

A large iceberg floats in a body of water under a blue sky with light clouds. The visible tip of the iceberg is on the right side of the frame. The water is calm, reflecting the sky and the iceberg. The horizon is visible in the distance. The text is overlaid on the image.

How Assumptions Work

An Introduction To The
Powerful Thoughts That Control You

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HOW ASSUMPTIONS WORK

Assumptions are funny things that all of us should know and understand. This is because we all do it. We all assume. It's not a bad thing that we assume. **It's not a matter of if you assume, but how you assume and whether your assumptions are true.** So how do we figure out our own or other people's assumptions? If I were to ask you "What are your deepest assumptions," I am sure you probably couldn't tell me. Then you might respond by saying, "So what? It doesn't matter." And you would be wrong. Here's why.

It's not a matter of if you assume, but how you assume and whether your assumptions are true.

You see, inside all of us is an autopilot that automatically guides and directs our lives. An autopilot in an airplane or ship keeps the craft at the proper speed, altitude, and heading—the very basics of operating these vehicles. This allows the pilot, helmsman, or captain to do other things without having to constantly think about keeping the ship on the proper course. An autopilot is a wonderful invention. But what if the settings on the autopilot are wrong and even worse, what if the pilot doesn't know it? At the least, the ship will end up someplace unintended, and at worst the result would be a disaster.

The autopilot in our head is our assumptions. They allow us to do more sophisticated thinking and exploring without having to constantly pay attention to the basics of our understanding of the world. The same is true of our assumptions as the autopilot in an airplane. What if the settings are wrong and you don't know it? You may end up someplace you didn't intend or even encounter disaster. Knowing what your basic assumptions are and where they can take you is crucial. They matter a lot!

What Are Assumptions?

An assumption is "a willingness to accept something as true without question or proof" (Cambridge English Dictionary). It is something we consider to be self-evidently true—something that anyone who knows anything knows to be true. Since it is self-evidently true, it is never questioned or discussed because we don't think it is necessary. Over time as we don't question or discuss an assumption, it disappears into the background of our minds. We forget it is even there—ever working to push our thinking on a preset course.

So, essentially an assumption is a starting point for reasoning about our world, our lives, and ourselves. It operates unexamined in the background of our minds—like an autopilot. We can't help having them, but be careful how you assume. As Oscar Wilde irreverently quipped, "When you assume, you make an ass out of you and me."

Whenever we watch a video, TV show, or movie; read a book, article, or webpage; or listen to a lecture, lyrics of a song, or just a conversation with a friend or on the radio, there are always assumptions at work. Of course, since they are assumptions, they are seldom discussed, acknowledged, or questioned, but they are always there. Whatever the topic you may see, read, or hear, think of that topic as the top part of an iceberg. This is the part we see, so by analogy, this is what we talk about. We may be a champion or a critic of the topic, but it is the visible part of the iceberg.

Yet, there is a whole mass of ice underwater that we don't see. This is the part that generates and supports the part of the iceberg above the water. The bottom of the iceberg is out of sight, so it is seldom discerned. By analogy, the bottom of the iceberg is deeper, more foundational thoughts that make the philosophies above the water possible. **The bottom of the iceberg is our assumptions.** The things we see and discuss are built on deeper assumptions that we find to be self-evidently true without question and with little or no proof.

Think of some current topics. Why is it that some people are convinced that global climate change is a serious threat to our planet and others do not? Why is it that evolution seems the most plausible explanation for the origin of life for some and others are unpersuaded? Why do some want "sensible" gun control laws and others want anyone who wishes a gun to own one?

You may have discussed these issues and others with friends, family, or acquaintances. When you discussed these topics with someone with whom you disagree, did you notice how difficult it is to persuade them? This is because they likely were operating on different assumptions from you. When you disagree with someone, as long as the conversation remains "above the water," you are likely going to get nowhere. So you "demolish" evolution, climate change, or gun control. It won't matter. Something else will grow up to replace it. **You haven't dealt with what generates and supports their position. You have not dismantled their assumptions.**

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this is a much more simple and effective strategy.**

Think about the iceberg analogy for a minute. Which part of the iceberg can sink a ship? It's the part of the iceberg below the water. So why is it we only discuss topics above the water? We have to get to the deeper thinking. Some are true. Others are flawed and false. What happens to the part of the iceberg above the water if you knock out the part below the water? It collapses. If the assumptions are true, then the things built on them are likely true. However, if the basic assumptions under a topic are false, then the things built on them also are false. **If your goal is truth, persuasion, and cultural change, this is a much more simple and effective strategy.**

Core Assumptions

I have shown you a little about what assumptions are in general and how they work. Let's look at the specific assumptions that all of us make. I have spent years researching and categorizing assumptions. These assumptions are very powerful, and yet they are surprisingly simple. I have found that many middle school children understand the importance and power of assumptions. While the "above the water" topics and ideologies may be very complex and require a lot of education and study to fully understand, the assumptions underneath these topics and ideologies are not very sophisticated at all.

I have identified many specific assumptions that we all tend to make. However, underneath them all, at the very bottom of the iceberg, is the biggest, rawest, both-feet-planted-in-mid-air assumption of all. **I call this our core assumption.** It is the first and most basic of all of our assumptions, and it is the one from which our other assumptions and later our beliefs and knowledge stem. It is the starting point from where we try to understand ourselves and the world around us. I call this the biggest, rawest, both-feet-planted-in-mid-air assumption of all because it is not questioned and it has little or no proof. But we ALL have one. We can't NOT do it.

Since we don't all agree on various topics, it is usually because we are operating on different core assumptions. As I have devoted my time to understanding assumptions, I have discovered that there are three core assumptions that people make. You are operating from one of them right now even though you probably don't know it. How you understand yourself and the world around you is based on this core assumption. Because it is hidden and not obvious, is not questioned, and has little or no proof, this assumption controls everything you say, do, and think. Now, that's pretty powerful!

Core assumptions have to do with what we think is really real—what is really here. "Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away," said Phillip K. Dick, the creator of *Blade Runner*, *Total Recall*, *Minority Report*, *Adjustment Bureau*, and *Imposter*. Philosopher Dallas Willard once mused that "truth reveals reality, and reality can be described as what we humans run into when we are wrong."

The First Core Assumption

The first core assumption that some people affirm is that everything that exists boils down to one characteristic. Everything is physical—physical only. Only the material, the natural world is really real. Non-material things like minds, souls, and spirits are not fully real or don't exist at all. I say "not fully real" because some people who start with this core assumption will say, for instance, that they have a mind—something that generally is non-physical.

However, they will say that their mind is the by-product of biochemical reactions in their brain. Their thoughts are likewise the by-product of biochemistry. Their senses detected something. Their senses then stimulated their brain which created a biochemical reaction in their head that produced a thought. It is the chemistry that is real. Their mind is not. There is but one reality, and that reality is physical only.

The Second Core Assumption

The second core assumption is exactly the opposite of the first. This second way of assuming also begins with the assumption that there is but one reality. However, that reality is not physical. It is non-physical. Everything boils down to something mental or spiritual. The physical world that we see around us is not really real. We only think it is. It is a projection on our mind by a spiritual power, or it is the creation of our mind. We create our own reality. It is our perception that is really real, not any physical thing that is the subject of our perception.

Have you ever heard someone say "perception is reality?" This is why some people believe we can choose our gender. It is because they believe gender is a construct of the mind, not anything physical. Maybe you have heard someone say, "If I can conceive it and I believe it, I can achieve it." Or perhaps you have heard someone express, "The world you think you see is just an illusion. It really is an expression of the divine, world spirit, high power, Gaia, Brahman, etc." However it is expressed, the common thread is there is but one reality and that reality is non-physical.

The Third Core Assumption

The third core assumption is entirely different from the other two. Both of the first two core assumptions affirm that we and the world around us come down to one reality—something physical or something non-physical. The third way of assuming denies that there is only one reality. These assumers affirm that there are really two realities. It is not a matter of physical or non-physical for them. They would say that both physical and non-physical things are equally real. Some things are just physical, like stars, planets, flowers, microbes, or frogs. Some things are only spirits, like angels and demons. Other things like higher life forms are both physical and non-physical having a soulish nature.

However, these physical and non-physical things together have something in common. They are all created things. None of them are self-existent. They haven't always been here and they didn't make themselves. They were created. Human beings while certainly physical, are uniquely made to reflect their Creator. They have a spirit designed to commune with their Maker. Yet, whether human, animal, plant, or rock, they are all part of one reality—the created reality.

There is another reality, though, that is distinct from the created reality. It is the Creator. There is God, and there is everything else. Not two sides to one coin, so to speak, but two distinct realities. I say distinct because you can tell them apart. God is not nature and nature is not God. There is a difference between them, but they are not separate. It is as if the universe is like a giant cup that God holds in His hand. He is intimately involved with it rather than being a distant observer. God did not set the cup on a shelf and watch it from afar. For all practical purposes, a distant observer-God is the same thing as the first kind of core assumption—there is just a physical universe. The third kind of assumer affirms that because God is involved in this created reality, there is a relationship between the two realities. He knows us and we can know Him.

So What Is True?

The interesting thing about these three core assumptions is that they are all equally assumable and they are mutually exclusive. Anyone can assume any of these three core assumptions. Yet, once you pick one, it excludes the other two. There cannot be both one reality and two realities. If you pick the third way of assuming (two realities), you exclude the other two ways of assuming that affirm one reality. If you pick the first way of assuming (one physical-only reality), you exclude the second and third ways of assuming. Likewise, the second way of assuming (one non-physical reality) excludes the first and third core assumptions. **Because these core assumptions are mutually exclusive, only one of them can be true.** Because they are equally assumable, this means that we can inadvertently adopt a false core assumption and live our lives believing it is true. Right now you are operating with one of these three core assumptions, and you can't NOT do it. Do you understand now why I say it is not a matter of if you assume, but how you assume and whether your assumptions are true?

But how can we know which core assumption is the true one? Generally, we know something to be true if it matches something that really exists. For instance, imagine that you and I were sitting on a bench in the park on a nice spring day. As we are watching the birds, flowers, and squirrels, I remark to you, "Isn't that an amazing pink tree." Now, unless there was something wrong with your eyesight, you would see a grove of beautiful green trees in the park. Immediately, your mind would perk up, "Alert! Alert! That's not true!" Why does your mind do that? Because I said the tree was pink when it really was green. In other words, what I said about the tree did not match the actual tree, so what I said was *false*. You may not have ever stopped to think about it, but this is how our minds typically work.

True matches real things, which is why it is important to get our core assumption right. Our core assumption is what we think is really real. But if what we think is real actually isn't real, then our the core assumption is false. We must embrace the core assumption that is true.

Our core assumption is what we think is really real.

Truth does not really depend on us. Truth does not depend on our existence. Some things were true before we were born, and they will be true long after we are gone. Truth does not depend on our knowing it. Some things are true whether we know them or not. Some things are true whether we believe it or not. Our belief in something is irrelevant to whether it is true. Some things are true whether we experience them or not. Essentially, we do not determine what is true. Reality does, and truth is what matches reality. Since each core assumption is a mutually exclusive assumption about reality, only one core assumption can be true.

Unpacking Core Assumptions

The way we can discover which of these three core assumptions is true is to unpack them. We can start with any one of them, but only one can be true. Once we choose one, we begin to follow it where it leads. There is a group of secondary assumptions that is attached to each core assumption. Together this group of core and secondary assumptions I call respectively Type 1, Type 2, and Type 3. These types are identified by their core assumption—Type 1 (one physical reality), Type 2 (one non-physical reality), Type 3 (two realities). Each of these core assumptions lead to interesting destinations, but only one arrives at the truth.

The specific secondary assumptions that come from these core assumptions are explored in detail in my book *Transparent: How to See Through the Powerful Assumptions That Control You*. In *Transparent* you'll also discover a powerful, practical tool to detect and evaluate the assumptions in yourself as well as those in the things you read, watch, and hear. Once you learn this easy method, with some practice, you can detect hidden assumptions in as little as 20 seconds. Not only that, but you will also learn how all core assumptions are religious. This means that because we all have a core assumption, we are all people of faith, just people of different faiths—even atheists. Do you know the assumptions that drive education, science, government, and public policies like climate change, gay marriage, or gun control?

Now that you have a taste for assumptions, try the full meal. Visit TheTransparentBook.com to continue the journey.

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