

**WHAT CAN I KNOW? AN  
INQUIRY INTO TRUTH, ITS  
NATURE, THE MEANS OF ITS  
ATTAINMENT, AND ITS RELATIONS  
TO THE PRACTICAL LIFE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649732678

What Can I Know? An Inquiry into Truth, Its Nature, the Means of Its Attainment, and Its Relations to the Practical Life by George Trumbull Ladd

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**GEORGE TRUMBULL LADD**

**WHAT CAN I KNOW? AN  
INQUIRY INTO TRUTH, ITS  
NATURE, THE MEANS OF ITS  
ATTAINMENT, AND ITS RELATIONS  
TO THE PRACTICAL LIFE**



Philos  
L154w

# WHAT CAN I KNOW?

AN INQUIRY INTO TRUTH,  
ITS NATURE, THE MEANS OF ITS  
ATTAINMENT, AND ITS RELATIONS TO  
THE PRACTICAL LIFE

BY  
GEORGE TRUMBULL LADD, LL.D.

137498  
10/1/16

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.  
FOURTH AVENUE & 30TH STREET, NEW YORK  
LONDON, BOMBAY, CALCUTTA AND MADRAS  
1914

## PREFACE

THE asking of questions, and the conscious, persistent, and deliberate search for their answers, is characteristically human. Even in the quest for the gratification of his appetites, the intellect, volitions, and tastes of man are involved in a quite different way from that which is the case with any of the lower animals. Only man makes a problem demanding thought and exciting anxiety out of the questions: "What shall I eat?" or, "What shall I drink?" or, "What shall I put on?" In answering these and all similar inquiries, he defers to customs that have established themselves, not merely in considerations of physical necessity, but also of propriety, aesthetical gratification, and moral obligation. And these considerations are themselves the fruits of reflection, if not on the part of the individual, at least on the part of the clan, tribe, or race, to which the individual belongs.

But what is for our present purpose more important to notice, is this: It is characteristic of human reason to ask and pursue the answer of yet more abstract and deeply hidden questions. Some sort of interest in, and of inquiry into, the

## PREFACE

fundamental problems of science and philosophy, has excited the minds of men from the very earliest traceable beginnings of human history. Nor are the motives for this interest wholly confined to any imagined physical good or pleasurable, but as it were *ab-extra* experiences, which their conjectural answer might promise to afford. The intellectual satisfaction which comes from asking and answering questions of every sort — and not by any means least, questions of the most difficult sort — has operated to stimulate the human mind as much as the hope of gaining information available for the more successful conduct of the so-called practical life.

Among the questions, the value of right answers to which is found both in the interest of intellectual satisfaction and in the successful conduct of life, we may distinguish the following four as easily standing in the front rank. Tersely put in common language, they may well enough take the following form: What can I know? What ought I to do? What should I believe? What may I hope? As expressed in this form, they are designedly made closely fitting to the exigencies, the opportunities, and the interests of the individual man. As set in the moulds of the different main departments of philosophical discipline, the first and third of these questions might be called "epistemological"; the second "ethical," and the fourth, a question having to do chiefly with certain aesthetical and religious

## PREFACE

experiences. It is as problems of the personal life that we are proposing briefly to raise and to discuss them.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that any of these four questions can ever be raised, much less even provisionally and partially answered, as other than as philosophical problems. But this is only to say that they are all problems of reflection, and reflective thinking is the method of all philosophy. Nay! reflective thinking is, essentially considered, the very substance of philosophy. We might go still further — and employing another more offensive word — say that they are all “metaphysical” problems. But we need not be troubled by this manner of designating them. For we may at once remind ourselves of the truth which was clearly enough enunciated as long ago as Aristotle, namely — that every man, inasmuch as he is a man, is also a philosopher. If, then, we say to ourselves “You must not philosophize,” the answer of our common nature comes back: “And yet you must philosophize.” Inasmuch as metaphysics is nothing but some thinker’s theory of reality, whether framed in terms of instinctive belief, or of the most elaborate and systematic form of reasoned argument, every man is also bound to be either a naïve or a more or less trained metaphysician. Neither does the man who thinks of himself as a thorough-going agnostic, or as a complete empiricist of the most new-fashioned sort, escape the



## PREFACE

charge of being intellectually more noble than he esteems himself to be. He, too, is a born philosopher.

Even a momentary attention to the language in which these four questions have been couched, suggests certain prominent features, which, while relating them and making them inter-dependent, serve to emphasize their differences. To raise the question, What can I know? indicates a problem that emphasizes ability. To ask, What ought I to do? introduces and lays stress upon the idea of obligation. But to inquire further, What shall I believe? suggests a mingling of prudence, dependent upon rational considerations, with a certain kind of obligation: while, What may I hope? seems to be mainly a question of privilege. Further reflection reveals the fact that they build upon one another in the order in which they have been named. The question, What can I know? is for every man fundamental and controlling in his attempt to find answers to the other three questions. We shall, therefore, consider this question first of all.

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE MEANING OF THE QUESTION . . . . .	1
II. WHAT IS IT TO KNOW? . . . . .	24
III. ON THINKING ONE'S WAY THROUGH A SUBJECT . . . . .	53
IV. ON BEING SURE OF WHAT WE KNOW . . . . .	83
V. DEGREES AND LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE. . . . .	108
VI. WHAT MAY THE KNOWER TAKE FOR GRANTED? . . . . .	134
VII. ON THE WORTH AND WAY OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE . . . . .	160
VIII. AGNOSTICS AND PEOPLE OF COMMON-SENSE . . . . .	186
IX. KNOWLEDGE AND REALITY . . . . .	212
X. WHAT IS THE USE OF KNOWING? . . . . .	241
XI. THE VALUE OF THE MEN WHO KNOW . . . . .	258
XII. CAN A MAN KNOW GOD? . . . . .	279

*To the Seekers after Truth:*  
*“ Shall we not look into the . . . things that seem,*  
*And things that be, and analyze*  
*Our double nature? ”*