

1: THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

There is a well-known story about a group of scientists who conducted an experiment by placing five monkeys in a cage. The story was first published in a book called *Competing for the Future* by Gary Hamel and C. K. Prahalad; and the story goes something like this:

- A group of scientists placed five monkeys in a cage, and in the middle of it, they put a ladder with a bunch of bananas on top. Every time a monkey tried to climb up the ladder, the scientists soaked all the monkeys with cold water.
- After getting soaked by a few cold showers, every time a monkey tried to go up the ladder, the rest of the monkeys beat it up; just to make sure none of the others had to experience cold showers.
- In time, all the monkeys learned their lesson, and none of the monkeys dared to climb up the ladder, regardless of how many bananas were on top.
- The scientists then decided to replace one of the five monkeys with a new one. The first thing the new monkey tried to do was climb up the ladder to get to the bananas on top. Immediately, the other four monkeys beat up the new monkey; thinking that they might all get soaked with cold water again. After a few beatings, the new monkey learned its lesson, and stopped climbing the ladder, even though it never knew why.
- Now the scientists added a second new monkey into the cage and replaced another one of the original five monkeys. As soon as the second new monkey arrived, the same thing happened. When the second new monkey tried to climb up the ladder, all the other monkeys beat it up, thinking that they would get soaked with cold water. Interestingly enough, the first new monkey participated in the beatings of the second new monkey, without really knowing why.
- The scientists then replaced a third monkey in the cage, and the same events followed. Later, a fourth monkey was replaced, and the same events were repeated.
- Finally, the fifth and last monkey was replaced with a new one; and none of the original monkeys that were soaked with cold water were left in the cage.
- Now, the five new monkeys in the cage continued to beat up anyone that tried to climb the ladder, even though they never received a cold shower themselves; and they had no idea why they were beating each other up.
- At this point of the experiment, if it was possible for the scientists to ask the new monkeys why they were beating up anyone trying to climb the ladder, their obvious answer would be: "We don't know - that's just how things are done around here."

This fictional story, narrated by its authors, aims to drive home a simple message — apparently, the moral is that we should not keep doing something without knowing why we are doing it. Since none of the five new monkeys experienced cold showers themselves, none of them knew why they were beating each other up. Their actions were merely based on custom or habit. They were following a tradition they did not understand — blindly upholding a custom with no clear reason behind it. This message seems simple, but let's not take it at face value too quickly. Let's consider this question — if at the end of the experiment, one of the new monkeys tried to climb up the ladder; how do we know if the scientists would soak the new monkeys with cold water, or not? The answer is — we don't really know. So maybe those seemingly pointless actions of the new monkeys weren't so foolish after all. The customs and habits the five new monkeys inherited from their predecessors would be valuable if in fact the scientists were planning to continue splashing cold water on the new monkeys. Their actions could only be considered stupid and pointless if the scientists decided to stop splashing cold water on the new monkeys. Therefore, the simplistic moral of the story is slightly flawed in my opinion. The real lesson of the story is — we should always question the customs and traditions we inherit from our predecessors and try to figure out why things are the way they are. It is always better to know why we do the things we do, rather than blindly follow old customs and traditions.

We are all products of our environment and upbringing. All throughout our lives, we are shaped by the world around us — by the families who raise us, the schools that educate us, the people

we meet, and the experiences we gather along the way. During the various stages of our lives – from childhood to adolescence to adulthood to old age, our understanding of the world gradually evolves. Bit by bit, our worldview is sculpted by our relationships, our environments, and the cultures and places we live in. Along the way, we often try to answer life’s big questions: *Who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going?* For centuries, philosophers, scholars, scientists and different religions have attempted to answer these profound questions, offering different theories, which have been passed down through generations. We most often embrace those answers without question, and very seldom do we pause to examine those answers? Many of us accept strict religious teachings imposed upon us without question, rarely challenging the traditions and rituals we've inherited. But, in today’s rapidly changing world, it’s more important than ever to reflect critically on whether those age-old religious doctrines and customs still hold relevance.

We should all be able to agree on the premise that, as we go through life, it is essential to ground ourselves in a set of core beliefs. There comes a time in our lives when each of us must pause and ask the critical question — what do I truly believe in, and why? Without this curiosity and critical introspection, our beliefs risk becoming hollow — merely a set of inherited ideas that we embrace without really understanding them. Only if we go through a process of careful reflection and questioning, can we gain some strength and conviction in the ideas and theories we choose to believe in. This is especially true for those beliefs that are passed down by tradition or authority — and are promoted by the various religious doctrines that require blind faith. If we never challenge those religious doctrines and inherited beliefs, we may end up like the five monkeys in the cage — beating each other up, without really knowing why. The best way to question our blind faith and re-evaluate our belief system is to embrace the “Socratic Method” of philosophical inquiry. Named after the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, this method invites us to go beyond blind acceptance. It urges us to question, dissect, and re-evaluate ideas from the ground up. At its core, any type of philosophical inquiry is a rigorous form of critical thinking — one that encourages us to set aside all our preconceived ideas and forces us to examine everything with a fresh perspective. Interestingly, the method of philosophical inquiry is very similar to the method of scientific enquiry — but philosophy actually predates modern science. Long before the Renaissance movement began, which created the spark for the scientific revolution — it was philosophers who first dared to ask bold questions about the nature of the world and our place within it. In that sense, philosophy paved the way for science, which is why it is often regarded as the mother of science. Most of us are somewhat familiar with the scientific method of inquiry — it is the simple blueprint we learned in our grade school science classes. The method of scientific inquiry is the process through which scientists explore and investigate the natural world and formulate rational theories. It typically follows these steps:

Observation: You start with making observations about the world around you.

Data Collection: You collect data by measuring and recording information relevant to the observations you made.

Analysis: You analyze the collected data and look for patterns, trends, or relationships.

Hypothesis: You formulate a hypothesis based on your analysis of the data collected. A hypothesis is really an educated prediction that tries to explain the potential cause-and-effect relationship of your observations of the natural world.

Experimentation: You design and conduct experiments to evaluate your hypothesis against real world scenarios. If the results support your hypothesis, that means you are getting closer to a plausible theory, which allows you to draw some conclusive theories.

Communication: Once you arrive at a plausible theory, the next step involves sharing the theory with other members of the scientific community through reports or publications for peer reviews.

Re-evaluation: Peer reviews can lead to new refinements of your theory. It is quite common for scientific theories to evolve over time based on new observations and experimentation. The method of scientific inquiry encourages skepticism and questioning, which allows for continuous improvement.

Although science and philosophy often use similar tools — like logic, critical thinking, and analysis — they venture into very different territories. Science is grounded in the objective study of the natural world, seeking to uncover how things work through observation, experimentation, and evidence. Philosophy, on the other hand, delves into abstract and subjective topics. There is a crucial difference between scientific theory and philosophical theory, which is worth noting. Most scientific theories try to explain some phenomenon of the natural world, i.e. The theory of evolution, Gravitational theory, Einstein’s theory of relativity, etc. All scientific theories must be universally accepted by the scientific community and need to be well-substantiated by a body of empirical evidence (things we can observe, test, and measure). Even though philosophy once explored natural phenomena before the advent of science — modern philosophy turns its focus on questions that science cannot answer — questions such as, what is the meaning of life, the nature of consciousness, the essence of justice, the boundaries of morality, the nature of reality, etc. Unlike scientific theories, philosophical theories do not have to be universally accepted. Different philosophical theories can vary widely, and each of those theories can be embraced by people of different cultures, religions or nationalities. The acceptance of a philosophical theory is based more upon its interpretation, reasoning and logical coherence, rather than direct observations and experimental evidence.

Let’s look at an example of how philosophical theories can contradict one another — unlike scientific theories, which must align with observations and experimental evidence. Interestingly, there are two ways philosophers tend to look at humankind. One school of philosophers view humankind as God’s greatest creation, endowed with divine virtues such as intellect, free will, morality etc. Another school of philosophers view human beings as just another species of animal that evolved on this planet; driven by greed, envy, lust and a desire to conquer and dominate others. Now if we analyze the history of human civilization, we will see that there is plenty of evidence to substantiate both schools of thought. Throughout the course of history, humanity has reached incredible heights — founding civilizations, advancing science, creating religions, composing music, producing timeless literature, and cultivating deep philosophical ideologies. On the other hand, that same history of human civilization is stained by the horrors of slavery, genocide, war, persecution, and colonization. So, if both philosophical perspectives can be substantiated by historical data; which one is correct? The philosophical theories that glorify humanity as divine beings capable of great feats are just as plausible as the other theories, which demonize human beings for being cruel, selfish, vindictive and egotistical animals. Some philosophers even go as far as to categorize humans as the only species on Earth destined to destroy this planet’s eco-system and bring about its own extinction. Whether we choose to view humankind as divine visionaries, or merely a unique species of destructive animal; is a personal choice — but it is one that should be made after careful introspection and scrutiny. Whatever we choose to believe in, especially if we want to have strong convictions in our beliefs, should be rooted in historical evidence, sound reasoning, and personal reflection. We should not accept any religious doctrines or philosophical theories, simply because they are inscribed in ancient texts, or because they are endorsed by certain popular figures.

For thousands of years, religious scriptures have sought to explain the origin and purpose of human life. Each religion offers its own distinct narrative about where we came from, why we are here, how we should live our lives, and what ultimately awaits us after we perish. For the devoutly religious folks, sacred texts and ancient scriptures are the primary source for answering life’s deepest philosophical questions. Those religious folks believe that humankind is God’s most cherished creation, made in God’s image — a symbol of divine hope in a troubled world. This idea is promoted by most ancient scriptures, which have long claimed to be the ultimate repositories of truth and knowledge. However, those views advocated by most religions, which we have been passed down through generations, do not always align with the most recent scientific theories or the revelations of recent archaeological discoveries. Over the past few centuries, philosophers and scientists have dramatically expanded our understanding of the universe. Today, we know far more about the natural

world we inhabit, compared to the authors of ancient religious texts, which were inscribed thousands of years ago. There are huge discrepancies between the theories of modern science and the theological doctrines promoted by ancient religions. But before we start analyzing the complexities and contradictions between traditional religious beliefs and modern science, it's important to first outline the most common beliefs propagated by the most popular religions of the world. Let's begin by looking at those popular doctrines that try to answer the timeless questions we all ask about our existence, purpose, and destiny:

Question#1: Where did we come from and who brought us here?

Answer#1: Obviously, we did not create ourselves; we were created by a divine power — God — who also created the universe and everything within it. God placed us on earth so that we can rule over this planet and all the other species that inhabit it. God is the reason why we are here, and our existence is merely a manifestation of God's will.

Question#2: Why were we created — is there some special purpose, and are we unique?

Answer#2: Humankind is God's most beloved creation — and yes, we are unique because we were created in God's image. God has bestowed certain unique gifts upon humanity, such as Intelligence, Free Will, Morality and Eternal life after death. Every human being has supposedly been created for a special purpose, but only God knows the true purpose and meaning of our lives. We can get a glimpse of that purpose by establishing a communion with God, which can only be achieved by following the path of righteousness prescribed in most religious scriptures.

Question#3: Where are we heading, and what happens after we die?

Answer#3: Neither humanity nor this world is meant to be forever — we are all awaiting the Day of Judgment, when the material world will come to an end, and everything God created will be destroyed. However, we will all be resurrected after that fateful day, and each one of us will enter an eternal realm called heaven or hell. On the Day of Judgment, we will have to answer for our actions during our lives. Those who followed the righteous path will be blessed with eternal life in heaven — but those who were seduced by the forces of evil and strayed from the prescribed path will be thrown into the fires of hell to be punished for their sins.

In a nutshell, these are the religious answers to the age-old philosophical questions of life. The different religions of the world may have varying nuances to these answers; but the gist is really the same. These religious teachings were developed thousands of years ago, and they have been passed down through generations. Most historians and scholars will agree that these religious theologies have deeply shaped human consciousness throughout the ages. But while these doctrines have provided guidance for centuries, they have become largely obsolete today, because they do not offer solutions to the challenges we face in this Modern Age. In fact, instead of providing solutions, blind adherence to these age-old religious beliefs is becoming part of the problem. Religious fundamentalism might be less visible in highly developed and industrialized societies like America and Europe — but in many underdeveloped regions of the world, religious bigotry and intolerance is fueling resentment and social unrest, which in turn, is hindering progress. For example, dogmatic interpretations of ancient scriptures often foster backward worldviews among those people living in parts of the Middle East and South-East Asia. Moreover, religious theocracies are vehemently opposed to any secular or pluralistic worldviews — which severely hinders a nation's journey towards modernization. That is why it is more important than ever to question the relevance of ancient dogmatic beliefs during this Modern Age. It is crucial that we learn to open our minds and take the time to re-evaluate our beliefs, in light of modern scientific theories and archeological discoveries made over the last couple of centuries.

The recent discoveries of modern science have radically transformed our understanding of the universe — and have redefined how we view our place within it. While there is nothing inherently

wrong with believing in ancient religious doctrines — trouble arises when those beliefs clash with the rational, evidence-based theories of science. The paths of science and religion diverged in different directions many centuries ago, but there are still many topics where the theories of modern science and religious doctrines overlap. There are obvious contradictions between the theories of modern science and ancient religious doctrines. However, that doesn't necessarily mean we should discard our belief in religious doctrines altogether. Many of the age-old religious doctrines still offer profound insights into life's deepest philosophical questions. But there are some beliefs, shaped thousands of years ago, which no longer hold up under modern scrutiny. Even though most priests and clerics claim that scriptures represent the inspired word of God — many of the ancient scriptures have been altered or misinterpreted over time. In order to stay grounded in truth derived from reason and logic, we must be willing to re-evaluate all those inherited religious narratives that have been passed down through generations. If we want to have strong convictions in our beliefs, we must first confront and reconcile the inconsistencies between the theories espoused by ancient religious scriptures and the recent discoveries of modern science.

In this book, we will explore all the different facets of science and religion. We will look at how the world's major religions emerged across different eras of history, tracing their origins and evolutionary paths. Alongside this journey, we will also examine the origin of the scientific revolution that began during the 15th century; and identify the key turning points when science and religion first began to clash; and then began to diverge from each other. Since we are all searching for answers to the same philosophical questions — the old cliché "*the search for truth*" and "*the truth shall set you free*", taps into something universal within all of us. It is a common human impulse that unites us in our search for meaning and understanding. But it is important to note that, in today's Modern Age, the search for truth should involve a far more comprehensive process than solely relying on traditional religious beliefs that have been handed down to us by our predecessors. The search for truth in this Modern Age can be defined in many different ways, depending on how we choose to look at the world. Understandably, we all look at the world through a filter of our own experiences. Then when we search for answers to questions, we often choose to look at the world through different lenses — philosophical, scientific, empirical or spiritual — each offering a unique perspective shaped by our personal intuitions. But at its core, the search for truth in this Modern Age should be a pursuit that enables us to acquire a deeper understanding of the world around us, and our place within it. This process should begin by stripping away illusions, biases, assumptions, and pre-conceived notions. The most important thing we should remember is that '*Truth*' is not set in stone; and neither science nor religion has a monopoly on what can be classified as '*Truth*'. In fact, '*Truth*' is just an attribute we assign to our deepest beliefs. Different people who come from different cultures and backgrounds can choose to believe in different things. So, the truth can sometimes be elusive, even contradictory, since it relies on individual perspectives, which tend to change over time.

As our knowledge and understanding of the world gradually increases with time, we should rely on the powers of observation, analysis and rational thinking, to continually refine and redefine the fundamental truths that we choose to believe in. The fact that we live in an age of information and technology is both a blessing and a curse. The good news is that everything we want to know about, whether it is related to Science, Religion, History or Philosophy, is available at our fingertips. Yet it is not easy to navigate through this abundance of information. With so much content floating around on the World-Wide-Web, and with the numerous social media platforms disseminating a myriad of information — it can sometimes become difficult to separate facts from fiction, in our quest to decipher the truth. Unfortunately, the more information we are exposed to, the more confused we seem to become. Then there are those powerful special interest groups lurking behind the scenes — corporate giants and political influencers who actively manipulate the information we are exposed to, in order to serve their own agendas. In a world full of facts and fiction, news and propaganda — objective truths and clarity of thought have become rare commodities. That is precisely where this book can help. One of the main purposes of this book is to cut through the clutter and give you the fundamental facts about the history of our world, without any bias or prejudice. This book takes an in-depth look at the origin and evolution of humankind, as it tries to explain in laymen's terms, why things are the way they are, and how they came to be this way. The various chapters of this book

explore the most recent scientific theories of our Modern Age and investigate all the hallmark events of history; from the time of creation till the 21st century. The progressive chapters of this book provide a chronological description of the long evolutionary journey of our universe, which unfolded over the last thirteen billion years. This book should be viewed as a guide and a reservoir of basic facts and information, which allows you to make sense of the chaos — and reaffirm your deepest beliefs.

The inspiration for this book came from an unexpected source — which was a book I read recently. It left a lasting impression on me, with its simple yet powerful format. In fact, the book I am referring to is one of the most widely read works on religious philosophy in recent years, titled — *The Purpose-Driven Life* by Pastor Rick Warren. What made pastor Warren's approach so compelling was its structure. The forty short chapters of the book are meant to be read one per day, over forty days. At the beginning of his book, Pastor Warren highlights the deep spiritual symbolism of the number forty. He points to the Biblical stories of Noah enduring forty days of rain during the Great Flood, Moses spending forty days on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, Jesus fasting in the wilderness for forty days, and then there was the forty days Jesus spent with his disciples after his resurrection. Interestingly, those forty-day periods weren't just time markers — they were periods of transformation. Inspired by Pastor Warren's use of the forty-day framework, I've structured this book into forty chapters as well. I invite you to read one chapter per day over forty days. Each chapter will take you through a pivotal moment in human history — it may be the rise of an ancient civilization, the advent of a revolutionary new idea, the spread of a major religion, or the life story of a transformative historical figure. Each of the forty chapters of this book should be viewed as a dot on a vast map that describes the history of our world. How you choose to connect those dots is entirely up to you. But, once you connect all the dots — the lines you draw should represent a framework for understanding the history of this world, and our place within it. I cannot promise that after you finish reading this book within a forty-day period, it will cause a spiritual transformation within you. But I can promise you that it will spark reflection, challenge assumptions, and encourage you to re-examine your beliefs. At the very least, I hope the contents of this book will help you calibrate all the different lenses you can choose to look at the world, which will in turn prompt you to look at the world in a new light.