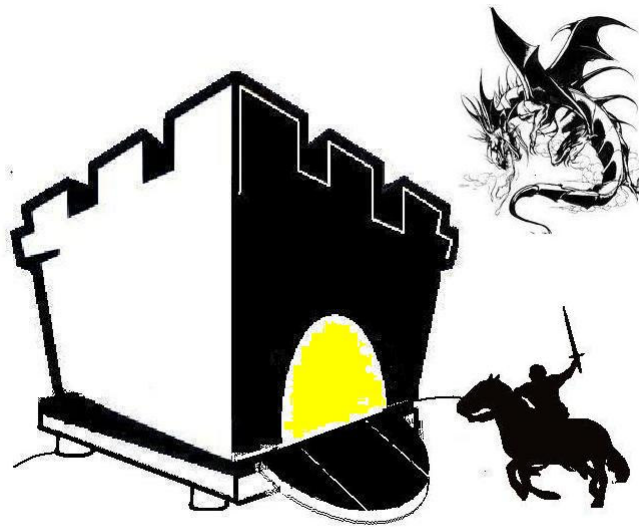

Fortress Living



Three Solutions for Your Greatest Problems in Life

Fortress Living: Three Solutions for your Greatest Problems in Life

Lesson Three

Where do Normative Solutions Come From?



The norms of life are the way we address the greatest problem of failure. We want to be successful. It's part of our humanity to want others to notice us and affirm our existence and our achievements. Therefore, the various normative solutions constructed in history are intended to accomplish *self-validation*; to make us feel good about ourselves. The modern term for this is self-esteem.

Yet before we examine some of those normative solutions that others have devised, it will be helpful to see where norms come from. As we do, we will be better able to evaluate whether they provide a solid base for the rest of the building.

There's an old folk saying, "if at first you don't succeed: try, try again." This little proverb summarizes the way many people view success: as a *trial and error* process. If we try long enough and hard enough, we'll get it right. There is some truth to this. We need to keep working at things and not give up. But such a trial and error approach is totally inadequate for establishing solid norms for living. What if we keep working at the wrong things? In the parable of the two builders told by Jesus, they both worked long and hard at their houses, but the foolish man still suffered total loss because he was trying long and hard in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The "trial and error" method is totally inadequate for developing normative solutions to the greatest problems in life because we can never be sure we've tried every possibility and ruled out every error. Therefore, we must derive our norms from other sources. Practically, this means learn to rely on solutions received from others who have already tested and proven them.

Imagine that you are starting out to build a building. Would you be better off to utilize tools and skills passed down from expert craftsmen or try to invent all new ones? Obviously the more you can benefit from past proven solutions the quicker you'll get done and more satisfactory the results.

We live in a time in history when more and more people think the norms of the past are irrelevant and outdated. They imagine they have to totally invent new ones for today. But they are on a fool's errand. They are like builders setting out to build a castle with no existing tools, technologies or materials.

Another way of describing the origin of norms is: our foundations are determined by the way we process the past—especially the information we receive about and from it. Using the fortress metaphor, the foundation of a building is constructed on preexisting material, using proven methods and tools.

Fortress Living: Three Solutions for your Greatest Problems in Life

Normative Solutions and Apriori Knowledge

Reliance on past information for norms in life is a form of “apriori knowledge.”

In logic and philosophy, the term “apriori” means knowledge that is held “prior” (before) actual experience. Apriori knowledge is the “assumptions” and “presuppositions” which form the bedrock of our beliefs and ideas. Apriori knowledge represents things we believe to be true before we’ve examined them. Children receive this kind of knowledge from their parents. But we all live by it daily, particularly in things we just “assume” to be true without much thought.

While it may seem like apriori knowledge would be a form of cheating or taking a short-cut, we could never function without it. Apriori knowledge means we don’t have to reinvent every idea, tool and procedure each time we need one. Apriori knowledge means we can use ones that have already proven effective.

In the vocabulary of logic, apriori presuppositions are called “premises.” A logical premise is a “truth” claim. Every norm has some premise out of which it flows. Though it may seem like only college professors or philosophers would need to understand them, the fact is we all live by them. For example, our beliefs about ourselves—what psychologists call “self-image”—are grounded in apriori knowledge.

Normative Solutions and Deductive Logic

Once a bit of apriori knowledge has been adopted, another form of logical reasoning is used to process it. It’s called *logical deduction*. Logical deduction means that once we accept a particular premise as true, we go on to derive other thoughts and practices from it. They are the “necessary consequences” of our apriori assumptions—if we want to be “logically consistent.” It is those consequences that result in decisions, feelings and thoughts.

The thinker who systematized this age-old process was Aristotle. He developed an entire system of logical deduction, including the “rules” for how logical deduction can be done. Here are two examples of deductive logic. Which one is true? How do you know?

*If all men are mortal,
and Socrates is a man;
is Socrates mortal?*



Fortress Living: Three Solutions for your Greatest Problems in Life

*If all men are purple,
and Socrates is a man;
is Socrates purple?*



Both sound logical because they are in the form of logical statements called “syllogisms.” Both follow the rules of deduction. However, one is obviously true and the other not. The second statement—“Socrates is a man” is true. But one of the main premises is true and one is not. “All men are mortal” is true. “All men are purple” is not true. This means any statement flowing out of the logical argument will likely be untrue. This silly example illustrates the much larger problem of deductive reasoning. It may be *valid* but still not *true*. A person’s thinking can be logical but not accurately reflect reality.

It is customary nowadays to assume that if something is logical it is automatically true. For example, much of the psychological theory of our day is based on the premise that mental illness is a breakdown of rationality and logic. Thus, a person who is depressed, angry or suicidal is committing logical fallacies in false conclusions about his problems or his condition. Doctors who follow this system work with their clients to think more “rationally” and “logically” about themselves and their circumstances. This is based on their normative assumption that if a person will just be rational and logical he will be mentally healthy.

This may sound like a good approach to mental health, but remember the problem of the purple Socrates! The only guarantee that a person’s logical conclusions are accurate is if he starts with an accurate and true premise. When evaluating the various normative solutions people have used as the foundation of their lives, it is not enough for their solutions to be “logically valid” or even to “make sense.” Deductive logic has the potential of yielding “certainty” of knowledge. Therefore it is “Sure Thing Logic.” But it is only a “Sure Thing” if the premise upon which it is based accurately reflects reality. So, the next question is, how can we know whether the premises are accurate?



Fortress Living: Three Solutions for your Greatest Problems in Life

Normative Solutions and Trusted Authority

Apriori reasoning and logical deduction can yield certainty—Sure Thing Knowledge—but only if the foundational premises of the arguments are accurate. So, how can we test them?

Normative solutions are generally derived from accepted authorities—from those we consider experts. Only a fool imagines he can invent every tool and technology for every task. We benefit from the work of trusted experts before us. And when it comes to the norms of life, only a fool rejects expert advice of trusted authorities from the past.

Having said that, however, just because someone *claims* to be an expert doesn't mean he is. Not all who claim the mantle of authority deserve to wear it. As we will see in later lessons, there have been self-proclaimed experts, claiming to give true advice, since the beginning of history.

This explains yet another experience of humanity: false knowledge, erroneous belief, or what we might call “cognitive distortion.” Since the beginning there have been false or deluded teachers who have managed to persuade others to accept their norms.

Though there are many cognitive distortions we could consider, one of the most common relates to knowledge itself; that our human reason is enough; that it is sufficient by itself to live our lives. The technical term for this is “autonomous reason.”

This distortion entered our world at the dawn of human history with the first human beings. They refused the authoritative norms given them by God in their desire for independence and self-sufficiency. In a real way, they no longer wanted to serve God. They wanted to be “gods” themselves. The story of how this unfolded is contained in the Bible, in Genesis 2-3. We will return to consider it in more detail in a later lesson.

The point now is that cognitive distortions are not simply a breakdown of logic but a rejection of authoritative information. A person can be very smart and still be wrong. Autonomous reason is the ultimate “cognitive distortion” because it makes us believe things that are not true about ourselves, others and our world. It's like looking in one of those funny mirrors at the carnival. The reflection we see looking back at us is twisted and distorted. Sadly, the very problem of failure, so fundamental to our existence, is only made worse by cognitive distortion. And that's not funny at all. How can we ever hope to be successful if we don't know what is true?



Christianity has typically not used the phrase “cognitive distortion” to describe this condition. It uses the word “pride.” And when we realize that this great problem in life—failure—is ultimately a problem of pride and self-image; when we realize that much of our quest for self-validation and success is actually a result of cognitive distortion, we also have our first clue about the greatest solution to it.

Fortress Living: Three Solutions for your Greatest Problems in Life

Quiz 3 Questions:

1. The “trial and error” method of problem solving for determining normative solutions to the greatest problems in life...
 - a. is a problem because we can never be sure we’ve tried every possibility and ruled out every error
 - b. is a good idea because it’s the only way we can test our solutions
 - c. has never been scientifically researched to see if it works
2. Apriori knowledge is knowledge
 - a. that is held prior to the experience itself
 - b. that is held within an experience
 - c. that is held after the experience itself
3. The statement: “all men are purple, Socrates is a man; therefore, Socrates is purple is:
 - a. factually accurate and logically invalid
 - b. factually inaccurate and logically valid
 - c. factually accurate and logically valid
4. Trusted authority is the ultimate origin of norms for life because
 - a. apriori knowledge relies on them
 - b. apriori knowledge rejects them
 - c. apriori knowledge has nothing to do with them
5. Cognitive distortions are not simply a breakdown of logic but the result of
 - a. rejecting rationality
 - b. rejecting authority
 - c. submitting to authority