

List of Reports

Report
Summaries

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Email List

Contact

Donate

Search

The Logic of Love

Chapter 19: Competing Paradigms

Carrie and Terri are twin sisters who love collecting stuffed animals. After making their beds in the morning, they carefully arrange these furry friends on their respective beds.

One day their mother came in and said they would soon be leaving for Grandma's house.

"You can each bring one of your stuffed animals for the car ride. We have to leave in a few minutes. So, hurry up and choose," warned their mother. "When I come back in this room, it's going to be time to go to Grandma's whether or not you've decided which one to bring."

Carrie and Terri had recently become very melodramatic about choosing between furry friends. What if it turned out to be the last ride of their young lives!?! Would the courage of Simba, the Lion King, or the Zen-wisdom of Pooh escort them to the great beyond? Narrowing it down to just one was such a hard choice.

When their mother came back in the room, she found Terri sitting on the bed staring through tears at all of her animals. She was paralyzed by indecision. Carrie, for the first time, did not share Terri's frustration. She sat happily on the bed hugging Simba with all her might. Strewn on the floor around her were all of the other stuffed animals.

"Usually you get as frustrated as Terri. How did you decide so quickly and happily?" their mother asked Carrie.

"Well, this time I started by figuring out which one was my least favorite," stated Carrie very matter-of-factly. When I decided which one was my least favorite, I threw it on the floor. That way it wasn't around to confuse me and make the decision harder than it needed to be. I kept using this process to narrow down the options. As I got rid of the ones that I knew were not my favorite, I saw that the choices I had left looked better and better. For some reason deciding what was not my favorite was less difficult than trying to figure out which one was my favorite."

We choose a geometric model based on our previously chosen application. Once the application is chosen, we can apply only one model at a time. We cannot mix and match axioms and maintain intellectual integrity. Similarly, consistency demands that we choose between the gnostic paradigms of atheism, agnosticism, and theism based on which one is most complementary to and consistent with our previously chosen value of love. To enjoy the freedom to choose between the theistic paradigms, we must be able to see each of them as each internally consistent and as not unreasonable. When we reach this point, we can be guided by the supreme value of love in making the best choice.

With the geometric models, a specific problem or circumstance guides us in which model to choose. Maybe we want to sail the world or maybe our math teacher is passing out an exam that covers six weeks of plane geometry, but something comes along to get us out of the metalanguage discussion and into application. When we are done with the application, it has not changed our experience of reality. Previous and satisfying experiences with a particular geometric model do not predispose us

to misapply it to new situations that call for a different model. Moving between geometric models is easy and comfortable because these models are nothing more than tools.

Along with a given geometric model come the axioms of that model. In plane geometry the sum of the angles of a triangle is always exactly 180° . So long as we work with the axioms, we get the correct answers. Getting the right answer is everything. Consequently, once a geometric model has been chosen for a given application, we readily accept the axioms that are appropriate for that model.

Unlike geometric models, theistic paradigms should not be chosen based on a specific situation. These paradigms are supposed to be applicable to all situations. Therefore, individual experience is of limited value, except to the degree that it takes on a universal quality. Experiences that are common to most everyone are useful for understanding our general condition, and this is important for developing beliefs about life and its meaning.

With the geometric models, there is a safe harbor of metalanguage to retreat to when we are not forced to sail the seas of real mathematical living. With theistic paradigms, we are always swimming in the gnostic sea of our choice. With math, sometimes we can get out of doing the problem. We can trade bubble gum for homework assignments. But no one else can live our life for us. We are always living within a gnostic paradigm. The only question is whether at any given moment we care to choose a different one.

Because we are always living "applied" lives, we must accept the logical consequences of choosing to be atheistic, agnostic, or theistic. Just as with the geometric models, each theistic paradigm has inherent limitations and features. If we believe that God does not exist, then nothing in our experience can be interpreted as a manifestation of God's existence. According to our self-imposed definition of life experience, such a possibility does not exist. If we are agnostic, then in theory, there could be an experience that proves the existence of God. However, such an experience would not respect the Freewill Love Factor. Therefore, there can be no hope of such proof. Consequently, all experience will be interpreted as insufficient grounds for taking a position. If we are theists, then all experiences manifest God to some degree and, therefore, validate that choice.

This circularity between belief and interpretation of experience is the natural result of entering into realms where no combination of reasoning and experience can offer objective proof. When we are faced with comprehensive, mutually exclusive, internally consistent paradigms and models, then the value of choosing any one of the possible paradigms or models is personal. The geometric models are user-friendly in the sense that we can sit back and engage in a metalanguage discussion until the cows come home. Or if we care to apply a model, everyone can get out their protractor and come up with the same measurements. But there is one huge drawback to the geometric models: they are not very useful for understanding life and the meaning of it all (unless we get clever and try to analogize them to gnostic paradigms, which is the most practical application I ever found for this stuff).

With theistic paradigms, we are not afforded the luxury of a metalanguage chat room. Like rats in the lab, we are trapped in the maze of our lives. Whether or not we believe we can find the Big Cheese, the clock ticks just as loud. And to make matters worse, even if we find the Big Cheese, we are not really able to lead anyone else there. But even though we have nothing more than our own subjective experience to rely on, at least theistic paradigms are as comprehensive as comprehensive gets.

It is no great loss that the subjective nature of spiritual experience does not permit its objective verification. In fact, this is a blessing when love is the highest value because the Freewill Love Factor provides an opportunity to know that our love is real. And faith provides the trust and hope that the freewill-respecting limitations on revelations of God will be progressively transcended.

The subjective interpretation of experience is just as subjective, just as personally arbitrary, whether one is an atheist, agnostic, or theist. Ownership of our assessment of life allows us to appreciate that we affect our ability to interpret our experiences just as profoundly no matter which gnostic paradigm we choose.

[Go to Part V: The Leap: Believing Without Knowing](#)

[Go to Table of Contents](#)

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