



Lecture 3 – Relation of Faith and Reason

Paul — "See that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit (Col. 2:8)."

Tertullian – "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"

Pascal - "The heart has its reasons which reason does not know."

Peter – "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have (1 Pet. 3:15)."

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Reason helps us teach our faith and to better understand it, but...

Should you have good reasons to believe that your faith is true?

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1. Faith and Reason converge

Strong Rationalism:

- In order for a religious belief-system to be properly and rationally accepted, it must be possible to prove that the belief-system is true. Relies on reason and intelligence in deciding beliefs and actions. One must therefore have easily acceptable premises that are assumed (self-evident) and utilize methodologies that are acceptable to any rational person. This is often the realm of Christian Apologetics.

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1. Faith and Reason converge

- Descartes: "Prove to show that a belief is true in a way that should be convincing to any reasonable person.
- John Locke (1632-1704): Fierce empiricist who believed that rational reflection on sensory evidence supported Christian belief.
- Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274): Presented "Five Ways" in which reason argued for the existence of God. Natural Theology. However, he did not say all people need to be able to rationally defend their faith. He also acknowledged that some may not accept the five arguments and that you couldn't totally prove to everyone there is a God, but he did argue that you could demolish any argument against God's existence.

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The “Five Ways” are commonly presented as follows:

1. Argument from motion,
2. Argument from efficient cause,
3. Argument from necessary being,
4. Argument from gradations of goodness,
5. Argument from design.

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1. Faith and Reason converge

- Richard Swinburne: Resurrected Anselm's "ontological argument", rejecting Chapter 3 because of Kant's objections, but arguing Chapter 4 presented a second "modal argument" which is valid. Thus, he believes there is a deductive proof for God's existence. (Karl Barth argues that Anselm didn't expect his proof to work outside of a theistic worldview. "Faith seeking understanding."). Plantinga/Hartshorne, & Nash also accept versions of the ontological argument.

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Criticisms of Strong Rationalism:

1. Widespread opinion that faith means that one trusts in something that can't be proven (i.e. "being certain of what you cannot see.")
2. Empirical observation that not every rational person accepts theistic arguments. All worldviews lack universally convincing arguments.
3. There is no neutral or pure assumption-free form of reason (contra-Descartes).

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2. Faith and Reason are Opposite

- Fideism (FEE-day-ism): Religious belief-systems are not subject to rational evaluation. There are absolutely rational premises that need no proof. These are the self-evident starting points upon which arguments can be built. Such premises include "I exist", "the world exists", "my senses properly correspond to reality", mathematics, or the principle of non-contradiction. Fideists claim religious belief itself is proof or properly basic. To base faith on reason is to make the human mind **an idol**. Some aspects of God may even be logically contradictory (i.e. goodness and existence of evil, mercy and justice, three and one, Sovereignty and human free will).

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2. Faith and Reason are Opposite

- Soren Kierkegaard: Argued that rational inquiry is a never-ending process which gets closer and closer but never completely grasps its object. True knowledge of God is put off indefinitely because there is never 100% proof. We must make a "leap of faith." Faith involves commitment and risk-taking. His focus on personal decision spawned the Existentialist movement as well as neo-orthodoxy (Karl Barth et al).

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"Without risk there is no faith. Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty"

Soren Kierkegaard

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Criticisms of Fideism:

1. Which faith should one leap into? How do you choose between competing belief systems if they can't be reasonably assessed?
2. Fideism often leads to dangerous cults (ex. David Koresh).
3. Many have tested their faith by rational standards and seen it grow.
4. Seeming contradictions in God may not be actually contradictory, just beyond human reason. Faith is not irrational but supra-rational.
5. It is very difficult to avoid rationally evaluating religious beliefs. If we criticize other worldviews due to logical inconsistencies, we must look for the same in our faith.
6. Some people have come to faith through logical argumentation.

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3. Faith and Reason are Compliment

- Critical Rationalism: Religious belief-systems can and must be rationally criticized and evaluated although conclusive proof of such a system is impossible.
- Positive Apologetics: Critical evidentialist. Provide reasons and arguments in favor of beliefs.
- Negative Apologetics: Critical anti-evidentialist. Answer objections to religious worldview.

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Critiquing an Individual belief:

1. Understand the belief, including definitions and implications
2. Study criticism of the belief, both problems and ambiguities
3. Study arguments for the belief.
4. Consider personal experience.
5. Investigate personal preconceptions and prejudices.
6. Is conclusive disproof available?
7. What view seems most probable?

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Critiquing a Worldview:

1. Is it logically consistent?
2. Is it consistent with known facts?
3. Does it have explanatory power? Do you find any arguments personally convincing?
4. Can you live out this worldview day to day?

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Some people find certain arguments more convincing than others.

“A person may recognize that she cannot support her belief with evidence that will be convincing to all rational persons, and yet she herself may find the evidence for those beliefs rationally conclusive.” Religious faith does indeed involve a commitment; the question is just how far is this leap of faith? Total devotion is needed, but with a rational, reflective, and open attitude (sometimes causing frustration and tension). "It is one thing to need an argument; it is something else to have an argument to bolster or confirm faith (Nash)."