

What do we know and how do we know it?

One person cannot know everything. There is far too much information in the Tree of Knowledge to keep in our own brains, and there are far too many things we just don't know. We therefore have to trust other people. and make working assumptions about the world we see around us.

In the Church of Reality, faith is not blind, but earned. We question everything. We embrace doubt in both the giving of doubt and the receiving of doubt. By embracing doubt and scrutiny, we work to earn trust, to be credible, to be accountable, to have a process that has integrity, and to be responsible for what we believe in. For us to be trusted, we have to earn that trust.

Why do I believe in Evolution? After all, I'm not billions of years old. I haven't examined any fossils. I haven't compared any DNA. In fact - I personally don't know that DNA really exists. I am relying on the word of others, people who I do trust, people who I have faith in, people who have earned my faith. I believe in evolution because it comes from trusted sources.

But what if evolution is wrong? What if space aliens constructed this planet yesterday and created us with false memories of the past and fake fossil evidence to make us believe that we have a historical past? What if the Earth really is only 24 hours old? Or that this reality is just a giant computer simulation in a higher level of reality. Those are possibilities that we can't prove are not so. After all, if we're just characters in some great video game, we would never know it.

Most everything we know comes from other people who we trust. We just don't have the resources to test everything ourselves.

Is reality really real? Is this a simulation? Am I the only person in the universe that is real and this is all my personal dream? I don't know. So what am I to do? I suppose that I am going to just have to pick one and go with it. So I'm going to put my faith in reality. And if we are a computer generated simulation, then it is still the correct decision because the programmers want us to believe in the artificial reality. So one might say that Realists have chosen to put their faith in reality.

What is knowledge and where does it come from? How do we know what we know? There are things we know directly, from our own experiences, and things we know based on trust. Even what we know directly is suspect because we know it through our flawed senses and we understand it with our flawed brains. And everything that we do know is relative or related to everything else that we know.

Imagine what it must be like to be a newborn baby. You open your eyes and begin to see things for the first time. But what do you see? You see walls, lights, chairs, a bed, people, mommy, but these are all just images. The information goes in but it doesn't mean anything because a newborn's brain doesn't have very much knowledge to relate this information to. Everything is new. Reality itself is new. Learning begins a little bit at a time and builds up by relating new information to everything else you know. Over time you learn language and associate objects and concept with words and phrases and talking increases the ability to communicate and get information from others so that the young mind becomes connected to the Tree of Knowledge. Most everything we know is something that we learned from other people and what they know comes from common knowledge that is trusted to be true.

Of course the problem is that not everything that you are taught is true. We all know that we were filled with a certain amount of misinformation and now we have to go back and reexamine what we were taught to see if it's really true. But we can't reexamine everything. We are stuck with having to know things based on trust. We can only hope that what we trust is correct.