



A Parable of Two Women

by Anthony Rizzi

This is a true story, but it is also a parable of our times. It is a story about a young woman and an older woman. Let's call them Jane and Molly. These are not their real names which will help us to think of them as representing the thinking of each one of us. Every parable is, in the end, about a universal truth, not a particular man's thinking. It is a story about each of us.

Jane's Question

In a group discussion, Jane was upset about a recent decision of the Pope and was asking how we can maintain proper respect for the Pope when he says something that we think is wrong. I answered by explaining that we must start with the generic nature of authority that we can understand by reason alone.¹ That is, we must understand authority among men, and then and only then, can we understand any other kind of authority, including the Pope's, which is said by analogy to it.²

A father, and by analogy even the Pope, only has authority insofar as it is true. In exactly the same way that the proofs of the existence of God find that change can only be explained

¹ In using the phrase "reason alone," I mean reasoning starting with what we know through the senses.

² What we don't see can only be understood by analogy to what we do see, for everything we know comes through what we know through the senses (See (KIP) *A Kid's Introduction to Physics (and Beyond)* Vol. I, A. Rizzi (IAP Press, 2012) and (SBS) *The Science Before Science: A Guide to Thinking in the 21st Century*, A. Rizzi (IAP Press, 2004)).

by the Unchangeable changer (see KIP),² one can show that all authority must trace back to Him as well. Just as, ultimately, every new form that arises in any change has its new existence, as well as its continued existence, from Him, all authority does. We can say it this way: authority is only such insofar as it arises from the Author. Now, obviously, something arises from the source of reality only insofar as it is real! Authority exists to promote truth in understanding and in action. A father and mother give birth to children and by nature have the responsibility and the authority to raise them. That is the reality of the situation. Raising them cannot include things that, for example, harm their human nature or that of another. This would not be raising them, but damaging them. This would not be true use of authority.

If a man tells his child to kill a random innocent neighbor, the child should not listen to that command. That command may as well be coming from anyone, because it is not part of the father's authority. It is usurping the role of God in deciding when a man is ready for death. Authority is for conforming the authority and those under him to reality in some way. This would be deforming that connection to reality. Like all evil, it is evil in so far as it is in unreal³. It is a false action, so should not be obeyed. This command cannot come from the authority of the father, so one is not properly speaking

³ See SBS (fn 2) on privation, which is also discussed in A. Rizzi, "The Death of Justice?" *Physics and Culture* (October 2018).

disobeying the father (as father) in not following this one command.⁴ Hence, the child is not disrespecting his father in not following the command.

Now, leave aside this particular example (which is extreme to make the point but can cause confusion in the most general case). Not following a command that is a false command does not mean one does not respect the proper wishes of the father. This is where the answer to Jane comes home.

If the Pope says something wrong (after all he is a man), then one does not follow it, but only in this point, for making a mistake in one point does not take away his proper authority. One must be mindful to listen and follow in all ways one can.

What about infallibility? To answer this I gave her the following example. I said, now Catholics believe that the Pope is infallible when he speaks in certain carefully defined way called *ex cathedra* (and only in that special case) -- this is where the supernatural aspects come in. If the Pope were to say: “ $2 + 2 = 8$ ”, you don’t have to investigate whether this statement was *ex cathedra* or not, because we already know that it is not true (so therefore, granting the doctrine, it cannot be *ex Cathedra*).

What did Jane say to this? She replied: “Perhaps my teachers taught me wrong [and two plus two does equal eight].” This shows the faith-based nature of our culture; we, in general, don’t *know* things, we *believe* things. For Jane, even simple arithmetic is not known but only taken on the word of another. But, let me emphasize, this is not just Jane; this represents a faith-alone attitude that all of us have deep in our formation from being raised

⁴ Bringing it home by going to the full depth of the causal structure: insofar as it is evil, it cannot come from the Author, so it has no authority.

and living in our culture, a culture which is not aware that all we know comes through what we know through the senses.

Question for Molly

Here’s where Molly comes in. In a phone conversation with Molly,⁵ the topic came up that we need to know things even to believe things. It appeared that she did not feel this was much of a problem. To show her how deep the problem was, I told her about my conversation with Jane. After I told her that Jane resolved the problem by conjecturing that she was taught arithmetic wrong in school (apparently to avoid gainsaying the Pope), she thought it was a crazy response. *But then I asked her: why?* And, it went something like this:

Molly: Well $2+2$ is not 8.

Me: What’s wrong with that?

Molly: Well, she is believing the wrong thing. She should believe that $2+2=4$.

Me: Why?

Molly: Because that is true

Me: How do you know?

Molly: Because it’s just true. And we should believe what’s true. It’s real.

Now, notice how her language reveals that *belief*, rather than *knowledge*, is central to her thinking; when knowledge is discussed she doesn’t know what to say.

I kept probing to find why she thinks $2+2$ is 4. At this point, she got frustrated. I was, after all, pointing out something so profound that she believed but about which she had no idea on what ground her thinking stood. And, for a moment, she even wanted to stop the conversation. I encouraged her that this was important and that we should finish, as it will

⁵ Molly was glad to hear that our conversation would be shared so that others could learn through her experience.

bring home the whole point of the Jane story.⁶
She could not think of why it was true:

Me: But, Why?
Molly: It's real, its true
Me: But why?
Molly: I don't know.
Me: Okay, what color is the wall in the room you're in now in your house.
Molly: Ah ah brown
Me: How do you know?
Molly: Because I know
Me: How? It's not hard I think you are thinking its hard.
Molly: I don't know, someone taught me what the word brown means when I was little?

I said, let me give you a hint, everything you know comes through what you know through the senses. And, she still did not know what to say. Finally, I had to tell her:

Me: It's because you see it.

⁶ When you are explaining something life changing to someone, as the logic builds, at some point, he will realize (usually only confusedly) that something is about to profoundly alter him (his thinking and thus his behavior). This is precisely what a successful explanation should do. Hence, it is important not to let that very realization stop the discussion. If you do that important point you have will never be heard! Why? Because, any such explanation will lead, because of the very nature of what you are saying, to the same uncomfortable feeling. Once it's heard the effect begins. What you are trying to relay is life-altering and this will be uncomfortable at some level. Also, at the certain points of such a conversation, because your interlocutor cannot see the profound point yet and knows that he should be able to, he gets frustrated. This arises for two possible reasons: 1) he realizes that he should know it, but doesn't, and/or 2) he feels like he's never going to get it and that it cannot be worth the frustration. We must realize these are necessary parts of growing in truth and thus, ultimately, in happiness, but at the same time realize that patience and kindness are needed with ourselves and those we are talking with. In this way, we minimize the difficulty and share in the journey of the one with whom we are discussing.

Molly: Well, of course I see it. I know that

Me: Why didn't you say it then?
Then she realized. Then I said.

Me: Everything you know comes through what you know through the senses!

Molly: "Even 2+2!!!," she said stunned

Me: Yes, how do you know it's through your senses?

Molly: I don't know, tell me.

Me: You see two apples and you put two more apples and you see you have four apples⁷

Oh I can count, she joked, realizing how important and serious yet simple the point was.

We are a faith-alone people

You see we all, not just Molly, do this; even when we think we know, we don't, we only believe. Few people know what math is, though we all take it in school. What is math? What is a number? Our teachers don't know so they don't teach it, and confusion is at the base of how we live and make decisions.⁸ Arithmetic is easy compared to life! If we don't know the meaning of math, even arithmetic, or even that we know it in any conscious way (rather than just believe), how will we keep our balance in the complications of life.

Again, this is not about Molly and Jane. It is about how our thinking is confused and

⁷ Even this is not quite right...even our understanding of arithmetic is confused and problematic (see A. Rizzi, "What is Math Really?" IAP *Journal of Physics and Math*, 2006). No one tells us what a number is; indeed, no one even tells us what math is? A number is a whole with parts, leaving aside how the parts connect. This means one is not a number. To learn the unconfused meaning of $2+2=4$, see the just mentioned article.

⁸ See the central theorem of the Institute for Advanced Physics at iapweb.org/mission.

ungrounded because we don't have a properly formed foundation for our thinking and actions, which makes all of them skewed in ways we are not even aware of. As a result of this confusion, we are faith-alone people. A faith-alone people is liable to believe anything because it has by its own lights no way to determine the truth of something, to know something. Tyranny is around the corner for such people. We must know things to act against tyranny. Could Nazi resistors have resisted if they did not know the grotesque evil of killing Jews and the like?

Can we truly live if we don't have the truth. After all, we are made for truth and to live it. Here alone is our happiness, finally in Truth Himself.

Reason comes first then faith

Jane and Molly remind us that reason comes before faith, for we must know something in order to believe something. A proposition can only be formulated and understood when one already knows something. Only once I understand the proposition can I say I believe it. If I say " 'blub di blub di bla', do you believe me?" I cannot be serious because I don't know what I've asked you to believe. *Belief is important* for it is only in trusting authorities (even natural authorities) that we can learn, but it can only begin when you know something.⁹

We need to regain the starting point of our thinking, all we know through the senses, and begin again to know.¹⁰

⁹ This is seen in supernatural revelation, for example, by noting nobody cannot assent to the doctrine "God is trinity" until he understands something of what "God" is and what "3" is.

¹⁰ See KIP and SBS (fn 2) to start see. Also other articles in *Physics and Culture* (IAPweb.org/magazine) can help seeing this necessity. To see some of the relation of physics to www.iapweb.org

Anthony Rizzi, Ph.D., Director of the Institute for Advanced Physics, gained worldwide recognition in theoretical physics by solving an 80-year old problem in Einstein's theory; has physics degrees from MIT and Princeton University; has been senior scientist for Cal-Tech's Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatory (LIGO), which won the Nobel Prize in physics 2017 and taught graduate courses at LSU; worked on the Manned Mars Craft and the Mars Observer spacecraft; received the NASA Award, as well as, a Martin Marietta New Technology Award.

He is author of *The Science Before Science: A Guide to Thinking in the 21st Century* and *A Kid's Introduction to Physics (and Beyond)*; he has been interviewed in many media outlets. In addition to his professional articles, Dr. Rizzi authored the ground breaking texts *Physics for Realists-Mechanics and Physics for Realists-Electricity and Magnetism (both recommended by the journal of the American Association of Physics Teachers)* and, recently, *Physics for Realists-Quantum Mechanics*. He has recently made groundbreaking discoveries in quantum mechanics.

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our understanding of people, see "Two Types of Empirical People" (Nov. 2019), to understand physics' relation to religion and Grace: "Does Grace Help You Think Better?" (June 2021), to understand its relation to ethics see "Death of Justice?" (Oct. 2018), for its relation to the our technological world, see "Is your Computer Real?" (Aug 2014), and to understand how we lost our sense of beauty see "Is There in Truth, Beauty?" (May 2015), and many more.