

# OpenTheo

## Aren't There Truths I Can Only Know Because of My Lived Experience?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Question about how to reconcile the fact that there are things one can only know through experience with the idea that truth can be known apart from a person's experiences.

\* "Woke" culture says, "Only I can know this because of my lived experience," which seems to contradict the idea that truth can be known apart from those experiences, but I also find myself experiencing things and learning things as a parent that I couldn't have otherwise known, so how do we reconcile this with the idea of objective, publicly accessible truth?

### Transcript

[Music] [Bell] Welcome to Stand to Reason's #STRask podcast. I'm Amy Hall and Greg Koukl is here with me. And I'm with my famous Amos.

[Laughs] Okay Greg, this first question comes from John Michael Jones. A epistemological question. What culture tells us, quote, "Only I can know this because of my lived experience," end quote.

Which seems to contradict the concept that truth can be known apart from those experiences. But I find myself experiencing things and learning things as a parent that I believe I could not have otherwise known if I didn't experience them as a parent. How do we reconcile this? Alright, this is a real good question because it pertains to a very peculiar claim that is being made by people on the left.

It's characteristic of being woke, or at least acknowledging the legitimacy of the claim is characteristic of being woke. And I'm trying to think of the specific term that is used in the term of art. There's like four or five characteristics of critical race theory or any of its variations.

And one of those characteristics is that the person who is the victim is the only one who's in a position to assess or to verify that they're a victim and how victimized they are because they're the one who's receiving the victimhood. Now, by the way, notice if somebody listening carefully will see a circularity in there. The victim is the only one who knows he's a victim because he's the victim.

Well, wait a minute, you first have to be sure or presume you're the victim before you can know you're the victim. Knowing you're the victim should be a conclusion of other factors. But what happens in this situation is a whole group of people are characterized as victims.

And so given the fact that they're victims, how do you know that you're victims? Well, I'm the victim. Therefore, I know when I'm being victimized, well, that's circular, strictly speaking. And this is part of the problem.

Generally, being a victim is a result of having received some tangible action against yourself that would characterize you as a victim. So if during the beginning, right after Pearl Harbor, a bunch of Japanese are rounded up and put in internment camps, they were not concentration camps. That's a mischaracterization.

They were internment camps. It was terrible to do. But they were victims in virtue of having been rounded up and placed in these camps, not in virtue of them feeling like they're victims.

No, I'm sure they felt victimized in that circumstance. But maybe some didn't. I don't know.

But the action is what is what characterizes the group as the victim. There's an external state of affairs that characterizes someone as a victim. In the case of the woke world, the external state of affairs is asserted not with regards to individuals, but with regards to groups.

Okay? And so let's just broadly say people of color, POC, on this point of view, are the victims of white oppression. And so whites are oppressors as a group. That means if you remember the group, it doesn't matter what your individual behavior or character is like.

You are guilty in virtue of being part of the group. You're the victimizer. But the victim is a victim in virtue of being part of the group, which the claim is, has been victimized as a group over time.

Okay? Now that is a claim about external circumstances, but this has not been demonstrated to be the case. And it is an article of faith that people who are part of this group that is allegedly consistently and persistently persecuted and victimized are each themselves experiencing victimhood. Now, when they are told that their victims, guess what? They're going to start feeling like their victims.

And it is this feeling like being a victim that is the insider perspective that according to this way of approaching things is all the verification that's needed to establish the fact of the individual being victimized. Now, I'm still struggling to find the phrase. I'm hoping for you to rescue me here.

A Neil Shenvi. It's called, it's like insider's perspective is what it means, but it's a different term. Maybe I'll think about it in just a phone.

It's something experience. It's a... Are you talking about lived experience? Yeah. Okay.

Thank you. So Amy to the rescue. It's lived experience.

And so when someone who has labeled a victimizer raises a question about the victimhood of the individual, the individual can say, "I know what I feel. I am the victim." And so therefore, I have a place at the table in the discussion. You are the victimizer and you're even denying it.

You have nothing to say here. So this is a way of squeezing out the competition. Now, I just want to notice a couple of things.

First of all, I mentioned that the entire enterprise is circular. Okay? I'm the victim by definition because of my skin color, status and society, a person of color, whatever. And therefore, or maybe by my gender woman, or maybe by my sexual preference, LGBT, it may be about my gender identity, gender dysphoria, transsexuals, all of these things make me a victim of those who disagree with me.

Okay. And therefore, I am victimized and my victimize can be explained by the fact that I'm a victim. But notice that you start with the presumption of being the victim and then you... You establish the veracity of that assessment based on your feelings.

Okay? So that's one problem. It's circular. Another problem is that the thing that is a feature or a function or a tool in victimizing is ideology.

Okay? So it's... This is another one of those elements. Now, I'm trying to think of the exact crazy analogy that Neil Shenvy uses, but let's just call it victimization by ideology. Okay? Or oppression by ideology, I think maybe it's his term.

And that is, it's one thing to have blacks left out of community enterprises, you know, whites only, drinking fountains, whites only, places on the bus, that kind of stuff. That is overt observable, prejudicial discrimination. Okay? But that isn't what's being talked about because nothing like that exists anymore.

In fact, people have been trying to root that out forever. And this is one reason why the idea of systemic racism is so appealing because it's built into the system. And it isn't like just one little thing.

It's just all inside there. So you can't get to it and it's hard to refute it when it's characterized in that way. But notice that what is the victimization now is the fact that there are people who, not the overt actions, homosexuality is another one, for example, where gays were persecuted in the past and discriminated against in the past, which is not the case now, except for now you have, you still have people who think that homosexuality is wrong.

Oh, we can't have that. Now I'm a victim in a different way. So it's, it now it's, it's oppression by ideology, not oppression by behavior.

This is a huge shift. Now people aren't even allowed to differ with you or that makes you a victim. Okay? This is the whole idea of, of, of equity that there is a safe place for you to be.

You can't feel psychologically made to be feel psychologically uncomfortable for something that you're doing. Everybody's got to approve or else that's more examples of victimization. Of course, this is only a one way street.

It has to do with all these things popular on the left. Nobody mind speaking a Christian feel uncomfortable for anything that they believe. Okay.

So all of that is kind of a, a, a groundwork, a conceptual groundwork to what's going on here. Okay. So understand when somebody uses or makes an appeal to lived experience as the foundation and justification of their view, which experience the oppressor doesn't have.

And so the oppressor doesn't have anything to say to it. So way of silencing assessment. All right.

So let me try to put this in its correct perspective. All lived experience can tell a person is what they feel or how they personally assess a circumstance. Lived experience isn't adequate generally by itself to assess whether their experience is true to reality.

So there are lots of people say, well, I feel, I feel oppressed. I feel rejected. What would be the source of that? It might be that they are being rejected and oppressed.

It might be that somebody's told them they're being oppressed and rejected. And they're internalizing that and then they're, then they see it where it isn't there. I think this is huge.

I've talked to people who've come over in friends that have come over from other countries, Africa in particular, never experienced any of this stuff in the US of A because they had not been preconditioned to do that. Now that preconditioning is everywhere. Now, can we sometimes learn by and I think this is part of the last part of the question that from regardless of our status in this woke kind of assessment, can't we learn from

experience? Of course we can.

Sometimes what we learn is that our emotions have been misinformed. And this happens all kinds of times. Any person who's married who has had trouble in their marriage and have gone to counseling knows how this works.

People interpret actions one way when that wasn't exactly what was going on in the mind of the spouse. And what good counseling does is tries to get everything on the table and helps people to see that they read into behaviors, motives or intentions that were not in their own mind. That we're not there to begin with.

You got teenagers happens all the time. All right. So now what has happened though is this is this liability of knowing what's going on based on our feelings and our prejudices.

And I mean prejudices on the woke side at this point. So this is something we are all to be aware of our liabilities. This isn't an inviolable part of being woke.

If I feel it, then it must be the case and the issue. Of course, you're standing back and you say, I wonder why you feel it. The reason you feel it is because you've been this been pounded into your head for decades that everybody's out to get you because of your color or what's going on.

Or because of your color or because of your gender or because of your sexual preference or something like that. And I mean, this month we're recording in June is gay pride month. One-twelfth of the calendar year in our culture is given to celebrate a sexual preference.

No adultery month? Why not that? No masturbation month? Pride in that? These are all just sexual desires and no, I like skinny girls month. I use these alternate examples, which might stun some of you what I've just said, to show that gay pride month should be just as stunning. But I think the reason it's being done is to placate this feeling that people have of not being accepted by some groups, though all the culture is now rooting for them as a group.

There still is some intransigent groups like Christians who live by a different ethic and therefore aren't willing to surrender the ethic. Doesn't mean they're going to treat people badly, but they're not willing to surrender the ethic. And this is viewed that we have an ethic about these things.

This itself is viewed as discriminatory and hostile and abusive and creates victims. So there's a very odd dynamic going on here. And please read the last part of that question, Amy.

I'm not sure if I covered the end of it as well as I might have, but I want to say something more about it. I find myself experiencing things and learning things as a parent that I

believe I could not have otherwise known if I didn't experience them as a parent. That's right.

Okay. Well, I agree with that statement. And that goes along with what I read a moment ago, or I said a moment ago, and that is as we go through life, certainly have parents have children and be parents.

We learn things about child raising through our experience. But what we're doing is we're learning facts about the nature of the world. We're learning facts about children and what they need and what they don't need and what they want and what they don't want.

And all of these things are new to us. We're exploring a new area, but we are not. But what we are trying to find out is what the truth of the world is.

It isn't... Let me back up. A father can feel disrespected if a child disagrees with him. But it might be that the child is disagreeing in an appropriate way about a particular thing and raising an issue.

And if the father simply reacts that, oh, that's disrespectful, it might be that his understanding of disrespect is distorted. He's experiencing what he thinks is disrespect, but there is no disrespect in that circumstance because he's overly sensitive to that. Rather, maybe there's a place here for an appropriate given play between the father and the child and listening.

That's not taking place. Scripture says, "Fathers don't exasperate your children." Maybe that's what's going on. But notice here what the father could say is, "Hey, the kid could say, I wasn't disrespected." "I was disrespected you, Dad.

I was asking a question. You say, I felt disrespected. So you are the disrespector, ipso facto, and the issue, QED.

That's how wokeism works." Yeah, I agree that there are many things we can learn, John, about life from our experience. And the main thing we learn is what it is like to experience something. So not only do you learn more about love and self-sacrifice and all those things, but the main thing that only experience can teach you is what it is like to experience something.

So let's say somebody experiences a form of racism. They understand racism in a way that I don't understand it because they have experienced it. But everyone can know that it has happened.

So there's a subjective element and there's an objective element. And it's when you confuse the two, when you use the subjective to, as evidence for the objective, that's where you can go wrong. I mean, not necessarily every time, but you can go wrong

because our experience, as you illustrated, Greg, can not reflect reality.

It doesn't always reflect reality. We could misinterpret something. We could misunderstand something.

But when you experience something and you are interpreting correctly, you are learning something about the world. But everyone else can also look at that and say, "Yes, I can see what happened here and you are right. You have experienced this.

And even if I haven't experienced it, I can say, "Yes, I can see that it's happened because it's an objective feature of reality." So what we have here is two different things, but truth should inform our experience. So we experienced something, but we also have to be informed by the truth. And the truth is objective and publicly accessible to people.

I think that's where this goes wrong because what you have here is subjective experience versus objective reality. And you also have an individual experience versus a widespread reality. So that's, I think that's where the second mistake goes wrong.

And that's my experience. Let's say your experience is informed by reality. It is true.

You have experienced racism. That also doesn't, that can't evaluate the overall situation in the world. That is something that's publicly accessible that people can see and can evaluate.

So it could be absolutely true and real what you have experienced, but it doesn't necessarily read. As an internal experience, right? And it could be something that true happened to you. But that doesn't inform you as to the entire situation and maybe the policy decisions too.

Because I think sometimes this experience, which is valid and you have experienced it, then we're supposed to let you decide how we should fix it. And that doesn't necessarily follow either. The evaluation that's made is noise accurate of the thing that you are experiencing, which is real, and you're attaching it to some outside circumstance, which you think is the cause of your experience.

Let's just cause it racism here. But see, that's an assessment of what's going on outside. Now, I'm just, I just finished reading and incorporated sections of this piece in the chapter that we're working on right now with the book, Amy.

And this piece was called the Primal Heracy and it was 2021, I think March, that solid ground. So it's available. But what that shows, what I talk about there is people do not distinguish between what they feel and what the world is actually like.

This is a pox on an entire generation. All right. What they feel just is reality and of issue.

If I feel persecuted, I am persecuted because reality, the locus of reality is inside of me.

It is not outside there. Okay.

That is the heart of relativism. That's the same with gender. If I feel like I'm a man, that's right.

So this isn't more than just this tiny issue. This is something that's going on in the entire culture. Absolutely.

It is this massive move towards metaphysical narcissism. It's the nature of one's identity is what they and truth is what they feel and believe in any given moment. And that's it.

And so this, they can claim that they are an oppressed group because they feel like they're oppressed group and they think that the feeling epistemologically establishes the fact of them in the objective world being oppressed. When this is a fact that is not been shown the way it's characterized in CRT or IED. That's an explosive DE.

That's an objective reality. Nobody can deny it. I'm trying to find the right acronym here.

It's the right letters wrong. They're all explosive and dead, but it's DEI, diversity, equity and inclusion. So anyway, because there is a very powerful cultural sentiment that's driving this that is being pounded into the heads of everyone all the way down to kindergarten by your government.

All right. This is a very hostile ideologically hostile worldview to Christianity. It's not Christian and the slightest.

It's not true. The way it's being characterized, which isn't to say there aren't examples of inequity, inequalities and lack of appropriate diversity, whatever, or racism, whatever. But that's not the point.

This is a package and it's just hammered in and dissent is punished. That's always a signal that something's wrong with the idea. And so consequently, people think this way and then we're intimidated.

You don't know what I'm experiencing. No, you're right. I don't know what you experience.

I don't know your emotions. Okay. But whether your emotions are tied to what's actually happening in the outside world, that's a different matter entirely.

And I do have some access to that. And I just want to say here a couple of things. First of all, this is not to say that there is no oppression or there is no racism or there is no experiences like this.

What we're trying to do is give you some categories so you understand the place of truth and the place of experience. Now, it could certainly be the case in your case or in any



sort of claim that the objective truth backs up what you are experiencing. Right.

As an individual. Sure. Or maybe even more than an individual.

It's just so we're not making or I'm not making any claims right now about any sort of claim that you might have. This is not a judgment on this is to say that you have to be willing to look at the objective truth and hear from other people even if they haven't experienced it because publicly accessible objective reality can be seen by other people even if they haven't experienced it. And everything that we've said here in terms of what culture or whatever it is applies to the parent to as as you explained Greg you can have the same sort of misunderstandings between parent and child or a child could make sort of have ideas about how it is for every family that we've talked about can absolutely be applied to your experience as a parent.

And if you're doing the same thing that we've described then you are also having this woke problem. It's in a certain way I was trying to be charitable to teenagers by using the father as the one who is fault in the illustration I used where he was feeling something that wasn't actually happening. The met vast majority of crisis is the other way around it is the teenager lost in their feelings and their emotions and in their self centered narcissism which is part of the whole enterprise of being a teenager.

And it's extremely aggravated by the ethos of this culture where parents see the way the world really is. No this is not unfair what's going on no this is not inappropriate honey what we've just asked you to do no we are not being extreme in this circumstance this is the way things work okay and what are the teenagers doing they're always screaming that's not fair that's not right I'm not getting my my proper I'm not getting my just do I shouldn't have to do that I should have to do that I feel this I feel that I feel the other thing their world is confused and it takes adults to help put their world in order. Now I say characteristically because I gave another illustration where the parent was the confused one but generally it is the children that are the confused one the adults are meant to train them to see the world the way it really is and to react properly in an emotional fashion.

And I say what this whole woke thing does DEI or CRT or whatever other acronym you apply to it turns the world upside down makes one's emotions the focus the locus of what is true gender is a great example of that. And it ends up destroying people and destroying human flourishing every single time okay and when you try to speak wisdom into the circumstance you are disqualified from speaking because you don't have the same lived experience as somebody else just like the teenager says you don't know what it's like to be me. No I don't but I do know what it's like to be an adult and we want to help you to become an adult and this is what it takes.

And that's something you can keep in mind as a parent or you can teach your child that as Christians what we must do is conform our lives our minds are understanding to an

objective standard whether that is God's view of the world or its reality in general, which of course is also God's view of the world I guess. But how we should behave all these things this is so counter cultural this idea that we have to conform our lives to a standard outside of ourselves. This is this is the root issue of the entire culture war I think.

So if you can understand this I know we've talked about a lot of different things here but if you can understand this then you can put your experience in the proper place experience is what makes life interesting. It's delicious emotions make it delicious but there are problems right we learn a lot about God from our experience with him we learn a lot about other people we learn a lot about human beings in general. All those things but always we are submitting to an objective reality outside of ourselves and as long as you're approaching this from that perspective then the other thing that happens is now you can have a conversation with people about it.

It would take so much of the intensity out of the conversation if we all had in mind the idea that we are trying to come to the objective reality and likely we both need to move a little bit because we are all fallen human beings. So as Christians this is how we need to approach this. Let me remind you the piece that I referred to that will help you that I wrote in 2020.

Is that right yeah 2020 is called the primal heresy it's on a str.org and then two months or three months or four months later I wrote another one called CRT civil rights upside down. Okay and the reason I mentioned that is because it has those five characteristics that Neil Shenvie I think so insightfully offered which includes lived experience and oppression by they put it by ideology. There's four others I'm sorry there's three others there but that's where you can find that material played out in a way that will help you to understand what is going on in our culture right now and help you respond appropriately to it.

That just brought one more thing to mind Greg I know we're way over but hopefully people are finding this interesting. There are problems in the world. The problem with any sort of ideology that's rooted in this misunderstanding of experience and reality and objective truth is not that they're saying there are problems in the world.

The problem is how made how they're diagnosing the problem how they want to fix the problem. There are certainly problems so we address those problems from a Christian perspective. We address them from God's perspective from the idea that there's objective reality all the things that we said we can address these problems we don't we don't have to address them in these ways and I think that's another thing people are another mistake people are making and that is they think that this is the only way to address problems in society and don't buy into that.

We can see things that are wrong as Christians and Christians have for two thousand years. We can see things are wrong and we can apply all the truth that we know reveal

truth from God the objective truth that we can see around us. We apply all that to the problem and we do seek to make a world that reflects God's truth and justice and goodness and beauty.

So don't think that if you reject some of these other ideas that you are saying there's no issue at all. Whatever the issue is I just think people have only heard from these other ideas that have grown out of this idea of our experience our lived experience and that's why everyone now is assuming that's the only way to address things. Well it's even worse than that because now there's a totalitarian element only the victims quote unquote get to speak otherwise it's all of what we're doing right now many would characterize as an example of of oh my goodness the name of the book by Deangelis White fragility yeah all this is Amy and Greg all their white fragility okay now this is just another example of circular reasoning it continues to soon their view is correct without giving any good reasons for it taken as an overall view not as a view pertaining to individuals.

But no we're silenced we don't have a place at the table and in fact these kinds of exercises done in government organizations and also in private organizations are look at the people of color get to speak the whites don't get to say a thing. They're the bad guys okay and all they have to do is listen. So you can see how destructive that kind of thing is there's a totalitarian element that is that is part of this enterprise and that's another really bad sign.

And it's not just there it this also happens in the abortion debate obviously because if you're not a woman you can't have an opinion on this you can't speak about this actually had a friend say this to me she was we were having a very good conversation. But she kept saying women should decide this and so I was trying to explain to her. It's not just the people who are experiencing something who have a say and because there is objective reality that people care about so it's all sorts of topics it's not even just this one yeah I think only husband should be allowed to decide whether it's okay to beat their wives.

Now that's right but that is a perfect parallel it's a perfect parallel if you're single you have nothing to say about whether you think I'm abusing my children or not you're not a parent I'm a parent. Exactly the same parallel. And that's that will reveal the idea that there is an objective reality that we can all speak into because we can evaluate the rightness or wrongness of something but of course we're saying there's an objective standard that we can refer to and not everyone agrees with that.

So there are a lot of issues core issues going on here. Wow John you really made a mess of things here today with your question hope that helps actually. Thank you.

Great question I'm glad you. Yeah thank you so much John we really appreciate hearing from you if you have a question send it to us through our website just go to our podcast

page and you will find a link there to submit a question or you can go on Twitter and use the hashtag #strask. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

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