in 1945.

## *Circumstances*

Still another source of alleged guidance in foreign policy is circumstances. When President McKinley started the war with Spain, sank the Spanish fleet, and invaded the Philippines, he claimed that

circumstances required that he do all these things. "Destiny," he frequently asserted, "determines duty." Destiny, fate, providence, circumstances, the forces of history, the march of events – all allegedly make clear to us what we "must" do. Many people practice such a philosophy in their personal lives, especially if they happen to be superstitious: If their car breaks down on the way to work, it is a message from God (or the stars) that they are not supposed to go to work. If they try to telephone someone, but the line is busy, it is a sign that they ought not to call at all. The effects of such superstition practiced by individuals are confined to those individuals or to those who have the misfortune of being their acquaintances. But when the superstition is used to formulate government policy, it affects millions of people.

Alfred Thayer Mahan, the apologist of naval power at the turn of the century, thought of America's "unwilling acquisition of the Philippines" in these terms: "[T]he preparation made for us, rather than by us...is so obvious as to embolden even the least presumptuous to see in it the hand of Providence." Circumstances not only justify the action, sometimes they lend it divine authority.

Had King David been guided by Mahan's notion of the guiding hand of Providence, rather than by the Biblical idea of obedience to God's laws, Old Testament history would have been quite different. When King Saul was trying to kill David, and David was fleeing from him and his troops, Saul

"came to the sheepfolds by the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to attend to his needs. (David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave.) Then the men of David said to him, 'This is the day of which the Lord said to you, "Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you."' And David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe. Now it happened afterward that David's heart troubled him because he had cut Saul's robe. And he said to his men, 'The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch

out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.' So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul. And Saul got up from the cave and went on his way."

Here was the "guiding hand of Providence" if ever it had displayed itself. It led Saul into the cave where David and his men were hiding. David could have killed Saul while he napped. David's men, like Alfred Mahan, urged him to seize the moment; they even quoted a prophecy to lend the sanction of God to their opinion. But David, who was truly a man after God's own heart, knew that they were wrong. His obligation was to obey God's command not to harm the king. He could not tell what God's purposes were by reading the circumstances. As it turned out, God's purpose, or one of God's purposes, was to test David to see whether he would obey God rather than leaning on his own understanding of circumstances. David passed the test; his men would have failed had David not restrained them.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that " 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord. 'For as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts' " (*Isaiah 55*). Arrogant men, who sometimes seem very pious, frequently claim, as Mahan did, to know the will of God for their lives and for the nation. But God has not revealed this information to anyone: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (*Deuteronomy 29*). What God has revealed is his law, so that we may obey it. It is found wholly in the Bible. Those who claim otherwise err.

The notion that circumstances can be read to discern God's purposes is a major part of many religions, especially those that view the Bible as furnishing less than sufficient guidance, or which claim to offer their adherents the stamp of divine approval for their actions. This tealeaf reading form of guidance is dangerous and arrogant enough at the personal level; to elevate it to the high councils of

government has always meant and will always mean disaster. Events are mute; they offer no guidance. Circumstances can be interpreted in an indefinite number of ways. Logically, circumstances alone can never be used to justify a course of action. Guidance, ethics, must come from another source.

## *Nature*

Another common answer to the fundamental question, "How do you know?" is nature. Natural law and natural rights, are concepts at least as old as the Stoics. We know what to do once we know the nature of things. Since man is a rational animal, he should act rationally. Nature herself teaches us that some things are right and good and some things are wrong and bad.

Although this view has had very respectable defenders, it is destroyed by two considerations. The first is an elementary principle of logic: In any valid argument, nothing can appear in the conclusion that was not contained in the premises. If one were to argue, All nations collapse; the United States is a nation; therefore the United States is three thousand miles wide, the fallaciousness of the argument would be apparent to all. Width does not appear in either of the two premises. The same rule applies to verbs: If we start with indicative sentences, such as man is a rational animal, we cannot end with imperative sentences, such as man ought to think logically. The "ought" is not contained in the premises, and therefore the argument is invalid. Nature, therefore, cannot teach us what we ought to do. This was made quite clear by the Scottish philosopher David Hume in the eighteenth century.

The second consideration, which is somewhat superfluous, since the first is decisive, is that nature "teaches" all sorts of things that natural lawyers deny. Does nature enjoin peace? Nature is red in tooth and claw. Does nature prescribe the monogamous family? Polygamy occurs in nature. In a way, we can be glad that nature teaches us nothing: If it did, we, like the Marquis de Sade, would learn all the wrong lessons. Just as David Hume demonstrated the logical problems of natural

law, so the Marquis de Sade (unwittingly) showed some of the practical problems.

## *The Bible Alone*

All the secular answers that have been given to the question, "How do you know?" – experience, common sense, philosophy, success, intuition, nature – are not answers at all. They simply disguise our ignorance.

But there is an answer to the question that can stand up under close examination: the Bible. It may seem strange to some to suggest that the Bible talks about foreign policy. After all, is not the Bible concerned about Heaven and Hell, and angels and demons and all those other things that it is impossible for a sophisticated citizen of the twentieth century to believe in?

Now the Bible is very much concerned about Heaven, Hell, angels, demons, God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, souls, and salvation. In fact, those things are its primary concern. They are far more important than foreign policy. It is only the decadence of this materialistic age which makes us think otherwise. What shall it profit a man if he make peace in the Middle East and lose his own soul? The Bible teaches nothing if it does not teach that the life to come is far more important than this life. It is only the fool who gains the whole world and yet loses his own soul.

But the Bible, in addition to teaching how God has saved his people from their sins and the fire to come, teaches us how to live peaceful and civilized lives on Earth. The laws God gave to Moses – the Ten Commandments – are not merely for the life to come, but for the present life as well. They – all ten of them, not just the last five or six – are the indispensable basis for civilized human society. Insofar as we are civilized, our laws and customs copy God's laws on worship, words, life, family, property, and envy.

The Apostle Paul, in his second letter to the young preacher Timothy, said that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be

complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." This is an extremely important passage of Scripture, for it contains several ideas that we need to keep clearly in mind as we study foreign policy. The ideas are these:

1. The Authority of Scripture
2. The Inerrancy of Scripture
3. The Clarity of Scripture
4. The Sufficiency of Scripture
5. The Power of Scripture
6. The Meaning of Scripture

All the other possible sources of knowledge that we have mentioned are either errant, unclear, insufficient, or lack authority, or have combinations of these defects. Yet unless the source of our knowledge possesses all these characteristics – authority, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency – it will be, at best, an inadequate source.

## *Conclusion*

The fundamental question in all disciplines, including foreign policy, is the question of knowledge. Should anyone assert that a certain statement is true, or that one should follow a certain course of action, the speaker must be prepared to defend his assertion with reasons. He must be able to answer the question, How do you know? If no coherent answer can be given, then there is no reason to believe that the assertion is true or that the guidance is reliable.

Over the twenty-five hundred year career of philosophy, many answers have been given to the question, How do you know? We have briefly discussed some of the more common as they apply to matters of foreign policy. None of the secular answers given has been satisfactory; none furnished the truth and guidance necessary to maintain a rational foreign policy.

Two of the most celebrated American foreign policy experts, Henry Kissinger and Jeane Kirkpatrick, both maintain that nations learn from

experience. Neither gives any argument for the assertion, nor any rebuttal to the objections that have been raised against that opinion. Dr. Kissinger goes even further. While asserting that nations learn *only* from experience, he recognizes that such knowledge comes too late: If one learns only from experience, then one must first act without knowledge. Pragmatic or empirical knowledge follows, not precedes, action. In the age of the atom, that is an exceedingly dangerous viewpoint. Dr. Kissinger therefore recommends that we rely on visionary statesmen who intuit the "truth" but cannot substantiate it. He advocates blind faith in this mystical elite of experts. How this is an improvement over the notion that we learn from experience, he does not say. How it is better than a charismatic's words of knowledge "from God" or hearing voices he does not explain. It also is a sure prescription for disaster.

The Christian response to the failure of secular philosophy to answer the epistemological question is the axiom of revelation. Scripture not only explains how we know, it gives us all the information we need for living on Earth and in Heaven; it gives us that information before we act, not after, so that there is no need to act blindly; and it explains the failure of non-Christian philosophies. It may not tell us all we would like to know, but it tells us all we need to know.

In matters of foreign policy, the guidance of Scripture is indispensable. For most of this century we have been following blind guides; we have accepted the secular view that society or the state must play the role of God on Earth. The result has been the increasing savagery and frequency of our wars, and the malignant growth of totalitarianism.

The public statements of nominal Christians have been powerless to prevent our decline into totalitarianism because they have denied the meaning of Biblical revelation. To cite but one example out of dozens that might have been chosen, Richard J. Mouw, professor of philosophy at Calvin College, wrote in *Politics and the Biblical Drama*, "we cannot derive answers to fundamental questions about society and politics by strict deduction or inference from the Bible" (12). If Mr.

Mouw had written "I" rather than "we," his statement might very well have been correct, but irrelevant. That sentence would have been a simple admission of his own incompetence. But that is an unlikely admission from a professor of philosophy. I believe Mr. Mouw means that no answers about fundamental questions of society and politics can be deduced or inferred from Scripture. That means, of course, by strict deduction, that his answers are not deduced or inferred from the Bible. Mr. Mouw is saying that he wants to advance his theories which are not deduced or inferred from the Bible, under the aegis of the Bible. His theories are not logically warranted by the statements in the Bible, but Mr. Mouw still wishes to use the honor and reverence accorded the Bible in some circles to gain a hearing for his own opinions. Unlike Mr. Mouw's views, many Christians have long recognized, "As the Bible contains the origin of civil liberty, by the Bible alone can it be sustained.... If the Bible goes, liberty follows. We can hope to be a happy nation, a free nation, only so long as we are a Christian nation."\*

The world suffers now, and it will suffer in the age to come, because it has forgotten or rejected the lesson that our fathers knew so well: "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men" (*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1647).

\* J. M. Mathews, *The Bible and Civil Government*, 87, 91.