

Session 7: Is Historical Certainty Possible?

(1). The Problem of Historical Knowledge:

Skeptics have sometimes attempted to avert the implications of the strong historical case for the Bible by insisting that history, as a discipline, cannot be directly_____.

Yet a closer look at the views of many leading scientists today suggests that the universe itself may also be fundamentally_____.

This session will argue the view that:

1. Scientific grounds for questioning history are_____.
2. History may justifiably be taken_____as modern science.

(2). “Science Trumps History!”

Many people today hold that virtually all ancient texts are generally unable to properly accredit their own_____.

Thinking such as this is common in our time. It is a byproduct of the many incredible advances of our age. In fact, it has become so strongly believed so as to be taken as a reasonable justification for rejecting alternative_____.

“...philosophy is dead. [It] has not kept up with modern...science.... Scientists have become the torch bearers of discovery in the quest for knowledge.”
(Prof. Stephen Hawking) ¹

Such statements fairly represent the_____today and arrive to us as a throwback to an antiquated set of views, previously held by thinkers in the earlier part of the 20th century. Example:

“[We]...maintain that no statement which refers to a ‘reality’ [beyond] the limits of...sense experience can possibly have any literal significance; from which it

¹ Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow; The Grand Design; Bantam Books; Random Publishing Group, New York City. Copyright 2010; pg. 5.

follows that the laborers...have been devoted to the production of nonsense.”
(A.J. Ayer) ²

“In what sense can I be said to know an event which is in principle unobservable, having vanished behind the mysterious frontier which divides the present from the past?” (Patrick Gardner) ³

The sacrificial loss of rejecting our grounds for historical knowledge would be the vast disappearance of all our antecedent_____.

Sadly, by faulting our knowledge of history as technically uncertain, there is nothing to prevent us from concluding that the past cannot be known.

(3). Reclaiming Historical Certainty:

The previous argument holds significant problems. In fact, it could be demonstrated that it is no longer plausible. Why?

Because if disqualifying history as non-empirical were truly justifiable, then the same argument would also serve to disqualify_____.

“Until...[recently]...it was...thought that...[all] our knowledge of the world could be obtained...through our senses. But the spectacular success of modern physics has shown that this is not true.” (Prof. Stephen Hawking) ⁴

Illustration: Human beings used to believe that wind was the work of the gods—now we understand that wind is the work of energy differentials.

But the concept of “energy” is simply a theoretical and mathematical abstraction. There is no way to “prove” that energy actually_____.

Therefore, the man who rejects history because it can’t be directly observed may also have to deny other truths we simply_____.

² Alfred Jules Ayer; Language, Truth and Logic; Second Edition; Dover Publications Inc. New York, 1952; Introduction, pg. 5.

³ A. J. Ayer; Language, Truth and Logic; First edition; Penguin Books; Random House Inc.; Copyright 1936. pg. 14

⁴ Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow; The Grand Design; Bantam Books; Random Publishing Group, New York City. Copyright 2010; pg. 7.

Consider for example philosopher of science, Bas van Fraassen. In a recent interview, Fraassen was questioned on the subject of science and realism. There, writer, Peter Byrne, who recorded the interview noted one of van Fraassen's most far-reaching assertions. He openly mentioned that experimental data is nothing more than: "...an observable fragment of a fundamentally unobservable universe." ⁵

"...the universe has no...independent existence." (Prof. Stephen Hawking) ⁶

Since there is no way to prove the universe's existence, it is up to the scientist to simply _____ it—indirectly.

This is fundamentally no different from the work of the historian. Belief in the claims of the past is a simple rationale leap of _____.

It is inferred on the basis of overwhelming evidence, drawn from universal _____.

Science offers no reason it's methods should somehow outweigh _____.

Scientific methodologies are equally riddled with _____, apart from which, science, as a discipline, could not _____.

Those who believe otherwise do so despite the best evidence that current thinkers are beginning to show us.

(4). The Power Of Inference:

"The wind blows where it pleases. You hear it's sound, but cannot tell...where it is going. So it with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8; NIV)

(5). Summary Argument:

P1: Both science and history depend on the use of inferential _____.

P2: Science therefore has no epistemic _____ over history.

P3: Historical knowledge can be trusted as much as scientific _____.

C: History may justifiably lay claim to _____.

⁵ Why Scientists Should Steer Clear of Metaphysics; Nautilus; Peter Byrne; September 8th, 2016.

⁶ Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow; The Grand Design; Bantam Books; Random Publishing Group, New York City. Copyright 2010; pg. 6.

Answer Key:

- Observed
- Unobservable
- Invalid
- As seriously
- Innermost claims
- Forms of knowledge
- Norm
- Histories
- Science
- Exists
- Take for granted
- Assume
- Reason
- Human experience
- History
- Assumptions, function
- Advantage
- Knowledge
- Certainty