

“Imagine that a group of curious bees lands on the outside of a church window. Each bee gazes upon the interior through a different stained glass pane. To one bee, the church interior is all red. To one bee, it is all yellow, and so on. The bees cannot experience the inside of the church directly; they can only see it. They can never touch the interior or smell it or interact with it in any way. If bees could talk they might argue over the color of the interior. Each bee would stick to his version, not capable of understanding that the other bees were looking through different pieces of stained glass. Nor would they understand the purpose of the church or how it got there or anything about it. The brain of a bee is not capable of such things.

“But these are curious bees. When they don’t understand something, they become unsettled and unhappy. In the long run the bees would have to choose between permanent curiosity—an uncomfortable mental state—and delusion. The bees don’t like those choices. They would prefer to know the true color of the church’s interior and its purpose, but bee brains are not designed for that level of understanding. They must choose from what is possible, either discomfort or self-deception. The bees that choose discomfort will be unpleasant to be around and they will be ostracized. The bees that choose self-deception will band together to reinforce their vision of a red-based interior or yellow-based interior and so on.”

“So you’re saying we’re like dumb bees?” I asked, trying to lighten the mood.

“Worse. We are curious.”

— God’s Debris by Scott Adams