

bility of the author. This volume, however, will not disclose its riches upon any casual reading. It demands close and careful study. Such labour, however, can only yield pleasure, for, as the philosopher himself remarks in his discussion of the highest actuality of thought, "the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best" (*Metaph.* XII. 7).

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*Faith Beyond Reason: A Kierkegaardian Account.* By C. Stephen Evans. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1998. ISBN 0-8028-4555-X. Pp. 167.

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This modest contribution explores the Dane's and other versions of what has been called fideism. Several species of such are found to provide insights on the nature of reason's limitations as a vehicle of religious knowledge. Evans's focus is on Christian faith as primarily trust in God, involving certain beliefs concerning God (as a spiritual, personal, transcendent Being) and a willingness to relate obediently to God. Rationalistic approaches regard such faith as only appropriate when supported by sufficient propositional evidence. Fideism in all forms rejects the need for faith to be governed by the human faculty evaluating such evidence, since this capacity is at best limited and at worst adversely affected by sin. Reason is unqualified to preside as an autonomous, authoritative arbiter of all truth. It has, however, not been rendered utterly unfit, and so may be employed in critically exposing its own boundaries in regard to understanding God.

Before taking up various potentially constructive critiques of reason's role, Evans treats and counters three contentions to the effect that religious faith and the beliefs it involves should be appreciated as off-limits to rational questioning. One line, that reason is incompetent to pass any judgments, is too extreme on several counts. Reason is at work in distinguishing, grasping the sense of an affirmed truth, even if it cannot see that assertion to be truth. To consider and to contest whether a concrete particular pattern of thinking is as useful as alleged toward attaining truth is a legitimate exercise. It honors normative reason, the notion of an ideal or preferable way worth pursuing to arrive at some accurate answers.

A second, Wittgensteinian line, holds that standards for evaluating the concerns of a given faith are strictly internal to a religious community's life and language. This approach is helpful in highlighting the distinctiveness of that religious outlook and the advantage of an inside vantage point, but takes these too far. A related, more pointed third line argues that Christian claims are based on subjective experience rather than objective realities. For Evans, this emphasis on expressive versus descriptive faith greatly overstates the

difference and insularity of especially Christian claims put forward and assessed in the general public domain concerning the nature of reality.

In successive chapters Evans examines fideistic stances that respectively commend faith apart from reason, faith above reason, and faith against reason. The first stance opposes the evidentialist demand for support in the form of accepted facts, arguments to which one can appeal and from which one can consciously infer one's religious convictions. The threshold variety requires a sufficient amount of such evidence before commitment is justified. Against this sort of evidentialism, Alvin Plantinga deems basic theistic belief proper when it is elicited by adequate external experiential grounds. In such instances the believer need not have and be consciously aware of any propositional basis that would satisfy some criterion (wrongly) supposed to be neutral, independent of particular claims. The proportionality species of evidentialism requires that the degree to which one believes correspond to the measure of evidence available. Against it, William James points to other (e.g., relational) factors as bearing on the matter. What is at stake and what else is involved may well tip the scales in favor of subscribing when evidence on its own seems on the short side. Both Plantinga and James are adjudged responsible fideists for carefully circumscribing the extent to which discursive reasoning must figure into one becoming religiously persuaded.

Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant, and Søren Kierkegaard rate separate chapters for their differing renditions on faith above reason. While the first judged that reason was not capable of definitively deciding the truth/falsity of some Christian beliefs, the second denied its ability even to investigate such belief, and the third rejected reason being able even to comprehend them. Aquinas realized that openness to revelation did not necessarily spell credulity, but could involve trustful reasonable recognition of a superior over against presumptuous reliance on human sufficiency. Kant claimed that theoretical knowledge of God was out of reach, leaving only a distinctly practical, moral faith as rational. In elaborating this dichotomy, Evans finds, besides a questionable construct of unduly rigorous empiricist and rationalist sentiments, a salutary but overworked accent on God's transcendence. Modest conceptual apprehension of God may be attainable, and the moral, spiritual elements in faith which Kant did appreciate may facilitate even some of the limited insight into God he disclaimed.

Kierkegaard regarded the entrance of the eternal Divinity into the temporal by way of the incarnation not as a logical contradiction, but as an absolutely paradoxical truth. Not entirely unintelligible, in its baffling uniqueness it resists being comprehended and established as certain by us merely ordinary humans. For the Dane, any attempt to confirm independently authenticity for this purported revelation signaled a rejection of its authority. Evans, though, allows that such an effort in validating provenance may rather reflect and help satisfy genuine concern whether an already accepted authority, the divine discloser, is indeed the source. He concurs, however, that faith may be necessary to discern confirming tokens.

For Kierkegaard, reason is not only faced with its own finitude but also with its fallenness, for sin seriously impairs its exercise. Proudly, reason tends to pursue eventual explanation of everything in an egoistic assumption of objectivity. Our self-centered bent to take foremost thought of our own gain or loss renders the story of supreme self-denial and sacrifice most implausible. Outright offense is not inevitable, as reason is at the same time attracted by what it cannot fathom. Reason may be won over to faithful free submission in a passion prompted by personal encounter with the transforming Teacher, or it may be gripped by affront and alienation against an unflattering call to abandon autonomy. Kierkegaard may take his contentions against the place of public evidence too far. Evans is happy, however, to echo the tenor of his judgement concerning the inadequacy of supposed intellectual detachment and the necessity of changed desires for discovery of Christian truth.

The last three chapters treat the possibility of a natural but non-neutral rough knowledge of God; how a fideistic approach may address the problem of evil; and how a believer may claim knowledge for belief in particular doctrines concerning Christ that have been received as divinely revealed rather than as evidentially established. Finding constructed arguments for God's existence neither compelling faith nor fortifying it, Kierkegaard acknowledged that an awareness of God could be acquired by development of spiritual sensitivity, a concern that involved faith even if not a particular revelation. While seconding necessary and valid reliance on faith, too, Evans is more positive here than the Dane about the utility of such an interpretive consciousness for perceiving the soundness of some arguments as pointers to God's presence. Given his insistence that a divinely facilitated faith must enable even this more broadly realized, not distinctively Christian awareness of God, in what significant way can Evans still call this kind of knowledge natural?

On the question of evil, Evans finds a fideistic attitude congenial to a defense rather than the more ambitious theodicy. Drawing especially from Stephen Wykstra, Evans challenges the pretensions of reason to be so confident it could have a handle on divine motivations, were there any, for allowing evil to occur. Even reason's often presumed consensus between believers and unbelievers on deciding what constitutes good, evil, justification and divine obligation may be questioned. It is unfortunate that Evans gives only a closing paragraph to how the story of God's suffering in Jesus bears on the matter.

Christian trust, occasioned by historical testimony, but given via personal encounter with the incarnate Christ, impassions reason to recognize its own limits, renounce autonomy, and embrace central doctrines received through revelation. In the language of the Reformed tradition, this is the internal witness of the Holy Spirit authenticating such revelation and producing faith. This means to knowledge accords best with an externalist epistemology that accredits knowledge not to one's own reflective awareness of the evidential credentials of one's beliefs, but to reliable operation in the experiential processes engendering those beliefs. The rationalist premium on evidence as an objective public consensus ignores the reality that even scholarly inquiry knows

no detached neutrality. Substantial disagreements will come out, and faith's bias may be more advantageous than others in accessing disputed truth.

While he shows sensitivity for fideists in other religious traditions, Evans is not a pluralist. Though simplistic at points, he has provided a clear and concise commendation of the view that (especially Christian) faith, in responsibly seeking a right understanding of truth, may be much more a vehicle of progress than of escape.

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***Faith and Reason: Encyclical Letter FIDES ET RATIO of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on the Relationship between Faith and Reason.*** Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana; Sherbrooke: Médiaspaul, 1998. ISBN 2-89420-164-8. Pp. 154

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Papal encyclicals are seldom hot news. Some are memorable or historic—the social statements of Leo XIII, or those of Vatican II defining a quiet revolution for the modern church. The present Pope has presented numerous works relevant to the Church of Rome and beyond; now he offers a timely monograph with special import for the Academy. It breathes the air of the old lecture rooms and libraries he once inhabited as theological professor.

"Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth" (3). In a prefatory note akin to Calvin's famous opening to his *Institutio*, itself echoing classical wisdom, the knowledge of God and oneself happen together. The introduction, "Know Yourself" (3–13), sketches this partnership between reason and faith, philosophy and theology. The search for truth begins in that wonder awakened "by the contemplation of creation," especially human being. This priority accorded to philosophical enquiry reflects a kind of "implicit philosophy" attained by reason when it follows its proper insight: *recta ratio*. An early warning is sounded: reason is biased in concentrating on human subjectivity, forgetting the higher truth beyond. This allows "pragmatic criteria based essentially upon experimental data" to let technology dominate. Modern philosophy has substituted knowing for being as its object. Hence the rise of agnosticism and relativism—and "undifferentiated pluralism" rather than "a legitimate plurality of positions." What is needed? *Courage!*

Chapter 1, "The Revelation of God's Wisdom" (14–26), draws on former statements from Vatican I and II: a knowledge "peculiar to faith, surpassing the knowledge proper to human reason" is posited, implying that faith and reason attain truths "neither identical nor mutually exclusive." This twofold order of knowing is familiar in historical theology, indeed it forms the bedrock of classical theism, and is set forth in paragraphs of biblical quotation and commentary. The Pope's careful and modest description avoids direct conflict with, say, Karl Barth's rejection of *analogia entis* in behalf of *analogia fidei*.