Worldviews
Mr. Myers

Philosophy: Epistemology—How do we acquire knowledge?

**Ways of Knowing:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (logic, common sense)
2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (hunch, inner voice, conscience)
3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (the word of a trusted friend, an expert or authority)
4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (science, personal experience, sense perception)
5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (word of a prophet, Scripture, vision)
6. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (history, tradition, public opinion)

**Parable of the Boys in the Box**

Once there was group of seven boys who had grown up in a rather large box. Neither they nor anyone they knew had ever been outside the box and returned to tell about it.

          One day one of the boys became curious about the shape of the world, the large box. He got out some tools, a ruler, a calculator, and some paper, and began to measure, calculate and sketch a drawing of the box as well as he could figure it. When he finished, he knew he had something special and he wished to show it to someone else.

          He found one of his friends right away and told him, I’ve found it! I have measures, calculated and sketched an accurate rendering of the shape of the box!”

          His friend, looked at the sketch, scratched his chin contemplatively and said, “Hmmm . . . . “ Then his friend took out an old piece of paper, obviously worn and yellowed by years of storage and opened it. It too contained a drawing. “This paper” said Boy 2, “was given to me by my father, who said it had been in the family for countless generations. This is the drawing of The Box as my family has understood it for many centuries.”

          The two boys compared the two drawings. There were so many similarities that it was obvious the drawings were of the same thing, yet there were some significant differences. The two boys couldn’t tell from looking at the two drawings which one was more accurate. They were in the midst of what philosophers would call an epistemological dilemma: two ways of knowing, two slightly different renderings. Which if either of them could be trusted? So the two of them set out to solve their puzzle.

          They went to Boy 3, explained their difficulty, showed him their two drawings, and asked him what he thought. “I don’t know if I can help you or not,” he said, drawing a piece of paper from his pocket. “This is what I’ve always believed The Box to look like.” he showed them another drawing of The Box. This one, too, was similar in many significant respects but different in some ways as well. “Where did you get your picture?” asked the other boys.

          “I just thought about it for a long time,” answered Boy 3,”and I realized that this is simply the only way it could be. This is the only drawing that makes sense.” he carefully explained the reasoning behind every line in his picture, but he acknowledged that the first boys measured drawing and the second boys drawing that had been accepted by countless generations, could also be the right drawing. Now the three of them had an even more complicated dilemma, so they set out to seek the answer.

          Soon the trio found Boy 4 and explained their problem. Boy 4 thought for a moment, drew forth from his pocket a blank sheet of paper and quickly sketched a drawing of The Box. “This is what The Box actually looks like.”

          “How do you know?” asked the other three. “I don’t know how I know, I just know. Doesn’t it seem right to you?” The other boys compared the drawings and admitted that the new one seemed as good as the others, but they still had no idea which one of the pictures, if any, accurately portrayed The Box. So they set out to find the Answer.

          When they found Boy 5, showed him their pictures and explained their problem. “This is what you’ve been looking for.” Sure enough, it was a very fine drawing of The Box, similar to the others they had collected, but the boys had their one crucial question. “that’s a very fine drawing of The Box, where did it come from?”

          What do you mean, “Where did it come from?” “Can’t you see the signature? This drawing was produced by a man who has a 200 IQ and is an expert on almost everything, as if he says this is what the Box looks like, this is that the Box looks like!”

          For Boy 5, that fact settled the issue, but the other boys weren’t so sure. Their uncertainty finally shook Boy 5, who began to wonder how he could be so sure his picture was so much better than the others. Now all five set out to find The Answer.

          When the found Boy 6, he was no help at all. He thought they were all wasting their time. “No one knows what The Box looks like, and no one will ever know because no one can ever know. You are dumb to even try!” He declined to continue with them on their quest.

          When they found Boy 7, they explained their problem, but without much enthusiasm. Their search so far had only made their puzzle more complicated, and they didn’t have much hope that this boy would be able to help.

          When Boy 7 said, “I have a picture of the Box” no one was surprised. But when they asked him where he got his picture, he told them, “Someone outside the Box sent it to me.” This statement startled the boys, for they had never thought of seeking counsel from Someone Outside The Box, but they all acknowledged that they could never hope to find a better source of information about The Box than that. Boy 7 explained that the Maker of The Box had told him what The Box was like.

          But Boy 7 had even more startling news. “Not only do I know what The Box looks like, but I also can tell you what else is Out There.” He went on to tell his dumbstruck friends about things like rivers, clouds, stars, and other things they had never seen Inside The Box.

          Now they began to compare their pictures to the picture given from Outside The Box. They could see places where their renderings were inaccurate or slightly out of proportion, and some of them began to make corrections on their drawings, while others hesitated, not willing to admit that their drawing might need correction. This started a new Debate - this time about whether there really was a Maker of The Box and whether such a Maker would want to say anything to the Boys In The Box and whether they should correct their drawings according to the Picture From Outside The Box.

          And to this very day, that debate continues. No one knows how it will end, except Boy 7, who says with a smile that he knows how the debate will end, because Someone Outside the Box told him.