



## VERITAS FORUM AT CLAREMONT

### WHAT SKEPTICISM IS GOOD FOR!

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**The Bitterness of Truth**  
is its total indifference to  
human will and desire,  
together with the fact that  
human desire and will is set  
on reshaping reality, and  
therefore truth, to suit itself.

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### **Knowledge Brings Authority**

Knowledge tends to confer a right  
and responsibility to act, direct  
action, formulate and supervise  
implementation of policy, and to  
teach.

Claims to knowledge often become  
instruments of oppression.

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### **Truth**

A thought or statement is true  
if what it is about is as that  
thought or statement  
represents it.

2

### **Knowledge**

We have knowledge of something  
when we represent it as it is, on an  
appropriate basis  
of thought and experience.

NO CRITERION OF “APPROPRIATE  
BASIS” HAS BEEN ACHIEVED

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### **From Knowledge To Power**

Authority institutionalized or  
vested in individuals tends to drift  
away from knowledge to power.

Thus it becomes oppressive and  
often opposes truth and  
knowledge. A familiar human  
story.

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## Living From Your “Insides”

There is something extremely important about living from your own thoughts, understanding, choices.

Authority can blot that out.

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## Enter Skepticism

- Thus, historically and socially, a primary role of skepticism has been to break the grip of authority and power (social, institutional).

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## Enter Skepticism

- Often its aim and function is liberation.  
Familiar stories (Galileo, etc.)
- The skeptic becomes a hero.  
Skepticism as such is glorified.

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## What Is Skepticism?

- It is an attitude that calls knowledge into doubt.
- In a broader or narrower scope of subject matter.
- Its point is that we do not have knowledge of a certain kind, though we may think we do.

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## **EXTREME** Skepticism

- Simply denies there is any knowledge
- Tends to be dogmatic, because it cannot, obviously, be based on knowledge (“there isn’t any!”)
- Cannot be sustained in ordinary life, where we constantly distinguish what is known from what is not.

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## **TARGETED** Skepticism

- Skepticism can be aimed at particular areas of knowledge, or at specific issues, e.g. Geocentrism.
- Today, morality and religion are often rejected as areas of knowledge.

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## TARGETED Skepticism

- But this can be a path to inquiry.
- The responsible skeptic seeks to discover and to know.

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### What To Be Skeptical ("Targeted") About?

- Things that might really matter.
- Things assumed to be obvious:
  - You are your brain.
  - Marriage should be based upon romantic and sexual feelings.
  - Morality is just "feelings."
  - "Education" is the road to success.

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### ULTIMATE Issues:

- John 3:16—"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (to it), that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."
- Wow! Where did that come from?
- Used to be central to education.

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## Of The Two Forms of Skepticism

- **Extreme** (Dogmatic) skepticism leads nowhere but possibly some form of vacuous "liberation."
- It may shut off serious inquiry into matters ('truths') that really matter.
- **TARGETED** skepticism would seem to be an intellectual duty, arising from the need for truth in responsible living.

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*Devote serious intellectual  
work to such issues*

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### John 3:16 RESTATED...

"God cared so much about humanity that He sent His unique Son among us, so that whoever relied on Him would not lead a futile and failing existence, but would now have a quality of life that is like God's—eternal."

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## Intellectually Serious— About This!?!

How to get your mind around this:

- **Take Jesus** out of the category of religious artifacts.
- **Ask:** Was He not the most influential and smartest person whoever lived on earth?
- **Look** into the details, applying the best intellectual tools.