

Chapter 13, Reason and Faith

What is faith?

1. Relation between **religion and reason**:
 - a) Compatible e.g. Aquinas
 - b) Religious beliefs = irrational, or perhaps beyond reason e.g. Enlightenment
2. If religious **belief ≠ rationally justifiable**, what should our attitude be?
 - a) **Reject it – atheism** e.g. Diderot
 - b) **Suspend judgement – agnosticism** e.g. Hume
 - c) **Accept it** even if or even *because* = irrational – **fideism** = religious matters go beyond the limits of human reason e.g. Pascal, Kierkegaard

Pascal's wager

1. Reason can neither affirm nor deny God's existence
2. **Better bet to believe than not**: gain everything if you are right – lose very little if you are wrong = Pascal's wager
3. We do not believe things because it is in our interests
– but we can use various means to **'condition' ourselves to believe**
4. **Problems** with the wager:
 - a) If we can't be sure God exists, we can't be sure what God is like, so **can't be sure of the possible benefits** of believing
 - b) Is it psychologically possible to **believe something without evidence** to justify it?

Kierkegaard

1. Rationally religious belief is absurd, but **faith is above reason** – only thro faith can we fulfil ourselves or 'become subjective'
2. **Essence of a human being = subjectivity**: capacity to commit ourselves passionately to a way of life:
 - a) **Truth is subjectivity** = something **living up to its essential nature** therefore as the essence of a human being = their subjectivity 'truth is subjectivity'
 - b) We = **subjective** when we commit ourselves to a set of values = **pure act of commitment**, passionate 'leap of faith' – can't be justified
3. **Christianity = most subjective form of human existence** – no rational justification – nothing to do with objective thinking
4. **Problem: committing ourselves without knowing what we're committing ourselves to**
– if some rational understanding of God is required, K's sharp distinction between faith and reason has to be abandoned – some kind of rational justification of religious belief will be required

Tillich

1. Impossible to demonstrate existence of God in rational terms, so **room for faith**
2. Faith = 'the state of being **ultimately concerned**':
 - a) Concerns for nation, family or personal = preliminary
 - b) Ultimate concern = God – something unconditional and infinite
3. **Problem**: Is God an **object out there** or that with which human beings are **ultimately concerned**?

Chapter 13, Reason and Faith continued

Morality and the Problem of Evil

1. Morality:

– religious view = God provides us with moral rules ('divine command' theory of morality) – right thing to do is that which has been commanded by God; the wrong thing is that which God forbids

Problems:

- a) depends on a belief in God
- b) how can we be sure what God's will actually is?
- c) the 'Euthyphro problem':
either right/wrong = arbitrary, whatever God decides
or God has to obey moral standards defined elsewhere

2. The problem of Evil:

A good, all-powerful God wouldn't allow evil things to happen therefore since evil things do happen, God cannot exist

Possible responses:

- a) deny the presence of evil in the world
- b) modify the way God is understood – either God = not good or not all-powerful
- c) reconcile an omnipotent, all-good God with the presence of worldly evil (theodicy):

(i) 'Free will' solution: people, not God, bring evil into the world:

Problems:

- I. if God is omnipotent he could create us so we always freely choose the good
- II. if we have totally free will, he cannot be omnipotent since there is something he cannot control
- III. if he does have control but doesn't use it when people commit evil acts, he cannot be benevolent?
- IV. free will doesn't help us come to terms with natural evil
e.g. earthquakes.

(ii) 'Character-building' solution – it makes it possible for us to perfect ourselves – but why does a good and all-powerful God allow so much evil, far in excess of what might be required for character building?

Critics of Religion:

– stands in the way of human happiness and fulfilment

Marx

1. Through labour human beings survive + develop their 'essential powers' and realize themselves
2. Modern industrial society = workers live in poverty, work long hours in inhuman conditions
3. Ideas reflect economic needs and practices – they rationalize them
4. Therefore religion = distorted reflection of material situation of people:
 - a) makes life bearable with the promise of a happy afterlife, but does nothing to solve real problems

Chapter 13, Reason and Faith continued

- b) encourages people to accept their situation – discourages any attempt to change conditions for the better in this world

5. Religion must be abolished if there is to be progress

Nietzsche

1. Human fulfilment requires the rejection of traditional values:

- a) incl. Christianity = preaches weakness, self-denial, hatred of instincts
- b) fulfilment = creation of new, life-affirming values – work of the solitary individual

2. Traditional morality/religion and social circumstances:

- a) Master v. slave morality
- b) Religion reversed the values of strength and weakness:
 - (i) Condemned strength and celebrated submissiveness (to God)
 - (ii) Religion = values of slave morality = life-denying
 - (iii) Bad conscience emerged out of the master-slave confrontation:
 - I. Our desire for revenge turns inward on our instincts, which are regarded as evil – we feel guilty and suffer from bad conscience
 - II. Christianity strengthens this instrument of self-punishment
 - III. Teaches absolute goodness of God and the baseness of human beings = unworthy sinners i.e. self-hatred

3. Progress:

- a) Abandon religion = promotes weakness, self-denial and self-hatred
- b) Instead of hating and denying our instincts organize and enhance them = the positive self-discipline of the 'overman'

Freud

1. Like N, religion = the product of social constraints on instincts

2. Like M, progress towards greater human happiness is possible through social change

3. In society instinctual needs exceed possibilities for satisfaction therefore restrained or repressed by social institutions and rules:

- a) Internalised as superego or conscience, the mechanism of self-control
- b) Repressed desires find indirect expression in forms of substitute gratification – collective fantasies that compensate for instinctual renunciation

4. Religious beliefs = one of these fantasies:

- a) justify social rules and instinctual denial + offer compensation: a happy afterlife
- b) = not simply a delusion but an illusion, a belief motivated by the desire to see wishes fulfilled

5. Progress – we should outgrow religion by:

- a) developing more rational ways of constraining instincts
- b) where possible, relax social constraints